

## Chapter One

### Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition

In 1923 German art critic Franz Roh coined the term “magical realism” and then repeated it in a 1925 book in reference to a new artistic tendency he saw appearing in European painting.<sup>17</sup> It is unlikely he could have realized how far his notion would travel in terms of both geographic and inter-disciplinary debate. It has since formed part of Latin American literature, postcolonial studies, and can now be found in art and literary criticism related to India, Africa, Canada, Europe, and beyond. However, as was discussed in the Introduction to this book, much of the criticism about magical realism is essentialist or universalist; critics disagreeing with other critics using the same “magical realism” to refer to different notions. The principal reason for this confusion is the fact that critics create their own definitions of magical realism, often without taking into account the term’s historical evolution. As a first step towards using that evolution to define magical realism, this chapter will focus on Roh’s original ideas and use them as a crux for navigating through the many things which have been written about the term. As an end point, this chapter seeks to show that those critics who included an analysis of magical realism’s critical evolution in their study often added clarity to an increasingly abstract debate. On the other hand, books and articles which either marginalized or erased (sometimes on purpose, but often out of ignorance of Roh’s

---

<sup>17</sup> Anne C. Hegerfeldt cites Michael Scheffel’s *Magischer Realismus: Die Geschichte eines Begriffes und ein Versuch seiner Bestimmung* (1990) as pointing to Roh’s 1923 article “Zur Interpretation Kalr Haiders: Eine Bemerkung auch zum Nach-expressionismus” as an earlier application of the term than the 1925 book cited by most critics (Hegerfeldt 2005: 12-13).

work) the German's ideas from the magical-realist debate simply sowed the seeds of further confusion. Placing magical realism's critical debate in an appropriate historical context serves both to clarify many of the contentious issues associated with the term, as well as emphasize the need to analyze a selection of the fictional works which are commonly labeled magical-realist.

Various critics have argued Roh has little or no place in a discussion of literary magical realism. At the conclusion of her detailed study of magical realism's early history, Irene Guenther wrote that "Franz Roh's actual influence on the contemporary literary genre, magical realism, is debatable, so transmuted have his pictorial formulations become" (Guenther 1995: 61). Anne C. Hegerfeldt both quoted and seemed to agree with William Spindler in saying that magical realism has come to mean "the exact opposite, in fact, of what the original term signified" (Hegerfeldt 2005: 14). There is a modicum of truth in these criticisms, but by no means do they constitute a justification for marginalizing Roh's original concepts. The principal reason for the critical confusion surrounding magical realism is that many critics during its early stages, utilized the term with little or no consideration of its evolution. As a result it took on multiple meanings, many of which were not well received. However, some did become popular and despite the fact they often had conflicting or even contradictory significations, this chapter will attempt to show that those which took Roh's notions into account were the most helpful in edging towards a delineation of what magical realism is. In part, it is because of those studies which either did not include Roh or diminished his role, that magical realism as we know it today is so far from Roh's use of the term in European painting

(particularly its association with Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*). Indeed, if he were alive today, the German art critic would probably not claim any paternity over the internationalized postcolonial brand of literary magical realism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century. Nevertheless, tracing magical realism's evolution must consider what has been written about the term, and, as this chapter will attempt to show, eliminating or even marginalizing Roh's original ideas is unhelpful.

The following chapter is divided into three sections. The first, *Early Historical Context*, looks at Roh's historical situation and gives a profile of magical realism according to Roh's conception. The second, *Latin America: A Trip into Confusion*, follows the term to Latin America and analyzes how it became separated from Roh's ideas as well as the consequences of this disconnection. The last, *Out of Confusion and towards Hybrid Societies*, examines the phase during which Roh's ideas were once more seen as important, and which coincided with the international postcolonial phase of magical realism.

### *Early Historical Context*

Roh's 1925 book was published in Lipzig by Klinkhardt and Bierman and consisted of 134 pages of text followed by 87 reproductions of paintings. The first 14 were comparative pairings between Expressionism and magical realism; Kandinsky with Carrà, Delaunay with de Chirico and Citroen, Metzinger with Schrimpf, Schmidt-Rottluf and Macke with Mense, and Uhden with Haus am Teich. The rest were presented as magical-realists including Severini, Funi, Oppi,

Räderscheidt, Davringhausen, Kanoldt, Dix, Grosz, Scholz, Spies, Metzinger, Sköld, Ernst, Derain, and Von Dardel; as well as a painting in the opening pages by Rousseau. The title of the book, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme Der Nuesten Europäischen Malerei*, put the term “magical realism” as only a subtitle with the main title profiling the new art as a reaction to Expressionism (Roh 1925: 5). Roh’s work was centered on painting with little of the content wavering from this focus.

The art movement discussed in this 1925 book had begun several years earlier and became popularly known by two different names.<sup>18</sup> Roh named the new art magical realism, while his contemporaries gravitated more towards Gustav Hartlaub’s *Neue Sachlichkeit* or as it has become known in English translation: New Objectivity. Hartlaub’s term was first used in 1923 when he announced an exhibition which would travel Germany in 1925 bringing the new art into the public domain. New Objectivity quickly became established as the proper nomenclature for the new art, particularly after World War II when, as Seymour Menton has pointed out, Roh himself

---

<sup>18</sup> The exact starting date of magical-realist painting is an object of some discussion. Seymour Menton argued it began in 1918 “[a]s a reflection of the crisis of nineteenth century bourgeois society” with the end of World War I, while Irene Gunther believed it started in 1920 when several art critics had “perceived Expressionism as having nothing more to say” (Menton 1983: 14; Gunther 1995: 33). While it is difficult to ascertain a precise moment, the close proximity of Menton and Gunther’s dates serves to locate the movement’s beginning within the atmosphere permeating Europe in the wake of World War I and diverging from Expressionism.

used it in reference to the art in his 1958 book *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*.<sup>19</sup>

While Roh's term was substituted by another in the world of painting, its evolution into an important part of twentieth-century literature is the focus of this chapter. In order to better understand how this occurred it is worthwhile to trace magical realism's development from inception to the present day. As a name, Roh did not consider magical realism to be of much importance. In his brief prologue he wrote "I attribute no special value to the title magical realism" and that he "added the first title quite a long time after having written this work" (Roh 1995: 15-16). He chose the term because more established notions such as Ideal Realism, Verism, and Neoclassicism were expressions which only defined parts of the whole and therefore incomplete. Starting with Jean Weisgerber's *Le Réalisme magique: roman, peinture et cinema* (1987), Irene Gunther's "Magical Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts During the Weimar Republic," (1995) and most recently in Christopher Warnes's "Magical Realism and The Legacy of German Idealism" (2006), the work of Friedrich Leopold Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772-1801), or "Novalis" as he was known by his pen-name, has been credited with the creation of the term magical realism. Warnes's exploration of the presence of German Idealist philosophy in the works of Borges, Carpentier, and Asturias has shown that Novalis's creation of a magical-realist prophet "that sacred, isolated being simultaneously in touch with real and ideal, looms large as a totemic ancestor of the modern purveyor of magical realism" (Warnes 2006: 498).

---

<sup>19</sup> Menton wrote: "Roh recognized at this time that his term, *magical realism*, had been overwhelmed almost since its inception by Hartlaub's *new objectivity*" (Menton 1983: 18).

With this in mind, Novalis's notion of the amalgamation of realism and magic will serve as a good starting point for exploring Roh's understanding of magical realism.

Roh described the realist component of magical realism in contrast to Expressionism's way of seeing the world. For Roh, Expressionism presented a "fantastic dreamscape" which focused on "an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects" (Roh 1995: 16-17). M.A. Abrams seemed to be trying to put a similar notion into words when he understood Expressionism as depicting "powerful emotional states of mind" (Abrams 1993: 61). Art critic Frederick S. Levine also seemed to echo Roh's vision in writing that Expressionism sought the personification of "inner reality" and wanted "to project emotional needs, psychological pressures, and private obsessions" (Levine 1979: 2). According to Roh, magical realism reacted to Expressionism by producing a space where "our real world re-emerges before our eyes" in the form of a "new style that is thoroughly of this world" (Roh 1995: 17). While Expressionism had given primacy to representation of the interior, emotional world; magical realism for Roh marked a return to empirical reality.

However, magical realism's second component – the magic – identified it as a more complex term than traditional realism. Guenther has shown that Roh believed the artists used a "cold cerebral approach," concentrating on objects which were shown down to their last detail appearing as "strange shadows or phantoms" bringing to the surface their "inner spiritual texture" and "clarity" (Guenther 1995: 35). This "spiritual reconstruction" was the product of what Roh saw as mankind's constant pendulum swing between "devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality" (Roh

1995: 17). He saw Expressionism as a sort of existential flight which sought to delve into our world from an almost mystical perspective, while magical realism was a return to the real world, producing as a result “a profound calm and thoughtfulness” (Roh 1995: 17). It was a movement of “decantation and clarification” which endowed “all things with a deeper meaning and reveal[ed] mysteries that always threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things” (Roh 1995: 17-18). Thus magical realism in Roh’s vision was a return to reality, but not simply going back to the realism which existed before Expressionism – a homecoming which carried with it the baggage from the trip through Expressionism’s existential voyage, a mix of wild flights and anchored reality.

It is important to comprehend that Roh saw the new art as focused on the representation of the object. For him, magical realism dissected the object, renewed it in a cold, clinical way which turned the presentation of a normal item into something unfamiliar. It is impossible to ignore the similarities between this notion and the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky’s idea of “defamiliarization” which sought to present an object in an unfamiliar way so the reader/spectator did not become accustomed to its presence and ceased “experiencing the artfulness of an object” (Shklovsky 2001: 50).<sup>20</sup> Shklovsky was writing in 1919, more or less at the same time this new art was taking form; both were trying to produce a feeling described by

---

<sup>20</sup> Amaryll Chanady pointed out the similarity between magical realism and defamiliarization by indicating magical realism’s connection to European avant-garde art movements and writing “the notion of defamiliarization developed by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky is particularly relevant in the case of magical realism” (Chanady 1995: 129). Lois Parkinson Zamora also mentioned this similarity in writing “Roh’s formulation echoes the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky’s famous definition of defamiliarization” (Zamora 2005: 32).

Roh quoted in Guenther's article where "one was so in awe of objects that they received new, secret meanings [...] Objectivism as spiritual creating" (Guenther 1995: 36). Thus *magic* was combined with *realism* to produce an oxymoron which aptly described the new art.

Philosophically speaking, Roh saw magical realism as a middle ground between two extremes. On one side were the nineteenth-century Realists and Impressionists who represented the world through "vague sensuality" and "ingenuous realism" (Roh 1995: 23). On the other were the Expressionists who reacted against the former by using "highly structured schematics" and "exalted idealism" (Roh 1995: 23). For Roh the former was the type of person who "contemplates and knows" and the latter was a "man of action [...] who constructs the future according to preconceived plans, a utopian who scorns mere knowledge [...] [the] kind of man who truly moves the world [...] in the direction of its evolution" (Roh 1995: 23). In the middle of these two was the magical-realist who, while not "losing any of his constructivist ideals," knew how to reconcile them with "greater respect for reality" and a "closer knowledge of what exists" (Roh 1995: 23). The magical-realist was neither the practical "Machiavellian politician nor the apolitical man who listens only to the voice of an ethical ideal, but a man at once political and ethical" (Roh 1995: 23). For Roh this middle ground was important and it was what he saw being represented in magical-realist art.

To further understand magical realism in its original formulation it is also worth examining what happened to the new art under its other name: New Objectivity. Irene Guenther showed how Hartlaub divided New Objectivity into two groups. The first, Neoclassicist conservative group concentrated chiefly

on aesthetic concerns and included artists like Picasso during the period of 1916-1924, André Derain, and Auguste Hebin, as well as Italians like Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà. The Germans Georg Schrimpf, Carlo Mense, and Alexander Kanoldt also belonged to this conservative group. Once Hitler came to power in 1933, some of these artists became Nazi propagandists and one in particular, Adolf Ziegler, was named president of the Third Reich's Chamber of the Fine Arts and counted among Hitler's favorites. Guenther anecdotally included in her study the fact that Ziegler's frequent depictions of nude women earned him the nickname of "Reich Master of German Pubic Hair" (Guenther 1995: 55). On the other hand were the Verists, who included artists like Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Rudolf Schlichter. This second group focused on social issues in their art, representing the tortured era Germany was experiencing after World War I. Many of them became politically active in Germany's Communist Party which, unsurprisingly, brought them problems once Hitler came to power. Guenther points out that their art was often declared "degenerate" and in the worst cases, it was burnt. Roh himself was accused of being a "cultural bolshevist" and sent to Dachau concentration camp in 1933 where he was eventually rescued through the intervention of art historian Wilhelm Pinder.

For Guenther, especially in Germany, this was an art which represented its time: urban life, dirty cities, machines, factories, all concentrating on the individual lost in a world he could neither understand nor control. It was the art of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), a Germany suffering the depression of defeat in World War I, the economic inflation where in 1924 one dollar was worth more than 40 trillion

marks, and the festering anger, cynicism, and social division which would lead to the rise of a tyrant and World War II.

*Latin America: A Trip into Confusion*

In 1927 magical realism had already made an unexpected turn away from German painting, into Spanish literature, and had arrived in Latin America by being translated in José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente*. Based in Madrid, Ortega y Gasset's magazine had an international flavor because it reached outside of Spain for contributions and to Latin America for new readership bases. When writing on Ortega y Gasset's death in 1955, Alejo Carpentier sought to explain what the Spanish philosopher meant to "los hombres de mi generación en América Latina" by writing that Ortega y Gasset's magazine was the "faro y guía" which "estableció un nuevo orden de relaciones intelectuales entre España y América Latina" (Carpentier 1983: 222-23). In a recent sounding of early twentieth-century literary magazines in Spain, Fernando R. Lafuente called Ortega y Gasset's publication "el referente intelectual de una España necesitada de hacer viajar a las ideas" (Lafuente 2004: 37). Lafuente reminds us that Ortega y Gasset wanted to be remembered as "Ortega el americano" and his *Revista de Occidente* was a manifestation of this desire since it exercised great influence in Latin America, particularly in Buenos Aires. A testament to Ortega y Gasset's influence is the speed with which the translation of Roh's text reached that Argentine city where Enrique Anderson Imbert recalled a friend's use of the term magical realism: "La primera vez que lo oí aplicado a una novela fue en 1928, cuando mi amigo Aníbal Sánchez Reulet – de mi misma edad – me recomendó que leyera

*Les enfants terribles* de Jean Cocteau: ‘puro realismo mágico,’ me dijo” (Anderson Imbert 1975: 11-12). Thanks to the translation of Roh’s text in Ortega y Gasset’s *Revista de Occidente* and that magazine’s international outreach, magical realism had arrived as early as 1928 to Latin America.

The *Revista de Occidente* version of Roh’s text was in the April-May-June 1927 edition occupying pages 274-301. From the very beginning its design launched the term magical realism to the forefront by eliminating Roh’s original title and replacing it with the “Magical Realism” subtitle. The translation also erased the preface which, despite being only a paragraph, is where the German critic explained his selection of the term. Only four of the 87 paintings were reproduced in the Spanish translation; they are by de Chirico, Severini, Schrimpf, and Spies. Despite Roh’s text sharing space in the magazine with an article about Goya and translations of scientific writings such as Einstein’s “La mecánica de Newton y su influencia sobre la física teórica,” the main focus of *Revista de Occidente* was literary. This is important because, as the anecdote about Cocteau’s book being magical-realist suggests, it is with this translation that magical realism passes from artistic nomenclature to the world of literature. In the same edition where Roh’s text was published there are articles and translations by various hands: “Un artista del hambre” by Franz Kafka, “Notas sobre la grandeza y decadencia de Europa” by Paul Valéry, and others by Benjamín Jarnés, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, and Francisco Ayala. In fact almost all of the 32 texts in the magazine are advertised on the cover except the translation of Roh, a fact which might reflect the magazine’s primarily literary readership.

Anderson Imbert's anecdote about Cocteau's book quoted above is interesting because it shows how far the translation had already brought magical realism away from Roh's ideas: geographically it had left Europe and crossed the Atlantic and artistically it had been transferred from painting to literature. The fact magical realism was used to describe a European novel indicates the term was not considered, in 1928, to be a Latin American phenomenon. Moving magical realism away from Europe and into a strictly Latin American context would not occur until 1949 when Arturo Uslar Pietri used it in his book *Letras y hombres de Venezuela*.

However, before discussing Uslar Pietri's use of the term it is important to establish what happened in Latin America in the 21 years between Anderson Imbert's anecdote and Uslar Pietri's book. Uslar Pietri has stated that, when he first used the term, he did not remember its connection to Roh and that it came from the "oscuro caldo del subconsciente" (Uslar Pietri 1986: 140). He wrote in 1986 that he had encountered the term "al final de los años 20" in a translation of Roh's book (Uslar Pietri 1986: 140). This translation has to be either the *Revista de Occidente* version or Ortega y Gasset's publication of the entire book in translation as *Realismo mágico, post expresionismo: Problemas de la pintura europea más reciente* (also translated by Fernando Vela and published by *Revista de Occidente* in 1927). José Donoso's *Historia personal del "boom"* painted an image of a Latin America during the beginning of the twentieth century until 1960 sharply divided by borders; each country existed as an isolated island unmeshed and barely influenced by other parts of the continent:

Antes de 1960 era muy raro oír hablar de la  
"novela hispanoamericana contemporánea" a

gente no especializada: existían novelas uruguayas y ecuatorianas, mexicanas y venezolanas. Las novelas de cada país quedaban confinadas dentro de sus fronteras, y su celebridad y pertinencia permanecía, en la mayor parte de los casos, asunto local. (Donoso 1983: 18)

It is not surprising then, that, in an intellectual atmosphere where it was difficult for ideas to cross borders, magical realism would be largely forgotten.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the intellectual separation of the Latin American countries did not last and the period when Uslar Pietri recovered magical realism from what he called his “subconsciente” was marked by the increasing interest in a new kind of writing unifying the continent. Elzbieta Sklodowska described the time up until 1950 as an era when “el intento por redefinir la realidad latinoamericana en términos propios del continente es el denominador común” (Sklodowska 1997: 480). Luis Harss made a similar point when he argued that Latin America was united “en busca de su identidad cultural” (Harss 1969: 17). It is therefore unsurprising that in this Latin American-centered atmosphere, Uslar Pietri was not thinking about Roh when in 1949 he sought a term to describe “esa nueva manera creadora” (Uslar Pietri 1986: 140). In an analysis

---

<sup>21</sup> This is not to say magical realism was forgotten altogether during this period. Juan Barroso’s book *‘Realismo Mágico’ y ‘Lo Real Maravilloso’ en El reino de este mundo y El siglo de las luces* (1977) includes references to numerous critical texts which go unmentioned by the majority of people studying magical realism. Among them is one published during the years between Anderson Imbert’s anecdote and Uslar Pietri’s book: Rudolfo Usigli’s *Realismo moderno y realismo mágico: Itinerario del autor* (1940).

of short stories from his own country, Venezuela, Uslar Pietri outlined the moment around 1928 when

[L]o que vino a predominar en el cuento y a marcar su huella de una manera perdurable fue la consideración del hombre como misterio en medio de los datos realistas. Una adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad. Lo que a falta de otra palabra podría llamarse un realismo mágico. (Uslar Pietri 1974: 287)

As has already been pointed out, Uslar Pietri did not mention Roh in 1949, but many years later, in 1986, recognized that the term came from the German art critic. This separation between magical realism and Roh drove a wedge between the concept and its source and became the spark for confusion, not only because it was launched in Latin American literature at a point when bridges were being constructed across borders, but also because in the same year Alejo Carpentier published his famous prologue to *El reino de este mundo*.

Carpentier and Uslar Pietri had similar intentions. The latter has stated both of them were concerned with “la noción de una condición peculiar del mundo americano que no era posible reducir a ningún modelo europeo” (Uslar Pietri 1986: 135). They believed Latin American literature was veering away from its European influences and had begun to document the flora and fauna of the American continent. Carpentier affirmed the fantastic was not to be discovered undermining or surpassing reality with theoretical structures and manufactured images, such as, in his opinion, those which could be found in Surrealism. Instead, he argued, it was natural to Latin America’s history, geography, people, and politics that unlikely

combinations of events occurred producing marvelous results. He called this phenomenon “lo real maravilloso” and said it was “the heritage of all of America [...] found in every man” (Carpentier 1995: 87). Magical realism was not immediately associated with Carpentier, but the fact both he and Uslar Pietri published their ideas – which were similar – in the same year when Latin America was searching for its particular literary identity would cause Uslar Pietri’s adopted term to be linked to Carpentier, thereby, furthering the distance between magical realism and Roh’s original ideas.<sup>22</sup>

Angel Flores gave a fillip to the confusion surrounding Roh’s term with the publication of his essay “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” (1955). Flores argued in his closing remarks that magical-realist writing signaled “the inception of a genuinely Latin American Fiction” and therefore “Latin America now possesses an authentic expression, one that is uniquely civilized, exciting and, let us hope, perennial” (Flores 1995: 116). In Amaryll Chanady’s convincing reading of the text she argued Flores’s main concern was “to reject the hierarchical dichotomy between civilization and barbarism [...] by demonstrating the acceptability of Latin American literature in its present state of evolution within the universal canon” (Chanady 1995: 128). Chanady believed Flores was appropriating the imaginary for Latin America and I would take this a step further to say he was, in effect, “territorializing” magical realism. Flores’s essay provided the institutionalized confirmation of Uslar Pietri’s separation of magical realism

---

<sup>22</sup> Hegerfeldt expresses a suspicion which seems to support my idea that doubts about the relationship between *lo real maravilloso* and magical realism led to confusion: “Carpentier’s endeavor to claim the marvelous for his continent may well have contributed to later tendencies to discuss magic realism as a mode unique to Latin America” (Hegerfeldt 2005: 19).

from Roh. Furthermore, he also institutionalized the idea that magical realism was the proper nomenclature for referring to the new Latin American literature. Lastly, his essay included references to a wide variety of texts from different areas of literature which may have functioned within his purpose of promotion, but only served to cloud the meaning of magical realism.<sup>23</sup>

At this point a series of publications came out which merit mention because they helped connect magical realism to Latin America and further separate the term from Roh. In 1957 J.E. Irby published *La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispanoamericanos* which appeared to echo Flores's approach by arguing magical realism was distinctly Latin American in its combination of the fantastic with realistic literature. Ray Verzasconi enhanced this in writing magical realism was a particularly Latin American literary movement in his 1965 doctoral thesis *Magical Realism and the Literary World of Miguel Ángel Asturias* which combined European reality and anthropological aspects of America. Another thesis, by E. Dale Carter, titled *Magical Realism in Contemporary*

---

<sup>23</sup> Flores has been heavily criticized for the breadth of his definition, particularly for its inclusion of texts which are normally considered fantastic. Probably the best known of these criticisms is Luis Leal's "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature" (1967) which is discussed below. Despite this, in 1985, Flores had a Spanish translation of his original presentation published and reaffirmed in the preface his belief that an important element in magical realism was the influence of Franz Kafka: "Como se verá, en dicha ponencia sugería, entre otras cosas, la influencia kafkiana en nuestra narrativa, fenómeno luego corroborado por Borges y Cortázar, entre otros, y ahora en 1979 por Gabriel García Márquez, ejemplar supremo del realismo mágico" (Flores 1985: 7). As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, Kafka's influence and what Jamie Alazraki has called the "neo-fantastic" is indeed an important element in magical realism's evolution, particularly in regard to Borges's short stories.

*Argentine Fiction* (1966), followed Flores's ideas by accepting his definition as the appropriate starting point for a study on Latin American literature. These studies are not often discussed and it is thanks to Juan Barroso's '*Realismo mágico*' y '*Lo real maravilloso*' en *El reino de este mundo* y *El siglo de las luces* (1977) that I am aware of their existence. They offer a valuable vantage point in that they show how Flores's position that magical realism was a particularly Latin American expression had grown and found support in more than one part of the continent. Furthermore, they demonstrate that Uslar Pietri and Flores's elimination of Roh from the discussion produced a notable change by removing the term from its original historical context and thus enabling its subsequent Latin-Americanization.

In Luis Leal's 1967 essay, the debate reincorporated Roh, but also turned towards Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*. Leal refuted Flores's essay, but almost stole his title by translating it into Spanish: "El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana". His essay was important because he sought to reestablish magical realism to what he saw its proper place by reinserting into the discussion the Roh – Uslar Pietri – Carpentier genealogy. Leal positioned Roh as the originator of the term in writing "neither do I agree the movement was started by Borges in 1935" because "[t]he term 'magical realism' was first used by the art critic Franz Roh" (Leal 1995: 120). He went further by establishing that magical realism is not a strictly prose phenomenon as Flores would have had us believe, noting it includes "pictorial output" and that "[i]n Hispanic America it seems to have been Arturo Uslar Pietri who first used the term" (Leal 1995: 120). In reestablishing both Roh as the originator of the term and amplifying the definition to include painting, Leal helped to reposition magical realism

within its proper historical context. However, he also wrote that Carpentier is who “has paid this phenomenon the most attention” in Latin America with his “lo real maravilloso” (Leal 1995: 120). These words linked magical realism and *lo real maravilloso*, a juxtaposition which would soon create further confusion.

After Leal’s contribution the discussion surrounding magical realism grew in both intensity and confusion. Angel Valbuena Briones, in 1967, briefly referred to it and considered magical realism the same as “lo real maravilloso” writing “una fórmula fantástica [...] de Carpentier que supone que en Hispanoamérica la realidad es maravillosa” (Valbuena Briones 1967: 486). A year later Orlando Gómez Gil wrote in the glossary of *Historia crítica de la literatura hispanoamericana* that the term came from Roh and also gave a definition:

La realidad es tratada por el autor subjetivamente [...] los símbolos [...] crean una escena de misterio, que dan la impresión [...] de un sueño en que las cosas y objetos de todos los días aparecen envueltos en una atmósfera extraña, aunque reconocible. (Gómez Gil 1968: 762)

Gómez Gil included Uslar Pietri and Carpentier as magical-realists, but did not think the real world was marvelous and that Carpentier incorporated “leyendas y mitos” (Gómez Gil 1968: 679). Within the space of two years Leal and Valbuena Briones accepted Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* and magical realism as being the same thing. Gómez Gil also accepted Carpentier as a magical-realist, but considered his theory of Latin America being marvelous as based in legends and myth instead of reality.

The following year, 1969, Jean Franco included a brief section on magical realism in her book *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature*. She considered the 1940s to be a period in which Latin American writers began using “new techniques” learned from authors such as James Joyce in the 1920s. However, these authors, of which she included Miguel Ángel Asturias and Carpentier, produced “work which differs greatly from their predecessors of the ‘20s” and a “discussion of influences no longer has much meaning in relation to their work” (Franco 1969: 310). Franco considered Carpentier magical-realist, but did not seem to think his notion of marvelous reality was true. However, for the purpose of this chapter, the most notable feature of her contribution is the exclusion of Roh from the discussion and the suggestion that magical realism came into being in Latin America.

Also in 1969, Angel Valbuena Briones published another essay on magical realism called “Una cala en el realismo mágico”. He cited Roh as the first person to use the term and gave a brief summary of the art Roh considered magical-realist. He saw the fantastic, *lo real maravilloso*, and magical realism as being parts of the same “corriente estilística” and that magical realism was different from the others because “la elaboración del realismo mágico presupone la visión de un mundo sorprendente, de una realidad en la que la fantasía y el mito forman parte de ella” (Valbuena Briones 1969: 233-36). Valbuena Briones did not consider magical realism to be strictly Latin American, but he did seem to suggest its existence in that part of the world was only related in name to the European contribution.

In 1974 Roberto González Echevarría published “Isla a su vuelo fugitivo” which concentrated on the biographical and

literary evolution of Carpentier. In it, González Echevarría summarized Carpentier's work by writing his words were "una búsqueda de vínculo entre la escritura y la condición americana" (González Echevarría 1983: 145). González Echevarría associated magical realism with this Latin Americanist thesis by considering it to be essentially the same as *lo real maravilloso*; the latter only differing because of its Surrealist roots and the former being more "fenomenológica" (González Echevarría 1983: 152). He recognized Roh as the source for the term and summarized the German critic's ideas, but in the end concluded "[l]as teorías de Roh no tienen mayor impacto sobre el escritor hispanoamericano" (González Echevarría 1983: 154). González Echevarría considered magical realism and *lo real maravilloso* to be the same thing and he argued it was a Latin American phenomenon, thereby diminishing Roh's contribution within the term's historical evolution.

Perhaps the high point (or low point) of this deliberation was the 1973 (published in 1975) Congreso Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana held at Michigan State University. The declared intention of the conference was to resolve once and for all the question of magical realism's definition and its role in Latin American literature. Emir Rodríguez Monegal's opening remarks famously referred to the "diálogo de sordos" which had developed around magical realism where many critics were using the same term, within the same forum, but in reference to different notions (Rodríguez Monegal 1975: 26). Years later, Seymour Menton recalled that at the conference "many papers were read, heated discussions ensued, and some scholars even argued that, because of the lack of agreement, the term should be eliminated completely" (Menton 1983: 9).

Nevertheless the term endured and in the same year the conference was published Enrique Anderson Imbert published *El realismo mágico y otros ensayos* where he disagreed with Carpentier arguing that within literature reality is represented as if it were magic, but that it is not really magical. Lucila-Inés Mena also published an article during this year criticizing Flores for the breadth of his definition arguing Flores “define como realismo mágico todo el movimiento literario que, efectivamente, empezó a vislumbrarse en Hispanoamérica hacia la década del treinta” (Mena 1975: 397). She gave a brief definition of Roh’s notion of magical realism, but then continued by associating it with an aspect of Todorov’s fantastic writing “hay una gran correspondencia entre el realismo mágico de Roh y lo maravilloso de Todorov” (Mena 1975: 406). Lastly, she wrote that magical-realist authors “cultivan una temática que enfoca insistentemente la realidad americana a través de sus mitos y de su naturaleza” (Mena 1975: 407). 1975 was an important year for magical realism in Latin American literature with most critics recognizing the “diálogo de sordos” while also arguing it was a Latin American phenomenon with little or no connection to Roh.

1975 still held one more important moment which further illustrated the confusion. Many critics considered Carpentier to be a magical-realist, but he presented a paper expressing disagreement. He differentiated himself from magical realism in a lecture titled “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” given in the Caracas Athenaeum on 22 May 1975. Carpentier incorrectly affirmed that what was described in Roh’s book “is simply Expressionist painting” which has “nothing to do with concrete political agendas” (Carpentier 1995: 102). In truth, Roh’s book described magical realism as a

reaction to and departure from Expressionist painting. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned above, several of the artists involved were politically active although Carpentier is correct in saying the movement did not have a concrete goal. In his speech, Carpentier stated that Roh “also considered that Chagall was a magical-realist” (Carpentier 1995: 103). This is also incorrect because while Roh did indeed mention Chagall, he did so in order to celebrate that magical realism had moved away from such Expressionist art as that typified in Chagall’s work.<sup>24</sup> This contribution to the debate showed how little Roh’s theories were comprehended by Carpentier and how much of a “dialogue of the deaf” the debate had become.

#### *Out of Confusion and Toward Hybrid Societies*

Fortunately Carpentier’s words did not have much effect, because at this point the discussion began to diverge from an interest in *lo real maravilloso*. In 1977 Emir Rodríguez Monegal published a short article which outlined Latin American criticism’s efforts to name the “new narrative” (Rodríguez Monegal 1977: 27). For him, the various attempts which included magical realism and *lo real maravilloso* had

---

<sup>24</sup> Roh mentions Chagall in a paragraph where he is outlining the nature of Expressionism; he wrote: “But above all (as in Chagall’s work) animals walked in the sky; behind the transparent brain of the viewer, also present in the picture, appeared towns and villages; overly vehement and heated heads popped like corks from overflowing bottles; grandiose chromatic storms flared through all these beings; and the farthest reaches of the pictures appeared mysteriously close to foregrounds” (Roh 1995: 17). In the next paragraph Roh directs the reader towards what he has called magical-realist art and states that in comparison with the description from the previous paragraph: “It seems to us that this fantastic dreamscape has completely vanished and that our real world re-emerges before our eyes” (Roh 1995: 17).

something in common: “they all attempt to offer a formula to overcome the limitations of mimetic realism” (Rodríguez Monegal 1977: 26). However, magical realism and *lo real maravilloso* differed because Roh “was more interested in the phenomenological activity of ‘seeing’ reality” while Carpentier “substituted Roh’s phenomenological approach with an ontological approach” (Rodríguez Monegal 1977: 26-27). Rodríguez Monegal made sure to point out that this “meant something completely different from what Roh had meant” (Rodríguez Monegal 1977: 27). Rodríguez Monegal’s contribution argued that magical realism and *lo real maravilloso* were different notions.

In the same year the discussion also turned towards the reincorporation of magical realism’s historical evolution with Juan Barroso’s aforementioned *‘Realismo mágico’ y ‘Lo real maravilloso’ en El reino de este mundo y El siglo de las luces*. Barroso also separated magical realism and *lo real maravilloso* along the phenomenological/ontological line. Furthermore, the beginning of his book provided an analysis of Roh’s role as innovator of magical realism. He dedicated the first thirty pages to a study of magical realism’s history both in painting and literature. This section discussed Roh and maintained him as a constant, comparing other critics and notions with the German’s ideas. Barroso’s work continued the theme of separating magical realism and *lo real maravilloso*, but more importantly, positioned Roh as an important crux in the discussion.

In 1980 Irlemar Chiampi published a detailed study on the subject. Applying notions from Russian Formalism, New Criticism, reception theory, and other critical approaches, Chiampi analyzed narrative to outline the differences between magical realism and *lo real maravilloso*. She emphasized the

phenomenological point of view of Roh's work in writing "lo que le interesaba postular como mágico era más *el acto de percepción* que la cualidad esencial del mundo objetivo" and considered Roh's vision distinct from Carpentier's ontological approach (Chiampi 1983: 24). Chiampi's words were yet another example of an emerging trend, that of marking a distinction between Roh's magical realism and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* along the difference of the first representing reality and the second being reality.

Carpentier's ontological approach can be illustrated by looking at the famous scene in *El reino de este mundo* (1949) when the slave leader Mackandal is to be executed by burning. In attendance are characters which have faith in the power of Mackandal's magic as well as others who do not. In the novel's prologue Carpentier had expounded upon the importance of having faith in order to understand a world where "hombres ansiosos de libertad creyeron en los poderes licantrópicos de Mackandal, a punto de que esa fe colectiva produjera un milagro el día de su ejecución" (Carpentier 1985: 16). The narration describes the flames growing around the slave leader when "[s]us ataduras cayeron, y el cuerpo del negro se espigó en el aire, volando por sobre las cabezas, antes de hundirse en las ondas negreas de la masa de esclavos" (Carpentier 1985: 42). This escape excites the slaves to such a point that soldiers also present at the execution charge and the narration continues "[y] a tanto llegó el estrépito y la grito y la turbamulta, que muy poco vieron que Mackandal, agarrado por diez soldados, era metido de cabeza en el fuego, y que una llama crecida por el pelo encendido ahogaba su último grito" (Carpentier 1985: 42-43). In this scene the narration has presented two outcomes for Mackandal's execution. Lois Parkinson Zamora has accurately

argued that while the characters in this scene “select one or another of the contradictory meanings according to their own cultural positioning [...] the reader must envision them all at once” (Zamora 2005: 30). For Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* to work, the reader must have faith in the ontologically magical nature of Mackandal’s world and thus believe in his miraculous escape like his fellow slaves did in this scene. In the prologue Carpentier made clear where he stood on the question of faith stating that when visiting the lands where the story took place he was “en contacto cotidiano con algo que podríamos llamar lo real maravilloso” (Carpentier 1985: 16). Carpentier possessed the necessary faith to find *lo real maravilloso* in the real world. In contrast, Roh wrote in the prologue of his book “with the word ‘magic’ as opposed to ‘mystic,’ I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (Roh 1995: 16). The key word in this sentence is “represented”; Roh was writing about how the world is represented by artists, not how it exists in reality. Roh expressed a phenomenological view in magical realism while Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* was ontological.

Earlier in this chapter Roh’s philosophical vision of magical realism as a middle ground between practicality and idealism was discussed. Carpentier fits into the idealist extreme because he believed a marvelous world existed. Roh’s text does not discuss his own personal beliefs regarding the existence of magic in the real world; instead he concentrated on artistic representations of the world. He wrote:

This second objective world thereby rigorously resembles the first, the existing world, but it is a purified world, a referential world [...] Post-Expressionism [magical realism], in holding to

existing exteriority, wants to say clearly that we  
have to shape the world we find in front of us.  
(Roh 1995: 24)

For Roh, art changes the world in front of us by purifying and shaping it in such a way as to express the magic which “palpitates” behind it (Roh 1995: 16). Roh claims this magic can be seen in art, but to find it in the real world would require a mystical faith of the type described by Carpentier. Roh expressly said he was not talking about mystical faith coming down from above, but a representation of reality which can provoke spectators to find magic within an artistic work and for this reason it is misleading to link his magical realism with Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso*.

Seymour Menton’s book *Magical Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981*, published in 1983, bucked the trend. It looked at the pictorial aspect of magical realism’s early history, naturally focusing heavily on Roh. Menton intended his book to be the first of a two-part study with the second looking at the literary implications of Roh’s ideas. The second half was not published until 1998 which is unfortunate as it could have, perhaps, helped to move Roh’s ideas to more of a prominent position in the discussion of literary magical realism. Nevertheless, confusion surrounding the term was still evident a year later when Robert Young and Keith Hollaman published their *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*. The collection’s introduction underlined that those who did not consider magical realism within its historical evolution were more likely to create terminological confusion. The closest they came to mentioning Roh was writing that “[t]he term had been used in art history to characterize some painters” and their definition of magical realism was quite ambiguous: “a category of fiction that could

be distinguished from traditional realistic and naturalistic fiction on the one hand, and from recognized categories of the fantastic” (Young and Hollaman 1984: 1). As a result, their anthology included short stories such as Nikolai Gogol’s “The Nose” which is probably better associated with the nineteenth-century fantastic; however this is not surprising as Young and Holloman quoted Ángel Flores’s aforementioned problematic publication on magical realism several times and their understanding of the term seems related in breadth to his.

The differences between fantastic literature and magical realism had been delineated by Leal in 1967, but had nevertheless remained a point of confusion for many years. In 1985 Amaryll Chanady confronted the problem in her book *Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*. For Chanady both the fantastic and magical realism existed on two levels of reality: “the natural and the supernatural” (Chanady 1985: 9). In the fantastic “the natural” is “pre-supposed by the text, asserted by the narrator, and accepted by the implied reader” while “the supernatural, is rejected as inconsistent with our normal [...] structuring of reality” (Chanady 1985: 10). As a result of this uncomfortable coexistence both levels are distorted and “[b]y the end of the narrative, each code has been developed to the point where it must be accepted, even though it cannot by itself explain satisfactorily the events occurring in the fictional world” (Chanady 1985: 12-13). Magical realism, on the other hand, presents the conflicting views as “autonomously coherent,” but divided along cultural lines: “one based on an ‘enlightened’ and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality” (Chanady 1985: 21-22). For Chanady the role of the implied author and reader

were important in the final difference between the fantastic and magical realism: “[t]he irrational but coherent perspective of an individual can be perceived by the Western reader in the same way as the superstitious would view of a culture that is unfamiliar to him” (Chanady 1985: 22). Thus for Chanady “[t]he main difference between the two modes is the manner in which the irrational world view is perceived by the narrator,” because “[i]n contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader [...] [t]he same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist” (Chanady 1985: 23-24). Chanady based her separation of the fantastic and magical realism on a cultural basis. For magical realism to function the reader had to see magical events as supernatural and this presupposed his or her vision coming from Western empiricism. On the other hand, the text had to come from a position which was alien to the implied reader, containing characters who accepted magical events as part of life. For Chanady, if these criteria were not met then the magical-realist effect could not be produced. Her view presented a bi-cultural dichotomy.<sup>25</sup>

Magical realism’s ability to interact with societies where more than one culture exists at the same time made it a logical choice for places outside Latin America where people were looking to represent multi-cultural worlds. Canada was one of the first places outside Latin America to take advantage of magical realism to explore the country’s hybrid nature. The book, *Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and*

---

<sup>25</sup> Chapter 2 will have a more detailed discussion of the role of the fantastic in magical realism’s evolution, particularly through analyzing Kafka’s influence on Borges’s writing.

*Stories*, edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski, contained a mix of critical essays and fiction presented at a conference at the University of Waterloo in May 1985. The first of the essays, written by Stanley E. McMullin, created a view of Canada divided along the “heartland/hinterland” dichotomy where “the heartland perpetuates a state of underdevelopment in the hinterland regions” (McMullin 1986: 13). Through magical realism such injustices could be expressed. In the third essay, Geoff Hancock presented a Canada where “the boundary between reality and illusion was always blurred” and “as a child [he] was always surrounded by fantastic reality” (Hancock 1986: 30-31). Neither of these texts mentioned Roh which may be why their visions of magical realism seemed closer to Carpentier in describing the marvelous nature of Canada. Nonetheless, Hinchcliffe and Jewinski’s book indicated magical realism was expanding beyond Latin American-centered analysis and was headed into an examination of hybrid cultures.

In 1988 Stephen Slemon continued this trend. He pointed out that while not necessarily needing to come from the third world, magical realism has worn a stigma for some time: “the perception [is] that magic realism, as a socially symbolic contract, carries a residuum of resistance towards the imperial center” (Slemon 1995: 408). Slemon saw the critical use of magical realism as taking advantage of the term’s rebellious potential to “signify resistance to monumental theories of literary practice” (Slemon 1995: 408). He speculated that perhaps this was the reason the term had proved difficult to define. He then used two English Canadian texts to show “the ways in which these texts recapitulate a postcolonial account of social and historical relations of the culture in which they are set” (Slemon 1995: 409). By choosing texts from an

economically powerful country like Canada, Slemon not only continued the Canadian magical-realist theme, but also showed the versatility of the term when wielded within the analysis of post-colonialism. Magical realism had become a way to represent the complicated cultural blend examined by postcolonial theory.

In 1995, a collection of essays titled *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* was edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. It included 23 monographs such as Faris's "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," Patricia Merivale's "Saleem Fathered by Oscar: *Midnight's Children*, Magical Realism, and *The Tin Drum*," and Stephen Slemon's aforementioned article. These texts reflected how the magical-realist discussion had moved beyond Latin America and now included texts from various parts of the world. However, the most important contribution of Zamora and Faris's book was its reconsideration of the term's historical context. Not only did it provide a historian's article tracing magical realism's steps between Roh and Latin America (Guenther's article quoted several times in this chapter), but also published key essays in magical realism's evolution by Roh, Carpentier, Flores, and Leal. Putting all these texts together, in English, for the first time, reflected and further facilitated the magical-realist debate's reincorporation of historical evolution as well as growing development in international literary discussion.

In the last ten years, several books have been published concentrating on magical realism's developing role in post-colonialism. The first, Brenda Cooper's *Magical Realism in West African Fiction Seeing With a Third Eye* (1998) included as magical-realists African authors such as Ben Okri, Syl

Cheney-Cocker, and B. Kojo Laing. Jean-Pierre Durix's *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse Deconstructing Magical Realism* (1998) worked through ideas of post-colonialism by critics and theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said to show magical realism's relationship to "characteristics shared by countries which, at some point in their history, suffered the imposition of an alien culture presented as an absolute model" (Durix 1998: 1-2). For Durix it is from countries where such an imposition has existed that literature replenishes itself: "the renewal of literary forms now largely depends on original syntheses produced by what, up to that point, had remained the margins of empire or its latest avatars" (Durix 1998: 11). In 1999, the collection of essays *Conterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English* also became part of the increasing list of works which have established magical realism as an important element in postcolonial discussion.

Several of these texts maintain Roh at a distance; either only mentioning him as the originator of the term and not locating their ideas within magical realism's historical evolution, or in the worst of cases, ignoring completely this evolution. Furthermore, several postcolonial views have incorporated Carpentier's work as magical-realist. While comprehensible that Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and its elucidation of marginalized voices in Latin America is attractive to the postcolonial position, returning to a point where *lo real maravilloso* is considered the same as magical realism is a disregard for the term's genealogy and can only result in further abstraction and confusion.

A last, but important, trend has now begun to appear as critics recognize on one hand magical realism's

internationalization, they also seem to understand the need for better historicizing and contextualizing within the various literatures where magical realism has been seen to exist. Among these, are Erik Camayd-Freixas's *Realismo mágico y primitivismo: Relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo, y García Márquez* which tries to take advantage of renewed interest in magical realism outside Latin America to better solidify what is meant by the term within the part of the world where it has gained the most prestige: "el nuevo diálogo internacional puede en efecto ayudar a reafirmar las características hispanoamericanas del realismo mágico, de cuya mejor definición depende a la vez su aplicación efectiva a otras literaturas" (Camayd-Freixas 1998: xii). Shannin Schroeder's *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (2004) also works with magical realism in its Latin American manifestation, but seeks to expand the vision with "dual goals of justifying and covering the works of North American magical realism" (Schroeder 2004: xiv). Anne C. Hegerfeldt also takes the approach of recognizing magical realism's internationalization, but concentrating on a specific geographic, cultural, and linguistic area of literary studies to analyze with greater detail a part of the whole in her *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen Through Contemporary Fiction From Britain* (2005). Such specification is important and can prove especially beneficial when combined with a more generalized analysis of magical realism like this book.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that at several moments critics argued for abandoning the use of the term magical realism. They believed this was necessary because magical realism's various stages of development and often strained relationship with criticism had created a situation of

indeterminacy where many people were using the same term to refer to different things. Another call several critics have made is for a severing of the link between magical realism's roots in Weimar Republic painting and its various literary manifestations. As I showed at the beginning of this chapter, those who made this second call find little or no connection between the European pictorial past and magical realism's more famous fictional expression. In this chapter I have argued that both of these inclinations, while possessing some logic, are erred because, as I have demonstrated, any severing between magical realism and its evolution serves more to further confusion rather than clarify contentious notions of what magical realism means. Instead of cutting links to the past, I have used this chapter as the first step in taking advantage of magical realism's evolution to create a definition for the term. In the following chapters it will become clear that my definition of magical realism is based on close readings of fiction and attention to the formal qualities represented in a variety of texts.

However, before commencing this engagement with fictional magical realism, I have used this chapter to discuss the many arguments and currents which have surrounded magical realism in the critical sphere. These discussions have taken many forms and all too often they have lost sight of the fiction they are analyzing. This has proved detrimental to defining magical realism and instead has produced a body of criticism which concentrates on what other critics have said about magical realism while ignoring what should be the focus: the narrations. In order to wade through many of the things which have been said about magical realism as well as emphasize the importance of maintaining an evolutionary perspective of its history, I have used the German art critic who coined the term,

Franz Roh's, original ideas as a critical thread. This chapter has traced magical realism's birth in twentieth-century German inter-war painting and then followed it as it was translated into Spanish and applied to literature through José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* which also served to transport magical realism to Latin America as early as 1928. Once in Latin America, magical realism was eclipsed by the divided and uncommunicative nature of Latin American intellectual communities during the 1930s and 1940s when few trends were crossing borders. However, in the late 1940s, the atmosphere changed and magical realism was resuscitated at the same time leading Latin American intellectuals were searching for literary currents which could unite the Spanish speaking portion of America. Magical realism became one of many names which were applied to this Latin America-focused literary spirit meaning it was logical that the term became separated from Roh and its roots in Europe. In the long term this caused confusion which was furthered by magical realism's association with Alejo Carpentier's proclamations and theories about Latin America which he called *lo real maravilloso*. Within a few short years, this separation of magical realism from its past and its connection with contradictory theories, caused notions of what magical realism meant to become muddled and lost.

However, once the excitement which came with multiple Latin American authors gaining worldwide recognition in the 1960s and 1970s waned, critics began to take a more sober and detailed look at magical realism which enabled them to reconnect the term to its past, separate it from *lo real maravilloso*, and move closer to a definition. Yet, just as this was happening in Latin America, theorists and critics dealing with post-colonialism in Canada, India, Europe, the United

States, and other parts of the world began to look to magical realism as an important tool of postcolonial expression. This trend continues today and while there is some evidence of postcolonial critics once again associating magical realism with *lo real maravilloso* or forgetting the term's genealogy, generally speaking more detailed studies of the term within its proper historical evolution are appearing and it is my feeling that extending this type of study from geographically specific areas to something which encompasses magical realism as a worldwide phenomenon is the best way to obtain a definition. This chapter argues that magical realism's evolution has been unpredictable. Its future is difficult to determine, but criticism has spent more than eighty years trying to understand what it is and provide a definition. It is my intention in the following chapters to refocus the debate from a concentration on what has been written about magical realism to the fiction. It is in the texts where magical realism's definition can be uncovered. However, in order to do this effectively it is essential to maintain the term's history as a constant or else risk, once again, entering a "dialogue of the deaf".

