An Infinite Succession of Steps:
Magical Realism's Prehistory

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I, Elizabeth Nightingale, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the presence of magical-realist literature in pre-1935 Europe, demonstrating a prehistory that situates magical realism in dialogue with the development of global literature. Although the theoretical study of magical realism is substantial and wide-ranging, it is limited by the critical convention that considers the mode to have begun in Latin America in the 1950s, and often treats Gabriel García Márquez as its originator: texts emerging from outside of this context are excluded from critical discussion, even where they comply with all formal definitions of the mode. My thesis interrogates this convention, which I view as producing an untenable internal contradiction. The texts I study here evince the presence of magical-realist technique pre-dating the mode's supposed inception, suggesting an unexamined prehistory that rewards study. First I trace the origins of the 'Americanist' convention through the history of the Latin American crisis of national identity, then explore how this convention was replicated in academic discourse, which I argue would benefit from dispensing with context-based exclusions. In Part II, I read Alfred Kubin's *The Other Side* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as works of magical realism, arguing that both use the mode to explore the position of the individual in relation to society. Part III develops this theme with Nikolai Gogol's 'The Nose' and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*, which are placed in conversation with Gogol's 'The Overcoat' and Andrei Bely's *Petersburg,* to demonstrate how they give magical-realist treatment to the dilemma of the individual within the social conditions of the Petersburg urban landscape. Finally I bring my own research into contact with existing magical-realist academia through a comparative study of Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* showing Márquez's text as one that revolutionises as well as participates in magical realism.

Impact Statement

The most persuasive contribution that this study has to recommend it is that it does not already exist, in spite of its merits having been consistently suggested by magical-realist criticism for over sixty-five years.

One of the earliest recorded lectures on magical-realist literature, delivered in 1954, explicitly aligned the work of Franz Kafka with the techniques of magical realism, and the similarities between his work and canonical texts of magical realism have been repeatedly observed in criticism ever since. Nonetheless, this study provides the first extended reading of *The Metamorphosis* as a work of magical realism. Similarly, suggestions of affiliations between magical realism and Alfred Kubin's text *The Other Side* date back to 1983, and have persisted until today, but mine is the first study to substantially expand on those suggestions. Amaryll Chanady suggested that Mikhail Bulgakov's work should be considered as magical-realist in 1985, in one of the most influential works ever published on magical realism, and yet no other critic has pursued the resemblance, in spite of many expressing their agreement. The same is true of the literature of Nikolai Gogol, on whom only one relevant article exists.

For this reason, this study has significant implications for future academic research. Theoretical discussion around the production of magical realism has been hampered by a hesitancy to resist the convention of considering it only in its specific relation to postcolonial contexts, especially where the works concerned originate before the mid-twentieth century, despite evident critical impetus to do so. This study releases magical realism from the contextual specificity to which it has hitherto been bound, and, by demonstrating the value of this avenue of inquiry, invites similar explorations from researchers specialising in other fields, who may apply the same methodology to other instances of magical realism found in a variety of contexts. Broader contributions to the field can only deepen our understanding of the mode: by reversing the current dominant practice of identifying an approved context and then using that context to interpret the texts it finds there, more creative, investigative discussion can proceed in analysing the relationship between the text and the conditions of its production. Again, I am not the first suggest the benefits of this approach, but am the first to meaningfully put it into practice.

In the broader context, by expanding the definition of magical realism, it escapes the stigma to which it has long been attached. Magical realism within the Latin American literary

community has now inherited some of the complaints that it was first celebrated for alleviating, and its reputation now carries charges of exoticism, derivativeness and kitsch. This is based on a misinterpretation of the mode as ‘a passing fashion in the literary history of a certain region’; by encouraging a broader interpretation of magical realism, it can be seen as a nuanced literary response to various stimuli, encompassing a range of literary styles emerging throughout history, and Latin America’s own output as the most celebrated and revolutionary participation in a rich literary tradition.

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Introduction

In London's Bloomsbury, between the *London Review of Books* bookshop and the British Museum, is a dustbin graffitied with the words 'it's not magic realism if it isn't LATIN AMERICAN'. What this unlikely inscription attests – aside from the singular preoccupations of the university district's particular breed of vandal – is that, over half a century after the term 'magical realism' entered into the literary lingua franca with the success of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967, it persists in its association with contentious identity politics. It is unusual for a term mostly heard in publishing circles or academic literary criticism to inspire much passion beyond those spheres, and yet its pedestrian appearance on the streets of Bloomsbury (replete with suggestively emphatic punctuation) illustrates that magical realism is an exceptional case. A search for 'magical(al) realism' on Twitter unearths similarly enlivened sentiments (the first of which received over 500 shares and 1,500 likes):

> @ShoMarq: I'm going to need everyone who talks about books to stop calling things 'magical realism' if it doesn't centralise a postcolonial perspective and critique of regimes, government, and socio-political oppression. Some magic in your white bread town doesn't make it magical realism.
>
> @booksinarmor: The fact people have to state over and over that Magical Realism should never be written by white authors. / It originated in Latin America and people still don't understand is so frickening frustrating [sic]. Don't mess with our culture.
>
> @litfever: Please God, make 2020 the year books by white people with hints of magic stop being labelled Magical Realism.

The common thrust here is that magical realism belongs within a certain cultural context, and that any suggestion of its appearance elsewhere carries overtones of cultural appropriation, whether at source level in the text's production, or at interpretive level in the assignation of the 'magical-realist' label. I do not wish to rob any of these pronouncements of nuance by presenting them as part of a united front (for example, by adducing on the first writer's behalf a necessary connection between the 'critique of regimes, government, and socio-political oppression' and postcolonial discourse, which itself is only limited to the Third World if you disagree with Anne Hegerfeldt that such discourse can proceed 'in the hands of writers who are inextricably implicated in the postcolonial hierarchy they seek to challenge' and that 'critical re-evaluations may also be conducted from within' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 346)); I merely supply them

to demonstrate the surprising persistence, prevalence and strength of magical realism's association with its production within postcolonial landscapes, and particularly Latin America.

The tradition of considering magical-realist literature to be an exclusively, or at least an originally Latin American phenomenon has been widely sustained since its output began to receive global attention with the success of Márquez's work. This tradition is propagated within academic discourse as much as, if not more than outside of it, usually in the form of blandly categorical statements such as (to cite a few relatively recent examples) Ben Holgate's that 'the term "magical realism" was introduced in the 1950s in regards to Latin American fiction' (Holgate 2015: 645); Lucie Armitt's that 'magical realism comes to us first from Latin America, though it has also taken strong root elsewhere' (Armitt 2014: 224); and Christopher Warnes' that 'from the 1940s [magical realism] came to designate a mode of narrative fiction, originally Latin American but now global' (Warnes 2006: 488). This convention in combination with the enduring popularity of Márquez's work is responsible for the common perception of Márquez as the mode's 'father figure', or even the 'creator of magical realism', as one obituary hailed him (Marche 2014); this effect was also felt within Latin America by later practitioners of the mode such as Isabel Allende and Laura Equivel, who were received as epigonic imitators producing 'inferior copies of the original model' (Olivera-Williams 2015: 288). It is widely known that the term 'magical realism' was in use before it was applied to Márquez's text, but the association is so well-forged that the latter is often treated as the former's original expression. This, along with the nationalistic emphasis of early magical-realist criticism, has resulted in a critical narrative that privileges Latin American literature and culture, whilst the mode's significant European prehistory has been obscured.

Whether or not he 'created' magical-realist technique, Márquez certainly epitomised it, popularised it, and, I shall argue later, revolutionised it in ways which account for its profound relevance to the postcolonial world. The endlessly-quotable opening pages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are rightly celebrated as the purest distillation of magical realism's deft handling of competing ontologies, which is achieved by the narrative subversion of the norms of realism. Put in the simplest terms, magical realism is recognisable for inserting magical events into an otherwise realist setting, and treating those magical events without any surprise, whilst at the same time treating real, non-magical phenomena as extraordinary. Márquez illustrates this beautifully in the portrait of his character José Arcadio Buendía engaged in solemn pursuit of scientific discovery when a band of travelling gypsies comes to town:

> One afternoon the boys grew enthusiastic over the flying carpet that went swiftly by the laboratory at window level carrying the gypsy who was driving it and several children from the village who were merrily waving their hands, but José Arcadio Buendía did not even look at it. 'Let them dream,' he said. 'We'll do better flying than they are doing, and with more scientific resources than a miserable bedspread.' (Márquez 2014: 31-2)

The nonchalant reaction to the flying carpet typifies the most remarked-upon tool of magical realism, variously termed 'banalisation' (McHale 1987: 76), 'naturalisation' (Bényei 1997: 152), or simply 'matter-of-factness' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 53). This is partnered in reverse by technique of defamiliarisation, or 'supernaturalisation' (Bényei 1997: 152) by which everyday, ordinary phenomena are reported as if they violated the norms of reality. Márquez provides the most iconic use of this technique in describing the moment his characters 'discover' ice:

> Inside there was only an enormous, transparent block with infinite internal needles in which the light of the sunset was broken up into coloured stars. Disconcerted, knowing that the children were waiting for an immediate explanation, José Arcadio Buendía ventured a murmur:
> 'It's the largest diamond in the world.'
> 'No,' the gypsy countered. 'It's ice.' […]
> He paid another five reales and with his hand on the cake, as if giving testimony on the holy scriptures, he exclaimed:
> 'This is the great invention of our time.' (Márquez 2014: 18).

This treatment of ontologies forces reconsideration of assumed structures of knowledge, achieving the result of reflecting epistemological uncertainty back on the concept of 'reality' as it operates at both the local and the universal level. Constructing an inter-textual reality in which ontological expectations are disrupted accommodates a philosophical querying of 'reality' as a concept; by the same token, refusal to assign the traditional hierarchies and demarcations to the category of 'real' engenders a wholesale collapse of reality's navigational infrastructure, and so – and it is in this respect that magical realism is viewed as ideally-suited to the postcolonial world – facilitates interrogation of other, locally-constructed hierarchies.

There can be no doubt that the poetics of magical realism find optimal function in questioning the conditions of colonial oppression, but this isn't the only, or, I will argue, the first purpose for which magical-realist technique has been employed. That the mode has been adapted to a range of historical and social considerations is accepted as fact when referring to post-Márquez examples of magical realism, which has for instance been studied as a strategy of representation in holocaust literature, and as serving a subversive agenda in feminist literature.

However, next to no critical discussion exists of the use of magical-realist technique in texts pre-dating Márquez's canonical work, particularly if originating outside of the Latin American context; this is in spite of numerous critics acknowledging (although, almost without exception, doing no more than acknowledging) that such texts exist. I have selected five examples of such works for close analysis in order to remedy this omission.

This thesis argues that magical realist criticism has hitherto excluded from its canon texts emerging from geographical and historical contexts outside of its supposed genesis; that this neglect is based on a convention developed and reinforced over time, rather than any conscious critical decision based on the content, form or techniques of the texts in question; and that the exclusion of these texts leaves magical realist criticism in a position of self-contradiction. To this end, Part I of this thesis, entitled 'Context v. Content: The Problem of Magical Realism', is devoted to illuminating the origins of what I term the 'Americanist convention'; this convention's propagation within influential critical works; and my argument that its presence is incompatible with any operable definition of magical realism. The first section (I.i) provides an historical account of the cultural conditions in Latin America that fostered the impulse to interpret magical realism in its direct relation to the question of national identity, whereby it came to be viewed as ineluctably wedded to the Latin American context. The second section (I.ii) examines how this convention has been reinforced within magical realist criticism, but also exposes the manifestations of the self-contradictory position the canon adopts with regards to pre-Márquez magical realism (for instance in the widespread acceptance of Günter Grass' *The Tin Drum* (1959) as a work of magical realism); it also calls attention to the numerous critical studies which have already alluded to the contradiction I discuss here, and to evidence of an existing impetus to dispense with the Americanist convention. The third section (I.iii) progresses to the technical definition of magical realism (having no relation to the various contexts of its production), reviewing several points of disagreement which reside in this area of the critical debate (the nature of the ontological codes being employed; the techniques via which magical realism manipulates these codes for narrative effect; whether magical realism should be considered a literary 'genre' or a 'mode'; and magical realism's relationship with adjacent literary forms) and clarifies my own working definition, justified in relation to my evaluation of the existing critical offerings.

My own position thus stated, I then proceed to demonstrate that the technical definition of magical realism can be applied to texts pre-dating Márquez and emerging from a

European context. Part II, entitled 'Czechs and Balances: Bohemian Magical Realism', examines two texts from European contemporaries, Alfred Kubin and Franz Kafka. First (II.i) I undertake a close reading of Kubin's *The Other Side* (1909), highlighting the text's sustained use of magical-realist technique, with an emphasis on the radical ontological disturbance it enacts, and this disturbance's relation to the conditions of twentieth-century modernity. I then (II.ii) apply the same critical lens to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), predominantly analysing this text's use of magical-realist techniques to focalise the bodily boundary, thus developing the specific thematic (which had been germinating in Kubin's work) of the treatment of ontologies as a comment on the position of the individual in modern society, with the disturbance of ontological binaries used to query the (apparently) aporetic construct of self and other.

The third part of this thesis privileges the question of context. Since I am concerned not merely with demonstrating the presence of magical realist techniques in earlier works, but in broadening our understanding of magical-realist literature as a varied and nuanced literary response to its own climate of production, this section inevitably progresses the discussion, begun in Part II, of magical realism as a response to modernity, which here is given more thorough treatment. However, I say 'inevitably' because the interpretation of magical realism as a response to modernity doesn't in itself tell us much: 'modernity' is too ubiquitous and momentous a feature of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century world for the fact of its inspiring literary engagement to be especially noteworthy. Most literature of the period responded to the conditions of modernity in some way or another, by simple virtue of being a product of its environment. The more interesting question is how, and why, the various ways in which modernity proceeded in different settings inspired different literary creation for its expression, and it is this question which I seek to explore in Part III.

In Part III, entitled 'Speak of the Devil: Magical Realism in Petersburg', I compare the conditions of modernity in two urban contexts, Paris and Petersburg, in order to develop theories as to why the latter inspired works of magical realism, in the works of Nikolai Gogol's 'The Nose' (1836) and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* (written 1925), whilst the former did not. I first (III.i) lay out the conditions of the 'Paris paradigm', and examine how the writings of this paradigm, both sociological (Georg Simmel; Philippe Ariès; Walter Benjamin) and literary (mainly Baudelaire and his contemporaries), evaluated the consequences for the individual subject to these conditions, with specific attention to the negotiations of the 'public / private' boundary, and again, the closely-related boundary of 'self / other'. Next (III.ii), I move my focus

to St Petersburg, in order to compare how the same border negotiations (public / private, self / other) played out within the nineteenth-century conditions of the 'Petersburg paradigm', with particular focus on the threat to the individual Petersburger's autonomy which inheres within this paradigm, as reflected in Gogol's 'The Overcoat' (1842); I then analyse how these themes were given magical-realist treatment in 'The Nose', and the ways in which this treatment reflects on the structures of control by which the Petersburg paradigm is organised. Thirdly (III.iii) I examine how the Petersburg paradigm, and the consequences for the individual, evolved in the twentieth century, where the 'public / private' and 'self / other' border negotiations constitute the magical realism of Bulgakov's text. Finally (III.iv) I resume a comparative perspective, examining how the outcomes for the individual subject differ between Paris and Petersburg, suggesting that this variance relates to the different renderings of the 'hell' motif that unites the mythologies of all urban landscapes. Drawing on the research of anthropologist Michael Taussig, I propose parallels between the Petersburg paradigm's thematic of 'the city of the devil' and the devil-beliefs which Taussig finds in his subject field in Latin America; this produces a different mythological structure to the 'city as hell' construct found in the hyper-developed modernity of the Paris paradigm, and impacts upon how the individual subject is positioned in relation to each paradigm's governing framework.

In analysing these texts as works of magical realism, the last thing I wish to do is relocate the charge of appropriation from the post-Márquez context to Latin America itself; in illuminating the prehistory of the mode I do not negate, nor wish to negate the validity of the established body of research which explores the nature of the relationship between Latin America and magical realism, but to argue that other social, geographical and historical contexts have developed their own affinities with the mode, and that they too reward exploration. Nor, indeed, do I wish to reassign the Adamic role from Márquez to an earlier figure; this thesis does not meaningfully pursue the question of literary influence, which I view as not nearly so interesting as the question of which conditions of a given context its authors seek to articulate with the use of magical-realist technique. In this regard, the fact of these texts' predating the Latin American incarnation of magical realism is arguably irrelevant, beyond the fact that current critical convention demands justificatory engagement. What does deserve consideration is a comparative study of the various contexts within which magical realism can be identified, and how the use of its technique differs between and among them, to

find divergences and commonalities which can only enhance our understanding of the mode in all its forms.

With this in mind, my thesis concludes by following the steppingstones of magical realism's history to the point of its maximum exposure with Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in order to illuminate the revolutionary originality of this text's own participation in the mode. In Márquez's hands, the 'figure of the individual', who has provided the interpretive framework for all of the texts examined thus far in the thesis, all but vanishes. This has a transformative effect on the social commentary that magical-realist technique serves to communicate, sufficiently that I deem it a different category of magical realism which I term 'Márquezian magical realism', as distinct from 'pre-Márquezian magical realism'. I demonstrate this development of the mode in Part IV of my thesis, entitled 'Spinning Winds: Pre-Márquezian and Márquezian Magical Realism', by tracing the role that the individual plays in determining the ontological register of the inter-textual reality that the magical-realist text constructs. This, again, is achieved by comparative analysis. The first section (IV.i) reads Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935) as exemplifying the role of the individual in the magical realist text as a 'touchstone figure' in informing the reader's establishment of the text's ontological status. This is then (IV.ii) contrasted with the reading experience of Márquezian magical realism where the touchstone figure is removed, along with a close analysis of the variation in magical-realist technique that attends this amendment to the mode, which becomes one not about the fate of the isolated individual, but of the invaded community.

My closing argument (IV.iii) reunites pre-Márquezian and Márquezian magical realism in their purpose, which is to strike a fatal blow to any delusions of epistemic certainty.[1] In this, magical realism takes for its most frequent target those delusions which inform constructs of structural authority, but the breadth of convictions that the mode summarily deconstructs in order to expose the illusory nature of their foundations is broad; in the examples found in this thesis alone, they range from the immutable value of the money economy, to the firm distinction between human and animal consciousness, to the assumption of basic human decency, to the nature of death. These are just some of the beliefs that form the component materials from which we manufacture a coda that we call 'reality', the undermining of which is the single unifying principle of all of magical realist texts. It is this comment on the nature of human knowledge which I have captured in my title, 'An Infinite Succession of Steps', chosen

[1] To clarify my use of these terms: 'epistemological' refers to the theory of knowledge, whereas 'epistemic' refers to knowledge itself.

for its suggestive relevance to the many allusions throughout the texts studied here of unstable structures, porous boundaries, illusory borders. The title is excerpted from a longer quotation from Vladimir Nabokov, comprising the most elegant expression of epistemological surrender that I know of, and which therefore seems an appropriate epigraph for this work:

> Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialisation. If we take a lily, for instance, or any other kind of natural object, a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. You can know more and more about one thing but you can never know everything about one thing: it's hopeless. So that we live surrounded by more or less ghostly objects.
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, BBC Interview, 1962
> (Nabokov 2011: 9)

I.

Context v. Content: The Problem of Magical Realism

I.i. '*A fresh American beginning'*: Magical Realism as the Latin American 'National Genre'

Although Márquez is popularly considered to be the defining figure in magical-realist literature, it is generally accepted that there was a burgeoning practice of magical realism in Latin America in the years approaching the appearance of his seminal work (although there is no clear consensus on what moment, text or author can be said to have 'begun' the movement). Wendy Faris in her work *Ordinary Enchantments* (2004) provides a list of texts upon which she bases her ideas about magical realism, going no further back than the 1950s: 'Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967)…' (Faris 2004: 2). What is interesting about the pre-Márquez texts named in this list is the unremarked inclusion of Günter Grass. Harris and Rulfo can be assimilated into a Latin American narrative history of magical realism: both are geographically appropriate (Rulfo was Mexican, and although Harris wrote in English and lived in England by the time his first novel was published, he had lived in his native Guyana until 1959), and Rulfo was explicitly acknowledged by Márquez as one of his great influences. Far more problematic is the inclusion of *The Tin Drum*; whilst only the most dogmatic of Márquezian scholars would insist that magical realism emerged *in toto* from Márquez's imagination without some inspiration from stylistically similar contemporaries, the acceptance into the canon of *The Tin Drum,* a product of 1950s Germany, upsets the received chronicle of its development as a distinctly Latin American response to its subject matter.

That the aberration in accepted examples of pre-Márquez magical realism should be a German text is not necessarily surprising: it is well known that the term 'magical realism' was popularised in the twentieth century by German art critic Franz Roh, who used it in his 1925 text *Post-Expressionism: Magic Realism* (*Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus*) to describe the unique sensibilities of an emergent post-expressionist movement in the visual arts. Roh's essay celebrated the appearance of works of art which rejected the 'fantastic dreamscape' of Expressionism and its radically subjective style, in favour of 'a new style that is thoroughly of this world, that celebrates the mundane' (Roh 1995: 17). The use of the word 'mundane' is misleading, implying a return to straightforward realism and an end to

'imaginative' art: what Roh perceives is in fact the privileging of reality in a way which engenders new appreciation of its inherent magic, in which 'our real world re-emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day' (ibid). It is this sensibility of 'magical-realist' art which chimes most significantly with its literary incarnation, whose treatment of events conceives of the real as a matrix of the fantastic – or vice versa – and whose stylistic hallmark is the laying of 'fantastic' (magical) events and characters alongside, or atop, a 'realist' narrative, with the two receiving entirely commensurate reception. It is generally accepted that magical realism is a kind of literary neologism, providing a solution to the modern quest for authentic expression: as Michael Wood writes, 'the largest claim of the writers we associate with magical realism—Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, many others—is that ordinary realism cannot represent certain realities' (Wood 2002: 10).

Although Roh's work is credited with being the context from which the term was appropriated by the literary community, the concept of magical realism – or at least, the phrase 'magical realism' – appears earlier still, in the eighteenth century philosophical writings of the German romantic poet and philosopher Friedrich von Hardenberg, more widely known by his *nom de plume* Novalis. Novalis' 'Magical Realist' makes a fleeting cameo in his philosophical pursuit of 'Magical Idealism':

> If we want to attain and accomplish something definite, then we must also set up provisional and definite limits. Yet whoever does not wish to do this is perfect, just like he who does not want to swim, before he is able to. He is a Magical Idealist, just as there are Magical Realists. The former seeks a wondrous movement – a wondrous subject – the latter a wondrous object – a wondrous figure. Both are *logical afflictions* – types of delusions – within which, nonetheless, the ideal manifests or reflects itself in a twofold manner – holy – isolated beings – who wonderfully refract the higher light – Genuine prophets. (Novalis 2007: 116)

Novalis' Magical Realist does not immediately yield any obvious affinities with the ideas that characterise magical-realist fiction, and he never pursued the concept in the rest of his work, but his sibling figure of the Magical Idealist offers some striking resemblances. David W. Wood calls Novalis' Magical Idealism 'the attempt at creating a synthesis of realism and idealism […] It affirms the necessity of transforming Nature into a work of art, so that it retains its inherent magic and beauty' (ibid. xxiv); otherwise phrased by Christopher Warnes as 'the project of apprehending truth not through correspondence with external reality, but by undoing the antinomies between language and the world and between subject and object' (Warnes 2006: 489). Clearly Magical Idealism, like magical-realist fiction, seeks a reconciliation of two

dichotomous realms, as well as the illumination of an inherent 'magic' in natural, or 'real' phenomena. Indeed, for Novalis 'magic' is defined as '*Sympathy* of the *sign* with the signified' (Novalis 2007: 23, emphasis in the original), situating it as the resolving force in this reconciliation, just as it frequently is in magical-realist fiction. The Magical Idealist pursues the '*Wunderwahreit*' – magical truth – which exists within every '*Naturwahreit*' – natural or 'real' truth' – a universal condition encompassing 'Magical astronomy, grammar, philosophy, religion, etc.' (ibid.) and so it is hardly surprising that the 'Magical Realist', pursuer of the most profound '*Wunderwahreit*' of them all, magical reality, is afforded the position of 'genuine prophet' alongside the Magical Idealist.

Roh never acknowledges influence from Novalis when he revives his concept in the 1920s, but it is likely such influence exists.[2] His vivid descriptions of magical realism in the visual arts, whether deliberately or not, form a conceptual bridge between Novalis' abstract philosophical musings on the relationship between real and the ideal, and later literary explorations of the relationship between tangible reality and fictionalised realities. Roh's sentiment that 'the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it' (Roh 1995: 16) signals a similar reality structure to Novalis' '*Naturwahreit / Wunderwahreit*', however, it also neatly characterises a fundamental assertion of magical-realist fiction which is that the limits of what we accept into the territory of 'reality' are not denoting a complete picture. This differs from Novalis' theory, which does not visualise the wholesale amalgamation of two realms, but seeks a point of contact or conduit for the flow of communication between them, facilitated by the 'prophet' figure. Roh introduced a relationship between 'magical realism' and the process of artistic creation, and it is doubtful that when magical-realist literature began to appear on a large scale in Latin America in the twentieth century, it would have acquired Novalis' coinage without the subtending influence of Roh's work.

Even with Roh's laying the groundwork for magical realism's nominal adoption by the literary community by relocating the term into the artistic sphere, it is unlikely to have gained purchase had not Roh's essay been translated into Spanish by Fernando Vela and published in Jose Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* in 1927, two years after its initial publication in Germany. This is usually regarded as the decisive moment in Latin America's adoption of 'magical realism' as a label, and indeed it surely was, but quite when and how it migrated from

[2] Arguments for this likelihood are provided by Warnes (Warnes 2009: 24-26), Lois Parkinson Zamora (Zamora 2005: 29), and Erika Haber (Haber 2003: 7).

the lexicon of the visual arts to that of literary classification is unclear. Luis Leal notes that 'in Hispanic America, it seems to have been Arturo Uslar Pietri who first used the term in his book *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (1948), where he says: "What became prominent in the short story and left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism"' (Leal 1995: 120). This suggests that over 20 years elapsed between the introduction of the term in *Revista de Occident* and its formal (i.e. written) association with literature, but by Enrique Anderson Imbert's anecdotal account, the adoption in informal circles was almost immediate:

> In 1927 Ortega y Gasset had Franz Roh's book translated for his *Revista de Occidente*; and then, what was merely a subtitle in German—*Nach-Expressionismus (Magischer Realismus)*—became a title in Spanish: *Realismo magico*. This term was, then, well-known in the Buenos Aires literary circles which I frequented in my adolescence. The first time I heard it applied to a novel was in 1928, when my friend Anibal Sanchez Reulet—of my own age—recommended that I read *Les Enfants Terribles* by Jean Cocteau: 'pure "magical realism",' he told me. Within the circle of my friends, then, we talked about the "magical realism" of Jean Cocteau, G. K. Chesterton, Franz Kafka, Massimo Bontempelli, Benjamín Járnes, et al. (Anderson Imbert 1975: 2)

So much for magical realism's rebirth as a literary mode, but it is evident from Anderson Imbert's account, and the writers he lists (all of whom are European), that at this stage at least, the term was not considered to be synonymous with any kind of distinctly Latin American experience. Whilst the list provided is clearly not exhaustive, Anderson Imbert specifies that 'in fact, between 1930 and 1950 the literature of the Spanish-American countries was predominantly realistic and rustic' (ibid. 7) and even claims to have himself been 'the first to associate Roh, who coined the term half a century ago, with the "magical realism" of a Spanish-American writer' (ibid. 2), when he reviewed Uslar Pietri's short stories in 1956.

The recasting of magical realism as a distinctly Latin American phenomenon seems to have been promoted in a small number of influential articles received with selective emphasis, performing what Amaryll Chanady terms 'a territorialisation of the imaginary' in which 'a particular manifestation of international avant-garde fiction is ascribed to a particular continent in an act of appropriation that is not adequately justified in the argumentation of the essay' (Chanady 1995: 131). Angel Flores' 1955 essay 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction' is credited with formally disseminating the concept of magical realism among the literary academic community; if Anderson Imbert is to be believed, this event forms a sequel to the

introduction of the term with the publishing of Roh's essay, although Flores acknowledges no influence, and even appears to be taking credit for its coinage: 'I shall endeavour to suggest the general trend in which [Borges and Mallea] and other brilliant contemporary Latin American novelists and short story writers are located. This trend I term "magical realism"' (Flores 1995: 111).

Flores' article, coming in the wake of the *mundonovismo* movement, which promoted the protection of Latin American culture by the development of a national literary body that would immortalise its distinct voice, is steeped in the idea of a 'national genre' being discovered in magical-realist literature:

> Never before have so many sensitive and talented writers lived at the same time in Latin America […] their slim but weighty output may well mark the inception of a genuinely Latin American fiction. We may claim, without apologies, that Latin America is no longer in search of its expression […] we may claim that Latin America now possesses an authentic expression. (ibid. 116)

However, in spite of this rousing rhetoric of a national literature, Flores seems to regard magical realism as part of a global trend, already in existence, which just happens to be uniquely suited to, and exemplified by, its Latin American incarnation. His account of magical realism begins with 'many notable writers of the First World War period […] Among them geniuses of the stature of Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka', and goes on to acknowledge an ancestry in nineteenth-century Russian, German, Swedish, Austrian and North American writers (ibid. 111). Kafka's work is the most referenced and quoted of anyone's in the article and Flores explicitly locates the beginning of magical realism in Latin America in 1935, to coincide with the publishing of Borges' *Historia Universal de la Infamia*, 'at least two years after he had completed a masterly translation of Kafka's shorter fiction' (113). Flores' test case for magical realism is *The Metamorphosis* and his argument for the inclusion of works by Casares, Borges, Arreola, Sábato and Mallea in the 'general trend' of magical realism is their respective stylistic similarities to Camus' *The Stranger* and Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis* (114-5). Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría suggests that Flores' is 'an article that more than anything celebrates – belatedly – the coming of the avant-garde to Latin American literature. Critics after Flores, however, no longer attempted to celebrate Latin America's claim to such a legacy, but began to appropriate it' (Echevarría 1977: 111).

This ‘appropriation’ of magical realism’s legacy by Latin America is most notable in Luis Leal’s 1967 rebuttal of Flores, in which he categorically states that ‘the existence of the marvellous real is what started magical-realist literature, which some critics claim is *the* truly American literature’ (Leal 1995: 122): he does not cite his own point of departure for magical realism, but we can deduce from the works which he discusses that he believes it was in force by the 1930s, although he rejects the inclusion of Borges and all of the European influencers and practitioners of magical realism named by Flores, relegating their work instead to the genre of fantastic literature:

> Magical realism does not derive, as Professor Flores claims, from Kafka's work [...] if, as Professor Flores notices, in Kafka's story the characters accept the transformation of a man into a cockroach, their attitude towards reality is not magic; they find the situation intolerable and they don't accept it. In the stories of Borges himself, as in those by other writers of fantastic literature, the principal trait is the creation of infinite hierarchies. Neither of those two tendencies permeates the works of magical realism, where the principal thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. (ibid. 122)

A ‘magic’ (which we assume means an unsurprised, unquestioning) attitude towards narrative realities appears to be Leal’s defining characteristic for magical realism, in which he is not alone. The precise delineation between fantastic literature and magical realism (which are undoubtedly closely related) has been much debated, and the reception of text’s events by its characters is often perceived to be the characteristic upon which the distinction hinges; but as Roberto Echevarría asks, ‘for Leal it is not only a question of marvellous reality existing in Latin America, but also that writers present that reality without doubting it […] But what could possibly be specifically Latin American about that?’ (Echevarría 1977: 111-2).

This ‘marvellous reality’ cited by Leal and Echevarría points to another work which was instrumental in the development of ideas about magical realism through Latin America, Alejo Carpentier’s preface to his 1949 novel *The Kingdom of This World* (later expanded into the essay ‘On the Marvellous Real in America’ (1964)). It was in this essay that Carpentier devised the enduring concept of *lo real maravilloso Americano* which, as we see in Leal, has been pressed into service to argue for the unique Latin Americanness of magical realism. Carpentier’s idea is that a ‘marvellous reality’, rather than being a reality created in narrative fiction, is an indigenous feature of cultural and geographical landscapes. This idea has been interpreted as being relevant only to Latin American landscapes, and therefore of justifying the apparently

unavoidably Latin American nature of magical realism, although Carpentier never uses the term 'magical realism', and as Echevarría points out, 'the facts that link Carpentier to [magical realism] do not display the coherence and continuity that historical accounts of literary or critical movements demand' (Echevarría 1977: 108).[3]

When read without a preconception of its serving as a defence of Latin America's monopoly on 'the marvellous real', it seems unlikely that Carpentier's essay was intended to convey any such monopoly. This is, however, a surprisingly enduring interpretation of Carpentier's work: Echevarría refers to 'the implication that the marvellous is found in America and not in Europe' (ibid. 128) and suggests that

> Carpentier's concept of the marvellous or of magic rests on an onto-theological assumption: the existence of a peculiar Latin American consciousness devoid of self-reflexiveness and inclined to faith; a consciousness that allows Latin Americans to live immersed in culture and feel history not as a causal process that can be analysed rationally and intellectually, but as destiny. From the perspective to which that mode of being aspires, fantasy ceases to be incongruous with reality. (125-6)

Chanady calls Carpentier's essay a 'virulent territorialisation of the imaginary' (Chanady 1995: 131), and Faris and Zamora note in their editorial introduction to the essay in their collection that 'the northern European origins of Roh's formulation and its dissemination in Latin America by the Spanish *Revista de Occidente* served to spur Carpentier to his aggressively American discussion of the mode' (Faris and Zamora 1995: 75).

'Aggressively American' is rather strong. As far as I see it, Carpentier's essay indicates, even expounds upon the presence of the marvellous real in Asia and Europe. The first four chapters comprise travel notes from China, Iran, the Soviet Union and Prague, in each of which Carpentier clearly detects varieties of 'marvellous reality', but regrets his cultural and linguistic barriers to truly appreciating them. Of China he says that 'in order to really understand […] it would have been necessary to learn the language, to have clear ideas regarding one of the most ancient cultures in the world' (Carpentier 1995: 77) and of Iran that 'upon my return I was invaded by the great melancholy of one who wanted to understand but understood only

[3] When Carpentier did address the topic of magical realism in his later work 'Baroque and the Marvelous Real' (1975, published 1981), it was with little more than a brief dismissal, and a clear indication that he himself saw no relationship between magical realism and *lo real maravilloso*: 'at times people say to me "We have something that has been called *magical realism*; what is the difference between magical realism and the marvelous real?" […] In fact, what Franz Roh calls magical realism is simply Expressionist painting […] what he called *magical realism* was simply painting where real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality […] elements of reality but transferred to a dreamlike atmosphere, an oneiric atmosphere' (Carpentier 1995: 102-3).

partially' (ibid. 78). The implication is that the marvellous real exists in these lands, but is lurking frustratingly out of his grasp. Only in the Soviet Union, his mother's native land, does he find his 'sense of incomprehension was entirely alleviated' and notes 'the endless *taiga*, exactly like that in our own jungles' (79); of Prague he finds 'its buildings and spaces also speak to us of a past forever suspended between the extreme poles of real and unreal, fantastical and verifiable' (81) which sounds very much like the configuration he later attributes to Latin America. What Carpentier experiences in America is a renewed appreciation of kinship with his country, because 'the Latin American returns to his own world and begins to understand many things', and his oft-quoted concluding remark 'what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvellous real?' (88) does not preclude the existence, heavily suggested, of a similar 'marvellous real' elsewhere.

Similarly, Faris and Zamora note of the contrast with the Surrealist movement, which Carpentier uses to define the purpose of the marvellous real, that

> *lo real maravilloso* differed decidedly in spirit and practice from European Surrealism. In Latin America, Carpentier argues, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvellous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, and politics – not by manifesto. (Faris and Zamora 1995: 75)

At best this is a non sequitur. To extrapolate Carpentier's attack on Surrealism, that 'the result of willing the marvellous or any other trance is that the dream traditions become bureaucrats' (Carpentier 1995: 85), into an attack on all manifestations of the 'marvellous' which occur outside of Latin America seems to be overstating the purpose of the comparison.[4] Moreover, the image of 'a monotonous junkyard of sugar-coated watches, semstresses' mannequins or vague phallic monuments' is too specifically aimed at Surrealism, in particular Dalí, to be interpreted as a comment which exceeds that target. There is no doubt that Carpentier's essay is a programmatic promotion of the Latin American variety of the marvellous real, and

[4] In spite of Carpentier's denunciation of Surrealism, the relationship between his *real maravilloso* and European Surrealism has attracted some critical discussion - Echevarría simply states that the concept of 'marvelous American reality' (as he calls it) is 'of Surrealist background' (Echevarría 1977: 113); Chanady summarises explorations of influence by Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Irlemar Chiampi, and concludes that Carpentier's 'parricidal impetus in representing the metropolitan other as artificial is an essential aspect of the constitution of an imaginary Latin American community' (Chanady 2008: 428-30). It is worth noting, though, that the strident separation of magical realism from Surrealism is clearly not shared by Nobel Prize winning magical realist Miguel Angel Asturias, who in a 1967 interview said that 'between the "real" and the "magic" there is a third sort of reality. It is a melting of the visible and the tangible, the hallucination and the dream. It is similar to what the surrealist around Breton wanted and it is what we could call "magical realism"' (qtd Mead 1986: 330).

especially of its literary representation ('we, the novelists of Latin America, are the witnesses, historians, and interpreters of our great Latin American reality' (ibid. 107)), and this combined with his vocal condemnation of European (particularly French) culture (most notably in his 1941 series 'The Dusk of Europe' – see Echevarría 1977: 39) in favour of 'a fresh American beginning' (ibid.) does heavily imply an American supremacy, but from the marvellous real being an inherent feature of Latin American landscapes, it does not follow that to be not Latin American is to be left only the most formulaic versions of the marvellous, and I do not believe Carpentier intended it to. Rather, the idea of the 'marvellous real' appears to have been retrofitted onto the narrative of magical realism's development in Latin America, in ex-post-facto service of its promotion as a 'national genre'.

As for the motivation for this quest for 'authentic expression', Amaryll Chanady interprets Carpentier and Flores' 'territorialisation' of magical realism as reactions against Latin America's status as a colonised society, asserting that Carpentier 'used the concept of the marvellous real as a marker for difference in a Latin American discourse of identity rejecting European influence' (Chanady 1995: 137). This is of particular interest in the case of Flores who, as we saw above, seems to be simultaneously advertising magical realism as an expressly Latin American genre, and acknowledging it as an international phenomenon. Chanady interprets this as a double-duty defence by Flores, employing 'two of the main strategies for the discursive constitution of cultural identity and the desire for metropolitan recognition in the "periphery" […]: valorising the national culture by demonstrating that it is equivalent and even in some aspects identical to that of the metropolis, and valorising it by emphasising its difference' (ibid. 130-131). Certainly magical realism has long been associated with postcolonial landscapes and a desire to recapture a national identity from the jaws of colonial oppression, and the emphasis on a national literary voice is just one part of this wider struggle.

The conscious coupling of literature and national identity in Latin America might be almost as old as Latin American literature itself: in 1847 the Argentine historian, military leader and eventually president (from 1862) Bartolomé Mitre published his first novel *Soledad*, touted as 'South America's first novel' (Ihrie and Oropesa 2011: 638),[5] the prologue of which called for an instructive body of literature to shape national identity, lamenting that 'world-wide, South America has the fewest original novelists' and proposing that 'the novel would popularise our

[5] This claim is contentious. Doris Sommer identifies José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816) as 'the first novel published in the Spanish-speaking New World' (Sommer 1991:11), a claim echoed by Echevarría (Echevarría 2012: 36).

history' (qtd Holland 1996: 73), promoting his own literary output as the first in such a campaign. (This sentiment prefigures Flores' anxious admission that 'in the field of fiction Latin America is unable to boast of any titans' (Flores 1995: 111).) A similar view is expressed by Cuban writer, journalist and historian José Martí, a vocal figure on the subject of Latin American identity: his enduring essay 'Nuestra América' (1891) urged the Latin American population, particularly the youth generation, to dispense with 'Yankee or French spectacles' (Martí 1999: 114), resist influence from the United States and Europe and become 'swift conquerors of a suffocating past' (ibid. 119), with literature occupying a dominant position, because there can be no 'national life without a national literature' (from a letter qtd. Sommer 1991: 10).

Martí's 'Nuestra América' is seen as one of the earliest criticisms of the positivist ideology which dominated the intellectual landscape for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. Positivism originated in Europe with the writings of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and the publication of his *Cours de Philosophie* (1830), proposing that if the scientific approaches which had been spurring colossal advances in the fields of physics, biology etc. were to be applied to the social sciences, then similarly robust empirical solutions could be achieved. As Jorge Valadez explains, the positivist ideology believed that 'by discovering the laws governing human behaviour, one could create a utopian society in which all the social and political problems facing humanity would be resolved' (Valadez 2003: 92); this idea held immense appeal for post-independence politicians and intellectuals preoccupied with the achievement of stable, modernised and economically successful societies, and was enthusiastically adopted by the ruling classes with the promise of 'an order based upon science, an order concerned with the education of citizens and the attainment for them of the greatest material comfort' (Zea 1963: 33).[6] The tenets of positivism were so influential during the nineteenth century as to represent the official state doctrine of Mexico during Porfirio Díaz's reign (1876-1911), and its influence is still reflected in the Brazilian flag, which since its

[6] Chanady argues that the initial adoption of positivism in Latin American countries was propelled not just by promises of economic and social progress, but by the desire of a colonised society to demonstrate superiority to their colonial oppressors: she writes that 'the hegemony of metropolitan values, institutional systems, and conceptual paradigms leaves the colonies three main alternatives for legitimating their autonomy', the third of which is 'categorically rejecting the paradigms of the coloniser in order not only to demand autonomy and respect for their difference, but also to claim their superiority. […] In the period immediately preceding and following independence, numerous Latin American writers had insisted on the necessity that the New World countries reject retrograde peninsular paradigms and adopt more efficient means of economic management and government. By portraying a New World Adam working the land and contributing to the development of the continent, they valorised progress while depicting the colonial heritage in a pejorative light' (Chanady 1995: 133-4). She views the adoption of positivist values and their later rejection as two halves of the same objective of demonstrating superiority of character.

introduction in 1888 has borne the legend *Ordem e Progresso*, adapted from Comte's positivist motto *L'amour pour principe et l'ordre pour base; le progrès pour but.* Philosophical objections to positivism, which burgeoned in the twentieth century, accused it of being a doctrine of materialism which assigned value to artistic and ethical endeavour only insofar as they furthered an economic agenda.[7]

To this end, as well as abetting the backlash against positivism, 'Nuestra América' may have been responsible for the wedding, which would persist into the twentieth century, of positivism's perceived shortcomings – mercenarism, artistic sterility, moral deficiency – to a 'North American' character, and the correspondent reverence for an opposing 'South American' character who retains a close relationship with his land and customs, with an especial rancour reserved for the 'deserter' who renounces his cultural ancestry:

> Then who is a real man? He who stays with his mother and nurses her in her illness, or he who puts her to work out of sight, and lives at her expense on decadent lands, sporting fancy neckties, cursing the womb that carried him, displaying the sign of the traitor on the back of his paper frock coat? These sons of Our America, which will be saved by its Indians and is growing better; these deserters who take up arms in the armies of North America that drowns its Indians in blood and is growing worse! (Martí 1999: 112)

This idea was taken up in 1900 by Uruguayan philosopher José Enrique Rodó with the publication of his essay *Ariel*, called by Carlos Fuentes 'an essential book in the protracted Latin American search for identity' (Rodó 2008: 15). *Ariel* constructs a discussion about Latin America and its relationship with North America within a symbolic model based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with North America represented by the barbaric Caliban and Latin America the ideologically-driven Ariel, embodying 'generous enthusiasm, elevated and unselfish motivation in all actions, spirituality in culture, vivacity and grace in intelligence' (ibid. 31). The purpose of

[7] It is important to note that the adoption of the positivist philosophy took different forms in different Latin American countries, and that this is reflected accordingly in the subsequent backlash. In Brazil, the adherents of positivism were mainly concerned with utilising the doctrine to challenge the legality of slavery and the authority of the Catholic Church, and promote equality for the indigenous population. Meanwhile in Mexico, the rigidly measured approach to social reform justified the institution of a state-approved education curriculum by education commissioner Gabino Barreda, and sanctioned the dictatorial rule of Porfirio Díaz, in what Leopold Zea calls an attempt 'to orient the Mexican mind so that all Mexicans thought alike and would agree', which 'can only produce selfish, incredulous and materialistic men who have no ideals' (Zea 1974: 114). The anti-positivist movement here, most powerfully characterised by the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, is often interpreted as sibling to the political rejection of Díaz's regime (see for instance Hurtado 2010: esp. 90-94). In general, however, it is true that across Latin America, as Valadez points out, Comte's social vision rested on 'the rather naïve assumption that political leaders and powerful businessmen would base their decisions not on self-interest but on what was good for society as a whole […] Political leaders and members of the elite classes preferred a philosophy that advocated stability and order to doctrines that might threaten their power and control by demanding revolutionary change' (Valadez 2003: 92).

the text is to warn against the 'Calibanisation' of the Latin American society as a result of its modernisation in the hands of its positivist doctrine, because 'it is in civilizations that have achieved a whole and refined culture that the danger of spiritual limitation is most real and leads to the most dreaded consequences' (42). The threat is explicitly located in North America, whose corrupting influence Rodó warns is in danger of encroaching the borders:

> We imitate what we believe to be superior or prestigious. And this is why the vision of an America de-Latinized of its own will, without threat of conquest, and reconstituted in the image and likeness of the North, now looms in the nightmares of many who are genuinely concerned about our future. […] We have USA-mania. It must be limited by the boundaries our reason and sentiment jointly dictate. (71)

To be 'de-Latinized', then, is to invite 'spiritual limitation' and the 'dreaded consequences' that have befallen North American society where 'the life of the spirit is speeding towards utilitarian egoism and the disintegration of idealism' (85). Responsibility for the protection of this unique, noble 'Latinity' is assigned 'to the youth of America' (by which we gather, from the hypothetical scenario of students being addressed by a teacher which is devised as a context for the 'lecture' which follows, is meant the next generation of intellectuals) who are rallied, in a rousing discourse at once military and evangelical in tone, to 'rise up, blood and muscle and nerve of the future […] to lead others to battle on behalf of the spirit' (93).

So influential was Rodó's text that the anti-positivist, Latin Americanist movement which swelled in the wake of Martí and Rodó came to be known under the catch-all term of *Arielismo*. This term refers more to a general zeitgeist than an organised faction, for *Arielismo* was, as Oviedo points out, 'far from being a school or even a precise form of Americanist thought' (Oviedo 1996: 371); however, if it was organised resistance to the tenets of positivism that Rodó hoped to inspire, his wish could hardly have been more neatly fulfilled with the founding of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* (Athenaeum of Youth) in Mexico in 1909, a group representing cultural rebellion against positivism, heavily influenced by and implicitly named in tribute to *Ariel.* The *Ateneo* was short-lived, disbanding by 1914,[8] but was immensely influential not only in the anti-positivist movement, but in the history of Mexican culture: as Guillermo Hurtado writes, 'one can say without the slightest fear of exaggeration that it is impossible to understand the Mexican culture of the twentieth century without taking into account the intellectual and artistic work of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*' (Hurtado 2010: 82). The group have

[8] There is some disagreement about the timeline of the *Ateneo*'s disbandment: whilst most critics cite 1914 as the year of official disbandment, Robert T. Conn claims the group 'all but disbanded in 1911' (Conn 2002: 45).

been credited with disseminating the principles which catalysed the advent of the Mexican Revolution as they 'fought to reaffirm humanistic values in culture, for an end to French influence in literature and, in general, for the recovery of all that was Mexican' (Speckman-Guerra 2013: 228).

The *Arielismo* movement is important because it illuminates the ideological process via which literary endeavour gained position in the discourse of the twentieth century's nation-building projects. The writings of Martí and Rodó served to make political resistance to the hegemony of positivist principles in government the avatar for ideological resistance to foreign modernising influence in culture, and the symbolic nationalised characterisations which emerged as a result have long outlived the debates which they were first developed to serve. A national literature would be a natural fit as the motif for a campaign for the Latin American character for several reasons, some of which are obvious: a literary canon could serve as a tangible ventriloquisation of cultural identity, and beyond that, as an international emissary; also, a truly Latin American literary output would represent emancipation from a literary landscape presently dominated by European influence. (Even in Rodó almost all literary references are French to the extent that, as Fuentes writes, 'the Parisian perfume is at times almost faint-provoking' (Rodó 2008: 17).) The pursuit of literary studies in education could also act as a quantifiable progress marker: literacy itself in 1900 was low in the Latin American countries, coming in at around 50% in Argentina and Uruguay, and as low as 22% in Mexico and 26% in Brazil (see Frankema 2009: 88-9),[9] and literary studies at university level were almost non-existent. An increased number of literary departments would offer a firm rationale for Latin America to advertise itself as a nation with a sophisticated appreciation of art, and furthermore, the privileging of humanities subjects would explicitly distance national education from the positivist precepts by which it had previously been led. This point was made as early as 1888 by Norberto Piñero and Eduardo Bidau, secretaries of the University of Buenos Aires, who, in their campaign to establish a literary department, wrote that 'because wealth, the benefits of fortune, industries, the longing for opulence and business transactions must all be developed […] it is necessary to spread the high philosophical truths, the arts, the letters, lest people's character diminish and they see the accumulation of material interests as the final good' (qtd in Ramos 2001: 50). The development of a national literary body would be the

[9] That education and literacy were causes close to the heart of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* is further exemplified by the fact that one of its founders, José Vasconcelos, went on to become the Secretary of Public Education in 1921 with a drive to increase literacy as his central manifesto.

crowning glory of the *Arielismo* movement because artistic pursuit both occupies the furthest possible point from the base materialism prized by positivism (in that appreciation of art serves no direct material purpose), and ontologically embodies the Ariel qualities which were being promoted as indigenous to the Latin American identity.

When considered with the nation-building agenda of the *Arielismo* movement in mind, it is not remotely surprising that the ascendance of magical realism in Latin America, half a century or so later, was seized upon as the final arrival of the long-anticipated 'national literature' which had thus far failed to materialise; nor that any suggestion of the mode as a European import was – consciously or not – obscured or ignored. Without the pre-determined impetus to represent magical realism as a 'local phenomenon', Flores' 'introduction' of magical realism to the intellectual community might have been received, to again quote Echevarría, as 'an article that more than anything celebrates – belatedly – the coming of the avant-garde to Latin American literature'.

I.ii. *'But what could possibly be specifically Latin American about that?':* 'Americanism' in Magical-Realist Criticism

Seymour Menton has written that 'what has prevented Latin Americanists from reaching an agreement on a precise definition [of magical realism] is their division into two camps which may be labelled as Americanist and Internationalist' (Menton 1995: 126). This study is far from the first to object to the 'Americanist' argument in magical-realist criticism, but it is clear that reluctance to dispense with the Latin American origin story is widespread. This reluctance, as already noted, normally takes the form of unmitigated statements, which tend to affirm the supposed Latin American origins of magical realism even when arguing for its global application: for instance, Mariano Siskind writes that magical realism has moved away from 'a restricted Latin American specificity to a more universal form of particularism', but clarifies that he is referring to 'the trajectory of magical realism, from its Latin American origin to a larger transnational stage' (Siskind 2012: 833). When such critical giants as Gayatri Spivak remark that 'it is interesting that "magic realism", *a style of Latin American provenance*, has been used to

great effect by some expatriate or diasporic subcontinentals writing in English' (Spivak 1989: 202, my emphasis) it is easy to see how these ideas can take hold and go unchallenged.[10]

A less explicit form of Americanism comes with the conflating of the term 'magical realism' with Carpentier's concept of 'the marvellous real', a practice sufficiently common that Shannin Schroeder refers to 'one of the fundamental challenges of magical-realist scholarship' as 'distinguishing it from that of Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*' (Schroeder 2004: 6). As expressed above, I do not deem Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* to have been intended as an exclusively Latin American phenomenon, but the vast majority of critics evidently do, and so the marriage of the two terms implicitly couches magical realism into a Latin American context. At its most extreme, this takes the form of their being used entirely interchangeably, as for example by Beverley Ormerod (Ormerod 1997: 216), Maria Takolander ('Carpentier […] theorise[s] magical realism in terms of "Io real maravilloso"' (Takolander 2010: 165)), and Maria-Elena Angulo, whose 1995 work *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* was criticised by Seymour Menton for 'the undifferentiated use of the terms "Magic Realism" and "*lo real maravilloso*" or "*realismo maravilloso*"' (Menton: 1997 256). (Lon Pearson echoes this criticism, adding 'I fear Alejo Carpentier would turn over in his grave with that interpretation of his concept' (Pearson 1996: 109).) More often, the marrying of the two is one of colocation and implied equivalence: Jenni Adams, for instance, acknowledges the European history of the term 'magical realism', but goes on to state that 'its meaning developed to refer to an integration of real and fantastic elements, with Alejo Carpentier's formulation in 1949 of the term '*lo real maravilloso*' (Adams 2011: 4); Theo D'haen refers to 'magic realism in its current and most common meaning, which is that of Alejo Carpentier's *real maravilloso*' (D'haen 1997: 284); and Jeanne Delbaere claims that magical realism was 'rebaptised "real maravilloso" by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier' (Delbaere 1992: 76). The *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* even makes the extraordinary claim that 'the term [magical realism] derives from a mistranslation of Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's notion "*lo real maravilloso*" (marvellous reality)' (Buchanan 2010).

The implications of the conflation of magical realism with the marvellous real reach beyond the 'Americanisation' of the genre. This problem Frederick Aldama defines as

[10] At this stage that I am referring specifically to the Latin American origin story of magical-realist *fiction*: that the term itself originated in Germany is now widely known and is referenced, however fleetingly, in most major critical works, although Kenneth Reeds gives a detailed account of its exclusion from criticism before the mid-1990s, when Faris and Zamora's critical collection re-established the term's context (Reeds 2013: 41-75).

'confusion between magical realism as literary category and as a reflection of Latin American being-in-the-world' (Aldama 2003: 112) or 'magical-realism-as-aesthetic' and 'magical-realism-as-ontology' (ibid. 6). Anne Hegerfeldt agrees that 'magical realism is a literary mode, whereas *lo real maravilloso* refers to Latin American reality' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 17). Even if, as I contend, *lo real maravilloso* as Carpentier conceived it doesn't have to exist exclusively in Latin American landscapes, as an ontological concept it must refer to *some* tangible landscape or climate, and the conceptual leap from discussing a feature of reality to discussing a literary technique is never convincingly made, in the writings of Carpeniter or anywhere else. This means that in order to accept the essential Latin American-ness of magical realism on the grounds of a Carpentian taxonomy, we have to first accept that 'the marvellous real' is necessarily a Latin America-exclusive phenomenon, and then that 'marvellous reality' necessarily has anything to do with magical-realist fiction, neither of which can be satisfactorily concluded from Carpentier's writing. Certainly the relationship is implied, not least by the fact that the essay coining the term '*lo real maravilloso*' formed a preface to his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* (Aldama drily remarks that 'presumably, Carpeniter needed a manifesto to promote his book' (Aldama 2003: 11)) and it is understood that magical-realist fiction is supposed to be a literary embodiment of 'marvellous reality', but to use the terms interchangeably is to ignore the fact that they are fundamentally different concepts.[11] [12]

For Stephen Hart 'the single greatest difference between "*lo real maravilloso*" and magical realism concerns the role that the supernatural plays in each. According to Carpentier's definition of "*lo real maravilloso*", the experience of the marvellous is unexpected and unusual […] nothing could in fact be further from magical realism' (Hart 1982: 43). Hart's distinction points to a contradiction which exists within Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* at a more granular level, specifically in the marvellous as 'unexpected and unusual'. Carpentier himself seems somewhat at odds with his own coda on this point, where he at once 'refers to "miracle", "spiritual exaltation" and "faith"' in his writings on the marvellous real (ibid. 43), and to the fact that to its inhabitants, the marvellousness of the Latin American reality is commonplace as opposed to miraculous ('the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace'

[11] Amaryll Chanady prefers to translate *lo real maravilloso* as 'marvelous realism' after the example of Irlemar Chiampi for exactly this reason: '*lo real maravilloso* cannot be translated […] as "marvelous reality" since it is explicitly contrasted with a particular literary practice' (Chanady 2008: 432).

[12] Takolander makes the interesting observation that 'in the fusion that occurred, the marvelous real became a literary designation in addition to a theory about Latin American reality and, vice versa, magical realism came to be regarded not only as a category of Latin American fiction but as the embodiment of a Latin American essence' (Takolander 2007: 87).

(Carpentier 1995: 104)). The problem with this contradiction is twofold: firstly, it underscores the fact that in order to meaningfully discuss 'magic' and 'realism', or 'marvellous' and 'real', we need a point of referential stability from which to apply these terms, which arguably exist only in relative form, and so the idea of a variable, localised notion of 'reality', differing from one landscape to the next, makes a nonsense of the prefix 'marvellous'. The very notion of a 'marvellous reality' erodes the antagonism between the two, and so technically renders the literature of magical realism, which works by adopting two disjunctive realities, impossible.

The idea of localised realities (and attendant localised marvellousness) is justified into Carpentier's writing to an extent when he writes of being 'reacquainted' with the marvelousness of the Latin American reality on being re-exposed to it after a period of absence, but this merely suggests that 'marvellousness' is a question of perspective, which in turn raises the second issue: this, as Echevarría writes, is that 'to assume that the marvellous exists only in America is to adopt a spurious European perspective, since it is only from the other side that alterity and difference may be discovered – the same seen from within is homogenous, smooth, without edges' (Echevarría 1977: 128). Hegerfeldt agrees that 'ultimately, Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso* is Eurocentric […] if Latin American reality strikes Carpentier as marvellous, it can do so only if European reality is taken as the norm' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 23). When Carpentier describes the 'marvellous' reality of America he cannot be referring to its effect on its own inhabitants, to whom it is 'commonplace', and so we must assume that magical-realist fiction would represent to its local readers more or less unmediated realism. This might even be to suggest that magical-realist writers had so to speak 'stumbled upon' the literary technique of magical realism in pursuit of a realist narrative style; or perhaps that they, like Carpentier, were privy to a binocular view of Latin American reality from within and without, which they exploited to create fiction representing its relative 'marvelousness' purely for export purposes in order to attract outside readers to their texts on grounds of their exoticism.[13] These suggestions, apart from being patently ridiculous, undermine the clearly deliberate nature of magical realism's unsettlingly sanguine approach to its own events, and ignore the broader philosophical agenda of magical-realist fiction, which is to augment the truths it expresses by purposely distancing itself from realist conventions. It is neither sensible

[13] This Timothy Brennan terms 'saleable Third-Worldism' (Brennan 1989: 65). Such Marxist theories may be a valid criticism for post-Márquez magical realists who benefitted from its popularity (Rushdie, Allende, Esquivel, etc.), but given the almost complete indifference to the literature of Latin America that the rest of the world had shown until the mid-twentieth century, to apply it to the earliest magical realists (Rulfo, Márquez, Asturias) would be to impute to them astonishing foresight, not to mention cynicism.

to argue that early Latin American magical-realist writers guilelessly represented their own pedestrian reality without suspecting its reception by the rest of the world, nor that they created magical-realist fiction as a kind of tourist brochure, and so there can be no causal, and certainly no essential relationship between the nature of Latin American reality and the literary techniques employed by its writers.

Although the Americanist argument is far from being without detractors, several critics go only halfway towards a rejection of magical realism's essential American-ness without focusing their critical energies on pursuing the question. For example, in what is surely the most influential volume of magical-realist scholarship ever published, Faris and Zamora's *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), the editors claim in their foreword that 'readers know that magical realism is not a Latin American monopoly' and that the volume 'considers magical realism an international commodity' (Faris and Zamora 1995: 2). In Wendy Faris' essay in the same volume she ventures that although there are 'essential connections to be made between these magical-realist texts and the particular cultural traditions and historical connections that produced them […] one can register significant similarities that indicate a world-wide movement of a sort' (Faris 1995: 187). Shannin Schroeder writes that magical realism 'has been appropriated by a variety of authors, many of whom have no connection to Latin American literature whatsoever', suggesting an internationalist perspective, but goes on to refer to the same group as 'international writers [who] continue to borrow from (and elaborate on) the Latin American magical-realist tradition' (Schroeder 2004: 3-4).

It is clear that even critics who appear to be arguing for magical realism's pre-existing its American incarnation remain somewhat in thrall to the origin story they purport to challenge. A particular exemplar of this halfway-mark occupancy is Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, who writes that she is 'increasingly dissatisfied' with 'a tendency in recent debates […] to systematically consider the concept of magical realism "in its specific engagement with postcoloniality"' (here she is quoting Stephen Slemon's seminal 1988 article) and asserts that 'magical realism is not exclusively a postcolonial phenomenon, but a much older one whose various offshoots require

more precise and specific definitions' (Delbaere-Garant 1995: 249).[14] However, in arguing for this more inclusive approach, Delbaere-Garant takes as her test-cases only texts which postdate Márquez (Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* (1977) and Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* (1988)), only one of which is not labelled postcolonial, and makes clear that she perceives texts from outside the Latin American context to differ fundamentally from those emerging from within it, arguing that they 'devise ways of heightening the real, rather than doing away with it', and that they '[remain] strongly anchored in the real and the moral – a far cry from a novel like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*' (ibid. 261). The phrasing of this distinction signals that, not unusually in magical-realist scholarship, Márquez's text is being used as the benchmark against which other texts' 'magical-realness' is measured, but the specific terms of her distinction either ignore or dismiss the widely-accepted premise that magical-realist texts – including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – have always employed magic in the service of 'heightening' reality in the way she describes later English-language works to do. Delbaere-Garant locates her test cases exclusively within the sub-categories she has devised to suit them ('psychic, mythic and grotesque realism' (ibid. 250)), whilst the Latin American works occupy the master category of 'magical realism', a point further illustrated when she concludes that 'much as the Anglophone world wants to challenge traditional realism, it is not the Hispanic world' (ibid). This suggests that, in spite of her objection that magical realism is 'much older' than the postcolonial context, for Delbaere-Garant, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* ultimately remains the father text, and postcolonialism – specifically Latin American postcolonialism – its original and most authentic expression.

A more decisive rejection of the Americanist claim to magical realism is Amaryll Chanady's 1995 essay decrying what she calls the 'Territorialisation of the Imaginary', levelled specifically against Flores' 1955 article, but implicitly extending to the field as a whole, as she proposes 'a reconsideration of what has frequently been considered […] as the authentic literary expression of Latin America: magical realism' (Chanady 1995: 126). The bulk of the essay disassembles Flores' and Carpentier's rejection of European influence (uncompromisingly

[14] It's worth pointing out that Slemon never claims that magical realism *is* an 'exclusively postcolonial phenomenon'. In fact, his study carries the lengthy disclaimer that although 'magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions […] [t]hat does not mean that magic realism somehow worms its way into all, or even most, literary texts written from marginal cultures, or that it is somehow absent from the literary archives of the imperial centre, or that the emergence of what seem to be magic-realist literary texts at a given moment in a given literary culture can be explained by any single, causal relation that ranges across literary cultures, independent of historically specific accounts of agency or literary circulation' (Slemon 1995: 408).

termed ‘parricide’ (ibid. 138)), arguing that Flores’ purported defence of magical realism as a decidedly Latin American literary mode both explicitly and implicitly aligns the texts he discusses with the perceived standards of European fiction: explicitly with his repeated comparisons of those texts to works by Kafka, and implicitly with his denunciation of Latin American literature pre-dating the emergence of magical realism, which he calls ‘flatulent’, ‘elephantine’, ‘sprawling’, ‘unwieldy’ and ‘clumsily assembled’ (Flores 1995: 116). The essay concludes that ‘the dominant preoccupation of his discussion [is] to reject the hierarchical dichotomy between civilisation and barbarism […] by demonstrating the acceptability of Latin American literature in its present state of evolution within the universal canon’ (Chanady 1995: 127-8). She also notes the affinities between Flores’ conception of magical-realist style and the emphases of European avant-garde movements, and that ‘Flores thus situates magical realism as a universal phenomenon having nothing to do with the chronicles of the New World’ (ibid. 129). Similarly, of Carpentier, she argues that his 1953 work *Los Pasos Perdidos* leans on European tropes in devising ‘a nostalgic utopian recreation of an idealised past indubitably influenced by the European pastoral mode’ and featuring ‘a hegemonic intellectual and literary canon in their own society and [looking] towards the European Other for inspiration in a movement largely inspired by exoticism’ (137). Ultimately, for Chanady ‘in the case of magical-realist narratives that attempt to recreate an autochthonous worldview, one can also establish the importance of European influence’ and magical-realist literature ‘cannot be attributed by a naïve essentialist argument to the supposed marvellous reality of the continent’ (140-141).

Maggie Ann Bowers is similarly clear on the fact that ‘it is a common misconception that all magical realism is Latin American and that it originated particularly in the tropical regions of Latin America’ (Bowers 2004: 33), as is Hegerfeldt for whom ‘it does not make much sense to impose geographical restrictions upon magical realism’, since ‘while postcolonial writers may write in a magical-realist mode more frequently or more consistently […] this does not exclude other writers from using similar techniques’ (Hegerfeldt 2005: 33). Seymour Menton declares his ‘contention that *magic realism* is a valid term to describe a tendency found not only in recent Latin American fiction but in the art and literature of Germany, Italy, France and the United States from the end of World War I’ (Menton 1983: 9), and Rawdon Wilson refers to ‘the geographic fallacy’ which ‘seems, flatly, to deny the parallels between Latin American […] magical realism and the traditions of European fantasy exemplified by, say, Kafka or Bulgakov’ (Wilson 1995: 223). For Michael Boccia, ‘Magical Realism is a multicultural literature that knows

no national boundaries and will not be confined by any literary traditions' (Boccia 1994: 30). Even within Latin America the proprietorial attitude doesn't seem to have reached the second generation of magical realists: as Isabel Allende announced in 1991, 'what I don't believe is that the literary form often attributed to the works of […] Latin American writers, that of magical realism, is a uniquely Latin American phenomenon' (Snell 1991: 238).

Why, then, with so many critical voices united in their rejection of the Latin Americanist chronicle of magical realism's development, is there such a sparsity of discussion on any texts pre-dating Márquez? Even keeping within the borders of Latin America this is diachronically inconsistent, since Angel Flores was celebrating magical realism as the 'authentic expression' of Latin America twelve years before Márquez's work was published. Rawdon Wilson's observation quoted above is just one of a great many affirmative references to pre-Márquez European literature in magical-realist criticism, and that there exists next to no actual scholarship on these authors and texts by magical-realist critics is all the more surprising in light of these fairly frequent mentions. The great exception is of course Günter Grass, who, as alluded to above, is firmly established as a magical-realist author. *The Tin Drum* has afforded attention by magical-realist scholarship due to the incontrovertible strength of its magical-realist qualifications and its ancestral relationship with another canonical work, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), but the fact of its apparently anachronistic appearance, removed by eight years and over 9,000km from Márquez's 'father text', has occasioned surprisingly little discussion, and the culture of Márquez-centricism in magical realism even allows Stephen Hart to ask, 'can Günter Grass's novel really be magical-realist if it pre-dates by eight years the canonic Latin American expression of the genre?' (Reeds 2013: iv).

Grass first came to be considered by magical-realist scholarship in the 1980s when affinities between *The Tin Drum* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* were noted. Patricia Merivale was probably the first to introduce Grass into a discussion of magical realism when a version of her paper 'Saleem Fathered by Oskar: *Midnight's Children,* Magical Realism and *The Tin Drum*' (Merivale 1995) was delivered in 1983; the following year Rudolf Bader again noted similarities between Rushdie and Grass in his 'Indian Tin Drum' (Bader 1984),[15] and shortly thereafter Rushdie himself bolstered suggestions of influence by Grass in his piece for Granta

[15] This article is important as an early voice highlighting the similarities between Rushdie and Grass, but does not approach either text from a perspective of magical realism. The same is true to a certain extent of Kenneth Ireland's 'Doing Very Dangerous Things: *Die Blechtrommel* and *Midnight's Children*' (Ireland 1990), in which magical realism is referenced but does not dominate the discussion.

magazine in 1985, entitled 'On Günter Grass' (Rushdie 1985). Since then, numerous studies unquestioningly discuss *The Tin Drum* as a magical-realist work, among them Peter Arnds (2009), Eugene L. Arva (2011: esp. 243-64) and John Sutherland (2013), to cite a few recent notable examples. However, discussion of the fact that Grass' text pre-dated Márquez's is scant. Some, like Arva and Sutherland, evidently do not consider the timeline an obstacle to Grass' inclusion in the magical-realist conversation and don't discuss it at all. Arnds' essay 'Günter Grass and Magical Realism' (2009) provides a thoroughly convincing reading of *The Tin Drum* as a magical-realist work, but solves the problem of its untimely appearance by simply claiming that '*The Tin Drum* in particular influenced […] Gabriel García Márquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude'* (Arnds 2009: 53), a suggestion which he takes no trouble to justify and which is not echoed in any other work of Márquez or magical-realist criticism.[16] Faris refers frequently to *The Tin Drum* belonging to the mode of magical realism throughout her *Ordinary Enchantments* but skates parenthetically over the issue of its precocity: '*The Tin Drum* is from Germany, and locates the final (albeit chronologically first) apex of this far-flung triangle in Europe, so that it is not only a postcolonial style' (Faris 2004: 29). More recently Kenneth Reeds offers a magical-realist reading of *The Tin Drum,* but he no more than hints at a justification for its inclusion within the canon, saying only that

> *The Tin Drum* was published in 1959, when magical realism was still germinating in Latin America. The presence of magical-realist techniques being employed at this period raises the possibility that […] while perhaps existing under different names, magical realism has been around for far longer than previously understood. (Reeds 2013: 226)

Aside from Grass, the most frequent name-drops for European writers in magical-realist criticism go to Kafka, although as Bowers observes, 'he is well-known as a primary influence on magical-realist writers, but he is not usually considered to be a magical-realist writer himself' (Bowers 2004: 26). As mentioned above, he is a surprisingly prominent feature of Flores' 1955 article, and for Faris, Kafka is an 'eminent precursor', along with Gogol and Grass, among others (Faris 1995: 167-71), whilst for Patricia Merivale he is an 'immediate [predecessor] in the interweaving of the tangible and the marvellous' (Merivale 1995: 338). Warnes writes that

[16] It's certainly not impossible, though: *The Tin Drum* was published in Mexico, in a Spanish translation by Carlos Gerhard, in 1963, around the time that Márquez settled in Mexico City. We know that at some point Márquez did encounter Grass' work, as in a 1982 interview for *The New York Times* it is reported that 'Nothing exciting, he feels, is happening in West European fiction. The exceptions, he says, ''are Germany's Heinrich Boll and Günter Grass"' (Simons 1982).

'writers like Kafka, Bulgakov, Grass […] and many others show clearly that a range of cultural trajectories can be established for the existence of magical realism in different contexts' (Warnes 2009: 28), and Hart and Ouyang's *Companion to Magical Realism* asks (but does not answer) the question 'is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* a magical-realist novel?' (Hart and Ouyang 2005: 13). Michael Valdez Moses refers to 'European pioneers of magical realism such as Kafka and Grass' (Moses 2001: 111), and a 2014 post on the British Library's European Studies blog (by Susan Halstead, the library's then-Curator of Czech, Slovak and Lusatian Studies) entitled 'Malevolent Magical Realism: the Enigmatic World of Franz Kafka' calls Kafka's *The Trial* 'a grim forerunner of magical realism' (Halstead 2014).

A few critics are happy to positively accept Kafka as a magical realist, among them Amaryll Chanady (1985: esp. 48-9; also 2003: esp. 434-5) and Faris (2004: 161); William Spindler names *The Trial* as the exemplar of his 'Metaphysical Magical Realism' and *The Metamorphosis* as that of 'Ontological Magical Realism' (Spindler 1993: 79-80, 82); Adams writes that *The Metamorphosis* is 'a text not usually identified as magic realist but one which might profitably be considered as such' (Adams 2011: 9-10) and Schroeder that

> German Franz Kafka [was] practicing what may very well have been magical realism before the advent of the Boom or even before Roh offered the terminology that could be applied to such endeavours. The fact that magic realism existed before it existed, that is, before we knew what to call it, suggests that its definition will not be limited to any particular region or set of experiences. (Schroeder 2004: 13)

Despite this, the closest to an in-depth study of Kafka's work in this context is Hannelore Hahn's *The Influence of Franz Kafka on Three Works by Gabriel García Márquez* (1993), whose textual comparisons and observations are too woefully superficial to illuminate any insights on either author. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not one of the three Márquez novels covered, and magical realism is barely mentioned at all: where it is, it seems either to be used in the Carpentian sense ('South America – its colourful world of "magic realism"' (Hahn 1993: 75)) rather than the literary, or as a fuzzy literary descriptor ('students will appreciate García Márquez's vision, his distinctive style […] using the aesthetic concept of "fantastic" literature – of "realismo mágico"' (ibid.79)).

Alexandra Berlina's 2009 article 'Russian Magical Realism and Pelevin as Its Exponent' charts the conspicuous omission of Russian literature from existing magical-realist scholarship, noting that 'nods of appreciation to Gogol and Bulgakov exhaust the amount of references to

Russian literature […] in Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang's *A Companion to Magical Realism*' and that 'JSTOR, the MLA, and Google Scholar provide next to no suitable hits for the keywords magic(al) realism and either Russia(n) or (post-)Soviet' (Berlina 2009). Berlina finds that the only essay to deal with magical realism in Russian fiction is Robert Porter's 'The City in Russian Literature: Images Past and Present' (1999) (which addresses only post-Soviet texts) and the only book-length study is Haber's *The Myth of the Non-Russian: Iskander and Aitmatov's Magical Universe* (2003) which, as the title implies, deals mainly with non-Russian authors. In addition to Berlina's findings I have discovered one article exploring 'Magical Realism in the Tales of Nikolai Gogol' (Hardy and Staunton 2002), one unpublished 2008 PhD thesis from Arizona State University on magical realism in the works of post-Soviet authors Pelevin, Petrushevskaya and Ulitskaya (Keeling 2008), and one article which postdates Berlina's study, Alexander Etkind's 'Magical Historicism in Contemporary Russian Fiction' (2009) (also dealing with post-Soviet authors). A recent article by Michael Rodgers, 'A Theory of Genre Formation in the Twentieth Century' (2015), has been the first published work to suggest affinities between magical realism and Vladimir Nabokov's 1935 novel *Invitation to a Beheading*, although again, not in any depth. Of the Russian authors, Bulgakov's name appears with the most frequency: Amaryll Chanady suggests that 'if magical realism is the amalgamation of a rational and an irrational worldview, then we can also include in this category works such as Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, in which the devil makes his appearance in twentieth-century Moscow' (Chanady 1985: 21), and Warnes highlights thematic similarities between *The Master and Margarita* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), with the former 'undoubtedly to be considered an example of magical realism', and therefore 'an interesting example of how magical realism can arise from themes and tendencies within a national literature (one which, moreover, has no relationship whatsoever with Latin America)' (Warnes 2009: 163). Michael Bell notes that *The Master and Margarita*'s publication 'is almost contemporary with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* yet its particular brand of "magical realism" emerged from a completely different history, both literary and political' (Bell 2010: 186), and the Routledge *Encyclopaedia of the Novel* notes that 'the fantastic realism of *The Master and Margarita* (with its elements of ontological confusion, fantastic characters, and fantastic events based upon the ordinary pushed to its extreme) locates Bulgakov as a pioneer of the technique of magical realism' (Schellinger 2014: 821-2).

Some critics give brief mention to a Dutch 'moment' of magical realism in the 1940s, although this was helmed entirely by Flemish author Johan Daisne, whose designation as 'magical realist' was largely self-appointed after he discovered the term in its use by Bontempelli and promoted it as a philosophy to accompany his fiction. He passed on the mantle to his younger colleague Hubert Lampo, and the two receive scattered acknowledgments in a handful of critical works on magical realism (Guenther 1995: 56, 61-2; Delbaere-Garant 1995: 251; Faris 2004: 150; Haber 2003: 9; Siskind 2012: 862; Bowers 2004: 61-2; Kluwick 2011: 8)). For the most part these amount to nothing more than a mention or very brief biography: the only critic to engage meaningfully with Daisne is Luc Herman who, in his *Concepts of Realism,* devotes much of his chapter on magical realism to an in-depth discussion of his work (Herman 1996: 124-31). Lampo garners slightly more interest, perhaps because he attaches his conception of magical realism to the Jungian idea of the 'collective unconscious', which forms the focus of Martin Bakker's article 'Magic Realism and the Archetype in Hubert Lampo's Work' (Bakker 1991) and accounts for the Lampo references in G.M.M. Grobler's essay on magical realism in the work of South African writer O.K. Matsepe (Grobler 1993).

The most flagrant throwing of the cat among the pigeons on the subject of geographically diverse and pre-Márquez magical realism was the publication, in 1984, of David Young and Keith Hollaman's *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*, which gaily gathers under the magical-realist standard writers as diverse as Tolstoy, Kafka, Faulkner, Henry James, Nabokov and D.H. Lawrence, alongside the usual suspects (Borges, Cortázar, Carpentier, Fuentes, Calvino). This decision appears to have been motivated more by naivety than revolutionary impulse: the editors note that at the time they began compiling their collection 'the term "magical realism" […] was anything but well known' (Young and Hollaman 1984: 1), and although they demonstrate themselves to be conversant with Angel Flores (ibid. 1-2) they exhibit no awareness of any potential controversy in the heterogeneity of their selection, and certainly take no pains to justify it. If anything, though, this lends weight to my contention that the ring-fencing of magical-realist fiction by the Latin Americanist argument appears deeply counterintuitive to those not indoctrinated into its creed.

What I have endeavoured to highlight here is the tremendous confusion within magical-realist criticism regarding pre-Márquez European magical realism. Several critics seem dissatisfied with the received narrative of the mode's development, many openly dismissing it,

and there is apparently a considerable impetus to draw the authors discussed here into the conversation, but, with the exception of Günter Grass, a hesitation to do so in any appreciable depth. As Marisa Bortolussi writes,

> These earlier, European texts have been all but forgotten by contemporary critics of magic realism, who assume that the mode or genre started in Latin America. Yet it is of crucial importance that the early European and Latin American varieties of magic realist narratives be compared and explored to determine their commonalties. This has never been done in any systematic, or even cursory fashion. One cannot simply reject these texts on the basis that they were produced in a very different context. (Bortolussi 2003: 287)

Grass sits uneasily in the magical-realist family because *The Tin Drum* demonstrates perfectly the inherent contradiction in magical-realist criticism's two incompatible qualifications for inclusion: on the one hand, descriptions frequently take a formalist 'tick-box' approach, detailing specific textual characteristics which qualify the text in question as magical-realist; and yet on the other, anything which falls outside of the Latin Americanist chronicle of the mode's development is implicitly debarred. This creates a situation wherein texts can meet every requirement given in a descriptive definition, and yet be disregarded due to temporal or geographical distance from its perceived literary coinage. Grass cannot be viewed but as the sluice gate in magical realism's admission control; if we can agree to admit him as a magical realist, why *not* Kafka or Bulgakov, or indeed Kubin or Nabokov?

For the most part, the current chronicle of magical realism has it emerging in its current incarnation more or less *ex nihilo* at some point in the 1960s. A more satisfying history of magical realism would be one which situates its texts within a global literary context, and accounts convincingly for these early European instances. I would propose that the considerable critical energies which have gone into negotiating classificatory frontiers, and disentangling the thorny tissue of encumbrances, have been handicapped by a lingering refusal to locate the genesis of magical realism in dialogue with global trends, and that part of the 'problem of definition', which has plagued magical realism since the literary community began trying to codify its canon, has been down to the 'territorialisation' (to borrow Chanady's term) of its literature in the earliest instance.

I.iii. *'A theoretical vacuum':* The 'Problem of Definition'

It is conventional to begin a discussion on magical realism by addressing the 'problem of definition' which plagues the field. I would argue that magical realism is instantly recognisable to anyone who encounters it, even (perhaps especially) if they are not equipped with the terminology to identify it as such, and yet the praxis proves curiously resistant to academic capture. Bland descriptions like 'combines the magical with the real' just as readily conjure science fiction, fantasy and fantastic fiction; the difference lies in the handling of the two ontologies, not in their presence, and so the problem of disentangling magical realism from its neighbouring literatures has consumed much critical effort. To compound this difficulty, there is even academic disagreement on what constitutes the opposing ontologies of 'magic' and 'real'. Attempts to resolve the root problem have tended to only sprout further ones, as critics respond to the 'problem' of magical realism either by producing increasingly byzantine critical models which invariably contribute to rather than clarify the confusion, or by attempting to absorb magical realism into other critical canons, such as postcolonialism and postmodernism. Such is the confusion that Echevarría has declared that 'magical realism lies in a theoretical vacuum' (Echevarría 1997: 108). In this section I will visit some influential examples of this critical debate in order not only to state my own position on its various features, but to argue for dispensing with some of the proposed particulars required for a working definition of magical realism.

This isn't to say that there is no consensus at all: there is, up to a point, consensus both on what magical realism does and how it does it. Adams' stated working definition of magical realism goes only to the point of unanimity:

> The following definition suggests two main properties of magical realism: first, their encompassing of two contradictory ontological codes, broadly recognisable as 'realist' and 'magical / supernatural'; and secondly their attitude of acceptance towards magical or supernatural events. In advancing this ostensibly minimal definition, I aim to avoid overly schematic formulations which might both exclude a number of canonical magical-realist texts and limit the concept's productive application to novels not conventionally or obviously categorisable as such. (Adams 2011: 4-5)

Adams' definition is telling in its sparsity: reluctance to engage with the 'problem of definition' beyond the point of consensus is understandable given the scope of the debate, and also the fact that, as she correctly identifies, by engaging in 'overly schematic formulations' one runs the

risk of being hampered by labyrinthine justifications for introducing texts into the magical-realist canon, a risk that she is wise to avoid given that her study focuses on European holocaust literature. This definition more or less encompasses the sum total of critical agreement: the one thing upon which everyone agrees is that magical-realist texts create a 'blend' or co-mingling of realist and non-realist events, juxtaposing the two in a way which invariably takes the form of a realist narrative reporting on supernatural or magical events as though they presented no challenge to the assumptions of realism, without active expositional integration into the perspective adopted by the text (as happens in science fiction or much of fantasy fiction). More pithily put, 'the reporters are sober while reality is drunk' (Wood 2002: 10-11).

Even the agreed-upon technique of reframing the magical as real runs into problems when critics introduce doubt as to the demarcation between 'magical' and 'real'. The singular effect of magical-realist fiction is achieved by the use of the techniques (described earlier) of banalisation and defamiliarisation, which work in concert in what Brian McHale calls a 'rhetoric of contrastive banality' (McHale 1987: 76), and yet even on this absolutely rudimentary point about magical realism, consensus is endangered by critics who object that, as Jean-Pierre Durix writes, 'in civilisations where the religious domain can include elements belonging to various forms of traditional faiths, the dividing line between reality and the supernatural is far from clear' (Durix 1998: 86). This argument relates to the Carpentian idea covered above of *lo real maravilloso*, of the concept of 'reality' (and therefore of its negative), differing from one cultural context to another; however, magical realism operates via a dialogue between ontological codes, and for this dialogue to proceed depends upon a point of referential stability, a fixed perspective existing outside of the text, and I am in agreement with Hegerfeldt that 'magical-realist fiction itself suggests [traditional Western realism] as a convenient basis of comparison' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 52). Although cultural relativity is a legitimate concern in theory, in reality it turns out to be a straw man, as magical-realist fiction in all of its origins adopts the same broad codes as Western realism, in the sense that it anticipates the readers' reaction to its 'magical' events and deliberately models the reverse; the 'rhetoric of contrastive banality' depends on subversion, which requires that there be an expectation to subvert. As argued above, following the argument for culturally-contingent ontological codes to its logical conclusion leads to an argument for magical-realist technique being engaged by complete serendipity, by writers for whom the ontological codes being manipulated experience no

antinomy. To put it bluntly, by the twentieth century when magical realism was burgeoning in the Third World, if any writers remained who truly subscribed to the religious or mythological beliefs which supposedly imperil our ability to interpret texts based on ontological assumptions, then they were not writing magical-realist fiction, because its apparatus was beyond their operational capabilities.

Beyond this point of consensus, such as it is, there have been many attempts to condense magical realism's specific characteristics. The best-known attempt so far at such a distillation has been Wendy B. Faris' model composed of five criteria, the achievement of which she considers designate a text as a work of magical realism:

> First, the text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms, and finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity. (Faris 2004: 7)

These five elements are closely related, and in practice share considerable overlap, but provide a useful itemisation of stylistic elements. The first two items on Faris' list are fundamental, because they refer to the established simultaneous presence of the two ontological codes: the magic element must be 'irreducible' because even the slightest possibility of interpreting a text's 'magical' elements as a fantasy, vision or hallucination on the part of the protagonist automatically excludes it as magical-realist, and similarly, if the magical code of the text is not contradicted by a realist one then we are reading a work of marvellous or fantasy fiction. The fourth quality relates to the text's handling of the two codes it establishes, also essential because texts which enact resistance to their 'merging' generally belong to the mode of the fantastic; the fifth could be said to be a summary effect of the first, second and fourth criteria, but is certainly a valid common denominator.

Identifying these sorts of denominators can be useful, and there is no doubt that discussion of them forms a worthwhile and instructive contribution to magical-realist criticism. However, part of the 'problem of definition' arises when critics attempt to assimilate them into an actual working definition of magical realism itself, which frequently leads to so-called 'models' so unwieldy that they cannot possibly be usefully applied. Hegerfeldt's five-point model, for instance, encompasses the point of consensus ('the fusion of realistic and fantastic elements'; 'matter of factness'; and 'fantastic reality', by which she refers to the technique of

defamiliarisation or 'supernaturalisation') but also carries the 'literalisation of metaphor' and 'the production of knowledge', textual accomplishments which occur deep in the undercarriage of the magical-realist text, where they occur at all, and are, I would argue, dispensable to a descriptive model (Hegerfeldt 2005: 50-65).[17] For Marisa Bortolussi the essential criteria are 'Magical Plot Events: Coherence vs. Discontinuity', 'Narrators: Authoritative vs. Ingenuous' and 'Implied Authors: Serious vs. Ironic' (Bortolussi 2003).[18] Maggie Ann Bowers persists in classifying 'magic' realism as different from 'magical realism' which is different again from 'marvellous realism' on the basis that 'in magic realism, "magic" refers to the mystery of life: in marvellous and magical realism "magic" refers to anything spiritual or unaccountable in rational science' (Bowers 2004: 20).[19] William Spindler devises a typology dividing magical realism into 'Metaphysical Magic Realism' (which privileges the technique of defamiliarisation), 'Ontological Magical Realism' (which privileges banalisation – Spindler does not acknowledge that the two techniques are almost invariably used in concert to a greater or lesser degree), and 'Anthropological Magic Realism', in which 'the narrator usually has "two voices"' reflecting the two ontological codes, and 'the antinomy is resolved by the author adopting or referring to the myths and cultural background […] of a social or ethnic group' (which does not correspond with

[17] To repeat, this isn't to say that they aren't valid insights into magical realism: it is hard to disagree that 'in magic realist fiction figurative language acquires the referentiality, and by extension also the status of literal language' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 56), but that the equity of literal and figurative differs meaningfully from the equity of the real and the fantastic is not convincingly argued. In emphasising the literalisation of 'idioms and sayings' (ibid.) and 'figures of speech' (ibid. 58) Hegerfeldt is doing no more than pointing to a different source of 'myth' than that of the practitioners of postcolonial magical realism, who identified the literalisation of shamanism, telepathy, etc. as magical realism's source of magic: these are frequent features of magical-realist texts, but not essential ones, and that 'in magic realism the figurative dimension always remains visible' (59) is a feature sufficiently represented in her first criterion. Similarly, magical realism's destabilising influence on our concept of 'knowledge', to which Hegerfeldt's 'production of knowledge' refers, is not convincingly differentiated from the technique of defamiliarisation. That magical-realist texts 'examine critically the status of dominant as well as "Other" knowledge' (62) strikes me more as a motivation for than a characteristic of these texts, and the re-inscription of 'official' histories is too closely related to her 'fantastic reality' to warrant being listed as an item in its own right.

[18] Bortolussi's 'narrators' and 'implied authors' refer broadly to the 'attitude of acceptance' to magical events observed by other critics, but her rendering of it needlessly confuses the issue. Bortolussi maintains that 'real readers are often surprised that the narrator is not surprised by anything s/he narrates. Thus, the very status of the narrator is rendered suspect' and that 'obviously, this investment is the doing of the implied author. Therefore, in magic realism, the distance between narrator and implied author is ironic' (Bortolussi 2003: 361). I would argue that the figure of the narrator varies too much from text to text for it to be considered a static quality: for instance, whilst Bortolussi's observation may be true of Grass' *The Tin Drum*, which is narrated by its own protagonist, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is too lacking in a discrete 'narrator' figure to be able to talk meaningfully about 'distance' between narrator and implied author, and Carter's *Nights at the Circus* is largely narrated through the sceptical eyes of the Walser character, which dislodges the 'ingenuity' that Bortolussi assigns to all magical-realist texts.

[19] The observation is, again, an interesting one, and the historical research on which it is based is sound (Bowers relates 'magic' to the earlier visual-art-informed use of the term by Roh and Bontempelli and 'magical' to the narrative form), but the multiplication of terms splits hairs and cannot be practically applied. Designating two different terms denies that magical realism carries a philosophical agenda relating precisely to 'the mystery of life', and in fact denies the technique of defamiliarisation by which this is achieved.

any other definition of magical realism that I recognise) (Spindler 1993: 80). Jeanne Delbaere-Garant is similarly impelled to divide magical realism into three sub-categories of 'psychic realism', 'mythic realism' and 'grotesque realism', to be determined by the text's magic originating in the psyche as 'a reification of the hero's inner conflicts', or 'borrowed from the psychical environment itself', or reflecting 'the anarchic eccentricity of popular tellers who tend to amplify and distort reality to make it more credible' (Delbaere-Garant 1995: 251-256). The problem with all of these models is that they suffer from an attempt to situate nuance as an axis of operational difference, and what is clear is that even where these nuances are relevant, they do not yield successful classificatory models. Even allowing for the relative merits of each model (although one very seldom sees these models employed by ensuing magical-realist critics), those merits are negated by the sheer multitude of conflicting terminology and emphasis, which cannot but exacerbate the 'problem of definition', and it isn't at all clear what compulsion is driving this profusion of neologisms. In critical canons generally, the idiosyncratic behaviour of individual texts towards their subject matter is not considered to be a sign that that behaviour inheres within the genre or mode under discussion, and must therefore be fed into our definition of it, and there has been no tangible advantage to adopting such an approach in magical realism.

Of the additional characteristics proffered by critics as distinguishing features of magical realism, one does strike me as worthwhile, which is Bortolussi's observation about plot discontinuity: she observes that

> it is difficult to understand why the level of plot has not been considered in the formulation of a poetics of magic realism, for it is precisely at this level that one observes the most obvious differences between magic realism on the one hand, and fantasy and the fantastic on the other. (Bortolussi 2003: 358)

Narrative treatment of plot, character interpretation of plot, symbolic relevance of plot devices, all of these feature in magical-realist critical discussion, but Bortolussi makes the deceptively simple point that in terms of productively differentiating magical-realist literature from other types, the discontinuity of its events is a useful common denominator. (This refers, of course, to the abrupt and ontologically-inconsistent events which are neither explained nor contextualized by the narrative.) Obviously this feature cannot be taken in isolation, as it does not independently distinguish magical realism from Surrealism, but it is an undeniably persistent ingredient in all magical-realist texts.

One critical model which stands out in its enduring success is Amaryll Chanady's 1985 work, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy,* which defines magical realism via explicit contrast with fantastic literature. This applies to part of the wider problem-area for magical realism, which is its frequently confusion with the neighbouring literatures of marvellous, science fiction, fantasy and fantastic fiction, and so it is worth delimiting these terms for the sake of clarity. First, to briefly dispense with the low-hanging fruit, is the question of distinguishing of magical realism from texts belonging to the superficially-comparable categories of marvellous, science fiction, and fantasy. What these three types of literature share is a single reality, each with differing distance from the recognised single reality of the implied reader. (Again, here we are following Hegerfeldt's example in assuming Western realism as the point of departure.) An example of marvellous fiction would be a fairy tale: this reality is broadly recognisable to the reader in the sense that its setting is roughly analogous to planet earth in its natural laws, landscapes, flora and fauna, but the reader easily understands that they are in 'fairy tale reality' when they encounter witches, mermaids, talking mirrors, etc., and does not seek any further explanation for such apparitions. At the other end of the spectrum is science fiction, which explicitly occupies the implied reader's reality, but one in which scientifically-plausible advances or discoveries have taken or are taking place, and thus are often located in an imagined future. Any phenomena – aliens, triffids, sentient machines – which are not recognised occupants of the reader's reality are given a pseudo-scientific explanation, and so are incorporated entirely into the logical dictates by which that reality is organised.

Between the two is fantasy, whose range of texts is the broadest in terms of distance from 'our' reality.[20] None of the literary-classificatory distinctions here cause especial confusion within magical-realist academia, but misappropriation of the magical-realist label is frequent in its general usage, particularly in respect of certain types of fantasy literature; to use an example cited by Stephen Hart, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) was

[20] Chanady's 1985 work classifies fantasy as simply 'belonging to the marvellous' (Chanady 2003: 430) although she later muses that 'a discussion of popular fantasy would have led me to formulate other distinctions, which may have led to a better understanding of the specificity of texts considered as magic realist' (ibid.). I am inclined to agree with Chanady's earlier assessment in the cases of fiction known as 'high fantasy', set entirely in realities radically different from ours (Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* would be an example) because the reading experience is much like the experience of reading fairy tales. Whether or not we classify fantasy as a sub-genre of marvellous fiction, I think that some distinction between 'the marvellous' and 'fantasy' is valid for separating fairy-tale-type fiction from 'low fantasy' texts, which are set primarily in the 'real' world but with the inclusion of fantasy elements (an example would be Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*) on the basis that these texts are not entirely immersed in a 'marvellous' reality.

advertised on the Bloomsbury Publishing website as a work of magical realism (Hart and Ouyang 2005: 305). The confusion here presumably arose because – apart from the fact that the epithet 'magical' would have held obvious attraction to promoters – for the first several chapters the text is located firmly in suburban England before moving into a magical space, but the *Harry Potter* series is easily classified as fantasy fiction because the texts' magical elements are presented as a secret, but existing facet of a single reality – our reality – deliberately and systematically concealed from the view of the world's 'muggle' (implied reader) population. Another example of contemporary fantasy which has caused confusion is *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman, who was described in *Newsweek* as 'our most beguiling magical realist for all ages' (Jones 2000). This trilogy, especially in its first two instalments, actually thematises the existence of multiple realities with its pseudo-scientific use of the 'many worlds' theory; however, these texts also belong firmly to the genre of fantasy, as the 'worlds' through which its characters travel are consolidated into a single reality, albeit composed of infinite co-existent universes.

Discrimination becomes more complicated in cases where unexpected textual events are not neatly situated into a single narrative, which is why fantastic literature has presented something of a problem to scholars of magical realism. Fantastic literature, like fantasy and science fiction, is intuitively different from magical realism, but codifying the precise nature of the difference has proven challenging to critics. Tzvetan Todorov's model of the fantastic is the most commonly evoked, and does in many ways resemble the models of magical realism quoted above:

> The fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations. (Todorov 1975: 33)

What fantastic literature shares with magical realism is the presence of two narrative codes in conflict: the 'real' of the reader, and the unreal – usually supernatural – which seeks to impose upon it, and the academic disagreement arises in regards to the way in which the 'reality status' of events is handled by the text. The disagreement assembles around the question of how the

experience of 'doubt' manifests in each mode: in Faris' model, the third criteria is that 'the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events'; however, for Maggie Ann Bowers, it is precisely these 'doubts' which are definitively *absent* from a magical-realist text, and instead are the hallmark of a work of the fantastic: she argues that the scholar of the fantastic tends to interpret magical realism's 'magic' events as 'extraordinary events within a realist tale'; by contrast, 'a magical-realist interpretation considers these two elements to be presented by the narrator to the reader as ordinary events in a realist story', and the element of doubt is the point of distinction: 'this element of doubt […] stops the text from being magical-realist, but it is exactly this hesitation between the two explanations […] that affirms its fantastical nature' (Bowers 2004: 25-6).

The problem here may be the focus on the word 'doubt', or 'hesitation', which, as McHale points out, frames the conflict as an epistemological one rather than an ontological one. This is appropriate for discussion of fantastic fiction (as Todorov uses it), because the fantastic text invites the reader to try and decode which ontological code is the correct interpretative cipher; in magical realism, though, the uncompromising presence of both codes deters any such interpretative inclination on the part of the reader. This is what makes the reading experience so fundamentally different. A better word than 'doubt' is 'antinomy', as Chanady prefers. It is Chanady's contention that the difference lies in the state of antinomy between the opposing ontological codes that each mode encapsulates, which in magical-realist fiction is resolved, and in fantastic fiction is unresolved. In other words, the presence of a conflicting narrative code (the unreal or supernatural) presents a cause for fear and distress in the fantastic text, whereas in the magical-realist one it is naturalised (or 'resolved') in its treatment by the narrative, or more specifically the implied author: 'authorial reticence plays an essential role in each of these two modes, but it fulfils a different function in both cases. While it creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation in the fantastic, it facilitates acceptance in magical realism' (Chanady 1985: 30). Chanady develops a three-part taxonomy of magical realism based on this key distinction: that the text demonstrate 'coherently developed codes of the natural and the supernatural' (ibid.); that the antinomy between the two codes be resolved; and that a reticence on the part of the authorial voice both legitimises the supernatural events (since 'the mere act of explaining the supernatural would eliminate its position of equivalence with respect to our conventional view of reality' (ibid.)) and encourages the 'acceptance' which characterises 'resolved antinomy'.

Chanady's is one of the most widely-cited models of magical realism ever penned, to the point that Bortolussi suggests that its enduring influence has stymied further enquiry:

> Curiously, sixteen years after its publication, her formal theory still has not received the critical attention it deserves, and even the most current scholarship continues to quote her arguments uncritically, indeed, often naively. Subsequent scholars stopped asking the question of what constitutes magical realism on the false assumption that it had already been adequately answered. It was not. (Bortolussi 2003: 283)

There are two problems with the concept of 'resolved antinomy'. The first is that the state of apparent antinomy differs from text to text. For example, compare the representation of a magical event in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in which Father Nicanor demonstrates 'the miracle of levitation' to one in British magical realist Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984):

> 'Just a moment, he said. 'Now we shall witness an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God.'
> The boy who had helped him with the Mass brought him a cup of thick and steaming chocolate, which he drank without pausing to breathe. Then he wiped his lips with a handkerchief that he drew from his sleeve, extended his arms, and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. It was a convincing measure. He went among the houses for several days repeating the demonstration of levitation by means of chocolate. (Márquez 2014: 85)

Márquez naturalises the magical event so thoroughly that it appears, as Bower argued, as an 'ordinary event in a realist story'. Compare this to a passage from *Nights at the Circus* in which the protagonist Fevvers, in the house of the Grand Duke in Petersburg, discovers his plan to imprison her in a Fabergé Egg, so uses a miniature toy train set to escape from his clutches and physically relocate herself into the dominant narrative strain, where the other characters are on the platform of the Moskovsky railway station boarding a train to Siberia:

> She dropped the toy train on the Isfahan runner – mercifully, it landed on its wheels – as, with a grunt and whistle of expelled breath, the Grand Duke ejaculated.
> In those few seconds of his lapse of consciousness, Fevvers ran helter-skelter down the platform, opened the door of the first-class compartment, and clambered aboard.
> 'Look what a mess he's made of your dress, the pig,' said Lizzie.
> The weeping girl threw herself into the woman's arms. (Carter 2006: 226)

What is presented here is not a straightforward technical impossibility (levitation) but an event which is impossible on literally every conceptual level, and whilst neither the narrative nor the

inter-textual characters acknowledge the antinomy, it is preserved in that it assaults the reader's imaginative powers far more vigorously than the Márquez passage.

This leads me to the second problem: 'doubt' is the wrong word because it suggests that magical-realist texts leave the reader in a state of uncertainty about how to interpret the magical events they encounter, which they do not. Magical realism is uncompromising in its magical events: they *cannot* have happened, and yet they *did* happen, described and corroborated by textual witnesses, and so it is the concept of 'reality' itself that becomes hopelessly slippery. Although the text does not itself acknowledge the antinomy, this in no way prevents the reader from experiencing it. As Tamás Bényei writes, 'a conflict seems to be eliminated from the text only to be reproduced in the process of reading; the element of ontological doubt might appear to be absent from some magic realist texts […] but in those cases it is inevitably reborn in the reader' (Bényei 1997: 152). Indeed, the reverse is the case: as McHale argues, 'the characters' failure to be amazed by paranormal happenings serves to heighten *our* amazement', and the technique of banalisation 'actually sharpens and intensifies the confrontation between the normal and the paranormal' (McHale 1987: 76). Where magical-realist texts differ from fantastic ones is in the *appearance* of resolved antinomy, which is created for the very purpose of causing the reader to experience it more potently.

In this regard the solution to differentiating the magical real from the fantastic is a simple one, and is in fact exactly the same as that outlined above with regards to other adjacent literatures, which hinges on the question of unidimensionality. Fantastic texts resemble magical-realist ones in that they adopt the same contradictory codes, and they exploit the antagonism between them for narrative effect, but in fantastic literature, the emphasis is on the eventual resolution of the two codes into one: in most fantastic texts, the tension which arises from the friction between two codes eventually resolves into either what Todorov calls the 'fantastic-marvellous', in which the supernatural is eventually accepted to be an existent (if intolerable) element of reality (such as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)), or the 'fantastic-uncanny', in which a natural explanation is found for the apparently magical occurrences (such as in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)) (Todorov 1975: 44). The rare exception is the 'pure fantastic' (of which James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is the prime example) in which the text withholds resolution, and so the tension extends beyond the end of the text and the reader is asked to decide for themselves. This is the important point: in all cases of the fantastic, either the text or the reader must *decide* between the two ontological codes: they are

held always to be incompatible, and narrative momentum is sustained by the endeavour to collapse them into one, whether by 'reality' triumphing, or by its capitulating to accommodate supernatural elements. Meanwhile, magical-realist texts purport not to notice the antagonism between their two ontological codes, and the two are not considered to be incompatible: both just *do* exist, and the narrative tension arises from the systematic failure, or refusal, to acknowledge any incompatibility, or to resolve the two ontological codes into one.

If formalist approaches to defining magical realism cannot entirely succeed in overcoming the 'problem of definition', then the poststructuralist approaches which have been popular in magical-realist criticism, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, merely add to the confusion. I have already addressed the problems of unwarranted geographical exclusions associated with aggressively postcolonial approaches to magical-realist fiction; Jean-Pierre Durix in his *Mimesis, Genesis and Post-Colonial Discourse* (1998) demonstrates that these exclusions can lead to further tightening of the entry requirements when he adds the proviso that magical-realist texts must include a socio-political angle, since 'magic realists usually have a definite idea of their social role and pose political problems, which beset the (post-colonial) country described' (Durix 1998: 146). This edict begets a criteria for magical-realist classification which is narrowed almost to non-existence:

> One may wonder whether it is not preferable to abandon the term 'magical realism' altogether. An alternative is to restrict it severely […] to reserve the label to those texts that share strong similarities with García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* […] which have a strong realistic basis, depict large communities in the process of making their own history in the face of strong imperialistic resistance. The main characters are larger than life and veer towards the allegory. But this 'serious' concern is evoked in problematic terms which invoke mock heroism as well as heroism. 'Magic realists' are clearly sophisticated in the use they make of metafiction, intertextual references, an interweaving of the 'realistic' and 'fantastic' modes but also of implicit questioning of the polarity on which such terms are based. (ibid.)

This is specificity to the point of annihilation. Postcolonialism can, and has from the earliest magical-realist criticism been, an illuminating lens through which to view magical-realist texts, when applied to those texts which have emerged from relevant contexts (Dash 1974; Cooper 1991; Schultheis: 2001; Holgate 2015, to name a few), but proves to be a problematic starting point in forming a definition. Texts can of course be both magical-realist and postcolonial – indeed, many critics would argue that *most* magical-realist texts are both of these things – but

if magical-realist texts can be shown to emerge also from non-postcolonial contexts (and they can) then no context can be allowed to inform a practical definition of the mode.

More recently, critics have come to consider magical realism within the context of world literature (Bell 2010; Siskind 2012; Holgate 2019) which, as Mariano Siskind writes, 'produces new genres, or rather new generic formations, constellations of texts whose identity is defined in accordance with new needs and new critical and aesthetic desires translated into new organizing principles' (Siskind 2012: 347). In other words, the school of world literature has grown out of a need for new categories in which to situate literary modes which cannot be accommodated by existing structures; in this Siskind includes travel writing, ghost narratives and *bildungsromans* among others, but focuses specifically on magical realism as a prime example. What is striking about Siskind's study, though, is that even whilst promoting magical realism as a global literature, he continues to wed it decisively to postcolonialism: 'only recently has magical realism been construed as a world literary genre, when it was identified as an aesthetic strategy of postcolonial literary fields' (ibid. 350). Even as he argues against the 'perception of magical realism as a conspicuously Latin American problem', pointing out that 'the worldly history, geography, and cultural politics of magical realism did not begin (as is usually assumed) in Latin America, but in Paris' (selecting Bontempelli's promotion of magical realism in his journal *900* as an origin point), he gives only a throwaway mention to its consideration 'more generally, as a global literary currency' (349-50), citing Angela Carter and Peter Carey as 'global' examples. Magical realism cannot at once be 'trans-cultural, trans-historical, trans-generic' (346-7) and be specifically postcolonial, but its consideration within the field of world literature does suggest a critical recognition of the mode's international capacities.

The other paradigm to which magical realism has frequently been married is postmodernism. Postmodernism is not beholden to the contextual specificity of postcolonialism and so does not (necessarily) carry the same threat of diminution. As with postcolonialism, comparative studies with postmodernism have been fruitful, but similar problems arise when critics go further than interrogating the points of contact between the two and view magical realism as 'a particular strain' of postmodernism (D'haen 1995: 194). Wendy Faris' project of 'building magical-realist rooms in the postmodern house of fiction' in order to 'situate it within postmodernism' (Faris 1995: 175) involves first establishing her formal criteria for magical realism (an extended version of that quoted above) and then going on to list

'several secondary or accessory specifications' which are supposed to demonstrate that 'magical realism can be profitably extended to characterise a significant body of contemporary narrative in the West, to constitute […] a strong current in the stream of postmodernism' (ibid. 165). Some of these characteristics are legitimate – 'Metafictional dimensions are common'; 'many of these texts take a position that is antibureaucratic' (175; 179) – but it is unclear how others contribute to the extension of magical realism into postmodernism: for instance, that 'the narrative appears to the late-twentieth-century adult readers to which it is addressed as fresh, childlike, even primitive […] wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted – presumably as a child would accept them' (177) is a quality which many readers would use to *differentiate* magical realism from other literatures, rather than one frequently cited as a feature of postmodernist works. Similarly, that 'metamorphoses are a relatively common event' (178) is not a characteristic commonly attributed to postmodernism, and Faris' only examples of metamorphoses come from works of established magical realism (Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel,* and Carlos Fuentes' *Distant Relations*). Indeed, Faris' study is altogether impoverished by a lack of *any* references to works not already firmly established as works of magical realism with which to bolster her argument from the other side, and so although her secondary characteristics serve to fine-tune her broader description of magical realism, that they signify an ancestral relationship with postmodernism is not evidenced.

Theo D'haen's 'Magical Realism and Postmodernism' approaches the problem from the opposite direction, and consequently runs into even worse problems for our 'problem of definition'. He starts by outlining a few broad features thought to mark a text as a work of postmodernism: 'self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the dissolution of character and narrative instance, the erasure of boundaries, the destabilisation of the reader' (D'haen 1995: 192-3) and argues that magical-realist texts '[achieve] their magical-realist programme by way of the very same techniques' (ibid. 194), but that magical realism is distinguished by 'the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place "other" than "the" or "a" centre' (ibid.). This is a fair model in principle, but in practice has the disastrous result of leading D'haen to classify John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a text without the merest trace of magical-realist flavour, as a work of magical realism. D'haen's justification is that the text's use of multiple endings 'are accounted for in a magical-realist way' as the author appears in his own

book as a character and conducts the fate of his protagonist, then changes his mind after selecting his first ending and so 'puts back the hands of his watch, and thereby also the narrative time of the novel' (D'haen 1995: 198). That D'haen is able to make this judgment evinces a lamentably feeble grasp on the first principles of magical-realist narratives. The authorial intervention in question does not happen at plot level, but serves as a self-proclaiming metafictional device, replete with direct address to the reader from the author, who ruminates on the process of storytelling:

> I have already thought of ending Charles's career here and now; of leaving him for eternity on his way to London. But the conventions of Victorian fiction allow, allowed no place for the open, the inconclusive ending […] Of course if these two were two fragments of real life, instead of two figments of my imagination, the issue to the dilemma is obvious: the one want combats the other want, and fails or succeeds, as the actuality may be. Fiction usually pretends to conform to the reality: the writer puts the conflicting wants in the ring and then describes the fight—but in fact fixes the fight, letting that want he himself favours win. (Fowles 2004: 389-90)

By no available definition of magic, let alone magical realism, does this character's appearance qualify as a 'magical' occurrence and neither, as D'haen claims elsewhere, does 'John Fowles' use of his foppish impresario to turn back not only the hands of the clock, but actually time itself, in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* […] rank as an extension of what is currently dubbed "reality"' (D'haen 1987: 145). Quite why D'haen needs this to be a magical-realist device and not a postmodern one is unclear: we must presume from D'haen's own model that this text occupies an 'ex-centric' perspective because it follows the fate of a disenfranchised woman in Victorian society, but since the narrative perspective in fact spends more time in the company of its titled male character Charles, one could hardly characterise it as 'speaking from the margin'. This misattribution is ample testament to the fact that, whilst engagement with existing literary structures is invaluable in magical-realist criticism, attempts to assimilate magical realism into its parallel paradigms only serve to further obfuscate its 'problem of definition', because magical realism has its own ideological aesthetic profile, and cannot be pinioned to a specific geographical or social context.

Magical realism cannot be pinioned to a specific context. The question of whether we consider it a 'genre' or a 'mode' is intimately informed by this fact. Whilst many critics have defaulted to 'genre' (Connell 1998; Durix 1998; Faris 1995; De la Campa 1999; Moses 2001; Aldea 2011; Siskind 2012), many others have preferred 'mode' (Roberts 2000; Wood 2002; Aldama 2003; Takolander 2010), in Chanady's case specifically because 'genre' is 'historically

and geographically restricted' (Chanady 1985: 2). Bowers agrees that 'the flexibility of the mode resides in the fact that it is not a genre belonging to one particular era, and therefore not related to a particular critical approach' (Bowers 2004: 63), and Arva is insistent on 'magical realism, as a mode of writing and *not* as a canonical genre restricted to a certain geography, culture or literary trend' (Arva 2011: 3, emphasis in the original). For Bényei '"Mode" seems to be appropriate precisely because of its vagueness: the term is narrow enough not to define the phenomenon as a genre, and broad enough to go beyond the identification of narrowly interpreted "stylistic" features' (Bényei 1997: 150). Although the justifications (where they occur) for magical realism as a mode vary in emphasis, the consensus is clear that 'genre' imposes restrictions based on context, and it is on this basis that I also discuss magical realism as a literary mode.

What this survey of various approaches to magical realism reveals is that our 'problem of definition' is a peculiar case of specificity begetting vagueness. Christopher Warnes maintains that vagueness is tactically employed in order to smuggle writers of disparate contexts under the same classificatory umbrella, referring specifically to Stephen Slemon's 1988 article comparing works by Canadian writers Jack Hodgins and Robert Kroetsch to Márquez, an exercise which he views as a 'liberty provided by magic realism's lack of theoretical specificity' (Slemon 1995: 409). To describe this as a 'liberty' presupposes that the grounds for comparison are technically illegitimate, which is a conclusion that can only be reached if we consider geographical origin as the *only* legitimate ground for comparison. This is not an exclusion which we impose in other schools of literary academia, and the impetus to do so is surprising given, as Warnes points out, that 'on the contrary, the facilitation of comparative analysis is probably magical realism's most persuasive claim to usefulness' (Warnes 2005: 7). Of the critical works he considers, Warnes praises Erik Camayd-Freixas' *Realismo magico y primitivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias*, *Rulfo y García Márquez* (1998) as the only one 'to take seriously the need to ground synchronic category construction in diachronic literary history' but notes that 'the price he pays for this specificity is that his analysis is limited to the Latin American context' and therefore 'does not account for how and why magical realism has the global prominence it does' (ibid. 11). Meanwhile, this question is tackled by Faris, but for Warnes suffers the opposite problem, since she 'eschews cultural and historical specificities', and 'the "irreducible elements" of these texts—as of all magical realism—can be understood only through close scrutiny of the cultural, material and historical conditions under which they were written' (10).

Warnes therefore concludes that 'it remains to be seen whether it is possible to combine Faris' global range with Camayd-Freixas's commitment to historicity' (11).

This is the clearest articulation of any in magical-realist criticism of the contradiction that runs to its core. Warnes at once condemns and demands historical and cultural specificity. It seems clear to me that the solution to this impasse is not to hold out for the discovery of this Tasmanian tiger, a hitherto unsuspected critical angle or paradigm to facilitate the alchemic miracle of the 'combination' viewpoint, but to relegate specificities to secondary rank. Warnes' fear seems to be that *any* such hegemonic concession will be tantamount to a total unmooring of magical realism, that without a 'commitment to historicity', with historicity in the passenger seat, critics can only be governed by 'naive, sentimental or Romantic assumptions that magical realism is concerned with describing some kind of dreamily ahistorical "magical reality"' (Warnes 2005: 11). Perhaps the trouble that academics have had in pinning down and articulating the machinations of magical realism contributes to this anxiety, but it seems overly emphatic. After all, whilst contextualisations are frequently invaluable, they need not necessarily occupy the forefront of our every critical discussion, especially where the context itself does not occupy such a position within the text. This point is made by Bényei, in proposing the same model: 'I suggest that a reverse procedure could be installed as an experiment: one could look at the group of texts considered "magic realist" by the little critical consensus there is on the matter, and bracket the geographical/cultural context - always conceding that the context is there and is continually reasserting itself' (Bényei 1997: 150). Context can occupy the leading evaluative role in any given study, but cannot be considered in a definition of magical realism itself. Since magical-realist texts *do* share common poetics, characteristics and narrative techniques – the fact that we can recognise them at all is proof of this – and yet do *not* share a common context, what sensible approach is there but to consider context on a text-by-text basis, especially since its position of relevance varies between texts of the same category?

With specificities of context relegated to secondary consideration, a schema of magical realism needs to be established which is relevant across all its instances. Informed by the consensus already achieved by magical-realist criticism, I propose to broadly follow Adams' definition, as quoted above, that magical-realist texts are marked out by their 'encompassing of two contradictory ontological codes, broadly recognisable as "realist" and "magical / supernatural"; and secondly their attitude of acceptance towards magical or supernatural events'. I propose two minor amendments to Adams' first point, which I believe serve as fine-

tuning, to sharpen the definition between magical realism and other modes or genres: firstly that that magical realism not only adopts, but *sustains* two contradictory ontological codes. This is what separates it from fantastic fiction, whose narrative tension arises from not only friction between these two ontological codes, but an impetus to collapse them into one, which even in rare cases of the 'pure' fantastic, where neither a fantastic-uncanny nor a fantastic-marvellous destination is reached, sustains beyond the limits of the text. Secondly, I would add that the two ontological codes, once established, do not conform to any fixed hierarchy. (This again differs from the fantastic, in which even if the hierarchy of the codes is problematised, it is implicitly upheld.) I would also add one further characteristic to Adams' model, after Bortolussi's contribution, referring to the 'discontinuity of events'. This proviso covers a number of unifying characteristics of magical realism: firstly, the absence of a robust explanatory thread to connect events (which, again, would mark a text out instead as fantastic or fantasy); it contributes to the *ostranenie* effect, the 'supernaturalisation' or defamiliarisation of familiar objects, which is often achieved by their appearing out of order, in contrast with 'magical' elements; and the element of paradox, of insoluble indeterminacy, which prevents the reader from ever fully relaxing into the text's proffered coda of reality.

So to summarise:

i. Magical-realist texts encompass and sustain two contradictory ontological codes, broadly recognisable as 'realist' and 'magical', which do not conform to a fixed hierarchy;

ii. The narrative adopts an attitude of acceptance towards magical or supernatural events;

iii. Plot events exhibit an element of discontinuity.

This model outlined above is deliberate in its austerity, and may therefore not be considered radical, but it is crucial to adopt a model which can adapt to magical realism in all its local variants. Embracing these variants is important because when we release magical realism from its received history, as a necessarily postcolonial, originally Latin American literature, we are left without a chronicle of its development. This study proposes to remedy this loss by contributing to our understanding of magical realism before it was popularised and revolutionised by Gabriel García Márquez. Magical realism from then until the present has been thoroughly and convincingly documented and evaluated, but a more robust and satisfying chronicle of magical realism will be one which considers its thus-far neglected prehistory, not in

order to reassign the mode a new figurehead, but to situate magical realism in dialogue with its contemporaries.

II

Czechs and Balances: Bohemian Magical Realism

It is a curious fact that of the small handful of European pre-Márquez authors whose work receives mention in magical-realist criticism, two of them, Alfred Kubin and Franz Kafka, should have been direct contemporaries, compatriots and friends. There is no especially compelling reason to suspect that it was the biographical connection which led to their both being recognised within the canon; the association between Kubin's work and magical realism predates that of Kafka, originating with the attentions of Ernst Jünger in the 1920s,[21] and it goes without saying that Kafka's work is far too independently famous to have required that line of introduction. What the two authors share is a cultural heritage, particularly their respective kinships with Prague; Kafka of course is synonymous with Prague, where he lived for most of his life, and Kubin is widely accepted to have used the city as the model for 'Pearl', the fictional capital of *The Other Side.* Magical realism, which focalises the boundary between binary concepts with its interplay of opposing ontological codes, is an optimal register for fictional explorations centred on Prague, since as T.H. Meyer explains,

> Prague means 'threshold'; first, that between East and West. But more is meant by this word than a threshold in space. Prague can also be experienced as a threshold in time; as the gateway for those cultural impulses of the Slavic East which will be decisive in future times [...] Not only the East, therefore, but even its future seems to press forward in Bohemia like a bridgehead into the centre of Europe. (Meyer 2014: 1)

Thresholds are a consistent thematic in Kubin's work, in which Jünger especially admired the 'binary concept – the invisible and the visible, the interior and the exterior in the existence of things and the fusion of the two' (Guenther 1995: 58), and *The Other Side* is a magical-realist exploration of these binaries and boundaries. Kafka's thresholds are more personal, relating to the uncertain position of the individual in relation to societal structures, which again resonates with the atmosphere and vicissitudes of his Prague, which as Mike Mitchell writes, was 'a city in transition':

[21] Jünger was a great admirer of Kubin, and used the term 'magical realism' in his 1927 essay *'Nationalismus und modernes Leben'* having picked it up from Roh (Warnes 2009: 27). Although Jünger's primary interest was in Kubin's artwork, for which he is better known than his writing, and his use of the term 'magical realism' has little relation to its current application in literary criticism, it was probably he who first suggested the connection between the name and the term, whence it was picked up by Jean Weisgerber in 1983 who names Kubin as part of the 'chronology' of magical realist literature, which 'développe de la fin de la première guerre mondiale à nos jours' (Weisgerber 1987: 214).

> In 1850 German-speakers made up half the city's population and were dominant socially, culturally and politically. By 1880 the higher Czech birth rate, the migration of workers from the countryside and the incorporation of outlying districts mainly inhabited by Czechs had reduced this to 14% and by 1910 […] to 6–7%. For the declining German population […] Prague became associated with the past, with decay, an image both gloomy and romantic. […] For the Czechs on the other hand, who had fully taken over the city council by 1888, Prague was to become the symbol of the resurgent nation. That meant slum clearance and redevelopment, which included the razing of the Josefstadt, the old Jewish ghetto, apart from the cemetery, town hall and some of the older synagogues. (Meyrink 2017: 3)

Unexpected though it may be to find these two authors together in the pages of magical-realist criticism, that they should both have developed the techniques of magical realism in their respective quests to capture the demands of this environment is no surprise at all.

II.i. '*Everything at once: the thing and its opposite'*: Alfred Kubin's *The Other Side*

The adjective 'Kubineseque' was in circulation long before the closely-related and far better-known epithet 'Kafkaesque', inspired by Alfred Kubin's friend and contemporary.[22] Whilst Franz Kafka wouldn't achieve any appreciable literary recognition until after his death in the 1920s, Kubin was a well-known graphic artist and illustrator, making a splash at his first exhibition in Berlin in 1902, and publishing his first and only novel, *The Other Side* (*Die andere Seite),* in 1909.[23] Although more commonly applied to the artistic output for which he is better known, definitions of 'Kubinesque' given by critics apply just as readily to his literary work: for Philip Rhein 'the Kubinesque quality […] to a large extent results from his mingling of realistic with imaginative elements to provoke questioning about the categories and boundaries that are usually imposed on human action' (Rhein 1989: 29); for Peter Assmann it 'has come to be applied to suggestively disconcerting systems of classification that bring together contradictory elements' (Assmann 2008: 56). Already these descriptions evoke the poetics of magical realism, and I will argue that this narrative treatment of subject, at the time perceived to be sufficiently

[22] Raymond Furness notes that 'The *Galerie der Phantasten* series of publications of fantastic literature eagerly sought Kubin's cooperation and the adjective "Kubinesque", long before "Kafkaesque", became applied to the world of darkness, menace and horror which many of his drawings exemplified' (Furness 1990: 29).

[23] Graphic art is not my field. It is abundant furlongs from my field; any academic pronouncements I might venture into it would probably fall under the category of charlatanism. I have (tentatively) referenced, and reproduced in Appendix I, a small number of Kubin's artworks in which I perceive thematic convergences, but for the greatest part I will be limiting my discussion of Kubin's work to his literary output.

unique as to warrant its own appellation, constitutes an early example of magical-realist literature.

To briefly restate my model of magical realism: its literature depends upon the establishment of two contradictory ontological codes ('real' and 'magical') between which no hierarchy is sustained; in which the narrative displays an attitude of acceptance towards the magical equivalent to that of the real; and whose textual events exhibit an element of discontinuity. *The Other Side* begins by establishing its realist narrative, and the question of veracity is foregrounded from the very beginning: an air of scientific specificity is established with a detailed map preceding the text entitled 'Plan of the City of Pearl', with a key detailing no fewer than 43 discrete features and locations, and the text opens with an assertion of authenticity typical of nineteenth-century first-person narratives, purporting to be an eyewitness account: 'I have done my best to give a faithful account, as an eyewitness, of at least part of the events' [of the text] (Kubin 2014: 13; henceforth *TOS*). Immediately thereafter, though, the narrator makes the curious admission that 'as, with scrupulous regard for the truth, I set down my experiences I found that, without realising it, I had somehow managed to describe scenes which I cannot possibly have witnessed nor heard about from some other person' (ibid.). This has a somewhat deflationary effect on the attestation to authenticity, but in another about-turn, the narrative, whilst dubbing such events 'mysterious acts of clairvoyance', does not encourage us to consider them as belonging outside the realm of the real, instead advising that 'if you want an explanation I recommend you seek it in the works of our learned research psychologists' (ibid.).

This haphazard handling of the facts typifies Part One of the text: eccentric, but not, as yet, cause to suspect an abandonment of realism. This section opens with a visit from a stranger named Franz Gautsch, who explains that he is visiting on behalf of our narrator's old school friend Claus Patera, who has since come into 'what is probably the largest fortune in the world' (*TOS* 14) with which he has founded a 'Dream Realm' in 'the extensive region of the Tien Shan, the Mountains of Heaven, which are in Chinese central Asia' (ibid. 21). Again, the narrative is at pains to furnish this peculiar pronouncement with a wealth of particulars which imbue it with an air of authority:

> First of all a suitable tract of some 1,200 square miles was acquired. One third of the area is mountainous, the rest consists of a plain and hills. A lake, a river and large forests divide up this small realm and add variety to its landscape. A city was established, villages and farms. […] The present population of the Dream Realm is 65,000. (14-15)

We learn that our narrator has been invited, along with his wife, to join the populace of Dream Realm, whose capital city of Pearl we reach at the end of Part One. *The Other Side* is divided into three parts: 'The Call', 'Pearl', and 'The Decline and Fall of the Dream Realm'. Part One continues the realist conventions established above, firmly situated in time and space from the beginning (a 'foggy November afternoon […] in Munich' (14)), and detailing the narrator and his wife's strictly-delineated journey to Dream Realm ('Munich - Constanta - Batumi - Baku - Krasnovodsk – Samarkand' (31), taking ten days, leaving on a Friday), replete with characters with full names and job titles ('he introduced himself, "Kuno Eberhard Teretatian, agent"' (38)) and even the name of the shipping company ('the steamer which was to take us to Batumi belonged to Austrian Lloyd' (33)). Each stage of the journey is catalogued with journalistic precision, and it isn't until we arrive in Samarkand that this supply of meticulous detail abruptly runs out, and the geographical definitude gives way. The characters sleep through the entire two-day final leg of the journey, which seems to resist the authority of the map:

> 'In two days you'll be in Pearl where you can find everything you need.'
> 'What's this? Two days did you say? From the map I thought it would take at least a week.' I was astounded.
> 'In that case you can't be quite clear about the route', said our half-Armenian mongrel with a discreet smile. 'Even with frequent rests it wouldn't take more than three days at most.' (40)

I propose that the text's three parts roughly represent first the dominance of the 'realist' narrative; second, a period of tussle between the 'realist' and 'magical'; and third, the ultimate showdown between the two (whose outcome will be discussed later). For this reason, the chapters comprising Part Two, where the ontological codes are of roughly equal dominance, are where the techniques of magical realism are most notably employed, and where my close reading will begin.

One of the most remarked-upon consequences of magical realism's narrative technique is that of defamiliarisation: done properly, the commensurate treatment of the 'real' and the 'magical' results in an upending of the norms of recognition, in which we detect intuitive truths in the marvellous whilst the familiar becomes alien. The alienation of the familiar in *The Other Side* is written into the very landscape of Dream Realm, of which the narrator's first impressions are not favourable: '"This is supposed to be Pearl, the capital of the Dream Realm!?" I exclaimed, hardly able to conceal my disgust. "That's just like any one-horse town at home", I

said, pointing to a dreary building, with a mixture of irritation and disappointment' (*TOS* 49). The narrator's indicating the 'dreary building' is telling, for all of the buildings in Dream Realm have been dismantled, transported from all over Europe and reconstructed brick-for-brick on-site, creating an uneasy familiarity which jars with the absolutely alien climate and atmosphere of Dream Realm: as the narrator notes, 'by and large things here were much the same as in central Europe and yet, on the other hand, so very different' (51). That the climate is different is of course to be expected, and yet Dream Realm is infused with an eerie, crepuscular quality which exacerbates the unfamiliarity: 'The sun *never* shone, the moon and stars could *never* be seen at night' (ibid., emphasis in the original). (Indeed, it is even underscored that the alien atmosphere of Dream Realm isn't a result of its simply being foreign to the narrator, as the narrator quips of his journey through Asia, 'you know what oriental cities look like. Just the same as at home, only oriental' (39).) In a letter to the author, fellow German painter and writer Max Dauthendey recognised the sensation of the almost-familiar, remarking that 'whatever people in Perle experience, one experiences with horror in Schwabing and Würzburg and everywhere else where one feels himself at home and yet not entirely at home' (qtd Rhein 1989: 89).[24] Kubin himself suggested the text 'could be used as a sort of Baedeker for those lands which are half-known to us' (qtd. Furness 1990: 33).

As well as everything being out of place, everything is out of time: since Patera 'feels an extraordinarily strong aversion to all kinds of progress' (*TOS* 15) he only allows 'used goods' into Pearl, and for the antiquities which he imports, 'the 1860s are the absolute limit' (23). The inhabitants of Pearl all dress in the fashions of the previous century: 'Antiquated curved top-hats, colourful frock-coats and Inverness capes were what the men wore, while the ladies minced along in crinolines with bonnet and shawl and strange, old-fashioned hair-styles' (57); this is much to the amusement of the narrator at first, but before long, 'we were the ones who caused a stir and after only a few days we were compelled to adapt' (ibid.), the first sign that the norms of Dream Realm are beginning to overpower those of the outside world.

An early indication of the destabilisation of 'normal' reality in Dream Realm is the shifting significance of money. Money has been established in Part One as the highest value in the text's schema of authority: after first hearing of Patera's Dream Realm from Franz Gautsch, the narrator first suspects 'that some acquaintance might be playing a joke on me', and then that he 'must be confronted with a madman' (16), and is only finally persuaded of the truth of

[24] The German spelling 'Perle' was retained by Denver Lindley, who completed the first English translation of *The Other Side* in 1967. The 2014 translation by Mike Mitchell, which I am using, anglicises the spelling.

Gautsch's tale when he is handed a cheque for 100,000 marks. 'Whenever we hear tell of something fantastic, something far from everyday reality, there is always a tiny residue of doubt left in us. […] For that reason we are much more easily convinced by things we see than by things we hear. That is what happened in my case. […] when I saw this huge sum, a small fortune to me, when I actually held it in my hand, a strange feeling came over me' (27). The same process is repeated when the narrator relates Patera's offer to his wife, who is also initially sceptical, until he shows her the cheque: 'for my wife, too, it was more effective than words' (28). It is therefore of especial significance when, on arrival in Dream Realm, the cheque is promptly rendered valueless, as we learn that 'to the casual glance, buying and bargaining went on here according to the same customs as everywhere. That, however, was mere pretence, a grotesque sham. The whole of the money economy was 'symbolic'. You never knew how much you had' (60). The bizarre handling of finances is demonstrated when the narrator, on arrival in Pearl, tries to buy a street map from a bric-a-brac shop:

> They looked high and low, rummaged around among mounted antlers, candelabra and old caskets, but nowhere was one to be found. Finally the assistant brought out a horrible ink-well cast in bronze. 'Take this, I'm sure you have a use for it. You simply must have it, it's an absolute necessity. Only seventy-two crowns!' […] I gave him one crown and he threw in a pair of nail-scissors as well. (61)

This is an example of the 'discontinuity of events' which I have designated as a defining characteristic of magical realism. None of the events in this chain follow from the previous ones: the search for a street-map warping into a hard-sell for an ink-well; the unremarked reduction from seventy-two crowns to one, with no mediating scene of a barter or argument; the inclusion of the nail-scissors. These events are not as startlingly discontinuous as others in the text will be, but they herald the receding dominance of linear, realist narrative norms as magical ones begin to jostle for space.

Financial systems intuitively designate order and form an indispensable facet of organised modern life, and so the degradation of money's status from absolute to meaningless signals a radical degradation of other tenets of reality. At this stage, we need not step outside of realist measures in order to understand Dream Realm's financial landscape: after all, Franz Gautsch has explained that the Realm was designed as 'a sanctuary for all those who are unhappy with modern civilisation' (*TOS* 15), and since economies are a contingent and unstable (though ubiquitous) phenomena of 'modern civilisation' it is at least plausible, if not practical,

that this particular economy could be an aspect of social experiment invented by the governing Patera. Kubin began writing *The Other Side* in 1908, and so the text is in direct contemporary relation with the questions of modernity that were occupying sociologists and academics throughout Europe, of which the subject of the money economy was central: Georg Simmel, for instance, had only five years earlier published his seminal 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) in which he famously decried that 'money is concerned only with what is common to all, i.e. with the exchange value which reduces all quality and individuality to a purely quantitative level […] the last remnants of domestic production and direct barter of goods have been eradicated' (Simmel 2002: 12-13); it is safe to assume that this is one of the complaints of modernity that contributed to Patera's ambition to create of a respite from modern life in which such grievances would be redressed – in this case by rendering incoherent the very notion of 'value'. Thus, a realist narrative can accommodate Dream Realm's idiosyncrasies, until we reach this passage:

> New arrivals tried to exploit [the economy] to their advantage, but […] Dream fate was implacable: the wealth they had accumulated simply vanished into thin air. These smart Alecks found themselves paying exorbitant prices for the most basic necessities or they were inundated with parcels 'to be paid for on delivery'. If they did not accept them, then much worse troubles came, for example illnesses and the doctors charged extortionate fees. (*TOS* 61)

How are we to interpret this last detail? In order to fit it into a realist narrative we must assume some kind of poison-based conspiracy, of which the text offers no suggestion. This apparently throwaway line, smuggled past the reader so casually that it could be missed, is deceptively important: it is the first absolutely unavoidable announcement of the magical within the text, its first 'irreducible element' of supernatural activity. That the rigidly codified concept of financial transaction, already demeaned by the nonsense economy of Dream Realm, becomes tangled in events which can only be explained by supernatural influence, is again indicative of the diminishing foothold that the realist narrative has within the text.

It's worth noting that we do not only fall back upon a magical explanation simply by default, because no realist explanation is offered: the magical explanation is explicit, if amorphous. We have already learned that 'in the midst of all this confusion, you still felt the presence of a *strong hand*. You could sense its power behind apparently incomprehensible situations' (60, emphasis in the original). With the assertion of the 'strong hand', which can only be Patera's, guiding the 'apparently incomprehensible', the mysterious illnesses suffered by

savvy newcomers become the smitings of Patera, consequences of the autarchic laws by which Dream Realm is governed. Patera's limitless powers of control are indisputably established here, and yet we also know him to be a product of our own (i.e. the narrator's) reality: indeed, on the very first page of the text, we learn that the narrator 'got to know Patera sixty years ago in Salzburg when we both started at the same high school together' at which time 'he was a somewhat short but broad-shouldered lad and the most striking – indeed the only striking – thing about him was the classical cut of his features beneath a tumble of handsome locks' (13). Patera's real, 'phenomenal' (to use Faris' word), mundane existence is established as uncompromisingly as is his supernatural power: neither can be discounted, and therefore no hierarchy exists between his 'real' and 'magical' incarnations.

Another peculiarity of Dream Realm which is introduced via the section on financial dealings is its performative aspect: the narrator tells us that in financial transactions 'the trick was to sound plausible, to pull the wool over your adversary's eyes' (60). This comes up again and again. When the narrator is spontaneously offered a job on the local paper he is pleased because 'I could *make a show.* And that's what counted in the Dream Realm, to make a show of being something, anything, even a rogue or a pickpocket or whatever' (ibid., emphasis in the original). The subject is foregrounded before the narrator even arrives in Dream Realm, when he asks after the latest news in Pearl, and is informed that Patera has recently had a theatre imported. When he eventually visits the theatre (to see *Orpheus in the Underworld*, befittingly enough) there is an audience of three and inevitably the theatre fails. '"Why do we need a theatre in Pearl?" people would say. "There's theatre enough as it is"' (90). Later, the narrator describes 'a few lads who were making a racket behind the house with rattles and drums. When I asked them what they were doing they told me "We're making background noise". I was beginning to find the nonsense irritating, it all had a touch of the madhouse' (96), contributing to a pervading sense that the whole of Dream Realm is an elaborately staged theatrical performance.

As will later be the case with Kafka, the disquieting, disjunctive artifice of Dream Realm finds its apotheosis in the centre of bureaucratic process, which in Pearl is a building known as 'the Archive'. As Wieland Schmied notes, '[t]he civil service hierarchy might be called Kafkaesque were it not Kubinesque, if Kubin had not in delicate thoroughness and detailed topography anticipated Kafka's description of the village and the unreachable castle of Count Westwest' (Schmied 1969: 24). The Archive scene is a masterclass in discontinuity: our narrator,

having learned that a ticket for an audience with Patera can be obtained there, visits the Archive, and is asked for 'your certificates of birth, baptism and marriage, your father's school-leaving certificate and your mother's confirmation of vaccination. […] A character reference for your father-in-law is desirable but not absolutely essential' (*TOS* 64). The Archive is a wealth of nonsense edicts like this, filled with 'bulging files bought in from all over the world, [which] had nothing at all to do with the Dream state' (ibid.). Eventually our narrator is taken to see 'His Excellency' who, as well as being (or because of being) the highest-ranking official, embodies the height of surreally performative discontinuity, behaving like something between an actor who is woefully mis-timing his cues, and a malfunctioning, spring-loaded automaton:

> as if someone had pressed a button, he stood up and started to address a non-existent audience: 'Gentlemen! Gentlemen! In the interest of public welfare and our reputation the government fully accepts its responsibility. […] Our immediate goal is to develop the theatre here to its full potential. I hope I can rely on your energetic support in this enterprise. Our experiences in introducing decontrol to certain institutions in the French Quarter, guarantee that … gentlemen … I am convinced I express your own most dearly held convictions when … when … when …' The speaker lost his fluency and fixed me with a bewildered, glassy stare. (65)

As with the sham monetary system, a pantomimic bureaucracy is an elegant vehicle with which to expose the ultimately arbitrary content of structures on which we tend to confer jurisdiction, and by extension, to suggest the arbitrary jurisdiction of conventional realism.

The assault on man-made social structures is one thing; a far more serious and troubling commodity whose significance seems to shift, or degrade, in the course of the text is personal identity. In Part One of the text, identity is treated with respect and authority: our narrator is given a portrait of Patera by Gautsch in an attempt to convince him of his credibility, and the portrait takes on the status of currency: the narrator prizes it almost as highly as the enormous cheque ('I kept looking at the picture and the cheque and fell a little in love with both…' (29)), and he is able to produce it throughout the journey when asked for his 'credentials' (38; 44). Once in Dream Realm, however, identity is shown to be curiously fluid. On the train as they travel to Pearl for the first time a stranger 'looked at me as if he knew me. I had the feeling I knew him too but it's probably just that one comes across the same faces all over the world' (47). When the narrator and his wife hire a charwoman, she appears to morph into a different person:

> for quite some time now I myself had felt there was something odd about Anna. Eventually it became just too obvious. The previous day we had been served by a sprightly middle-aged person, today a bustling old woman with a wrinkled face was putting the dishes on the table. My wife clung to me; we were both stunned. 'But it's the same headscarf', I stammered, seeing the pupils of my wife's eyes dilate in horror. (81-2)

Combined with the observation that the 'masses' of Dream Realm had been 'recruited from well defined psychological types […] selected with abnormality or one-sided development in mind' (55), these incidents suggest that the inhabitants of Dream Realm are merely extras in a play, nothing but a 'crowd scene' with interchangeable actors inhabiting minor roles.

The significance of these identity shifts is exposed when the wife's horror is again inflamed, this time by an encounter with a lamplighter:

> 'it can't have been an illusion. There can't be two people with *those eyes* […] he almost brushed against me as he dashed past. At the same time he turned his head for a moment and said quietly, "Sorry". But – oh, it was horrible – it was your friend Patera!' She literally screamed the last words. The tears were pouring down her cheeks. (85, emphasis in original)

This event has a sequel when the narrator sees an old beggar woman whose appearance inexplicably disturbs him: 'it was not her stinking breath or toothless mouth that held me, but her two horrible, bright eyes; like the fangs of a viper they lodged in my brain' (98); later, he is admiring the beautiful Melitta Lampenbogen when 'her gaze hit me … I was staring into a blankness of white … like a blow to the brain. *It was the eyes of the old beggar-woman!*' (108,

emphasis in original). We interpret these eyes to be Patera's, although only the wife, who mistrusted Patera on sight, is able to recognise them for what they are.[25]

Whereas the wife's experience can be rationally interpreted as Patera going incognito as a lamplighter (or simply as 'a hallucination', as the narrator does (86), although her disproportionate alarm itself lends symbolic substance to the event), the three combined give rise to the suspicion that Patera's influence is beginning to parasitically inhabit the citizens of Pearl. Suggestions of a homogenising influence are repeatedly made throughout the text: early on, the narrator remarks that 'here fantasies were simply reality. The incredible thing was the way the same illusion would appear in several minds at once' (62); children who are born in Dream Realm are all missing half of their left thumb, as, we learn, is Patera (104; 184); eventually he concludes that Patera 'possessed our wills, he clouded our minds, he exploited his puppet-like subjects […] His imagination, the pulse of the Dream Realm, throbbed in everything that was' (132-5). When we eventually meet Patera he demonstrates his power over the fixity of identity with a display of protean fluidity, his face changing 'like a chameleon – unceasingly – a thousand, no, a hundred thousand times […] it was the face of a youth – a woman – a child – an old man. It grew fat then thin, acquired growths like a turkeycock, shrank until it was tiny…' (112). Everyone in Dream Realm is '*under the Spell*' as another inhabitant describes it (95), and the erasure of discrete identities is a result of their being supplanted by Patera's own.

The encroaching influence of Patera upon the narrator's psyche is reflected in his descriptions of events, with distinctly magical-realist results. Having, in Part One, responded

[25] It is notable that these incidents focus on the eyes of the characters involved. Eoin Bourke's study traces eyes and eye imagery as a prominently recurring motif in Kubin's artistic work, and 'their association with both death and power' (Bourke 1997: 130). As well as expropriation of identity, the repeated appearance of Patera's eyes have overtones of surveillance (as does the single, enormous eye attached to a skull in one of Kubin's best known drawings, '*Das Guaesen*' ('The Horror') (1902) (see Appendix I, fig. 1)), making an Argus-like figure of Patera with his 'strong hand'. The narrator describes Patera in precisely these terms, 'this eye that saw into the darkest corners, was everywhere present, nothing escaped it' (*TOS* 61), and befittingly, Bourke suggests that Kubin's eye-imagery relates to 'an enduring, craven fear of the unassailable and absolute authority as represented by the father' (Bourke 1997: 131). Patera's eyes do feature repeatedly through the text even outside the context of his possession of other characters, but taken together, the various representations of his gaze exhibit an unnerving lack of consistency that accords with the Protean quality he later demonstrates: the narrator first remembers Patera's 'protuberant, light-grey eyes' of adolescence and recognises his 'eyes, large and abnormally bright' in his portrait, but they then become 'an ice-cold stare […] eyes that could ensnare a man' with 'something cat-like about them' (*TOS* 20) (how can light-grey eyes be 'cat-like'?); later, when he finally sees Patera in person, 'they weren't eyes at all, they resembled two bright, shiny metal discs gleaming like two small moons' (111). These eyes recall the blind white mare which gallops through Dream Realm during the 'Brainstorm' whose 'vacant, wide-open eye' haunts the narrator, and indeed, in his illustration of Patera, Kubin depicts him with disturbing empty sockets (see Appendix I, fig. 2), although on the verge of death, 'the last traces of eeriness had gone from Patera's eyes; now those large eyes shone a dark, moist blue' (239).

with incredulity to Gautsch's description of Patera's project ('"It's a novel idea, certainly. If you've no objection, I'll pass it on to a writer friend of mine"' (19)), once in Dream Realm he is increasingly unmoved by the bizarre things he finds there, producing the disjuncture between the nature of events portrayed and their treatment by the narrative that forms the universally identified hallmark of magical realism. An exemplary passage demonstrating this is found in his description of the barber's assistant:

> the barber's shop would have suffered badly had it not been for Giovanni Battista. He was only a monkey, but what a monkey! He was an uncommonly gifted and ambitious beast […] His swift and sure hand with the razor was famous throughout the district. On Wednesdays and Saturdays he even made home visits to private clients. We often used to see him, bag in hand, going down Long Street in his earnest, businesslike shuffle. (66)

Rhein remarks of this detached style of observation that the narrator 'functions as a point of reference – a contact with the common-sense understanding of reality – in order for the reader's attention to be pointedly and credibly focused on the bizarre and grotesque events he relates' (Rhein 1989: 27): he is the reader's touchstone figure, the representative of 'reality' in the increasingly unreal Dream Realm, and yet he is not entirely immune to the influence of the magical, because 'in the Dream Realm you became so accustomed to even the most unlikely scenes that nothing surprised you any more' (*TOS* 59). The erosion of his identity, which begins the morning that he wakes up in Pearl and momentarily cannot remember who he is ('Oh, I have it… that's right… I'm so-and-so, the artist' (50)) reduces the narrative friction between the 'real' and the 'magical', and so although he is at first 'horrified at how susceptible the Dream-landers were to suggestion' he himself proves to be likewise: 'I had to accept it, like it or not, and gradually I became more and more immersed in fantasies, my own and others'' (60). His wife, meanwhile, who has proven resistant to Patera's mysterious allure since first laying eyes on his portrait in Part One ('"Do we really have to go there? I don't like the look of that man. I don't know what it is, but there's something terrible about him"' (28)) cannot be subjugated, and so must die for her 'healthy, down-to-earth disposition which could never take root in this

spectral realm' (129) just as she herself predicted at the gates of Dream Realm, when 'in tremulous tones she whispered, "I'll never get out of here again"' (44).[26]

The wife's death marks a significant turning-point in the text. I have highlighted a few ways in which the 'extra-Dream Realm reality' – the 'realist' code which was obeyed in Part One – encounters conflict from the 'Dream Realm reality', the magical code which does not observe the tenets of linearity and fixity. Dream Realm and the world outside are established to be incompatible: as Gautsch explains, 'one could say that normal life and the Dream world are opposites, and it is precisely this deference which makes understanding between them so difficult' (15). This conflict comprises much of Part Two, as the realist narrative broadens to admit both, reporting with linear sobriety on magical events, with our narrator and his wife suspended between the two in their attempt to navigate the struggle. The wife's death signals an advantage in the tug-of-war, a triumph for the 'magical', which has defeated resistance from the extra-Dream Realm reality that she cannot relinquish. The magical appears to have overpowered the narrator too: whereas shortly before his wife's death he suspects that Dream Realm is 'just one big joke and we're all too stupid to understand it' (110), immediately after her death he remarks that 'the rest of the world was of no consequence, we forgot it […] "Out there" was just a hoax, it didn't exist at all' (129). The stakes have been raised, and a more powerful adversary must be introduced in order to escalate the conflict. Just such a person arrives at the end of Part Two in the form of Hercules Bell, 'the American' (130).

Bell is in every way Patera's opposite: whilst Patera remains a shadowy, insubstantial threat, Bell is every bit as clamorously corporeal as his name suggests; whereas Patera is averse to novelty and progress, Hercules Bell, the 'king of the canned-meat trade', represents aggressive modernity; Patera's nonsense 'symbolic' economy contrasts with Bell's hard-nosed business acumen; Patera's creed is imagination – '*imagination is power*' (135) – whilst Bell champions the material, 'the countless inventions which spread order and happiness' (154); in Johannes Schaaf's 1973 film *Traumstadt*, adapted from Kubin's novel, Bell is even played by a black actor to contrast Patera's white (a casting decision which we can safely assume was not

[26] Michael Cowan suggests that Patera's bodily expropriation of the narrator and his wife began at this juncture in the text, at the gates of Dream Realm (Cowan 2008: 240), when 'something bizarre happened. I had been walking along under the vaulted ceiling for a while when all at once I was assailed by a sensation of horror such as I had never felt before. It started at the back of my head and trickled down my spine. I caught my breath and my heart skipped a beat. Completely unnerved, I turned to my wife, but she too was pale as a corpse, the fear of death etched on her features' (*TOS* 44). I interpret this as slightly melodramatic foreshadowing rather than evidence of expropriation, which I feel figures in the text more as a creeping, viral usurpation, but it is an interesting point nonetheless.

incidental, since his first line is 'you and me Patera, black and white! We could have built a new world together!'). Their conflicts play out as weaponised enactments of these antitheses: when Bell urges Dreamlanders to reclaim their autonomy, proselytising that 'you are victims of a mass psychosis. None of you obey your own minds any more. You take another person's suggestions inside your heads as your own thoughts' (153), Patera retaliates by redoubling his attack on individualisation with a plague of doubles:

> About this time a great influx of strangers from abroad led to many bizarre misunderstandings. The new arrivals found their doubles here, which gave rise to both amusement and genuine annoyance. Many of the new Dreamlanders resembled old inhabitants not only in looks and manner, but even in dress, so that it seemed to be their intention deliberately to ape them. It was ridiculous, but there appeared to be two Alfred Blumenstichs going round, two Brendels and several Lampenbogens. (148-9)

To Bell's warning to the Dreamers, '*Let each of you beware of sleep!* That is the time when your Lord enslaves you […] that is when he whispers his insidious ideas in your ear, daily renewing and strengthening his fiendish spell and destroying your will-power' (154), Patera (who, we note, is first seen in his palace 'sitting on an elevated bed' where we might reasonably expect a throne (110)) responds with an 'irresistible sleeping sickness' sending the entire city into a 'state of complete unconsciousness [which] probably lasted six days' (164-6). In the face of Bell's attempt to drag Dream Realm into the modern age, Patera embarks upon a campaign of aggressive decivilisation, sending in plagues of wild animals to ravage the town, causing every building in the city to enter into a process of accelerated decay, and sending Dream Realmers into an orgiastic frenzy of sex and violence.[27]

What is curious about this antithetical construction is that on close inspection, it does not seem to carry any, or at least any straightforward, moral hierarchy, which, under my model of magical realism, corresponds with the treatment of the ontological codes which Patera and Bell represent. On the surface, Bell is cast with almost comical zest as the villain: he arrives at

[27] For Cowan it is the other way around, and instead, in 'the world of sterile aesthetic contemplation created by Patera, Bell's arrival unleashes a flood of "primitive" vitality in the form of destructive violence and unbridled sexuality' (Cowan 2008: 232). This is a perfectly plausible interpretation, but I disagree with it for two reasons: firstly, because although Dream Realm is reproductively sterile it is never shown to be sexually sterile: the 'French Quarter' is a blatant allusion to a red light district, and when our narrator stumbles into it – before Bell's arrival – he appears to find himself in a brothel (*TOS* 101); secondly because the polarities of modernity and antiquity by which Bell and Patera are (apparently) characterised appear to me to be the more pronounced qualities than Cowan's 'primitive' and 'aesthetic'. Indeed, 'primitive' could be said to directly contradict the message of progress that Bell promotes, whereas it can be read as a comic exaggeration of Patera's preoccupation with antiquity (which under duress progresses from 'antiquated' to 'prehistoric').

Dream Realm after a tireless quest (during which we learn his personal physician abandoned him, 'declaring he couldn't stand being with [him] any longer' (159)) and gallops around town on a black stallion handing out 'propaganda cheroots', spitting, swearing, abusing citizens, and pulling guns on anyone who resists his authority. There are shades of Martí and Rodó in this portrait of American character, trampling with crass vulgarity over the curated creation of the epicurean Patera, blaring the philistine message of progress and mechanisation ('canned meat' is itself a superb emblem of insalubrious, industrialised mass-production). The rift even takes on theological overtones, as Bell, possessed of a 'satanic profile', founds a group for his followers called 'the Lucifer club' whose members are 'Sons of Lucifer', whereas Patera is 'the Lord', and a rift emerges as 'everyone fell into one or the other of two large groupings: those who still believed in the *Lord* and those who listened to the *American*' (151, emphasis in the original).

In spite of this idolatry, though, it is notable that Patera's creation has never been shown in a positive light – the narrator has barely a positive word to say about life in Pearl from his arrival, and it only gets 'more and more harrowing and stressful' (86) – and his God-like power over his subjects has a distinctly tyrannical flavour. Indeed, the narrator's devotion to Patera seems to grow in direct proportion with the devastation being wreaked on Pearl, to the point that it seems deliberately ironic: when the city has become overrun with a plague of insects and all the food is rotten, he ponders 'How great you must be, Patera […] Why does the Lord hide himself away, even from those who love him?' (179). An ironic edge to Patera's deification has already been suggested in the 'Great Clock Spell', the manner in which Dream Realm citizens engage in worship of Patera: at regular intervals they are all magnetically drawn to the clock tower in the town square, 'literally dragged toward it', where they queue in sex-segregated lines to enter a small room with 'water streaming down the stone wall, streaming down unendingly' and 'one after another the people disappear, each spending a minute or two inside. When they emerge they all have profoundly satisfied, almost happy expressions on their faces' (72-3). As Andreas Geyer writes, 'the resemblances to a public convenience are abundantly clear' (Geyer 2008: 81). An unsettling chasm emerges between the narrator's misery and misfortune in Pearl and his fanatical devotion to its author Patera, whilst Bell's message of freedom, individuality and sunshine (Lucifer, of course, being 'bringer of light'), is paradoxically cloaked in connotations of evil.

Even the antitheses by which the two are characterised do not always stand up to scrutiny: Bell seems indisputably to be aligned with the conditions of modernity which Patera professes to have founded Dream Realm to escape, and yet it is at Patera's hands, with his bodily usurpations and rash of doubles, that its citizens encounter the deindividuation that supposedly occurs in the modern urban environment where, to again quote Simmel, 'the deepest problems […] flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society' (Simmel 2002: 11). Further, as Jon Hughes points out, whilst he is intuitively allied with Europe in the Europe / America comparative construct, Patera can be associated just as readily with the contemporary ideas about American social identity, as Pearl 'is the product of Patera's desire *not* to create something entirely new, but to transfer and transform something already existent' (Hughes 2007: 92-3); Dream Realm resembles America far more closely than any European city in the respect that it is, crucially, *not* in Europe, but is essentially a product of colonial exercise which relies on 'the importation of European fashions, social norms, products, and occasionally even buildings. The parallels with Patera's project are surely clear' (ibid.).

If magical realism's trademark is the disruption of assumptive codes, then the reassignation of moral significance and destabilising of antithetical categories are quintessentially magical-realist moves: from the beginning, the text has been challenging our assumptions about reality, and in its climactic act it takes conceptual poles whose hierarchy we hold as intuitively dependable – good and evil, and real and magical – and scrambles them beyond all recognition. This 'scrambling' is the key to decoding the third act of the text which, as Jane Kallir writes, 'does not necessarily entail victory for one side and defeat for the other, but rather the resolution of the two into a coherent whole' (Kallir 1983). Whilst the tussle between real and magical in Part Two took the form of an implicit, insidious takeover of one thing by its opposite – mirrored in the very architecture of Pearl, the European city in Asia, the occident installed in the orient – Part Three is an apocalyptic clash which can only end in destruction, appropriate to the 'holy war' typology by which Patera and Bell are characterised, as they both grow to gargantuan, mountainous proportions, and fight so violently that Pearl is destroyed.

The outcome of this fight is, however, hard to decipher. On the one hand Patera dies, whilst at the end 'The American is still living. Everyone knows him' (*TOS* 244); but in the scheme of antitheses via which Bell and Patera's characters are constructed, Bell's natural medium is

life whilst Patera's is death, and so this outcome can be interpreted as not a conquest but a stalemate, with each retiring to their natural register. As Geyer suggests, 'the Dreamland for which Bell fought dies with Patera, hence Patera proves to be victorious as well, since death was the object of Dream Kingdom from the beginning' (Geyer 2008: 86). This reading is borne out in the manner of the death of Patera, who is not struck down in battle but instead seems to expend his strength and then, diminished, retreat voluntarily to a sepulchral chamber where he dies alone, still possessed of 'his true majesty' (*TOS* 240). Just as the text establishes no hierarchy between the magical and the real, it ultimately assigns no hierarchy between Patera and Bell, who are shown to be interchangeable and inseparable. In the narrator's final visit to the palace, Patera morphs into Bell before his very eyes: 'in front of me in the brightly lit room in place of Patera *was the American*' (186). When they finally come to a physical confrontation 'Patera and the American grappled each other, forming a shapeless hulk, the American completely fused with Patera' and they become one 'monstrous body, too huge to distinguish its various parts' (235). The narrator comes to understand 'Patera's double nature' (186), that Bell to Patera is merely the 'other side' of the same coin, and concludes in the text's final line that 'the demiurge is a hybrid' (248).

How we interpret the intended significance of this 'hybridity' depends upon how we interpret the two entities from which the hybrid is formed, to which critical readings of *The Other Side* offer various possible avenues. Critical analyses of Kubin's text generally employ one of three interpretative paradigms: the psychoanalytic (both Jungian and Freudian); the socio-political; and the aesthetic.

A Jungian reading of the text was championed primarily by Carl Jung himself, who frequently mentioned Kubin in his writings (Jung 1946: 483; Jung 1989: 141), and saw Dream Realm as a manifestation of his 'collective unconscious': 'it is seen as an artist would see it, who was properly trained not to think about the things he sees in order not to disturb the absolute form and surface of the object; he saw the surface of the collective unconscious most accurately' (Jung 2015: 34).[28] This reading is justified by the text's master 'dream logic' (the puppet economy, for instance), and suggestions that the inhabitants of Dream Realm are party to a single shared imagination. (It is interesting to note that 'Patera' is Latin for 'vessel', perhaps

[28] This was during a seminar in 1934; by 1939 he seems to have lost his enthusiasm for the text, instead opining that 'Kubin's book is actually quite silly. It was written by a modern artist keen not to think anything, in contrast with the artists of the Renaissance. He gives a description of the unconscious *tel quel*, pure raw material, a reproduction' (Jung 2008: 214).

the communal repository of all ideas and fantasies. The same connotation may be present in the bureaucratic building's being called 'The Archive'.) Allusions to dreams and dreaming are too obvious to need elucidation, and if the collective unconscious is paired, as it explicitly is in Jung, with nocturnal dreaming, then this too is supported by the depictions of the narrator's journey into Dream Realm as an act of falling asleep: the narrator and his wife sleep for the last two days of the journey to Dream Realm, and are difficult to rouse at the gate, suggesting that they are entering the nocturnal state necessary for immersion in the unconscious. Moreover, the line between the sleeping and waking state is blurred on their first morning in Pearl when the narrator finds that 'the day was already well advanced when I realised I had been lying there with my eyes open for some time' (*TOS* 50). Under a Jungian reading, then, the clash between Patera and Bell would represent a union between unconscious and conscious in a nocturnal dream, as it does for Rhein (Rhein 1989: 29-30), or between 'a self-certain "I", […and] experiences inherited from ancient ancestors, for forces of animal existence and elemental nature' (Gosetti-Ferencei 2011: 221).

Closely related are Freudian interpretations,[29] which also view Dream Realm as a manifestation of the unconscious, focusing specifically on Kubin's self-advertised father complex.[30] Autobiographical resonances, however unfashionable they may be in modern literary criticism, are difficult to avoid in Kubin's case: the narrator of *The Other Side* introduces himself as an 'artist and illustrator' in his thirties, born in Salzburg but now living in Munich, all details which directly describe Kubin. The narrator remains unnamed throughout the text, but Kubin more or less unambiguously inserts himself into the narrative role with a portrait of the

[29] Jung defined the collective unconscious, in contrast to the Freudian subconscious, as 'a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from the personal [i.e. the Freudian] unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and, consequently, is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been conscious, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of *complexes*, the contents of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of *archetypes*' (Jung 1969: 42, emphasis in the original). In other words, Jung saw Kubin's narrator as entering into a space of shared archetypes, whereas a Freudian interpretation sees him confronting his own accumulated subconscious detritus. I see no reason, at least in Kubin's case, why the two need be mutually exclusive.

[30] This interpretation probably originated with Hans Sachs' article in the inaugural edition of Freud's journal *Imago* in 1912, in which he interpreted Patera as an *ersatz* father and Bell as a fantasy projection of the author himself: 'With this book he "abreacted" his repressed feelings. […] This is obviously a realization of the kind of *wish fulfilment* we know to be the essence of the dream. In it, the son receives the giant and superhuman phallus' (qtd. Cowan 2008: 311, emphasis in original). Elizabeth Wright's Freudian reading of the text similarly suggests that '"Reality" is no more than an experimental outcome of every attempt to achieve some kind of coincidence of desire' and thus, the final conflict is 'an inferno, resulting from the attempt to realise a single totalizing fantasy and treating this fantasy as if it could be the fulfilment of a wish' (Wright 1999: 39-40).

narrator on the novel's frontispiece, whose face, as Siegbert Prawer observes, is 'clearly […] Kubin's own' (Prawer 1977: 975) (see Appendix I, fig. 3 and fig. 4). (Throughout his review of *The Other Side*, Robin Magowan likewise refers unquestioningly to the narrator and his wife as 'the Kubins' (Magowan 1969)). More inescapable still is the autobiography which was published as a preface to the novel, updated by Kubin for the republications released in 1926, 1931, 1946 and 1952, an extraordinary life story with which Freud himself would have had a field day: Kubin was raised by his mother and didn't meet his father, a violent disciplinarian, until he was two years old, whereupon an instant animosity sprang up between the two; he watched his mother die when he was ten, and his father carry her body around the house in a frenzy of grief, leaving him with 'hate, hate, hate toward my father and all men'; his father promptly remarried his mother's sister, who died a year later in childbirth; at eleven he was molested by an older pregnant woman;[31] at nineteen he travelled to Zell Am See with the intention of committing suicide on his mother's grave, but when he pulled the trigger, the revolver failed to fire. He joined the military, and immediately suffered a nervous breakdown and was discharged, then became engaged, only for his fiancée to die before they could marry. In one of his youthful lucubrations he devised a 'weird cosmology' based on the Father-Son relationship:

> My conception was that an eternal, extratemporal principle – I called it the Father – for some unfathomable reason created self-consciousness – the Son – together with the world, which was inseparable from him. In this scheme I myself was, of course, the Son, who deceives himself, torments and persecutes himself as long as this is well pleasing to his true and gigantic Father, who spontaneously created him as a sort of mirror image. Such a Son can therefore disappear at any instant along with his world and be assimilated into the superexistence of the Father. (Kubin 2017: 13)

Insofar as any meaning can be gleaned from this 'cosmology' (which Kubin himself admitted was written in a 'feverish scribble') it does suggest an intricately-wrought matrix of significance to the construct of Dream Realm. There are many points of relevance in this passage: it is oft-noted that Kubin wrote *The Other Side* after the death of his father, and critics frequently regard the text, as Kallir does, as 'a result of the artist's attempt to come to terms with his

[31] That the woman was pregnant is not mentioned in Kubin's autobiographies but is a detail related by Kafka in his diaries, and frequently repeated in secondary literature (Van Zon 1988: 6; Karl 2005: 118; Rosenberg 2008). Kubin does note that the experience 'excited me tremendously and cast its shadows as far as my early manhood', and his works often include disturbing depictions of pregnant female figures: for instance, the piece 'Earth: Mother of Us All' (1900) (Appendix I, fig. 5) shows a pregnant woman walking, sprinkling seeds, with a trail of decapitated heads in her wake, and 'The Egg' (1901-2) (Appendix I, fig. 6) is of an enormously pregnant skeletal woman standing beside an open grave. It seems likely that this preoccupation with the relationship between pregnancy and death found its expression in *The Other Side* in the reproductive stagnation of Dream Realm.

father's death' (Kallir 1983); the paternal reference in the name 'Patera' is obvious, and the idea of the son 'disappearing along with his world' into the 'superexistence of the Father' chimes with the narrative journey from Munich to Pearl; the tortuous yet adulatory tone of the relationship is mirrored; even the lack of any coherent purpose to the ordeal of the 'Son' who is created 'spontaneously' and 'for some unfathomable reason'. For Freudian readers, then, the battle between Patera and Bell is emblematic of the resolution of an Oedipal complex, a battle of masculinity and authority and the struggle for emancipation from the influence of the paternal figure.

From the lengthy and frequently-revised autobiographical accompaniment to publications of *The Other Side* we can assume that Kubin was keen to encourage these comparisons, but readers more frequently perceive a political or social commentary than a personal one. This sometimes takes retrospective form, viewing the text, as the *Sunday Herald* did, as 'horribly prescient about what the Nazis would perpetrate 30 years later' (September 14th, 2014). Edouard Roditi similarly suggests that Kubin 'seems to visualise, as if in a clairvoyant's crystal ball, the macabre parodies of a kind of old-world Germanic Disneyland that some half-mad Kommandants of Nazi extermination-camps later forced their victims to build hurriedly as a façade to deceive squeamish higher-echelon visitors' (Roditi 1969: 239).[32] More often Dream Realm is seen as 'representing the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire in its waning days' (Kallir 1983), or 'a parable of the old Austria and premonition of its decline' (Schmied 1969: 24). Jünger saw in Kubin's 'dream kingdoms, dark quarters and fantastic cities' the 'collapse of Old Austria' (qtd Furness 1990: 32), and elsewhere wrote that Austria 'constitutes a refuge for things that have almost vanished, and Kubin was of the opinion that the people there in no way know what a paradise is still to be lost' (qtd Raabe 1977: 23). Moreover, Pearl mimics Austrian social stratifications in the 'disreputable' French Quarter 'inhabited by 4,000 inhabitants of mainly Latin, Slav and Jewish extraction' (*TOS* 54).[33] The 'hybrid' would in this

[32] Eoin Bourke advocates a more personal, vengeful reading here, claiming that 'critics who perceive in this vision a prophetic warning of what was to culminate at the end of the Hitler Period choose to ignore Kubin's evident attraction to the idea of an apocalypse […] in the apocalyptic scenes at the end of *Die andere Seite,* Kubin was indulging, like so many of his contemporary artists and writers, in Nietzschian misanthropy, in the lustful fantasy of a punitive and cleansing cataclysm that would crush and sweep away a world that did not understand or accept him and for which he purported to feel nothing but nausea' (Bourke 1997: 135-6).

[33] Denver Lindley translates this instead as 'Rumanians, Slavs and Jews' (Kubin 1969: 55). The original German is *Romane,* which refers to those speaking romance languages, including but not limited to Romanian (the German word for Romanian being *Rumänen*). In an email to me, Mike Mitchell (the translator of the edition used here) explained that his choice of 'Latin' is 'rather general, but it does give the precise meaning of the German' and suggests of Lindley's choice that 'perhaps he just decided to be more specific, less generalised'.

case be of the 'old world' of Europe and the bright lights of industrially-progressive America, representing 'a beneficial synthesis of the old and the new' (Furness 1990: 32).

As noted above, Pearl is commonly read as representative of Prague (Cacciari 1996: 113; Prawer 1977: 974; see also Schroeder 1976: 213), and the assumption of Pearl's affinity with Prague was sufficiently entrenched that the Pearl scenes in Schaaf's *Traumstadt* were actually filmed there.[34] [35] There is in fact a documented ancestral relationship of sorts between Pearl and Prague, as Kubin's illustrations for *The Other Side* began life as commissioned illustrations for Meyrink's *The Golem*, but when Meyrink's inspiration dried up and he stopped providing chapters to be illustrated, Kubin repurposed the existing drawings for his own work. Pearl inherits Meyrink's superstitious characterisation of Prague architecture, when the narrator remarks of the buildings of Pearl, 'I often felt as if the people were there for them, and not the other way round. It was the buildings that were the strong, the real individuals' (*TOS* 67); this anthropomorphisation is strikingly reminiscent of *The Golem,* in which Meyrink writes of the houses of Prague:

> I have lived here for a generation and in that time I have formed the impression, which I cannot shake off, that there are certain hours of the night, or in the first light of dawn, when they confer together, in mysterious, noiseless agitation. […] Often I dreamt I had eavesdropped on these houses in their spectral communion and discovered to my horrified surprise that in secret they are the true masters of the street, that they can divest themselves of their vital force, and suck it back in again at will, lending it to the inhabitants during the day to demand it back at extortionate interest as night returns. (Meyrink 2017: 35)

Spyros Papapetros' study of Pearl's architecture makes the point that 'contrary to the citizens' lack of animation the buildings had strong individuality' (Papapetros 2001: 428). The buildings are granted personal histories, as Bell reveals that 'there is scarcely one of them that had not been defiled by crime, blood and infamy before it was brought to its present site' (*TOS* 153) although, as Papapetros astutely observes, they 'are essentially "dead", in fact brutally murdered – "cut up into sections" – and then carried to the Dream Kingdom basically to be buried' (Papapetros 2001: 456). Andreas Geyer points out that Kubin repeatedly returned to the 'dying city' motif in his work (Geyer 2008: 77), which finds expression in the sterility which

[34] All filming locations listed on the International Movie Database are in Prague except one in the more southerly town of Ceský Krumlov. See www.imdb.com/title/tt0070829/locations.

[35] Furness is unconvinced by the Prague argument: 'Kubin certainly visited Prague later and met Kafka there, but the descriptions of Perle, with its square, coffee house, antique shops, villas and "Franzosisches Viertel" bring to mind any Central European city, and in this connection it is of interest that Franz Marc, writing to his wife from the Western Front in 1915, should describe Strasbourg as 'Perle', the ghostly confusion of the town reminding him forcibly of Kubin's city' (Furness 1990: 32).

affects every aspect of Dream life, from its landscape in which 'grey and brown predominated' (*TOS* 51) to the almost complete absence of any children, who 'were not particularly welcome; their value, it was claimed, did not match the inconvenience they caused' (55). The reproductive stagnation is shown to intensify as the text progresses, as the exception to the generally childless populace, Frau Goldschläger, has nine children and is carrying a tenth when we meet her, which eventually arrives stillborn (108). Here Kubin achieves resonances not only with contemporary commentary on modernity – whose objections, per Simmel's 'Metropolis', were explicitly city-based – but with later European modernism: Patera, ruling from his raised bed, recalls the legendary figure of the Fisher King, whose kingdom wastes around him, condemned to barrenness for as long as his emasculating wound fails to heal. This was the legend so famously evoked some thirteen years later by T.S. Eliot in 'The Waste Land' (1922) – one of the indisputable texts of British modernism – dominated by imagery of the moral and spiritual destitution that plagues the modern urban landscape; Kubin seems to anticipate this same connection with his weakened ruler (the narrator remarks, 'what was certain was that this mysterious figure was ailing' (133)) around whom everything else is desolated, and Eliot's London, under 'the brown fog of a winter noon' could be describing the arid twilight of Kubin's city.[36]

For Raymond Furness, 'to interpret the novel as a description of a journey of self-exploration is […] more fruitful than to read it as a political allegory' (Furness 1990: 34). The 'journey of self exploration' he refers to is the development in Kubin's artistic style, in which the writing of *The Other Side* formed a significant turning point. Kubin writes in his autobiography that he turned to writing in a moment of artistic impotence: 'when I tried to start a drawing I simply could not do it. I was not capable of putting down coherent, intelligible lines […] In order to do something, no matter what, to unburden myself, I now began to

[36] Given the importance of city imagery in *The Other Side* it is interesting to note that Jung referred to the text as 'a country-cousin of the metropolitan *Ulysses*' (Jung 1966: 128). In a letter to Kubin in November 1932 he clarified that 'the epithet […] is really a compliment. In a way I value your book much more because it gives an exact and faithful description of the things you have seen. I have mentioned your book several times in my writings as a classic example of the direct perception of unconscious processes' (Jung 2015: 104). Jung seems to be praising Kubin's 'rural' directness of report in contrast with Joyce's labyrinthine prose, which he wrote 'bores me to tears' (Jung 1966: 114). Elsewhere, however, he seems to find Kubin's so-called 'country' approach unsatisfying: 'he has described what he, as an artist, experienced of the unconscious. It is an artistic experience which, in the deeper meaning of human experience, is incomplete. […] the vision is experienced artistically, but not humanly […] the person of the author should not just be included passively in the vision, but that he should face the figures of the vision actively and reactively, with full consciousness […] a real settlement with the unconscious demands a firmly opposed conscious standpoint' (Jung 1966: 213). It is tempting to interpret this charge of 'incomplete' immersion in the magical (or 'unconscious', as Jung would have it) as a reaction to the narrator's detached style of commentary, which of course would go on to become magical realism's calling card.

compose and write down an adventure story' (Kubin 2017: 22). The completion of *The Other Side* marked a watershed in his graphic style, which dispensed with colour and shading in favour of 'the simplest means, lines, specks, and dots' (ibid. 23). For Furness the apocalyptic clash between, and ultimate fusion of, Patera and Bell refers directly to the creative process, to 'the realisation that the fusion of illusion and strength […] is necessary for artistic achievement to obtain its most satisfactory manifestation' (Furness 1990: 34). Schroeder, too, argues that the text is 'a symbolic narrative of a graphic artist who, by means of a dream, descends into the depths of his subconscious mind and returns to consciousness not only with a new conception of the nature of reality, but also with a new insight into the creative process and a new graphic style' (Schroeder 1976: 214), and sees in the text a pre-surrealist doctrine of inspiring the creative process via a uniting of the conscious with the subconscious. That the fusion is symbolic of creativity is borne out by the clash culminating in the formation of 'an impossibly large phallus' (*TOS* 235) which fructifies the land, and the sun reappears, marking an end to artistic stagnation which, under this interpretation, the stagnancy of Dream Realm represents.[37]

Doubtless there is merit to each of these analyses, and many of the symbolic totems around which they are arranged – darkness, consciousness, creation, modernity – are sufficiently flexible to be adapted into multiple frameworks. Its sheer density of imaginative prose and suggestive imagery means that the text resists being calibrated into a single allegorical thread, and the breadth of antithetical concepts which come into conflict in Bell and Patera's showdown is itself indicative of a widely-thrown net of allusions. However, it is the final reading, the aestheticists', which comes closest to what I consider to be the essence of *The Other Side,* although I would argue that it goes beyond the development of Kubin's technical style, and to a more profound change in his approach to his subject matter. (This, of course, is a question of emphasis: the two are inevitably closely related.) Kubin writes that on returning to the drawing board after completing *The Other Side,* 'the representation of fantastic combinations – for example, pigs with halos, houses with huge ears, volcanoes erupting fountains of blood, and so forth – no longer exercised the old attraction for me' (Kubin 2017: 23) and so, as Furness notes, 'his imagination, although drawn to the macabre, would not exult in the fantastic for its own sake, but see the fantastic *in the real*' (Furness 1990: 34, emphasis in

[37] In another potential angle of antithetical construct, is often noted that Bell and Patera form a kind of hybrid parentage here: Patera, in keeping with his hybrid nature, is 'father' but with a feminine suffix – again, not unlike the castrated Fisher King – and Schroeder sees the two as embodiments of the feminine and the masculine: 'Patera – the female principle, identified with passivity, grace, beauty, the nocturnal; Bell – the male principle, identified with physical strength, aggressiveness, activity, the diurnal' (Schroeder 1976: 225).

the original). Rhein notes, similarly, that 'from 1908 forward the bizarre and fantastic features that dominated his earlier work were in no sense abandoned, but they were handled in a completely different manner. Instead of being the central and often threatening focus of a work, they became integral facets of familiar everyday scenes' (Rhein 1989: 37).

This is more than just a question of aesthetic style: Kubin's intention in *The Other Side*, and in his graphic work which pursued it, was to convey a poignant philosophical revelation:

> During [*The Other Side*'s] composition I achieved the mature realisation that it is not only in the bizarre, exalted, or comic moments of our existence that the highest values lie, but that the painful, the indifferent, and the incidental-commonplace contain these same mysteries. This is the principal meaning of the book. (Kubin 2017: 22)

This equivalence could hardly correspond more closely with the stated aims of magical realism, and is represented throughout *The Other Side* in the repeated establishment, and then undermining, of antithetical moral and ontological codes. The categories of real and unreal, good and evil, past and present, precious and worthless, creator and creation, self and other, waking and sleeping, day and night, life and death, are brought forcibly into collision until their classificatory boundaries crumble like the walls and structures of Dream Realm itself, and we discover that only their collaboration can produce a viable settlement.

After all, what *The Other Side* – or at least, its narrator – communicates is not the desirability, so much as the inevitability of these fusions. The end of the text sees the narrator in a sanatorium, left to ponder the tragic duality of existence, that we cannot delaminate any human experience from its 'other side': we cannot experience dreams without tolerating consciousness; cannot exercise individual self-will without an element of 'an inevitable fate which works itself out through us' (*TOS* 95); cannot experience life without accepting the inevitability of death – or, in fact, vice-versa, for as if to underscore the completeness of his scrambled hierarchies, the narrator, once subject to 'all-pervading fear' of the 'intangible web' of death (182), emerges from the crazy mirror hall of Dream Realm with his priorities reversed, his enduring loyalty to Patera leaving him instead in thrall to death's lure. It is the unavoidability of life, and not the unavoidability of death, which torments him:

> When I ventured back into the world of the living, I discovered that my god only held half-sway. In everything, both great and small, he had to share with an adversary who wanted life. The forces of repulsion and attraction, the twin poles of the earth with their currents, the alternation of the seasons, day and night, black and white – these are battles. True hell lies in

> the fact that this discordant clash continues within us. Even love has its focus 'between faeces and urine'. The sublime can fall prey to the ridiculous, to derision, irony. (248)

Both Patera and his follower, our narrator, have discovered the unsustainability of attempting to live exclusively in one register without accommodating its 'other side', and whilst Patera capitulates, our narrator must learn to achieve equilibrium in order to survive in a world which is subject to both poles because, as Rhein writes, 'there is no "this side" and "the other". Meaning can exist only when the two blend into one' (Rhein 1989: 35).

Although *The Other Side* ends on a note of resigned despair, the achievement of the equilibrium required is shown to be possible. This question is explored via the presence of the indigenous 'blue-eyed tribe' who reside across the river from Pearl, an aspect of Dream Realm which has inspired much critical discussion. In his despair at the death of his wife, the narrator retreats from Pearl life and studies the customs of the tribe, taking respite in their more sedate pace of life: 'How everything here contrasted with conditions in the Dream Realm! There the haste, here the calm' (*TOS* 132). The 'blue-eyed folk' are 'the incarnation of complete equilibrium' (133), and it is presumably as a result of his study and emulation of the equilibrium they practise that the narrator remains 'completely unaffected' by the degradation which seizes the Dreamers (192), and ultimately why he survives the disintegration of Dream Realm; it is because he has learned 'to intensify my joys and my sorrows while secretly laughing at both, knowing, as I did, that it is by swinging to and fro that the pendulum creates balance' (135) that he can be allowed to proceed from Dream Realm whilst the other inhabitants – including Patera – committed to the pendulum's 'farthest, most violent swings' (ibid.), are swallowed up in its destruction. There is no critical consensus on the role that the blue-eyed tribe play;[38] the closest the text comes to giving us an explanation is that 'the mystery of Patera was never solved. Perhaps the blue-eyed tribe were the real masters and used magic powers to galvanise a lifeless dummy into life, so creating and destroying the Dream Realm as they thought fit' (244). This gets us no closer to a truly comprehensible explanation for the events of *The Other Side* (if anything, it gets us further away from one), but it does underscore the absolutely

[38] For Cowan, the blue-eyed tribe exist to provide contrast to Bell in a model in which 'America and the Orient figure as the opposite poles of the socio-evolutionary scale' (Cowan 2008: 231); for Furness 'If Patera and his world are the temporary embodiment of the imagination, then the "blue-eyed ones" […] represent its permanent source' (Furness 1990: 34); for Hughes the presence of an indigenous settlement underscores the status of Pearl as an exercise in colonial oppression (Hughes 2007: 94), whilst conversely, for Gosetti-Ferencei 'the blue eyes of the indigenous inhabitants of Kubin's *Traumreich* […] highlight the creation of an aesthetic realm rather than a colonialist fantasy' (Gosetti-Ferencei 2011: 192).

primary importance of the equilibrium which the text promotes, and which the blue-eyed people embody, giving them 'mastery' over all others.

The denial of a single, linear explanation of the events of the text is fully appropriate to its construction which, as established earlier, is arranged into two competing narratives informed by two ontological codes: the 'realist' one in which we begin, and the 'magical' one into which we journey. Hercules Bell, of course, is the embodiment of the 'realist' narrative, so committed to routine explanations for magical events that he even manages to resist Patera's 'sleeping sickness' by sheer force of will, by simply denying its power (164-5). If the difference between magical-realist and fantastic literature is that the latter seeks tirelessly to consolidate the two ontological codes into one whereas magical realism sustains both codes, then the ending of *The Other Side* a decidedly magical-realist one. On the one hand we are presented with the apocalyptic showdown between Bell and Patera as the explanation for the final dissolution of Dream Realm, whilst on the other we have Bell's narrative which has its own altogether more terrestrial solution:

> Suddenly word went round that Patera had appeared himself. He had been carried by four servants in a litter to the Market Place, so the story went, wearing a tall tiara and a green velvet cloak richly embroidered with pearls, blessing the people like a cardinal. Seeing him, the American had picked up a cobblestone and hurled himself at the Lord like a mad-man. The head – it was actually a wax model – had burst like an eggshell. The eyes had been glass balls filled with mercury, the ceremonial attire stuffed with straw. The Master had been a hoax, nothing more. (224-5)

Bell exits the novel with his ontology unscathed, 'boasting that *he* had put an end to all this Patera nonsense by destroying the waxwork dummy' (243-4). This explanation does not undermine the one which our narrator offers, just as the 'magical' explanation being espoused makes no impact on Bell's certitude of his own. The narrative threads do not, as in texts belonging to the fantastic mode, collapse into either of the Todorovian categories of the 'fantastic-uncanny' or the 'fantastic-marvellous', nor does the text ask the reader to choose between the two. Both are stated without opposition, and the text ends with both intact.

The Other Side has received barely a handful of mentions within magical-realist criticism (although given its provenance, that it has received any at all is remarkable in itself), and no in-depth study considering it as a work of magical realism exists. This is surprising when considered in light of the remarks typically made of it in other areas of literary criticism:

> The mind grasps in an entirely new light what had formerly been regarded as the fantastic […] it automatically enters the realm of the fantastic without, however, recognising this extraordinary realm as anything but the ordinary (Schroeder 1976: 227);
>
> The power of Kubin's novel lies in the eerie indistinction between the real and the unreal (Comini 1978: 24);
>
> Commentators tend to stress the fantastic element in *Die andere Seite*. Of equal importance, however, are the realistic aspects of the novel […] The triumph of Kubin's novel, and of his art, is the apotheosis of the mundane, the merging of the worldly with the spiritual (Kallir 1983);
>
> Throughout his narration Kubin had to maintain a level of *vraisemblance* while simultaneously introducing a measure of the mysterious or inexplicable. […] He could not settle for a willing suspension of disbelief, for the level of interpretation he sought demanded the acceptance of the fantastic as an essential and inseparable part of reality. […] He and his protagonist describe what he sees without any interpretive commentary. […] As in a Kubin drawing these two realities are fused into one. The familiar is transformed into the strange and incomprehensible, whereas paradoxically the bizarre and unknown are treated realistically. (Rhein 1989: 28-33)

None of these pronouncements are intended to describe a work of magical realism, and yet all articulate textual characteristics specific to the mode. In fact, *The Other Side* fulfils every requirement of a magical-realist text: it encompasses both a realist and a non-realist ontology; the non-realist ontology is entered without surprise on the part of the narrative voice; the hierarchy between the two ontologies is persistently negated; and the plot events demonstrate a consummate absence of logical consistency:

> At five in the morning a bricklayer with a bucket of mortar and a bag of tools rings the bell and insists he has been instructed to brick up the windows in our living room. Another time there's a gypsy band outside the door serenading us late in the evening; by mistake, of course. Visitors turn up on all sorts of business, things that don't belong to us are delivered and not collected again. Once we had a packet of old cheese rinds lying around for two weeks. After I had thrown it away three army officers came demanding their property in peremptory tones. (*TOS* 80-81)

What inspired Kubin to embrace this technique can only be guessed at. Rhein's observation above that the events of *The Other Side* appear 'as in a Kubin drawing' suggests one possible interpretation, that the lack of surprise in the delivery is a 'painterly' one, in which objects, however startling in themselves, just *are*: they are presented in unmediated, complete form to the viewer. Indeed, Kubin's desire to communicate his particular message of hybridity might find a more effective vehicle in prose than in a drawing: the hallmark of magical-realist literature is the insistence, corroborated within the text, of the *actually-existing* nature of both of its aspects, which requires radical, rigorous statement of each. The very efficiency of the fusion between two modes of reality achievable in the visual arts makes its delivery too

harmonious. This is not to say that the visual arts cannot be startling, shocking, evocative or radical, but these impacts are necessarily finite: one doubts whether the continual deferment of reality-status, the relentless oscillation between two ontological codes which makes the best works of magical-realist fiction so uniquely implacable, can be achieved in a medium which is by its nature static.

What is so valuable about Kubin's work in understanding the development of magical realism is his extreme proximity to the European works of fantastic literature which were so popular in the 1900s (not just to direct contemporaries like Meyrink, but earlier writers like Nerval, Hoffman and Poe). *The Other Side* addresses the same anxieties of modernity as these works – the erosions of boundaries, the upsetting of rules, fear of the implications of industrial progress, explorations of the recently-conceived 'subconscious' – and gives them magical-realist treatment. The emphasis on Patera's preference for antiquity over progress, and his 'sanctuary for all those who are unhappy with modern civilisation' (*TOS* 15), express a dread of modernity which, as Cowan points out, was present in Kubin's earlier artwork: one of his best-known artworks 'Der Mensch' (1902) (see Appendix I, fig. 7), depicts a figure (sexless and almost featureless, reflecting the perceived deindividuating effects of modernity) strapped, arms bound, to a sparse pair of wheels, hurtling along a vertiginous, narrow railway track – itself an undisputed emblem of modernity which 'has figured historically both as a celebration of modernity and as a critique of it' (Beaumont and Freeman 2007: 13) – but so angled as to resemble a rollercoaster, hurtling from the upper left corner and down into a mist-shrouded abyss. And yet, although this image captures, as Cowan says, 'the frightening side of industrial modernity' (Cowan 2008: 227), it is equally possible to detect the ambivalence towards the prospects of progress which Kubin develops in *The Other Side,* since the trajectory is from darkness into light, and the destination of the railway track is the unknown rather than the sinister or infernal. Again, Kubin's final message on modernity seems to be less concerned with its merits or otherwise – a question which he perhaps deemed to be of secondary consideration given its unstoppable approach – but that, as Cowan concludes, he 'pleads neither for a purely "decadent" society that would reject technological modernity […] in favour of aesthetic

contemplation nor for the futuristic fantasy of a machinelike and inexhaustible willpower. His argument, rather, is that the latter can never completely rid itself of the former' (ibid. 252-3).[39]

It is by this ambivalence – or perhaps, this agnosticism – that Kubin's text, especially if viewed as a comment on the advent of modernity and its impact on the ontological realm of reality, is distinguished from its peers. Rhein makes this observation about the fantastic authors of Kubin's time:

> Their dealing with the fantastic – and this is the relevant point in a discussion of their significance to Kubin – was not as in fairy tales or the earlier tales of horror. […] To a degree they deceived the reader by promising reality and then going beyond its limits as they manipulated the story's setting from that of concrete reality to an increasingly fantastic level of experience. By the end of the tale the reader had to choose between acknowledging the reality of the reported action or dismissing that action as a product of the character's imagination. (Rhein 1989: 45-6)

Here Rhein, again inadvertently, pinpoints the precise nature in which Kubin's work conforms with the techniques of magical realism. The difference between magical realism and the fantastic is that the latter, ultimately, asks the reader to *choose* between the two codes that it embraces; in most cases it asks the reader to admit the existence of a frightening, disturbing supernatural which diminishes rather than enhances the tenets of reality. Kubin's motivation, though, was not to assault 'reality' with intrusions from the supernatural, but instead to articulate his suspicion that what we call 'reality' does not represent the full picture, but is 'a false front hiding the real secret – probably a poorly lit, stable-like, bloody cavern' (qtd Sebba 2017: vi).

Kubin's message, as already intimated, is not necessarily one of positivity (although as Ernst Jünger wrote of Kubin, 'he knows more than people comprehend, and can bear […] I nevertheless have the impression that he knows how to console himself for that by way of a

[39] Cowan touches here on the relationship which has been observed between Kubin's work and the literary Decadent movement of the late nineteenth century, which Geyer summarises as 'the experience of the world based on that which wastes away in it […] The crucial aspect in all this is the general presentiment – which seen in retrospect was certainly justified – that the old European world was inevitably condemned to decline' (ibid. 71). He also quotes Viennese critic Hermann Bahr's formulation: 'Fleeing life, suppressing by means of whim, madness and dreaming, forgetting oneself – that is the meaning of this decadence' (ibid.). There are clear lines of affinity here, and also with the movement as it manifested in the visual arts, which the Tate website defines as 'inspired partly by a disgust at the corruption and rampant materialism of the modern world and partly by a related desire to escape it into realms of the aesthetic, fantastic, erotic or religious' (see www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/decadence). Geyer also notes that 'the primacy of moods […] is one of the most important topoi in decadent literature' (Geyer 2008: 78), which corresponds with Gautsch's proclamation when describing Dream Realm that 'the word that probably comes closest to describing the core of our world is "mood". The only things our people experience are moods, or, better, *they exist in moods alone*' (*TOS* 15, emphasis in the original).

pleasant form of secret irony' (qtd Raabe 1977: 23)), but one of equilibrium: at a point in history when, as is well-known, the foundations of knowledge were being rocked by startling new advances – psychological as well as industrial – it does not do to hurtle headlong into novelty with no regard for what is being steamrollered in its path (Bell), nor to cower in rarefied servitude to departed norms (Patera). *The Other Side* is in every way about the erosion of boundaries: between night and day in Dream Realm's eternal twilight; between self and other; between conscious and subconscious; between past and present. The purpose of the text's repeatedly drawing attention to, and then to the insubstantiality of these boundaries is to convey that authentic knowledge, authentic existence, can only be achieved via the absorption of the truths residing at both ends of the 'pendulum's swing', on both this 'side' and the other, and by achieving a hybridity which productively accommodates them all.

Some of these boundaries make their way into the hands of Kafka, whose own work of magical realism was published just six years later. There is no real suspicion of influence here: although Kafka knew and appreciated Kubin's work (a touching postcard dated 1914 reads 'perhaps I shall be able to tell you yet again what your work means to me' (qtd Furness 2012: 36)), *The Metamorphosis,* his own literary exploration of boundaries, is fêted as one of the most original works in the history of Western literature, and stands quite apart in its style. It is nonetheless strikingly similar in technique and theme to Kubin's text, and in concentrating what Roman Struc terms the 'uniting of mutually exclusive ontological strata' (Struc 1971: 147) on the boundary between dream and reality: 'after all', as Kata Gellen observes, 'strange dreams are far less strange than strange realties' (Gellen 2016: 118).

II.ii. *'Gregor ruled the bare walls all alone'*: Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

That magical-realist scholarship has never given Franz Kafka significant critical attention is surprising for a number of reasons. As detailed in an earlier chapter, his name has been attached to magical realism at one stage or another by almost all leading critics in the field, including Amaryll Chanady, Maggie Ann Bowers, Wendy Faris, Christopher Warnes and Shannin Schroeder to name but a few, and yet none of these strikingly frequent mentions is developed beyond the point of passing allusion. Arguments for doing so are persuasive: the association dates back to the earliest origins of magical realism's consideration within the literary community with Angel Flores' 1995 essay 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', which

presents Kafka as a paragon, even a taproot of magical realism; *The Metamorphosis* is treated as a test case, and the dominant claim Flores cites to the suitability of certain Latin American authors for inclusion in the magical-realist category was their work's similarity to Kafka's. Like Kubin, Kafka's hallmark of combining realism with what is variously called 'absurd', 'fantastic', or 'extraordinary', is deemed sufficiently distinctive as to have earned its own epithet, although unlike Kubin's, the 'Kafkaesque' is so well-known a concept as to have entered into common speech, and finds application far beyond the sphere of the literary. Also in common with Kubin, descriptions of his work are quantitatively indistinguishable from descriptive definitions of magical realism, like this one from Dmitri Zatonsky:

> Kafka constructs the edifice of his works from two kinds of bricks – the unreal and the actual – cementing them together with the mortar of a balanced and monotonous narration, a narration which is extremely subjective in essence and as "objective" as possible in form […] Between them there is no antagonism, nor even any noticeable transition. (Zatonsky 1981: 219)

An even more obvious source of comparison is the acknowledged line of influence from Kafka to Márquez. The quote from his 1981 interview in *The Paris Review* is well-known:

> One night a friend lent me a book of short stories by Franz Kafka. I went back to the pension where I was staying and began to read *The Metamorphosis*. The first line almost knocked me off the bed. I was so surprised. The first line reads, 'As Gregor Samsa awoke that morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect…' When I read the line I thought to myself that I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago. So I immediately started writing short stories. (Márquez 2007: 184)

It goes without saying that the nature of literary influence is not straightforward, and for one writer to credit another's influence can mean any number of things, but for a narrative technique distinctly associated with a given author to become a distinguishing feature of a given literary mode, apparently via its direct adoption by that mode's seminal figure, is compelling to say the least. That the attribution in itself hasn't generated more interest is unexpected, even without going as far as Michael Wood does in writing that 'when García Márquez describes his indebtedness to *The Metamorphosis*, his schooling at its tone of determined unsurprise, it seems as if Kafka might have invented magical realism itself' (Wood 2003: 81).

The opening passages of *The Metamorphosis* establish the text's magical-realist proposition with remarkable efficiency, introducing both the facts of the magical and the real,

and of their hierarchical equivalence, all in the space of three paragraphs. Indeed, when the text is considered as a work of magical realism, its notorious opening line ('When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin' (Kafka 1996: 3) (henceforth *TM*)) evinces a structural surprise: rather than establishing a realist landscape into which magical events irrupt and disrupt, the magic in this text manifests as an abrupt herald which then fades to an echo and reverberates through the otherwise realist (or at least logically plausible) events of the text. Not for Kafka is Kubin's opening claim to cartographic veracity, nor even Gogol's brief establishing shot in 'The Nose' of 'on March 25th, there took place, in Petersburg…': Kafka plunges the reader directly into the magical, and it is the real which then drops into view around it.

The credibility of both Gregor's transformation and of its realist backdrop are established by their each being furnished with a wealth of incidental detail: had the narrative moved directly from Gregor's finding himself 'changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin' (*TM* 3) to his dreamily placid '"What has happened to me?"'(ibid.), then an obvious solution would suggest itself, namely that we are witnessing a half-asleep consciousness still in the thrall of nocturnal delusion. Yet the opening statement is anchored by the physical specificity of the beetle's 'vaulted brown belly', 'arch-shaped ribs' and 'many legs, pitifully thin […] waving helplessly', and the almost prosaically practical concern of 'the cover, about to slide off', which draw the scene into too sharp a focus to be mistaken for a fantasy, even without the uncompromising statement that 'it was no dream'. By the same token, we are prevented by the mundane enumeration of Gregor's travelling salesman detritus, the description of a painting on his wall, and the detail of 'raindrops hitting against the metal window ledge', from assuming ourselves to be in an inter-textual reality wherein this kind of transformation is to be expected.

Once established, in order to forestall any attempt by the reader at disentangling the two codes from one another, by the end of the third paragraph the narrative flip-flaps no fewer than five times between the 'insect strain' and the 'realist strain', as if to showcase the absolute absence of friction between the two: as described above, we are first presented with the fact of Gregor's transformation, and then with the minutiae of his lifestyle, job and bedroom; we then sidle mid-sentence back into the 'insect strain' as Gregor ponders 'going back to sleep for a few minutes and forgetting all this nonsense' but realises this is 'completely impracticable, since he was used to sleeping on his right side and in his present state could not get into that position'; after a few lines detailing his frustrated attempt to roll off his back, the narrative sidesteps just

as seamlessly back into the 'realist strain' as, apropos of nothing, we re-enter Gregor's internal viewpoint to find him bemoaning his working conditions: '"oh God," he thought, "what a gruelling job I've picked!"'; finally we end up back in the 'insect strain' when Gregor's thoughts are interrupted by 'a slight itching up on top of his belly' (4). From the moment Gregor leaves his bed the narrative ceases to oscillate between the two, because by this time they are inextricably fused, forming the kind of narrative Möbius strip so familiar in magical realism, with the impossible-yet-true fact of Gregor's metamorphosis as firmly established as the domestic setting in which it occurs.

This treatment of events is instructive to the reader in two ways: first of all, the establishment and persistent restatement of what I have termed the two narrative 'strains', representing the two ontological codes at play, informs the reader upfront that this will not be a text in which the two collapse into one as in a work of fantastic literature: the supernatural event will not, after its first flush, recede and be revealed to exist (uncannily) only in the protagonist's mind, nor will we find ourselves in a (marvellous) landscape whose coda can reasonably accommodate the transformation. Secondly, and more importantly, however jarring the reader may find Gregor's preoccupation with the discontents of a travelling salesman, namely 'constantly worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours' (3), in the face of the more distracting question of his having spontaneously mutated into a giant insect, it is quickly made clear that the event will not receive the expected treatment by either the text or by its characters.

Gregor's reaction – or lack thereof – to his situation is one of the most remarked-upon techniques employed in *The Metamorphosis*,[40] but what makes it so disconcerting is not merely the fact that he accepts the situation so calmly (a calm acceptance taken in isolation would, again, indicate to the reader that they have entered a marvellous landscape), but the unsettlingly inappropriate nature of the objections he *does* raise. Gregor's characterisation of the event as 'all this nonsense' is not a dismissal of its reality, but of its significance: his consternation is dwarfed by more mundane concerns, and the first hint of dissatisfaction at his

[40] Such remarks are too universal to need enumeration, and can be represented by a recent example from Carolin Duttlinger, who writes that '*The Metamorphosis* is actually rather atypical of Kafka's writings. His texts often deal with strange and inexplicable situations, but they rarely break the conventions of realism so openly. […] The text's premise may be fantastical, but its narrative tone points in a very different direction. One of the first things we are struck by when reading *The Metamorphosis* is the understated, calm and factual way in which Gregor's transformation is narrated. The narrative lacks any of the emotions – horror, shock, surprise – which we would associate with such a disturbing discovery' (Duttlinger 2013: 33). Albert Camus probably put it best with his pithy pronouncement that the text 'will never show sufficient astonishment at this lack of astonishment' (Camus 1955: 79).

metamorphosis is that it prevents him from adopting a comfortable sleeping position. Likewise the rest of the Samsa family: although 'determined unsurprise' wouldn't be an accurate characterisation of their reaction, we learn that it is 'in the course of the very first day' (19) that their concerns turn from Gregor's metamorphosis to their adjusted financial situation, and although they do exhibit fear, dismay and distress on first seeing the metamorph, the speed of their acceptance registers as similarly inappropriate to the situation. Like all works of magical realism, the effect of *The Metamorphosis* depends upon a discord between the nature of events being related, and the handling of those events by and within the text (which is another way of saying, a discord between the reader's response to events and the text's response to them, or for Struc, 'disparity between form and content' (Struc 1971: 146)), and magical realism occupies the space that this discord creates. Absolute sobriety, like that which Gregor presents, is not necessary to create this discord, which is just as keenly felt in the impassioned but eerily inappropriate.

The effect of this reception of the supernatural is an instant unmooring of the assumptions about reality with which the reader entered the text. Even as Gregor anticipates their reaction to his altered state he is remarkably broad in his expectations, seeming to regard a non-reaction as equally likely as a horrified one, but what is conspicuously absent is any suggestion that his family might reject, or even logically interrogate the facts of the situation: 'If they were shocked, then Gregor had no further responsibility and could be calm […] if they took everything calmly then he, too, had no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the station by eight o'clock' (*TM* 10). The logical expectations being dismantled in this one sentiment are surprisingly numerous: firstly and most strikingly, in foreseeing no difficulty in persuading his family that the enormous insect in his room is in fact Gregor himself, he takes for granted – and rightly, as it turns out – that when confronted with a giant insect, they will bypass any even quasi-logical attempts to explain the apparition (that the insect has eaten Gregor perhaps, or that it is simply a monstrous invader, unrelated to Gregor's apparent absence) and immediately accept the literal impossibility that the insect is Gregor after a magical metamorphosis; secondly, by treating as equally likely the prospect that his family will be 'shocked' (the very phrase '*if they were shocked*' is a startling one under the circumstances) as that they might 'take everything calmly', the significance of the transformation is treated as contingent, unfixed, a matter of opinion; finally, in some ways the most absurd of them all, is the reasoning that if his transformation inspires no especial excitement his routine could go on

uninterrupted, that its significance can even be suppressed to the point that it poses no logistical impediment to the lifestyle of a travelling salesman. Gregor's refusal (or failure) to acknowledge the implications of his transformation empty the event of its intuitive significance, and so the entire system of values by which reality is navigated and evaluated is nullified.

In concert with the text's unexpected structural arrangement, the Samsa family's reaction to Gregor's transformation thus registers as more discontinuous with reality, more offensive to our expectations, than the transformation itself. Discontinuity is a headline feature of *The Metamorphosis*, almost literally, in the sense that the metamorphosis itself occurs completely unprompted, whereupon explanations of any kind are neither offered nor (even more surprisingly) sought, and by concentrating the supernatural into a single generative event, the focus is inevitably consumed not by the event itself but by the consequent fallout. In abstracting Gregor's transformation from the implications to which we intuitively expect it to be attached, the transformation, itself a discontinuous event, is shown to engender further discontinuities in the realm of the 'real'. Indeed, fundamental defocalisation of the supernatural may be signalled by the fact that the supernatural event itself occurs outside of the bounds of the narrative, presented to the reader as a *fait accompli* in the opening line; the persistent presence of beetle-Gregor keeps the supernatural in the frame, but any description of it is deliberately omitted.[41] Once the impossible fact of the metamorphosis has been accepted and yet reality is otherwise maintained, the focus of our incredulity is shifted from the impossible to the improbable; as aforementioned, Gregor's suggestion that he could continue life as a travelling salesman in his insect-state registers as the height of absurdity in spite of being technically possible (insofar as we accept the idea of a giant intelligent insect to be possible) because, as Struc writes, 'the ideational premises of realism […] are not based on the proposition of the possible, but rather on the probable versus the improbable' (Struc 1971: 137). This is because *The Metamorphosis,* along with the rest of Kafka's oeuvre, and in common with all works of magical realism, is ultimately concerned more with exposing the extraordinariness of what we tend to call 'ordinary' reality than with any manifestation of the supernatural. Boris Suchkov interprets the presence of domestic detail in a similar vein:

> It was not only to amplify the aesthetic effect of the horrible that Kafka placed the drama of the Samsas in the element of the everyday. By saturating the narrative with

[41] My choice of the label 'beetle' for the metamorph is not without controversy, and will be covered in more detail at a later stage.

> tiny prosaic details, he strives to show that the horrible and monstrous is hidden and lurks in the bosom of normal, everyday life […] to affirm the ordinariness of the extraordinary, the naturalness of the unnatural, the logicalness of the illogical. (Suchkov 1981: 148)

If magical realism can be defined as a literature which establishes and sustains two opposing ontological codes, resists assigning them a hierarchical schema, and advertises this resistance via the tone of its narrative, then Kafka's text is a prototypical work of magical realism. It is also an exquisite test-case for the importance of discontinuity in magical realism: David Cronenberg's 1986 film *The Fly,* heavily influenced by Kafka's work (Cronenberg penned an introduction to Susan Bernofsky's 2014 translation of *The Metamorphosis* comparing the two, entitled 'The Beetle and the Fly'), corrected the discontinuity by having the film's hero Seth Brundle mutate into a human-fly hybrid as a result of a mishap with a teleportation device, thus rendering it decidedly science fiction, and not magical realism.[42] The question is not whether *The Metamorphosis* represents an example of magical realism *avant la lettre*, but how it employed magical realism's techniques and to what end.

The specific element of magical-realist technique which will be explored in this chapter is the engagement with conceptual boundaries. To say that magical realism depends on the treatment of two antagonistic ontological codes is to say that it depends upon boundaries. Antagonism (resolved or otherwise) can only exist in the presence of boundaries, and magical realism's destabilisation of the assumptive antagonism between two distinct ontological codes is achieved by its destabilising the margins which uphold their distinction. It is a generally accepted principle of magical realism that the mode's suitability to postcolonial contexts is due to its exploration of macro-boundaries, between magical and real, offering a springboard for exploration of more localised boundaries, 'whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic' (Faris and Zamora 1995: 5). *The Metamorphosis* is one of the best available examples of magical-realist technique being used in this way, to interrogate conceptual boundaries in multiple coincident contexts simultaneously, as the text continually explores boundaries of all kinds, and specifically the 'paradoxically destructive consequences' – to borrow a phrase from Stanley Corngold – of their agitation. The central motif of Gregor's

[42] I covered the difference between the two in an earlier chapter, but to briefly reiterate: works of science fiction absorb their non-realist elements into an ontologically unidimensional coda by way of pseudo-scientific explanation. As Amaryll Chanady phrases it, 'the fictitious world is an extrapolation of our own, and its norms of logic are based on existing scientific discoveries and theories. Every situation is integrated within the perspective posited by the text, and nothing surprises the protagonist or reader. What would obviously be regarded as supernatural in a difference context is considered normal in the world of science fiction' (Chanady 1985: 7).

indeterminate beetle-body focalises and queries the boundary between human and animal, both in its very nature, and by the calculated imprecision with which Kafka renders it, ensuring it cannot be shunted from the boundary between the categories and into one or the other. The central motif in turn generates an exploration of the boundary between 'inner' and 'outer', tracing the body's physical perimeter in pursuit of its role not only in physical interiority, but also psychological and social. Boundaries are a dominant feature of every operative level of the text right down to the mechanical, as each plot point is motored by negotiations of the physical boundaries within the Samsa apartment, the changing significance of the separate rooms and the walls which form their margins, and the characters' movements between and through them (or across them, in Gregor's case), which explorations themselves intersect with the categorical boundaries which define the roles that constitute the Samsa family structure. All of these explorations take place beneath the text's overarching *bel étage*, wherein the boundary being explored is that which delimits the territory of the 'real': the exposure of this boundary, in the text's opening passages, as fundamentally unstable and osmotic, cascades through the subsequent boundaries the text encounters as it proceeds.

The most obvious boundary-transgression in Kafka's text is, of course, Gregor's flagrant disturbance of the boundary between 'human' and 'animal' in his metamorphosed form, which is best suited to exploration through the lens of the grotesque, another literary mode to which boundaries (and especially their transgression) are central. A number of critics have explored similarities between magical realism and the grotesque (Danow 1995; Delbaere-Garant 1995; Noriega Sánchez 2002; Adams 2011). The definition which Philip Thomson gives in his influential 1972 work *The Grotesque* mirrors our definition of magical realism in its evocation of antagonistic codes: 'the most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as a conflict, clash, mixture, of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparities' (Thomson 1972: 20); he identifies the nature of this 'disharmony' as the 'clash in the text itself, between – on the most obvious level – the gruesome or horrifying content and the comic manner in which it is presented […] 'grotesque' will cover, among other things, the co-presence of the laughable and something which is incompatible with the laughable' (ibid. 2-3). Replace 'laughable' with 'real' and we have a clear structural affinity, replete with the emphasis on the disparity of tone and subject matter so familiar from discussions of magical-realist technique. It is interesting to note that in demonstrating this incompatibility Thomson reaches immediately for the opening passages of

The Metamorphosis, which he quotes at length (although quite what he finds 'comic' in them is unclear), specifically in order to avoid the 'danger […] that one could be led into associating the grotesque too closely with the fantastic'. He goes on:

> however unnatural and impossible the metamorphosis which Kafka describes, it is narrated in an entirely realistic, indeed matter-of-fact fashion, as if it were quite an ordinary event. […] We can take it, then, as likely that, far from possessing a necessary affinity with the fantastic, the grotesque derives at least some of its effect from being presented within a realistic framework, in a realistic way. (ibid. 7-8).

A further affinity is found, then, in both modes' being distinguished from the fantastic by 'the conviction that the grotesque [or magical] world, however strange, is yet our world, real and immediate' (ibid. 23), by their presenting the 'unnatural and impossible' as though it were not discontinuous with the real. Thomson even ascribes the 'function' of the grotesque as being 'a means of presenting the world in a new light […] to make us see the (real) world anew, from a fresh perspective which, though it be a strange and disturbing one, is nevertheless valid and realistic' (ibid. 17), a phrase strikingly similar to the one employed by Franz Roh to describe the effect of magical-realist art, that 'the real world emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day'.

What is surprising about Thomson's employing *The Metamorphosis* in delineating the features of the grotesque is that he focuses on the interplay of antagonistic codes, whilst barely touching on what seems the more obviously grotesque aspect of the text, namely Gregor's grotesque beetle body. The body in general does not feature strongly in his analysis of the grotesque: he goes only so far as to suggest that 'at the very least, the grotesque has a strong affinity with the *physically abnormal*' (ibid. 9, emphasis in the original), and 'grotesque' in this formulation refers to a jarring juxtaposition, rather than physical repulsiveness. In its broader application, the body is often centred in discussions of the grotesque, especially in its most famous articulation, the concept of the carnivalesque espoused by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's writing on the grotesque articulates the word's popular usage, that of excessive materiality or corporeality, in his principle of 'degradation', 'to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth' (Bakhtin 1984: 21). For the purposes of this study, the interesting aspect of Bakhtin's formulation is the idea of the body as an essentially dialogic vehicle, possessed of a physical boundary which is continually permeated:

> the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. (ibid. 26)

Bakhtin's focus here is inevitably on the transgressions of bodily integrity that occur in nature – eating, bleeding, sneezing, breastfeeding, ejaculation – but, just as magical realism's exploration of ontological boundaries is often in the service of an exploration of more local ones, magical realism's use of the grotesque body concerns itself with transgressions of a more profound nature. The bodily grotesque is one of the most persistent features of canonical magical-realist literature: Márquez's very old man with enormous wings, Allende's two-headed baby, Grass' diminutive Oskar Matzerath, Rushdie's supernaturally-nasally-endowed and physically disintegrating Saleem Sinai, and Carter's winged woman Fevvers are just a few examples of bodies which resist straightforward categorisation due to being employed as sites of political and philosophical negotiation. Gregor's beetle-body is described here as grotesque not by dint of being verminous, but because it is a site where conceptual boundaries are problematised, transgressed and occupied.

The indeterminate human/animal status of Gregor's beetle-body is the basis of the horror that *The Metamorphosis* inspires. The prospect of turning into a beetle is only fractionally as frightening as the prospect of turning outwardly into a beetle whilst retaining a human consciousness as Gregor does (or being 'caught between man-ness and bug-ness', as John Zilcosky has it (Zilcosky 2003: 186)); as Stanley Corngold writes, it is unsettling 'because the indeterminate, fluid crossing of a human tenor and a material vehicle is in itself unsettling' (Corngold 1996: 86).[43] Kafka, though, not content with the straightforward demolition of our presumption of a mind-body analogue, further blurs the boundaries by making the beetle-body itself indeterminate in numerous ways, beginning with the nominal; it has been exhaustively noted that English translators stumble straight out of the blocks in Kafka's text with the German *Ungeziefer,* which, as Corngold tells us, 'derives (as Kafka probably knew) from the late Middle

[43] Barbara Creed points out that many stereotypical horror figures depend upon similarly disturbed analogues: '"bodies without souls" (the vampire), the "living corpse" (the zombie), corpse-eater (the ghoul) and the robot or android' (Creed 2007: 10).

High German word originally meaning "the unclean animal not suited for sacrifice"' (ibid. 87),[44] and encompasses far more ambiguity than the usual English translations of 'insect', 'bug', 'vermin', etc.[45] This linguistic dilemma means that the text in the English, Monika Hubel writes, 'over-anticipates Kafka; it yields a specificity Kafka has yet to denote. *Insect* narrows the reader's expectation more than Kafka intended' (Hubel 2005: 17). Further, as Shane Weller observes, the prefix *un-* appears twice more in the sentence (*unruhigen* and *ungeheuren*, which Corngold in his translation renders as 'unsettling' and 'monstrous'), and so Gregor, who is physically both present and absent from the story, 'is not only a monstrous, verminous being, but also a *negatively* determined one' (Weller 2013: 15). This negativity, as Michael Levine points out, is of an essential, irreversible character,

> since in German there is no such thing as a *geheuer* or a *Geziefer.* Removing the negative prefixes from these signifiers does not restore them to some prior positive form, nor does doubling these negatives by combining them into *ungeheures Ungeziefer* yield any kind of stable positive identity. Instead, the product of such a combination is only a kind of redoubled negativity. (Levine 2008: 127)

[44] This is, of course, literally true, since in his metamorphosed state Gregor cannot be sent out to work, in which capacity he has always been treated as a creature of sacrifice, suffering dehumanising employment conditions in order to indemnify the family's debt even as his father hoards his wages when 'he could actually have paid off more of his father's debt to the boss with the extra money, and the day on which he could have gotten rid of his job would have been much closer' (*TM* 21). David Gallagher suggests, further to this, that eventually 'the paradox is that […] the reverse fate befalls Gregor, who is effectively regarded as unimportant and sacrificed and left to die' (Gallagher 2009: 137).

[45] Gallagher points out that even interpreting the post-metamorphosis body as a member of the insect family is more a matter of convention than anything, based only on deduction from the descriptions of the hard domed back, the numerous legs and the sticky secretions, and that we can only say (from strictly textual evidence) that he is an invertebrate; the insect interpretation is probably reinforced by the English translation of the title, of which 'a more accurate translation would be "The Transformation" […] The original title suggests something miraculous and radical, as when a magician changes a white scarf into a white rabbit. It can also suggest a religious conversion, a chemical transmutation, a theatrical change of scenery, and a theological transubstantiation. The entomological metamorphosis is there, too, but it must compete for attention with all those others' (Koelb 2010: 117). Gallagher offers an in-depth review and analysis of the various attempts by critics to identify the exact genus in question, and concludes that 'it is unlikely that Gregor has been transformed into a beetle, since all beetles only have six legs rather than numerous ones' (Gallagher 2009: 130); nonetheless I will persist with 'beetle' for convenience's sake, partly because I'm unconvinced by Gallagher's assertion (six is, after all, more numerous than two) but mainly because I'm unconvinced that it matters. The prism of linguistic obscurity in which Kafka very deliberately suspended his creation determines that no term will be the correct one. What the critical pedantry around the exact nature of the beast (Gallagher writes on the subject for ten pages) misses is the essential point that indeterminacy is at the very core of the beetle-body: it is indeterminacy made flesh, and I am inclined to agree with Harold Bloom that Kafka 'did everything possible to evade interpretation, which only means that what most needs and demands interpretation in Kafka's writing is its perversely deliberate evasion of interpretation' (Bloom 2007: 11).

In this way the beetle-body implicitly represents an emptiness, a void rather than a presence, which empirical emptiness mirrors the allusory emptying, discussed above, of the transformation itself.

The descriptions of the beetle-body's behaviour engender further indeterminacy, in that they suggest that it retains the capacity for peculiarly human motions, even to the point that Tom Hartman concludes that at the beginning of the text Gregor is literally a man trapped inside a beetle, 'a human being, endowed with a normal body, but dressed in a beetle shell' (Hartman 1985: 33) and that he metamorphoses throughout the text into a fully-beetle form. Hartman's argument is an eccentric one, but one can see how he came to it when beetle-Gregor at various points 'could not suppress a smile' (*TM* 7), 'cleared his throat' (11), 'humbly […] turned his head' (14), shed 'tears of contentment' (18), 'nodded emphatically' (21), 'felt hot with shame' (ibid.), etc. Of course, since these acts are self-reported by Gregor they could be being performed only inside his own mind, but they serve to resist the fixity of our mental image of the beetle, and therefore to resist categorical fixity too; we know that Gregor is physically a beetle, and yet a beetle that can smile and clear its throat cannot be any kind of beetle that we can visualise, and so we cannot establish a firm grasp on Gregor's physicality. (That the quicksilver quality of Gregor's presence in the text was deliberate is confirmed by Kafka's insistence to his publishers that the beetle-body was unrepresentable: '[I] make this request from my own naturally better knowledge of the story. The insect itself cannot be drawn. It cannot even be shown at a distance' (Kafka 1996: 70).) Even more problematically, Gregor, at least at the beginning of the text, appears to be capable of human speech: when his mother calls to him through his door, he is 'shocked to hear his own voice answering, unmistakeably his own voice, true, but in which, as if from below, an insistent distressed chirping intruded, which left the clarity of his words intact only for a moment really' (*TM* 5); this could be interpreted as the words being intelligible only to Gregor as the speaker, if not for the corroborating fact that 'his mother was satisfied with this explanation and shuffled off' (leaving Gregor to conclude that 'the wooden door must have prevented the change in [his] voice from being noticed'), and her later declaration that 'there's something wrong with him, even though he said this morning there wasn't' (8-9). These intradiegetic corroborations of details which appear to contradict the stated position of the plot (i.e. that Gregor is physically a beetle, and therefore physically incapable of articulate speech) are immensely important in magical-realist

literature, propping up that which runs counter to our attempts to enforce logical linearity onto the text's events, and forcing the reader to accept the coexistence of opposing codes.

(As a related point, it is interesting to note that in this instance, that which 'runs counter' to our accepted position, and therefore needs explicit inter-textual corroboration, is a phenomenon that would generally belong in the realm of the 'real': it attests to the efficiency with which Kafka devises the structural placement of 'real' and 'magical' markers that the simple act of speech, which ought to inspire no particular reaction in its audience, has been sufficiently defamiliarised by the text's generative magical event that it accumulates the contentious status usually reserved for events incompatible with conventional realism.)

One argument, probably begotten of beetle-Gregor's slippery reality status, is that the beetle-body should be interpreted as a metaphor made literal. This is a popular line which has been around for a long time: it seems to have been first proposed by Günther Anders in 1951, who argued that Kafka

> draws on the inherent resources of language, on its figurative and associative character and insists, as it were, on its face value in the world. […] Because Gregor Samsa wishes to live as an artist (i.e. 'free as air'), he is considered in the eye of the respectable, down-to-earth world, to be a 'bit of an insect'; thus, in *The Metamorphosis* he wakes up as a beetle, whose idea of happiness is to be clinging to the ceiling. (Anders 1960: 43)

This idea was taken up by Walter Sokel in 1959, who wrote that 'the character Gregor Samsa has been transformed into a metaphor that states his essential self, and this metaphor in turn is treated like an actual fact. Samsa does not call himself a cockroach; instead he wakes up to find himself one' (Sokel 1959: 47).[46] The idea of the 'literalisation of metaphor' is theoretically appealing to the magical realist: the 'metaphorical' is ontologically analogous to the 'magical',

[46] Malcolm Pasley adopts up a similar 'word made flesh' angle in his 1971 essay 'Kafka's Semi-Private Games', observing that 'Kafka's images are unusual in that they almost always spring from literature, or at least from words. They grow mainly out of metaphor or hyperbole, and they remain in some degree attached to their origin' (Pasley 1971: 114), and that 'Kafka not only makes it difficult for us to know how – and how seriously – to take the latent meaning, tone, or reference of his deliberate ambiguities' (ibid. 116), interpreting these 'deliberate ambiguities' as 'a form of joking or punning which involves two accepted meanings of some word or phrase, one of which is literal and the other figurative or hyperbolic […] the "joke" depends on treating the metaphorical meaning as if it were nonmetaphorical, and developing it in those terms' (ibid. 118). These observations do not explicitly refer to *The Metamorphosis* but he does link them to 'a joking or half-joking ambiguity, like the opening pages of *Die Verwandlung*' (ibid. 115) suggesting that, like Thomson, he finds the text (at least half) comical, although again, he doesn't expand on why. Whilst I am quite prepared to accede humorous potential in *The Metamorphosis* – Margit M. Sinka convincingly enumerates scenes which she considers 'comically absurd' (Sinka 2008: 150) – the suggestion in both Pasley and Thomson seems to be that in literature, ambiguity is to be considered an inherently comical register, which is a curious position to take given that ambiguity is employed just as frequently in works of horror and fantastic modes. Maybe humour was just thin on the ground in 1970s academia.

and the process of transubstantiation via which the metaphorical is 'literalised' corresponds with the techniques of magical realism which reframe the 'magical' as 'real'. Indeed, Anne Hegerfeldt lists 'literalisation of metaphor' as one of her 'prototypical attributes' of magical realism, that 'literalisation is behind much of magical realism's magic, for many of the apparently fantastic events are based on the making-real of figures of speech, mental concepts, or psychological mechanisms' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 56).

As argued earlier (see n.17), I don't consider 'literalisation of metaphor' to be a feature of magical realism so much as another way of expressing the nature of magical realism's employment of real and magical, with 'literal' and 'metaphorical' standing in for the existing terms, but my specific objection to Hegerfeldt's argument is her focus on the literalisation of 'idioms and sayings' (although she does clarify that 'literalisation is not restricted to figurative language' (ibid.)), which applies only sporadically, and never relevantly, to that which is made manifest in magical-realist literature, and which therefore detracts rather than enhances our understanding of magical realism's intentions. This is where my objections to the 'literalisation of metaphor' as a feature of magical realism and as an interpretation of *The Metamorphosis* dovetail: obviously there is a metaphorical level to Gregor's transformation, without which it would be a meaningless literary event, but to attach that metaphorical level to a 'a figure of speech embedded in ordinary language' (Corngold 1996: 88) suggests a neat, direct line of interpretation, even an element of idiomatic cliché, which is not borne out by the text.

For beetle-Gregor to be a 'literalisation' of anything presupposes some conceptual bridge between human-Gregor and beetle-Gregor, some beetle quality to human-Gregor which has become manifest – but what is the precise constitution of this bridge? In order for the metamorphosis to be the manifestation of a 'figure of speech', the beetle-quality which is literalised ought to be couched in some stereotypical attribute of the metamorph which correlates with a quality held by the pre-metamorphosed being (for instance, if Gregor turned into a sloth most readers would instinctively understand this to be an embodiment of laziness; or into a butterfly we would take to be a miraculous blossoming rather than a debasement). We can easily accept Sokel's claim that 'German usage applies the term *Ungeziefer* [vermin] to persons considered low and contemptible' (Sokel 2002: 36), but beyond this fairly broad metaphorical level, although several possibilities present themselves if sought, the text offers no robust, coherent through line connecting human-Gregor to beetle-Gregor (and even this metaphorical level requires some reverse-engineering to validate it: beyond some hints gleaned

through Gregor's complaints about his human life, the greatest indication that anyone, including himself, considers him to be exceptionally 'low and contemptible' *is* that he turns into a beetle). The choice of a beetle as the metamorph (as opposed to, say, a stallion) does intuitively suggest that Gregor is being rendered (or exposed as) 'low and contemptible', but any suggestion beyond that confers on the metaphor an unwarranted – and, I would argue, unasked – precision.

Certainly critical opinion cannot seem to agree on the precise nature of the metaphor, and my objection to the 'literalisation' argument arises in part to a trend of attempting to concretise the metaphor by implying for it a spurious linguistic basis: for Anders '*The Metamorphosis* originates in the transformation of a familiar metaphor into a fictional being' (Corngold 1996: 81), and so Gregor becomes a beetle because as an 'aspiring artist' he is considered 'to be "a bit of an insect"' (Anders 1960: 43), this placed in inverted commas as though denoting a common turn of phrase (whilst not actually doing so);[47] similarly suggestive quotation marks are used in Sokel's 'Gregor […] is "like a cockroach" because of his spineless and abject behaviour and parasitic wishes' (Sokel 2002: 36); Corngold employs the same legerdemain in writing that '[Kafka's] created metaphors are more complex than "salesmen are like vermin"' (Corngold 1996: 88); and Theodor Adorno goes one further, suggesting that '"These travelling salesmen are like bugs" is the German expression that Kafka must have picked up, speared like an insect. Bugs – not *like* bugs' (Adorno 1983: 255), an 'expression' to which I can find no other recorded reference. These are three fairly disparate beetle-qualities which are supposedly being embodied in Gregor's metamorphosis: does Gregor turn into a beetle as pyrrhic realisation of his wish to live 'free as air', or because he berates himself for being invertebrate and parasitic and therefore 'cockroach-like', or because as a travelling salesman he is deemed one of a swarm of faceless perambulatory pests? These beetle-associations exist, to be sure, but in their very multitude they lack the coherence to constitute the precise metaphorical underpinning that the 'literalisation' argument requires.

Curiously, Anders himself (the originator of this theoretical angle) appears to raise a similar objection in rebutting any interpretation of *The Metamorphosis* as allegorical, on the grounds that 'the writer of allegory follows rules laid down by convention, often of mythical or religious origin, in order to substitute an image in the place of a concept' (Anders 1960: 42); in other words, the text cannot be an allegory because allegories trace semiotically clear lines

[47] Even that 'Gregor wishes to live as an artist' is at best an extremely permissive interpretation of his hobby of whittling with his fretsaw: there is no actual suggestion of his harbouring artistic ambition within the text.

between concepts, clear either inherently or by popular convention, and no such line exists between human-Gregor and beetle-Gregor. As Wilhelm Emrich succinctly puts it, 'The metamorphosis does not take place as a transformation of spirit, mind, or character' (Emrich 1968: 146). Theodore Ziolkowski, similarly, argues that 'Gregor Samsa's sudden transformation into a great insect constitutes a textbook case of metonymic metamorphosis' (as opposed to a 'metaphoric metamorphosis'), which he defines as 'a process by which an individual is abruptly transformed into something with no semiotic connection to his or her character' (Ziolkowski 2005: 78), and Ritchie Robertson agrees that

> the insect in *Die Verwandlung*, turns out to be largely metonymic. Gregor's increasing isolation from his family, his loss of power, his regression to an infantile state, the dominance of his physical being over his mind, the sensations of horror and self-disgust, and so on, are suggested readily and naturally by the central image, without the mediation of a distinct conceptual system' (Robertson 1985: 271-2).[48]

The Metamorphosis cannot be an allegory because it doesn't map onto any recognisable framework, and also differs from allegory in the same way that, as Eugene Arva puts it, 'the magical-realist text cannot be read as an allegory […] because instead of substituting one ontological level for another, it aligns them next to each other' (Arva 2011: 109).

This brings us to Corngold's argument, that it 'is not correct […] that in *The Metamorphosis'* literalisation of the metaphor is actually accomplished; for then we should have not an indefinite monster but simply a bug' (Corngold 1996: 86). Corngold contends that Kafka does not 'literalise' the metaphor, but 'metamorphoses' it, suspending the process in mid-animation. Gregor's indeterminate physicality, discussed above, resists an argument that relies upon a completed process of 'literalisation' because Gregor does not traverse a boundary from one state to another, but instead *occupies* (and thus agitates) that boundary:

> As literalisation proceeds, as we attempt to experience in (B) more and more qualities that can be accommodated by (A), we *metamorphose* (A). But if the metaphor is to be preserved and (A) and (B) are to remain unlike, we must stop before the metamorphosis is complete' (ibid.).[49]

[48] Jean Weisgerber makes a similar distinction in outlining the metonymical nature of magical realism versus the metaphorical function of surrealism: 'Metonymical in nature, magical realism may reveal a necessary relation of contiguity or correspondence between the everyday real and the imaginary, while surrealism would emphasise, similarly to the metaphor, the analogy between these terms in an attempt to realize their fusion […]; magical realism does not rupture the lines that keep it attached to the everyday' (qtd Arva 2011: 109).

[49] Here, (A) refers to human consciousness and (B) to the beetle body: 'I shall call the *tenor* of the metaphor (A), the thing designated, occulted, replaced, but otherwise established by the context of the figure; and the *vehicle*, the metaphor proper, (B), that thing *as* which the tenor is designated' (Corngold 1996: 85).

The Metamorphosis' magical-realist credentials come precisely from the fact that the text does not replace the 'real' with the 'magical', (or – *pace* Anders et al – the metaphorical with the literal, or '(A)' with '(B)'), but sustains both ontological codes concurrently. Corngold observes that 'to stress the estrangement of the monster from his familiar setting in the metaphor – the dirty bug – is to stress Gregor Samsa's estrangement from his identity in the family' (ibid. 88); beetle-Gregor is just that: the dash between two designations, neither 'beetle' nor 'Gregor', precisely as alienated from a beetle identity as he is from a human one, and thus becomes 'an opaque sign' (ibid.), taking on 'the character of an indecipherable word' (ibid. 89). Up to this point I agree with Corngold's argument, but the problem with his conceiving of beetle-Gregor in terms of a 'metaphor' at all is that in doing so he makes central the specious and unnecessary angle of linguistic familiarity. Corngold's motivation for characterising beetle-Gregor as a figure of speech, or 'a mutilated metaphor, uprooted from familiar language' (ibid.) is to juxtapose the 'familiar' with the 'indecipherable' in order to underscore the point that 'the intent is to make strange the familiar, not invent the new' and to stress Gregor's exclusion from the Gregor family koiné by becoming not only inarticulate but 'a monstrous noun' (ibid. 88). Whilst the text surely does operate at this level, to insist upon beetle-Gregor as *linguistically* familiar is unnecessary, because the 'familiarity' exists at a more essential level, in the fact that the reader – unlike the Samsa family – remains in the presence of Gregor's internal human consciousness. Gregor's human consciousness is what sustains the 'real', prevents *The Metamorphosis* from flying off into the realms of the marvellous, is essential to Gregor's 'indecipherable' nature, itself essential because 'metamorphs […] like Gregor, although they could not be more fictitious, are never frozen into emblematic fixity […] for a literary metamorphosis to succeed, the metamorph must resist symbolical recuperation and remain opaque. Otherwise […] the metamorph gets reabsorbed into some collective structure' (Clarke 1995: 18). If beetle-Gregor's 'opacity' depends for its survival on the sustaining of two codes, then his internal narrative (that which prevents him from becoming 'simply a bug'), audible only to the reader, constitutes not just the emotional, but the ontological ganglion of the text.

Another problem with reducing beetle-Gregor to a linguistic abstraction is that it leaves very little space for consideration of beetle-Gregor's physicality. Although the beetle-body's indeterminacies gestalt more or less on arrival from the strictly physical into the ontological, the philosophical, the conceptual, etc., the physical should not be disregarded. The keenly

visceral quality of *The Metamorphosis*' first chapter is due largely to the fact that beetle-Gregor's physical integrity is under near-constant attack. Kafka ensures that the importance of these attacks on Gregor's bodily border is not lost on the reader by emphasising the resultant near-constant physical pain: Gregor's initial attempts to roll himself out of bed result in 'a slight, dull pain in his side' (*TM* 3) which soon escalates into a 'searing pain' as he 'slammed himself violently against the lower bedpost' (6); finally escaping the bed, he 'had not held his head carefully enough and hit it' (8) and, in unlocking the door with his jaw, 'paid no attention to the fact that he was undoubtedly hurting himself in some way' (11); in the first chapter's conclusion, as a result of forcing himself through the narrow doorway, 'one of his flanks was scraped raw […] his little legs were […] painfully crushed against the floor […] and, bleeding profusely, he flew far into the room' (15). These attempted ingresses are partnered in reverse by the 'brown liquid [that] came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor' (11), and the 'traces of sticky substance' which he leaks wherever he goes, and leaves smeared all over the walls and ceiling when he's been climbing them (23). This incessant focus on the permeability of the beetle-body's physical perimeter, ravaged from without and leaking from within, draws attention to its radical ontological liminality, to its rejection of binaries; beetle-Gregor is not just an ontologically unstable being, he is the physical manifestation of border instability, and as such, his very presence poses a threat to all borders he encounters, as suggested by the sticky secretions he leaves all over the walls (i.e. the borders) of the Samsa apartment; these secretions do not just physically defile the boundaries but in their very constitution suggest a challenge to their assumed integrity, since, as Pauline Greenhill writes, 'sticky substances aren't good with borders and boundaries; when pulled apart, they don't fully detach, but tend to adhere to both sides' (Greenhill 2008: 162).

The beetle-body registers as grotesque in respect of its indeterminacy and peripheral instability, but it should be acknowledged that the text is tonally at odds with the principles of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, in which transgressions of physical integrity are 'deeply positive', 'a triumphant, festive principle' representing 'a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity', where man 'is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal', and whose 'leading themes […] are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance' (Bakhtin 1984: 19-20). This could not be further in register from Kafka, whose troublingly-leaky beetle-body evokes instead the closely-related abject, and especially Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, where the

excretion of physical refuse directly encounters the agitation of other borders: bodily excretions become 'waste', become a disturbing and repulsive pollutant, by crossing the bodily boundary, and so 'we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger' (Kristeva 1982: 9). (It is worth noting that Gregor's unstoppered secretions coincide with his almost completely ceasing to eat, in spite of craving the pleasure of food: in the abject, unlike the grotesque, not all bodily border transgressions are created equal.) Beetle-Gregor is the very embodiment of the abject, because 'the abject confronts us […] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal' (ibid. 12).

The reason for our at-times irrational phobia of physical waste (as Slavoj Žižek points out, 'although we can without problem swallow our own saliva, we find it repulsive to swallow again the saliva that was spit into a glass out of our body' (Žižek 2016: 158)) is that it triggers a generalised horror of disrespected borders: 'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva 1982: 4). It is therefore unsurprising that *The Metamorphosis'* most dramatic bodily transgression accompanies a more profound incursion. At the climax of the text's second chapter Gregor's father launches an attack on him, throwing a volley of apples until one penetrates his back where it festers, embedded in his skin for the remainder of the text. Even if this event were not rotten with Biblical-Oedipal symbolism it would, as the long-threatened achievement of successful bodily penetration, register as highly significant: firstly, it draws explicit attention to the presence of the border (which, incidentally, is further obfuscated here, as an apple ought to be no match for an exoskeleton), with the embedded apple serving as 'a visible souvenir' (*TM* 29) of physical liminality; more importantly, though, it evinces the structural disruption which this boundary-occupation engenders. Structures depend upon boundaries to provide their essential framework, and so in the presence of Gregor, the embodiment of boundary-denial, the Samsa family structure cannot be sustained.

What Gregor's metamorphosis brings about more than anything is a shattering of the Samsa family structure. Prior to the metamorphosis we can glean, from the fact that Gregor held all of the financial responsibility but none of the purse strings, that he inhabited the role of 'breadwinner' but not the role of 'alpha', which was held de facto by the senior male figure. In

strictly traditional terms, this denotes an already-uneasy power dynamic, as the trappings of the patriarchal position are split between two potential claimants to its authority. Subsequently, the financial responsibility is spread among the three remaining employable family members, and this disruption to the relative economic harmony engenders a chaotic tussle for authority within the recalibrated family dynamic, with disastrous results. Indeed, the apple-attack occurs as the climax of a string of attempted control-seizures: the first bid for a promotion of power is by Grete (Gregor's sister), who goes from being considered 'a little useless' (23) to taking charge of Gregor's care and '[adopting] with her parents the role of the particularly well-qualified expert whenever Gregor's affairs were being discussed' (25); when her authority on the management of Gregor's environment is challenged by her mother, who expresses reservations about her plan to remove the desk and drawers from Gregor's room, Grete in 'childish defiance' (ibid.) redoubles her intentions and insists on removing *all* of the furniture, sending Gregor into a rage which frightens his mother to the point of collapse. This event leads directly to another seizure of authority (in the form of the retributory apple-attack) by the father, who has undergone an even more dramatic transformation, from an old man who spent his days 'sitting in his bathrobe in the armchair', and who on family outings 'used to shuffle along with great effort […] wrapped in his old overcoat, always carefully planting down his crutch-handled cane', into an arrestingly-attired official, 'holding himself very erect, dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons […] his usually rumpled white hair was combed flat, with a scrupulously exact, gleaming part' (28). Eric Santner suggests that *The Metamorphosis* 'refers to a change in the nature of patriarchal power and authority that infects its stability, dependability, and consistency with radical uncertainty' (Santner 1996: 196); I would propose that, although the paternal role occupies the focal point in the portrait of a family in dissolution, the fact that the other (female) family members also partake in the struggle for position means that what is being depicted here is more than a comment on patriarchal power, and instead denotes a wholesale structural collapse – albeit a structure in which the father, as deposed governor, stands as a load-bearing wall.[50]

[50] Not unlike Kubin, the autobiographical resonances in Kafka's work at times threaten to overpower the autonomy of the text and make it impossible to receive any appearance of a paternal figure on its own terms; I am inclined to agree with James Rolleston that the father's role in *The Metamorphosis* is often critically overblown due to this, and to other contemporary paternal portraits in Kafka's work: 'A common critical error in Kafka criticism is to align individual works under a single rubric. Because "The Judgment" relates to a destruction of a falsely based individuality, Gregor Samsa is forced into the same mould, with guilt and parasitism read between the lines of the text; because "The Judgment" shows the resurgence of a father, crucial importance is attached to the uniform and bearing of Herr Samsa' (Rolleston 2008: 5).

It is notable that the site upon which these struggles are performed is Gregor's bedroom, the treatment and condition of which become a barometer throughout the text of the condition of the Samsa family structure (and another space whose boundaries are constantly focalised, from Gregor's prolonged attempt to wrench the door open, to his excursions across the walls, to the repeated escapes from and banishments to within those walls). A subsequent family row erupts when Grete loses her monopoly over Gregor's domain to her mother, who takes it takes it upon herself to clean the room in defiance of Grete's insistence that that task 'remain her province' (*TM* 32); this scene forms the apex of the battle for authority, and demonstrates just how catastrophically Gregor's disruptive presence has desolated the formerly-harmonious Samsa family unit:

> Hardly had his sister noticed the difference in Gregor's room that evening than, deeply insulted, she ran into the living room and, in spite of her mother's imploringly uplifted hands, burst out in a fit of crying […] turning to the right, his father blamed his mother for not letting his sister clean Gregor's room; but turning to the left, he screamed at his sister that she would never again be allowed to clean Gregor's room; while his mother tried to drag his father, who was out of his mind with excitement, into the bedroom; his sister, shaken with sobs, hammered the table with her small fists. (ibid.)

It is clear from his almost-comical indecision in his attempt to arbitrate this argument that, in spite of his dramatic physical transformation, Herr Samsa has ultimately lost his assumptive position of familial authority, just as Grete has failed in her attempts to assume the role. His uniform, which at first sight conferred station and prestige, in fact turns out to be the fetters of a post which is consistently associated with positional inferiority, a job where he 'brought breakfast for the minor officials' (31), and which he wears even in his sleep, 'as if he were always ready for duty and were waiting even here for the voice of his superior' (30). As Santner writes, his 'clinging to the outward appearance – to the vestments – of institutional authority suggests just how precarious that authority is' (Santner 1996: 201). The increasingly, almost surreally dilapidated condition of the uniform, 'covered in stains and gleaming with its constantly polished buttons' (*TM* 31) in spite of the family's combined efforts to maintain it, reflects the hopeless struggle against the disintegration of the family structure – a struggle which is all but lost when a seismic shift to the household dynamic occurs, with the introduction of three lodgers to the Samsa apartment. This is the deciding blow for the family unit: without even the advantage of numbers (if one excludes Gregor, and it's fair to say that Gregor is by now decidedly excluded), their residence no longer qualifies as a 'family home'

and, as paying guests, the lodgers both pose a further disturbance to the economic landscape (Levine points out that with their arrival the apartment becomes 'a second workplace' (Levine 2008: 139)), and immediately usurp the position of privilege: their hosts, 'who had never rented out rooms before and therefore behaved toward the roomers with excessive politeness' (*TM* 35), are demoted to eating in the kitchen as they cede the living room to the lodgers, and treat them with slavish deference. The key role of the lodgers, though, is to catalyse the process which began with the apple-attack: the abjection of Gregor himself.

Gregor's abjection is necessary because, as the physical unity of two incompatible states, he poses an intolerable challenge to all structures which depend upon boundaries and margins (which is to say, all structures), and as such must be disavowed. Gregor is not so much a criminal as an embodiment of 'basic illegality', to borrow a phrase we will meet later from Vladimir Nabokov: by his very existence he does not obey the established ontological laws, and 'any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject' (Kristeva 1982: 4). The process of his abjection, therefore, takes the form of collapsing him into one code, and thus defusing the challenge he poses. Again, this process can be tracked in the progress of the bedroom: the reason for the central significance of the room – first described pointedly as 'a regular human room' (*TM* 3)[51] – is that it serves as a standing reminder of Gregor's former (and, as we know, prevailing) humanity, as suggested by his mother in protesting the removal of his desk: 'doesn't it look as if by removing his furniture we were showing him that we have given up all hope of his getting better? […] the best thing would be to leave the room exactly the way it was before, so that when Gregor comes back to us again, he'll find everything unchanged' (24). At this stage, evidently, his latent humanity is still assumed (as we see also with Grete's addressing him as 'you, Gregor!' (26)), but after the apple attack (whose Edenic-banishment overtones need not be elucidated) control of the room becomes mere currency in the squabble for position, and its condition is neglected by Grete until 'streaks of dirt ran along the walls, fluffs of dust and filth lay here and there on the floor' (32). Gregor's attempts to silently reproach his sister for this neglect go unnoticed, presumably because she no longer credits him with being sensitive to the state of his environment. As Žižek writes, 'disgust arises when the

[51] Such was Kafka's determination to underscore the 'humanness' of this room that he actually coined a word for the purpose, whose meaning is, again, not entirely captured by 'human room', as Hubel explains: 'The word *Menschenzimmer* is Kafka's creation. It does not exist in German but clearly alludes to something like a doghouse. It is certainly not "a regular human bedroom" […] Kafka's neologism must find its counterpart in English to let the intended imagery arise. "Sound, democratic English" describing the room as regular, normal, or ordinary will not do. Gregor lives in a real humanroom. This is once more a phrase full of ambiguity and with a special halo around the written words suggesting that one also reads something that is unwritten' (Hubel 2005: 21).

border that separates the inside of our body from its outside is violated, when the inside penetrates out. […] What distinguishes man from animals is that, with humans, the disposal of shit becomes a problem: not because it has a bad smell, but because it came out from our innermost. […] Animals do not have a problem with it because they do not have an "interior" like humans' (Žižek 2016: 158-9). The increasing squalor of the room tracks the process by which the fact that Gregor *does* have an 'interior' is gradually discounted.

With the arrival of the lodgers the situation escalates further, and Gregor's living space, hitherto such contested territory, is forgotten by the family, and its care – and therefore Gregor's – passed over to the new cleaning woman, another destabilising addition to the household. Due to the lodgers being men 'obsessed with neatness' who 'could not stand useless, let alone dirty junk' (*TM* 33), the room becomes a dumping ground for spare furniture and household waste, a dedicated habitat for the 'superfluous', 'useless' and 'dirty' – a category which, by implication, now includes Gregor. (That the Samsas condemn their own furniture and belongings to this room to make space for the lodgers' is a further assault on the integrity of the family unit.) If Grete's admonishing 'you, Gregor!' attested to a continuing assumption of his essential identity, the cleaning woman, presumably not privy to the sequence of events which led to a giant beetle being resident in the Samsa household, has no basis for such an assumption and so further cements Gregor's animalisation by addressing him (the first character to do so at all since Grete's admonishment) as 'you old dung beetle!' (ibid.). The wheels thus in motion, it is not long before the process reaches its inevitable conclusion, and it is not so much in the decision to physically banish him from the household that Gregor is rendered abject, but in Grete's severing the last vestiges of his human identity:

> 'If he could just understand us,' his father repeated and by closing his eyes, absorbed his daughter's conviction of the impossibility of the idea, 'then maybe we could come to an agreement with him […]'
> 'It has to go," cried his sister. […] 'You just have to try to get rid of the idea that it's Gregor. Believing it for so long, that's our real misfortune.' (38)

Gregor's physical death may not occur until the next page, but it is really at Grete's words that he is slain, is reduced from 'him' to 'it': in disavowing Gregor, and so 'killing off' Gregor from beetle-Gregor, neither can continue to exist, since, like Kubin's Bell and Patera, they are insolubly co-dependent, and have been since the text's opening paragraphs exhibited the fusion of the 'insect narrative' and the 'realist narrative'. Beetle-Gregor is neither beetle nor

Gregor, but is the hyphen that both separates and conjoins them. The impossibility of delaminating Gregor from beetle means that the expired remains of beetle-Gregor are no more beetle than they are Gregor, but are pure 'border', Kristeva's ultimate in abjection: 'the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object' (Kristeva 1982: 3-4). Beetle-Gregor *cannot* be collapsed into a single ontological category as Grete would wish, because *The Metamorphosis* is a work of magical realism, whose absolute first principle is the sustaining of two ontologies.

Why *does* beetle-Gregor exist though? Or, more accurately: to what end, in the service of what expression or idea, was Kafka compelled to create this hybrid? Opinions vary. The question is usually addressed by critics in the service of advancing the 'reason' for the metamorphosis, most of which perceive a psychological motivation, in which Gregor either somehow 'wills' himself into an insect form, or is the subject of some obscure punitive action by an unknown force: for instance, Wilhelm Emrich views the beetle-body as an exposure of Gregor's previously-enshrouded 'self', encompassing 'the conflict between his occupation and his desire to make the final break and become self-reliant and independent' (Emrich 1968: 138); for Sokel, the metamorphosis is a rebellion, and Gregor's death a self-inflicted punishment for that rebellion as 'Gregor has, unconsciously to be sure, changed his birthright, his human form made in the image of God, for a "guiltless" escape from an intolerable situation' (Sokel 1956: 206); Heinz Politzer views the metamorphosis as punishment for Gregor's 'human failure' (Politzer 1962: 75) but does not specify the nature of this failure, saying only that 'ultimately he remains in the dark about the reasons of his punishment' and that to speculate is to 'moralise unduly' (ibid. 79); Saul Friedländer agrees that Gregor is being punished for his 'sinful nature' (Friedländer 2013: 35), specifically his 'incestuous longing for his sister' (ibid. 19); for F.D. Luke, Gregor's crime was 'the unforgivable offence of self-assertion […] replacing the father as practical head and bread-winner of the family' (Luke 1951: 233). Meanwhile Robert Weninger asserts that 'we all agree' that the metamorphosis is caused by Gregor's inability to 'communicate his subdued feelings of anger, isolation, and frustration, not that he was ever in a position to express his opinion outright' (Weninger 2008: 98). Inevitably, various biographical resonances have been found in Gregor's fate: for instance, for John Winkelman, beetle-Gregor is 'an attempted exorcism of Kafka's own guilt', which 'ultimately went back to his discontent with his own puny body', and so he 'expressed hatred of his own

body by appearing in the story in the form of a repulsive insect' (Winkelman 2008: 30-31). Still other critics maintain that the beetle-body resists all attempts to be understood, such as Allen Thiher for whom the whole text is a 'self-frustrating quest' (Thiher 2008: 57) and Santner for whom Gregor 'remains a foreign body in the text and in any interpretation' (Santner 1996: 209).

For the most part, these interpretations emphasise exactly that which in the text is de-emphasised: the actual metamorphosis from Gregor into beetle. They implicitly correct the very deliberate discontinuity which Kafka assigned to Gregor's transformation by perceiving it to be continuous with, i.e. in some way caused by (punishment for, or wilful escape from) his pre-metamorphosed state. *The Metamorphosis* is misleadingly named: it cannot possibly be true, as Weller contends, that the text 'concerns itself less with human or animal being as such than with the transformation of the former into the latter' (Weller 2013: 16), when said transformation takes place outside of the scope of the narrative. These readings treat the beetle-body as a by-product, whereas the more fruitful – and more faithful – reading – is one which centres the beetle-body as a symbolic whole. Zatonsky, for instance, reads the beetle-body as a symbol of man's essential isolation:

> In transforming Gregor into a centipede, the writer is striving to demonstrate that the true situation of man is distinguished by his tragic and insurmountable *loneliness.* The individual exists in some kind of surroundings, some society. He goes to work and feels himself to be a small, but necessary, wheel in a firm or establishment. He communicates with those close to him – his father, mother, sisters, brothers, and friends – and considers himself dear to them. But all that is an error, a blind illusion. In reality man lives in a desert or, more accurately, in a vacuum, in a glass retort, and therefore he does not see the walls of his frightful prison. (Zatonsky 1981: 266)

The 'loneliness' angle is a popular one, for obvious reasons:[52] beetle-Gregor's isolation from the family forms the text's emotional spine, and much of the plot is advanced by his failed attempts to interact with them. There is a poignant irony in beetle-Gregor's brief, optimistic fantasy, immediately upon the Samsas' becoming alarmed for his welfare when they can't access his bedroom, of feeling himself 'integrated into human society once again' (*TM* 11); this is felt in the use of the phrase '*once again*', because we have already learned that Gregor's life is hopelessly impoverished of human contact. One of his chief complaints about the constraints of his job is 'constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate' (4); we

[52] A variant of this angle takes the form of a focus on Gregor's 'self-alienation' (Sokel 1983), that he becomes 'exotic unto himself, paradoxically self-strange' (Zilcosky 2003: 186).

learn from his mother that ‘he never goes out at nights. He’s been back in the city for eight days now, but every night he’s been home’ (8), and his romantic devotions are directed at a pin-up cut from an illustrated newspaper for which he’s spent ‘the span of two or three evenings’ devotedly hand-carving a frame. This hermitism is clearly not elective, any more than is the amplified hermitism of his beetle-confinement, but is necessitated by the conditions he finds whenever he ventures beyond the walls of his bedroom. Adorno considered Kafka a paragon of the ‘radically darkened art’ which he held to be the only response to the ‘administered world’ of modernity, because ‘the darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational’ (Adorno 2013: 27); Gregor’s tragedy is the insoluble dilemma of craving ‘human society’ in a ‘darkened’ world, where man is valued only for his ‘use-value’ (Hájek 1981: 116), and such society is uniformly venal, cynical and mercenary.

A grotesque animal-human hybrid is an appropriate vehicle to explore this dilemma, because the ambivalent nature of the grotesque body encompasses the very same quandary, as reflected in its different renderings by Kristeva and Bakhtin, called by Jenni Adams ‘positive and negatively-inflected versions of the same grotesque body’ (Adams 2011: 89): on the one hand, the dialogic potential of the grotesque enables the potential for open lines of communication with society; at the same time, though, this dialogue cannot proceed in the presence of what Bakhtin calls ‘the bourgeois ego’. The advantages of the bodily grotesque ‘refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private, egotistic "economic man", but to the collective ancestral body of all the people’ (Bakhtin 1984: 19). Whether or not this egoistic bourgeois describes the pre-metamorphosed Gregor we cannot say (after all, we’ve never met him), but it certainly describes his exploitative family and employers, who stymie any attempts at dialogue by systematically denying Gregor his individuality and autonomy in self-serving one-directional transactions; in these conditions the grotesque becomes intolerable, as Kristeva describes, precisely because it threatens our individual identity: ‘the subject is confronted by material which threatens its constitution of itself, as subject, as an entity bounded by a clean and proper body […] [and] the subject’s achieved sense of bounded subjectivity with a reminder of continuity with the world’ (Adams 2011: 88).

As Matthew Powell observes, in Kafka’s writing, exploration of the self is intimately linked to exploration of the nature of reality:

> By playing off this tension between human and non-human, between what is ‘the self’ and what is ‘not the self’, Kafka is able to explore the ontology of otherness that clarifies the space

> between self and other. This space is critical to maintaining notions of self and identity. Kafka uses the grotesque as a means of illuminating the environing shadows that are not oneself and that allow for definition of self. The grotesque becomes, for Kafka, a device for explaining those aspects of reality whose very existence must remain in shadow in order to maintain a coherent and sustainable reality. (Powell 2008: 130)

This point is an important one in understanding Kafka's motivations for developing the technique of magical realism to communicate his complex exploration of the nature of these boundaries, apparently between human and animal, but really between self and other, and more broadly, between 'real' and 'not real'. These explorations, especially of the nature of the ego boundary, are more than philosophical musing for Kafka, who once remarked to his friend Gustav Janouch:

> Everybody lives behind a fence he carries within himself. That's why now there is so much writing about animals. It's the expression of a longing for a free and natural life. Natural life for man, however, is human life. […] A life with well-defined confines, just like in the office. Such a life consists of not miracles, but regulations, prescriptions, directives. (qtd Ziolkowski 2005: 80)

This seems to me to express Gregor's dilemma to a tee. In the previous chapter I quoted the work of Georg Simmel, who articulated Kafka's 'fence' as 'the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life', which amounts to a more expansive and florid expression of the same point. For both Kafka and Simmel, the fence is a necessary evil which both protects and isolates. Attempts to exist within structures – familial and social – fail due to the ruthless, entrenched selfishness which Gregor encounters from every quarter, whilst attempts not to do so engender impossible loneliness and isolation. The fence cannot be removed, the human 'self' cannot be destroyed to enable a 'free and natural' animal existence; but can it be occupied? Is it possible to, in fact, sit on the fence? Would it shatter under the pressure like the Samsa family structure did when Gregor crawled its supporting walls, or is the 'boundary' simply – to borrow the imagery evoked by Powell above – an illusion wrought of light and shade, two 'sides' of the same phenomena, infinitely more permeable than it appears if one only dares try?

This line of questioning is what prompted – necessitated, really – Kafka's employment of magical realism to depict Gregor's fate: to depict, ultimately, the awareness that, in the ruthless, self-driven society in which Gregor (and Kafka) finds himself, attempts to exist in society and to exist as an individual *are* incompatible states, *do* represent two opposing codes.

Gregor's death, in which case, can be read as an admission of the impossibility of achieving an equilibrium, as a bleak statement of surrender, and indeed it often is: one common critical argument is that *The Metamorphosis* charts a chiastic inversion of fortune, with the Samsa family's prospects improving whilst Gregor's decline (see Koelb 2010: 117-8), under which interpretation the Samsas have 'won', have successfully evicted the threat and normality is restored; Gregor is dead and disposed of, the upstart lodgers have been vanquished, and the cleaning woman is about to be sacked; the Samsas even vow to leave the apartment, severing themselves from any lasting ties with the attempts on their structural unity, and set off on a jaunt to the country. This is frequently interpreted as a happy ending, in spite of, or rather because of, Gregor's demise: Santner suggests that 'with the destruction of Gregor […] the family can thrive, perhaps now for the very first time' (Santner 1996: 208), and Winkelman that 'Gregor by his death brings relief and the prospect of a happy life to his family […] The fact that Kafka […] found it necessary to add a cheerful epilogue […] proves that it was central to his intention that the story end on a positive note of spiritual victory' (Winkelman 2008: 29).

But that can't be right. It is well-known that Kafka was dissatisfied with the ending of *The Metamorphosis*, pronouncing it 'unreadable' (Kafka 1975: 253), but it is simply not credible, after their vivid characterisation, that a positive outcome for the Samsas (especially Grete) at the expense of Gregor could have been Kafka's idea of a 'happily ever after'. (In any case, the 'inversion of fortune' argument is wholly incompatible with the parallel argument, that the 'parasite' role transfers from the Samsas to Gregor after his metamorphosis, under which terms they become the beleaguered providers and Gregor the pampered layabout.) Does Gregor really die, as Manfred Engel suggests, 'for the sake of a successful ending' (Engel 2017: 57)?

In regard to the almost farcically-loaded choice of apples as the weapon of paternal punishment/banishment, Thiher writes that Kafka can only have been anticipating and defusing a too-obvious interpretation of the text, and so includes it as 'a way of disarming the interpretive tool before it can be applied' (Thiher 2008: 56); I would argue, similarly, that the appearance of a chiastic structure is too simplistically-executed *not* to be ironic. At the very least, the appearance of a 'happy ending' is belied by its reproducing the conditions which predated the metamorphosis, with Gregor flagellated and sacrificed in the name of the Samsas' happiness. More importantly, though, this apparent return to a structurally sound harmony rings false because such a return is impossible: beetle-Gregor has poisoned the well, has permanently compromised the integrity of the family structure. He has, with his very existence,

his ‘basic illegality’, weakened the walls which supported the structure, exposed them to be flimsy and unstable, occupying and defiling them just as he crawled the supporting walls of the apartment, coating them in his boundary-compromising secretions; he did not create the discord and unhappiness of the Samsa family following his metamorphosis, merely held a mirror up to them, and exposed that ‘the family’s whole happiness and contentment were founded on deception and covert calculation’ (Emrich 1968: 143). Gregor looms large over the Samsas’ apparent return to harmony because his disruption to their structural integrity cannot be repaired: the abject, as Kristeva writes, ‘lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master’ (Kristeva 1982: 2).

The idea of a disruptive voice speaking from the margins, disrupting from without, is a familiar one in magical-realist scholarship. Theo D’haen writes that

> the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place ‘other’ than ‘the’ or ‘a’ centre, that seems to me an essential feature of […] magical realism. […] magical-realist writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the ‘centr’-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, ‘realistically’, that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this ‘reality’ depends upon. Magical realism thus reveals itself as a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourse(s). It is a way of access to the main body of ‘Western’ literature for authors not sharing in, or writing from the perspective of, the privileged centers of this literature for reasons of language, class, race, or gender. (D’haen 1995: 194-5)

One of the limitations of magical-realist scholarship to date, as explored earlier, is a tendency to detect positions of ex-centricity only in postcolonial contexts, although, as Anne Hegerfeldt argues, ‘magic realist authors can be seen to speak from the margin […] not by virtue of their authors’ marginalised position, but by exploring and presenting world-views that diverge from the rational-empirical outlook prevalent in the Western world’ (Hegerfeldt 2005: 117). In any case, as pointed out by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka *was* a writer on the margin in many respects. Their influential study of Kafka as an exemplar of ‘minor literature’ (‘minor’ness here used to mean subversive, disobedient to the norms of the canon) mirrors many of the same ideas:

> A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. […] In this sense, Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible—the

> impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise. (Deleuze and Guattari 2008: 16)

A Jewish, German-speaking (and near-fluent Czech speaking), Prague-dwelling writer, Kafka doesn't fit easily into any 'major' categories, as he himself was very much aware: writing in 1916, after seeing his work simultaneously branded as 'fundamentally German' and quintessentially Jewish, he described himself as 'a circus rider on two horses' (*TM* 70) (a phrase which could be beautifully repurposed to describe his creation beetle-Gregor, or indeed to describe magical-realist literature itself). Peter Zusi writes that Kafka's Prague was steeped in 'ethnic animosity, lack of communication and, at times, open violence between the two largest linguistic communities in the city. These historical realities have given rise to the persistent image of a "dividing wall" between the Czech- and German-speaking inhabitants of Prague', but 'Kafka himself […] actively defied the ethnic and cultural barriers characterizing early twentieth-century Prague by associating with Czech writers, following Czech cultural periodicals and attending Czech theatre presentations' (Zusi 2017: 159); clearly he, like his hero Gregor, saw borders, 'dividing walls', as a challenge rather than an obstacle.

If what Kubin's work encouraged was a productive collaboration between antithetical principles, Kafka's text questions, exposes and troubles those very antitheses in the hopes that in doing so, the structures which they support will collapse as readily as the Samsa family did under the weight of exposure. Refusal of hierarchies is the *sine qua non* of all magical-realist texts, and *The Metamorphosis*, from its first word, which occurs in the liminal space between sleeping and waking, questions every assumptive hierarchy it encounters, the very text becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, a 'rhizome', in which 'one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. […] Good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013: 8-9) (which configuration could just as well be applied to Kubin's text). Kafka himself characterised writing as 'an assault on the frontiers' (Kafka 1975: 399), an enterprise whose revolutionary spirit anticipates Angela Carter's aim of 'putting new wine in old bottles' in the hopes that 'the pressure from the new wine makes the old bottles explode' (Carter 1988: 69); Kafka's frontiers are familiar ones, but his method of assault is, like all works of magical realism, in equal parts destructive and productive.

This section has focused predominantly on the poetics and the techniques of magical realism as it presented in early twentieth-century Europe. I chose for close reading two texts

striking in their proximity (related not just by literary mode but by geography and even biography), which utilise the same magical-realist themes and techniques to order to articulate distinct messages: Kubin's querying of ontological codes was in the service of a commentary that was as aesthetic and psychological as it was philosophical, whilst Kafka required radical ontological disruption to question the assumptive substance of the structures by which the individual is variously constrained. In neither text does the social, cultural context of the work potently assert itself, and so has accordingly not occupied a dominant role in my own analysis, but a full account of the presence of magical-realist texts in the early part of the twentieth century requires a closer examination of the environment from which they emerged. Kafka's exploration of the tensions that play out at the frontier between the individual and society lead usefully into a more focused examination of the same frontiers as they manifested under the conditions of modernity, and thence of the magical-realist texts which responded to those conditions. I shall undertake this examination in specific relation to Petersburg, which could be said to resemble Prague in the striking mythology which arose around its history of drastic social and topographical reform, and which would have been equally deserving of Meyrink's epithet, 'the city with the secret heartbeat' (Meyrink 2010: 112).

III

Speak of the Devil*:* Magical Realism in Petersburg

One theme that has proven persistent in the magical-realist texts examined thus far in this thesis is the meaning, durability and sanctity of personal identity, and specifically of personal identity under threat. This theme was present in Kubin's Dream Realm, where the fixity of autonomous identity was one of the assumed colonnades of reality corroded by the magical-realist climate of the city of Pearl, and was prominent in Kafka's beetle-body, which I posited was devised as an expression of and response to the agonising dilemma facing the individual attempting to live in the modern 'administered world'. It is not altogether surprising that the stability of personal identity should be a compelling question in magical-realist fiction, whose endeavour is to trouble our assumptions about reality; in a mode which, to once again quote Wendy Faris' famous configuration, 'disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity', these are simply the three foundational categories comprising the 'reality' which is being interrogated, and it stands to reason that 'identity' should be the most urgent of this triumvirate since 'reality' begins, as it were, at home. Questions of the stability of personal identity are not just a central feature of early magical-realist literature, but a – if not the – defining feature of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century explorations of modernity. Earlier chapters have referenced the opening claim of Georg Simmel's seminal 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), that 'the deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life' (Simmel 2002: 11); in this chapter I will take the direct context of that work – the conditions of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban environment – as my central focus. By comparing contemporary literary works which undertake similar explorations of individual identity, this chapter will demonstrate the deep affinities between the magical-realist texts considered here and the explorations of modernity that were preoccupying artists, writers and sociologists around the world.

Discussions of 'modernity' and 'modernism' are frequently beset by a bewildering lack of consensus on the meaning and appropriate usage of the terms,[53] but there is at least one point of general consensus: that what we call modernity, when discussed as a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, is a product of the city. To speak of 'literature of modernity' is not necessarily to speak of 'modernist literature' (Baudelaire's work, for example, is an exemplar of the former but not the latter), but both are concerned with the aspects of urban life (and nineteenth-century life in general) which were either introduced or enormously exacerbated by the seismic changes wrought by rapid industrialisation, secularisation and urbanisation of landscape, and which were deemed sufficiently disquieting by some writers to require for their representation the revolution in language and form by which modernist literature is

[53] The word 'modernity' was first recorded in an essay by Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (written 1859) in which he described 'that quality which you must allow me to call "modernity" […] By modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable' (Baudelaire 1986: 12-13); as such 'modernity' is usually associated with the nineteenth-century urban experience described in Baudelaire's poems, although Marshall Berman assigns 'modernity' a vaguer, more perennial presence, claiming that 'people have been going through it for close to five hundred years' (Berman 1988: 15-16). 'Modernist' has been in use, according to Peter Childs, since the late sixteenth century, originally 'to denote a follower of modern ways and also a supporter of modern over ancient literature' (Childs 2008: 14), but Jean-Jacques Rousseau is credited with the first usage in 1769 of *moderniste* as we would recognise it today (Berman 1988: 17; Ciugureanu 2008: 13; Pullan 2018: 174). The word 'modernism' dates back to the eighteenth century when it was used 'simply to denote trends characteristic of modern times' and later to changing practices in the Catholic church, but only entered common currency in literary criticism in the 1960s (Childs 2008: 14-15). Among critics who wish to define a period of 'modernist' literature, demarcations differ significantly from 1880-1950 (Connolly 1965), to 1890-1930 (Bradbury and McFarlane 1978), to 1909-1939 (Butler 2010); Childs contends that 'the vast majority of attempts to offer alternative modes of representation from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century have at one time or another been termed Modernist' (Childs 2008: 3), and Berman identifies modernism as germinating before the French Revolution, finding expression in Goethe's moment of writing in *Faust*, and continuing in various forms up to his own present in the 1970s (Berman 1988). Of course, geographical differences play a part here too (since, as Bradbury and McFarlane write, 'modernism can look surprisingly different depending on where one finds the centre, in which capital (or province) one happens to stand' (Bradbury and McFarlane 1978: 30)), and as Childs writes, 'postwar dates for modernism's high-point make sense in terms of British and also US literature but, perhaps, not in terms of any other in Europe' (Childs 2008: 15). For clarity's sake, I will be following the convention of taking the 'Baudelaire years' (i.e. the mid-nineteenth century) as the critical years of the emergence of modernity, since it is widely agreed, as Janet Wolff writes, that 'the urban experience took on an entirely different character around the middle of the nineteenth century […] I think it is useful to take this period of accelerated urbanisation, coupled with the transformations in work, housing and social relations brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism, as the crucial years in the birth of "modernity"' (Wolff 1985: 38).

characterised. These aspects are various and have been discussed elsewhere at length,[54] but I will be focusing specifically on what I perceive to be the most pressing and widely-explored dilemmas facing the 'modern man' and the stability of his autonomous identity. One is the problematic relationship between the public and private 'spheres' of life, which was a much-observed feature of the nineteenth-century urban social experience; the other is the problem of maintaining individual autonomy within the of crucible of burgeoning modernity, a subject touched on already but explored here specifically in the context of the urban environment. These two concerns form a dominant component of nineteenth-century sociological and philosophical thought, and are often treated, as they will be here, as closely related.

I will begin this chapter by examining my guiding themes (the negotiation of public and private spaces, and the struggle to maintain individual autonomy) first within the general context of city literature, taking Paris as my central focus; I will then go on to explore how these same themes present within the context of Russian city literature, again first by giving a more general context, and then by demonstrating that, and discussing how and why, those themes are given magical-realist treatment in Gogol's 'The Nose' and Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*. The purpose of this line of argument is to demonstrate that magical realism, far from being an esoteric expression of specifically Latin-American reality, is a literary treatment of reality which has been inspired by many political and social contexts, and that can be situated in dialogue with global literary trends; and most importantly, to interrogate in detail the specific conditions of the Russian context in order to identify which factors, political and cultural, motivated the writers found there to employ magical-realist technique for its representation. The purpose of the Paris paradigm within this chapter is to clarify the terms of this line of enquiry: by discerning both the similarities and the differences between the two contexts, even – perhaps especially – where those differences amount to subtle variations on a similar theme, I am able to establish why the one nurtured the production of magical-realist literature whilst the other did not. The theories developed here inform our understanding of the relationship between

[54] Griselda Pollock offers an especially succinct précis: 'It is a response in a mythic or ideological form to the new complexities of a social existence passed amongst strangers in an atmosphere of intensified nervous and psychic stimulation, in a world ruled by money and commodity exchange, stressed by competition and formative of an intensified individuality, publicly defended by a blasé mask of indifference but intensely "expressed" in a private, familial context. Modernity stands for a myriad of responses to the vast increase in population leading to the literature of the crowds and masses, a speeding up of the pace of life with its attendant changes in the sense and regulation of time and fostering that very modern phenomenon, fashion, the shift in the character of towns and cities from being centres of quite visible activities – manufacture, trade, exchange – to being zoned and stratified, with production becoming less visible while the centres of cities such as Paris and London become key sites of consumption and display' (Pollock 1994: 66).

magical realism and modernity, not just in the European context but globally: in relating the techniques of magical realism to the particular circumstances under which modernity progressed in St Petersburg, as distinct from the corresponding conditions in Paris, utilising Marshall Berman's concept of 'the modernism of underdevelopment', I am able to contribute also to our understanding of magical realism's appearance in the analogous contexts of the Third World. Although the conditions of Petersburg are in many ways correspondent with those of Paris, being a comparatively modern, Western (sometime) capital, by considering the city's social landscape with close attention to its specific experience of modernity, which began inorganically and developed in halting and partial fashion, it can be seen, as argued by Berman and Michael Taussig, to more closely resemble conditions in Africa, Asia and Latin America, whose writers also turned to magical-realist technique to express the conditions of their environment. It is in this way that I achieve my aim of establishing not just the fact of magical-realist literature in the Russian context, but the factors which contributed to its occurring there.

This chapter will place significant emphasis on social context, and so not all of the works discussed will be of the magical-realist mode: here I attempt the technique of constellation, approaching magical realism through commentary on works that can be configured with it in the context of its production in order to make visible the historical space, along with its crisis of personal and individual boundaries, from which European magical realism emerged.

III.i. *'A mirror as vast as the crowd itself'*: Self and Other in the Paris Paradigm

The obvious starting place in establishing the history of 'city literature' is Paris, Walter Benjamin's 'capital of the nineteenth century', a site of hypermodernity and the indisputable original epicentre for written reflections on modern urbanity, both literary and scholarly. Whether because it has long been considered to lead the charge in philosophical thought, and as an epicentre of artistic experiment, or due to the dramatic topographic transformations that came with the Haussmann programme, the city has come to occupy a central position in not just the cultural imagination, but in academic discourse, and has become paradigmatic of the modern urban experience. The Paris experience can be seen as both universal and singular; other European cities experienced the same pressures of population increase and industrial advancement, but what I shall call the 'Paris paradigm' has been the subject of exceptionally varied and complex treatment in its relation to modernity, and so generated its own mythology,

in part a specific commentary on the Paris experience, in part transplantable to other urban contexts. Thus, the classically and originally Parisian preoccupation with the 'bourgeois interior' is only the Paris-specific manifestation of the universal urban anxiety over the conflict between public and private spaces; and the Parisian figure of the *flâneur* is at once a specific product of Parisian architecture and lifestyle, and the embodiment of the archetypal urban citizen's struggle for individual autonomy.

The changing configurations of the 'separate spheres' is a common subject in discussion of urban environments, particularly in relation to the ideological gender binaries which were reinforced (if not created) by a societal hemispherectomy which confined women to the 'private' sphere and regulated their behaviour therein, whilst men dominated the 'public' sphere which consisted not just of the workplace, but the streets, restaurants, shops and all entertainment venues.[55] However, the same conditions of modernity which were causing the public / private boundary to be reinforced in respect of gender were causing it to be obscured in other ways. Some of these conditions are obvious: the massive population increases that cities saw in the nineteenth century (Paris, London and Berlin all more than doubled in population between 1800 and 1850) led to the kind of overcrowding which Friedrich Engels famously described in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (1845): 'families in […] "dwellings" (if they deserve the name!), men, women, and children thrown together without distinction of age or sex […] of these families three-fourths possessed but one room' (Engels 1950: 28). This depicts literal poverty of and encroachment on private space, and of course resides at the extreme where it affected the very most disadvantaged, but gives an insight into the pressures which formed the impetus to reinforce the boundary of the private sphere. This impetus is described by Philippe Ariès:

> Starting in the eighteenth century, people began defending themselves against a society whose constant intercourse had hitherto been the source of education, reputation and wealth. Henceforth a fundamental movement would destroy the old connections […] Everywhere it reinforced private life at the expense of neighbourly relationships, friendships, and traditional contacts. The history of modern planners can be reduced in part to this long effort to break away from others, to escape from a society whose pressure had become unbearable. (Ariès 1962: 406-7)

[55] The gender division embodied in the 'separate spheres' argument falls outside of the scope of this argument, but its impact on literature of modernity is significant, accounting for the relative exclusion of female voices and experiences from the era's literary output. As Janet Wolff writes, 'the particular experience of "modernity" was, for the most part, equated with experience *in* the public arena' whilst it 'ignores the private sphere, and so is silent on the subject of women's primary domain' (Wolff 1985: 44).

As alluded to by Ariès, this impetus is written into the very lineaments of nineteenth-century city planning: it accounts for the changing building practices in Victorian England where 'the trend was to turn each house upon itself as its own private world' so that 'the threshold between the public and private spheres […] [was] redrawn and made much less ambiguous' (Daunton 1983: 215), as well as the establishment of suburban neighbourhoods for middle-class families to retreat to, where pre-industrialisation city dwellers had been content with an urban design comprising 'a jumble of building spaces, used for a variety of purposes while the enterprise and living quarters were virtually almost physically integrated or very close' (Davidoff and Hall 1983: 332).

The unscrambling of 'enterprise and living quarters' is important here. The notion of a 'private sphere' under threat takes two forms: firstly spatial, and secondly psychological. The threat to the spatial private sphere is more complex than physical infringement on space. The spatial private sphere becomes a retreat from the mores and demands of modernity, which are found in their most concentrated form in the workplace, home of the abiding spirit of industrialism, where 'a person, as labour power, is a commodity', 'his mode of existence […] imposed upon him by a system of production' (Benjamin 1999: 58), and so a separate private sphere of 'home' becomes necessary. Benjamin has written that 'the nineteenth century, like no other, was addicted to the home. It conceived of the home as human beings' casing and embedded them with all their accessories' (Benjamin 1999: 865), insisting that these 'accessories' of the bourgeois interior have 'conferred on them only a fancier's value, rather than a use-value' (Benjamin 1999: 168). This imagery conjures an attempt to construct a protective husk for a realm governed by it own value system, immune to the increasingly-regulated standards of the outside world: the vagaries of value-apportioning by the market economy; the obligatory obedience to regulatory systems, such as horal and calendric coordination; mental overstimulation from the pressures of 'fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu' (Simmel 2002: 12). Benjamin theorises that the defensive reinforcement of the spatial private sphere arises in response to these pressures, and so 'for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work' (Benjamin 1999: 167) because the need to enforce this separation, to garrison the private sphere, only becomes urgent when, as in the modern urban environment, it ceases to be a given. As Sonia Hirt suggests, 'borders, like rules, are made to be broken. A world where rigid, impermeable borders between the public and private is erected is a world where the one fears the other, a world where both the public

and the private are under siege' (Hirt 2012: 16). One is reminded that the Latin root of the word *bourgeois* is *burga*, meaning 'fortress': for all the various mythologies attached to the *bourgeoisie*, the association with the protection of the private sphere exists at an embryonic level.

The idea of a 'private sphere' is not, then, confined to the notion of a physical space: changing attitudes towards these spaces generate the most interest when regarded as an outward projection of a psychological struggle to protect a sense of human value and autonomy in a world dictated by the ruthless standards of industrial capitalism. The sharpening of the distinction between 'home' and 'work' is therefore synechdocal of a more profound impulse to maintain an individual identity under the conditions of modernity, retreating in order to fend off what Ariès terms (with suitably Gallic dolour) 'an unbearable moral solitude' (Ariès 1962: 406-7). This idea is explored most famously by Simmel who prefigures Benjamin's imagery of a 'casing', a galvanised boundary for the private sphere, in writing that the metropolitan mind develops a 'protective organ for itself', which whilst being protective is also anaesthetising, resulting in 'a purely matter-of-fact attitude in the treatment of persons and things'; and thus also homogenising, repressing 'those irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life from within' (Simmel 2002: 11-14). The implication is that the individual in the metropolis develops a psychological 'casing' in response to the constant danger of having his psychic interior swamped by external influence, and becoming a psychologically-neutered component an indiscrete mass. This idea prevails into late nineteenth-century crowd theory, in which the individual fears the crowd not so much for comprising 'violent, bestial, insane, capricious beings', 'plebeian, uncouth, and deaf to the subtle reaches of the human intellect' (Barrows 1981: 5; 44), but for the danger to the very integrity of his identity: as Gustave Le Bon would warn in his famous pronouncement, 'crowds are somewhat like the sphinx of ancient fable: it is necessary to arrive at a solution of the problem offered by their psychology or to resign ourselves to being devoured by them' (Le Bon 1999: 124). Writing in the twentieth century, Herbert Marcuse coins the term 'introjection' to describe the process which Simmel warned of, via which external conditions are mirrored internally, resulting in man having become 'one-dimensional', meaning he has sacrificed his individuality and freedom in order to exist in a 'totally administered society' which controls and dictates his every thought, desire and opinion. Marcuse regards the process of 'introjection' as having begun in 'the preceding stage of industrial society […] in nineteenth-century European

society' (Marcuse 2007: xliv), and interestingly, he characterises these early stages in terms which evoke a battle for territory between two ontologically opposing spheres, with the 'public' sphere seeking to invade and colonise the 'private':

> introjection implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigencies – an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious *apart from* public opinion and behaviour. The idea of 'inner freedom' here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain 'himself'. Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality. Mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory. (ibid. 12)

Whether or not we agree with Marcuse's bleak conclusion on the destiny of the individual, it is certainly compelling that he perceives a period of boundary dispute (which he considers long-since lost at the time of writing in the 1960s) amid the very time and conditions which, I will argue, begot and nurtured early magical-realist literature.

Within (and indeed without) the 'Paris paradigm', the battle to retain individual autonomy in the 'big-city crowd' indisputably finds its most complex and academically profitable expression in the *flâneur*, the perennial figure of Parisian urban legend, perambulatory denizen of Paris who makes a lifestyle of ranging through the city observing modern life (or 'botanising on the asphalt', in Benjamin's oft-quoted phrase (Benjamin 1999: 36)). Ever since Benjamin located him at the centre of his treatise on modernity via the work of Baudelaire, the *flâneur* has been a permanent fixture in discussions of nineteenth-century city life and literature, hailed as 'the patron saint of the nineteenth-century city and of modernity itself' (Conlin 2014: 14), or 'the emblematic figure of modernity and a personification of modern urban life' (Saliot 2015: 146). For many critics his meanderings enact the urban citizen's sense of displacement and dispossession, using *flânerie* as a self-consolatory attempt to defer the impact of modernity, 'deriving an aesthetic thrill by moving along incognito, and therefore not (yet) being fully exposed to the shock of alienation' (Lauster 2007: 142).[56] Much of the

[56] These evaluations are of course retrospective: historically, the characterisation of the *flâneur* adapted with the development of ideas about individualism in the nineteenth century. In the post-Enlightenment Paris of the early nineteenth century, individualism was seen as complementary to the 'General Will' (as espoused by Rousseau), and accordingly, in early usage the *flâneur* was portrayed as a feckless drifter, 'a lazybones, a loafer, man of insufferable idleness' (from an 1806 article, qtd Ferguson 1994: 82) (the word *flâneur* was not, as Jonathan Conlin claims, 'first defined by the newspaper Figaro in 1831' (Conlin 2014: 14)); however, the post-Revolution nation-rebuilding energies of bourgeois Parisian society soon saw the emergence of what Patrice Higonnet calls 'Promethean individualism' and the beginning of a capitalist economy (Higonnet 2002: 206), and as such 'the *flâneur*'s conspicuous inaction comes to be taken as positive evidence of both social status and superior thought' (Ferguson 1994: 83).

valorisation of the *flâneur*-figure came via the framing, by Honoré de Balzac, of *flânerie* as a kind of artistic pursuit, when he drew the distinction in *Le Physiologie du Mariage* (1826) between the passive 'walker' and the actively-observing *flâneur-artiste* whose perambulations are '*une science*', and who partakes in *'la gastronomie de l'œil'*, actively mining the city for material and inspiration for later creative purposes, an enterprise entirely distinct from the walker without this purpose, since '*se promener, c'est végéter; flâner c'est vivre*' (Balzac 1968: 60).

With the reframing of *flânerie* as an artistically-productive endeavour, Balzac introduces a crucial facet of the *flâneur*, which is that of detachment, and it is in this respect that he can be seen as the embodiment of the negotiation of the boundary between self and other. As Priscilla Ferguson explains, 'urban stories […] can only be told by those immune to the stress and seduction of the city, who can turn those seductions to good account, that is, into a text that will exercise its own seductions' (Ferguson 1994: 27-8) and so in order to 'channel […] the desires roused by the city' into creative output, the *flâneur-artiste* must 'remain both in and above the inferno' (ibid. 91). The *flâneur* must maintain physical proximity with the crowd in order to accurately and sensitively report on and represent it in his art, and yet must maintain intellectual and emotional distance from it in order not to be distracted from his artistic endeavour. Although this may sound like a fuzzy, even incidental distinction, it is striking that in almost all cases, characterisations of the *flâneur* specifically emphasise this indeterminate position of selfhood: he 'stands apart from the city even as he appears to "fuse" with it' (Burton 1988: 59); is 'a man *in* the crowd without necessarily being *of* the crowd' (Forth 2004: 108), 'immersed in yet not absorbed by the city' (Ferguson 1994: 80); an embodiment of 'the sovereignty of individual selfhood in synthesis with a situation in which the practice of selfhood is dependent on the contingencies of spectacles such as crowds' (Tester 1994: 5); requires 'precisely the conditions of involvement / non-involvement' which can be found in Paris in order to flourish (Wolff 1985: 40). For Benjamin, the *flâneur* as the emblematic figure of modernity is read in close relation to what he considered the emblematic architecture of modernity, the Paris arcades, which he characterises as 'a cross between a street and an *interieur*' (Benjamin 1999: 37), at once inside and out, both public and intimate, an indeterminate threshold space in which

> the contours of the existing relations between buildings are not destroyed but blurred. In one sense, it becomes unclear where the outside ends and the inside begins. Whether one calls this

> process the privatisation of the public realm or the surrender of private to public, these material objects can be read as easily as Balzac's novels in their rearticulation of human experience in the industrial age. (Rolleston 1989: 19)

The *flâneur,* then, is a specimen of the threshold, inhabiting, even enacting, the borders both between self and other and between public and private. Once again, the spatial and psychological concepts of 'spheres' are closely interrelated.

That the possession of a 'self', a reinforced ego boundary, is an actual distinguishing characteristic of the idealised *flâneur* is further enunciated in his contrasting figure, the *badaud*, usually translated as 'gawker': unlike the discerning, perceptive *flâneur* who digests the urban fare into productive output, this is the consumer of city life who simply rubbernecks at spectacles and moves on. An 1867 dictionary defined him as 'curious; he is astonished by everything he sees; he believes everything he hears, and he shows his […] surprise by his open, gaping mouth' (qtd Shaya 2004: 49); as Benjamin clarifies, 'in the *flâneur*, the joy of watching is triumphant. It can concentrate on observation; the result is the amateur detective. Or it can stagnate in the gaper; then the *flâneur* has turned into the *badaud*' (Benjamin 1999: 69). Most significantly, whereas the *flâneur* is 'always in full possession of his individuality', the *badaud* 'on the contrary, disappears, absorbed by the outside world' (Ferdinand von Gall, 1845, qtd. Higonnet 2002: 218); this sentiment is echoed, almost word-for-word, by Victor Fournel in 1858, who writes that 'the *flâneur* must not be confused with the *badaud* […] the simple *flâneur* is always in full possession of his individuality, whereas the individuality of the *badaud* disappears. It is absorbed by the outside world […] the *badaud* becomes an impersonal creature; he is no longer a human being, he is part of the public, of the crowd' (qtd Benjamin 1999: 69). What these distinctions underscore is that it is not simply in his possession of a 'self' that the *flâneur* is especially remarkable, but in his ability to limn the tightrope between the individual and the collective.[57]

[57] Although not demonstrated in any of the examples here, the *badaud,* being easily-led, idle, gossip-motivated and hard-of-thinking, tended, inevitably, to be presented as female, or feminised (see Shaya 2004: 51); this accords with the later convention of considering crowds to be feminine, a position which finds explicit expression in social psychologist Gabriel Tarde's *L'opinion et la foule* (1898): 'By its whimsy, its revolting docility, its credulity, its nervousness, its brusque psychological leaps from fury to tenderness, from exasperation to laughter, the crowd is feminine, even when it is composed, as is usually the case, of males' (qtd. Barrows 1991: 47). The *flâneur,* by contrast, is traditionally referred to in the male pronoun (although this is a historically-accurate convention since, as explored notably by Janet Wolff, the social restrictions placed on women in the 19th century prohibited them from urban strolling (Wolff 1985)). This study will strive to resist the temptations of revolting docility, and, for the sake of ease, refer to all Parisian character types by the male pronoun.

One of the most interesting aspects of *flâneur*-lore is the tortured and contradictory nature of his relationship to 'the crowd'. One of Benjamin's key contributions to *flâneur*-lore was to highlight his essential isolation, writing that his keen observation of the lives of fellow Parisians as an attempt to 'break through this "unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest" [here Benjamin is quoting Engels] by filling the hollow space created in him by such isolation, with the borrowed – and fictitious – isolations of strangers' (Benjamin 1999: 58); this suggests that his relationship to the crowd is one of conciliatory proximity to alleviate his essential alienation. This version of the *flâneur*-crowd relationship comes from Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Life' (written 1859-60) where, profiling the newspaper illustrator Constantin Guys, in his best-known expression of *flânerie*, he attributes to Guys the declaration 'any man who can be bored in the heart of a multitude, is a blockhead! A blockhead! And I despise him' (Baudelaire 1986: 10), a sentiment which conjures a 'multitude' of engrossing heterogeneity. For Baudelaire's *flâneur*, 'the crowd is his element, just as the air is that of the bird's, and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd'; it is his 'immense joy' to 'be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet remain hidden from the world', to 'watch the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty'; he is a 'prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito […] an "I" with an insatiable appetite for the "non-I"' (ibid. 9-11). In this version of *flânerie* the crowd is a source of joy and fascination to the *flâneur*, and it is in this configuration that he can be seen as embodying the crisis of the modern urban citizen, encapsulated within his indispensable 'protective organ' (Benjamin's 'casing', Kafka's 'fence') but seized with longing for human contact which propels him into physical proximity with the crowd.

Elsewhere in Baudelaire, though, we find the *flâneur* in less joyous spirits, and troubled by precisely the question of erasure of personal identity: in *The Seven Old Men* (1859) the narrating *flâneur* has a 'weary soul' and walks beneath a 'foul yellow mist' in 'a scene to match the actor's plight' (Baudelaire 1952: 118). Here, the thrillingly varied crowd of 'The Painter of Modern Life' is instead Le Bon's savage, faceless, spectral swarm, in a city which is now 'ant-seething […] where ghosts by daylight tug the passer's sleeve' (ibid.). The de-individualising potential of the city is realised in its full horror in the figure of 'a wretch' with 'loathing malevolence that glittered in his eyes' which regard 'the world around […] less indifferent than

a foe', who self-generates into a procession of seven identical copies of himself like a 'disgusting Phoenix, his own sire and father':

> *Son pareil le suivait: barbe, oeil, dos, bâton, loques,*
> *Nul trait ne distinguait, du même enfer venu,*
> *Ce jumeau centenaire, et ces spectres baroques*
> *Marchaient du même pas vers un but inconnu.*
>
> *À quel complot infâme étais-je donc en butte,*
> *Ou quel méchant hasard ainsi m'humiliait?*
> *Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute,*
> *Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait!*
>
> [His image followed him, (back, stick, and beard
> In nothing differed) spawned from the same hole,
> A centenarian twin. Both spectres steered
> With the same gait to the same unknown goal.
>
> To what foul plot was I exposed? of what
> Humiliating hazard made the jeer?
> For seven times, (I counted) was begot
> This sinister, self multiplying fear!] (ibid.)

The implication is that this proliferation would continue indefinitely, that the narrator could have 'watched an eighth instalment spawn […] But from that hellish cortege I'd withdrawn' (ibid.). The procession of old men clearly represent, as Nicole Jouve suggests, 'the result of an initial weakness of selfhood, or a lack of "*innéité*"' (Jouve 1980: 120), but they also underscore the isolation of the observer: whereas the *flâneur* elsewhere enjoys the 'ineffable orgy' of 'universal communion' (Baudelaire 1992: 131), Barbara Wright points out that here 'between the poet and the seven old men, there is no exchanged glance, no encounter. The old men are

remembered as dislocated body parts. Their procession to an unknown place […] brings nothing new, only more of the unthinkable same' (Wright 2005: 44).[58]

Baudelaire's two renderings of the *flâneur*'s environment and his relationship to it conflict so sharply as to lead Gregory Shaya to dismiss the Guys portrait as 'ironic, or a work of fantasy' (Shaya 2004: 48); Christopher Forth, similarly, concludes of the *flânerie* depicted in 'The Painter of Modern Life' that 'while the *flâneur* might experiment with the boundaries of self and other by immersing himself in the crowd, this playful blurring was always only a game […] the truth of the *flâneur* would always reside in his capacity for bounded interiority and possession of a strong will capable of sustaining a sense of self despite the encroachment of physical impulses and external stimuli' (Forth 2004: 106). For Richard Burton, though, the truth lies in taking the two portraits together: Baudelaire expresses the *flâneur*-dilemma, that 'modern urban man suffers at once from a disabling sense of isolation from his fellows *and* from a compulsive tendency to identify "pantheistically" with those around him; the frontier between self and others is at once impassable and curiously porous' (Burton 1988: 66). In this way the *flâneur,* as a literary construct, serves as an unlikely antecedent to another threshold creature, Kafka's Samsa: both respond to the dilemma of retaining individual autonomy under external pressure, the impossibility of experiencing intimacy without exposing the psychological sphere to invasion, and therefore the inevitable state of loneliness and alienation, and in the *flâneur*'s attempt to exist between two registers, to occupy the unstable boundary between self and other, he experiences the Samsa-fate of ontological expunction:

> The 'physiognomic' approach to urban life depends on the existence, in others, of a series of transparent or hieroglyphic 'correspondences' between outward forms and inner realities, but,

[58] This ambiguous relation of *flâneur*-to-crowd has given rise to some debate about whether the concept of the *flâneur* belongs with Baudelaire at all, in spite of his using the term himself. For Shaya he is 'an essential stop for *flâneur* scholarship' (Shaya 2004: 48), whereas Richard Burton unquestioningly couples the *badaud* with the 'Baudelairian *hommes de foules'* in opposition to the *flâneur* (Burton 1988: 59), ascribing Baudelaire's figure the very assimilatory impulse which the *flâneur* exists to resist: 'whereas the pre-1850 *flâneur* strives to understand the individual Other in his or her otherness, the *homme des foules*, as described by Baudelaire, seeks to lose all selfhood in a kind of 'pantheistic' fusion with the crowd considered as an undifferentiated and anonymous mass' (ibid. 60). This seems to me a misreading of Baudelaire, who uses the phrase '*homme des foules'* only in direct reference to Poe's short story of the same name (which Baudelaire was the first to translate into French in 1856), which is evoked specifically in order to draw attention not to the eponymous 'man of the crowd' but to the observing narrator-figure ('the convalescent') who plays the *flâneur* role. Martina Lauster agrees, 'to see the *object* of the narrator's vision, the 'man of the crowd', as a *flâneur* is absolute nonsense' (Lauster 2007: 144). Baudelaire's 1861 prose poem *Crowds* restates the *flâneur*'s distinctive position, stating that 'to enjoy a crowd is an art', which surely underscores the *flâneur*'s singular ability to be at once 'a solitary, meditative walker' and still draw 'an unusual excitement from this universal communion': the line 'Multitude, solitude: synonymous terms and convertible by the active and creative poet' signals a skilful navigation of the opposing states, which is why 'for him alone, everything is opened' (Baudelaire 1992: 131).

> by the same token, the *flâneur's* survival and success as observer requires that, in his own case, inward and outward be dissociated as far as possible to thwart the invasive eye of the Other. Secreting his 'true self' beneath an anodyne and anonymous exterior, he ceases to live in and for himself and becomes instead an ontological void, a negative capability. (Burton 1988: 65)

This, surely, is the true essence of the *flâneur*, and the reason for the enduring fascination he commands. His assumed distinguishing features, his peregrinations and scopophilia, his creative output, even his artistic detachment, are merely vehicles via which he navigates the far broader and more universal problems of individual identity which affect the archetypical hero of modernity, of which the *flâneur* is but a subtype.

It is in this capacity that, in spite of Victor Hugo's pronouncement (clearly after Balzac) in *Les Misérables* (1862) that 'to wander is human; to *flâner* is Parisian', the *flâneur*-dilemma can be viewed as belonging to modernity in general rather than to Paris in particular: as Keith Tester writes, in modern criticism 'there seems to be little doubt that the *flâneur* is specific to a Parisian time and place. On the other hand, the *flâneur* is used as a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place' (Tester 1994: 16); Baudelaire himself, whose work is indelibly associated with Paris, was 'unprepared to make any significant distinction between *Paris* and *modernity* […] the *flâneur* certainly occupies the specific times and places of nineteenth-century Paris, but that Paris is itself made important because it is an expression of modernity' (ibid.), and even of Benjamin, who conceived of the *flâneur* in specific relation to Paris topography, Ferguson is able to write that 'Flaubert's *flâneurs* are Parisian in ways that Baudelaire's, and Benjamin's, are not' (Ferguson 1994: 108). Certainly more recent criticism has not hesitated to identify *flâneur*-figures the world over, with James Werner identifying *flânerie* in the American works of Edgar Allen Poe (who 'projects *flânerie* onto a cosmic scale, stressing the dialectical nature of the inner/outer binary and porosity of personal, natural and architectural interiors' (Werner 2004: ix)), and Isabel Vila-Cabanes in nineteenth-century British literature (Vila-Cabanes 2018); he has also been found wandering the streets of Madrid (Rodriguez-Galindo: 2014), Prague (Huebner: 2014), Dublin (Saint-Amour: 2011) and even St Petersburg (Gheeradyn: 2014), to where we shall venture next. What this global impulse to *flânerie* demonstrates is that whilst each city makes its own particular demands on its residents, a common experience of and response to modernity reverberates through urban landscapes across the globe.

III.ii. *'There exists in Petersburg a powerful foe':* The Porous Petersburger of the Nineteenth Century

The Russian equivalent of the 'Paris paradigm', in terms of its hold on the cultural imagination and endless fascination for writers and academics, is what we may call the 'Petersburg paradigm'. The imperial capital has been a source of myth and mystique since its extraordinary beginnings, when it was built with stunning rapidity in the early eighteenth century by the enforced labour of a vast captive workforce, comprising every stonemason in the Russian Empire and serfs requisitioned in immense numbers from landowners, taking thousands of lives in the process.[59] Its reputation as a ruthless, devouring force, 'a city built on bones' was baked into its very founding: as Berman writes, 'Petersburg's horrific human costs, the dead man's bones mixed into its grandest monuments, immediately became central to the city's folklore and mythology' (Berman 1998: 178). With its classically Western architectural design, and its new citizens forcibly transplanted there under threat of dispossession (Miles 2017: 40), the new city was an anatopism to rival Kubin's Pearl, its monumentality and extravagance turning 'the whole city into a political theatre, and everyday urban life into a spectacle' (Berman 1998: 178); this is the fare consumed by the *flâneur*-characters of the genre of '*progulki po Nevskomy prospectu*' ('promenades on Nevsky Prospect') which was in vogue in the 1830s, who attempt to fathom 'the visual conflict between the rational regulation of perspective in the urban order and the fragmentation of its totality dictated by the phantasmic spectacle of the street' (Senkevitch 2014: 177; 184).

1830s Petersburg, obviously, is not 1830s Paris. Whereas the population explosions that so dramatically altered the urban experience in Paris, Berlin and London took place predominantly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the equivalent event in Petersburg occurred closer to the *fin de siècle*: by the twentieth century the population of the city had mushroomed from under half a million in the 1830s to almost 1.5 million in 1900, with around a

[59] The estimate of just how many lives differs wildly. Berman puts this number at a staggering 150,000 (Berman 1988: 178), and Jonathan Miles at a far more conservative – although still enormous – 30,000 (Miles 2017: 30). James Cracraft notes that these figures come from the diary of Friedrich Wilhelm von Bergholz, a German courtier who visited St Petersburg in the 1920s, and that they are, 'on their face, preposterous' (Bergholz's figure actually goes up to 300,000 in the first decade) as 'the city's population in 1725 was only 40,000, and […] no more than 30,000 workers laboured on constructing it at any one time': he concedes that 'the death toll among workers seems to have been unusually high' but that 'the total death toll between 1703 and Peter's death in 1725 was probably a few thousand' (Cracraft 2003: 43). I note this purely as a matter of academic interest: that the origin of this legendary death toll is located in the 1720s goes only to demonstrate how coetaneous St Petersburg is with its rapacious reputation.

third of that number having arrived in the space of five years, and so corresponding literary depictions of the individual navigating the pressures of the crowd find their fullest expression at the turn of the century. The Petersburg of the earlier half of the century is instead the city so vividly evoked by Nikolai Gogol, whose Petersburg Tales (as they are collectively known) were so influential in cementing Petersburg's reputation as a spectral, eerie place, described by Nabokov (in imagery which again recalls Kubin's Pearl) as 'a reflection in a blurred mirror, an eerie medley of objects put to the wrong use, things going backwards the faster they moved forward, pale gray nights instead of ordinary black ones, and black days' (Nabokov 1961: 12). This section will address how the struggle of the nineteenth-century Petersburger to retain a psychological 'private sphere' differs (and how it does not) from his Parisian contemporary, via the representation of this dilemma in two short stories by Gogol: first we shall examine the conditions that the urban individual faces in the conditions of the Petersburg paradigm as shown in 'The Overcoat', and then how those conditions are given magical-realist treatment – and the reasons for and consequences of this treatment – in 'The Nose'.

In spite of this crucial difference to the configuration of their urban landscapes, powerful confluences can be found between the Paris and Petersburg paradigms. The most important of these is the thematisation of the repetitive nature of mass production. One of the cornerstones of Benjamin's considerable contribution to our understanding of modernity was his stressing the novelty and impact of mass production, describing a world structured '*das Immerwiedergleiche erscheint sinnfällig in der Massenproduktion zum ersten Mal*' ('the always-the-same first manifests itself in an obvious manner in the age of mass production'). This imperils individuality not just by forcing human subjects into physically repetitive work, but thereby suppressing any individuality of impulse (an argument later taken up by Marcuse), with the result that 'the individual's "soul", his individuality, is negated by the infinitely reproducible object' (Rennie 1996: 399-400). As Forth phrases it, 'stable ego boundaries were compromised once the spectacle penetrated to the subjective interior; autonomous creativity was liquidated and replaced with mere repetition' (Forth 2004: 110). It is striking that Gogol was pursuing the same ideas in nineteenth-century Russia where, as Berman points out, 'despite the pervasive pressures of the expanding world market, and despite the growth of a modern world culture that was unfolding along with it […] modernisation was *not* going on' (Berman 1998: 174). Berman refers here specifically to industrial modernisation, and so where Benjamin's focus was on *mechanical* mass production (the implications of which he finds throughout a vast arena of

social theory), Gogol finds the same numbing futility in the manual reproduction which formed the bulk of the labour associated with bureaucracy, most of which fell to the archetypal 'little man' of Russian literary tradition, quintessential hero of the *chinovnik* story, who finds his most famous incarnation in Akakii Akakievich, the impossibly lowly titular councillor of 'The Overcoat'.[60]

The hero of 'The Overcoat' makes not only a job but an entire existence out of manual reproduction. His identity as a copyist is absolute: after a full day's work as a copyist he goes home, eats dull meals 'never even noticing their taste' and then resumes work on copying documents, of which 'if there happened to be none, he took copies for himself, for his own gratification' (Gogol 1992: 82; henceforth *TO*). He is the typical downtrodden, pusillanimous hero of the *chinovnik* story, and the paucity of his control over his own identity is demonstrated in his literal near-muteness:

> No respect was shown him in the department. The janitor not only did not rise from his seat when he passed, but never even glanced at him, as if only a fly had flown through the reception-room. His superiors treated him in a coolly despotic manner. Some assistant chief would thrust a paper under his nose without so much as saying, 'Copy' […] The young officials laughed at and made fun of him, so far as their official wit permitted […] But Akakii Akakievich answered not a word, as though there had been no one before him. It even had no effect upon his employment: amid all these molestations he never made a single mistake in a letter. (ibid. 80-81)

In this way, Gogol configures personal identity, the psychological 'private sphere', in narrative terms. Akakievich's power over his own narrative, his own identity formation, is so completely subordinated as to be practically non-existent: he is almost incapable of stringing together a coherent sentence, expressing himself 'chiefly by prepositions, adverbs, and by such scraps of phrases as had no meaning whatever', as his first spoken line of the texts demonstrates: '"Ah! I ... to you, Petrovich, this–"' (ibid.). His discomfort with self-expression is coupled in reverse with a dedication to prescribed, official narratives in the form of the government documents that he

[60] The *chinovnik*, or 'little man' type, along with other Russian literary 'types', is best preserved in the Russian *physiologies,* modelled after the French tradition, especially Nikolai Nekrasov's two-volume *Physiology of Petersburg* (1845). Whilst the Parisian *physiologies* – pocket-sized illustrated profiles of various character types one was likely to encounter in the city – had the emollient agenda of uniformly representing their subjects as 'of perfect bonhomie […] to give people a friendly picture of each other', portraying the medley of Paris characters as an assemblage of 'harmless oddballs' (Benjamin 1999: 37-9), in Russia the social agenda of the *physiologies* was less social harmony than national identity formation. As Thomas Marullo writes, 'the Russian interest in *physiologies* was seen by many writers, editors, and publishers as fostering national aspirations for political and philosophical progress' (Nekrasov and Marullo 2009: xxvii). Although the *chinovnik* tradition predates Gogol, 'it was under Gogol's influence that the theme acquired its "canonical form"' (Weeks and Kecht 1982: 311), and Gogol's story became the archetypal *chinovnik* story partly through its reading by Vissarion Belinsky, a main contributor to the *Physiology of Petersburg*.

copies out: ‘he served with zeal: no, he served with love. In that copying, he saw a varied and agreeable world’ (ibid.). He is the exemplar of Forth’s deindividuated man, in whom ‘autonomous creativity was liquidated and replaced with mere repetition’, as we see when he is asked to perform a task requiring the tiniest degree of independent thought:

> One director being a kindly man, and desirous of rewarding him for his long service, ordered him to be given something more important than mere copying; namely, he was ordered to make a report of an already concluded affair, to another court: the matter consisted simply in changing the heading, and altering a few words from the first to the third person. This caused him so much toil, that he was all in a perspiration, rubbed his forehead, and finally said, ‘No, give me rather something to copy.’ After that they let him copy on forever. Outside this copying, it appeared that nothing existed for him. (81)

Akakievich’s complete lack of narrative autonomy is symptomatic of his lack of individual autonomy: he is not allowed a voice because as a ‘little man’ he is not a character possessed of individual identity, but rather a mouthpiece for the broader narrative that he exists to regurgitate, the dominant ‘master’ narrative by which Petersburg society and all its inhabitants are arranged.

The dominance of the social narrative via which the Petersburg of ‘The Overcoat’ is organised is so unfettered as to even overpower the narrative voice of the text, which repeatedly underscores its own inferiority of position: of our hero’s name, ‘when, at what time, and in what manner [it originated], is not known’ (79); Akakievich’s birthdate is given ‘if my memory fails me not, towards night on the 23d of March’ (80); of one character’s address ‘unfortunately we cannot say: our memory begins to fail us badly; and everything in St. Petersburg, all the houses and streets, have run together, and become so mixed up in our head, that it is very difficult to produce anything thence in proper form’ (91). In Gogol’s city, the threat to individual autonomy takes the form of a suffocating system of structural control, the master narrative which exerts overwhelming dominance over its subjects, and especially those who are imprisoned in its lowest echelons, which is why it finds its most poignant expression in the *chinovnik* story whose ‘central conflict may be structured around a collision of the Individual and the State. The more modest the Little Man's attempt to extract any benefit from the System, the more pathetic his failure to do so may be made to appear’ (Shepard 1974: 291). The ‘little man’ is not just a character downtrodden by circumstance, but one whose individual narrative is crushed and consumed by a broader, more structurally imposing one; his position is dictated by the dominant narrative which is both political and social, since the epithet *chinovnik*

denotes an official rank (deriving from the Table of Ranks established by Peter the Great in 1722) as well as a person treated as socially contemptible by his employers and colleagues.[61]

Within this dynamic, the reason for the eponymous overcoat's disproportionate symbolic weight is that it represents a challenge to the dominance of the controlling narrative within which Akakievich is conscripted. When Akakievich seeks to have his old overcoat repaired, he stumbles into a quasi-Faustian pact with the tailor Petrovich who tempts him instead into exchanging not just several months' wages, but his entire comfortably-dictated existence, for a brand overcoat whose material gains far exceed physical warmth, an act which comes to represent an act of unforgivable rebellion. The relation of the thematic of the 'master narrative' to the structural format of the Faustian pact unites two Gogolian standards, which are the representation of Petersburg as a city under the thumb of a ruthless controlling force, and its characterisation as the playground of the devil. The devil is a constant fixture in the Petersburg Tales – indeed, Dmitry Merezhkovsky writes of Gogol's oeuvre that 'the sole subject […] is the Devil' (Merezhkovsky 1976: 57) – and the association between the city and the devil begins even before the Petersburg Tales, with Gogol's very first portrait of Petersburg in 'The Night Before Christmas' (1832) which has the blacksmith Vakula arriving in the city borne on the devil's back:

> The blacksmith flew on and on and suddenly Petersburg began to glitter before him, as if on fire. […] The Devil, having flown over the barrier, turned himself into a horse, and the blacksmith saw himself on a spirited steed in the middle of a street. (Gogol 1985: 123)

There is significant foreshadowing in the devil's changing form at the 'barrier' of the city, concealing his demonic nature beneath an innocuous disguise, for when Gogol's work moves from the rural setting to the city, the devil goes from being a tangible, more or less human

[61] The rank of the 'little man' is shown to be essentially immutable: in Akakievich's case (with classic Gogolian humour) it is apparently assigned at birth along with his name, as we learn that 'they christened the child, whereat he wept, and made a grimace, as though he foresaw that he was to be a titular councillor. […] When and how he entered the department, and who appointed him, no one could remember. However much the directors and chiefs of all kinds were changed, he was always to be seen in the same place, the same attitude, the same occupation—the same official for letters; so that afterwards it was affirmed that he had been born in undress uniform with a bald spot on his head' (*TO* 80). Gogol is keen to underscore the inevitability of Akakievich's fate, 'in order that the reader might see for himself that it happened quite as a case of necessity, and that it was utterly impossible to give him any other name' (ibid.). This is a large part of contemporary critics' 'flying "The Overcoat" as the "banner of the natural school"' (Maguire 2015: 183), in which individuals are presented as being more susceptible to external forces than they were in traditional realism: naturalism 'modified romantic realism by emptying it of moral content, making the individual choice […] more determined' and so 'good and evil were more pronounced, although narrative resolution, where "evil" often triumphed, made the distinction between the two virtually meaningless' (Lehan 2005: 34-5).

trickster (in 'The Night Before Christmas' he steals the moon to exact petty revenge on the blacksmith for completing an unflattering painting of him) to an ominous, lurking presence, evoked but never seen: as James Holquist writes, he is 'made to carry an increasingly heavy load of symbolic import' in Petersburg, 'a world in which the devil dons mufti' (Holquist 1967: 353). In Petersburg, where (as his 'Nevsky Prospect' (1835) concludes) 'the devil himself lights the lamps in order to show everything in an unreal light' (Gogol 1982: 186), rather than the meddlesome rogue of the Ukraine texts we find a figure at once more ethereal and more substantial, divested of his physical form, but recast as the shrouded embodiment of the principles of the Petersburg paradigm. As Holquist writes, 'shorn of his Halloween costume horns and tail, the demon is a creature who can be seen at one level as symbolising such mundane evils as overcrowding, social injustice, rampant bureaucracy, at another, as consummate evil, the devil himself' (Holquist 1967: 360). By structuring 'The Overcoat' in the format of the Faustian pact, Gogol achieves the marriage of the Petersburg paradigm with the devil thematic, and thereby secures the primary dynamic of the tale, which is between Akakievich and the governing Petersburg narrative.

Akakievich's journey towards the acquisition of his new overcoat is symbolic of his journey towards emancipation from the controlling narrative by which his life has hitherto been prescribed. The disruptive power of the overcoat is suggested at the moment of the proposed bargain which momentarily shocks Akakii out of a lifetime of submissive reticence: '"A hundred and fifty roubles for an overcoat!" shrieked poor Akakii Akakievich—shrieked perhaps for the first time in his life, for his voice had always been distinguished for its softness' (*TO* 86); once he has committed to the overcoat's purchase, the change is even more pronounced:

> his existence seemed to become, in some way, fuller […] He became more lively, and his character even became firmer, like that of a man who has made up his mind, and set himself a goal. From his face and gait, doubt and indecision—in short, all hesitating and wavering traits—disappeared of themselves. (ibid. 89)

Easily the most significant moment in the text in terms of Akakii's identity-formation comes as the advent of the overcoat approaches: the grip of the dominant narrative is shown to be loosening when 'once, in copying a letter, he nearly made a mistake, so that he exclaimed almost aloud, "Ugh!" and crossed himself' (89). Recall from the passage quoted above that in his lifetime as a copyist, 'he never made a single mistake in a letter': the power of the overcoat, even in prospect, weakens the structural bonds which confined Akakievich to his social position,

allowing him, or causing him, to deviate from the narrative which he previously obeyed so faithfully. Once the overcoat arrives, those bonds break altogether: on arriving at the office Akakievich finds that his former tormentors have become equals, as 'all rushed at the same moment into the ante-room, to inspect Akakii Akakievich's new coat. They began to congratulate him, and to say pleasant things to him' (91). That he has shaken the interiority of his identity as 'copyist' is confirmed when that evening he 'dined gaily, and after dinner wrote nothing, no papers even, but took his ease for a while on the bed, until it got dark' (ibid.) before leaving home for a party with his superiors and colleagues in the bright lights of central St Petersburg.

The reason for the incredible power the overcoat yields is that it represents an attempt by Akakievich to reinforce – or, given his former absolute capitulation to external narrative forces, to form – his own ego boundary (or Benjamin's 'casing'). As Susan Buck-Morss points out, 'clothing is quite literally at the borderline between subject and object, the individual and the cosmos. Its positioning surely accounts for its emblematic significance throughout history' (Buck-Morss 1990: 97). The coat makes material the conceptual boundary between self and other, interior and exterior, and therefore represents an act of rebellion against a system of structural control wherein independent thought is impermissible. For this rebellion, Akakievich is punished in three stages: first with the confiscation of the overcoat in the form of its theft by faceless criminals, whose accompanying admonition 'But of course the coat is mine!' (94) comes, surely, not from the criminals themselves, but from the dominant narrative. Next he is punished with death, which is really more of an erasure, since he has forsaken his copyist-identity and also lost his new overcoat-identity, and thus (not unlike Kafka's Samsa) cannot continue to exist. Akakievich's death is often interpreted, as Muireann Maguire does, as having 'a liberating effect' and causing 'restitutive, often transgressive, sometimes joyous renewal', in light of his spectral avenging crime spree: 'Akakii is literally dis-mantled by life's injustice. Fantastic realism, however, allows him a supernatural afterlife and an opportunity for effective revenge' (Maguire 2015: 192). Although there is evidence to support this (not least that the crime spree seems to cease once he has exacted revenge upon the 'prominent personage' who brutally refused his plea for help recovering the overcoat), I would argue that Akakievich's afterlife in fact represents the third and final stage of punishment, namely his reabsorption back into the dominant narrative as he becomes once again its agent, seizing others' overcoats,

destabilising their ego boundaries and undermining their attempts to defend an individual identity, as was done to him.

The idea of Akakievich as having descended into vengeful violence is, on the one hand, satisfying on a redemptive level in light of his former treatment at the hands of St Petersburg society, but it follows the line of Maguire's argument that 'in the Faustian formula, once […] man has exchanged his former state of contented deprivation for the advantage offered by the disguised Devil, his moral dissolution is assured' (Maguire 2015: 187), which suggests that the attempt to extract himself from a system of stifling social control represents a base, narcissistic greed; Dmitry Chizhevsky, similarly, argues that 'in saving up to get the overcoat, Akakii Akakievich sets out on the road of accumulation or acquisition, thereby becoming one of Gogol's "acquirer" types' (Chizhevsky 1976: 317), as though the desire for a warm coat represents the height of excessive avarice. These arguments fall foul of the trap that Gogol has laid for the reader in reframing the desires for individual autonomy and some degree of physical comfort as they are viewed by a tyrannical, inhumane authoritative narrative, which treats them as punishable pretensions unbefitting of a lowly citizen. Certainly there has been no suggestion within the text of a greedy, acquisitive attitude in Akakievich before, during or after the overcoat, and even in the face of the new status it affords him the text takes care to tell us that 'he began at first to smile, and then he grew ashamed', and that such is his embarrassment, he 'was on the point of assuring them with great simplicity that it was not a new coat' (*TO* 91). Chizhevsky was closer to the mark in writing that 'in the Petersburg stories, Gogol depicts people who are "losing themselves", giving themselves over to the power of the external world' (Chizhevsky 1976: 318); the more textually consistent reading would view Akakievich's downfall as the result of the clash between basic, ineluctable human needs, and a system of control which seeks to deny them.

Akakievich's tragedy is that the only means by which he can assure his physical survival is by attempting to navigate the world of commodity, the world of fashion, which, in Benjaminian terms, is where commodity directly assaults the physical boundary: as Buck-Morss explains,

> Benjamin opened up to philosophical understanding the phenomenon of fashion that is specific to capitalist modernity […] it embodies the changed relationship between subject and object that results from the 'new' nature of commodity production. In fashion, the phantasmagoria of commodities presses closest to the skin. (Buck-Morss 1990: 97)

In the Benjaminian framework, Akakievich's fate is that of the victim of modernity, on an unavoidable collision course with commodity culture, the same foe that slayed the *flâneur,* whose extinction was assured when his energies were diverted by the allure of department stores, 'the *flâneur's* final coup' (Benjamin 1999: 170). The distinction, of course, is that Akakievich is driven not by the attractions of consumerism, but by a simple self-preservatory instinct for physical warmth, which commodity culture has hijacked and corrupted. It is telling that the destructive force of commodity culture, which in Paris takes the form of the distracting splendour of the department store, is for Akakievich found in the apartment of the pock-marked, one-eyed tailor 'somewhere on the fourth floor up a dark staircase', where 'in cooking some fish [his wife] had raised such a smoke in the kitchen that not even the beetles were visible' (*TO* 84). Commodity culture is both a point of contact, and of extreme variance in the nineteenth century between Paris and Petersburg. In Paris it exists everywhere and exerts a lure which may prove impossible to resist, but in Petersburg it, like everything else, falls under the control of the master narrative, and thus functions as a trap. The dynamic of individual-to-state in Gogol's Petersburg is one where, under the reign of Nicholas I, the opulence and vigour of the city architecture clashed with a new doctrine of economic retardation in order to suppress any threat of dissent; for Berman it is this discord which is responsible for the unsettling climate under which 'Petersburg acquired a reputation, which it never lost, as a strange, weird spectral place […] Nicholas' politics – a politics of enforced backwardness in the midst and forms of enforced modernisation – made Petersburg the source and the inspiration for a distinctively weird form of modernism' (Berman 1988: 192-3).

A 'distinctively weird form of modernism' which amounted, in the case of Gogol's 'The Nose', to magical realism. In this text, Gogol utilises the same thematics of individual narratives in conflict with 'official' ones, but handles them using magical-realist technique, thus ensuring a very different outcome. It is widely remarked that 'The Nose' operates as a comment on the integrity of personal identity, in that it is frequently interpreted as a riff on the 'double' tradition exemplified by E.T.A. Hoffmann (Mochulsky 1973: 47; Peace 1981: 138-141; Spilka 1959: 291), in which the hero literally loses control of his own (personified) autonomy and identity, as the unfortunate Kovalyov of the story does of his 'double', his newly-emancipated nose. This is an important critical angle, especially in relation to city literature, since Gogol's specific contribution to the 'double' tradition (apart, of course, from making the 'double' a giant sword-wielding nose) was to migrate the setting to the urban environment in order to

turn the tale from a psychological tract to a social one, depicting 'the insignificant lives of office drudges […] to expose the squalor and banality of their existence' (Spilka 1959: 291). According to Mark Spilka, it was Gogol's work more than Hoffman's which inspired the text most famously associated with 'double' tradition, Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846) on precisely the grounds that he 'saw that doubles *belonged* in the urban environment which had produced them; that they were more at home, as it were, in flats and offices than in [Hoffman's] country inns and castles' (ibid.)*;* which trail of inheritance, significantly, leads directly to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (ibid. 290-2) (conceivably via Kubin's plague of doubles in Dream realm). Surely, though, another reason Gogol chose to take a literary tradition in which individuals lose control of their personal identity and transplant it to the city – specifically to Petersburg – was that this dramatic theme accorded so profitably with his perception of the Petersburg environment as one in which, as we learned from Akakievich's tragedy, such a loss of individual control – in Gogolian terms, narrative control – is a structurally-determined hazard. In 'The Nose', though, Gogol focuses equally on the individual narrative which is being endangered as on the authoritative narrative, the 'Petersburg narrative', which poses the threat; and using the techniques of magical realism, with its idiosyncratic refusal of traditional hegemonies, reverses the threat back onto that narrative, undermining the very concept of 'narrative authority'.

The city geography of Gogol's story is advertised upfront, as the opening line couches us firmly, and specifically, in reality: 'on March 25th there took place, in Petersburg, an extraordinarily strange occurrence' (Gogol 1992: 58; henceforth *TN*). Our grip on the terms of this reality as recognisable and predictable is allowed to last all of three paragraphs, until the barber Ivan Yakovlevich pulls a nose out of his breakfast roll. Like *The Metamorphosis,* 'The Nose' is an exemplar of the fact that magical realism's defining trademark is not the presence of 'extraordinarily strange occurrences' but their disconcerting reception within the narrative: Yakovlevich reacts appropriately enough – 'his face expressed horror' – but his wife's immediate recourse to anger and accusation leaves a glaring space where the more predictable reactions of disbelief and bewilderment should be:

> 'You beast, where did you cut off a nose?' she shouted angrily. 'Scoundrel! drunkard! I'll report you to the police myself. I've already heard from three people that you jerk their noses around so much when shaving that it's a wonder they stay in place.' (ibid. 59)

This is not only jarringly discordant, but has an injurious effect on our grasp of what kind of reality we are in here. The opening domestic scene is rendered mundanely enough, replete with smells of fresh bread and coffee which serve to anchor us in an unremarkable Petersburg family home; when Kovalyov discovers his missing nose, 'the major pinched himself so hard that he cried out. The pain he felt fully convinced him that he was wide awake' (70), a line which serves the same purpose as Kafka's 'it was no dream' in its intransigently definitive establishment of the realist ontology. However, the wife's instant acceptance of the nose situation, even her exasperation that it's 'a wonder' that Yakovlevich's clients' noses have hitherto stayed in place, suggests that the removal of the nose from its owner's face is a misdemeanour rather than a mystery, in a reality in which noses can quite easily be accidentally dislodged by barbers. This is compounded when Yakovlevich's 'horror' turns out to be at what he and his wife both seem to consider the imminent threat of his arrest, a peculiar fear 'that the police might find the nose in his possession and bring a charge against him' (ibid.). Even by the end of the first page, the logical perplexities are mind-bogglingly numerous (how the barber managed to remove the nose, which he identifies on sight as belonging to Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov; how its absence was not noted at the time by either party, or whether the removal was somehow deferred overnight; how it came to be baked into Yakovlevich's bread roll, etc.), but the greater assault on the reader is the mystifying symbolic weight that the nose accumulates as the text progresses, triggering eerily misplaced passions in everybody it encounters.

As noted in the previous chapter, assaults on realism are more effective when they take the form of a subversion of the probable, rather than the possible: the tonal friction between the two ontological states at play in magical realism is dependent on their both being sustained, and too-frequent excursions into the realm of the impossible jeopardise the 'realism' arm of the magical realism operation. As such, the subversions of our expectations in 'The Nose' largely emerge from the text's characters being, almost without exception, primarily concerned about the reputational damage that will supposedly result from association with the nose, and so the expected reactions to the fact of the vanished nose are displaced by the bizarre connotations of the criminal, scandalous or taboo which the nose accrues. We see this first with Yakovlevich and his wife, but it is felt most keenly by the unfortunate Kovalyov, enormously preoccupied with his social standing, hyper-aware of his status as a 'Caucasian' collegiate assessor (as opposed to a scholarly one), and whose first thought upon waking up to find his

nose missing is for his ambitious career and marriage prospects which he fears will be affected. His fears are compounded during his attempts to recover his nose by placing an advertisement in the newspaper, who will not publish an advert for the missing nose because 'the paper might lose its reputation' (67), and by reporting its loss to the district police inspector, who scathingly informs Kovalyov that 'no real gentleman would allow his nose to be pulled off' (69). Upon encountering the nose itself exiting a carriage on Nevsky Prospect, Kovalyov's expected confusion or relief are bypassed by intimidation, borne of the fact that his nose apparently outranks him: '"How am I to approach him?" thought Kovalyov. "From everything, from his uniform, from his hat, one can see that he is a state councillor"' (63). Even the nose itself is keenly invested in social rank, declaring when confronted by Kovalyov that 'there can be no close relation between us. Judging by the buttons on your uniform, you must be employed in the Senate or at least in the Ministry of Justice. As for me, I am in the scholarly line' (63).

The cumulative effect of these failures to treat the dislocation of the nose as a physical impossibility is that the event is reframed as not an impossible but an illegal one, and as such, 'The Nose' becomes a comment on the absurdity and insubstantiality of narratives of authority. The intra-textual conditions of the nose's behaviour as disobedient to social (and, it is implied, legal) regulations reflects (or refracts) the extra-textual situation, the reader's situation, of the nose's behaviour as disobedient to the rules of reality, which are treated as equally contingent, and the text's social comment is communicated via this transposition. To put it another way: the magical-realist effect of 'The Nose' is produced by the authority of social and political rule within the text trumping the authority of the rules of reality via which the reader navigates their expectations of the text, and in the face of this reversal of authority, the very idea of 'authoritative' narratives via which such navigation can be attempted is nullified.

These inter-textual 'authoritative' narratives in 'The Nose' (i.e. the social and political ones) should be understood in relation to the backdrop of authority from which they emerged, i.e. the reign of Nicholas I, which spanned the whole of Gogol's adult life. The absolute determining feature of Nicholas' reign was his establishment of the 'supreme police', a riotously corrupt and repressive political enforcement unit controlled by the 'Third Section', established in the wake of the 1825 Decembrist revolt in order to suppress any potential for further revolutionary activity. Nicholas' rule was characterised by secret surveillance, secret trials, censorship and brutality, and distinguished by the 'Corps of Gendarmes', the associated military force, essentially his grand-scale band of personal henchmen, 'agents of the tsar,

explicitly charged to act according to their conscience rather than formal law' (Semukhina and Reynolds 2013: 8). In other words, Gogol's Russia was an archetypal police state, governed by no reliable coda, and some of the text's apparent absurdities – Yakovlevich's fear of arrest for a crime as obscure as being in possession of someone else's nose, and then interrogated for standing on a bridge – may actually be a more accurate representation of Gogol's reality than a modern reader might assume. As has been established – repeatedly by now – the agenda of magical-realist technique is always to expose and comment on the nature of some aspect of reality. That Gogol's agenda is the exposure of the absurdities of administered society is a well-recognised feature of the text: as Wendy Faris writes, 'the bureaucratic red tape that Gogol's man in "The Nose" encounters in his attempts to report the loss of his nose seems more outrageous than the magical disappearance of the nose itself' (Faris 2004: 12). Whilst this is undoubtedly true, I would suggest that on a more fundamental level, 'The Nose''s assault on the assumptions of realism reflects the frighteningly slipshod, slippery and inconsistent notion of 'authority' which prevailed in Nicholas' Petersburg, and what happens to those under its rule.

'The Nose' treats the rules of 'reality' as if they are as tenuous and capricious as those via which the police state is governed, with the character of the nose standing as the ultimate challenge to both doctrines: in society he immediately assumes the position of a state councillor, making a mockery of the social hierarchy that Kovalyov was so preoccupied with ascending, and in the text he makes mincemeat of our assumptions about the laws by which reality is governed by becoming a being who literally cannot be contained within them. If Kafka's metamorph resisted conceptual fixity, Gogol's nose is an uncompromisingly audacious impossibility:

> A carriage drew up to the entrance; the doors opened; a gentleman in uniform jumped out, slightly stooping, and ran up the stairs. Imagine the horror and at the same time the amazement of Kovalyov when he recognised that it was his own nose! […] He looked right and left, shouted to his driver 'Bring the carriage round,' got in and was driven off. (*TN* 62)

The text deliberately withholds any physical explanation of how the nose is walking, talking, wearing clothes and carrying a sword. Presumably it has grown to colossal proportions and sprouted limbs; this is the only way which we can visualise a walking, talking, fully-dressed nose and is how most illustrations to the text have dealt with the problem (see Appendix II). However, clearly Gogol, like Kafka, was determined to prevent us from being able to conjure

any kind of image of the nose. When the nose is finally returned to its owner, it is brought by a police officer who 'reached into his pocket and pulled out a nose wrapped up in a piece of paper' (ibid. 71). The police officer provides no explanation for how the nose came to be returned to its normal size and lose the powers of speech and movement, explaining only that

> he [the nose] was intercepted on the point of leaving town. [...] he even had a passport made out a long time ago in the name of a certain civil servant. Strangely enough, I also at first took him for a gentleman. But fortunately I had my glasses with me and I saw at once that it was a nose. (ibid.)

This explanation inevitably raises more questions than it answers: as the nose has only been free of its owner for a single day, how could it have had a passport made out 'a long time ago'? Kovalyov's earlier interaction with his nose cannot be explained as any kind of hallucination, as its human guise is corroborated by the police officer. In any case, the very fact that the reader is led to a position of trying to extract from the text a logical explanation for the illogical behaviour of a nose which has mysteriously vanished from its owner's face and adopted for itself a senior political position is testament to Gogol's superb execution of magical-realist technique in balancing the measures of the plausible, probable and possible. The characteristic indeterminacy of magical realism is exemplified in the figure of the nose, as the magical and the real wrestle for a compromise but each persistently negates the other, and the problem proves insoluble.

Gogol's masterstroke was to reproduce his critique of political authority within the narrative voice itself. That the narrative's 'explanations' for the text's events (first in the pseudo-linear concatenation detailing the barber's role in its dislocation, and then in the account of its capture and return) serve in the end to further obscure rather than illuminate the problems it poses is a diabolically clever meta-textual strategy that belies the assumed authority of the narrative voice. As suggested above, the 'realism' half of the text's technique is sustained by scrupulous conformity to the traditional features of literary realism: the text is located definitively within space and time; the characters' movements are infused with topographical specificity; the characters themselves are given full names, ranks and professions; and the social hierarchy within which they are situated is not only tangibly present in the text but positively accentuated for comic effect. However, instead of the expected omniscient narrator, we find the authority of the narrative voice, the vehicle via which this wealth of plausible data is conveyed, undermined at the end of Part I which sees Yakovlevich

confronted by a police officer on the St Isaac's bridge, '…But here the whole episode becomes shrouded in mist, and of what happened subsequently absolutely nothing is known' (60). This lapse in narrative authority is the same technique noted earlier in 'The Overcoat', but used to a different end: whereas in 'The Overcoat' the narrative impotency was used to signal and parallel the throttling grip of the socio-political narrative dictating its hero's fate, in 'The Nose' the narrative voice slithers in and out of a position of omniscience, performing continual about-turns to resist attempts by the reader to grasp its position in relation to the events it describes. This elusiveness reaches its crescendo at the very end of the text, when the narrative voice in one single passage seems to be occupying, all at once, the position of the reader, interrogating the events of the text; the psychology of an inter-textual figure, still failing to grasp the correct (or 'correct') placement of 'extraordinary' and 'inexplicable'; the writer who has invented these events; and finally, once again the voice of assumptive authority, the very concept of which by now has been enfeebled to the point of absurdity:

> This is the kind of affair that happened in the northern capital of our vast empire. Only now, on second thoughts, can we see that there is much that is improbable in it. […] how is it that Kovalyov did not realise that one does not advertise for one's nose through the newspaper office? […] And then again – how did the nose come to be in a newly baked loaf, and how about Ivan Yakovlevich? […] But the strangest, the most incomprehensible thing of all, is how authors can choose such subjects. […] But all the same, when you think about it, there really is something in all this. Whatever anyone says, such things happen in this world; rarely, but they do. (78)

This narrative technique is known in Russian as *skaz*, denoting 'all those narrative devices that call attention to the fictionality of the tale told, by means of persistently foregrounding the inventiveness of the teller' (Hyde 1977: 149). Gogol not only highlights the mutability of the narrative's authority, but by having it descend into a polyphonic clatter of competing, overlapping voices (in a manner which, it should be noted, is startlingly, radically modern, replete with the broken-off sentences and discontinuities, seeming to anticipate the stream-of-consciousness style which the vanguard of European modernist writers wouldn't develop until the next century) he raises a question mark over the very nature of authoritative narratives. The mounting of a counterhegemonic force used to resist politically or socially dominant narratives is a well-documented motivation for the employment of magical-realist technique (especially, of course, in the postcolonial context), and the conditions of nineteenth-century St

Petersburg, where 'everything breathes deceit […] it lies all the time, this Nevsky Prospect' (Gogol 1982: 185), offer ample justification for resistance.

III.iii. *'A creeping, clamouring; a miscellany of voices':* Narrative Control in Twentieth-Century Petersburg

Gogol's evocation of Petersburg was so quintessential as to prevail into the twentieth century, when the city, as noted earlier, had undergone significant changes: as Nabokov writes, Gogol 'stressed the strangeness in such a vivid and unforgettable manner that Blok's poems and Bely's novel *Petersburg* – which belong to the dawn of this century – seem rather to develop Gogol's town than to create new images of its mystery' (Nabokov 1961: 11). The Petersburg paradigm developed to reflect the changed social landscape, and the representation of the threat of the individual evolved with it, so that in twentieth-century literature it no longer takes the form of overcoats snatched under the cover of darkness, but comes to more closely resemble the hazards of the Paris paradigm. The threat of being 'swallowed up', 'devoured' by the sphinx-like crowd which was expressed in Simmel, Marcuse and Le Bon, or 'absorbed by the outside world', becoming 'no longer a human being' but 'part of the public' like the *badaud*, arrives in Petersburg in the twentieth century, and is vividly evoked in Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* where we find again a sinister, faceless multitude of urban citizens. Bely conceives of the fungibility of the crowd in Petersburg in far more explicit terms than any of the Parisian texts, with the arresting image of a 'myriapod', a many-legged mass that occupies Nevsky prospect, and threatens to suck even the casual passer-by inexorably into its 'black porridge of humanity' (Bely 2009: 343):

> Shoulders flowed by, shoulders and shoulders; all together, the shoulders formed a pitch-black porridge; all the shoulders formed a slow-flowing porridge of extreme viscosity; and Alexandr Ivanovich's shoulder immediately became attached to that porridge; stuck to it, you might say; and Alexandr Ivanovich Dudkin followed that self-willed shoulder, in accordance with the law of the indivisible wholeness of bodies […] he was compressed like a single grain into the porridge that flowed with blackness. […] In just the same way the bodies of individuals who emerge on to the pavement are transformed on Nevskii Prospect into the organs of a communal body. (ibid. 342-3)

Clare Gheerardyn compares the twentieth-century Petersburg experience directly to the Parisian, perceiving the perils of Petersburg as the same that troubled the *flâneur*, but clarifying

that 'the Petersburgian *flâneur* is not the city's lover but the city's victim. St Petersburg, both a weapon and a disease, surrounds the *flâneur*, infecting and invading his porous body' (Gheerardyn 2014: 207).

As in Paris, where Benjamin detected poignant conceptual negotiations fermenting in the threshold space of the city arcades, relating city architecture directly to the psychic space, Bely's twentieth-century Petersburg is a place of boundary-denial, both conceptual and physical, frequently focalising boundaries, and especially their insubstantiality. Peter Barta writes that in their walks around the city, the text's characters 'constantly encounter boundaries and the possibility of crossing them' (Barta 1996: 42) and points out the prominence of bridges in the text, suggesting that their frequent traversals 'symbolise [a] restless movement between two ideologically divided worlds' (ibid. 43); bridges are the transfluvial equivalent of the Paris arcades, underscoring the threshold-creating nature of the modern city and threshold-occupying nature of the *flâneur* who explores it, but also that boundaries (even those as imposing as the Neva river, 1,250m at its widest point) *become* passable in the urban environment, which opens up routes of transit not available in the natural world. The border between interior and exterior is shown to be especially unstable, particularly in the presence of the usurping myriapod:

> This stream now simply pressed itself up against the senator's carriage, destroying the illusion that he, Apollon Apollonovich, as he flew along the Nevskii, was flying at a distance of billions of versts from that human myriapod which was trampling the selfsame Prospect: disconcerted, Apollon Apollonovich moved right up to the windows of the carriage, and saw that he was separated from the crowd by no more than a thin wall and a four-inch space. (Bely 2009: 33)

Petersburg was famously characterised by Pushkin as having 'cut through a window to the west' (Pushkin 1998: 60) which image, as Barta writes, 'has violent implications […] the window destroys privacy and intimacy by letting outsiders see what is happening inside' (Barta 1996: 43). This invasion of privacy pervades the whole of Bely's city, with repeated focalisations of doors and windows as sites of unwelcome transgression, doors through which 'the *invisible* thronged in' (Bely 2009: 51) and windows through which 'the sun was staring in' (ibid. 311). Petersburg is a city where even 'the illusion' of the public-private boundary has been shattered, and 'in an environment like this, it makes no difference whether one is inside walls or outside in the street' (Barta 1996: 44).

Whilst the perils of the Petersburg paradigm came into closer alignment with those of its Parisian counterpart in the twentieth century, the urban experience remained singularly Petersburgian, shaped by a very different socio-political ideology. The abolition of the private realm in the twentieth-century Russian city is well-documented: Bely's depiction of insubstantial or illusory boundaries between interior and exterior anticipates the challenge to privacy posed by the Soviet ideology, of which in 1928 Benjamin concluded, 'Bolshevism has abolished private life. The bureaucracy, political activity, the press are so powerful that no time remains for interests that do not converge with them. Nor any space' (Benjamin 1979: 187). Benjamin here identifies the two destructive forces which converged in a pincer attack on the Soviet citizen's privacy: ideology and space, which, like all pincer jaws, ultimately share a common origin. The private realm as a cultural ideal had been under attack since the early days of Socialism – Marx expressed in 1843 the hopes of 'liquidating the autonomy of the private sector and making civil existence inessential by contrast to political existence', in what Andrzej Walicki calls 'a kind of democratic totalitarianism' (Walicki 1983: 52) – but the physical abolition of the private sphere was all but assured under the Soviet housing policy. The ideology which led to mass industrialisation and collectivisation, and so to the enormous population increase in Russian cities, was part and parcel of the same ideology which abolished private property ownership and under which 'the home was conceived of as part of the public sphere and, as such, open to any intrusion by the State' (Gerasimova 2002: 209); the result of these two factors was the *kommunalka* (communal apartment) in which each family occupied a single room and shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. The *kommunalka* both responded to increasingly chronic overcrowding in Soviet cities (in 1926 per capita living space in Moscow was 5.7 square metres, and by 1956 it had dropped to 4.8; the corresponding figures for Minsk were 5.9 and 4.1 (see Porter 1999: 477)) and also represented 'an attempt to practise utopian ideologies' (Boym 1996: 265), serving 'the state's utopian expectation that communal housing would induce collective behaviour' (Singleton 1997: 36).[62] [63]

[62] That the communal apartment was introduced as an ideological as well as political expedient is a widely-held but not uncontested view: Frank Trentmann objects that 'the communal apartment was a product of socialist ideology only in the sense that it was part of a confiscatory and discriminatory approach to bourgeois property. Contrary to the impressions of many later observers, it was not officially regarded as an experiment in collective living' (Trentmann 2012: 453). Of course, the *kommunalka's* reflection of Soviet ideology stands irrespective of whether or not its rise was officially motivated by the ideology's desiderata.

It should come as no surprise that the *kommunalka*, the site upon which fundamental and intuitive boundaries are attacked, should have been explored by Bulgakov using the techniques of magical realism. Yuri Lotman writes of Bulgakov that 'the symbolism of the opposition "home/anti-home" is one of the organising ideas of all his writings' (Lotman 1990: 185), drawing on the cultural tradition of the 'important opposition […] of "home" to "forest" ("home" being the place which is one's own, a place of safety […] while "forest" is somewhere alien, where the Devil dwells, a place of temporary death)' (ibid.). This observation relates particularly to Bulgakov's most famous city text, *The Master and Margarita* (written 1928-1940), set in a realistically-drawn, geographically-accurate Moscow in which all dependent linearity and continuity collapses under the disruptive interferences of the devil (Gogol's influence here is clear), who sets up residence in the guise of 'professor' Woland, 'a specialist in black magic' (Bulgakov 2010: 12, henceforth *MM*). The *kommunalka* operates in this text as a richly polysemic space laden with social and political commentary: the principal location of the text's Moscow sections is the communal apartment at 50 Sadovaya St, where (cf. Lotman) the 'devil' *literally* dwells once it is requisitioned by Woland and his retinue; and the housing crisis is cited as responsible for the moral degradation in the people of Moscow, of whom Woland declares 'on the whole, they remind me of their predecessors… only the housing shortage has had a bad effect on them' (ibid. 105). The 'home/anti-home' topoi accommodates the Benjaminian construct of the private realm under attack from commodity culture in that, as Amy Singleton writes, 'the intangible "home" relationship between the dweller and the dwelling place breaks down when housing is regarded as a certain measured quantity of "floor space" […] The resulting living space does not represent the intangible qualities of the cultural self but merely a material asset – a commodity' (Singleton 1997: 120); it also, though, directly incorporates the Gogolian schematic in which the 'private sphere' is configured in terms of individual narrative, with 'home' standing for 'subjective interior', and thus 'homelessness' representing a lack of interiority: we see this in the character Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyryov who goes by the pen name Bezdomny (literally 'Homeless') who, as Daniel Vyleta writes, 'shows

[63] It is interesting to note that as the conditions in Petersburg came to more closely resemble those experienced by the Paris *bourgeoisie*, behaviours noted by Benjamin were replicated in the inhabitants of the '*Khrushchyovka*', the Khrushchev-era high rises which gradually replaced the *kommunalka* from the 1960s: where Benjamin noted in *bourgeois* Paris apartments a defensive fixation with the interior 'to compensate itself for the inconsequential nature of private life' and so 'seeks such compensation within its four walls' (Benjamin 1999: 46), Amy Singleton observes that 'to combat the standardisation and coldness of housing, apartment-dwellers cram their living space by overfurnishing rooms, hanging the walls with rugs, and displaying knick-knacks on any available surface' (Singleton 1997: 39).

signs of […] having internalized the official political language to such a degree that he no longer commands any other conceptual vocabulary which would allow for a genuinely private sphere of liberal, self-interested subjectivity' (Vyleta 2000: 40) (in which respect, again, we find echoes of Gogol's Akakievich). The *kommunalka* thus operates 'like a vast symbol' in the text's moral landscape, 'a synonym for something sinister and above all for denunciation' (Lotman 1990: 188), and so 'the communal flat is the centre of an abnormal world' (ibid. 186).

'Abnormal world' is right: under Woland's ministrations we encounter a giant talking cat, an unoccupied suit who speaks, writes memos and answers the phone, spontaneously disappearing clothes, magically-transfiguring ten-rouble notes, disembodied talking heads, and much more, all whilst retaining a firm grasp on the phenomenal world of these manifestations. It is this combination of magical and veridical that have made *The Master and Margarita* one of the only Russian texts to be even glancingly acknowledged within magical-realist scholarship: I cited in an earlier chapter mentions by Amaryll Chanady and Christopher Warnes, and in a more recent study, Michael Rodgers has treated Bulgakov's text to a whole three sentences, classifying it decisively as magical realism on the basis that it

> includes numerous passages of logical, realist narration to describe anti-realist events […] The novel's pre-empting of magical-realist traits (an 'irreducible element' of magic, matter-of-fact narration, and a strong presence of the phenomenal world) act to harpoon Soviet oppression and critique the idea that change is unfeasible. (Rodgers 2015: 6)

The same juxtaposition is frequently noted by critics who don't use the words 'magical realism' but describe the text in much the same language, such as Nicholas Rzhevsky who remarks that Bulgakov

> [makes] the supernatural real and the real unnatural. The falsity, grotesqueness, and impermanence of the everyday world organized by conventional notions of space and time is indicated by juxtaposition with fantasy and with the moral and epistemological validity of aesthetic vision. (Rzhevsky 1987: 321)

Like Gogol, Bulgakov uses the presence of opposing codes to comment on narratives of authority, of which he positions the *kommunalka,* where opposite values collide, at the centre. The communal apartment in *Master* is a place not where people live, but where they disappear or die: when we first encounter 50 Sadovaya St (in the chapter entitled 'The Evil Apartment'), we learn in the space of one and a half pages of the disappearance of seven characters, and by

the end of the chapter have witnessed the disappearance of an eighth (who is magically exiled to Yalta). Being 'disappeared' would have been a highly recognisable dread of those living under Stalinist terror, of which Woland becomes symbolic, bolstering an interpretation of the text as a critique of authority (thinly) veiled in the magical-realist aesthetic.

However, despite some evidence of magical-realist-adjacent technique in *The Master and Margarita*, it is not a true work of magical realism because it does not display any element of discontinuity. The presence of the supernaturally-empowered Woland eases the friction between the 'real' and the 'magical' by providing a bridge between them and so dissolving the opposition of ontological codes, which in magical realism is not just established but, crucially, *sustained*. Once we accept that the devil has arrived in Moscow and begun to cause chaos using his supernatural abilities, the potential shock of each individual magical event is absorbed by that initial acceptance, creating a marvellous structure within which magical events are internally justified, rather than a magical-realist one which actively resists such accommodation. The magical events exhibit rigorous internal logical consistency: Woland's purpose in Moscow seems to be to expose and punish the greed, selfishness and materialism of 1920s Muscovites, and so the magical events carry a hefty allegorical weight. I argued in the previous chapter that the effect of *The Metamorphosis* depends upon the discontinuous nature of Gregor's transformation, which would achieve an entirely different register if the metamorphosis were assimilated into an explanatory narrative framework (a witch's curse, for instance) or if even a clear semiotic passage between Gregor and metamorph could be detected. In *Master*, the materialistic audience at Woland's stage show receive expensive Parisian clothing, which later disappears from their bodies, 'victimised by [their] own frivolity and […] mania for clothes' (*MM* 126-7); they are sent into a frenzy when it rains ten-rouble notes, which later turn into bees, scraps of paper, and labels from mineral water bottles (ibid. 157); the last words spoken by the man who previously occupied what becomes the uninhabited suit are 'the devil take me!' to which Behemoth (Woland's giant talking cat) responds 'That can be arranged!' whereupon the man promptly vanishes from his suit (159). These are fairy-tale punishments which, although magical in nature, do not deviate from an easily-grasped structure: they happen because Woland *et al* make them happen, and Woland *et al* make them happen to punish immediately-precedent shortcomings. Although they are not an expected or recognisable feature of our extra-textual reality, the inter-textual reality expands with very little friction to accommodate them. The ontological structure of reality is

not queried or aggravated, but painlessly reconfigured. Compare these magical events to those found in *The Other Side*, which are also presented as the retributory actions of a supernaturally-empowered figure (one whose own reality-status is far more ambiguous), but which display nothing like the linearity of Woland's, and the cardinal importance of narrative discontinuity in demarcating magical realism from works of the marvellous mode becomes clear.

A better example of magical realism from Bulgakov, and particularly of a magical-realist treatment of the private 'sphere', is *The Heart of a Dog.* Like *Master* it foregrounds the housing crisis throughout, although here the theme is yet more strongly asserted: the vast majority of the text's action takes place in the apartment of the wealthy surgeon Preobrazhensky, who repeatedly battles with the housing committee who have moved extra tenants into all the flats in the building except his, a fate which he wards off by wielding his social status and influence in order to resist their attempted intrusions. The theoretical construct of the private realm under attack from outside forces – specifically those exerted by Soviet policy – is made explicit in this struggle, which finds its particular target in the practice of *uplotnenie* ('packing'), that is, the redistribution of room function in order to reduce space allocation: Preobrazhensky sarcastically asks if he must 'eat in the bedroom […] read in the consulting room, dress in the hall, operate in the maid's room and examine patients in the dining room' (Bulgakov 2009: 30; henceforth *HD*). In this text the 'private / public' construct is ideologically twinned with 'civilised / uncivilised' (evocative of the Russian 'home / forest' paradigm): the boundary of the apartment marks the besieged walls of a fortress protecting old-fashioned domestic values, as 'Professor Preobrazhensky's insistence on the observation of the social graces of prerevolutionary culture within the walls of his apartment transforms his home into […] "a little island in a dark, stormy sea" of proletarian indecency' (Singleton 1997: 131). The text's great wheeze is that Preobrazhensky, hoisted by his own petard, creates his own worst, and unevictable, nightmare tenant when he experimentally transplants the testicles and pituitary gland of a recently-deceased man into his stray foundling Sharik, resulting in the bawdy, flea-ridden, alcoholic, Engels-spouting (self-styled) Poligraph Poliographovich Sharikov, a literally uncivilised being.

The Heart of a Dog's magical events, unlike those of *Master*, resist assimilation into an internally-coherent textual reality structure precisely for their 'explanations' residing (purportedly) in the realm of the 'real': once again, we see that the improbable poses a far greater threat to 'reality' than the impossible. This text is science-fictive in nature only insofar

as its magical dog-man hybrid is presented to the reader as the result of a scientific experiment, but resembles later post-Soviet works of magical realism which, as Alexander Etkind writes, had 'little in common with "science fiction" even in the broadest understanding of this term […] these narratives are not concerned with knowledge or technology' (Etkind 2009: 651).[64] What 'science' there is in the text is continually engulfed by the bureaucratic or by the magical: in fact, Bruce Shaw comments that '*The Heart of a Dog* has fantastic elements in keeping with science fiction, but they are interwoven with realism. The present-day expression "magical realism" seems appropriate' (Shaw 2010: 124). This engulfment is best demonstrated in the fourth chapter, comprising the notes of Doctor Bormenthal (Preobrazhensky's assistant) on Sharik's metamorphosis into Sharikov: this section is a superb test-case of Michael Wood's description of magical realism's *modus operandi* in which 'the reporters are sober while reality is drunk', formatted and presented as scientific reportage even as it descends rapidly from recording temperature, pupillary reaction, weight and medication administered, into describing the miraculous accumulation of human characteristics in the dog subject:

> *December 31st:* Subject exhibits colossal appetite […]
> at 12:12 the dog distinctly pronounced the sounds 'Nes-set-a.' […]
> Dog laughed, causing maid Zina to faint. Later, pronounced the following 8 times in succession: 'Nesseta-ciled'. […]
> The professor has deciphered the word 'Nesseta-ciled' by reversal: it is 'delicatessen'… Quite extraord…
> *January 2nd:* Dog photographed by magnesium flash while smiling. Got up and remained confidently on hind legs for a half-hour.
> Heard to ask for 'another one, and make it a double'. (*HD* 61-2)

And so on. Sharikov's incipient individual narrative immediately disturbs the orderly nature of Bormenthal's notes, evidenced when he repeatedly blots the page and confuses the date, and the aposiopesis marks the exact moment at which the scientific narrative loses its dominance, is literally silenced in the face of the magical, which also strikes down its spokesperson when

[64] Etkind actually uses the term 'magical historicism' for the post-Soviet works rather than 'magical realism', on the basis that they are 'self-consciously distanced from the traditions of the realist novel that are critical to magical realism', i.e. they are 'realist in material and magical in style' and do not 'emulate social reality' (Etkind 2009: 654). According to Etkind, instead what the post-Soviet work 'emulates, and struggles with, is history' (ibid. 654), implying that to deal with matters of history is automatically to not be dealing with matters of reality. I find this distinction virtually meaningless: it seems to me to amount to the same agenda of exposing the inherent 'magic' in 'reality' by reversing the expectations of representation, and I am yet to be convinced that 'history' is as distinct a concept from 'reality' as Etkind treats it. His insistence on this distinction conceives in too narrow terms the dynamic ways in which the 'realism' arm of magical realism has made itself known in the genre's ancestry. Moreover, since magical realism has always employed opposing ontological codes in order to suggest their proximity, rather than their disparity, what Etkind finds 'ironic' in the fact that 'magical historicism shares a belief in the explanatory power of the past with rational versions of historicism' (ibid. 655) is a mystery to me.

directly afterwards 'Preobrazhensky falls into deep faint. On falling, strikes head on edge of table' (ibid. 61). The magical overcomes the mundane, but at the same time, the reverse occurs: in magical realism, antithetical codes are invoked in order to achieve mutual exposure, and Bulgakov creates the un/civilised creature Sharikov in order to expose the uncivilised nature of Soviet civil policy as, in typical magical-realist fashion, 'bureaucracy overwrites miracle' (Maguire 2015: 186). Sharikov is the embodiment, the living consequence of narrative collision, the magical result of scientific exploit, and so whilst he is present in the text he sustains both sides of the conflict, preventing the narrative from resolving back into an orderly scientific 'civilised' one, or flying off into a magical one. Whilst he remains, the narrative remains – must remain – magical-realist.

The resulting text encompasses and reflects the uncivilised absurdity not just of the housing crisis, but of Soviet life in general: Sharikov demands official documents in order to be able to navigate the bureaucratic system because 'you know yourself a person without a document is strictly forbidden to exist' (*HD* 75). He eventually gets a job with the pest control department as a professional cat-strangler (115), and when he expresses disinclination to join the military reserve he is asked 'are you an anarchist-individualist?' (80). We are in familiar territory here: like Gogol before him, Bulgakov wields the prototypical magical-realist mechanism of introducing magical elements into his text in order to comment on the realistic setting it otherwise inhabits, a conclusion Yvonne Howell also reaches (although of course without using the words 'magical realism') when she suggests that '*The Heart of a Dog* continually resists being relegated to the farcical and fantastical realm of allegory. Instead, the science fictional layer of the novel is coextensive with the very real world of scientific debates that occupied intellectuals, health officials, and policymakers in NEP-era Moscow' (Howell 2006: 558). As Irina Shilova similarly remarks, Bulgakov 'wanted to demonstrate that in his novella the fantastic event of a transformation is not, in fact, fantastic […] Moreover, it is real life in the new socialist state that is fantastic' (Shilova 2005: 117).

Magical realism is produced by the sustained presence of two ontologically-opposed narratives – in this case specifically scientific and magical – in uncompromising concurrence, and Bulgakov, like Gogol before him, exploits the technique of dual narrative framework to fundamentally disturb the structures of authority he identifies within the conditions of the Petersburg paradigm. Like *The Metamorphosis*, Bulgakov's text announces its treatment of narrative authority in the opening passages, but rather than Kafka's quick-changes between

two ontologies to announce the magical-realist treatment of events that will prevail, Bulgakov employs the Gogolian technique of blending the narrative registers so deftly that the concept of narrative authority slithers continually out of the reader's grasp. The text opens with an incoherent howl ('Ooow-ow-ooow-owow!' *(HD* 5)) announcing the first-person voice of the wounded dog Sharik, whose train of thought we follow for some four paragraphs, when the narrative voice experiences an abrupt shift:

> My side hurts like hell and I can see just what's going to become of me […] I shall get a chill on my lungs, crawl on my belly till I'm so weak that it'll only need one poke of somebody's stick to finish me off. And the dustmen will pick me up by the legs and sling me on to their cart… Dustmen are the lowest form of proletarian life. Humans' rubbish is the filthiest stuff there is. Cooks vary – for instance, there was Vlas from Prechistenka, who's dead now. (ibid. 5-6)

This appears plainly as a transfer from a dog's inner monologue to an omniscient narrative voice, and not just in tone: the next paragraph, observing a typist, goes on:

> A typist on salary scale 9 gets 60 roubles a month […] it's agony for her to have to choose a meal […] Anyhow, is it the right sort of food for her? She's got a patch on her right lung, she's having her period, she's had her pay docked at work and they feed her any old muck at the canteen, poor girl… (7)

The wealth of intimate, personal and technical detail to which the voice is privy means we cannot, surely, be hearing the thoughts of a stray dog; and yet, the ruminations on the typist conclude, 'I feel sorry for her, poor thing. But I feel a lot sorrier for myself. […] Where can I go? Oowow-owow!' (8). No sooner have we recovered from this revelation than the omniscient narrative voice creeps up and reveals itself after all: 'On the street the violent storm spun her like a top […] But the dog stayed in the doorway' (ibid.). As in 'The Nose', this treatment has the effect of undermining the concept of 'authority' at narrative level, which effect then informs and cascades through the negotiations of narrative authority that the text subsequently enacts.

The tussle for narrative authority converges on the 'private sphere' of the home with the struggles of Preobrazhensky, who rails to protect his apartment from the attempted invasions that constitute a persistent feature of the twentieth-century Petersburg paradigm. To begin with, the apartment clearly represents his personal sphere of considerable influence, and what may be called the 'apartment narrative' is under his strict control: he not only manages to vanquish the housing committee from his operating room, where they assemble with a threat to 'lodge a complaint about you with higher authority', which he dispels with a well-placed

telephone call to an even higher one (30-2), but is seen exhibiting positively god-like power over the patients he treats there: his speciality is in sexually 'rejuvenating' experimental procedures, with wildly unorthodox methods such as implanting monkey ovaries in a female patient (25). In keeping with the apartment as a space garrisoned from the uncivilised Soviet values which seek to invade and destabilise, Preobrazhensky advertises the primacy of his refined, epicurean values with his narrative leitmotif, the repeated interjections in speech of lines from classical opera ('to the banks of the sacred Nile…' and 'from Granada to Seville…', from Verdi's *Aida* and Tchaikovsky's setting of Tolstoy's *Don Juan*, respectively). With the arrival of Sharikov, though, the protective shell ('casing') of the apartment immediately cracks. First the news of the miraculous consequences of the operation seeps out in spite of his and Bormenthal's best efforts to contain it, and then the outside world begins to seep in: 'today the whole street was full of rubberneckers and old women… Dogs still crowding round beneath the windows […] After I had kicked out all the reporters one of them sneaked back into the kitchen' (63). Sharikov has opened the floodgates (almost literally in one climactic scene, when he floods the bathroom in pursuit of a cat posted through the window by an old woman, who breaks in 'to have a look at the talking dog' (82)) and the ensuing deluge dilutes Preobrazhensky's control. This is made clear in the text's fifth chapter, the beginning of the Sharikov-half of the text, which opens with the image of a piece of paper covered in notes from all the apartment's inhabitants, demonstrating that it has become a polyvocal space, no longer controlled by one master voice:

> *I forbid the consumption of sunflower seeds in this flat.*
> *P. Preobrazhensky*
> Below this […] Bormenthal had written:
> *Musical instruments must not be played between 7am and 5pm.*
> Then, from Zina,
> *When you come back tell Philip Philipovich that he's gone out and I don't know where to.* (70)

Preobrazhensky's iron grip on his private narrative, the 'apartment narrative' is failing. His repeatedly turning away patients represents a diminishing sphere of influence, and his compromised narrative control is reflected in his spoken narrative, when his operatic interjections escalate into deranged frequency, at one point interrupting his speech five times in as many pages (104-9), destabilising his formerly formidable verbal coherence and taking on a desperate, almost incantation-like quality.

The more profound narrative journey, though, is undertaken by Sharikov. Although hardly sophisticated in character, Sharik's dog-narrative is a surprisingly individuated one: he is literate ('why bother to learn to read when you can smell meat a mile away? If you live in Moscow, though, and if you've got an ounce of brain in your head you can't help learning to read' (15)), opinionated, and exhibits astute social comprehension and commentary. This voice, though, is forcibly silenced by Preobrazhensky's operation as that of the dead man Klim (the former owner of Sharikov's pituitary gland and testicles) begins to take over. This process is clearly delineated, as Sharikov's metamorphosis is tracked by Bormenthal primarily in terms of his verbal development: his first word, 'delicatessen', may be from his dog-mind, but every subsequent addition – 'bloody bastards', then 'liquor', 'every known Russian swear word' (62), 'I'll show you', 'American recognition', 'kerosene stove' (65) – is clearly an invader from Klim's consciousness. It is perhaps by virtue of being a hybrid creature, a margin-dweller, that he is able to succeed where the housing committee failed in shattering the boundary of Preobrazhensky's private domain and compromising his univocal control, and so the solution, as was the case with Samsa, is to resolve his hybridity back into a single entity, by transplanting his own organs back into him so that he devolves back into Sharik. The process is not reversed without a trace though, as the spirited, savvy voice with which the text opened has been subdued: 'I've been very, very lucky. Incredibly lucky. […] Certainly they cut my head around a bit, but who cares. None of my business really' (128). We have learned from Kafka's Samsa what happens when a controlling hand confiscates one half of a hybrid creature. The re-doggified Sharik is a pathetic, defused, complacent being, robbed of any individual narrative; even his name, the self-adoption of which was a powerful announcement of his burgeoning independence, is snatched like Akakievich's overcoat, leaving him as empty as beetle-Samsa's husk, and finally, perhaps, in the most perverse possible sense, 'civilised'.

Magical realism evokes antitheses only to trouble them. *The Heart of a Dog* follows the same technique of *The Other Side* in its refusal to assign hierarchies, especially where they might be intuitively expected. The most obvious of these is the headline construct of 'civilised / uncivilised', which we traditionally expect to be aligned with 'human / animal': inevitably, Bulgakov creates an un/civilised, in/human hybrid in order to tip this expectation on its tail and depict an aggressive decivilisation in the process of '*total humanisation*' (64), creating a creature whose downfall is not that 'he's a man with the heart of a dog […] the whole horror of the situation is that he now has a *human* heart, not a dog's […] the rottenest heart in all

creation' (110-1). The moral hierarchy between Sharik/ov and Preobrazhensky is similarly difficult to define, as each is riddled with ironies and inconsistencies: on the surface Preobrazhensky is the cultivated, civilised opera-lover, highly educated, talented, innovative, and defender of domestic values, whilst Sharikov is a destructive, verbally and sexually abusive thief. Preobrazhensky espouses persuasion 'by kindness […] you'll get nowhere with an animal if you use terror' (20) and counsels Bormenthal to 'never do anything criminal, no matter for what reason. Keep your hands clean all your life' (110); he is characterised variously as 'a wizard, a magician' (21), a 'high priest' (51), 'an ancient prophet' (40), and to Sharik he is 'the great, the powerful benefactor of dogs' (128); but after the operation he is described as 'a satisfied vampire' (57) and appears, as Diana Burgin says, 'more demon than deity' (Burgin 1978: 497). After all, what could be less humane to a dog than to anaesthetise it, perform scientific experiments on it, and then when the experiment yields undesirable results, forsake it? On which note Sharikov, born on Christmas Day, first appears as a grotesque inversion of a Christ figure, created by the divine Preobrazhensky, and yet in reverse characterisation to Preobrazhensky, turns out to be entirely appropriately cast as a sacrificial lamb. Preobrazhensky, in apparently 'rejuvenating' Sharik, in fact confiscates his character, his spirit – in Gogolian terms, his narrative control – rather than endowing it, as he, like the Samsas, does not credit Sharik with possessing any kind of 'interior' to begin with. There is little material difference between the fate of Akakievich, silenced and killed by the Petersburg master narrative, and Sharikov, silenced and dehumanised by the narrative of his own 'master' Preobrazhensky; both, in their own way, represent the crisis of the individual in the Russian urban environment.

Just as Gogol employed the techniques of magical realism to respond to the specific struggles encountered by the nineteenth-century urban individual attempting to navigate the Petersburg paradigm under the reign of Nicholas I, the thematics of *The Heart of a Dog* are inseparable from the conflicting narratives on the role of the individual which coexisted in Soviet ideology at the time of the text's composition. These are Lenin's New Economic Policy, at its height in 1925, and the ideologically-opposite focus on the formation of the 'New Soviet Man', of whom Sharikov is popularly considered a satirical embodiment.[65] The simultaneous presence of these two doctrines in Soviet history, the one an economical necessity predicated on private commercial gain, the other a utopian ideal with a fundamental expectation of

[65] See for example Chapple 1980: 42; Boym 1994: 136; Gomel 2004: 361; Caton 2006: 20-44; Howell 2006: 545-9; Drews-Sylla 2010: 241, 245.

selflessness, create a narrative on the position of the individual within society so paradoxical as to resemble a kind of internecine policy-level magical realism. The incongruous ideology which emerged was of a New Man who 'was supposed to be both humdrum and sublime, both immeasurably better than, and the same as, the average citizen. This led to some strange contortions, for the utopian subject had to hold fast to his humanity while at the same time transcending it' (Gomel 2004: 358-9). Bulgakov embeds this self-contradictory position into his 'individualist' hero Preobrazhensky, who on the one hand espouses a doctrine of personal responsibility, refusing any appeal to influence by social conditions, declaiming that 'Ruin […] is something that starts in people's heads […] so when these clowns start shouting "stop the ruin!" – I laugh!' (40), only to immediately endorse an entirely opposite position of despotic deindividuation, that 'a policeman should be posted alongside every person in the country with the job of moderating the vocal outbursts of our honest citizenry' (41). Bulgakov's commentary on the contrapuntal ideology of the Soviet individual surely informs the text's upending of all hierarchical expectations, a feature which itself appeared to stymie contemporary critics. One critic, Valerian Pravdukhin wrote that 'the author confuses all his ends - the shot turns out to be blank. What is it all about? Either the author himself had not felt, had not grasped the full import of his theme, or else he had taken fright at the "counter-revolutionary nature" of his satire' (qtd Doyle 1978: 470); another that

> because Bulgakov's pamphlet lacks a purposeful, willed aim, his story at best provokes bewilderment. Is the author attacking the 'communist experiment' in general or does he have in mind a narrower circle of generalizations; is he more concerned with the uncivilized ways and ignorance of the decisive but narrow-minded champion of the new culture? The reader can learn nothing about all this. The writer himself gives cause for all sorts of various interpretations and in the end one does not know where he is leading us. (ibid. 469)

The reason for these bewildered, even somewhat disgruntled reactions, is probably that their authors were seeking in Bulgakov's text straightforward satire, which *The Heart of a Dog* is not. One could say that satire and magical realism share a mechanical technique, of mounting a counterhegemonic challenge to an accepted narrative, and by forcing their reader to experience the discord between the words that they are reading and the words that they are *not* reading (by which mechanic, if done right, those words are automatically born within the reader's own mind). *The Heart of a Dog* does *contain* a biting satire on the Soviet housing shortage, the New Soviet Man, and the revolutionary attitude towards individual liberties and personal responsibility, but it exceeds that target to interrogate the nature of humanity, the

conceptual boundary between human and animal, between what we call 'civilised' and 'uncivilised'. The apparent absence of a 'purposeful, willed aim', a single narrative voice conveying a single ontological perspective, is not that of an undisciplined writer, but of one who seeks to question the very nature of such singularities.

III. iv. *'Things going backwards the faster they move forwards':* Hellish Hyperdevelopment and Devilish Underdevelopment

The pertinent challenge, as ever, is not to ask whether magical-realist technique can be found in these Russian works, but rather, what aspects of the context of their production prompted the use of these techniques. In this chapter I have highlighted a number of similarities between what I termed the 'Paris paradigm' and the 'Petersburg paradigm' in order to situate early magical realism in a literary constellation in which it can be shown to respond to the same stimuli which troubled the literature of modernity; more important, though, is to identify the *differences* between these two paradigms in order to understand why the one produced the works of Baudelaire, and eventually European modernism, whilst the other nurtured the magical realism of Gogol and Bulgakov. Marshall Berman's concept of the 'modernism of underdevelopment', touched on earlier, provides an intriguing starting point:

> The contrast of […] Paris and Petersburg in the middle of the nineteenth century should help us to see a larger polarity in the world history of modernism. At one pole we can see the modernism of advanced nations, building directly on the materials of economic and political modernisation and drawing vision and energy from a modernised reality […] even when it challenged that reality in radical ways. At an opposite pole we find a modernism that arises from backwardness and underdevelopment. This modernism first arose in Russia, most dramatically in St Petersburg, in the nineteenth century. (Berman 1988: 232)

Berman's work does not discuss magical realism nor any works thereof (he dedicates some time to discussing Gogol, but only covers 'Nevsky Prospect' in any depth), but his model of 'the modernism of underdevelopment' is suggestive of some of the fundamental incongruities which permeated the political and social landscape, 'a politics of enforced backwardness in the midst of the forms and symbols of enforced modernisation' (ibid. 193), which contributed to the uncertain position of the individual within that context. Berman theorises that his 'modernism of underdevelopment', 'suited perfectly to an urban society that stimulates modern patterns of consumption even as it represses modern modes of production and action'

(231) arises from the individual positioned in tantalising proximity to a modernity in which they are prevented from partaking, and so 'in relatively advanced countries, where economic, social and technological modernisation are dynamic and thriving, the relationship of modernist art and thought to the real world around it is clear', whereas 'in relatively backward countries […] modernism, where it develops, takes on a fantastic character, because it is forced to nourish itself not on social reality but on fantasies' (235-6); moreover, that

> [t]he anguish of backwardness and underdevelopment played a central role in Russian politics and culture, from the 1820s well into the Soviet period. In that hundred years or so, Russia wrestled with all the issues that African, Asian and Latin American peoples and nations would confront at a later date. Thus we can see nineteenth-century Russia as an archetype of the emerging twentieth-century Third World. (175)

In other words, an archetype of the exact contexts which magical-realist criticism unanimously agrees inspired the use of magical-realist technique for their literary expression.

The idea of magical-realist ideas emerging from an encounter between underdevelopment and modernity is also found in the anthropological studies of Michael Taussig, whose classic work *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980) examines the same phenomenon in South America where the rural communities, since the intrusion of capitalist modes of production, view as 'vividly unnatural, even as evil, practices that most of us in commodity-based societies have come to accept as natural in the everyday workings of our economy, and therefore of the world in general' (Taussig 2010: 3). This highlights again a point of contact between climates of underdevelopment and the hyper-developed world of the 'Paris paradigm', which responded to the same fear of and distaste for the encroaching commoditisation of the immaterial; however, Taussig's work also suggests that when modernisation is incompletely and artificially introduced into a pre-capitalist setting, as in Gogol's Petersburg where the breakneck herald of modernisation promised by Peter's project had for so many decades failed to materialise, and in the sugarcane plantations of Colombia and tin mines of Bolivia which are the subjects of his study, the clash of values has a destabilising effect not just on lifestyle, but on reality itself. When 'essential qualities of human beings and their products are converted into commodities, into things for buying and selling on the market', these qualities encompass not just human labour but 'time, space, matter, cause, relation, human nature, and society itself', producing a 'phantom objectivity' which 'amounts to a socially instituted paradox with bewildering manifestations, the chief of which is the denial by

the society's members of the social construct of reality' (ibid. 4). Although the literature of European modernity does respond to the shock and alienation of rapid modernisation, its most celebrated figures were, as Berman points out, active, vocal, and – crucially – empowered participants in the impetus to progress: Paris was the product of 'a dynamic bourgeoisie, and an active state, determined to modernise fast, to develop productive forces and social relations, to speed up the flow of commodities', and Baudelaire himself 'part of, and proud to be part of, a mass urban population that knows how to organise and mobilise to fight for its rights', in contrast to the Petersburgers, 'passive, atomised, uneasy in the streets, clinging to their overcoats for dear life' (Berman 1988: 229-30). The intrusion of an overbearing 'master narrative' on a muted and downtrodden individual one is simply not a feature of the Paris paradigm, unlike in Petersburg where 'the state is more concerned to contain its people than to move them forward' and the gentry 'anxious to enjoy the cornucopia of Western consumer goods, but without working toward the Western development of productive forces that has made the modern consumer economy possible' (ibid. 230); or in Latin America where, Taussig tells us, the challenge is in 'mediating two radically distinct ways of apprehending or evaluating the world of persons and of things […] I call these modes of evaluation *use-value* and *exchange-value*' (Taussig 2010: 18). In these contexts,

> the mystical interpretations and rhetorical figures associated with these two modes become enormously intensified when they are set into opposition. […] The spellbinding fantasy that irridates the works of Miguel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez […] provides further testimony to the blending of poetic and political elements that concerns us here. It is precisely this aura of fantasy that perplexes literary critics and Marxists who cannot understand the coexistence of fantasy and social realism. But as Asturias and García Márquez have repeatedly pointed out, it is this coexistence that constitutes reality in the 'strong wind' and 'leaf storm' of large-scale capitalism in the Third World. (ibid.)

The first major difference between the Paris and Petersburg paradigms, then, is that one represents a state of hyperdevelopment, and the other a state of underdevelopment; the second, which is, as we shall see, closely related, is their respective renderings of the threat to individuality, which in the Paris paradigm takes the form of the casting of the urban environment as hell, and in the Petersburg equivalent – like in the communities Taussig studies – of the city as the domain of the devil. This is a subtle difference, but an important one. The figure of the devil when applied to Russian literature can be used as a multi-functional point of distinction, exposing the subtle, but critical, divergence in tone from the Petersburg paradigm

to the Paris; from the city texts to the country; and ultimately, therefore, from literature of the magical-realist mode to that of the literature of modernity and of the marvellous.

It is Taussig's contention that the prevalence of devil-beliefs in the communities he studies functions as a response to the clash between his two 'modes of evaluation', 'a dynamic mediation of oppositions, which appear at a particularly crucial and sensitive point in time in historical development' (ibid.), and that 'these beliefs occur in a historical context in which one mode of production and life is being supplanted by another […] the devil dramatically represents this process of alienation' (ibid. 17). This observation is profoundly illuminating in respect of the role that the devil plays in Russian mythology. Specifically, to the way in which the role and representation of the devil varies in Russian literature between the countryside texts, informed by the Russian folk tradition in which devil-beliefs maintain a prominence similar to that of Taussig's subjects (see Putney 1999, esp. 56-63), and the city texts, where the arrival of the ubiquitous devil folk-figure in the urban environment (a space, as Taussig describes, of mediation between inherent human values and forces which oppose them), takes on a quite different tenor.

This contrast is most starkly exhibited by its manifesting within a single oeuvre, as obligingly supplied by Gogol. The handling of the demonic presence in the city and country texts is a subject addressed by the only existing work to analyse Gogol's work within the framework of magical realism, James Hardy and Leonard Staunton's 'Magical Realism in the Tales of Nikolai Gogol' (2002), which perceives 'two varieties of magical realism employed', concerning 'the divine, the demonic [and] the supernatural event' which 'Gogol treated […] as entirely real' (Hardy and Staunton 2002: 126), belonging separately to the city and the country. As explored above, the devil is a persistent feature of the Petersburg Tales, more prominent in 'The Overcoat' of the texts examined here for its being underpinned by the structural formula of a Faustian pact, although the devil is woven throughout 'The Nose' in sporadic mentions, all positioning him as either expert on, or author of the mischief currently afoot: Yakovlevich ponders that ' the devil knows how it happened' (*TN* 59); Kovalyov that 'the devil must have wished to play a trick on me!' (67); and then later wonders 'how on earth could this have happened? The devil alone can make it out' (74). These remarks may register more as figures of speech than serious demonic attribution; on the other hand, they could be said to carry more resonance in the context of Gogol's Petersburg oeuvre which, as noted earlier, takes the devil as a guiding thematic throughout his work, and it is probably true of Gogol as Lotman would

later observe of Bulgakov that 'all cursing in the devil's name in the novel can be taken in two ways - as an emotional interjection and as direct designation' (Lotman 1990: 186).

Hardy and Staunton are correct in observing that 'in St Petersburg, the Devil was an invisible and brooding presence who aimed to seduce souls to evil and […] had a fearful psychological edge to him' and that the city tales' rendering of the demonic differs from 'those set in the vast Russian countryside [which] treated the Devil as a menacing though still ordinary part of life' (Hardy and Staunton 2002: 127). They are incorrect, though, in perceiving here 'two varieties of magical realism'. The countryside texts are not works of magical realism. Rather they are of the marvellous mode in which, as Hardy and Staunton say, the devil is treated as *entirely* real. Take for instance this passage from 'A Bewitched Place' (1832), concerning the Grandfather character dancing on a vegetable patch:

> There is no denying that he did dance; he couldn't have danced better if it had been with the Hetman's wife. […] But as soon as he had got halfway through the dance and wanted to do his best to cut some more capers, his feet wouldn't lift from the ground, no matter what he did! 'What a plague!' […] His legs were stiff as if made of wood. 'Look, the place is bewitched, look, it is a spell of Satan! The enemy of mankind has a hand in it!' (Gogol 1985: 201)

The devil here exists as part of a single, marvellous ontological plane, no more or less menacing than a wicked witch or a tricksy imp, and there is no reason to believe he is evoked for any reason other than conformity with the Russian folk tradition in which the threat of the devil was so ubiquitous that 'the access aperture could be an uncovered bucket of water or an open mouth during a yawn' (Putney 1999: 59). In the city texts, where 'the brilliance of Petersburg represents a superficial cover over profound evil' (Rosenshield 1996: 402), devilry exists in a new, more complex variety which requires a new mode of representation.[66]

The idea of the city as a seat of evil is at once a point of similarity and a point of difference between the Paris and Petersburg paradigms: applying the terms of the former paradigm to the conditions of the latter helps to sharpen the distinction between the two, and

[66] Although it does not assert itself explicitly in the examples provided here, it is worth noting that the Russian urban landscape is laden with an especially rich history of demonisation. This originates in associations with Moscow as far back to the seventeenth century with the Orthodox *Raskol* and the mythical positioning of Moscow as the 'Third Rome': after the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century Russia made claim to the 'Third Rome', the new centre of the Orthodox church. The *Raskol* came after the reforms of Patriarch Nikon in the 1650s which decreed alterations in Orthodox practices to more closely align the church with Greek standards, which met with opposition by some sects of the church, partly on the grounds that the reforms weakened Moscow's claim to the Third Rome title: as David M. Bethea writes, '[i]f Moscow was turning its back on its heritage as the Third Rome, then there was only one conclusion to draw – it was not the holy but the *unholy* city, the seat of the Antichrist' (Bethea 1989: 20). This mythology of the urban space was of course compounded by the later founding of St Petersburg, whose fearful reputation became so deeply embedded in the Russian literary tradition.

therefore to enhance our understanding of the literatures produced within each. City literature has employed the 'city as hell' motif for as long as there have been cities: as early as 1819, Shelley was writing that 'Hell is a city much like London' ('Peter Bell the Third', l.147) which characterisation was still going strong over a century later when Eliot in 1922 'had not thought death had undone so many' ('The Waste Land', l. 63), a line borrowed from Dante's depiction of souls in the vestibule of hell. Benjamin accordingly perceived modernity as 'the time of Hell' writing that 'to determine the totality of features in which this "modernity" imprints itself would mean to represent Hell' (Benjamin 1999: 936). Benjamin's conception of modernity-as-hell is based on the idea of eternal recurrence: the archetypical punishments of hell are formed in endless, futile repetition (Sisyphus; Prometheus; the Danaïdes); he perceives these as being reproduced in the commoditised modern reality in which, to again quote Nicholas Rennie, 'the individual's "soul", his individuality, is negated by the infinitely reproducible object'. As such, in the Paris paradigm, the threat to autonomous individual identity is perceived as an unstoppable by-product, a creeping contagion, borne of the conditions of modernity, which is why figures like Baudelaire are able to decry this side effect (in poems like *The Seven Old Men*) even whilst enthusiastically partaking in the conditions that produce it. The Petersburger, whether dumbstruck like Akakievich or rebuffed into reticence like Kovalyov, simply has not the voice with which to pronounce such remonstrance, as voices are permitted only in the service of reiterating the master narrative.

In cities, people lose their voices; through literature, they attempt to recoup them. This is as true in Paris as it is in Petersburg, but the circumstances of the silencing are different. The 'hell' typology changes when an active 'devil' figure is introduced as a governing force, because such a figure carries the possibility – or the inevitability – of a dominant narrative voice which is responsible for the fate of the text's characters. With the figure of the devil present, the 'hell' typology becomes corporeal, audible, phenomenal. Whereas in the Paris paradigm the erosion of the ego boundary was a condition of the environment, in the Petersburg paradigm, this outcome is not a side effect but a targeted punitive sanction from an actual figure of authority, a single master voice; and this is important because it is this dominant, single voice which is challenged using the techniques of magical realism. In this respect, when literature mounts a challenge against a master narrative, works produced under the conditions of totalitarianism are far more closely aligned with those produced under postcolonial conditions than they are in contexts of progressive modernity; and it is for this reason that the figure of the devil, when

understood as symbolic of the confiscatory master voice, can account for Berman's 'modernity of underdevelopment' ('The Overcoat'*; Petersburg*) in which the struggle against this authority is enacted, and also for occurrences of magical-realist technique both in Latin America (as Taussig argues) and in the works of Bulgakov and Gogol, which function not only as a representation of the master voice, but as a counterhegemonic force that defies it.

This chapter has focused on context. It is the contention of this thesis that the relationship between magical realism and the context of its production should be reversed from its current dynamic in magical-realist scholarship, which prioritises a specific, approved context and then justifies the texts it finds there. Instead, I propose an approach that identifies works of magical realism, and then interrogates their context in order to develop theories about the nature of the relationship between that context and the works it produced. I've found it useful, in modelling this approach here, to take an established paradigm, one that does *not* exhibit a relationship with magical realism, and bring it to bear on the context in question, in order to highlight the differences as well as the similarities. This application of precise comparative analysis can only enhance our understanding not just of magical realism's technique, but of its social purpose.

This approach has the added advantage of pre-empting associated objections to the paradigm's application: for instance, we know from their documented correspondence that Theodor Adorno objected to Benjamin's methodology in his attempt to suggest a relation between the poetry of Baudelaire and the cultural conditions of nineteenth-century Paris, which amounted to an 'anthropological materialism', 'a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts' (Adorno 1980: 129), and thus provoked Adorno's contempt for any place given to the 'magical' in illuminating the problems of capitalism. For Adorno, as Leigh Wilson writes, 'while magical beliefs in response to capitalism might identify the latter's lies and failings', magic, far from challenging reality, treats too credulously the reality it interprets and thus 'is utterly complicit with the forces of reification' and therefore complicit too in 'the work of capitalism in making the present world the only possible world' because 'magic fixes the world as it is by mistaking the work of culture and the work of nature' (Wilson 2013: 29-31). Invocations of magic, then, could never, according to Adorno, be interpreted as a counterhegemonic attack on a dominant (realist, capitalist) narrative, because in so interpreting that narrative, they reify it. However, when applied here, this (admittedly hypothetical) objection only serves to sharpen both the terms of the Petersburg paradigm and the definition of magical-realist technique. Adorno's

animosity towards occultism suits the target for which it was designed, which is the resurgence of occult beliefs that occurred during European modernity (see Wilson 2013: 1-21 for a summary; see also Owen 2004; Warner 2006): in other words to the conditions of the Paris paradigm. Its implications are also easily transferrable to the Third-World conditions Michael Taussig describes, where capitalist values have been accommodated by, and not defeated by the enduring belief in demonic intervention. It is not, however, applicable to the Petersburg paradigm, which sits between the two. It would be absurd to argue that the presence of the demonic motif in works of Russian magical realism evinces actual 'magical beliefs', as it does in the two instances outlined above: nor, for that matter, is it true, as the Carpentian school of magical realism has maintained, that magical realism in Latin America is the result of a naïve, essential prevalence of 'magical beliefs'. Magical realism works by taking a narrative which it considers to be contingent, illusory – phantasmagorical, as Benjamin would have it – and challenging it by emptying it of its own assumptions, whilst holding a mirror up to it: the presence of (magical) counter-point dogmata, which reside in an entirely opposed ontological realm, exists only to expose the fallacious nature of the 'real' assumptions under examination.

In any case, if association with Benjamin's methodology means that this chapter inherits Adorno's charge that its approach 'is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism', so much the better: I cannot think of a more suitable description of magical realism.

IV

Spinning Winds: Pre-Márquezian and Márquezian Magical Realism

Each instance of magical realism discussed in this thesis thus far depicts an individual isolated within a version of reality dictated by rules that they do not recognise or understand, but peopled either entirely or majoritively by spokespersons of that version of reality. In *The Other Side* this was the narrator; in *The Metamorphosis* it was Gregor; in 'The Nose', Major Kovalyov; in *The Heart of a Dog,* Sharik/ov; and in *Invitation to a Beheading* it will be Cincinnatus C. These individuals are 'touchstone' figures, castaways from the reader's reality, what we might call the extra-textual reality, who take with them the expectations of linearity, continuity, proportionality; logical, situational and physical consistency; basic justice; in other words, expectations without which reality becomes incomprehensible, impossible to navigate. The reader's experience is predicated on these shared expectations, with which the inter-textual reality refuses or fails to comply: the intended effect of the text on the reader is achieved by their experiencing, along with the protagonist, this conflict between two codes, whether the effect be incredulous laughter, tears of bitter loneliness, or an impotent howl of frustration.

In this crucial regard, the magical-realist technique explored here differs from that used in the later, 'prototypical' works of magical realism which have been so popular since the success of Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Márquez's innovation to magical realism was to remove this touchstone figure from the text, and thus to dramatically alter the dynamics of the interaction between the ontological codes in operation: the fundamental magical-realist technique of interlacing two ontologically opposed realities remains intact, but their opposition is not enacted within the text as it is in the earlier works. In the examples considered thus far in this thesis both realities are represented within the text, and the conflict is at an insoluble impasse: the extra-textual reality is dominant, because it is shared by the reader and it constantly reasserts itself by the presence of the touchstone figure; but the inter-textual reality is dominant, because it is that reality's rules by which the text is ordered, by the agreement of all of its internal characters and by the narrative voice itself, whose complicity is announced in its trademark 'unsurprised' tone. The narrative position of the later magical-realist text actively represents only one, internally coherent code, and relies for ontological conflict upon the friction that exists at the perimeter of its dust jacket. In a literary mode that is defined entirely by its handling of opposing ontological codes, I propose that this difference is a sufficiently

radical one to denote two distinct models of magical realism, which I term 'pre-Márquezian' and 'Márquezian' magical realism.

This distinction relates back to the argument for 'resolved antinomy' and reader's 'doubts' or 'hesitations', examined in the first section of this thesis: in the early-twentieth century examples that I've given here, the conflict between ontological codes is easily visible because it is located within the text, actually vocalised by the touchstone figure who ventriloquises the reader's response to the ontological irregularities, but the conflict it is no less present in Márquezian magical realism for being a tacit one between text and reader. Chanady writes that 'in contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader, and this is the fundamental difference between the two modes. The 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: 24). This second statement is perfectly true, but to say that Márquezian magical realism represents 'resolved' antinomy is to suggest that simply because the narrative expresses no surprise at its incongruous worldview, the reader doesn't either. If anything the reverse is true: the master stroke of Márquezian magical realism was to remove the witness to the conflict in order to exacerbate the reader's struggle to reconcile the two narratives at play.

The difference between pre-Márquezian and Márquezian magical realism is a technical one, but it has wider implications for the nature of the mode, which evolves from one that most frequently depicts the fate of the single, isolated individual in conflict with society, to one suited to exploring conflicts that occur within or between communities. In Márquezian magical realism the individual's relationship with society is deemphasised in favour of an exploration of the relations within that society, and that society's relationship with the world outside it. With this adjustment Márquezian magical realism loses the nightmare quality of its predecessor, expressing instead the discord that arises from encounters with invasive narratives of modernity, of cultural, historical and linguistic oppression, which are so poignantly familiar to readers from climates of underdevelopment. The difference is best expressed by example, to which end Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* provides what I consider to be the best available case study in exhibiting both the thematic and the technical role that the fate of the individual plays in pre-Márquezian magical realism; by way of contrast, I will then bring my exploration of magical realism's prehistory up to the mode's perceived Anno Domini with a

comparative analysis of Márquez's *One Years of Solitude,* examining the differing applications of magical-realist technique within the two models.

IV.i. *'The crookedness was no ordinary one':* Unknowability in *Invitation to a Beheading*

Magical realism's colocation of ontological codes is a form of rule-breaking: that is why it has such a disconcerting impact on its reader. It is also why the (or rather, a) justice system offers an ideal landscape for a magical-realist text, as we find in *Invitation to a Beheading*: the robust framework of the judicial process (arrest, hearing, sentencing, imprisonment, execution) anchors the text in a 'realist' space for any subversions of the expected or the probable (and even the possible) to move within and against, and provides a sufficiently controlled environment within which to enact such subversions without their tugging the text into the realms of the fantastic. The opening line of *Invitation* manages in one very brief sentence not only to establish the theme of judicial process, but to inform the reader that this process will resemble none that they recognise: 'In accordance with the law the death sentence was announced to Cincinnatus C. in a whisper' (Nabokov 2012: 1; henceforth *IB*). In place of the expected tenor of court proceedings (especially ones with capital consequences) we find instead a cabaret legal system in which 'the defence counsel and the prosecutor, both wearing makeup and looking very much alike (the law required that they be uterine brothers but such were not always available, and then makeup was used), spoke with virtuoso rapidity the five thousand words allotted to each' (ibid. 9); the rules of this reality are not only unexpected, not even merely totalitarian, but illogical to the point that they make a nonsense of the very word 'rule', as we see in this excerpt from the prisoner's edict displayed in Cincinnatus' cell:

> 5. Singing, dancing and joking with the guards is permitted only by mutual consent and on certain days.
> 6. It is desirable that the inmate should not have at all, or, if he does, should immediately himself suppress nocturnal dreams whose content might be incompatible with the condition and status of the prisoner, such as: resplendent landscapes, outings with friends, family dinners, as well as sexual intercourse with persons who in real life and in the waking state would not suffer said individual to come near, which individual will therefore be considered by the law to be guilty of rape. (*IB* 32)

It is not just the constructed rules of the inter-textual reality which defy logic, but, more seriously, the natural ones. Repeatedly, the reader is confronted with events that conflict perplexingly with contiguous scenes or passages. Cincinnatus' first meeting with Rodrig, the prison director, is the earliest example:

> the door opened and the prison director entered. […] Moving his legs evenly in his columnar trousers, he strode from the wall to the table, almost to the cot – but, in spite of his majestic solidity, he calmly vanished, dissolving into the air. A minute later, however, the door opened once again, this time with the familiar grating sound, and, dressed as always in a frock coat, his chest out, in came the same person. (ibid. 3-4)

This is a bewildering passage, but at this stage need not be interpreted as a non-real one, as it can be plausibly put down to a premonition or vision on Cincinnatus' part. Shortly afterwards, however, comes a scene describing Cincinnatus moving a table over to the window to climb on it and try to peer out: 'how unwillingly, with what shudderings it moved across the stone floor!' (15); Rodion the jailor then enters and lifts Cincinnatus down, 'after which he moved the table with a violinlike sound to its previous place' (16); moments later, however, we read that '[Cincinnatus] tried – for the hundredth time – to move the table, but, alas, the legs had been bolted down for ages' (ibid.). In this case, the incident with Rodion and the table could again be put down to a vivid dream or fantasy, were it not for Rodion's corroborating the account some pages later: 'I come in, I look, he's up on the table-and-chair, trying to reach the bars with his little hands and feet, like a sick monkey' (24). The presence of such insoluble discontinuities nullifies the automatic impulse to interpret apparently non-realist events within a realist framework, and so colours the text's other deviations as similarly problematic to that framework.

The discontinuities in this crooked regulatory landscape provide background to the most significant broken rule of all, the crime for which Cincinnatus receives his death sentence: Cincinnatus is not so much a criminal as an embodiment of 'basic illegality' (17), guilty of the obscure crime of 'gnostical turpitude', so feared by the citizens of the text that they refer to it only by 'circumlocutions like "impenetrability", "opacity", "occlusion"' (52). It quickly becomes clear, though, this crime amounts to nothing more than human introspection, the possession of a conscious interior:

> He was impervious to the rays of others, and therefore produced when off his guard a bizarre impression, as of a lone dark obstacle in a world of souls transparent to one another; he learned

> however to feign translucence, employing a complex system of optical illusions, as it were – but he had only to forget himself, to allow a momentary lapse in self-control […] and immediately there was alarm. In the midst of the excitement of a game his coevals would suddenly forsake him, as if they had sensed that his lucid gaze and the azure of his temples were but a crafty deception and that actually Cincinnatus was opaque. Sometimes, in the midst of a sudden silence, the teacher, in chagrined perplexity would […] gaze at him for a long while, and finally say: 'what is wrong with you, Cincinnatus?' (11-12)

The threat to the private psychic realm, explored at length in the previous chapter, reaches new heights in Nabokov's text, where the very concept of interiority is defamiliarised, represented through a lens that regards it as a sinister and unknown quantity, punishable by execution. This defamiliarisation of such intimately familiar phenomena is necessarily enabled by contrast with the other characters, whose 'transparency' – in other words whose lack of a private interior consciousness – manifests as a complete incomprehension of Cincinnatus' (to the reader) primal, human despair at the prospect of his impending death.

The narrative conflict of the text is predicated on the friction, which asserts itself again and again with increasing volume, between Cincinnatus anguish and the prison characters' ludic antics, with the result that the reader's identification with Cincinnatus' consciousness is repeatedly focalised: whereas at the beginning of the text it was the illogic of the inter-textual reality which struck the most powerful note of discord, with Cincinnatus a comforting, though comparatively unremarkable, touchstone of familiarity, as the text progresses and the reader grows accustomed to the unexpected, Cincinnatus' fate stands out more keenly against the unintentional cruelty of their giddy apathy towards it. Cincinnatus' febrile attention to the tappings and scrapings he hears from his cell every night, which he desperately interprets as the sound of an approaching saviour, form a long narrative thread within the text which disintegrates suddenly into a dismaying punchline, when M'sieur Pierre and Rodrig burst through the wall to 'surprise' him, having dug a completely pointless tunnel through the walls of the prison (129); the prison staff's dismissive rebuffs of Cincinnatus' pleadings to know the date of his death become more outrageous with each refusal – '"Oh, will you please stop mumbling," the director said irritably […] All I can tell you is that your fate-mate is expected to arrive any day now"' (7); even Emmie, the prison director's small daughter, plays a 'prank' on him, promising to rescue him but instead leading him directly into the director's apartment where the prison characters are dining (130; 147). Each instance of casual cruelty heightens the friction whereby the transformative power of magical-realist technique is performed, as the

mundane becomes magical, and the normally-banal fact of human interiority is brought urgently into focus.

What is interesting about Nabokov's magical-realist treatment of consciousness is his decisive attachment of the question of consciousness to the question of 'reality'. Although the other characters' 'transparency' is implied by Cincinnatus' 'opacity' rather than given any kind of supernatural depiction or visual representation – they do not, for instance, communicate non-verbally or in any way visibly telegraph their thoughts – it is Cincinnatus' conviction that they are not to be considered 'human': 'there is in the world not a single human who can speak my language; or, more simply, not a single human who can speak; or, even more simply, not a single human' (71). The lack of a psychic interior is a reasonable grounds for exclusion from 'humanity', but Cincinnatus goes one further, and insists that they are not only inhuman, but actually (in contrast to Cincinnatus himself) unreal: '(f)or thirty years I have lived among spectres that appear solid to the touch, concealing from them the fact that I am alive and real' (49). He refers to them as 'spectres, werewolves, parodies' (25), and repeats the accusation to his estranged mother when she appears too, that she is 'just as much a parody as everybody and everything else' (102). This is in keeping with a repeated insinuation throughout *Invitation* that the entire inter-textual world is akin to a stage set, a 'hastily assembled and painted world' (34) as Cincinnatus puts it (for instance when 'a summer thunderstorm, simply but tastefully staged, was performed outside' (99)); the other characters, consequently, are not people, so much as poorly-drawn mannequins (Cincinnatus remarks to his mother, 'why is your raincoat wet when your shoes are dry – see, that's careless. Tell the prop man for me' (102)), with no emotional authenticity and no ontological heft.

The insubstantiality of these characters' discrete identities is epitomised in the case of the three principal prison staff members, Roman (the lawyer), Rodrig (the prison director) and Rodion (the jailer), whose interchangeability, already implied by their barely-distinguishable names, is confirmed when the narrative appears to confuse them with each other. In the midst of a conversation between Roman and Rodrig, the latter is seamlessly substituted for Rodion (who speaks first 'whilst giving his keys a rattle' – Rodion's signature move – and is then addressed with 'that's right Rodion, that's right' (24)); in the next scene, Roman and now-Rodion take Cincinnatus up to the top tower of the prison fortress, where Rodion 'found a broom somewhere and kept silent as he swept the terrace flagstones' (27) before the characters are just as spontaneously swapped back, and it is 'the director' who '[tosses] the

broom into a corner' (28). The lawyer Roman is not exempt from this interchangeability either, as a smudge of chalk seems to transfer from the back of his jacket to that of the newly-reinstated Rodrig: first 'the lawyer leaned his elbows on the broad stone parapet […] His back was soiled with chalk' but on the next page as the procession make their way back down from the tower top, 'the back of the director's frock coat was soiled with chalk' (27-8). This triangle of transferences is too deliberate to be mistaken for authorial error: the clear indication is that a figure without a private interior is but a deindividuated husk (which notion, if we recall Samsa, Akakievich and Sharik, is becoming a familiar trope), not only inhuman, but unreal.

The question of what *is* real extends beyond the unreality of the characters: one of the remarkable achievements of *Invitation'*s use of magical-realist technique is the clarity with which it renders the two ontologies it sustains, whilst preserving the delicate oscillation of the 'reality' placemarker. The text does not merely accommodate an implied dual-world structure (inter-textual and extra-textual) by its use of ontological codes, but actually erects such a structure. Donald Barton Johnson writes that

> Cincinnatus' prison world is only one world of the novel, for he visualises another, an ideal world in which he is a free citizen among people who speak his tongue. The structure of the novel is cast in terms of these two worlds: the 'real' world of the prison and the totalitarian society it presents, and Cincinnatus' ideal world, the world of his imagination. (Johnson 1985: 158)

This isn't quite right, though. Contrary to Johnson's assertion, Cincinnatus is confident of which world is 'real':

> In my dreams the world was ennobled, spiritualized […] in my dreams the world would come alive, becoming so captivatingly majestic, free and ethereal, that afterwards it would be oppressive to breathe the dust of this painted life. But then I have long since grown accustomed to the thought that what we call dreams is semi-reality, the promise of reality, a foreglimpse and a whiff of it; that is, they contain, in a very vague, diluted state, more genuine reality than our vaunted waking life […] It exists, my dream world, it must exist, since, surely there must be an original of the clumsy copy. (*IB* 69-70)

Cincinnatus recognises, along with the reader, that the world he envisages in his dreams, 'where the freaks that are tortured here walk unmolested' (ibid. 70) is the 'real' world, the extra-textual world, and yet the sustained presence of two ontologies which magical realism demands is upheld so consummately that *both* worlds of the text are as undeniably 'the real one' as the other. If Cincinnatus' 'dream world' appears idealised, unrecognisable as our phenomenal extra-textual world, this is because it, along with Cincinnatus' ordinary human

consciousness, has been cast into newly-illuminating light; it is never truer than in Nabokov's text that, to quote for the umpteenth time Franz Roh's memorable phrase, in magical realism 'our real world re-emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day'.

This is by no means, however, to suggest that *Invitation* is a naïvely celebratory paean to human society. Quite the reverse: in *Invitation*, as in most, if not all the texts examined so far, the impossible is almost immediately overtaken by the improbable, the unbearable even, manifesting most potently in the sickening disregard for human life – which, I need hardly point out, and which the European audience of 1935 would certainly not have needed pointing out, is far from a feature of fiction or of Nabokov's imagination. The delicate complexity of the interplay of the two 'realities' is not just down to their each having a convincing claim to the title, but due to the fact that the clash between the two is primarily one of tone rather than content. The axis of the conflict hinges on the discrepancy between the implication that the world of the text is but a gruesome farce and the all-too-real reality of Cincinnatus' impending fate; thus, it is not the logical short-circuits that result from trying to reconcile two contradictory versions of events, or the shifting identities of the prison characters, or the allusions to the world as a performative sham, that deliver the greatest insult to the reader's understanding of 'reality', but the gruesomely chilling register of Cincinnatus' eventual execution, held in 'Thriller Square' ('circus subscription stubs will be honoured' (141)): 'Attractively rouged M'sieur Pierre bowed, bringing together his patent-leather boot tops, and said in a comic falsetto: "The carriage is waiting […] Off to do chop-chop"' (166). Though the notions of being imprisoned for the crime of thinking and executed by a pantomime-clad axeman-*artiste* as entertainment for a blithe and baying audience are exaggerated for effect, they would not achieve their impact if they resided in the land of the impossible, and if not for their resonances with the facts of the text's immediately-adjacent context, written as Nabokov points out 'some fifteen years after escaping from the Bolshevist régime, and just before the Nazi régime reached its full volume of welcome'.[67] *Invitation,* like the critics who perceived in Kubin's work a vatic vision of the horrors the twentieth century would soon bring, appears when viewed through the lens of history not so much a celebration of the value of human life

[67] We should note that it was Nabokov's prescription in the text's foreword that 'the question of whether or not my seeing both [the Bolshevist and Nazi régimes] as one dull, beastly farce had any effect on this book should concern the good reader as little as it does me', although this does not amount to a denial of the impact of these on the composition process: he later referred to *Invitation*'s 'buffoons and bullies of a Communazist state' (Nabokov 1951: 217) and admitted in interview that *Invitation* and the closely-related *Bend Sinister* (1947) represented 'absolutely final indictments of Russian and German totalitarianism' (Nabokov 2011: 132).

and consciousness but a pressing reminder of it, and of the consequences that follow when we lose sight of it.

Invitation takes the dynamics and themes that have been implied in other texts discussed here and makes them explicit. As just discussed, the text does not only imply a dual-world structure, but actually designs one, and so designs a corresponding dual-narrative structure within which to perform its ontological juggling act. Of course, all works of magical realism employ a dual narrative structure in a sense: the disparity between the reader's own reaction to the events of the text and the reaction of the narrative means that magical-realist texts can be said to create two coincident narratives, as it were, with one stone: one which forms the body of the text, and a second that is implied and begotten equally of the reader and the text. Nabokov instead created two narratives with two stones: the 'prison narrative' (where the laws, natural and human, do not resemble our own) and Cincinnatus' narrative (where they do) which is not only, as in other texts, an internal or implied one, but an actual written text in the form of the diary he writes in his cell. The uncertain dynamic of narrative authority is given added weight within the institution theme, where the 'authoritative voice' is not an implied social code as it was in the Petersburg paradigm but an actual set of rules (although is no less menacingly capricious for that), and the dual-world structure of the text intensifies the sense of Cincinnatus' (literal, literary) incarceration within and by a master narrative that jars powerfully with his own. To begin with, Cincinnatus' narrative, after a lifetime of attempts to silence it in obeisance to the master narrative, is almost as inarticulate as that of Gogol's Akakievich, his first diary entry comprising only two broken sentences: 'In spite of everything I am comparatively. After all I had premonitions, had premonitions of this finale' (2). In the next entry, the narrative is growing in strength, although still faltering: 'But then perhaps […] I am misinterpreting … Attributing to the epoch … This wealth … Torrents … Fluid transitions … And the world really never was … Just as … But how can these ruminations help my anguish?' (34). This trajectory continues, with Cincinnatus becoming increasingly productive and eloquent, to the point that around halfway through the text, something strange happens: Cincinnatus' narrative tangles itself into the main body of the text:

> it is I, Cincinnatus, who am writing, it is I, Cincinnatus, who am weeping; and who was, in fact, walking around the table, and then, when Rodion brought his dinner, said: 'This letter. This letter I shall ask you to … Here is the address …'
> 'You'd do better to learn to knit like everybody else,' grumbled Rodion. (112)

This passage exemplifies how magical realism interlaces opposing narrative strains in order to sustain their respective ontologies ('merges different realms', as Faris termed it), but more importantly, is a clear indication of the growing ascendancy of Cincinnatus' voice, which has now risen to the same weight group as the 'master' narrative in preparation for the showdown between the two with which the text will conclude.[68]

The purpose of the master narrative of *Invitation* is to defamiliarise human consciousness; and the purpose of Cincinnatus' narrative is to reacquaint us with it. This achievement is not only the automatic result of our identification with Cincinnatus' suffering, but is the express, deliberate purpose of the diary, which is written in the hope that

> someone would read it and would suddenly feel just as if he had awakened for the first time in a strange country. What I mean to say is that I would make him suddenly burst into tears of joy, his eyes would melt, and, after he experiences this, the world will seem to him cleaner, fresher. (34)

The result of Cincinnatus' inner consciousness being defamiliarised is that when we are reintroduced to it, it is brought into sharper focus, made more tangible to the reader. The tangibility of the 'interior' is, again, evidence of a dominant theme of pre-Márquezian magical realism that is usually implied, but which Nabokov makes explicit. *Invitation* is arranged into a dual-world structure, which is reflected in a dual-narrative structure, and accordingly, Cincinnatus is given a dual-structured self: a bland, timorous 'social' self who largely performs docility (until his arrest), 'feigning translucence' in obedience with the terms of the master narrative, and his 'interior' self which is given quasi-corporeal form in the text as 'the double, the gangrel, that accompanies each of us – you, and me, and him over there – doing what we would like to do at that very moment, but cannot' (12). The 'double' often acts independently and concurrently with what the 'real' Cincinnatus is doing: '"I demand – yes, demand" (and the other Cincinnatus began to stamp his feet hysterically, losing his slippers) "to be told how long I have left to live"' (25); '"Oh well,' said Cincinnatus, "as you wish, as you wish … I am powerless anyway." (The other Cincinnatus … a little smaller, was crying, all curled up in a ball)' (48). The 'double', being his ordinary human interior which is a verboten anomaly in the inter-textual

[68] On this note, Vladimir Alexandrov makes the interesting observation that 'after being in a position of relative ignorance, dependence and passivity in relation to his situation and surroundings, Cincinnatus seems to be suddenly elevated to the privileged position of (relative) omniscience, which is the opposite of the more common novelistic practice of having the third-person narrator descend into the more restricted consciousness of a character' (Alexandrov 1991: 96).

reality, naturally 'belongs' to the extra-textual reality, and so this dual Cincinnatus, each half belonging to a different world and a different narrative, is an apt emblem for the magical-realist text, one single entity containing two fundamentally opposed narratives, which never disagree with each other more powerfully than at the moment of death.

The moment of death, the ending of the text, has occasioned much critical disagreement. The final passage sees Cincinnatus on the scaffold being 'directed' by M'sieur Pierre, when quite spontaneously Cincinnatus takes control of the situation: 'he reflected: why am I here? Why am I lying like this? And, having asked himself these simple questions, he answered them by getting up and looking around' (179); with this revelation, the whole world falls apart as Cincinnatus calmly walks away from it:

> All around there was a strange confusion. Through the headsman's still swinging hips the railing showed. […] Cincinnatus slowly descended from the platform and walked off through the shifting debris. He was overtaken by Roman, who was now many times smaller and who was at the same time Rodrig: 'What are you doing?' he croaked, jumping up and down. […] Everything was coming apart. Everything was falling. A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters; an arid gloom fleeted; and amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him. (179-80)

Critical discussion is divided on whether this scene represents a death of Cincinnatus, or of the world in which he's been imprisoned; whether it is Cincinnatus' physical death that effects the liberation of his notorious soul, or that Cincinnatus, on the brink of death, has effected the destruction of the text-reality by acknowledging its artificiality.[69] In the latter camp, for instance, is Margaret Boegeman, who compares the ending sequence to the ending of *Alice in Wonderland* when Alice, at the height of a crooked and absurd court trial not unlike that which began Nabokov's text, brings about the destruction of Wonderland with her objection, 'you're nothing but a pack of cards!' (Boegeman 1982: 109), and Gleb Struve, who writes that Nabokov 'deliberately bares […] the contrived nature of his fictional constructs and smashes them with

[69] Many critical analyses in fact accommodate the ambiguity of the text, rather than coming down decisively on either side: for instance, for Olga Hasty the text establishes Cincinnatus' 'simultaneous acknowledgement of death and the refusal to grant it dominion' and so 'the ending Nabokov supplies for *Invitation to a Beheading* elaborates on this emblem, for the novel ends with his protagonist both dying and not dying' (Hasty 2008: 12). Other interpretations still are sufficiently abstract in nature as to not require a decisive ruling on this point: for Andrew Field Cincinnatus is the artist imprisoned in the realm of 'dead, ready-made art' – 'the inevitable and natural exile that is the fate of all culture – especially in Russia' (Field 1967: 195); Connolly sees the text as 'the verbal account of a dream experienced by an artist figure who is beset by anxieties about the potential suppression of his creative energies' (Connolly 1992: 166); and Gennady Barabtarlo even suggests (somewhat eccentrically) that Cincinnatus escapes into a translation of *Invitation to a Beheading* by another of Nabokov's fictional heroes, *The Gift*'s Fyodor (Barabtarlo 1990: 396-7).

the same delight with which a child smashes some of its elaborate constructions' (Struve 1967: 156).

The text, though, consistently encourages the former interpretation. The textual details of Pierre the headsman's 'still swinging hips' and the librarian 'doubled up, vomiting' indicate that the execution has gone ahead, and there seems to be no ambiguity in the fact that the 'inter-textual' Cincinnatus continues his countdown to execution whilst the 'double' – 'the other Cincinnatus' – does not: 'one Cincinnatus was counting, but the other Cincinnatus had already stopped heeding the sound of the unnecessary count which was fading away into the distance' (179). More importantly, though, this interpretation is consistent with the schema by which the text has been so rigorously organised: the text has taken care to erect a dual-world structure, calling meticulous attention to the questions of 'reality' which this structure raises; to defamiliarise and personify Cincinnatus' interior self, the 'gangrel'; and to give that interior a distinct narrative space which he shares with the reader (who is directly addressed as a fellow proprietor of a consciousness, 'you, and me, and him over there'), which space, surely, he comes to occupy at the end of the text, where the 'beings akin' are fellow human beings. This coming together at the fruition of a shared narrative is reminiscent of the collaborative imagery Nabokov uses elsewhere to describe the relationship between an author and his reader:

> Up a trackless slope climbs the master artist, and at the top, on a windy ridge, whom do you think he meets? The panting and happy reader, and there they spontaneously embrace and are linked forever if the book lasts forever. (Nabokov 1980: 2)

The death of Cincinnatus precipitates the end of the prison world, and of Cincinnatus' prison-self: it is not only an end to the text's oppressive narrative (i.e. an end to the text itself), but a triumph over it, for the dual nature of the narrative, and of Cincinnatus, allows for a continuation of their 'real' counterparts. Both ontologies continue, but Cincinnatus succeeds where beetle-Gregor and Sharik/ov failed, and cleaves himself in two. As Julian Connolly puts it, 'the execution both does and does not take place […] what this description depicts […] is the execution of one dimension of Cincinnatus' personality and the simultaneous liberation of the other' (Connolly 1992: 179).

To say that this interpretation of *Invitation* reads the text as a tract on the afterlife is both true and incorrect. That the text is espousing an afterlife theme could not be more explicit than in its epigraph: '*Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels*'. The idea even

punctuates Cincinnatus' narrative, as the final page of the diary he has been writing throughout his incarceration is 'a blank sheet with only the one solitary word on it, and that one crossed out' – the crossed-out word being 'death' (*IB* 165). The theme, though, is not so simplistically rendered as it first appears. The epigraph, on closer inspection, does not instruct us in the text's position on immortality, but rather signals the madness, and the arrogance, of believing ourselves equipped with the knowledge to speak confidently on the miracle of existence. We recall Michael Wood's observation that 'the largest claim of the writers we associate with magical realism […] is that ordinary realism cannot represent certain realities' (Wood 2002: 10), of which the mystery of human interiority is undoubtedly an example: a new, different perspective is required for such realities to be represented in a fashion which truly appreciates their complexity. This idea is expressed in *Invitation* via a novelty toy described by Cincinnatus' mother, called a *nonnon*, comprising a 'crazy mirror' along with an unidentifiable shape, which work in harmony:

> you see, a special mirror came with them, not just crooked, but completely distorted. You couldn't make out anything of it, it was all gaps and jumble and made no sense to the eye – yet the crookedness was no ordinary one […] the mirror, which completely distorted ordinary objects, now, you see, got real food, that is, when you placed one of these incomprehensible, monstrous objects so that it was reflected in the incomprehensible, monstrous mirror, a marvellous thing happened; minus by minus equalled plus, everything was restored, everything was fine, and the shapeless speckledness became in the mirror a wonderful, sensible image [...] You could have your own portrait custom made, that is, you received some nightmarish jumble, and this thing was you, only the key to you was held by the mirror. (*IB* 104-5)

The *nonnon* could not be a more apt précis not just of *Invitation*, but of magical realism itself, whose basic principle is that the 'real' is as 'crooked' as the 'magical' and that only their collaboration can produce an authentic result, and in which two wrongs (*non-non*) so often make a right. The inter-textual world of *Invitation* is the *nonnon* mirror which 'completely distorts ordinary objects', but the miracle of Cincinnatus' consciousness becomes clear when it is viewed through the anamorphoscope of a hostile world in whose eyes it is 'incomprehensible and monstrous', but in whose reflection 'a marvellous thing happened […] everything was restored': thus, 'the key to you is held by the mirror'. The *nonnon* vignette is proceeded by Cincinnatus' feeling suddenly 'as if a corner of this horrible life had curled up, and there was a glimpse of the lining', whereupon 'Cincinnatus' soul could not help leaping for joy' (105); G.M. Hyde interprets this euphoria as a realisation that 'the novel in which he is the protagonist is the perfect *nonnon* mirror, the tricks and distortions of which produce (to the initiated eye, as

Nabokov himself admits) a perfect pattern of sense, won from the distorted forms presented by the "real" world' (Hyde 1977: 139). The image of the *nonnon* has helped Cincinnatus to understand that the realities of his life – and more to the point, his death – are as obscure to him as the obfuscating language the text uses to describe his crime, which in turn gives a clear adumbration that the obscurity will 'resolve' in the end. Cincinnatus' eventual execution will feature not as an end to his hopes of discovering a more profound version of the distorted reality in which he has been imprisoned, but as the beginning of just such a discovery.

Invitation, then, is not so much a tract on the afterlife, but one on unknowability. This, perhaps, is the reason that Cincinnatus is able to survive the delamination of Cincinnatus from 'other Cincinnatus' where Samsa could not. *Invitation* and *The Metamorphosis* are strikingly similar texts in their thematisation of the psychic interior, which both focalise using the techniques of magical realism, but the two approach the problem from opposite directions: Kafka thrust consciousness into a new illumination by obscuring it from without, trapping the reader alone inside Gregor's consciousness, and so it is brought painfully into view by the other Samsas' refusal of its existence. In Nabokov's work, instead of obscuring Cincinnatus' consciousness from the conscious beings around him, he confiscates *their* consciousness, throwing Cincinnatus' into relief by contrast: the result is that the reader is not only reacquainted with the *fact* of Cincinnatus' consciousness, but with the miracle of it – and moreover, the mystery of it. The principal way in which Nabokov differs from Kafka is that he endows consciousness with the potential, won from its unknowability, to resist the 'master narrative', a difference of which he was well aware:

> [Samsa] was a domed beetle, a scarab beetle with wing-sheaths, and neither Gregor nor his maker realised that when the room was being made by the maid, he could have flown out and escaped and joined the other happy dung beetles rolling the dung balls on rural paths. (qtd Golla 2017: 141)

The suggestion within *Invitation* that the human soul is immortal is not indispensable to the celebration of its virtues, but it is the key to understanding what Leona Toker calls 'the novel's deliberate subversion of the distinction between the illusory and the "real"' (Toker 1989: 124). This idea is part and parcel of a suspicion that appears repeatedly throughout Nabokov's oeuvre, that 'there is a mystery behind things, and what we are accustomed to call real life is but a stage set quickly patched together out of the simplest, cheapest odds and ends, such as chlorophyll, carbon, and the law of gravity' (Fowler 1974: 62) (in which we note echoes

of Kubin's suspicions of 'reality' as 'a false front hiding the real secret'). Nabokov is keen to remind us of the fuzzy limits of our own understanding, and therefore, of the folly of investing in the 'authority' of authoritative narratives, such as that of Dream Realm, the Samsa apartment and the Petersburg paradigm, the narratives of *Invitation*'s literary inheritance. This is a doctrine that runs to the very heart of Nabokov's philosophy on the authority of 'reality' – a word which, he once opined, should always appear in inverted commas (Nabokov 2011: 131) – which is expressed most poignantly in a later novel through his fictional poet John Shade:

> ...if prior to life we had
> Been able to imagine life, what mad,
> Impossible, unutterably weird
> Wonderful nonsense it might have appeared!
>
> So why join the vulgar laughter? Why
> Scorn a hereafter none can verify [...]
> It isn't that we dream too wild a dream:
> The trouble is we do not make it seem
> Sufficiently unlikely. (Nabokov 2000: 35)

The afterlife theme of *Invitation* points to the ineffability of death, and should not be taken as a decisive theory of the hereafter, but rather as a theory of indecisiveness itself. As in the best magical-realist works, *Invitation to a Beheading* plumbs the depths of the most 'real' of all realities, of life, selfhood and death, and points out that the mysteries of the magic of human consciousness should instruct us on the futility of conceiving in too decisive a manner life's other mysteries.

IV.ii. *'The unfathomable solitude that separated and united them'*: From Isolation to Solitude

If the watchword for pre-Márquezian magical realism is 'isolation', in Márquez's hands that word becomes 'solitude'. But how do these two concepts differ? Their meanings are broadly the same – they have to be, for the mechanics of magical realism to carry over – but the two bear different connotations, and thus, welcome different explorations of knowledge and reality, and especially of the extent to which the assumptions we bring to literature and life resemble those principles. In many respects, 'isolation' is the blunter of the two instruments, by virtue of being the more negatively-inflected: the word suggests an enforced alienation, interiority rather than physical remoteness, and is undoubtedly the more suited to the

psychological isolation, exacerbated rather than alleviated by the human company on offer, that characterises the dilemmas of the heroes encountered in pre-Márquezian magical realism. 'Solitude' is a more flexible concept, perhaps especially so in Spanish, as Michael Wood observes: *'soledad* is an alluring, mournful, much-used Spanish noun, suggesting both a doom and a solace, a flight from love but also from lies, a claim to dignity which is also a submission to neglect. *Loneliness* has some of this flavour, but only some' (Wood 2009: 34). 'Solitude' in Márquez's text is wedded to a stunning variety of connotations. It is at times positive, as when the first Buendía brothers find 'refuge in solitude' (Márquez 2014: 30; henceforth *YS*) and seek out sexual solace when 'anxious for solitude' (ibid. 28); at other times negative, as for Melquíades who returns from death because he 'could not bear the solitude' (50), or the elderly Úrsula in her 'impenetrable solitude of decrepitude' (253). More often it is ambivalent, as in the case of Amaranta who continually weaves and unravels her own burial shroud 'not with any hope of defeating solitude in that way, but, quite the contrary, in order to nurture it' (264), and Rebeca who 'needed many years of suffering and misery in order to attain the privileges of solitude' (225). It is friend, as Colonel Aureliano Buendía discovers in his hard-won conclusion that 'the secret of a good old age is simply an honourable pact with solitude' (205), and foe to many of the Buendías in their compulsions to the 'private and terrible solitude' of forbidden (paedophilic, incestuous, sometimes both) sexual longing (67; 147; 156; 380). 'Isolation' projects the claustrophobia, frustration, helplessness, and often misery of the narratives of pre-Márquezian magical realism, whereas 'solitude', with its breadth and pliancy of meaning, is better-adapted to the more panoramic narrative scope of Márquezian magical realism, which, though certainly no stranger to violence and anguish, is as often associated with – even identified by – a tone of whimsy, humour, and baroque excess.

Where I have used the by-words 'solitude' and 'isolation' to signal the different narrative tones of pre-Márquezian and Márquezian magical realism, David Danow devises an analogous model in highlighting the resonances between magical-realist literature and the principles of the carnivalesque which, after Bakhtin, he terms 'carnival heaven' and 'carnival hell':

> Both appear fantastic, straining credibility. Yet one presents essentially the bright side of human experience: the wide range of man's potential combined with a corresponding, even greater potentiality that exists in the extended world of nature. The other literary manifestation reveals the darkest side of human capacity, what would have been unimaginable had it not actually happened. (Danow 2004: 6)

In Danow's study, Latin American magical realism is aligned with 'carnival heaven' whilst 'carnival hell' is represented by examples of Holocaust literature, and his conception of two 'types' of one mode, 'two sides of a kind of Janus face of human experience' (ibid. 10) has obvious affiliations with the move from pre-Márquezian to Márquezian magical realism. Danow's study frames magical realism as a form of carnivalised dialogue:

> Part of the way in which that carnivalised dialogue proceeds is to remove all obstacles to its obstinate progress by obscuring the boundaries between seeming hard and fast oppositions – the official and unofficial, life and death – in an ongoing effort to merge these opposing forces into new configurations of truth and meaning. (ibid. 24)

I have touched in an earlier chapter on the significance of the carnivalesque to magical realism, and its relation to the dissolution of boundaries which Danow also identifies, but what I find especially valuable here is Danow's highlighting the 'heaven' and 'hell' aspects of magical realism, which is in fact an important point of difference from pre-Márquezian to Márquezian magical realism. Although the removal of the 'touchstone figure' is Márquez's defining alteration to the mechanics of magical realism, this alteration brings an attendant, probably more obvious, alteration in tone and technique.

It is worth at this stage briefly retracing the dominant strategies of magical realism, to demonstrate how they are used differently in pre-Márquezian and Márquezian works. The technique which both varieties of magical realism share is what Anne Hegerfeldt calls 'banalisation' (alternatively termed by Bényei 'naturalisation'): this is the calling-card technique of relating magical events in a banal tone, heavily associated with Márquez's work:

> Finally he reached the place where Melquíades used to set up his tent and he found a taciturn Armenian who in Spanish was hawking a syrup to make oneself invisible. He had drunk down a glass of the amber substance in one gulp as José Arcadio Buendía elbowed his way through the absorbed group that was witnessing the spectacle, and was able to ask his question. The gypsy wrapped him in the frightful climate of his look before he turned into a puddle of pestilential and smoking pitch over which the echo of his reply still floated: 'Melquíades is dead.' Upset by the news, José Arcadio Buendía stood motionless, trying to rise above his affliction, until the group dispersed, called away by other artifices, and the puddle of the taciturn Armenian evaporated completely. (*YS* 17)

Part of the reason for the difference in tone between pre-Márquezian and Márquezian magical realism is the consistent use of 'banalisation' throughout texts like *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude (as well as other works of Márquezian magical realism), whereas in pre-Márquezian magical realism, it is more sparingly applied. Márquezian magical realism is generally peppered throughout with casually-related magical events, whilst the presence of the supernatural in works like 'The Nose', *The Metamorphosis* and *The Heart of a Dog* is largely or entirely concentrated into a single magical event, and the focus thereafter is consumed with the events and receptions that event generates. The apparent lack of antimony between real and magical which many critics identify as a feature of Márquezian magical realism is due to the offhand regularity of magical events, which generally turn out to hold little, if any significance to the text as a whole. The difference in the density of this technique's employment has probably contributed to the pre-Márquezian texts being overlooked by magical-realist critics, who are primed to seek the use of 'banalisation' as an identifying characteristic. The difference, though, can be one of presentation as well as simple frequency: even in *The Other Side*, which of the pre-Márquezian texts studied here encounters the most frequent irruptions of the supernatural, the violations of the real have a queasy, menacing quality, like the accelerated ageing of the charwoman, the 'Brainstorm' and Patera's plague of doubles, which differ starkly in register from Márquez's flying carpets, rain of yellow flowers, and heraldic cloud of butterflies.

The inverse of this technique is what both Hegerfeldt and Bényei call 'supernaturalisation' – but which I would term 'defamiliarisation' – in which the text relates events that do not fall outside the boundaries of empirical realism, but presents them as if they do;[70] this is the same technique of defamiliarising the empirically real as observed by the German *Verfremdungseffekt* and Russian Formalism's conception of *ostranenie.* There are two varieties of defamiliarisation, which belong almost exclusively to the different registers of 'carnival heaven' and 'carnival hell', and which consequently feature with very different emphasis and regularity in Márquezian and pre-Márquezian magical realism. The first variety, which we might for clarity's sake call 'knowledge-gap-defamiliarisation', involves the reception of what the reader recognises to be an ordinary, mundane feature of reality, by a character within the text who treats it as miraculous. This technique does not problematise the reality-status of the phenomena in question, but simply depends upon a knowledge gap between the reader and the character. Márquez uses this technique heavily in the first chapter of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, when the early residents of Macondo react in amazement to the

[70] Hegerfeldt prefers 'supernaturalisation' as the name of the technique, and 'defamiliarisation' as that of the effect the technique produces. I feel the one word is adequate to both purposes.

gypsies' magnets, magnifying glasses, false teeth and ice (whilst barely batting an eyelid at flying carpets and dissolving Armenians), using defamiliarisation as a complementary tool to the banalisation of magic in exhibiting the magical-realist treatment of ontologies. However, the defamiliarisation of the mundane largely drops out of the frame after the first few pages, once the reader has been suitably acclimatised. This technique is almost exclusively associated with Márquezian magical realism because it was specifically enabled by Márquez's removal of the touchstone figure: when the character in question's perspective is aligned with that of the reader, as in pre-Márquezian magical realism, the scope for the necessary knowledge gap is reduced. This is the 'carnival heaven' variety of defamiliarisation, responsible for the 'childlike' quality some critics have ascribed to magical realism, the most straightforward technique via which 'our real world emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day', in which the mundane is reframed as miraculous by the lens of a new perspective.

The second variety of defamiliarisation, more common in the fiction of pre-Márquezian magical realism, reframes the real as fantastic by confronting, and subverting, the reader's philosophical or ethical assumptions rather than their empirical ones; an 'ethical-defamiliarisation'. This technique amounts to a kind of emphatic antiphrasis, achieved using either the mechanism of overstatement or of understatement. Both of these are superbly illustrated in *Invitation to a Beheading:* an example of overstatement would be the passage in which Cincinnatus, shortly after receiving the news that he will soon lose his head, encounters Roman, who has lost a cufflink:

> 'Oh, thanks, don't worry about it, it's nothing,' absentmindedly muttered the lawyer. And with his eyes he literally scoured the corners of the cell. It was plain that he was upset by the loss of that precious object. It was plain. The loss of the object upset him. The object was precious. He was upset by the loss of the object. *(IB* 24)

The corresponding technique of understatement is exemplified in Cincinnatus' wife's remark to her 'lame and evil-tempered' son, 'Diomedon, leave the cat alone this instant […] You already strangled one the other day, one every day is too much' (ibid. 24; 78). This is the 'carnival hell' version of defamiliarisation: both of the quoted passages attest to the staggeringly callous moral code adopted by the *Invitation*-universe, in which a cufflink ranks higher than a human (or cat) life, so offensive to our expectations as to appear incongruous with empirical realism, but without actually calling on any elements of the magical or supernatural to achieve this effect. It is essentially the same technique as the Márquezian 'carnival heaven' knowledge-gap

variety, a means of defamiliarising real phenomena, but the stakes are very different. The Márquezian variety of defamiliarisation takes the most mundane phenomena as its subject and makes us see how strange they would appear to the uninitiated (a train is described as 'like a kitchen dragging a village behind it' (*YS* 227)) whereas the pre-Márquezian 'ethical' variety takes us into the most shocking extremes of the real, to point out that the real can be stranger and more disturbing than fiction. This is a complex technique: as Hegerfeldt remarks, 'reality violating realism – this sounds paradoxical […] a conflict between empirical reality and realist representation should be ruled out by definition' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 207), and yet we have seen again and again in this thesis how, in works of pre-Márquezian magical realism, the behaviour surrounding the supernatural event eclipses the event itself in implausibility. There is nothing supernatural in *Invitation*'s prison-characters' utter inability to acknowledge the gravity of Cincinnatus' situation, nor in Yakovlevich's wife's furious reaction to his client's nose turning up in his bread roll, but they affront our expectations more powerfully than either Cincinnatus' crime of 'opacity' or the missing nose itself.

The techniques of defamiliarisation preferred by pre-Márquezian and Márquezian magical realism refer directly to their differentiating factor – the presence or absence of the touchstone figure – and also to their alignment with the principles of isolation and solitude. Márquez's removal of the touchstone figure is evidenced by the simple fact that the text does not align with the narrative vantage point of any one character throughout: there is no 'main character', no stable protagonist, with whom the reader's experience of the ontological codes can be identified. More to the point, even as the narrative's attention progresses through the vantage points of a series of pseudo-protagonists with the generations of Buendías, at no point does it yield an ontological 'touchstone', for whilst the Buendías' proximity to the modern world adjusts as the novel progresses, none ever occupy an ontological position analogous to that of the reader, i.e. of the extra-textual reality. Their attitude towards magic never changes: what differs from one Buendía to the next is the attitude towards the 'real', as the intrusions on Macondo's solitude result in a narrowing of the knowledge gap which enabled the process of defamiliarisation in the early chapters. The text's first pseudo-protagonist is José Arcadio Buendía, whose acceptance of the non-real is coupled with his incredulity of scientific advances, and so is doubly alienated from the extra-textual reality: his line 'we'll do better flying than they are doing, and with more scientific resources than a miserable bedspread' (Márquez 2014: 32) encapsulates with exquisite economy his position in relation to the inter-

and extra-textual realities at play. However, even as the text approaches its climax and the knowledge gap imposed between reader and pseudo-protagonist is all but eradicated, the Macondinos' attitude of acceptance towards the non-realist code is preserved, and so the integrity of the inter-textual reality is preserved. This is important because Márquezian magical realism is concerned with the fate of communities, and not individuals. The use of protagonistic bricolage prevents the text from investing primarily in the fate of any given character, and instead ensures that it follows the progress of the Macondo-fate: the ultimate victim of outside intrusion is not any one Buendía, in spite of any individual isolations they may experience, but is the solitude, which eventually becomes the isolation, of Macondo. As the town falls into ruin, what is felt most starkly is not the discord between the inter-textual and extra-textual realities as is the case in pre-Márquezian magical realism, but between solitude and isolation, between the Macondo of José Arcadio Buendía and the Macondo of the final Buendía, Aureliano Babilonia.

None of these techniques are unique to magical realism. That the 'banalisation' of the unfamiliar by an unsurprised narrative is a feature of marvellous and science fiction works has already been noted, and the imposition of a knowledge gap between reader and character is also frequently used in fiction to force reconsiderations of assumptive norms. An example of the latter would be Naomi Alderman's work *The Power* (2016) in which a character in the text's framing-narrative, set five thousand years in the future, expresses incredulity at the idea of a period of world history in which women were structurally subjugated by patriarchal rule (as opposed to the reverse, as is the case in the framing narrative's present). Similarly, Danow's study focuses on defamiliarisation in Holocaust literature as a means to 'an incongruously understated formulation of the times, whose cruelty extends beyond what might otherwise still be called the *human* imagination' (Danow 2004: 105). Broadly speaking, banalisation is concerned with the magical, whilst defamiliarisation is concerned with reality, and what distinguishes magical realism from other genres or modes that utilise those techniques is that it uses both in concert.

Danow's 'heaven/hell' typology is a useful model for demonstrating how different applications of the same technique (defamiliarisation) can produce works of radically different style within the single mode of magical realism. In its praxis, though, Danow does *not* treat his 'carnival hell' literature as magical realism. Even when discussing works which are frequently acknowledged within magical-realist criticism (such as D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* (1981)

and Jerzy Kosiński's *The Painted Bird* (1965)), he reserves 'magical realism' for Latin American texts, terming the Holocaust works (again after Bakhtin) 'grotesque realism'; this categorisation is based entirely on the assertion that magical realism pursues the 'bright, life-affirming, "magical" side' of the carnivalesque whilst grotesque realism is concerned with 'its dark, death-embracing, horrific aspect' (ibid. 5), qualities which he considers, for some reason, to be quite mutually exclusive, even whilst arguing that 'the two seemingly disparate literatures selected for joint analysis here represent a certain continuum in world literature' in which '*les extremes se touchent*' (7, 11). As both Hegerfeldt and Adams have already observed (Hegerfeldt 2005: 213; Adams 2011: 85-6), this categorical account is over-simplistic at best: even if 'bright' and 'dark', or 'positive' and 'pessimistic', were operable differentia in establishing literary modes, this distinction completely disregards the presence of the 'dark' and 'horrific' in Latin American magical realism, which Danow, perplexingly, does even whilst acknowledging it. He writes that the banana massacre passage in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is 'reminiscent of the literature of the Holocaust, the grim reality depicted in these passages of the premier work of magical realism is the same, only the metaphors differ', yet then proceeds to the altogether contradictory suggestion that 'the respective emphases of the two literary forms differ. What magical realism portrays is ultimately positive, affording a hopeful vision of life in which what might be termed fantastic is designed to appear plausible and real. In Holocaust literature, the fantastic emerges as horrific rather than "magic"' (Danow 2004: 9-10), a claim not at all borne out by the passage to which he refers (in which there is no magic, only horror). I suspect the reason for Danow's over-zealous division of Holocaust literature from magical realism is due in part to the endemic disinclination to categorise non-Latin American works as magical realism, but also to the fact that the portions of his study concerned with his 'grotesque realism' include discussions of works that are *not* of the magical-realist mode as well as works that are, making them arguably neither beast nor fowl in his schema, and leading him to his curious position of attempting to define magical realism by the register of its plot events rather than by its treatment of the magical and the real.

The reason that I raise this objection to Danow's model is that the inclusion of the 'horrific' in Márquez's text is central to understanding the significance of its central totem of 'solitude', which is ultimately a deeply political one. The concepts of 'carnival heaven' and 'carnival hell' are useful in understanding *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but not in the way Danow uses them: for the purposes of this study, the text's compelling 'solitude' is not any of

the localised solitudes ascribed to the individual Buendías, but the uniting solitude that characterises the town of Macondo and of the Macondo community as a whole, which, rather than exhibiting a state of pure 'carnival heaven', moves through the course of the text from a heavenly state to a hellish one via a series of intrusions on its solitude.

One Hundred Years of Solitude has a Biblical structure, beginning with Macondo's Edenic beginnings, and closing with its apocalyptic destruction; the intervening pages document the events which contribute to its development from a paradisic solitude to eventual decline into a state of isolation. That Macondo's initial state is one of solitude is established in the first chapter, which details both its geographic and cultural remoteness, and the Arcadian intentions of this solitude are clear from the fact that it appears untouched not only by modernity, but by time) (not to mention that its founder's name is literally 'Arcadio'): it is 'built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs', 'a truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died' (*YS* 1; 9). Modernity does exist beyond the garden gate, though, as we learn from the gypsies' visits with their 'wondrous' inventions, and that the prelapsarian idyll is a specific condition of Macondo (and not of the inter-textual reality as a whole) is underscored by its temporal solitude, situated, somehow simultaneously, both when 'the world was still so recent that many things lacked names' (1), and in the nineteenth century ('three hundred years' from when 'Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century' (19)). The social proximity of Macondo to the 'outside world' is likewise deliberately incalculable: the Macondinos' excitement and awe at the gypsies' offering of a magnifying glass suggests that they exist at a chasmic remove from modern life, but José Arcadio Buendía's immediate response to the 'novel' invention is to compile an instruction manual for the government, suggesting its use of a weapon of war: 'in spite of the fact that a trip to the capital was little less than impossible at that time, José Arcadio Buendía promised to undertake it as soon as the government ordered him to so that he could put on some practical demonstrations of his invention for the military authorities' (4). These confident references to 'the government' and 'the military authorities' in 'the capital' are jarring, coming amid a description of a town which we've just learned is so remote as to have never heard of magnets, and so serve to unseat the reader's attempt to situate Macondo in its surroundings.

Macondo's geographic solitude, similarly, is comically exaggerated, as the text supplies calculatedly obscure accounts of its virtually unplottable location:

> To the east there lay an impenetrable mountain chain […] To the south lay the swamps, covered with an eternal vegetable scum, and the whole vast universe of the great swamp, which, according to what the gypsies said, had no limits. The great swamp in the west mingled with a boundless extension of water. (10-11)

Thus, when José Arcadio Buendía leads an expedition of Macondinos to find civilisation, to 'open a way that would put Macondo in contact with the great inventions' (10), they head north as the only remaining option, only to end up back at the sea, and so conclude that 'Macondo is surrounded by water on all sides' (13). However, when the outside world finally, abruptly finds the village, it turns out that all along it was 'the other side of the swamp, only two days away, where there were towns that received mail every month in the year' (37). The arrival of local townsfolk in Macondo marks the beginning of the end of its innocence: the days of amazement at 'miraculous' inventions from the world beyond are over, cancelled by the 'peddlers of everyday reality' who 'were familiar with the implements of good living' (ibid.), and the dreamer José Arcadio Buendía becomes 'fascinated by an immediate reality that came to be more fantastic than the vast universe of his imagination' (39) – although as Wood observes, 'another name for innocence here is isolation, solitude: not knowing and not having what others know and have. It is a dubious privilege, but even so there is sadness in its cancellation' (Wood 2009: 30). This 'cancellation' of innocence, and of ignorance, is the process that the text traces, as Macondo's solitude moves from heaven to hell, from a paradisic one to a different, more negative solitude, one that is closer to the state of 'isolation'.

Isolation is a state that is characterised by, and arises from, a collapse in communication. This collapse in communication is caused – as should by now be no surprise – by downward pressure from a dominating master narrative. In *Invitation,* individual, creative communication was repressed by a narrative which policed the very boundaries of existence, under whose terms, '*that which does not have a name does not exist.* Unfortunately everything had a name' (*IB* 15). The only reason the text's 'transparent' characters can communicate is that they have nothing *to* communicate, no ideas that exceed the text's circumscribed linguistic possibilities: they 'understood each other at the first word, since they had no words that would end in an unexpected way, perhaps in some archaic letter, an upsilamba, becoming a bird or a catapult with wondrous consequences' (ibid.), which is why Cincinnatus' isolation centres on communication, his tragedy that 'there is in the world not a single human who can speak my language' (79). His crime is to trespass beyond the linguistic boundaries of the text-world,

committing an act whose name cannot be uttered, becoming a linguistic outlaw, forbidden to exist, and so is summarily written out of existence by the master narrative as were Samsa, Akakievich and Sharikov before him. Cincinnatus' existence represents an unspeakable quantity, a 'monstrous noun' as Stanley Corngold termed beetle-Samsa: 'one day, at some open meeting in the city park, there was a sudden wave of alarm and someone said in a loud voice, "Citizens, there is among us a–" Here followed a strange, almost forgotten word' (21). The first clue that the text gives us – albeit before we are able to understand its significance – that Cincinnatus may after all find others like him is in the graffiti inscribed on the walls of his cell by former inmates, presumably other perpetrators of 'gnostical turpitude', announcing their own rejection of the limited range of existents that the text-world permits: '"Nameless existence, intangible substance," Cincinnatus read on the wall where the door covered it when open. "Perpetual name-day celebrants, you can just …" was written in another place' (13). Crucially, though, Cincinnatus is not afforded the opportunity to meet these others within the bounds of the text: unlike the Macondinos he is actually alone, his isolation is of the purest, most acute form, and cannot be alleviated until he literally exceeds the text's limits; it is no coincidence that when he achieves this, the end of his isolation is announced by the *voices* of 'beings akin to him'.

This is an isolation of a different kind to that which plagues the Macondinos, because Márquez adapted the formula of pre-Márquezian magical realism, which explores the fate of the isolated individual, to suit his subject, which is instead the fate of the isolated community, of 'races condemned to one hundred years of solitude' (*YS* 422). Macondo's isolation, like Cincinnatus', comes from a failure of effective communication, but in Márquez's text this is a privilege that is lost, rather than one which is never permitted: at Macondo's beginning, 'many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point' (ibid. 1), in contrast to *Invitation* in which 'unfortunately, everything had a name'. Pointing conveys pure, unmediated meaning, leaves no room for ambiguity or corruption: what is not named cannot be misnamed, or renamed. The absence of names is the height of freedom from narrative oppression, an absence of fixity, an absence of certain, declarative narratives, of spurious epistemic claims, and therefore of narratives of authority. It is this loss of freedom which is constantly threatened by the interlopers, especially the ones who attempt, with increasing insistence, to impose their own narratives, like Don Apolinar Moscote, the so-called 'magistrate', with his order to paint all of Macondo's houses Conservative blue, and Father

Nicanor, who determines 'to Christianize both circumcised and gentile, legalize concubinage, and give the sacraments to the dying' (84).[71]

For this reason, of the many intrusions on the Macondinos' solitude, the most significant ones are those that endanger their abilities of successful internal communication. The first of these invaders are Melquíades' gypsies, whose apparently benign offerings from the world beyond Macondo lead to the isolation of the town's elder and de facto leader, José Arcadio Buendía, and eventually, indirectly, to the isolation of Macondo itself. Macondo's innocence, in true Biblical fashion, is threatened by the lure of knowledge: the gypsies' tantalising, serpentine glimpses of the world beyond Macondo derail José Arcadio Buendía's dedication to the Adamic husbandry of his Eden, as he complains that 'incredible things are happening in the world […] Right there across the river there are all kinds of magical instruments while we keep on living like donkeys' (8). He goes from 'a kind of youthful patriarch', the architect of 'a village that was more orderly and hard-working than any known until then' to a disconsolate pursuer of modernity, his 'spirit of social initiative disappeared […] pulled away by the fever of the magnets, the astronomical calculations, the dreams of transmutation, and the urge to discover the wonders of the world' (8-10). This thirst for knowledge propels progress from the inside out as well as the outside in, with an impetus that is repeated throughout the generations of Buendías, reaching its irreversible conclusion when Aureliano Triste succeeds in finally connecting Macondo to the outside world with the railroad, 'that was to bring so many ambiguities and certainties, so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, so many changes, calamities, and feelings of nostalgia to Macondo' (228). Macondo's movement from solitude to isolation via the promise of knowledge is forecast in the fate of José Arcadio Buendía who, maddened by his pursuit of scientific discovery, is finally 'dragged off by his imagination into a state of perpetual delirium from which he would not recover' and lives out the rest of his days tied to a chestnut tree ('a sort of inverse Tree of Knowledge', as Philip Swanson points out (Swanson 2010: 61)), 'barking in the strange language', unable to communicate, and therefore completely isolated: 'he looked at them without recognizing them, saying things they did not understand' (*YS* 81).

An even more immediate line of influence between invasion and communication breakdown is seen with the arrival of the insomnia plague, carried in from foreign lands by Rebeca (the blow-in Buendía), whose insidious symptom is not lack of sleep, but loss of

[71] For an exhaustive overview of the many invaders on Macondo's solitude, both personal and political, see Graham Burns' 'García Márquez and the Idea of Solitude' (Burns 1985).

memory, which leads to the even more serious loss of language. These two losses are related: communal loss of memory and communal loss of language combined mean loss of communal narrative, and therefore loss of communal identity, and so the insomnia plague functions, as Anna Marie Taylor points out, as 'an allegory to symbolise […] the potential repercussions when collective means of communication do not function in relation to the past' (Taylor 1975: 104). This is where the flexibility of Márquez's use of the word 'solitude' comes into its own: the insomnia / amnesia plague captures a degree of individual solitude in the erosion of interpersonal connection which language normally facilitates, but more poignantly, relates to the way in which a community can, paradoxically, become solitary. That Márquez adapted the pre-Márquezian magical-realist poetics of isolation to articulate a different kind of isolation, affecting communities rather than individuals, is perfectly demonstrated in the insomnia plague, which a near-exact inversion of Kubin's sleeping sickness: in the latter, each individual is trapped in his own psyche with no possibility of outside communication whatsoever, whereas Márquez shifts the focus to the ruinous isolation that can impact a community when it loses its internal coherence to outside intrusion.[72]

The loss of language also has wider historical implications: the Buendías' solution to forgetting the names of household objects is to begin labelling them, first only with names, but then, as amnesia progresses, with more detailed instructions: 'This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk' (*YS* 48); the free, instinctive communication they previously enjoyed is replaced by written notes, and their communal memory is replaced by the infinitely more corruptible written historical record, signalling Macondo's loss of its temporal solitude, its fall into history, 'the shift from the "Arcadian" pre-historical era into historical time' (Bell 1993: 44). Though the Macondinos recover their memories through the ministrations of Melquíades (the original bringer of knowledge), their fall into history cannot be paused. The early attempts on Macondo's narrative autonomy, by Don Apolinar Moscato and the priest, were fairly easily conquered, but as the text progresses, after the impact of the plague, two civil wars, the tyrannical régime of Arcadio, the multiple assassinations and murders, and finally the clamorous arrival of the railroad which brings electricity, the telephone, cinema, and an

[72] Michael Bell makes the point that the insomnia sickness is appropriately transmitted from the Guajiro Indians in a kind of colonial tag, 'since the destruction of someone else's cultural memory usually involves a guilty repression of your own' (Bell 1993: 45); Swanson, similarly, suggests that 'The founding of Macondo echoes the chronicles of the "discovery" and colonisation of the "New World", and the plague of forgetfulness the loss of historical memory regarding the indigenous inheritance' (Swanson 2010: 59).

'avalanche of foreigners' (*YS* 234) who settle in Macondo and transform it with breathless rapidity, the peaceful, coherent town we first met is unrecognisably fractured, and hopelessly vulnerable to narrative invasion and subordination.

This narrative subordination comes in the form of the banana company, the most calamitous invader of all, which completes Macondo's journey to isolation, to 'carnival hell'. The invasion of the banana company is generally considered to be the nucleus of the text, and is surely the invader of which all the others have been prefigurations, not least because it is a thinly-veiled proxy for the notorious United Fruit Company, and its actions barely-fictionalised retellings of historical events. The text, though, doesn't rely on the reader's recognising the historical credibility to lend weight to the despicable veracity of the banana company's massacre of three thousand striking workers. Instead it semaphores the gravity of the event by switching abruptly away from the narrative's established tone, 'the flippant, frivolous, sometimes even hilarious tone, which is consistently maintained except in relation to the massacre' (Shaw 1997: 326), and along with this, shifts its mode of magical-realist technique, from banalisation to defamiliarisation:

> After his shout something happened that did not bring on fright but a kind of hallucination. The captain gave the order to fire and fourteen machine guns answered at once. But it all seemed like a farce. It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen, but not the slightest reaction was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. Suddenly, on one side of the station, a cry of death tore open the enchantment: 'Aaaagh, Mother.' A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the centre of the crowd with a great potential of expansion. (*YS* 311)

This passage is drenched in unreality, 'hallucinatory' and 'farcical', but the effect is not achieved by exceeding the limits of reality, but rather by exacerbating them, showing how far into the realms of the improbable reality can expand. The event resides in the ontological category of the 'real', but due to Márquez's use of magical-realist technique, it appears far more startling than its surrounding magical occurrences. There are two survivors of the massacre, of whom Wood writes that 'both seem to die in this paragraph, because the light and the world go out, and the man's face is bathed in blood. Neither of them does die, but to survive in these conditions is to be a sort of ghost, hero and narrator of a hopelessly tall tale' (Wood 2009: 23); this observation highlights not only the defamiliarisation of reality that the massacre achieves,

but the watershed quality of the event, the irretrievable damage done to Macondo as it arrives in carnival hell.

If isolation is characterised by a breakdown in communication, then Macondo is truly in a state of isolation after the massacre, when José Arcadio Segundo tells the first person he meets what he has just witnessed:

> 'There must have been three thousand of them,' he murmured.
> 'What?'
> 'The dead,' he clarified. 'It must have been all of the people who were at the station.'
> The woman measured him with a pitying look.
> 'There haven't been any dead here,' she said. 'Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo.' (*YS* 313-4)

The massacre functions as the final, decisive blow to Macondo's narrative power, because in the aftermath, throughout the whole town the 'official version' of the story is repeated: '"You must have been dreaming," the officers insisted. "Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town"' (ibid. 315). This version is the one that prevails, 'the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks' (355), and soon develops into part of an even more egregious alternative 'history', in which 'Colonel Aureliano Buendía […] was a figure invented by the government as a pretext for killing Liberals', and even 'that the banana company had never existed' (396). This act of 'official' narrative overwriting the 'real' one is a magnificent reflection of the employment of ontological codes in magical realism: the reader is not in any meaningful way confused about which is 'real', but when one is laid atop the other, the first is still visible, palimpsest-like, in the fabric of the text, and so the question of narrative authority becomes impossible to untangle. The text's authority belongs, surely, to Gabriel García Márquez who created Colonel Aureliano Buendía, and yet the banana-company-narrative succeeds in writing him out of the story, and so the question of whose 'version' triumphs cannot be solved: like the diploid ending of *The Other Side,* there is no hierarchy of authority between the two narratives, just as there isn't between the two ontological codes in a work of magical realism.

The question of whose narrative is the authoritative one is further complicated by the text's closing revelation, when *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is revealed to be, or be emblematically twinned with, the manuscript of Melquíades, a chronicle of the Buendía family foretold, and the deciphering of the manuscript causes Macondo to self-destruct. The significance of the manuscript operates on a number of the levels already discussed here.

Firstly, its composition was precipitated by the insomnia plague: it is the physical manifestation of Macondo's fall into historical time and written history, and so delivers on the peril which accompanied that shift, condemning Macondo to annihilation when the written history, the manuscript (and the text), comes to an end. Secondly, it relates directly to the subject of communication – the manuscript, we learn, is triply-enciphered, 'written in Sanskrit' with 'the even lines in the private cipher of the Emperor Augustus and the odd ones in a Lacedemonian military code' (421), and so since the Buendías cannot read the prophecy, it narratively entraps them in the linguistic solitude that the insomnia plague engendered; as Michael Bell writes, 'they are unknown even to themselves. The device images their linguistic solitude and links it to their lack of self-knowledge: it suggests some important truth at once apparent and inaccessible to them' (Bell 2010: 180). Finally, as a direct result of this, Melquíades' manuscript is the ultimate in narrative oppression: unbeknownst to them, the Buendías' fates have been pre-determined, and for all their appearance of free will, they have been imprisoned and subjugated by the text as surely as Cincinnatus was in the narrative fortress of *Invitation to a Beheading.*

It is surprising, really, that nobody has hitherto undertaken a comparative study of *Invitation to a Beheading* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Their endings are astonishingly similar in their phrasing:

> A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters; an arid gloom fleeted; and amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him. (*IB* 180)

> Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages […] Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. (*YS* 422)

At the same time, these two passages are as entirely different as they are strikingly alike. This could be the very same apocalyptic wind, having blown through *Invitation to a Beheading* and directly into the pages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – and yet, whilst Cincinnatus is

miraculously spared, Aureliano, the last Buendía and the last Macondino, appears to suffer the opposite fate, trapped in the sinking ship of the text.

Is Márquez's ending as pessimistic as it seems? Whereas Nabokov in his text celebrates the tenacity of the individual human spirit, which survives the abuses to which it is constantly subjected in pre-Márquezian magical realism, Márquez is writing not about individuals, but about communities, and the abuses they suffer from invasion. The obvious interpretation, then, is that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represents the inevitable outcome of this oppression, with the native narrative silenced and obliterated by the powerful invader, 'condemned' to their solitude even as it degrades inexorably into isolation. Where Cincinnatus' isolation is alleviated, Macondo's is assured. Elsewhere, though, Márquez does seem to admit the possibility that the two opposing narratives which clash when cultures collide, as in colonial oppression, could instead be reconciled, and isolation avoided, if only successful communication could be achieved. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, the 'solitude of Latin America' is attributed not to its invasion by foreign forces, but to the procrustean attitude of those invaders:

> it is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world, exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us. It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of life are not the same for all, and that the quest of our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them. The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary. (Márquez 1987: 209)

Moreover, he clarifies that 'tellers of tales who, like me, are capable of believing anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to undertake the creation of a minor Utopia: a new and limitless Utopia for life wherein no one can decide for others how they are to die' (ibid. 211). Márquez leaves no question as to the possibility of a different outcome for Macondo, and therefore for Latin America, in reversing the text's final statement, proposing as possible that 'the lineal generations of one hundred years of solitude will have at last and for ever a second chance on earth' (ibid.).

This appears to be an about-turn for Márquez, a wholesale change in outlook between the publication of the text in 1967 and the acceptance of his Nobel Prize in 1982. Perhaps it is. Certainly Donald Shaw's summary of the first decade of critical responses to the text concluded that 'if there is an emerging consensus about anything connected with García Márquez it is

about the fact that his standpoint in *Cien años de soledad*, despite its humour and ludic aspects, is in the end one of profound pessimism' (Shaw 1977: 327). There is another possible reading of the ending, though: one that is suggested precisely by comparison with the earlier *Invitation to a Beheading.* If the destruction of the stage-set of Nabokov's text was a liberation of Cincinnatus from its grasp, why can't the near-identical destruction of Macondo be a similar emancipation? The escalating misfortunes which Macondo suffered from its repeated invasions were consecrated in Melquíades' manuscript, which naturally could not hope to be resisted until it could be deciphered, and so it seems logical that the latter act can be interpreted as enabling the former. The destruction of Macondo is only the destruction of the version which was imprisoned in the manuscript, and by extension, the destruction of a Latin American narrative told by a controlling voice which claimed authority over its fate. This is the interpretation Gerald Martin suggests:

> Aureliano's reading literally puts an end to one hundred years of solitude, to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and thus turns the reader who is reading about him back out into the history outside the text. […] The apocalyptic end to the Buendías is not […] the end of Latin America but the end of neo-colonialism and its conscious or unconscious collaborators. (Martin 1987: 111)

Michael Bell reaches a similar conclusion in identifying within the text two interconnected narratives, 'the "Melquíades" and "Márquez" narratives' (Bell 1993: 59), with the one foretold and the other retrospective, the former embodying a deterministic view of history which 'enforces a sense of inevitability as the outcome is already known in advance' (ibid. 58), and the Márquez narrative challenging that determinism with its competing perspective by which the 'fatalistic historical vision of the chronicle is mediated through a further narrative level, the novel itself, whose humorous tone and mysteriously external provenance constantly belie enclosure within the terms of Melquíades' prophecy' (ibid. 59). In this way *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, just like *Invitation to a Beheading*, can be read as a tract on unknowability. Magical-realist writing has always, in all its forms, been a challenge, a form of protest, of resistance, which perhaps explains its curiously prevalent impulse to *auto-da-fé*: the ending of Marquez's text recalls the end of Nabokov's, which in turn recalls the end of *The Other Side* which saw the dramatic dissolution of Dream Realm (predominantly by ants, in another uncanny parallel with Márquez's text); these also look forward to the disintegration of Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, the bodily manifestation of India's national post-Independence narrative, and possibly even recall Bulgakov's memorable reversal of this trope, in which it is the oppressed narrative which is cast

into the flames, and yet miraculously survives. These destructions represent the success of the protest against the oppressor.

This is not to propose, of course, that those critics who have identified pessimism about modernity, and about the fate of Latin America, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are necessarily wrong – it's not as straightforward as that, and how could it be? Márquez is writing about such phenomena as knowledge and progress, overall desirable, but with inevitable associated pitfalls, like the 'ha-has' built into the design of eighteenth-century formal gardens, or indeed the tree of knowledge built into the Garden of Eden. Nor is there any need for what Martin calls Márquez's 'determinedly optimistic conception of the march of history' (Martin 1987: 100) to contradict his reservations about human nature, as he expressed in interview in 1971:

> I think the critics who most nearly hit the mark were those who concluded that the whole disaster of Macondo – which is a telluric disaster as well – comes from this lack of solidarity – the solitude which results when everyone is acting for himself alone. That's then a political concept, and interests me as such – to give solitude the political connotation I believe it should have. (Bell-Villada 2006: 39)

Márquez, after all, never claims that the Utopia he envisages has yet been achieved, only his faith that it can be, and so his text expresses both the problem and the solution, rather like how Nabokov contains within his vision portraits of both the best and the worst extremes of the spectrum of human nature. The text, being a work of magical realism, is necessarily a curate's egg, and to read its self-destructive end as infused with positive potential is not necessarily to renounce the entire text as a pessimistic one, but to read it as a complex work which weaves together the contradictory cadences of 'solitude' in the same way that in Melquíades' manuscript, 'the use of the ancient language and of the multiple codes could be taken to symbolise the baffling complexity of reality' (Shaw 1977: 318). The point being made is both a philosophical and a political one. In using the techniques of magical realism, Márquez showcases the possibility of two opposed codes working in creative, cooperative harmony: he extrapolates the local, petty differences between cultures into a difference of radical ontological opposition, and places them in peaceful collaboration, as if to ask why, if the magical and the real can get along, the rest of the world cannot.

IV.iii. Conclusion: The Insufficient Unlikeliness of 'Reality'

The 'touchstone figure' has been present throughout this thesis. His role is thematically consistent, in each guise forcing the reader to experience their own individuality in relation to the world, but in each appearance highlighting a different stratum of the thematic paradigm. In *The Other Side* he disturbed our perception of aporetic ontologies by venturing into the wonderland of Dream Realm, whilst retaining his expectations from the outside world; in *The Metamorphosis* he embodied this aporia in his physical form, drawing our attention repeatedly to the exact zone of ontological conflict at his physical perimeter, which he invited us to dissect. In 'The Nose' he drew our attention to the absurdity and the illusory nature of the prevailing narrative of social authority, and in *The Heart of a Dog* reminded us of this authority's antagonistic position in relation to humanity, and of the profound peril it poses to the integrity of the individual who gets caught up in it. In *Invitation to a Beheading* this antagonism was taken to its logical, life-threatening extreme where it was finally possible to reveal to us the touchstone figure's hitherto unexpected capacity for resistance, and the surprising triumphs that it can yield; powers, which, the text is sure to remind us, are basic human ones, available to any individual who manages to maintain his capacity for interiority against the external pressures which seek to corrupt and confiscate it:

> 'And then, of course, there is always some hope. … Indistinct, as if under water, but therefore all the more attractive. You speak of escape…' […]
> 'This is curious,' said M'sieur Pierre. 'What are these hopes, and who is this saviour?'
> 'Imagination,' replied Cincinnatus. (*IB* 86-7)

The most visible role that the touchstone figure plays in my model of magical realism is in accounting for the shift in emphasis, technique and tone that accompanied the development of the mode from pre-Márquezian to Márquezian magical realism. However, the touchstone figure has also – necessarily – occupied the nodal point of each individual text under discussion, his ontological position supplying the starting point for identifying and interpreting the use of magical-realist technique, and so has been the focal lens through which this thesis has achieved its stated aims: it has enabled me to not only identify works of magical realism in various contexts, but to account for their presence in, and explain their relationship to those contexts. I have argued that it is a logically and methodologically insupportable convention to classify magical realism on the basis of a narrowly prescribed geographical and historical provenance,

and proven this by identifying it elsewhere. In bringing to light the relation between the production of magical realism and some of the world-historic developments to which it responds, I have begun the work required to release magical realism from its lingering reputation as 'a passing fashion in the literary history of a certain region' (Bowers 2004: 122), famed for 'the sloppy use of the term […] by western critics eager to bracket and to explain away the cultural production of the region' (King 2000: 5). Overall, I hope by demonstrating its application in this thesis to encourage adoption of this methodology, which privileges the use of magical-realist technique (sustained presence of antagonistic ontological codes; element of discontinuity) in identifying texts as magical-realist, and then examines the work's relationship to its context on its own merits.

The touchstone figure has operated in this thesis less as an interpretative tool applied to the texts chosen for analysis than as an Ariadne's Thread through them, a point of stability from which I have been able to embark upon comparative analysis, a structural theme which encompasses all magical-realist literature, and therefore is as significant in its absence as in its presence. Once we accept that both Nabokov's and Márquez's texts, as well as Kubin's, Kafka's, Gogol's and Bulgakov's, constitute different passages though the single labyrinthine mode of magical realism, the point at which the thread frays, the point of Márquez's transformative treatment of the mode, is *ipso facto* as significant in riddling the maze as its ubiquity up to that point. As demonstrated earlier in my comparison of the Paris and Petersburg paradigms, the differences between and within literary modes are frequently as illuminating as their similarities, often more so.

It is on this basis that I wish to conclude with a final word on a point that has been raised repeatedly throughout this thesis, which concerns magical realism as a comment on reality. By 'reality' I at this stage refer both to an ontological category, and the cultural, historical and geographic context from which a given text emerges, which is a liberty I inherit from the conflation of those concepts by the writers whose work forms the body of this study.

Magical realism is always a statement of epistemological agnosticism. Epistemological agnosticism is the only available foothold in an ontological structure that flatly refuses the limits of the real. Acknowledging this is important because doing so counters one of the most sustained criticisms that has been levelled against the magical-realist mode, which is that of reification: this was the essence of Adorno's objection to any interpretive rhetoric which exceeded the realms of the empirical, and comprises a common critique of the use of magical-

realist technique in the postcolonial context, which is often seen as 'escapist and ineffectual at best, and neo-colonial and exoticising at worst' (Aldea 2011: 147). The reification argument was most forcibly expressed in Liam Connell's 1998 philippic 'Discarding Magical Realism', which deems magical-realist technique to

> codify a set of prejudices about Western European and non-Western societies and their respective modes of thinking […] non-Western societies are persistently characterized through a series of indicators which are categorized as primitive—one of which is a residual belief in myth, magic, and the use of ritual. Western nations by contrast are characterized as progressive, developing, modern. (Connell 1998: 1)

The argument is that by employing any ontological structure that sets one code in opposition with another, and associating that structure with a social structure in which there is an oppressive and an oppressed party, the former will always be associated with the ontological code representing Western post-Enlightenment norms, leaving the inferior, empirically-void 'magical' code for the oppressed. In other words the oppressed cannot win, because by magical realism's very construction a hierarchy automatically emerges which replicates, and therefore reifies that structure of values the magical-realist text purports to negate. This objection implicitly applies not just to the postcolonial argument, but to all contexts of oppressive hierarchical control, which, as we have seen, is a common factor in all origins of magical-realist production; it could certainly apply to the magical-realist treatment of the Petersburg paradigm, and could just as easily be extended to the use of magical-realist technique to challenge the structures of patriarchy, as used by feminist writers such as Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson.

I think this pessimistic assessment of magical realism's effects drastically underestimates the power of boundary-denial. Magical realism is far more provocative than that. Structures of oppression are founded on claims of epistemic superiority, claims to knowledge (indigenous people are not emotionally sophisticated; working class citizens have no ambitions to self-improvement; women are not intellectually equal), which amount to claims about reality, which epistemologies profess to have harnessed, bounded within the walls of their programmatic worldview. Magical realism's denial of those bonds is an act of epistemic surrender, which is not only a challenge but a reminder – at times a teasing, gibing reminder, a playful nudge at the house of cards – of the lessons of history. In the concluding chapter of her work *Lies that Tell the Truth*, Anne Hegerfeldt undertakes a lively romp through five centuries of human

knowledge, detailing key points at which 'reality' burst its supposed banks, often with resplendently disruptive consequences: the explorers and colonisers of the New World, who found flora, fauna and landscapes so unexpected that they defeated existing linguistic faculties, and contributed to the 'dramatic expansion of the English lexicon during the late Renaissance' (Hegerfeldt 2005: 332); the rise in museum culture in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries which introduced such a staggering wealth of 'illustrated popular books, optical cabinets, marvellous machines, astonishing inventions' that the American public in 1835 were so desensitised as to credulously consume a series of hoax articles run by the *New York Sun* detailing life on the moon (ibid. 335); then the next century's inverse sequel with the advent of space travel in the 1960s, so recently the stuff of science fiction (or of hoax), which produced a climate of development in which 'everyday events continually blurred the comfortable distinctions between reality and unreality, between fantasy and fact' (ibid. 331). The reception of these events by the real-world public is knowledge-gap-defamiliarisation in action, and so magical realism's reproduction of this defamiliarisation is both a comment on 'real' as an ontological category, and a comment on its own cultural climate. By this transposition, magical realism treats the announcement of any but the most banal, local of knowledge-claims as a folly; if reality keeps expanding, then all knowledge claims are specious, and cannot form the bases of immutable structures of knowledge that their makers try to promote.

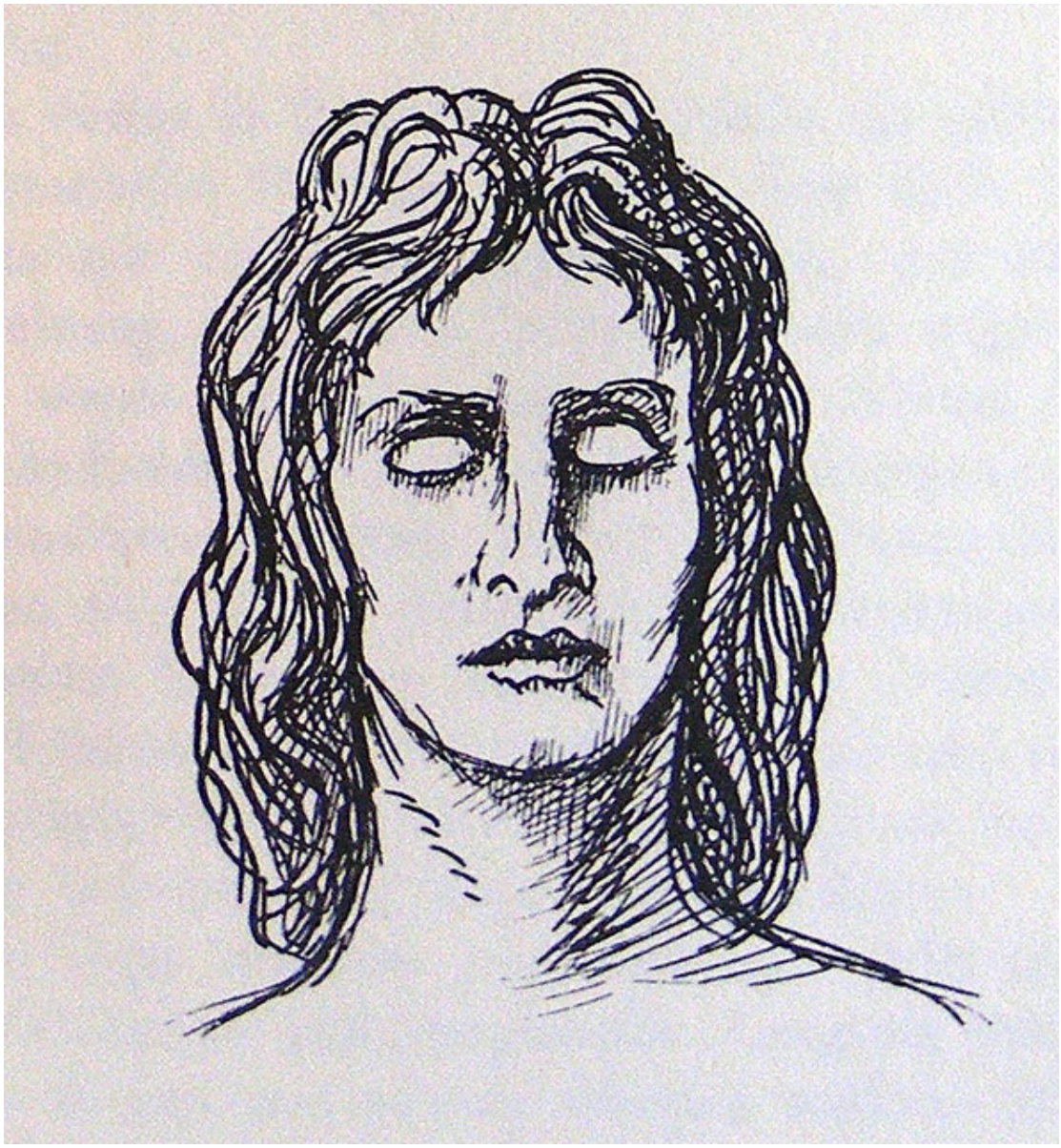
This does not by any means amount to a dismissal of the significance of specious knowledge claims: as we have seen throughout the works examined here, the exposure of the insidious consequences of their presence in and propagation through society is a primary motivation for the production of magical realism. Rather it is a dismissal of their validity, an exposure of the received chronicle of 'reality' as nothing but a vision. A vision of reality, a story told about it, perhaps containing glimpses, elements of truth, but so far from the whole picture as to be laughably unsound; a vision whose greatest deficiency is its failure to recognise, even after decades of endlessly-renewed proof, that the 'whole picture' is beyond our wildest imaginings; failure to recognise, in the face of this, the absurdity of any knowledge claims; failure to be, in Nabokov's words, 'sufficiently unlikely'.

Appendix I

Fig. 1

Alfred Kubin, *Das Grausen* (c.1902)

Fig. 2



Alfred Kubin, *Patera* (1909)

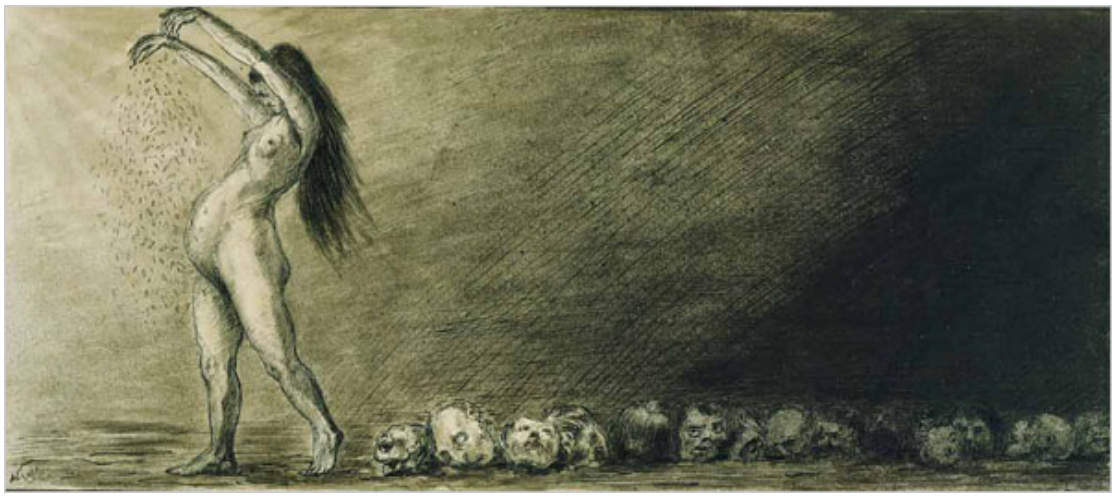
Fig. 3

Alfred Kubin, frontispiece illustration to *Die andere Seite* (1909)

Fig. 4

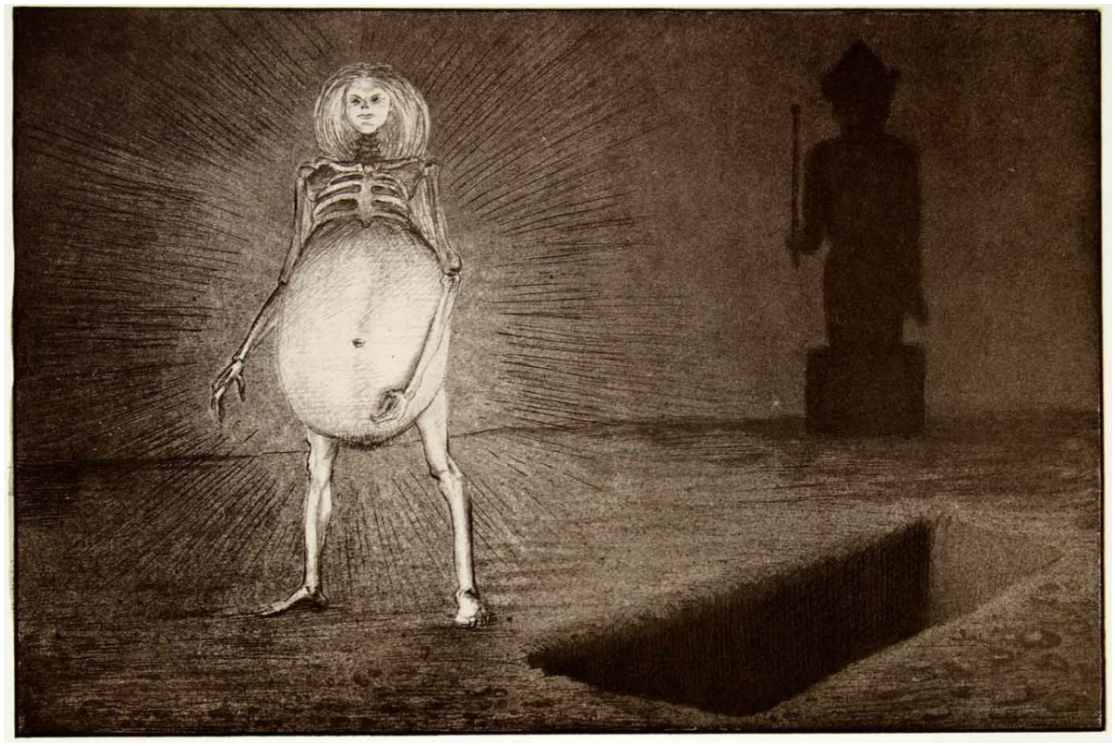
Alfred Kubin, 1898 (aged 21)

Fig. 5



Alfred Kubin, *Earth, Mother Of Us All* (1900)

Fig. 6



Alfred Kubin, *The Egg* (1901-2)

Fig. 7

Alfred Kubin, *Der Mensch* (1902)

Appendix II

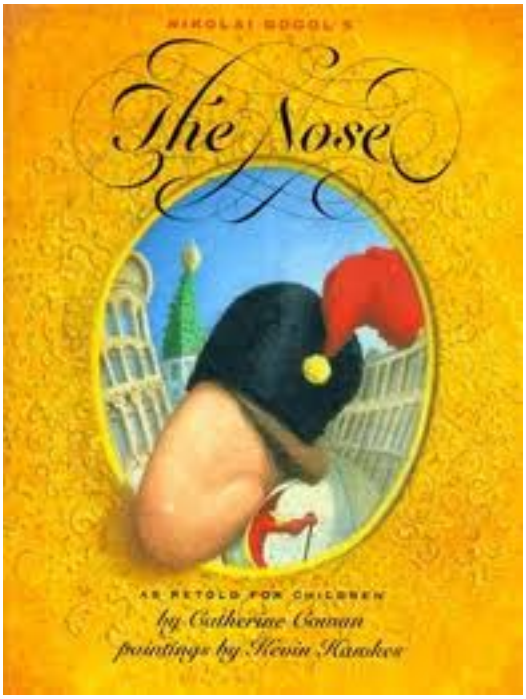
Clockwise from top left:

Kevin Hawkes' cover illustration of Catherine Cowan's *The Nose: As Retold for Children* (1994)

Sergei Aleksandrovich Alimov: 'Major Kovalyov's Nose Crossing Palace Square'

Monument to Gogol's Nose in St Petersburg, Universitetskaya Embankment, 11, courtyard of the St Petersburg State University Faculty of Philology

Detail from Dmitry Okulich-Kazarin, 'Nose'



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