Realism and the Novel
For *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel* (ed. Eric Bulson)

By Michael Sayeau

Realism is as much about the distance from reality as it is proximity. And it is because of this distance despite proximity that realism has always been a vexed matter for the novel in ethical, political, and aesthetic terms. Who gets to compose the realistic representation of whom, and who is to reap the benefits (whether aesthetic or political or otherwise) of it? And how is it to be done, especially when the content of the 'real' that is to be represented is so varied – running from the shelves of the contemporary supermarket to scenes of remarkable cruelty, depending on the location and situation from which this 'real' is drawn. 'Realism' exerts a sort of gravitational pull over the novel – writers may work within or around or against its mandates, but in the end having some sort of relation to realism seems to be an evitable part of what it means to write a novel.

But first, why all this effort and trouble just to show things they way they ostensibly really are? And why does anyone bother in the first place? Why go to the trouble of carefully crafting and then publishing the 'real' when all the reader would have to do to get a look at it for free would be to open her eyes and look around the room she is in, the street outside the window, or the city in which the street is located? In his essay on the so-called "reality effect", Roland Barthes attempts to answer a similar sort of question, and begins with a seemingly inconsequential detail from Gustave Flaubert's short story 'A Simple Heart' and another from the historian Jules Michelet's work:

> Flaubert, describing the room occupied by Mme Aubain, Félicité's employer, tells us that 'an old piano supported, under a barometer, a pyramidal heap of boxes and cartons' ("A Simple Heart," from *Three Tales*) […] produces notations which structural analysis […] usually and heretofore has left out, either because its inventory omits all details that are "superfluous" (in relation to structure) or because these same details are treated as "filling." [1]

Here Barthes is asking, at the opening of his essay, what criticism has to do with textual details that serve no function in the plot and which reveal nothing profound about the characters, their personalities, or their outcomes? That barometer on Mme Aubain's wall might provide a tiny bit of sociological shading to our sense of her (she is the sort of person who would own a barometer, at least a minimal marker of social class) but not very much – and besides, her social class has already been well established in the paragraph just before it appears. So the question remains, what exactly is it doing there?

Barthes's answer (if that is the word for it) comes toward the end of the essay when he describes what he calls the 'referential illusion':
[W]hen these details are reputed to *denote* the real directly, all that they do – without saying so – is *signify* it; Flaubert's barometer […] finally say[s] nothing but this: *we are the real*; […] the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity. [2]

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[1] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 141.
[2] Ibid., 148.

According to Barthes, it is the very lack of narrative usefulness of these details – the barometer, the little door, and by connection so much of the *stuff* that is included in narrative fiction – that helps to explain the reason for their existence in the text. By not having any function other than 'being there,' they, paradoxically, fulfil their function, which is to indicate that the world depicted is like the world in which the reader reads the work, full of objects with no immediate purpose or sometimes no purpose at all.

While Barthes's argument is one that sidesteps the ways that small details like the barometer can *mean* in novels and stories, it nonetheless is a vivid if complex evocation of one of the most important aspects of literary realism – that it not only includes but also revels in the inclusion of material seemingly too banal, ordinary, or useless to merit fictional inclusion. It is an answer that, in turn, raises a series of ever more difficult and sometimes abstract questions about the form of the novel. What is the ideological valence of all this useless accumulation of detail, of the writer's representation of it, and the reader's response to it? Is delving intentionally into the realm of the insipid and everyday an estranging, critical act or is it, as Oscar Wilde wonders in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a way to turn novels and stories into mirrors into which the audience can gaze narcissistically, finding itself – or something very like itself – taken up for artistic representation. [3] Furthermore, a fascination with the documentary aspects of realism that could in one light appear to be fuelled by a desire for self-transcendence and even engagement in another could appear to be nothing more than voyeuristic slumming.

Perhaps most importantly, given the history of the last century and a half, characterised as it is by a widening of the geographical scope (or at least our awareness of the scope) of literary production, Barthes's reference to 'A Simple Heart' raises, if only between the lines, questions aboutthe relationship between space, identity, and realism. Flaubert's story, like so much of his work, takes place in what, from a certain perspective, is a peripheral location (Pont-l'Évêque in Normandy, about 120 miles from Paris) – and part of the 'simpleness' at play has to do with the non-centrality of the lives and characters depicted. But what happens when a realist literary stance is translated into locales or situations far more distant (whether literally or metaphorically) than Normandy is from Paris? What happens if when a writer attempts to hang Mme Aubain's barometer on the wall of a home in Bombay, Columbia, or the American south in the years after the Civil War? It is impossible, or at least unprofitable, to consider what realism is without considering the forms, often intentionally distorted ones, that it has taken globally during the last hundred years. The emergence, for instance, of what has come to be called 'magical realism' not only was an adaptive challenge to the suitability of traditional mimetic forms to capture the full reality of peripheral situations, whether geographical, social, imperial, or racial, but was also an intervention that exposed some of the nearly invisible presuppositions of realism itself. (Wilde's reference to Caliban in his preface is interesting in this light, as the presumably British reader angered by either the mirror's distortion or lack of distortion, or perhaps both, is translated into a racialized figure himself. The self that faces the mirror is from the start an other.)

Long before the emergence of 'other' realisms, the term itself has from its earliest iterations been haunted by self-divisions and internal contradictions. Its first appearance seems to have been in a French journal (*Mercure français du XIXe siècle*) in 1821, in which it is aligned more generally with verisimilitude than with the imitation of established literary forms:

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[3] 'The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.' Wilde and Bristow, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 3.

> This literary doctrine that is gaining ground every day and which drives toward faithful imitation not of other artistic masterpieces, but rather of the original that nature offers us, might well be called *realism*: on the basis of a few appearances, it seems to be set to be the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century, the literature of the true. (translation mine) [4]

By the 1850s, it was an established term for the critical discussion of literature as well as fine art – Louis Edmond Duranty founded a journal called *Réalisme* in 1856. [5] But from the very first we can see that the term meant at least two things at once. On the one hand, it refers to an artistic stance that leans towards the accurate representation of things rather than obedience to previously established models. On the other hand, even if in the passage above it only comes in the form of a prediction based on 'a few appearances,' it is the word for an artistic movement, even a coterie.

Realism (with a capital-R) is a word we use to describe a school of writers from the nineteenth century who, as the story goes, reacted against the excesses (and especially the excessive subjectivity and general over-the-top-ness) of those we now label the Romantics. It began (again, according to the conventional telling of the history) with Europeans, generally British and French, such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot, on the one side of the Channel, and Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert on the other side. Germans (Theodor Fontaine et al.), Russians (Anton Chekov, Leo Tolstoy), and Americans (William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane) filled out the ranks as the movement spread.

But, then again, 'realism,' this time with a lower-case r, is something that has always been an important trait of the novel, at least in the tradition that had its beginnings in seventeenth-century Europe. According to Ian Watt, for instance, realism has long been seen as a 'defining characteristic' that 'differentiates the work of the early eighteenth-century novelists from previous fiction.' [6] And,he continues,

> If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it. [7]

Furthermore, novelistic realism is as much a matter of form as content. The very notion of fiction bears within it, even historically, a complex relationship between reality and falsehood, truth and lies. While we (and modern-day bookshops, in their layout) argue that the essential distinction in written works is between fiction and fact, Catherine Gallagher has argued that the novel has from its start been a matter of findinga third way between the two poles. Since the seventeenth century, the novel has negotiated not only with its distinction from factuality but also from fantasy. In other words, the novel emerged out of a dual differentiation – what happens may not have actually happened, but it might well have. As she argues, as the novel emerged out of and in resistance to prior forms like the personal allegory, the romance, and the libellous screed,

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[4] Villanueva, *Theories of Literary Realism*, 18.

[5] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 10.

[6] Ibid., 10.

[7] Ibid., 11.

Two things were lacking: (1) a *conceptual category* of fiction, and (2) believable stories that did not solicit belief. Novels supplied both of these simultaneously, which explains their paradoxical relation to fiction. Fictionality only became visible when it became credible, because it only needed conceptualizing as the difference between fictions and lies became less obvious, as the operators of fictionality became multiple and incredibility lost its uniqueness. [8]

She continues:

As the novel distinguished itself through fictionality, its fictionality also differentiated itself from previous incredible forms. Hence we have another way of imagining the paradox: the novel slowly opens the conceptual space of fictionality in the process of seeming to narrow its practice. [9]

So rather than the simple division between factual writing and 'made-up' narratives, according to Gallagher's argument, the category of fiction as it developed over the centuries has mediated between the two poles. It is not a true record of actual occurrences, but neither is it an utterly fantastic account of things that could never be. Fiction, she claims, developed as mode of representation that was *untrue but plausible.* And this, as she shows, has long been – from the beginning, in fact – something that literary criticism has been aware of. She cites, for instance, the following passage from the ninth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* on the role of the poet versus the role of the historian:

From what has been said it is clear too that the poet's job is not to tell what has happened but the kind of things that *can* happen, i.e., the kind of events that are possible according to probability or necessity. For the difference between the historian and the poet is not in their presenting accounts that are versified or not versified . . . ; rather, the difference is this: the one tells what has happened, the other the kind of things that can happen. (*Poetics*, ch. 9 [Else 1967: 301–2]) [10]

While Aristotle, of course, isn't discussing novels, realist or otherwise, his distinction, which runs not between things that happen and things that haven't happened, but between what has happened and what *could* happen, speaks to the inherence of the notion of what we now call realism in literary understanding from the start.

But how is this plausibility achieved? Aristotle links it in his *Poetics* to 'probability or necessity' – in other words our sense of *how things often enough are* and *what general happens as a result of a thing like this happening first.* Novelistic realism, at its most basic level, is a matter of conformity to certain rules of thumb and unwritten manuals of conventional wisdom about the sorts of things that are likely or unlikely to happen in a given situation. As the novel developed in Europe, and due in part to an increasing interest in human psychology (both before and then after the career of Sigmund Freud), this plausibility increasingly takes the form of what we now call *psychological realism*, which is staked on the depiction of the relationship between the internal personalities, mentalities, and thought patterns of characters and how they are informed by and in turn play out within the external world. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, for instance, could be encapsulated as the working out of a thought experiment: *what would happen if a young woman, who had received a thorough education in romance fiction, ended up living in a very boring provincial French town with an inept*

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[8] Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," 340.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 342–343.

husband. The intricate portrayal of Emma Bovary's interiority (in particular, its initial constitution) and how it manifests itself in her behaviour in the locale in which she finds herself is at the heart of Flaubert's innovatively realist project.

A late arriving sub-branch of nineteenth-century realism called naturalism intensifies this sense of social and psychological causality until the characters and their actions seem almost wholly predetermined by the circumstance out of which they emerge. An easy illustration of what this might mean comes on the first page of the American naturalist Theodor Dreiser's 1900 novel *Sister Carrie* with the subtitle of the first chapter: 'The Magnet Attracting: A Waif amid Forces.' [11] True to form, the novel's protagonist is inserted into a field of forces and acts in what is meant to be taken as a nearly automatically responsive way.

But there is another way that novels establish their realistic plausibility – and it is one that perhaps is a symptom of the long modernity in which they emerged and blossomed as a form. It is also a way that has affinities with Barthes's 'reality effect' discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In his essay 'Serious Century, Franco Moretti analyses the relationship between what he calls 'fillers' and 'turning points' in the the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel, offers the following reduction of the plot of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*:

> A cardinal function is a possible turning point; fillers no, they are what happens *between* a turning point and the next. An example. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth and Darcy meet in chapter 3, he acts horribly, she is disgusted: first action with "consequences for the development of the story": they are set in opposition to each other. Thirty-one chapters later, Darcy proposes to Elizabeth; second turning point: an alternative has been opened. Another twenty-seven chapters, and Elizabeth accepts him: alternative closed, end of the novel. Three turning points: beginning, middle, and ending; very geometric; very Austen-like. But of course, in between these three major scenes, Elizabeth and Darcy meet, and talk, and hear, and think about each other, and it's not easy to quantify this type of thing, but I have done my best, and have found about 110 episodes of this kind. They are the fillers. And Barthes is right, they really don't do much: they enrich and nuance the progress of the story, yes, but without ever modifying what the turning points have established. [12]

In short, Moretti has noticed something that is as interesting anthropologically as it is aesthetically. We could commonly think that readers – especially those who aren't necessarily writing an undergraduate essay or a PhD thesis – attend to fiction because they enjoy the moments of drama, the sudden turns and revelation. But when one examines a novel, even one as persistently popular as *Pride and Prejudice*, analysis (or here, really, just counting) discovers the stark imbalance of such moments when compared with the massive volume of what Moretti calls 'fillers.' Why do we allow ourselves to spend so much time bathing in the insignificant in order to arrive at that which we, it would seem, really want?

Moretti ultimately claims that the fillers, and their predominance in the text, provide works with a stabilizing sort of pleasure much in demand during the period in which they were written:

> **Why fillers, in the nineteenth century? Because they offer** *the kind of narrative pleasure compatible with the new regularity of bourgeois life.* **Fillers turn the novel into a "calm passion."** **[They] are an attempt at** *rationalizing the novelistic*

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[11] Dreiser, Berkey, and Kazin, *Sister Carrie*, xi.
[12] Moretti, "Serious Century," 367–8.

universe: turning it into a world of few surprises, fewer adventures, and no miracles at all. [13]

But there is another purpose, or at least effect, of the presence such seemingly issueless materials in narrative fiction. And it is a purpose that could be called a temporal version of the 'reality effect' that Barthes finds in the barometer, in the named material objects, of 'A Simple Heart.' We know we are dealing with realism when things don't happen all the time, at least important things – when a novel conforms more to the pacing and patterns of most people's everyday lives. The existential dilemma Emma Bovary suffers from, in a sense, is a temporal disorder that comes from a genre misunderstanding. She has read romances in which things *do*, in fact, happen all the time, only to find herself in a space – provincial France, but also, in a sense, the space of the realist novel – in which they don't. And so she tries, to disastrous results, to force the issue…

One thing, then, that realist texts do, in general, even if the actual patterns and rhythms vary dramatically from text to text, is disobey a general mandate that literature be eventful, that it have something of interest happening all the time. But this only begs another question: what becomes of realism when it is in fact confronted by an eventful world, when it, as the saying goes, lives in interesting times? And in particular, what becomes of realism when it is applied outside of the often more tranquil spaces of the cosmopolitan core of Europe and the United States?

A vivid evocation of the stakes involved in such a translation comes from the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee in a 1986 essay published in *The New York Times Book Review*. The essay deals with the strange and complex situation faced by literary writers during what would turn out to be the final years of the apartheid regime in South Africa. In particular, the question of the ethical stakes of the realistic depiction of the torture conducted by the regime is central to the essay. [need a better link here between previous sentence and this quotation. is there an ethics to realist detail?]

> Since the time of Flaubert, the novel of realism has been vulnerable to criticism of the motives behind its preoccupation with the mean, the low, the ugly. If the novelist finds in squalor the occasion for his most soaring poetic eloquence, might he not be guilty of seeking out his squalid subject matter for perversely literary reasons? [14]

But the issue at hand here is an even more knotty one than the potential sensationalization of violence for artistically mercenary ends. At the start of the essay, Coetzee focuses on the presence of the headquarters of the South African security police in a building on Vorster Square in Johannesburg. In one sense, it is just another municipal building in a large city, but, on the other hand, it is one that the citizenry passes by every day fully aware of the horrific scenes of interrogation, torture, and murder that were taking place within it. As Coetzee writes, 'One can go about one's daily business in Johannesburg within calling distance (except that the rooms are soundproofed) of people undergoing the utmost suffering.' [15]

Having described this darkly uncanny situation, Coetzee distills it into something of a literary double bind and how it is related to the fundamental dynamics and demands of realism. On the one hand, the novelist responds to an obligation – at once ethical, political, and aesthetic – to represent what takes place behind the closed door of the torture room:

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[13] Ibid., 381.

[14] Coetzee and Attwell, *Doubling the Point*, 365.

[15] Ibid., 362.

the novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there. Therefore my question should not have been phrased, Why are writers *in South Africa* drawn to the torture room? The dark, forbidden chamber is the origin of novelistic fantasy per se; in creating an obscenity, in enveloping it in mystery, the state creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation. [16]

Novelists' representational attention is provoked by the closed door - whether the one in question is that of some neighbours on **his** street or those of the cells of the hulking intelligence agency he passes daily downtown. And of course, when it comes to the latter situation, there is an ethical obligation involved as well. What would we make of a novel set in Johannesburg during the period in question that didn't, one way or another, involve itself in what is happening not quite off stage.

But on the other hand, as Coetzee proceeds, he asks:

Yet there is something tawdry about *following* the state in this way, making its vile mysteries the occasion of fantasy. For the writer the deeper problem is *not* to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them. The true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms. [17]

The reader, faced with a mandate that is at once literary and ethical, feels obligated to bring the reader inside the forbidden space. But in doing so, according to this paragraph, isn't the novelist simply playing the game by the state's rules or, worse, doing valuable propaganda work for the state itself. For beyond the immediate goals of torture, pragmatic or sadistic, there is a communicative intent – torture is an advertisement for the power of the state. To describe what is happening, what the state can only hint at but cannot say, may mean to serve as a sort of PR flack who sounds the dog-whistles and warnings that the electoral candidate cannot be heard to have uttered.

Coetzee's evocation of a very specific ethico-aesthetic situation, that of the artist writing in the shadow of Vorster Square, speaks to a wider problem faced by writers, critics, and readers alike when it comes to realism. Especially when dealing with milieus strewn with torture rooms and political prisoners rather than bourgeois pensioners and their barometers, the demand to represent accurately becomes a particularly vexing one, and one bound up with issues of appropriation, exploitation, and commercialized exoticism. Further, what happens when this literary form, developed primarily in Europe and secondarily in the United States, is resituated into locations far afield from its origin?

In his essay 'Misplaced Ideas,' the critic Roberto Schwarz discusses the effects upon the early development of the Brazilian novel of the mismatch between the liberal socio-ideological environment that sprouted the European novel as a form and the Brazilian cultural situation (and in particular, its prolonged economic dependence on slavery). As he writes, there was a noticeable "dissonance between representations, and what, upon consideration, we know to be

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[16] Ibid., 364.

[17] Ibid.

their context" during the period informed by "the impression that Brazil gives of ill-assortedness – unmanageable contrasts, disproportions, nonsense, anachronisms, outrageous compromises and the like." [18] The specific maladaption between acquired literary forms and the realities they were employed to represent in Brazil has, we can see, been a formative problem in the expansion of the realist novel more generally beyond its northern European points of origin.

One answer to this problem has been provided by a loose group of post-colonial and minority writers in the United States and elsewhere whose genre has come to be identified by the paradoxical term 'magical realism.' The term itself has a diffuse origin. According to Maggie Ann Bowers, it was first used in Germany to describe a species of Weimar painting, then used (in the form of *lo real maravilloso*, in the 1940s in Latin America, before attaining, in Spanish, its ultimate formulation in the 1950s as *realismo mágico*. [19] And true to the history of the term, the first practitioners of the form, most famously Gabriel García Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges, were South American writers. Eventually, through direct influence or merely critical association, the term came to be applied to a group of writers in English as well, such as Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, and Angela Carter.

Magical realism is a form which inserts fantastical, magical, or mythical elements into what we might call a realist 'container.' The elements of realist fiction described above are maintained, or at least performed – the magical realist text generally proceeds as if it is maintaining the plausibility, the handle on everyday reality, and paths of psychological causality that are hallmarks of the form, while nevertheless inserting the fantastical. This results in what we might call a casual hybridity, in which the banal and the magical share the narrative space without, seemingly, disrupting each other.

Take, for instance, the opening lines of a text frequently deployed as an example of magical realism, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981).

> I was born in the city of Bombay… once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date. I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th 1947. And the time? The time matters too. Well then, at night. No, it's important to be more… On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out, at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps, and outside the window fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later my father broke his big toe, but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, when thanks to the occult tyrannies of the blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. [20]

The paragraph evokes at least three genres at once: autobiography (as it is in the protagonist-narrator's first person voice), history (note the deliberate delivery of some textbook facts about the origin of the modern state of India), and myth. The 'once upon a time' conjures up the impression that we are about to hear a fairy tale or an exotic myth, only to cancel itself out in the narrator's hesitation ('No, that won't do). Above all, these lines are emblematic of a self-awareness – one might even call it a profitable self-alienation – at the heart of many magical realist texts. 'Oh, spell it out, spell it out': it is as if the narrator (or his author) is attempting to

[18] Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas*, 27, 25.

[19] Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, 2.

[20] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 3.

signal to us the stylistic difficult of fitting a reality such as that of the history of India, or himself as an Indian, into the form of the traditional Western novel.

But just as magical realism implicitly (and at times explicitly) [asks] certain questions about the classical realism that it has incorporated and productively deformed, we are left with difficult questions about magical realism as well . While the idea that colonial, post-colonial, or minority reality is maladapted to conventional realist representation is persuasive, it is also difficult not to sense that the newer forms of realism, at least to a certain degree, conform and cater to western readers' taste for the exotic or, to put it more darkly, their resistance to direct exposure to the realities of dire situations. The western reader may well *enjoy* a mythologically-inflected rendition of the emergence of Indian self-rule more than a documentary portrait of the Calcutta slums, just as a gothicized ghost story about the aftermath of slavery may be easier for the white American reader to take (or the teacher to teach) than a clinical depiction of the realities of black life in America before and just after the disappearance of the institution of slavery.

And further, as is wont to happen with chains of literary influence and history, just as writers from the periphery were influenced by but also reimagined realism into a new shape that was seemingly more appropriate to their purposes, so too has magical realism been influential upon writers working in the global centres. As Timothy Brennan has argued, in literary terms the 'relations of power have been reversed: U.S. and European novelists now eagerly cop the metafictional extravaganzas and the multilingual and multiracial cross-dressing of work from non-European countries." [21] This translation, further, can lead to controversial results. In a famous (or perhaps infamous) 2000 essay, the critic James Wood identified a set of American and British authors – Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, and Zadie Smith are just some of those named in his piece – that were practicing, according to him, a malign intensification or translation of magical realism that he terms 'hysterical realism.' "Storytelling," he explains, "has become a kind of grammar in these novels; it is how they structure and drive themselves on" and adds further that "The conventions of realism are not being abolished but, on the contrary, exhausted, and overworked." [22]

Whatever the merit of Wood's claims – and whatever we make of the complicated geopolitical issues undergirding them and the works he is discussing – they make clear the pertinence of the concept of literary realism as an issue that has remained a contentious one from Aristotle's day to our own. Forms like magical realism, which translate inherited literary forms from established contexts to new ones, and in so doing productively distort the original forms themselves. In so doing, again in the words of Roberto Schwartz, they expose 'a sore spot of the world-historical process' that is also 'a valuable clue to it.' [23] But it is also a valuable clue to one of the central dilemmas of the novel as a form, which may – and almost always does – resist the realist imperative to some extent, but which, it seems can only completely abandon it at their own peril.

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[21] Brennan, *At Home in the World*, 38.

[22] Wood, "James Woods' Classic Takedown of Faux-Dickensian 'Hysterical Realism.'"

[23] Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas*, 29.

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