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“Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable.

This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.”

Gabriel García Márquez, Nobel Lecture, December 1982

## Magical Realism: Hemispheric, Diasporic, Global<sup>1</sup>

### TUTORIAL DESCRIPTION

This syllabus contains, in no particular order, a fallen angel, a halo of yellow butterflies, an army of man-eating ants, a few ghosts, at least two separate instances of long-distance telepathy, a woman’s year-long scream, murder by chicken, multiple exorcisms, and the “magical” disappearance of a labor strike. In other words, this semester, we’ll be reading fictions that stretch the definition of what we call “realistic” or realist representation. We’ll ask what it means to represent and redefine fictional “realities.” What is “lo real maravilloso,” or “magical realism,” and how does it operate — aesthetically, epistemologically, politically?

This course will borrow Alejo Carpentier’s description of “lo real maravilloso” as “the heritage of all America” — and then extend it to examine in what ways it has become the heritage of all the world. That is to say that the course will adopt first a hemispheric and then a global, genre-based approach to literary study. We’ll follow eruptions of the marvelously real from Latin America to the United States, from the Hispanophone to the Anglophone (and, in Latino literature, the in-between). We’ll then move onward for a quick glimpse of African and Asian literatures; to that end, our range of authors will include Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Ana Castillo, Ishmael Reed, Haruki Marukami, Ben Okri, and Salman Rushdie.

We’ll ask how all these literatures and writers are interconnected, diasporic, hierarchical, and evolving. And — fascinatingly, soberingly — we’ll be evaluating the very idea of “global literature” in a time of rising nationalisms both at home and abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is adapted from a syllabus designed by Isabel Duarte-Gray.

## TUTORIAL GOALS

General goals: To introduce the discipline and practice of English literary studies at an upper-division level, and to write a 20-25 page research paper in preparation for an honors thesis.

You will be able to:

- 1) Design a research question
- 2) Develop a critical bibliography, including diverse methods and viewpoints
- 3) Put secondary criticism in conversation with your own ideas and with other criticism
- 4) Write with greater clarity and precision

Course-specific goals: To reflect critically on the ways in which magical realism as a literary mode and traveled across the hemisphere and into broader global contexts. You will learn to consider the relationships between several national literatures as related, continuous, and/or hierarchical.

You will be able to:

- 1) Define magical realism and describe its manifestations across contexts
- 2) Explain the historical and theoretical conditions that inspired these authors to frame the real as the marvelous and vice versa
- 3) Critique the existing national and linguistic frames we use to focus literary study and describe new approaches to reframing the literary history of the Americas
- 4) Describe and critique the idea of global literature while positioning magical realism as a key genre within it.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Discussion, participation, writing exercises: 25%

- Regular, active attendance in tutorial: 5%
- Visit to departmental writing fellow: 5%
- Weekly short responses to be uploaded to Canvas at least 12 hours before class: 5%
- Short paper (5-6 pages double-spaced): 10%

Research, draft, and junior essay: 75%

- Paper prospectus (2-4 pages): 15%
- Draft of final paper (15-20 pages): 10%
- Final research paper: 45% \*\*
- Junior paper presentation (5 minutes): 5%

\*\* YOU MUST  
SUBMIT A FINAL DRAFT  
OF THE JUNIOR ESSAY  
IN ORDER TO PASS THIS COURSE \*\*

## JUNIOR RESEARCH PAPER SCHEDULE

- Week 5: Initial topic due
- Week 6: Prospectus (2-4 pages) and annotated bibliography (8-10 sources) due
- Week 7: First draft due
- Week 11: In-class workshop of draft
- Week 12: Last week to meet with Departmental Writing Fellow
- (TBD): Junior Tutorial Conference
- (TBD): Final draft of Junior Research Paper Due

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2006)

Ana Castillo, *So Far From God* (W.W. Norton 2005)

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Harper Perennial 2006)

Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (Ballantine 1993)

Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood* (Vintage 2000)

Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (Anchor 1993)

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (Modern Library 2006)

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (Coffee House Press, 1990)

## SECONDARY READINGS

Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America" In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Duke 1995)

Hemispheric Studies: José Martí, "Nuestra América" from *Selected Writings of José Martí* (Penguin 2002); Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, "Essays Beyond the Nation," *Hemispheric American Studies*, 2008

Translation Theory: Jorge Luis Borges, "The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*" from *Seven Nights* (New Directions 2009); Allison Fagan, "Looking into a Speaking Mirror: Politics, Translation, and the English Translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 41.1 (Spring 2008)

Institutional history: Deborah Cohn, "PEN and the Sword: US - Latin American Cultural Diplomacy and the 1966 PEN Club Congress," *Hemispheric American Studies*, 2008  
*Cultural Critique* 0.7 (Fall 1987)

Marxist theory: *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 (Winter 1986)

Race and ethnicity theory: from *On Latinidad: US Latino literature and the construction of ethnicity* (University of Florida 2007)

Affect theory: Sianne Ngai, excerpt from *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard 2007)

Trauma theory: Jeffrey Alexander, "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma," from *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley 2004)

Russian formalism: Mikhail Bakhtin, excerpt from *Rabelais and his World* (Indiana University 2009)

Global literature: Rebecca Walkowitz, "The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer," *Contemporary Literature* 47.4 (Winter 2006)

# TUTORIAL SCHEDULE

## UNIT 1: Magical Realism in Latin American Fiction

### WEEK 1: WHY MAGICAL REALISM?

To be read in class: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1982 Nobel Prize Address  
José Martí, from "Nuestra América"

### WEEK 2: IS MAGICAL REALISM A HEMISPHERIC PHENOMENON?

Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*  
Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvellous Real in America"  
Hemispheric Studies: Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, "Essays Beyond the Nation"

### WEEK 3: LIBRARY VISIT!

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

### WEEK 4: 'BOOM' LITERATURE AS AMERICAN LITERATURE?

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph"  
Julio Cortázar, "Blow Up" (original title: "Las babas del diablo")  
Institutional History / Institutional Studies: Deborah Cohn, "PEN and the Sword: US - Latin American Cultural Diplomacy and the 1966 PEN Club Congress"  
- Short paper due Friday  
- Schedule individual paper conferences (to take place in Week 5)

### WEEK 5: LOST IN TRANSLATION: "MAGICAL REALISM" OR *LO REAL MARAVILLOSO*?

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, chapters 1 - 10  
Translation Theory: Allison E. Fagan, "Looking into a Speaking Mirror: Politics, Translation, and the English Translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*"  
- Final paper topic due in class

### WEEK 6: POSSIBLE & IMPOSSIBLE: THE POSTCOLONIAL & THE MAGICALLY REAL

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, chapters 11 - 20  
Postcolonial Theory: Kumkum Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible"  
- Prospectus and annotated bibliography due Friday

## UNIT 2: Magical Realism in Latino Fiction

### WEEK 7: MAGICAL REALISM AS AMERICAN HISTORY?

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*  
Marxist Theory: Fredric Jameson, "On Magical Realism in Film"

### WEEK 8: THE LIMITS OF MAGICAL REALISM

Ana Castillo, *So Far From God*

Theory of Ethnicity: Marta Caminero-Santangelo, “The Pleas of the Desperate”: Magical Realism, Latinidad, and (or) Collective Agency in Ana Castillo’s *So Far From God*,” from *On Latinidad*

- Send in your choice of a critical text for Week 9 by Friday at 5 pm

— SPRING BRAYKKKKKKK —

WEEK 9: MAGIC ACROSS DIASPORA

Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*

- Presentation of critical texts

WEEK 10: IN CLASS DRAFT WORKSHOP

UNIT 3: Magical Realism Beyond the Latin American Diaspora

WEEK 11: THE MAGIC AS THE ZANY?

Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*

Affect Theory: Sianne Ngai, excerpt from *Ugly Feelings*

WEEK 12: MYTH AND TRAUMA

Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

Trauma Theory: Jeffrey Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma”

WEEK 13: MAGIC AS SOCIAL DISRUPTION

Salman Rushdie, excerpts from *Midnight’s Children*

Russian Formalism: Mikhail Bakhtin, from *Rabelais and His World*

WEEK 14: WHAT IS GLOBAL LITERATURE?

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*

Global Literary Studies: Rebecca Walkowitz, “The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer”

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to yet more serious action. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code: "Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity — that is, work that adheres to scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."

COLLABORATION: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), academic collaboration and external sources should always be cited.

ATTENDANCE: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Being more than 15 minutes late to class counts as half an absence. Extenuating circumstances require clear communication with me — in advance whenever humanly possible.

DUE DATES AND LATE GRADES: Unless otherwise specified (e.g. short response papers, which are due 12 hours before class), assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the date listed on the schedule. Late assignments are docked 1/3 a letter grade per day late. The final paper must be turned in on the due date. Students who do not turn in a final paper will fail the tutorial. Extensions are available on all assignments except the final paper, but necessitate clear communication at least three days in advance of the due date.

EMAIL: I'll use our course list to distribute information throughout the semester. You are responsible for checking your email every weekday for course notifications, schedule changes, etc. If you need to email me questions or updates, please leave 24 hours response time.

\*\* I DO NOT RESPOND TO EMAILS SENT AFTER 8 PM  
UNTIL NOON THE FOLLOWING DAY. \*\*

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: "Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the course head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions remain confidential, although faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.