Magical Realism in Latin American and U.S. Fiction
Instructor: Isabel Duarte-Gray
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Office Hours: TBD

Tutorial Description:

“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

This syllabus contains, in no particular order, a fallen angel, a halo of yellow butterflies, an army of man-eating ants, a few ghosts, 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, while not anti-realist, stretch the definition of what we call “realistic” or realist representation. Reading a range of authors, including Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Ana Castillo, and Ishmael Reed, 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?

Borrowing Alejo Carpentier’s description of “lo real maravilloso” as “the heritage of all America,” this course will adopt a hemispheric 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), and ask how these literatures are interconnected, diasporic, hierarchical, and evolving.

This course is designed to do two things: to familiarize students with the 20th century mode of magical realism and the various literatures in which it has manifested and to provide Juniors with the time, space, and tools to craft a 20-25-page research paper. To accomplish the former, we will focus on a single mode as it travels across the Americas and explore a variety of critical methods and perspectives—from affect theory to theories of global literature. To do the latter, we will focus on a single, long-term assignment, taken in stages, and broken into small, manageable tasks. This includes developing a prospectus and annotated bibliography, in-class workshops, and visit with the English Department Research Librarian to explore the many options available through Harvard’s libraries.

Tutorial Goals:

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

- Design a research question
□ Develop a critical bibliography around that question, including diverse methods and viewpoints
□ Put secondary criticism in conversation with your own ideas and with other criticism
□ Write with greater clarity and precision

Course-Specific Goals
To reflect critically on the ways in which magical realism emerged as a literary mode and traveled across the hemisphere. To consider the relationship between the literature of Latin America and the United States as related, continuous, and/or hierarchical. You will be able to:
□ Define magical realism and describe its manifestation in multiple literary and cultural contexts
□ Explain the historical and theoretical conditions that inspired these authors to frame the real as the marvelous and vice versa
□ 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

Course Requirements and Grading:
- Regular attendance and participation in class - (10% of final grade)
- Visit to department writing fellow - (5% of final grade)
- Weekly short response (~200 words) to be uploaded to Canvas at least 12 hours before class - (10% of final grade)
- Short paper (5-6 pages, double spaced) due Week 4 - (20% of final grade)

Final Research Paper (55% of final grade):
- Final paper prospectus (2-4 pages) + Annotated Bibliography
- Draft of final paper (15-20 pages) due Week 10
- Junior Tutorial Conference (5-page paper presentation)
- Final version of research paper must be submitted to receive a passing grade

Junior Research Paper Schedule:
- Week 5: Initial Topic Due
- Week 6: Prospectus (2-4 pages) and Annotated Bibliography (8-10 sources) due Week 10
- Week 10: 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): Junior Research Paper Due

Required Texts:
Alejo Carpentier, The Kingdom of This World (Farrar, Straus & Giroux 2006)
Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (Harper Perennial 2006)
Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* (Mass Market Paperback 1994)
Ana Castillo, *So Far From God* (W.W. Norton 2005)
Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (Ballantine 1993)
Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (Scribner 1996)

**Secondary Readings:**

**Hemispheric Studies:** José Martí, “Nuestra América” from *Selected Writings of José Martí* (Penguin 2002); Caroline Levander & 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)


**Postcolonial Criticism:** Kumkum Sangari, “The Politics of the Possible,” *Cultural Critique* 0.7 (Fall 1987)


**Theory of Race/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: U.S. Latino literature and the construction of ethnicity* (University of Florida 2007)

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

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

**Fun with Russian Formalists:** 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)

**Course Schedule:**

Asterisks(***) denote readings that will be distributed in class or uploaded to Canvas.

**Week 1:** Why Magical Realism?
Unit 1: Magical Realism in Latin American Fiction

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 & 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”)***
- **Short paper due Friday (via Canvas dropbox)**
- Schedule Individual Paper Conferences - (I will send around a list of available times)

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**
- **Individual Paper Conferences will take place this week**

Week 6: Possible and Impossible: The Post-Colonial and 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 (via Canvas dropbox)**

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"
• Come ready to propose secondary readings/methodologies for Choose Your Own Adventure Week (Week 9)

**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*
  • First five pages of final paper due Friday (via Canvas dropbox)

---Pause for Spring Break---

**Week 9: Magic Across Diaspora**
Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*
Secondary Reading: Choose your own adventure (selected by class – I will provide some possibilities/recommendations)
  • Remember to meet with Department Writing Fellow if you have not already

**Week 10: Magic and Anxiety**
Loida Maritza Perez, *Geographies of Home*
Affect Theory: Sianne Ngai, excerpt from *Ugly Feelings***
  • First draft of final paper due Friday (via Canvas dropbox)

**Week 11: In Class Draft Workshop**

  Unit 3: Magical Realism Beyond the Latin American Diaspora

**Week 12: Myth and Trauma**
Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*
Trauma Theory: Jeffrey Alexander, “Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma”
  • Final week to meet with Departmental Writing Fellow

**Week 13: Magic as Social Disruption**
Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*
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"

(TBD): Junior Tutorial Conference
(TBD): Final Paper Due
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 even more serious actions. 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 the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement 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 be always 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. I will allow each student a “free” tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being late is disruptive and unproductive, so 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified (e.g. short response papers, which are due 12 hours before class), assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. If, well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

Email: I'll use our course list to distribute important info throughout the semester—from emailing you handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not receive a response in time.

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 (AEO) 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 will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”