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Magic Realism in Chicano Literature
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Foreword

This paper does not pretend to produce a complete reconstruction of the term "magic realism", but rather an overview of its history on the one hand, and an analysis of its various definitions within the framework of the current literary discussion, on the other, in order to elaborate certain general characteristics of the term and a useful critical concept important for the ensuing analysis of the Chicano novels. Because I will make frequent references to the term "magical realism" it is necessary to define it and clarify its applications to this study of Chicano literature. I will summarize those characteristics of magical realism which are relevant to the study of the Chicano novels I will discuss. In this process the term "magical realism" will be considered in connection with the Latin American "realismo mágico". This approach is based on two facts. First, magical realism is one of the most dominant stylistic forces of contemporary Latin American fiction, whereas it does not have such an impact upon contemporary European and Anglo-American literatures. Latin American writers such as García Marqués, Vargas Llosa, Asturias, Carpentier, Rulfo, Fuentes have affected some Chicano authors. However, Chicano culture and its literature are in many ways different from those of mainstream America. Rudolfo Anaya interprets the term "Chicano" as "the bold new image born of Hispanic and Indian synthesis" (Anaya1996: 313). In this paper we will see how Chicano literature is a different cultural expression from that of mainstream America and Latin American authors due to its linguistic uniqueness, distinctive shades of meaning, historical purpose, and social context. In this paper I will analyze the use of magical realism in six Chicano novels by means of general structural and stylistic characteristics that predominantly stem from Latin American literature while elaborating the special character of Chicano magical realism. In order to fully understand
and appreciate Chicano literature, one has to study it as the unique expression of a particular culture. In the novels I will analyze, magical realism is highly used. The interplay of the real and the unreal, the rationally explainable and the imaginary unexplainable reveals a special conception of reality which is a vital part of the Chicano cultural essence and which sheds additional light on the issue of Chicano identity. The novels analyzed in this paper are characterized by a blending of magical and realistic categories of reality. The mixtures of magic and reality on the level of textual representation is the expression of a special conception of reality that is based upon imagination and real experiences. In analyzing the interplay of magic and social reality in the novels, I will consider the special factors which shape the societal context within which Chicano authors write novels, as well as the historical dimension of Chicano literature with its roots in several traditions: Indio, Hispanic, Latin American and Mexican. In analyzing the novels of these six Chicano writers, I will try to show how the authors expand the aesthetic and thematic perspective of Chicano literature by employing the literary genre of magical realism. In this process, I will try to remain faithful to the texts themselves. I will attempt to measure Chicano creativity on its own terms because Chicanos are not Anglo-Saxons, Southwest Americans, Indians or Mexicans.

Based upon the acknowledged influence of Latin American magic realism on the Chicano magical realism, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of magico-realist elements in Chicano fiction by means of general structural and stylistic characteristics that predominanility come from Latin American fiction while elaborating the special character of Chicano magical realism. This paper is divided into three main chapters. Chapter one, entitled What is Magic Realism, will give a general definition of the term magic realism and it will also take a look at the characteristics of this literary genre. Chapter two, The Chicanos, will focus on the brief
analysis of Chicano history, culture and society in general and chapter three, *Magico-realistic elements in Chicano Fiction*, divided into six sections will analyze the works of six Chicano writers: Rudolfo Anaya, Ron Arias, Alejandro Morales, Helena Maria Viramontes, Lucha Corpi and Tomás Rivera.
Chapter 1: What is Magic Realism?

The first section of this chapter will give a general definition of the term magic realism and it will also take a look at the characteristics of this literary genre. The first section will contain a short history of the magic realist fiction and it will analyse those writers and writings which had a direct influence upon this genre. Section 2 will try to explain the differences and similarities between magic realism and other literary movements.

1.1. Magic Realism: definition and characteristics

The term magic realism, this strange oxymoron which combines two contrasting components, refers to the mixture of realism and fantasy, in film, art, and literature. According to Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, magic realism is a “Latin-American literary phenomenon characterized by the matter-of-fact incorporation of fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction”. In other words, this type of fiction combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements bloom from the reality depicted in the novels and turn to be very difficult to distinguish between the magical ones and the real ones. This fiction that does not distinguish between realistic and non-realistic events, the mythical and the supernatural are integrated in the cognitive structure of reality without a direct appeal to the characters' consciousness. In magic realist fiction characters encounter magical elements and fantasy in the same setting and figures that they normally associate with reality and fact. Magical realism has become a debased term. When it first came into use to describe the work of certain Latin American writers, and then a small number of writers from many places in the world, it had a
specific meaning that made it useful for critics. If someone made a list of recent magical realist works, there were certain characteristics that works on the list would share. The term also pointed to a particular array of techniques that writers could put to specialized use. Now the words have been applied so haphazardly that to call a work “magical realism” doesn’t convey a very clear sense of what the work will be like. Magical realism is well-known characteristic of the modern Latin American novel. It attempts to create “new realities” or to treat the existing ones with a different perspective from that of the social realism of the 1930s. Magic realism as a theoretical problem has occupied critics in Latin America especially after the 1950s Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Gabriel García Márquez are considered to be initiators of this mode in the new novel, which attracted the attention of international critics with the so-called boom of Latin American fiction. The magic realism label was initially used by German art critic Franz Roh to describe painting which demonstrated an altered reality, but was later used by Venezuelan Arturo Uslar-Pietri to describe the work of certain Latin American writers. After Uslar Pietri, Alejo Carpentier has paid this phenomenon the most attention. It is known that Arturo Uslar Pietri used this term to refer to the Venezuelan short stories of the thirties and forties. His definition of new prose, where man is a mystery among realistic data follows, as I said earlier, the pattern of Roh’s idea. Uslar Pietri centers the importance of magical realism in the creative act.

In 1948, Alejo Carpentier publishes his *De lo real maravilloso Americano*. This essay appeared as a prologue for his novel *El reino de este mundo* and the action of the essay takes place in Haiti. For Carpentier “lo real maravilloso” is inherent not only to Haiti but also to all Latin America where it is possible to find natural historical and cultural phenomena. In the prologue of his magic realist novel *El reino de este mundo* Carpentier says that: “the marvelous
begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle) from a privileged revelation of reality, an unusual insight that particularly favors the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, reality thus perceived with special intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state.” (Carpentier 2007: 2)

What Carpentier was trying to say was that magic realism should not be seen as magic literature because its purpose, unlike that of magic, is to express emotions not to evoke them. Magical reality can be seen as an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in cultural or popular forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, in closed or open structures. The magical realist writer does not create imaginary worlds in which he or we as readers can hide from everyday reality. In his works, the writer, is trying to confront and tries to untangle it, to find out what is mysterious in life, in humans, in things etc. This is what most of the magic realist writers of Latin America such as Carpentier, Garcia-Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Angel Asturias, Borges and other poets or magic short story writers do in their works.

Magic realism is a fictional technique that combines fantasy with raw, physical reality or social reality in a search for truth beyond that available from the surface of everyday life. There’s an irony behind this technique where only through the conjunction of the factual and the fantastic can truth fully emerge in fiction. According to literary critic Roland Walter, in his study of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel, *A Hundred Years of Solitude* in a magic realist writing “beliefs and metaphors become forms of fact and...more ordinary facts become uncertain.” (Walter: 143) The author employing magic realism searches out a hidden potential in the natural world or in
human actions and often describes the commonplace as mysterious. Reality seems to be
deformed, but the reader perceives essential truths as a result of this distortion.

In magic realist fiction key words have no logical or psychological explanation. The
passage of time loses all relevance and the plot seems to be suspended in time, the unexplained
and the mysterious yield larger truths. Garcia Marquez in an interview said that his magic realist
books are a “kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive vision of reality.
However good or bad they may be they are books which finish on the last page” (Marquez
webpage). His masterpiece, A Hundred Years of Solitude, is considered to be the most important
work of magic realism. Alejo Carpentier said that magic realism is the natural legacy of Latin
America. He concluded that this phenomena “flows out of the continent of South America and of
Central America with their mélange of cultures, unique birds, flowers and animals” (Carpentier
2007: 47). Magic realism emerges from descriptions of people living as Garcia Marquez might
put it awash in nostalgia, in solitude and in isolation from the industrial urban sprawl of North
America and Europe. Garcia Marquez also said that magic realism is a technique particular to
central and South America: “disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself out of
all proportion.” Garcia Marquez has referred to Latin America as “that boundless realm of
haunted men and historic women” a place suitable for magic realist fiction. He also said that
magic realism arises out of the Latin American experience not only as a cultural inevitability but
out of political necessity. Besieged by the military superiority of the neighbor from the north,
survival demands that the Latin American people develop an “ability to change their nature.”
(Marquez webpage)

Carpentier goes to define the ‘marvelous’ as “everything strange, everything amazing,
everything that eludes established norms.” He defines America as “baroque”, as a place of the
romanticism of excess, as a "continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, "mestizaje", the internarrsing of races and cultures, insisting that only here could "lo real maravilloso" be born: "The American baroque develops along with 'criollo' culture, with the meaning of 'criollo', with the self-awareness of the American man, be he the son of a white European, the son of a black African or an Indian born on the continent...the awareness being other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a 'criollo'" (Carpentier 2007: 2). Carpentier thus discovers that only out of diversity, a mélange of races and cultures, can magic realism take root.

In the United States the first to write about magic realism in Spanish American literature was the Puerto Rican critic Angel Flores, who in 1955 published an article titled *Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction*. Without mentioning Roh or Uslar Pietri, Flores states that magic realism began with Franz Kafka in Europe and Borges in Latin America. His definition, however, cannot be accepted, since for him magic realist literature is a mode practiced by the elite only. He says that "the magical realists do not cater to a popular taste, rather they address themselves to the sophisticated, those not merely initiated in aesthetic mysteries but versed in subtleties. Often their writings approach closely that art characterized by Ortega y Gasset as 'dehumanized'" (Flores: 31). His article, however, was beneficial because he was the first to apply the term to the contemporary Spanish American narrative fiction, and this started a controversy, which has not ended yet after almost half a century.

Magic realism and "lo real maravilloso" are similar but at the same time different. People often confuse the two modes and often accept them as synonymous. Carpentier localized the term "maravilloso" as being a characteristic of Latin American literature. He wrote: "I thought, the presence and vitality of this marvelous real was not the unique privilege of Haiti, but the heritage of all America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our
cosmogonies. The marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry: from those who searched for the fountain of eternal youth and the golden city of Manoa to certain early rebels or modern heroes of mythological fame from our wars of independence such as Colonel Juana de Azurday.” (prologue) The difference between “lo real maravilloso” and magic realism can be derived from that quotation. “Lo real maravilloso” is to be found in nature and in men of the Americas who evoke a reaction called “marvelous”, that is, causing wonder or astonishment. On the other hand, in magic realism, the important characteristic is the mystery found in men, objects and nature, a mystery that eludes the understanding of the observer. In “lo real maravilloso” only certain events are considered to be marvelous; in magic realism, all reality is magical. Abundant examples of “lo real maravilloso” in New Mexico and other areas of Southwest, can be found in the chronicles of the explorers who came to the region during the sixteenth century, as well as in many folktales brought by the settlers who came from central Mexico.

Although writers and critics do not agree upon a uniform definition of magical realism, certain aspects and characteristics are mentioned frequently. Magical realism as González Echevarría asserts, implies an outlook on life that is not solely based on objective reality. Many critics espouse the view that magical realism is the expression of the Indigenous Latin American world view, a view in which the magical is an integral part of reality. Angel Asturias describes it as a fusion of poetry, music, magic, incantation, cult, dream, report, chronicle and reality that develops on an unreal level. With regard to the indigenous world view, Miguel Angel Asturias states that the impressions which human beings receive from the environment are like hallucinations that become reality. Another two aspects are of importance for the definition
of magical realism. Asturias stresses the fact that people in Latin America perceive reality in a special way. According to him, a magico-realist outlook on life is as much a product of the visible and tangible, as it is of hallucinations and dreams, that is, of the way how human beings perceive and interpret their environment. The magical is magical because it is perceived as such, on the one hand, and because certain things are inexplicable, on the other.

To conclude, magical realism can be defined by two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives: one which is based on a rational view of reality and one which is grounded on a magical view of reality in which the unreal, the supernatural, and the unusual are embodied.

1.2. Magic realism and other literary movements

Although they differ radically in origin and purpose, magic realism would not have been possible as a literary technique if the surrealist movement of the 1920s in Paris had not preceded it. Surrealism asserted its "complete non-conformism". Andre Breton, the movement's foremost theorist, insisted that there was a of a higher truth that the truth offered by realism: "it is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solution." (Wikipedia) Magic realism borrows its freedom from Surrealism. It adds to Breton's access to the unconscious a particularly fecund environment, and hence produces an art both universal and yet married to the particularities of a unique set of cultural and historical circumstances. However, magic realism should also be distinguished from the European Surrealism because as Carpentier said, magic realism does not use motifs, does not distort reality or create imaginary worlds. Magic realist writings use reality, history, legends, and other folk elements which are more abundantly available in Latin America than in the United States where the foreign settlers had a more destructive effect on the original
populations of the continent. Thus, magic realism can be seen as a form of cultural assertion and a reaction to what was perceived as dominant discourse. As a discourse and worldview of cultural difference and resistance to domination, magical realism reorganizes the elements of hegemonic paradigms investing them with new, expanded meanings. It moves the surreal forward, away from the abstract and what Carpentier discovered were forced juxtapositions, to a much more intimate relationship in literature between characters and their setting.

If magic realism departs from surrealism, it also departs from the genre of fantasy literature. In magic realism "the principle thing is not the creation of imaginary being or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances", said Luis Leal, literary critic. Leal also points out that "in magic realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts" (Leal 1967: 234), an entirely focus from that of fantasy. Fairytales cannot be considered magical realist because they adhere to relatively uniform plot structures, an inevitable resolution of the conflict of the characters, and a classifiable number of motifs that have been cataloged by folklorists since the beginning of the century. Magical realism focuses on the hybridization of the supernatural and the reality by emphasizing some specific historical moments in order to problematize present-day disjunctive realities. It is also a way of writing which can be characterized by a dual character: an inward duality which is a mixture of natural and supernatural and reflects an outward reality.

There are some similarities between literature of fantasy and magic realism, however. In both magic realism and fantasy the author describes events which are not likely to occur in everyday life. The fantastic is always a break in the acknowledged order, an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality. The same is true for magic realism. Yet,
magic realism and fantasy are radically different approaches. In the literature of fantasy, the entire story is governed by fantastic elements. The appearance of natural beings as characters, or the voyage of characters to unreal places, are not commonly found in magic realism. In science fiction meaning derives from the placement of characters and action in worlds created by the imagination of the author, places that may bear a great deal or little resemblance to the real world. In fantasy, events that seem to defy science or physics might be characterized as “supernatural”, even as structurally the fantasy overwhelms the entire text. In works of fiction that employ magic realism, however, the instances of supernaturalism are intermittent; they arrive and disappear quickly, so that the reader is always returned to the world of social reality. This intermittent use of the supernatural is seen in Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis”. Like magical realism, the fantastic is characterized by two levels of reality, namely the rational, realistic one, on the one hand, and the magical one, on the other. In fantastic texts, however, the two levels of reality are opposed to each other; this dichotomy produces a certain disorientation of the reader. In these texts, supernatural beings or fantastic events literally destroy the harmony of a world ruled by our conventional reality. As in fantastic, in magical realism the reader is confronted with both a realistic and a magical level of reality. The main difference between the two modes, however, is the way the narrator and the characters react and perceive the magical standards. In magical realism they accept the real and the unreal circumstances on an integrated level. They do not react to the magical categories of reality as if they were strange or disturbing. The magical standards are an integral part of the fictional reality; they are incorporated into the realistic standards and, thus, naturalized. As a result, a reader does not doubt the circumstances on the level of fictional representation. Thus, the second important criterion of magico-realist text is the
harmonious integration of the realistic and the magical levels of reality. In contrast to the fantastic, in magical realism the antinomy between the two levels of reality is resolved.

The attitude of the author, the narrator, and the characters is equally important. The narrator cannot adopt the point of view of an observer who renders explanations regarding the magical events; this would throw into question the validity of the magical categories of reality. Instead, the narrator must adopt the view of a character who believes in a magico-realistic world. Any explanation on the part of the author, the narrator, the implied reader or the characters would entail an invalidation of the coherent, harmonious code that characterizes a magico-realistic text; it would furthermore disorient and distance the reader from the fictional world. Thus, the third criterion of a magico-realistic text is authorial reticence. Whereas in the fantastic authorial reticence serves as a literary device to maintain the contradictory levels of reality, in magical realism it helps to create a fictional universe that is characterized by a coherent interplay of the real and the magical categories of reality, a universe in which the magical standards of reality are just as valid as the realistic ones.

In magic realism, certainly as practiced by Garcia Marquez, the reader is asked to have total faith in the believability of a fantastic moment: there can be no doubt that the priest Father Rayna levitates when he drinks hot chocolate, or that Remedios the Beauty is on her own way to Heaven. The quick juxtaposition of such events with "normal" reality helps us make the faith in the truth of fantastic possible. Magic realism also lacks the ambiguity about the supernatural that is often found in fantastic literature. Literary critic Angel Flores said in his essay that "since fiction is itself a kind of magic, the novel should not be magical. The creation of characters out of nothing, their placement in an invented world is chimerical... Fiction demands belief from us and this request is demanding in part because we can choose not to believe. But magic-
impossible happenings, ghoulish returns-dismantles belief, forcing on us apparitions which, because they are beyond belief, we cannot choose not to believe. Belief is a mere appendix to magic, its unused organ. This is a moral problem." (Flores: 213)

Leal also said that "magical realism cannot be identified either with fantastic literature or with psychological literature, or with...surrealist or hermetic literature...Unlike superrealism, magical realism does not use dream motifs; neither does it distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; nor does it emphasize psychological analysis of characters, since it doesn’t try to find reasons for their actions or their inability to express themselves." (Leal: 232) Magic realism is not magic literature either. Its aim, unlike that of magic, is to express emotions, not to evoke them. Magical realism is, more than anything else, an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, in closed or open stuctures. In magic realism the writer doesn’t create imaginary world in which we can hide from everyday reality. In magic realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts.

Another genre would be that of escapist fiction. Although it has something in common with this genre, magic realism belongs to a branch of serious fiction, which is to say, it is not escapist. serious fiction's task is not escape, but engagement. Serious fiction helps us to name our world and see our place in it. It conveys or explores truth. Any genre of fiction can get at truths, of course. Some science fiction and fantasy do so, and are serious fiction. Some SF and fantasy are escapist. But magical realism is always serious, never escapist, because it is trying to convey the reality of one or several worldviews that actually exist, or have existed. Magical realism is a kind of realism, but one different from the realism that most of our culture now experiences.
Science fiction and fantasy are always speculative. They are always positing that some aspect of objective reality were different. What if vampires were real? What if we could travel faster than light? Magical realism is not speculative and does not conduct thought experiments. Instead, it tells its stories from the perspective of people who live in our world and experience a different reality from the one we call objective. If there is a ghost in a story of magical realism, the ghost is not a fantasy element but a manifestation of the reality of people who believe in and have "real" experiences of ghosts. Magical realist fiction depicts the real world of people whose reality is different from ours. It's not a thought experiment. It's not speculation. Magical realism endeavours to show us the world through other eyes.

It's possible to read magical realism as fantasy, just as it's possible to dismiss people who believe in witches as primitives or fools. But the literature at its best invites the reader to compassionately experience the world as many of our fellow human beings see it. There are three main effects by which magical realism conveys this different world-view, and those effects relate to the ways in which this world-view is different from the "objective" (empirical, positivist) view. In these other realities, time is not linear, causality is subjective, and the magical and the ordinary are one and the same.
Chapter 2: The Chicanos

This chapter contains only one section which will focus on the brief analysis of Chicano history, culture and society in general. America has long been widely interpreted as the country of social possibility and as a location for potential individual prosperity and success. However, America is also seen as a place of cultural supremacy where the ‘American culture’ is seen as Anglo-Saxon, white and protestant. As a result, the multi-ethnic cultures have been exposed to the ideology of the ‘melting pot’ which can be defined as America’s wish to integrate, assimilate (or reject) its ethnic diversity. From this diversity I focus on the Mexican-Americans or Chicanos.

Mexico and the American Southwest share a past of colonisation, oppression and syncretism of races and cultures. Political borders have not disrupted a common mythology, language and world view, but have introduced distinctive features and given rise to a rich borderland culture. The Chicanos inhabit this borderland and internalise its inherent culture and identity conflict. Generally called Mexican Americans and defined as American citizens of Mexican origin, they do not totally identify with the Anglo American cultural values nor with the Mexican ones. They call themselves Mexican when referring to race and ancestry; ‘mestizos’ when affirming both their Indian and Spanish ancestry; Hispanic or Spanish American or Latin American when linking themselves to other Spanish speaking peoples; Chicanos when referring to a politically aware people born and raised in the United States. The Chicanos today search for their identity in their Indian ancestry and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlan. Chicano is a word that derives from Nahuatl originally used to describe outcasts of the Mexican empire. The origin of the word is not clear. Mexican researcher Villar Raso attempted
to trace the origin to 1930s and 1940s California, although most Chicanos believe the terms far
predates that assessment. Nevertheless, according to Raso, the term supposedly stems from “the
inability of native Nahuatl speakers from Morelos state to refer to themselves as Mexicanos, and
instead spoke of themselves as “Mesheccanos”, in accordance with the pronunciation rules of
their language.” (Wikipedia) It is also thought that the word may have roots in the term
“Mejicano,” an archaic Spanish and American spelling of “Mexicano, which through the last
century linguistically evolved into “Jicano” or “Chicano”.

The American Southwest, Aztlán, was the mythical place of origin of the Aztecs. The
Aztecs left the Southwest in 1168 A.D. and migrated towards what is today Mexico and Central
America. After the Spanish conquest and Hernán Cortés invasion of Mexico, Spaniards took
Indians and “mestizos” to explore and settle the U.S. Southwest. For the Indians, this meant a
return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and doubly indigenous to
the Southwest. The culture of the Hispanic period (1542-1821) contributed important elements in
determining the nature of contemporary Chicano life. It was during that early period that
Spanish/Mexican culture was firmly established in the Southwest, with the introduction of the
Spanish language and the Catholic religion. In 1846 the United States incited Mexico to war and
invaded its territory. With the victory of the U.S. forces in the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848),
Mexico had to give up almost half of its nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona,
Colorado and California. The border fence that divides the Mexican people came into existence
on February 2, 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which left 100,000
Mexican citizens on the U.S. side, annexed by conquest along with the land. As a reminder of all
these conflicts throughout centuries, Chicano literature tends to focus on themes of identity,
discrimination, and culture, with an emphasis on validating Mexican American and Chicano
culture in the United States. However, Chicano literature is also characterized by its excessive use of magic realism or better said of magic realist elements such as themes, motifs, symbols, archetypes etc.

A Mexican American culture emerged then in the borderland in mid nineteenth century that expressed in oral and written form their bilingual and bicultural experience under the Anglo American economic and ideological domination. This was the beginning of Chicano literature. The recognition of chicanos as a distinct people came with the nationalistic movement of the 1960s, specifically around 1965 when César Chávez organized the farmworkers and I am Joaquín, an epic poem by roldolf “Corky” Gonzalez about the complex identity of the chicanos, was published. According to the “Handbook of Texas”: “Inspired by the courage of the farmworkers, by the California strikes led by César Chávez, and by the Anglo-American youth revolt of the period, many Mexican-American university students came to participate in a crusade for social betterment that was known as the Chicano movement. The Chicano Movement had been fomenting since the end of the U.S.- Mexican War in 1848, when the current U.S-Mexican border took form and hundreds of thousands of Mexicans became U.S. citizens overnight. Since that time, countless Chicanos and Chicanas have confronted discrimination, racism and exploitation. The Chicano Movement that culminated in the early 1970s took inspiration from heroes and heroines from their indigenous, Mexican and American past. The Chicano Movement encompassed a broad cross section of issues, from restoration of land grants, to farm workers’ rights, to enhanced education, to voting and political rights, as well as emerging awareness of collective history. Socially, the Chicano Movement addressed what it perceived to be negative ethnic stereotypes of Mexicans in mass media and the American consciousness.
They used Chicano to denote their rediscovered heritage, their youthful assertiveness, and their militant agenda. Though these students and their supporters used Chicano to refer to the entire Mexican-American population, they understood it to have a more direct application to the politically active parts of the Tejano community" (De Leon: 203). The Chicano movement promoted protest, resistance and active change and claimed a distinctive identity and language, Chicano Spanish, to describe their reality as an ethnic minority within the United States. The 1960s also signalled a 'Chicano Renaissance' with the rise of a new writing characterized by the search for native roots in the Indian past of Mexico, as well as the use of both English and Spanish in the same work, often in the same sentence, creating a literary discourse that would reflect the speech patterns of the Chicano population. While there were nationalistic aspects of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the Movement tended to emphasize civil rights and political and social inclusion rather than nationalism. However, Chicano nationalism allowed Chicanos to define themselves as a group on their own terms, and was a determination on their part to mold their own destiny. It is rooted in the Aztec creation myth of Aztlán, a "northerly place". As the Aztecs are central to the conquest and history of Mexico, the use of the word took on the added dimension of the reclamation of an indigenous heritage as part of the decolonization process.

Chicano literature is thus doubly enriched by Anglo and Hispanic traditions. It has received influences from the United States' and Latin American authors of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Chicano and Latin American literature share a similar past, oral tradition and folklore. Of course, this is particularly true of Mexico. There has been a conscious and consistent relationship between Chicano and Mexican literature, especially from the mid 1970s to the present. The rich Mexican narrative of the twentieth century has explored primarily the
components of the Mexican national identity and a mestizo culture, created out of the encounter and mixture of European and indigenous cultures and races in Mesoamerica. In the 1950s Mexican novels became increasingly experimental and entered into the realms of surrealism and magic realism. The impact of the Latin American boom and magic realism was indeed remarkable in the U.S. southwest. A number of important Chicano male writers have used magic realism in their novels: Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless me Ultima*, Ron Arias’ *The Road to Tamazunchale*. Because both Mexican and Chicano literatures occupy a junctural national position and reflect a borderlands culture in continuous reshaping, magic realism becomes for them an appropriate literary mode. For Chicano writers in particular it offers a meaningful way of describing life on the Mexican American border.

Magic realism originally associated with male Latin American writers, has more recently been taken up in female texts. The 1980s were notable for the emergence and profusion of Chicano women writers. Chicana fiction has provided a fresh vision of self and society by presenting an alternative view of the world filtered through myth and storytelling. The borders have inspired chicana writers to find multiple strategies for survival. Caught between two strong cultural currents, American and Mexican, they feel the pressure either to conform and to acculturate to mainstream literature or to preserve and transmit the culture of their ancestors, and their writing reflects this dilemma. They have expanded the Chicano literary space by demythifying the stereotypical roles of the passive, submissive Chicana imposed upon them. Chicana and Mexican writers undertake a re-visioning of their own cultural metaphors, especially of the myth of La Malinche. The Aztec Malintzin, also known as Doña Marina, played an important role in the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. Sold to Hernán Cortés, she became his translator, guide, mistress, strategic advisor and mother of his son. She was the
mother of a new race, a new culture, symbol of the union of Amerindian and European. La Malinche is a complex and ambiguous figure who has had contradictory interpretations. For a long time she has been as the betrayer of her culture and her race. At the same time, taken by violence, she is *la chingada*, the forced one. But contemporary Chicana and female Mexican writers have explored and vindicated the extraordinary woman in order to re-elaborate an image of themselves and subvert the masculine dominant discourse. Malintzin was a translator able to use words to communicate culture, to build bridges between cultures or to integrate. Contemporary chicana writers are also translators as they shift from one culture to another.

Now to conclude, I think that Chicano writers focus in their novels on social reality and also on the concern for the universal experience of man, depicting it against the background of Chicano reality. I argue that magical realism is a special characteristic of the Chicano conception of reality, as well as the authors' literary device to regain and recreate images and bits of memory through imagination. Consequently, magical realism, the literary mode that expresses a world view, is a way to resist chaos, discontinuity and destruction. The novels I will analyze in the next chapter are examples of how through magical realism the act of writing becomes an act of survival and liberation, rescuing fragments of the Chicano culture from oblivion, shedding light on history, tradition and reality, and thus asserting the vitality of this culture. Thus, the role of the Chicano writer becomes not only that of mediator or interpreter of his culture but one of "creator of new strategies", as Geneviève Fabre said. The Chicano writers use magico-realist structural and stylistic devices to express a magico-realist universe, but also in order to find imaginary solutions to existing conflicts. Chicano magic realist fiction has a socially symbolic act as well and this will be seen in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Magico-Realist Elements in Chicano Fiction

This chapter is divided into six main sections and each section will analyze the work of a Chicano writer. The first section contains an analysis of the magico-realistic elements found in Rudolfo Anaya’s novel, Bless me, Ultima. The second section will focus on the analysis of Ron Arias’ novel, The Road to Tamazunchale. In these two novels we will identify many characteristics of the Latin American magic realism in general. Section number three will analyze Alejandro Morales’ new magic realist novel, Rag Doll Plagues. In this section we will see the similarities between Garcia Marquez’ A Hundred Yeras of Solitude and Morales’ novel. Section four will analyze two short stories from Helena Maria Viramontes’ novel, The Moths and Other Stories. Section five will continue the analysis of the magic realist archetypes used in Viramontes’ writings but this time analyzing Lucha Corpi’s latest novel, Black Widow’s Wardrobe. And finally, section number six will focus on the complicated magico realist characteristics of Tomás Rivera’s novel ...And The Earth Did Not Devour Him.

3.1. Magic realism in Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima

The book, Bless me, Ultima, by Rudolfo Anaya, has been described as part of the magical realism genre in literature. As I said in the first chapter, in magical realism, the writer confronts reality, and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, and human acts. The principle idea is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds, but rather, the discovery of the mysterious relationship between a person and his circumstances. Thus, key events have no
logical or psychological explanation. In *Bless me, Ultima*, we can find evidences that support this definition, for example, Ultima’s magical powers as a curandera, her ability to manipulate the forces of good and evil through the casting of spells and the lifting of curses, and Antonio’s dreams that enable him to see the past and predict future events. All of the above invite the reader, to believe in the supernatural. This literary style helps Anaya to communicate with his readers, and convey to them through it, one of the major ideas: Antonio’s development of moral independence, and the influence of cultural beliefs on his identity. The author has created the symbol of the golden carp in this book, which also includes witches, magic, hexes, and even miracles. The novel contains magical realism, and themes include good versus evil, coming of age, nature, faith, the environment, the supernatural and the search for identity. In this story, a young Chicano boy, Antonio, searches for his identity in a culture that made him to ask questions about his faith, his family, and himself.

The plot of *Bless Me, Ultima*, is basically realistic, but it has elements of myth and magic realism. The story is told through the eyes of a boy who is six years old as the story starts. He has a dream, which describes the circumstances of his own birth, including the attending mid-wife, who is his grandmother, Ultima. Shortly after that she comes to live with his family, and they create a tight emotional and spiritual bond. The vast majority of the characters are drawn from the Chicano community. His home is located on the edge of the llano, and overlooks the town in the river valley. His mother’s side of the family is quiet, they are hard-working farmers of the llano; his father’s side are the men of the valley, emotional, high-strung, in need of the freedom and movement of the high fields. Ultima is a “curandera,” one who heals with magic, spells, and herbs. The boy, Tony, has three older brothers, who all manage to return from WW II, but they are restless, and two of them quickly leave. Much of the action takes place during Tony’s first
year of school, and there is a consistent amount of dramatic tension to entertain the reader through the story.

Anaya has the boy question many of the theological issues that appear during a very precocious coming-of-age, including some strong doubts about the moral power of priests, and some of the problematic issues of the Catholic Church, which might have been a bit “shocking” in the Chicano community. Through his grandmother, Ultima, Tony is introduced to the healing powers of natural herbs, which may be quite valid, and the incantations and beliefs of a spiritual world that are highly dubious, such as the spirits that haunt lives because they were not given a proper burial, and the practices of witches. These forces, more primordial than those of the Church, are usually triumphant. Another prevailing theme throughout the novel is the “Yin and Yang” forces of mother and father that are shaping the boy’s destiny.

Of all the curanderas created by Anaya, Ultima is the one that most perfectly embodies the traditional curandera as imagined in the Mexican-American folklore and legends. This old curandera is at the same time the spiritual guide of Antonio Márquez, and a “bruja”, a witch, who performs exorcisms and miraculous healing in the region. As Robert Franklin Gish succinctly states, Ultima is at once “curandera and bruja; spirit and person; human and animal; mortal and immortal; revered and feared”. (Gish 1996: 239) In the Southwest of the United States, and in Central and Southern Americas, a “curandera” is someone who practices traditional, alternative medicine by resorting to herborism, the knowledge of the curative power of certain plants. However, the term curandera designates a woman who practices medicine, not only by using herbs, but also by resorting to magic formulae and witchcraft. Curanderas are also important archetypes in magical realistic writings as we can see in Anaya’s magico-realist novel.
Involuntarily, Ultima, as a representative of the occult in a devout Catholic community, is also a destabilizing element. A saint to some, a witch to others, she arises both feelings of antipathy and powerful respect. This ambivalent reaction also occurs in the family that welcomes her: Maria Luna, Antonio’s mother, considers Ultima a handful person to the community; by contrast, Gámbriel Márquez, the boy’s father, has some doubts as the son perceptively registers: “I knew why he expressed concern for me and my sisters. It was because Ultima was a curandera, a woman who knows the herbs and remedies of the ancients, a miracle worker who could heal the sick. And I had heard that Ultima could lift the curses laid by brujas, that she could exorcise the evil the witches planted in people to make them sick. And because a curandera had this power she was misunderstood and often suspected of practicing witchcraft herself.” (Anaya, 1994: 4)

A magic characteristic shared by all curanderas is the capability of communicating with nature. In Bless Me Ultima, La Grande acts, frequently, as an intermediary between the elements and humans. When the old woman holds hands with Antonio, the boy experiences what can be described as an epiphany not from above but from the land: “She took my hand, and the silent magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sun baked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun’s home. My bare feet felt the throbbing earth and my body trembled with excitement. Time stood still, and it shared with me all that had been, and all that was to come.” (Anaya, 1994: 1) In this excerpt, as well as in other well-known chapters, the land appears personified, filled with color and energy, revealing itself to the child. Ultima, the curandera, teaches the boy Antonio about the curative power of all of these plants and teaches him on how to collect them. The art of herborism is completed with another magic power: “nagualismo”, the power to temporarily incarnate into the body of an animal. This ancient myth, part of the Aztec folklore, is mentioned in the “legend of Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, who sent forty
of his ‘brujos’ to the underworld, in the shape of jaguars, eagles, birds and other animals, to investigate the intentions of the ‘conquistadores’” (Anaya, 1994: 122). As the narrator explains: “the witches took many forms, and sometimes travelled as coyotes or owls” (Anaya, 1994: 87). La Grande can transform herself into an owl, an appropriate choice, since they are old, small, and enigmatic. Ultima and her magic are associated with the “Indians of the Rio del Norte ... the Aztecas, Mayas, and even ... those in the old, old country, the Moors.” (Anaya 1994: 39) Throughout the novel she teaches Antonio of the magical power of the land, the ancient perception of the oneness and wholeness of all life and the indigenous worship of the magical power in all living things. Already at their first encounter, Ultima’s presence transforms Antonio, and he begins to perceive reality in a magico-realistic way: “I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river. My nostrils quivered as I felt the song of the mocking birds and the drone of the grasshoppers mingle with the pulse of the earth. The four directions of the llano met in me, and the white sun shone on my soul. The granules of sand at my feet and the sun and sky above me seemed to dissolve into one strange, complete being.” (Anaya: 10-11)

In this vision he experiences an illumination that gives him the sensation of being the center of the spiritual world where the sacred directions come together. Antonio feels a special relationship with nature. This consubstantiality of human beings with nature is part of the vision of the sanctity, unity, and wholeness of all life. Similar to the indigenous cosmology of ancient Mexico and the Southwest, Anaya describes nature as invested with hidden forces and magical powers. In this regard, Antonio is told a legend which turns into a living reality within his belief system, namely, the legend of the golden carp, a pagan god. At a sacred pond, Antonio sees the fish god and realizes in a vision that this god is of the here and now, that he “witnessed a
miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god ... and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind." (Anaya: 105)

One interesting episode filled with magical realism is Lucas' healing. To narrate this episode, Anaya resorts to several suspense techniques, creating a ghostly atmosphere, similar to the one we find in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. First, the author incorporates in the plot elements that suggest fear and wickedness: the black mass, the witches, a whirlwind that unexpectedly interrupts the quietness of summer and covers the area with dust. Secondly, the narrator characterizes the villains in minute detail: Tenorio, the father of the Trementina sisters, is a sinister man, while his daughters are represented as powerful witches, capable of embodying ferocious animals. Finally, the narrator strategically delays the outcome of the treatment, which lasts for three days, keeping the reader in suspense. These strategies generate a supernatural atmosphere encompassing witchcraft, premonitory dreams, and the eternal fight between good and evil, and are intrinsic to the magic realism subgenre.

There are also three magic realist symbols in this novel. The first is the statue of Virgin of Guadalupe which represents in Chicano culture the divine forgiveness. The town of Guadalupe, where the Márquez family lives, is named after her. The second symbol is Ultima's owl. Antonio notices it for the first time when Ultima comes to stay with them. It is in the juniper tree outside Ultima's window, and is obviously special because no other owl comes that close to the house. The owl is Ultima's guardian spirit, and Antonio often hears it again in moments of crisis. Ultima's owl represents her life force and the power of her religious mysticism. The third symbol is a symbol I've mentioned earlier which is that of the golden carp. It represents an alternative religion to the Catholicism that Antonio is raised in. The golden carp represents a magical religious order not connected to Catholicism. The golden carp legend offers its own brand of
wisdom, comfort, and moral guidance. The golden carp is a god who rules over his realm. The
carp is also destined, according to the pagan myth, to rule the entire area when humans are
destroyed because of their sin. Antonio is at first scared of acknowledging any god other than the
one approved by Catholicism, but when he sees the golden carp, he is enthralled by its sheer
beauty. He feels as if he really has seen a god.

Like any other magic realist writing, *Bless me, Ultima*, is filled with imagery which
reinforces the theme of the interconnectedness of all things. This applies especially to the
instinctual connections that humans feel between themselves, nature and the cosmos. This
connection feeds the mysticism in Antonio’s soul, and it is expressed in highly lyrical language.
In the very first paragraph, for example, Antonio tells of the summer that Ultima first came to
stay: “The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its
mystery into my living blood.” (Anaya: 58) The lyrical language used by Anaya is similar to the
lyrical language used by García Marquéz in his masterpiece or the language of Miguel Angel
Asturias used in his magic realist writings. The imagery introduces the reader in the world of
magic realist fiction because they link the human world to the wider cosmos. The imagery brings
out the interplay of opposites in creation, wind and earth, sun and moon—that is also embodied in
the interactions of people.

One last magic realist element that I would like to analyze in this novel would be that of
Antonio’s dreams. I consider Antonio’s dreams as magic realist motifs. Antonio has a number of
dreams throughout the novel, from his early dream about watching his own birth to his later
dreams about his brothers calling for his help. Through dreams, Ultima tries to explain to
Antonio the universal cycle of life and that rebirth follows death eternally. Ultima expresses this
view in Antonio’s sixth dream, soothing him with her vision that “all waters are one”, united by
“the great cycle that binds us all”. (Anaya: 113) I can also say that Anaya uses the recurrent dream motif to show how Antonio’s interpretations of his thoughts and experiences change as he develops as a character. The author also uses dreams in order to create a second reality; dreams are worlds between worlds, worlds between reality and magic. In his dreams Antonio questions his destiny and by time his dreams change, also his interests in life. His dreams also offer him a rich and variable set of magic realist images and symbols with which to understand his own life. Dream motifs are widely used in magic realist fiction, in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* Garcia Marquez uses the dream motif and also the insomnia, Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Angel Asturias also use dream motif in their writings and sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between dream and reality. We can say that there are two worlds or two plots, real and imaginary one which are perfectly intertwined. Sometimes reality becomes dream and the dream itself turns out to be real life. Same happens in Anaya’s novel.

3.2. Magic realism in Ron Arias’ *The Road to Tamazunchale*

Ron Arias’ *The Road to Tamazunchale* published in 1975 is an important landmark in Chicano literature. It is an innovative novel in both form and contents and it breaks with the Chicano tradition of writing in a sort of social realism style that ends up repeating boring narrative formulas. The usual Chicano topics of culture clash, class conflict, etc. are dealt with by Ron Arias in an experimental way. Arias writes from the world of dreams and the rememberances of Don Fausto, who is about to die. He borrows from the Latin American tradition of magical realism and of travel writings initiated by the Spanish conquistadores. The influence of irrational premises present in the films of Luis Bunuel and the irrational premise of
Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*, in which all the characters are dead, are present in *The Road to Tamazunchale*. The constant sound of the alpaca herder's flute is a sign that La Muerte is near. No one hears it, other than Don Fausto. The sight of alpacas walking on the L.A. highways, the plan to help Mexican immigrants to survive in the USA by playing dead, the staging of a play in which the characters play themselves on stage and ends with all the audience joining as characters in the play, are irrational premises that can only make sense to Don Fausto, an eighty something year old man who is almost on the other side, close to La Muerte.

This novel is considered by literary critics a "parody of life and death" and narrates the last four days in the life of Fausto Tejada, an old, retired encyclopedia salesman from the East Los Angeles barrio. The novel represents a magico-realistic approach to a universal theme, namely death, and spins its narrative thread from Fausto's resignation to his rebellion and to his final reconciliation in the last chapter. Fausto faces death in a magico-realistic way by means of a mental journey. In this process, he reveals a spirit based upon a liberating imagination that transcends the boundaries between illusion and reality, between life and death. In this novel the logic of time and space is dissolved and loses its linear characteristics through a set of magical death scenes, dreams and hallucinations that are interspersed with and based on Chicano reality.

The novel embodies a magico-realistic approach to death. The protagonist is dying and the novel reflects the cultural concept that death plays in Chicano culture. Fausto leads a vegetative death-in-life existence before he starts out on his magico-realistic journey. The first chapter of the novel begins with a matter-of-fact description of how Fausto deliberately removes the skin from his body, like an Aztec priest in the ritual of Xipe Totec, the god of crops. Described in a detailed manner by the author, this unreal procedure is presented as a real one, an ordinary life event: "The operation would be clean, like slipping off nylon hose. ...Carefully he pulled each fingertip
as he would a glove. The rest was simple, and soon his body lay gleaming under the fragile light of the table lamp” (Arias 1975: 16) At the beginning of the novel the reader is confronted with a magico-realist universe. The reader although aware of the impossibility of the event on the extra-textual level, is led to accept the magical event as a real one within the text. “The reader is thrown into a timeless flux, time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality” (Flores: 191-192) Facing death Fausto decides to create life-in-death within the bounds of his imagination. He begins his quest with an imaginary journey to Peru, a venture into the world of his inner consciousness. During this magico-realist journey, the reality of the past, present and the future is woven into an achronistic whole. It is a magico-realist journey where airplanes, buses, taxis, trains and modern communications systems co-exist with sixteenth-century colonial viceroys, soldiers and lancers.

The next four chapters are set in the East Los Angeles barrio. Back from his Peruvian journey, Fausto is determined to find a river or a “little waterfall” and snow in Los Angeles, although it is summertime. Eva, Fausto’s dead wife enters the scene: “Raising herself from the chair she approached her husband...and forgave him with a kiss” (Arias 1975: 30) Alive or dead, the characters appear and disappear and re-appear throughout the narrative, like the characters in Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo. This device contributes to the blending of the realistic and the magical categories of the plot. The novel also contains Chicano social problems such as racism and a good example is the chapter when Fausto becomes a victim of the L.A. Police. The function of such realistic social details like the Anglo racism, is to naturalize the magical categories of reality; details of social reality frame and intersperse the magical ones to such an extent that they appear to be completely real within the fictional universe.
In chapter four the magico-realist elements continue when Fausto is driving to Elysian Park where he meets a Peruvian shepherd. The narrative dissolves the linear sequence of past and present and creates a magico-realist time continuum. The harmony between the two levels of reality in the narrative makes the reader accept the magical categories of reality as real ones. The unreal is presented as if it were part of our everyday world. In the next chapter the narrator describes a magical event embedded in realistic details: “The next morning the cloud of snow gathered itself beyond Pacoima and slowly blew eastward. ... Cars, trucks and buses stopped. Suddenly a woman wearing a purple jump suit and straw pith-helmet propped her scooter against the curb and began throwing snowballs at anyone within range.” (Arias 1975: 49) A reader has no difficulty in accepting this magical event on the fictional level due to the realistic details which frame and complement it: the detailed description of the setting and the everyday situation of the rush-hour traffic. No explanation or unusual reaction of the narrator, the author or the characters invalidates the harmonious intertwine ment of the two levels of reality.

Chapter seven narrates the discovery of an unknown dead Mexican. This is an excellent example of magical realism and presents an important aspect of Chicano reality: the wetback, who crosses the border and lives in the United States illegally, who is exploited and frequently deported. This theme will be also discussed in Viramontes’ novel. The wetback has no name and symbolically stands for the invisibility of thousands of wetbacks in the United States. The Chicano community gives him a name, David. Although he is dead, the Chicano community treats him as if he were alive. Hence, the absurd magico-realist elements of the narrative. People talk to the corpse, dress him, bathe him. The matter-of-fact description, the attitude of the characters and the reduced authorial stance lend authenticity to the magical events and create harmony between the two standards of reality. The naturalization of the magical event, David’s
resurrection, is completed when a Chicano woman and David are portrayed as a couple. The magico-realistic universe of this chapter, in which the dichotomies of life and death and of art and reality vanish, constitutes a magnificent enactment of the life-death cycle.

In chapter eight Fausto embarks on a mental journey to Mexico in order to help wetbacks cross the northern border. Several magico-realistic characters appear in this chapter such as Eva. Eva comes from the dead and advises her husband to stay home. But Fausto starts sailing with a captain across an imaginary sea, setting course for Mexico in order to pick up the wetbacks. The wetback is another social reality of the Chicano community and many Chicano writers describe and analyze this issue in their novels. In this chapter the reader is once more confronted with a magico-realistic universe in which two levels of the plot are blended. This creates an all-encompassing reality in which time and space lose their traditional characteristics, assuming instead circular dynamics. Fausto helps many wetbacks to enter in the United states and after having crossed the border new adventures await them. Chapter nine describes Fausto and Eva hitchhiking back to Los Angeles and the wetbacks’ peregrination to Los Angeles. This chapter also contains a flashback, a Mexican legend about the love story of two volcanos, Popocatépetl and Ixtlazihuatl. Also Eva, the magical phantom character, continues to bother Fausto with her inquisitiveness. The rest of the chapter comes back to the social realism, depicting the cause of the northward movement of thousands of wetbacks. I dont want to say that Arias’ novel is a a social realistic novel but it contains passages which depict Chicano reality.

In chapter ten appears a “curandera”. This magico-realistic has been analyzed in Anaya’s novel and it will also be discussed in Viramontes’ and Corpi’s novels. Cuca the curandera helps Fausto to continue his magico-realistic journey. Also the whole Chicano community will take care of the hungry wetbacks. In chapter eleven Fausto’s journey with the wetbacks comes to an end.
Also the title of the novel is explained. Thus the final destination for the wetbacks was the village of Tamazunchale which is a real Mexican village situated in the Moctezuma river valley and a former "Huastec capital". However, Tamazunchale is not only a real village but also a magico-realist symbol of death: "...whenever things go bad, whenever we don't like someone,... we simply send them to Tamazunchale. We've never really seen this place, but it sounds better than saying the other, if you know what I mean." (Arias 1975: 34) The statement that everyone either comes from or goes to Tamazunchale suggests the image of the life-death cycle. The road to Tamazunchale is not a linear one, it is a fixed road that has no fixed beginning or end. Tamazunchale, thus, stands for death, but a death that contains a future life as an integral part. Tamazunchale is a sort of utopian paradise where "no one dies" because people only pretend to die: "They usually see how stupid it is to die, so they come out of the earth and do something else" (106) "Tamazunchale is our home. Once we're there, we're free, we can be everything and everyone" (105) Absolute freedom reigns in Tamazunchale, it is "like any other place only that a few things are different and only if you want them to be," (104) Through an act of will or imagination everyone can be "an apple, a flower, the sun, the stars, the moon." (104-105)

Tamazunchale is a metaphor for a utopian paradise where life continues, although in a different way. Tamazunchale is a metaphor for death and it is the final destination for the wetbacks and for Fausto and the journey stands for life. Fausto becomes a leader for his people and he finally discovers life-in-death. In control of his destiny, Fausto prepares himself for death, his homecoming "Tamazunchale is our home". The real death of Fausto is described in realistic ways. The setting of it is Fausto's bedroom. The circle of the journey has closed and Fausto is dying. The author does not give the reader the impression of a serious, somber event, but rather of a happy, fiesta-like event. Those around Fausto start telling stories about war and chicano
history. Cuca the curandera tells two interesting stories rich with the oral tradition prevalent in the Chicano culture. The stories depict aspects of Chicano reality that are filled with myths, legends and superstitions. Arias uses the Chicano folk speech and oral tradition in order to reconstruct the Los Angeles Chicano community and its linguistic reality.

Fausto’s death is seen as magico-realist reality because it might seem unreal to our Western view of death. Fausto’s death ceremony has its roots in Mexican/Chicano tradition. Fausto’s death is not celebrated in a sad, somber atmosphere of mourning. Fausto’s transition from life to life-after-death requires a fiesta in his honor. There is music at his funeral and his neighbours bring him cake. They all treat him as if he were alive, the same they did with David the wetback. The last chapter of the novel describes Fausto in his beyond life, Tamazunchale which is still in Los Angeles barrio but transformed, made new. The entire chapter is characterized by a magico-realist universe in which the magical categories of reality are incorporated into the realistic ones: “There was no funeral, no burial. Instead, Fausto insisted they take him to the beach so he could look at the sea and the women in bikinis for a while” (119) Hence the magico-realist element, Fausto is not really dead. The attitude of the characters contributes to the naturalization of the magical categories, they show no signs of surprise or hesitation concerning Fausto’s rebirth. They act normally and participate in Fausto’s life-after-death, talking to him as if nothing unusual had happened.

The Elysian Park, name which may allude to the Elysian fields of paradise in Greek mythology, constitutes the realistic framework of the magical transformations. However, another magico-realist episode occur. Cuca, the curandera turns into a fox and a pigeon changes into a hawk and another chicano woman turns into a grasshopper. These magical events are mixed with realistic details and considered normal by the characters. Everything imaginable, as unusual as it
might appear, it is possible, is reality, is magical realism at its bets. The novel concludes with another series of magico-realist events. Fausto turns into a TV set. The final sequence of events appears absurd and surrealistic. However it is a magico-realist element. Fausto’s mental journey, his transformation from a passive onlooker to a creator of death is not a fantastic, but magico-realist process.

To conclude, in *The Road to Tumazunchale*, Arias uses structural and stylistic devices of magical realism to display a magico-realist world view. By means of a fluid two-dimensional narrative structure the realistic and magical categories of reality are harmoniously mixed.

3.3. Magic realism in Morales’ *Rag Doll Plagues*

Magic realist elements can be discovered within the analysis of Alejandro Morales’ novel *Rag Doll Plagues*, an interesting piece of writing in which the author combines magic realism, historical chronicle, and science fiction. His novel is seen as one of the most representative magic realist fiction in the English language. Morales is known as a writer who explores the Mexican American cultural heritage and often uses the techniques of magical realism to do so. The novel contains a lot of folklore, spirituality and religion such as Mexican history, Aztec history, ‘curranderismo’ which I analyzed in Anaya’s novels, Catholicism, myths, legends, reincarnation, clairvoyance etc. The novel is divided into three parts, and in each part a physician named Gregory Revueltas battles a deadly plague called “La Mona”. The author takes us on a trip through ancient and future civilizations, a sort of entertaining safari through lands, times, peoples and ideas never before encountered or presented in this manner in any other Chicano literary writing, except for Garcia-Marquez’ novel which belongs to the universal type of magic
realist fiction. Morales took elements from *A Hundred Years of Solitude* such as the cyclical time of the story. García-Marquez’ novel explores the issue of timelessness or eternity even within the framework of mortal existence. The author also uses the metaphor of history as a circular phenomenon, through the repetition of names and characteristics belonging to the Buendía family. Alejandro Morales does the same in his novel where we can see the repetition of personalities and events, however the setting and historic period are changed. Time in Morales’ novel is cyclical and eternal, as a doctor and his descendants are condemned to enter into an ever-consuming battle with a mysterious plague in three separate moments in history which have been mentioned earlier. There are also two plots, a realist and a magical one which are harmoniously intertwined. Not only plot elements but the poetic use of language thread the stories together, adding a surreal quality that forces the reader to examine the changing nature of the Mexican landscape, health issues, and cultural values. The stories are further held together by two central characters, Father Gregory and Papa Damian. Like García-Marquez himself, Alejandro Morales is trying to suggest through his fiction that time moves in a circle or better said in a spiral; a spiral which points towards the inevitable destruction, because when people repeat the same mistakes, and encounter the same problems they are not as strong as before to deal with them. *Rag Doll Plagues* also tries to symbolically tell the story of Hispano-American people the way García-Marquez was trying to tell the whole story of mankind in his magic realist novel.

Another magic realist element taken from García-Marquez is that of the ‘plague’. In *A Hundred Years of Solitude* the Buendias suffer from the plague of insomnia which is transmitted from generation to generation and seems to be impossible to cure. In *Rag Doll Plagues* people suffer from this plague called “La Mona” that cannot be explained or cured by doctors. The
people have named the disease La Mona (the doll) for, as Morales writes, "when life withdraws from the body La Monita leaves a corpse that feels like a rag doll." (Morales 1992: 21) In describing the effects of the deadly plague through the eyes of the young doctor, Morales writes: "The patients of the third ward were the most atrocious. Upon first seeing them, I prayed to God that they would die almost immediately. La Mona had eaten away at their faces, transforming them into monstrous mutilations." (Morales 1992: 79) The first book seems to contain a lot of magic realism because it is the world of colonial Mexico, the exotic world of the "Aztecas" and of the "curanderos" who practiced witchcraft in their native tongue, nahuatl. The constant biblical theme of the dual worlds of light and darkness, good and evil, health and illness, life and death runs throughout the practice of magic. But Morales, whose research into colonial-period medical practices took him to Mexico, uses the Old World as only a starting point for his novel, which is equal parts historical, contemporary and futuristic storytelling.

In Book two, Gregory Revueltas and his HIV positive girlfriend, Sandra, make a trip to Old Mexico where they rediscover the ancient Mexican/Indian spiritual traditions that help Sandra to think of death as a positive transformation, traditions that seem verified in Gregory's guiding visions of his ancestor, Gregorio. "The book deals with scientists confronting diseases that science cannot really solve," said Morales in The Plague. "The book is basically about the origins of diseases: Where do they come from? Why do they come back again? We think we have them solved and yet they will reappear. I feel it has a lot to do with economic and social conditions." Appearing throughout Rag Doll Plagues are two mysterious spirit-like characters that only the physician in each section can see. But rather than being supernatural entities, they are what Morales describes as "computer ghosts" from the future who have escaped the parameters of technology: "I think we have reached the point where in the future we'll be able to
describe the characteristics of human beings right down to the minutest detail and eventually those characteristics will, in a sense, become some kind of an entity that will survive in computers,” Morales said in an interview. “They’re so powerful that they’ll break away from the limitations of the computers themselves.” (Morales) For me the guiding visions of Gregorio are also magic realist elements. Morales might have borrowed them from Garcia-Marquez’ novel. There, Aureliano Buendia is guided by the ghost of the wise gypsy, Melquiades. Spirits of the dead walking and communicating with the living people or live human beings visiting territories of the dead are very common in *Pedro Párramo* by Juan Rulfo, another major magic realist fiction. The idea of “curanderismo” is also continued in Book three, where Mexican blood is used as a cure for most lung ailments. And like most of the magic realist novel it is very hard to distinguish fact from fiction.

As I said earlier curanderismo plays an important part in Morales’ novel. For Morales all curanderos are magical realists who can transform reality and blur the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural. This is their job, their calling. Historically, attitudes of hostility and suspicion towards curanderos go back to the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century. The Spanish persecuted the curanderos. A glimpse of what this must have been like is described in *Rag Doll Plagues*. In the first book, Don Gregorio Revueltas, a physician and surgeon to the king of Spain, has been sent to Mexico City, to cure the plague which is ravaging the people. The year is 1788. Don Gregorio is extremely prejudiced against the local Indian population. In particular, he dislikes the curanderos: “These [Spanish-speaking] ‘curanderos’ were dangerous and had caused the deaths of thousands. Worst of all were the Indian ‘curanderos’ who practiced witchcraft in their native tongue. They had to be prevented from practicing their evil craft.” (Morales 1992: 23) But *Rag Doll Plagues* also shows that some of
the Spanish rulers had a more enlightened attitude to curanderismo. Don Gregorio meets a Catholic priest, Father Jude, who after being badly wounded by pirates was taken in by a curandero who cared for him. Father Jude lived with the man and his family for five years. The curandero taught him everything he knew, and for the last year of his stay Father Jude became the principal practitioner of curanderismo in the village. Later, Father Jude takes Don Gregorio to see Father Antonio, a distinguished and highly respected Spanish Catholic doctor. When Don Gregorio asks him what he would do to improve medical conditions in the country they call "New Spain", Father Antonio replies: "The Holy Office must stop persecuting the curanderos, for they are an asset to us. Many are truly learned 'exoxotla ticiti', doctors and surgeons. It is not important that they speak Latin. They save more lives with their vulgar language than we do without sanctified words." (Morales 1992: 104) Thanks to the wisdom of those such as the fictional Father Antonio, the Spanish colonizers' persecution of the curanderos gradually disappeared. Over the centuries there was a twofold cultural interchange. More of the Spanish learned the art of curanderismo, and, as Christianity spread, more and more curanderos incorporated aspects of Christian theology and devotional practice into their work, as Rag Doll Plagues shows.

As have nearly all of Morales' novels, Rag Doll Plagues also deals with the contributions the Mexican population has made to the United States. We know that the histories of both countries are intertwined and, as the third part of the novel shows, the 21st-Century residents of Mexico City have an unlikely hand in the development of an antibody to the deadly plague. The book deals with the future of California, the United States and Mexico. In the third book there isn't any border anymore, and one of the points I wanted to make is that catastrophic events such
as earthquakes, great diseases or ecological events will force us in the long run to deal with each other in a different way.

To conclude the analysis of Morales’ novel, *Rag Doll Plagues* is an imaginative, prophetic work a narrative with a unique blend of fact, magic and why not, utopian fantasy.

3.4. Magic realism in Viramontes’ *Cariboo Café* and *Neighbours*

First I will start focusing more on the specific magic realistic elements that we can find in Helena Viramonte’s fiction *Cariboo Café*. Viramontes uses the style of magical realism characteristic of much Latin American literature, whereby the real and the fantastic are merged. In Viramontes’ writing the world of imagination does not parallel the world of reality, but, rather, permeates it. The language of *Cariboo Café* is quite lyrical and echoes to the language of magic realist fiction also the fragmentation, the non-linear way of managing the narration and different points of view allude to the structure and style of the magic realist fiction.

Her writing contains magic realism because she uses one of the most fascinating female archetypes in contemporary Mexican-American literature which is that of “La Llorona”, the weeping woman of Hispanic folklore and legend. According to the legend, La Llorona is a descendant of the goddess Cihuacoatl, who encompasses both death and creation. The origin of the La Llorona legend is Mexican and was first heard there in 1550 but it has been recorded in Texas, Colorado, California, and Southern Arizona, where it proliferates. There exist several different versions of the Llorona legend. The version given by *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* is that La Llorona is a “ghostly female figure who haunts waterways like canals,
creaks, and rivers, wailing loudly as she searches for the spirits of her children”. Then literary critic Gish says that: “her history is that she was an Indian peasant with whom an upper class Spaniard fell in love. His family refused to allow him to marry her for reasons of social status. Without the blessing of his family or the church, they established a home and had children. Convinced by his family that he needed to save the family line, the man married an upper class Spanish woman. In her anger the Indian woman drowned her children and was executed. She is not allowed to enter heaven until she finds the spirits of her children” (Gish: 431). In other versions La Llorona is described as a traitor, reminding us of the legend of La Malinche, and a bad woman who drowns her children due to various reasons: parental neglect and abuse, madness or revenge for being abandoned by her lover. La Llorona is also portrayed as the one who kills other children, men or women out of envy or sick pleasure to cause pain. In the legendary Mexican figure of La Llorona, she is associated with water once she drowns her victims. She is always portrayed wearing a white dress and wailing at night regretting the loss of her children.

I think that the Chicano contemporary writers use the legend of “La Llorona” in their writings for us, the readers, to understand several things such as the cultural, political, and social assumptions surrounding the portrayal of women in contemporary Chicano fiction. In her short story, Cariboo Café, Helena Maria Viramontes uses two conflicting perspectives which are structure and legend. Regarding the structure of the story, Viramontes asks the reader to see the whole of a story from a distance, to interact with legend, which, combining elements of both plot and symbol, requires the reader to look closely. Viramontes builds her story around the image of the ‘step by step’ reunited family until it spirals and fragments outward. With this powerful image the author is trying to highlight the pattern of increasing fragmentation of families,
individual and collective, in our society. Thus, an important issue in Chicano literature is that of fragmented lives and families and Viramontes uses it a lot. Then she makes the reader to focus on the legend of “La Llorona” where we can see the interdependency of the archetypal evil/good woman with concepts of the frontier generally and the American frontier specifically.

By using the legend of La Llorona, the author disturbs the reader’s perception making him to refocus and rethink the possible solutions for the problem in Cariboo Cafè. The introduction of La Llorona functions in a retroactive manner, forcing the reader to refocus on the subtle specifics that have been woven into the narrative. The naming of the legend sheds a different light on what has come before it, uniting the three stories. La Llorona is fragmentation embodied, and by recasting her story in an environment of expanding fragmentation, Viramontes is able to make us rethink the causes of and the blame for the fragmentation of families. Also the washerwoman in Viramontes’ story is the “La Llorona” version of the colonial Mexico. I see her as a symbol of maternal resistance and she is in constant search for her children. In Macky, the lost child, she sees her lost son, Geraldo. She also takes care of both children who have lost their way home and goes to the Cariboo Cafè with them. The washerwoman cannot distinguish reality from past memories. She is haunted by the image of her lost son which she thinks he’s alive. The idea of past which cannot be distinguished from present and the dead people “walking” among the living ones are also magic realist elements. Through this symbol, Viramontes is also presenting us the vivid portrayal of women in contemporary Chicano society. “Like ‘La Llorona’, the washerwoman is trying to survive in a patriarchal society like the Chicano one, and at the same time displays resistance and courage towards the ‘oppressor’” (Carbonell 1999: 140). However the washerwoman realizes when she is betrayed by the owner of the café: “she jumps up from the table, grabs “Geraldo” by the wrist, his sister
dragged along because, like her, she refuses to release his hand.” (Viramontes 1985: 30) Later she identifies with the myth of La Llorona: “It is the night of La Llorona. The women come up from the depths of sorrow to search for their children. I join them,...”. (Viramontes 1985: 31)

According to Ana Maria Carbonell in From Llorona to Gritona: Codicilque in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros the washerwoman in Viramontes: “reclaims her voice by transforming herself from La Llorona figure into La Gritona. She can be seen after midnight, weeping bitterly, dragging heavy chains as she walks about the streets, since she is a soul from purgatory trying to communicate with someone” (120), another important female archetype in Mexican folklore. The resistance shown by the washerwoman against the American police turns her into a La Gritona. She hollers at her oppressors. Thus, this Gritona washerwoman cries, throws hot coffee in the policemen and holds Macky with her until she is killed by her oppressors.

Viramontes embodies in her story two magic realist elements which are represented by the maternal resistance, La Llorona and La Gritona who cannot be satisfied, contained or silenced. Myth and reality are combined in Viramontes’ story. Through these symbols, Viramontes is also presenting us the vivid portrayal of women in contemporary Chicano society. The washerwoman is not idealized as a feminist who makes use of force to achieve power, unlike other female characters in Chicano literary works such as Gloria Damasco in Lucha Corpi’s novel. Her story is a true story and she is a real woman as much as possible with her strengths and weaknesses and fully conscious of her unfulfilled life. Like La Llorona, the washerwoman is trying to survive in a patriarchal society like the Chicano one, and at the same time displays resistance and courage. By using these archetypes, Viramontes is trying to make us re-reading the legend in a new way. A re-reading of the Llorona legend is precisely Viramontes’
goal when she uses La Llorona. It then becomes possible for the reader to re-see the legend. Viramontes invokes La Llorona before naming her in various ways. The clearest way is through the motif of children separated from parents. The central figures of the last two sections are, like La Llorona, looking for these lost children. They search in different ways, but both their attempts seem pathetic and futile. The cook searches for JoJo by looking for him in others. He lets Paulie “hang out cause he’s JoJo’s age (Viramontes 1985: 64-65). He is drawn to another boy “cause he’s a real sweetheart like JoJo” (66). The woman in the third section also looks for her son in others, but she takes it a step further; she convinces herself that the boy that reminds her of her son Geraldo is her son Geraldo. Since La Llorona is identified with Malinche and therefore with the idea of betrayal, she is also present when the cook betrays the workers who run into his bathroom and when he betrays the Salvadorian woman with the children, Sonya and Macky, to the police. La Llorona is also called forth in the pattern of victim becoming victimizer. In the legend La Llorona is wronged by her lover. She then turns her grief into violence toward her children.

While Viramontes evokes the Llorona legend, she is dismantling it as well. The author repeats Llorona’s victim-to-victimizer pattern in two characters, the cook and the Salvadorian woman. By creating more than one Llorona figure this way, Viramontes breaks the form of the legend that has La Llorona demonstrated by a single entity. Also, since the cook is the betrayer in the story, he becomes both a Llorona and a Malinche figure. With this detail Viramontes undoes the idea that the Llorona of the legend is necessarily female. The author has broken open the definition of La Llorona, now she is many women and many men. By emphasizing the role of La Llorona within the context of the structure, Viramontes succeeds in underscoring the role of situation in the weeping woman legend. In her recasting of the legend, Viramontes relocates
blame by emphasizing situation. She creates Llorona figures who suffer from the tragedy and are not singly to blame for it. Both Llorona figures in the story lose their children to a larger political machine, one they cannot see or fight. It is this larger question Viramontes raises, forcing the reader to look beyond the level of blame. All of Viramontes’ writing is politically based.

Not only the use of archetypes is considered to be a magic realist feature but also the use of some motifs or symbols such as loneliness. For instance Viramontes uses in her Cariboo Café the element of loneliness which she might have borrowed from Garcia-Marquez’s novel A Hundred Years of Solitude. Loneliness in this novel was a central theme and in Viramontes’ story, loneliness turns to be a central motif as well. All the characters in Cariboo Café are displaced or lonely. Sonya and Macky got lost and now are away from their family. The owner of the café is lonely, he has no wife, no son. The washerwoman is lonely too and she is isolated like most of the characters in A Hundred Years of Solitude, in her neurotic obsession.

Viramontes also uses the magic realist theme of solitude in her other story, Neighbours. The story’s theme revolves around the solitary lives of two older people and their personal demons. Aura Rodriguez and Fierro are neighbors who live separate existences even though they live within the same fenced-in area on a shared plot of land. Fierro, who, similar to the owner of the Cariboo Café, seems to be imprisoned by memories of his past, specifically his deceased son, Chuy and by his own solitude. His state of mind and life story also resemble to those of the washerwoman. Fierro lives alone and only has the company of his memories, but his memories are not good companions because they give him heartache and blur his perspective on reality. Memories and reality combine in this story. In A Hundred Years of Solitude memory was seen as a major burden and a curse for the Buendía family. The overabundance of memory causes many of the Buendías to lock themselves into their rooms and isolate from the rest of the society.
Fierro's overabundance of memory reacts in the same way. For some of the Buendías, the nostalgia of better days gone by prevents them from existing in a changing world. Fierro's memories prevent him from existing in a present world. Fierro lives in his 'magic' world; he lives in the past and it seems that there is an impossibility of separating from this past and to live in his present time. The washwoman like Fierro lives in her 'magic' insane world as well. She is trapped in her past memories which prevent her from seeing the reality of the outer world. This inseparability of past and present has also been exploited as a major theme in magic realist fiction. The afflicted, Buendías are doomed to repeat the same cycles until they consume themselves, and they are never able to move into the future. Fierro is doomed to live in the past and he is not able to move into the present and his memories make him consume himself. Sometimes this inseparability and lack of power of distinguishing between past memory and reality can be very dangerous to some characters. An example we have in the final scene of Cariboo Café. Both in Cariboo Café and in Neighbours characters seem to be desperately alone and isolated from the rest of the world. Isolation is another major theme used by García-Marquez in his famous magic-realist fiction. Viramontes' characters don't seem to have any connection with the people who surround them. The owner of the café doesn't have connections with his customers, a large percent of them being immigrants who do not speak English, which isolates him. This can also be seen with Fierro and his neighbor Aura, who share a common environment yet both are isolated. They are friends, but know very little about one another. These types of 'relations' can be found in A Hundred Years of Solitude where the Buendías maintain their world isolated from the rest of the world. The village of Macondo and the Buendía residence are archetypal symbols of isolated environments in magic realist fiction.

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3.5. Magic realism in Lucha Corpi’s “Black Widow’s Wardrobe”

Another female archetype in Chicano literature is that of “La Malinche”, known also as Malintzin, Malinali or Doña Marina, a woman who played an active and powerful role in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, acting as interpreter, advisor and intermediary for Hernán Cortés. She was also Cortés’ mistress and is thought to have betrayed her own people. La Malinche is considered to be one of the first “Mestizos” and remains iconically potent in Mexican folklore. She is understood in various and often conflicting aspects, as the embodiment of treachery, the quintessential victim, or simply as symbolic mother of the new Mexican people. This female archetype is used by another Chicano writer, Lucha Corpi, in her magico-realist detective novel *Black Widow’s Wardrobe*. This novel is nothing less than a re-telling of the legend and myth of La Malinche, Cortez’s mistress branded forever as a traitor. The use of La Malinche signals a deepening of the trend of the past several years to rewrite Malinche’s story in order to overcome the inherent sexism and racism of that history. In Corpi’s book, Malinche is the target of betrayal, not its purveyor, and she definitely is not her husband’s victim. Corpi also flips the myth of La Llorona on its head. The ancient tale of the woman who murdered her children and was thus forced to cry forever along riverbanks, which has been used for centuries by mothers and grandmothers to instill good behavior in unruly children, gets a complete overhaul in Corpi’s magic realist novel. Under Corpi’s pen, the children are the possible murderers of their mother and it is they who must suffer the consequences.

This novel is a Chicana tale of discovery and reaffirmation, and a cultural reclamation project that just happens to have a detective as a protagonist. I think that Corpi’s narrative helps
to redefine American literature by inscribing the experiences of the Chicano community, previously excluded from the literary canon, in general, and from the genre of detective fiction, in particular. This novel is similar to Chicano detective fiction written by male authors like Rudolfo Anaya, Rolando Hinojosa, Manuel Ramos or Michael Nava in that it presents an oppositional discourse to the ethnic discrimination and economic oppression of Chicano communities within mainstream Euro-American culture. In her novel, Lucha Corpi explores the history and myths of Mexican-American culture throughout a slow dynamic plot of retribution and murder. One of the major characters, Licia is considered to be the reincarnation of La Malinche. This element can be seen as magic realist. Also at the beginning of the novel there’s a juxtaposition of the physical and spiritual worlds. We can see two plot levels: the realistic and the magical. These two levels are well intertwined with each other. The novel also focuses on the preservation of Chicano myths, history and traditions. It is also full of comments on Chicano customs, foods and traditions. The narrative focuses on the reconstruction of the Chicano heritage and the comment on Chicano history. The novel contains lot of folklore, spirituality and religion such as Mexican history, Aztec history, “curranderismo”, Catholicism, myths, legends, reincarnation, clairvoyance etc. We can see how the realistic social categories of reality constitute the framework of the magical ones.

The heroine of the story, Gloria Damasco is a veteran of the Chicano civil rights movement educated, smart, ambitious and possessed with a mysterious ability to “see”, to use strange visions that appear to her incomplete and oblique. These visions are magico-realistic elements in the novel which in the end turn into reality. Although she is a female-detective, from a magic realist point of view she can be seen as the reincarnation of a “bruja” or “curranda”. Through her affirmation of her Chicana cultural heritage and her growing acceptance of what she
refers to as her “dark gift” of visions and extrasensory perception, I argue that Gloria Damasco contributes to the creation of a new consciousness that helps to break down the dualistic thinking that forms the foundation of our Western philosophical tradition and that dominates the genre of classic detective fiction. The binary oppositions between rational and irrational, scientific and spiritual, logical and intuitive, mind and body are called into question. The inclusion of indigenous and mestizo perceptions of reality in this novel contributes to the creation of a new type of detective, such as Gloria Damasco, who has more tools to work with, the magico-realist ones. In Lucha Corpi’s novel all those magic realist elements such as re-writing the story of La Malinche are used in order to overcome the inherent sexism and racism of that history and of the Chicano society in general. Corpi’s novel is also a detective novel and Damasco’s use of dreams and visions in her endeavor to solve mysteries provides an interesting twist and an important innovation that alters the reified formula of the traditional detective novel and makes it a magico-realist detective novel. The characterization of Damasco as a clairvoyant is foregrounded in many chapters throughout the novel: “For many years, every so often, I would sense the shimmering energy of a presence, somewhere at a distance. It came to me in the shape of a blue light, with a revolving force all its own. Once, while I was shopping at Union Square in San Francisco, I felt that presence, like a sudden gust of blue light brushing my arm and swiftly moving away. I didn’t know then, but it was your energy, Justin Escobar, I was feeling. I shivered, not in horror, but in excitement, for I sensed that you and I would meet one day; and when we did, the solution to the mystery would be near at hand. Now, let me tell you the story.” (Corpi 1999: 30) Also the novel opens with the following description of Gloria’s recurring nightmare: “Not day anymore, not yet night, it is the hour of the wild cat, the ocelot. A woman fans the fire in a stone stove. She wears a mid-length skirt underneath a ‘huipil’ with
embroidered red flowers. Her long hair streams down her back. Her back is to me and I cannot see her face. Her young daughter plays by her side. A brooding young man sits at the kitchen table, playing with a dagger, a gift from his father. Suddenly, without saying a word, he gets up, picks up the dagger, and walks towards the woman at the stove. He raises his hand. She turns. The fire flares up, and her hair catches on fire, then her clothes.” (Corpi 1999: 1) We can also see that the magical categories of reality do not provoke any surprise or hesitation on the part of narrator. Damasco naturalizes the magical categories of reality and the reader is invited to do the same, rendering them as ordinary facts, as true facts: La Malinche lives in our modern world.

As I said earlier, Corpi also flips the myth of La Llorona on its head. This archetype gets a complete overhaul in the novel. In Corpi’s work, Licia’s children are the possible murderers of their mother and it is they who must suffer the consequences. When Gloria Damasco consults Rosa, an “espiritista” who had befriended Licia in prison and later betrayed her, she tells her to investigate Malintzin Tepan’s death in order to find out who is trying to kill Licia. According to Rosa’s version, “a masked assassin stabbed Malinche thirteen times, outside her house in Mexico City... apparently this killer was sent by Cortés and Juan de Jaramillo, Malinche’s husband” (118-119). Thus, the cycle of violence is traced back to the sixteenth Century and a parallel is established in the text between the life of the modern day Black Widow and Malintzin Tepan, the mistress and interpreter of Hernan Cortés. As Rosa points out: “He used her as his interpreter, in other words his tongue, ears, and mind. Without her, the Spaniard’s mighty sword would have been useless” (57). A sort of fragmented narrative is created, also a dissolution of time and spaces in order to create a magico-realist universe.

The book opens with the Día de los Muertos procession in San Francisco, during which a mysterious woman in white is attacked. Damasco witnesses the attack and “sees” a duo of armor-
clad conquistadors involved in the incident. When Gloria first sees the Black Widow at the Día de los Muertos procession in the Mission District of San Francisco, she immediately knows that she is the woman in the recurring nightmare she had the day before. She comments: “I helplessly realized that my feelings and dreams had become inextricably meshed with the threads of Black Widow’s life. I knew that the visions would follow, and that I would give myself no choice but to work towards freeing myself from their hold” (1). At this stage in her career as a private eye, Gloria accepts the fact that her dreams and visions are inescapable and an integral part of her detective work. She no longer questions this, but rather, is resigned to accepting it as the reality of her life. Her natural inquisitiveness and the nature of her profession eventually lead her to Licia Leucuna, the Black Widow, a woman recently released from prison after serving a sentence of several years for killing her abusive husband. Before the story is finished, Damasco has traveled to Mexico in search of details about La Malinche, of whom the Black Widow claims to be a reincarnation. Damasco becomes involved in a plot that includes stolen Mexican artifacts, a wild chase and a shoot-out in a dangerous cavern, and at least two domineering husbands. By the end she is recovering from a serious bullet wound, the victims of domestic violence have had their revenge, and the artifacts are safe. However, the true identity of the Black Widow has not been resolved. Also, the novel ends with Licia’s house mysteriously burning down: “The fire department had found no evidence of arson. Although neighbors swore they had seen a woman wearing a white dress enter the house just before the fire started, no human remains were recovered at the site that once was Black Widow’s dwelling” (193). Thus, although Gloria successfully solves the mystery of who had tried to kill Licia, the novel ends with many unanswered questions. This, of course, is another example of how Corpi subverts the traditional genre of solving the mystery of who is trying to kill Licia, Gloria Damasco has another recurring
nightmare about a menacing hand: “Down a dark tunnel, I run after someone, but I can’t tell who. A man’s hand emerges from the darkness, the long, thin fingers and thumb wrapped around the pistol... The hand retreats back into the darkness. ‘Why did you take it from me?’ questions a raspy voice—I cannot tell if a man or a woman” (44). The inscription of these dreams adds to the suspense of the novel and invites the reader to participate in deciphering them in an attempt to solve the mystery. At the same time they create the magico realist universe of the narrative.

In Black Widow’s Wardrobe other types of non-rational experiences are presented contributing to Anzadua’s claims about the new mestiza’s acceptance of ambivalence and the overcoming of the Western binary logic. For example, serious discussions of regression to past lives, reincarnation, karma, the law of retribution, and hallucinations are all presented as real possibilities. Ambivalence is embraced in this novel that raises more questions than answers. Corpi questions the notions of an “absolute truth” or “History” as fixed and knowable. She accepts the fact that there are mysteries that can’t be solved and by the end of the novel she claims: “I nearly believed that Licia was the reincarnation of La Malinche. But despite everything I knew about her, Licia Román Lecuona had remained an enigma to me” (190).

3.6. Magic realism in Tomás Rivera’s...And The Earth Did Not Devour Him

Tomás Rivera’s novel...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him is concerned with the “common and the everyday” lives of mid-twentieth century Chicano migrant workers, lives that are presented as “awesome and unreal”. Rivera’s novel was used and analyzed by Angel Flores in one of his essays about magical realism. The impoverished lives depicted in...And the Earth...
*did Not Devour Him* were, indeed, quite “common and everyday” for the Chicanos of that era. However, the way in which Rivera presents reality is not common. Although God, Satan, spirits, Santa Claus, and disembodied voices figure in this text, the novel does not offer any encounter with the supernatural. The magic of this novel is real and sinister. Rivera presents a magico-realist world via his experimentation with language. He uses four primary narrative modes to weave an unreal tapestry of voices and events that mimic the functions of memory. Thus, memory and dreams are magico-realist elements in Rivera’s novel. The experiences of the child and his community are discovered outside the parameters of the text and then rediscovered in a seemingly illogical pattern that coalesces at the novel’s end.

According to the literary critic Simpkins: “magic realism finds that fantasy resides in everyday life. A realist text can never imitate reality. It is up to writers to construct versions of the world we live in, a world which is often threatening, mysterious and absurd.” (Simpkins 1988: 232) Rivera’s novel attempts to show the absurdity of life through the memory of a child narrator. We see how a young boy grapples with and processes daily life trauma while gaining insight into his subconscious. The illusory nature of dreams and their effects on reality do have a place in the magical realist novel. His dreams are influenced by the suffering of his family, thus dreams become intertwined with the real world. The mixture between dreams and real world is stated right from the beginning of the novel: “That year was lost to him. At times he tried to remember and, just about when he thought everything was clearing up some, he would be at a loss for words. It almost always began with a dream in which he would suddenly awaken and then realize that he was really asleep. Then he wouldn’t know whether what he was thinking had happened or not.” (Rivera: 83)
The novel displays remembrance. It presents a textual description of a psychologically-damaged ego filled with unpleasant memories. This novel is an example of the human subconscious. Trying to remember something is often a fruitless endeavour, however, the memories are still there. The little boy remains unnamed throughout the novel and he is a sort of “everyman”. He is at once one and many, he is a representative of the Chicano community.

The stories in Rivera’s novel are “a social construct that emerge through the linguistically circumscribed interaction of the individual, the community, and the material world.” (Flores 1955: 489). In this novel it is impossible to separate the magico-realist world from the material world where it actually comes from. Rivera’s novel also describes the unrepentant exploitation of cheap labor by American bosses, which includes the use of children and infants. Rivera’s novel also deals with the socio-political issue of the impoverished Chicano community. Chicanos are exploited by the Anglos but at the same time they can integrate in this cultural hegemony via their role as consumers. This “integration” is described in the story *The Night Before Christmas* when Chicano community goes shopping. The novel contains cultural clash; the Chicano/Mexicans are exposed to conflicting values of the new American culture but are not equipped with the knowledge and resources required to obtain the goals valued in the anglo culture.

Fragmentation and disorientation appear like in Viramontes’ novel. Rivera uses the language of the dream to suggest the sense of psychological and social disorientation in which the young boy and his family live. Rivera’s novel is magico realist through its use of innovative techniques, narrative technique and linguistic experimentation to elucidate social problems of race, class and gender. Rivera’s narrative technique is presented in four main structures: the first person narrator, the secondary voice of the first person narrator, direct quotations from
disembodied voices and third person narration. Each of these modes represent the boy’s attempt to understand his environment and they all serve very different functions in the novel. Each of the twenty seven stories in Rivera’s novel utilizes either one or more of the author’s narrative styles but *Hand in His Pocket* is one story in which style is most clearly limited to the protagonist of the story. In this story the speaker tries to reveal a trauma of his childhood. Although the action in *Hand in His Pocket* is believable, there is a fairytale quality to it that further shows the novel as an example of magical realism. In western fairytales children are often presented as victims. In these fairytales children are usually disobedient and they become victims as a way of punishment. In Rivera’s story the young boy is not disobedient or stubborn. He is actually very compliant and generally agrees to do everything his hosts ask of him. He even eats their disgusting food because he “didn’t want to hurt their feeling” or “seem ungrateful” (98). Despite his obedience, he is constantly punished by the “witches” of his “fairytale”. Thus, he represents the chicano community at large, he is a metaphor of his people; they work hard and do as they are told, but they are still ill treated by the “bad witch”, Anglo society.

The end of Rivera’s novel is highly ambiguous, but it does offer a sense of chronology and closure. We are told that a child is speaking to us throughout the whole narrative. In the last chapter “Under the House”, Rivera combines third person narration with extracts from the childhood memory. In essence, this story provides a summary of the whole work and shows us how the boy has processed his “lost year”. The narration is in the first person but taken from memory. These memories are revealed through random voices. These voices construct a magico-realist universe in the story. “Under the House” shows Rivera’s mastery at experimenting with language as a mode of the personal and cultural remembering that is so treasured by the Chicano community.
The novel ends with the narrator climbing a tree and waving to an imagined person on the horizon so that “the other could see that he knew he was there” (152). Rivera’s novel is at once one story and multiple stories. It is intensely personal to the unnamed narrator while also presenting communal experiences. The one thing that Rivera has in common to the magico-realistic writers discussed before, is the use of “defamiliarization” to radically emphasize common elements of reality and mixing it with magic. In his novel, Rivera defamiliarizes two most common elements of reality, thus making it magico-realistic: language, the way human beings communicate with each other, memory, and the way in which the individual attempts to develop his/her sense of “Self”.

To conclude, Rivera used the device of childlike fantasies in his novel in order to portray Chicano reality. Literary critic Luis Dávila argues that there is “a certain strain of subdued fantasy” in Rivera’s novel; a fantasy that revolves around “the muted lonely self-questionings of little children” who view the ideals and myths of their parents “through a glass darkly”. In another study he analyzes the reflection and aesthetic transformation of reality in Rivera’s novel. He states that within Hispanic tradition Rivera succeeds in portraying a protagonist who discovers reality from a child-like perspective, a reality that has already existed in his fantasies. Thus, childlike fantasy and imagination is transformed into and becomes an integral part of reality. By discovering the relation between reality and fantasy, the child protagonist realizes who he is and what life is about.
Conclusions

In analyzing the novels of these six Chicano writers, I have tried to show how the authors expand the aesthetic and thematic perspective of Chicano literature by employing the literary genre of magical realism. In this process, I have tried to remain faithful to the texts themselves. Throughout the study we have seen that the interplay of magic and reality in the six novels is an important characteristic of the narrative style and structure, affecting the setting, the plot and the characters equally. After all these analyses we can say that the fictional universe of the novels is characterized by the following features: it is composed of two plot levels, the realistic and the magical one and these two levels are harmoniously intertwined with each other, forming an integrated fictional reality composed of realistic social and magical categories. We have also seen that the realistic social categories of reality constitute the framework of the magical ones. While reading the novels, these magical categories of reality didn’t provoke any surprise or hesitation on the part of the narrator, the characters and the implied reader. The final result is the naturalization of the magical categories of reality, that is, their rendering as ordinary facts.

We can also say that the stylistic and structural devices used by these Chicano writers in order to create the magico-realistic universe of the novels are: the fragmented narrative, the cinema-like montage of scenes, episodes and chapters, the dissolution of times and spaces and the creation of a time-space-continuum. Most of the Chicano writers use the oral tradition in their writings and multiple points of view and perspective. We have also seen the importance of the use of imagination, dreams, visions and hallucinations. These devices create a fictional universe which is marked by fluid times, settings, and characters, by a magico-realistic totality in which all the elements are connected. In this way, the dichotomies of life and death, past, present, and
future, wakefulness and dreams, as well as of visions and hallucinations are dissolved and replaced by an achronological sequence. This sequence constitutes the essence of the novels, that is, their form, structure, and style. The authors employ an extremely fragmented narrative style and structure to deconstruct the chronology of time and space and to create an achronistic fictional universe. We can say that they create harmony through fragmentation.

In the novels I have analyzed the plot, the setting, the characters and the temporal framework are characterized by two-dimensionality. The setting of the plot is both realistic and magical. The magical level of the plot emerges from the imagination of the narrator-protagonist or the characters who are situated on the realistic level of the plot at the same time. Some of the characters exist only on the realistic level of the plot, while others appear only on the magical one, that is, they exist only in the imagination of certain characters. Many characters move from one level of the plot to the other, transcending the boundary between different times and places, between life and death. The dissolution of the antinomy between the two standards of reality creates the blending of magic and reality in the texts.

We have also seen that imagination, dreams, visions and hallucinations are the most important devices which the authors use in order to render this world view and, by means of it, a distinctive aspect of Chicano culture. In The Road to Tumazunchale, Fausto is able to shed his old skin and to become a Chicano with a communal identity, who is conscious of his cultural roots and who, by means of a mental journey, finds an answer, not to the Chicanos’ social problems, but to a universal one, namely human temporality and powerlessness before death. This magico realist journey, a series of dreams, visions, feverish hallucinations and wakeful states enables him to analyze and understand himself and his social and natural environment. The liberating imagination helps Fausto to defy disillusionment and death to find peace, harmony and
freedom of mind. Death assumes a different meaning: the magico-realist approach to universal theme of death deconstructs the Western perception of life and death, which is that of a linear period of time with a fixed beginning and end, and describes a circular continuum, the life-death circle. Like Melquiades in García Marquez A Hundred Years of Solitude, Fausto, Gregory Revueltas and Licia Lecuona believe in the maxim that everything has its own life and that it is only a question of reviving its soul. Like Melquiades, the magician, they arouse the invisible forces of reality by means of their imagination, drawing upon a belief system that is impregnated with myths, legends, and superstitions. In this process, in contrast to modern man who has a rather rational perception of reality and whose belief in the existence of a spiritual world is not so pronounced, they view the cosmos as an animate organism.

We have seen that Antonio in Bless me, Ultima comes to a magico-realist understanding of reality. Under the spiritual guidance of Ultima, la curandera, Antonio gradually rejects his mother's Catholic faith and turns toward Ultima's indigenous paganism. Dreams and imagination are used in this novel, also myths, legends and archetypes such as the one of curandera. All these elements were seen they are important for the creation of the magico-realist universe. We have also seen that Chicano symbols are important elements in magic realist writings: the Virgin of Guadalupe and the golden carp. Also myths, legends, spells and ancient languages are used in creating the magic realist atmosphere. Also, like any other magic realist writing, Bless me, Ultima, is filled with imagery which reinforces the theme of the interconnectedness of all things. The imagery introduces the reader in the world of magic realist fiction because they link the human world to the wider cosmos.

In Alejandro Morales' novel we have seen how magic realism, historical chronicle, and science fiction are combined. Like Anaya's novel, Rag Doll Plagues contains lot of folklore,
spirituality and religion such as Mexican history, Aztec history, 'curanderismo' Catholicism, myths, legends, reincarnation, clairvoyance etc. The author also uses the metaphor of history as a circular phenomenon, important feature of a magico-realist writing. We've seen that Morales was trying to symbolically tell the story of Hispano-American people the way Garcia-Marquez was trying to tell the whole story of mankind in his magic realist novel. Also dreams and hallucinations are used in this novel and spirits of the dead walking and communicating with the living people or live human beings visiting territories of the dead. Here the two plot levels are harmoniously intertwined. Also curanderismo is used by Morales and plays an important part as a magico-realist element.

In Viramontes' short story we have seen the way in which reality and fantastic were merged. We've seen how the world of imagination permeates the world of reality. Also the importance of lyrical language in a magico-realist fiction. And of course the use of fragmentation, and of the non-linear way of managing the narration and different points of view and the use of solitude, thus alluding to the structure and style of the magic realist fiction. The use of archetypes was an important magico-realist feature as well, the use of La Lorena and La Gritona. The same magico-realist elements were seen in Black Widow's Wardrobe: the use of La Malinche, the use of history, myths, legends, curanderismo, dreams etc. Chicano magic realist writings portray the Chicano contemporary society with its economic, cultural and racial problems.

Finally, we've seen how magical realism can be presented via language experimentation in Rivera's novel. Memory, dreams and disembodied voices can also create a magico-realist universe. Like in Viramontes and Corpi's writings, cultural clash, the problem of
integration, fragmentation and disorientation are very important in Rivera’s novel. Also, childlike fantasies were used to portray Chicano real society.

Thus, like its counterpart, the Latin American “realismo mágico”, the Chicano magical realism is a fusion of two conflicting views of reality, the rational mode which is centered upon reasoning and the magical mode which is centered on the unconscious, dreams, and imagination—a mode grounded on Chicanos’ Hispanic and Indian heritage. All novels analyzed render the fusion of the rational and the magical modes as possible solution to an existing conflict. By using magico-realist structural devices to render a magico-realist universe, these authors describe not only the conflicts and tensions that arise from the fusion of the realistic and the magical categories, but also imaginary solutions to the chicano conflict of identity. This type of fiction depicts the way things are in experience as well as the way they might be, such as an enlarged magico-realist expression of reality. Thus, reality assumes a more complete picture, a magico-realist one.
Works Cited


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