Chapter I

Origins of Magical Realism: Centring Latin America

‘Magical Realism’ described a European artistic mode that saw a presence in Latin American Fiction. It has been and continues to be at the centre of many literary discussions. Many critics have tried to define the term but the more definitions that have arisen, the more elusive the term has become.

‘The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms’ defines Magical Realism as “a quasi-surrealistic art form...mixture of realistic and fantastic elements. Realistic details and esoteric knowledge are intertwined with dreamlike sequences, abrupt chronological shifts and complex, tangled plots. Magical realists also frequently incorporate fairy tales and myths into their works” (Murfin & Ray 1997: 242).

This definition, studied in detail, shows an element of dismissal of Magical Realism. The term ‘quasi-surrealistic’ insinuates a hierarchical position that Surrealism, an accepted genre of the West, has in comparison to Magical Realism. Many Western critics address Magical Realism as a mode that is inferior to Realism and Surrealism in literary terms. Moreover, the definition does not do full justice to the mode, as observed in Latin American Fiction. Using expressions like ‘esoteric knowledge’, ‘dreamlike sequences’, ‘abrupt chronological shifts’ ‘complex, tangled plots’, ‘fairy tales’ and ‘myths’ deride the mode and place it in a space that incorporates everything that is negative and not acceptable to the Western concept of Realism. Contrasting and comparing Magical Realism to/ with other established modes gives rise to a number of doubts about the mode and results in readers questioning the authenticity of the mode.
The European and the Latin American worlds ushered in a number of studies on Magical Realism in order to reach a unifying definition of the term. But the result has been a diversity of approaches to Magical Realism. These critics can be divided into two main schools, the descendents of the art historian, Fanz Roh and the followers of the Latin American writer, Alejo Carpentier.

Franz Roh coined the expression ‘Magischer Realismus’ in 1925 to describe the art forms that were taking shape after the First World War in Europe. Unlike other Art Critics, Roh preferred the term ‘Magischer Realismus’ to the chronological term ‘Post-Expressionism’ (as seen in Roh’s essay which was translated into Spanish by Jose Ortega y Gasset in ‘Revista de Occidente’ in 1927 and later translated into English by Wendy. B. Faris). The features of Magical Realism that Franz Roh elicited defined Art and it was difficult to decide what it morphed itself into in the literary field. Hence when the term ‘Magical Realism’ found its way into Literature, it resulted in becoming a ‘widely used literary concept’ which became “a present-day historian’s nightmare” (Guenther 1995: 34).

Alejo Carpentier, who spearheaded the second school used the expression ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ which did not contain the word ‘magic’ and yet became associated with Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’. Carpentier uses the word ‘maravillaso’ that indirectly replaces Roh’s ‘magischer’ centring it in Latin America. The artistic concept of ‘Magischer Realismus’ appends another dimension when it becomes inclusive of a place.

Most discussions about Magical Realism revolve around the concept of ‘magic’. The magical world created by artists is juxtaposed with the authenticity and certainty of the real world. Magic is treated not as belonging to the real, Western, scientific world or the concept of the Enlightenment. Time and again critics make a comparative study of Magical Realism with accepted traditional genres like the fantastic, the fairy story, ghost stories, myth and
mystical stories. Yet when Franz Roh coined the expression ‘Magischer Realismus’ to describe the art forms that were acquiring form after the First World War in Europe, he used the word ‘magic’ in contrast to the ‘mystic’ and all else that spoke of an unreal reality. He saw Magical Realism as a ‘reengagement with the real’ and not as a crusade outside the real world (Roh 1995:15).

Roh’s definition does not talk of mystical faith coming from above; he focuses on a representation of reality which provokes readers to see ‘magic’ by ‘celebrating the mundane’ (Roh 1995:17). He used the word ‘magic’ to mean freshness. But as a literary concept it was taken to mean the opposite of ‘real’. Roh was close to the Russian Formalist’s concept of ‘ostranenie’ or ‘defamiliarization.’-recreating an ordinary object as something new (Hegerfeldt 13). He said of this new realism, “the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it…” (Roh 1995:16). The formalists saw literary language as a deviation from ordinary discourse, “a kind of linguistic violence” (Eagleton 2011:4). Magical Realism is a deviation from the traditional realism accepted by the Western world. It is important to decide in what way Magical Realism deviates from Realism. When a study of Magical Realism of Latin America is made, it is crucial to remember that for oral traditions, Magical Realism is not a deviation; it is the accepted pattern of story-telling.

Roh’s definition emphasizes the contrast between Expressionism and Post-Expressionism in Art by enumerating at least twenty differences of importance. Roh contrasted the way in which Post Expressionism used ‘objects’ to the earlier art forms, like Impressionism and Expressionism. Both Impressionism and Expressionism treated the world of objects as an ‘obvious’ fact that did not demand any critical attention on the part of the artist (Roh 1995:19). Post Expressionism/Magical Realism looked at the world of objects as a ‘problem’ (Roh 1995:20) and “celebrated the mundane” (Roh 1995:17). Roh analyzes Expressionism as
being ecstatic, extravagant, loud, and centrifugal and Magical realism as being sober, severe, quiet and centripetal (Guenther 1995: 35). This leads to a study in contrast, which once again focuses on reality and its representations by two types of artists.

In 1958, Roh disassociated himself from the term ‘Magischer Realismus’ but it had made a transatlantic move to Latin America where it was revived both as a painterly and a literary concept. Gonzalez Echevarria noted “The concept appears again in Latin America in the forties, when it had already been forgotten in Europe” (Hegerfeldt 2005:109). Magical Realism found relevance in the literary works of the 1930s and 40s in Latin America. Critics cannot decide whether the term Magical Realism ‘reappeared’ as Roh had defined it or whether it was ‘recycled’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:16). The novels belonging to this period respond to the need for “difference,” not as an escape to an exotic space, but as an alternative vision often entitled “magic realism” (Vlad 2008:11).

The movement of Magical Realism from Europe to Latin America needs to be seriously studied. It loses value if it is merely looked at as an artistic mode that travelled from the dominant spaces to the margins when it was no longer of value to them. The events of the Second World War left the European world devastated and the world of magic in art was dismissed as being unreal and disconnected to the disastrous happenings around the world.

Latin American Fiction took over the Magical Realist mode and made a success of it. The mode became the best way to describe a reality which was open to both Western influences and the native indigenous way of thinking. Latin American reality is far more diverse than being just native, primitive and indigenous; it is not a native culture in an absolute sense as it has its roots in European traditions. Enrique Anderson Imbert observed that the Latin American writer learnt a lot of the techniques from the ‘workshops of the world’s great literature’ and then began to turn to the ‘antirealistic techniques and tricks in a
concrete American reality’ To Imbert, ‘the magic, the "marvelous," does not lie in reality, but in the art of make-believe’ which relies on familiar objects (Imbert 1975:7).

Enrique Anderson Imbert was the first to recognize that the literature which was becoming popular in Latin America in the 1930’s exhibited a number of features and characteristics that Roh had applied to painting. Though Imbert realized that it was difficult to see components of a painterly concept in a literary work, he felt that it was possible to look for an ‘aesthetic ideal which is common to both painting and writing’ (Imbert 1975:1). In keeping with Roh’s ‘magic of being’ Imbert talked of ‘being’ as the focal point of Magical Realism, in his article “‘Magical Realism’ in Spanish-American Fiction” (Imbert 1975:1). Imbert applied his definition of Magical Realism to Spanish American Literature which he distinguished from Spanish- American reality, thereby following the aesthetic school and disconnecting himself from Alejo Carpentier’s concept of Latin American reality.

The details Roh attached to Magical Realism were directed to describing European Art, contrasting it to the earlier schools like Impressionism and Expressionism. This same study could not be applied to Latin American Fiction. Latin American Magical Realism, from the short stories studied proves that the concept of Magical Realism goes beyond a simplistic binary study; it is inclusive of many ‘realisms’ that make a classic definition impossible.

Latin American Magical Realism does not separate the mundane from the artistic as a literary ruse; it represents the reality of Latin America as ordinary and iterates the concept of culture being ‘ordinary’ (Williams 2011). Roh’s definition is European in its quality, looking at the ‘reengagement’ as a desire to move away from what existed earlier, the previous realism. Latin American Magical Realism does not ‘reengage’ with reality; it focuses on ordinary life experiences. It does not create hierarchies of reality; on the other hand, the archived reality is brought out in all its interesting dimensions.
There is no doubt that magical real stories represent reality from a different perspective but there is no reason to believe that this is a ‘reengagement’ in native cultures. The rational world looks at this perspective as one that is new but in the past, in oral traditions, even the Western world ‘engaged’ itself in stories of a magical quality. The focus in the European world has been on the ‘real’ as opposed to the ‘magical’ and hence Roh’s definition for Magical Realism has focused on the ‘reengagement of the real’. The word ‘reengagement’ centres itself on the manner in which European art looked at the world of objects; as something different from external reality.

The objects described in the short stories of Latin America represent the everyday reality of Latin America. They are ‘sober’ and ‘severe’, not to be treated as a contrast to the ‘extravagant’ and ‘loud’ of European art; they are a part of Latin American reality and hence cannot be contrasted to any other way of looking at objects. Magical Realism in Latin American Fiction exhibits one more way of looking at reality which is as serious as Western Realism. It is important in itself and not as a mere contrast to Realism; its essence lies in the fact that it is an expression of reality which ceases to be so when it is studied from a western perspective.

Latin American short stories use a number of ‘objects’ from the real world but as Roh observed these are objects that express “convulsive life” (Roh 1995:18). They are objects that blend ‘colours, spatial forms, tactile representations, memories of smells and tastes’ and create an ‘unending complex’ (Roh 1995:19). Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his short story ‘Balthazar’s Marvellous Afternoon’ uses the ‘object’ of a beautiful cage for birds. The cage is a cultural artefact to the Latin American sensibility which loses its aesthetic beauty in the world of reason and logic. The experience of having created ‘the most beautiful cage in the world’ makes Balthazar’s afternoon ‘marvellous’ (Marquez 1974: 225) The description of the cage with all its minute details - “with its enormous dome of wire, three stories inside, with
passageways and compartments especially for eating and sleeping and swings in the space set aside for the birds’ recreation, it seemed like a small-scale model of a gigantic ice factory”- makes it simultaneously a part of the temporal world of materialism and the eternal world of beauty and joy (Marquez 1974: 226). The cage is symbolic of the landscape of Latin America surrounded by exotic birds. To the Eurocentric world, the cage is representative of a position of power, the utility of imprisonment. Magical realism rediscovers ‘the charm of the object’ and the reader looks at it with such wonder that the object is ‘defamiliarized’. This is Balthazar’s masterpiece and emerges out of an ‘accustomed’ practice of making cages from childhood; aesthetic creativity is rooted in the mundane. Art in Latin America is intrinsically connected with the life-style of the people and Balthazar’s cage is a piece of art that emerges from Balthazar’s life.

Western views, resulting from the Enlightenment and the rational world of Science, have moved away from a magical world of storytelling, dismissing it as being a false picture of reality. To a great extent, stagnation has been the result of following One Truth by considering it as being the absolute truth. Pagan ways of thinking has been attractive but it has always been moved to a space that is outside the mainstream. When the spaces of magic and reality are compartmentalized concepts like ‘mainstream’ and ‘other’ get highlighted. This results in a binary study of Magical Realism, accepting it to be the only method we can use to understand this complex mode.

It is essential to move away from such a simplistic binary study and use methodologies that are non-western in order to disconnect it from the old framework of study. The margins have had to constantly explain themselves to dominant discourses and the result is that the study of discourses belonging to the margins are explored keeping a western lens. Hegemonic structures decide that there are no aesthetic qualities to be studied from the
margins. Shannin Schroeder says in her Preface to *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* that “comparative tradition is less marked in North American writing because less powerful nations have a vested interest in understanding their more powerful neighbours, whereas the reverse is not generally the case”. (Schroeder 2004: x) It is because of such a myopic view that North America and Europe treat all of Latin America as a homogenous group without focusing on the multi-cultures of Latin America. It is important to consider the study of Latin American fiction as a useful means to learn about discourses and structures that are intrinsically powerful in themselves rather than as secondary to the dominant discourses of the First World. When this is not done the expression ‘Magical Realism’ becomes a homogeneous term to describe all types of writing that do not follow the traditional forms. When Magical Realism is perceived from a hegemonic position, as a narrative which is second-rate to the accepted ‘realism’ it results in a number of misinterpretations. Gonzalez Echevarria explains it perfectly when he says of European Literature, “Theirs are important, canonical, the core of the core curriculum; ours are marginal, exotic, frilly, not part of anyone’s cultural program” (Schroeder 2004: 23).

The focus in this thesis will be on the indigenous reality that Magical Realism expounds. This is the reality of Latin America and is seen in the everyday life of the people of Latin America, coming from the history of Latin America. The ability to include multiple forms of knowledge and thinking has been a fundamental quality of Latin American reality. The short stories are representations of Latin American reality that does not foreground magic as something attractive and appealing or ‘exotic’; they are true representatives of the ‘collage’ culture that Latin America has become over the course of time. These stories tell the history of Latin America and the ‘magic’ lies not in the land as Alejo Carpentier focused on or in the cultural mixing, as Arturo Uslar Pietri foregrounded but in the everyday reality of Latin America. Shannin Schroeder’s observation is important, “These authors are not only
using their history to create literature; they are also using their literature to create a historic canon” (Schroeder 2004:20). It is valuable to look at Magical Realism as ‘rebellious aesthetic acts’ (Aldama 2003:17) rather than as ‘ethnopoetics of Otherness’ (Aldama 2003:27). When the approach to Magical Realism is as a ‘rebellious’ act then the focus is on important questions like whose history is recorded and what is the objective of this record (Aldama 2003:27).

Alejo Carpentier’s expression ‘lo real maravilloso americano’ entangled itself with Franz Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’. Carpentier used the term to describe the extraordinary that is present in the Latin American reality. Carpentier’s use of the word ‘maravillaso’ was meant to take into consideration not just the beautiful but also the terrible which is seen in the violence and military dictatorships of Latin America. The expression ‘lo real maravilloso americano’ makes no mention of the word ‘magic’ in it but Carpentier stressed that faith in magic is important to be able to experience the marvelous. He said, “it seems that the marvelous invoked in disbelief-the case of the Surrealists- was never anything more than a literary ruse, just as boring in the end as the literature that is oneiric ‘by arrangement’” (Carpentier 1995:86). For Carpentier, the entire history of Latin America is marvelous which has earlier been described by the Conquistadors themselves. Latin America’s broad ethnic cultural base made it possible to discover the marvelous in everyday life. The theme of his well-known novel, The Kingdom of this World is that “The meaning of things lies beyond any one point of view” and the prologue of the novel gave an ‘authoritative definition of Magical Realism’ (Aldama 2003:11). It is Carpentier’s definition that has led to the fact that Latin America is the home of Magical Realism—“characteristic of the Latin American Weltanshauung” (Pellon 1994:211). ‘Lo real maravillaso americano’ gives the concept of Magical Realism “the stamp of cultural authority, if not theoretical soundness” (Slemon 1995:407).
Carpentier’s discussions about the ‘marvellous’ in Latin America resulted in the second main school of Magical Realism. Carpentier approached the concept from an anthropological point of view. The school of critics, who followed Carpentier, saw in Magical Realism a Latin American Ontology and, breaking away from Roh’s aesthetic notion of Magical Realism, placed it in a cultural context, namely Latin America. Though the chief exponent of this school was Alejo Carpentier, its foundations must be traced back to the contact that three Latin American writers had with the French Literary world in the early twentieth century. Their interactions with the avant-garde introduced them to new techniques that they practiced in their writings. Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier and Arturo Uslar Pietri became more conscious of Latin American culture, landscape and the mixed cultures of Latin America—‘cultural crossbreed’ when they explored the French world of Surrealism. Paul Valery referred to Asturias *Leyendas de Guatemala* as ‘story-dream-poems’, called it surrealistic “reality”. But Asturias’ Surrealism had no resemblance to the French Surrealism. It was intrinsically connected to ‘the vanished world of the Maya Culture’ (Scarano 1999:11); it was vibrant, energetic, full-blooded and primitive. In his own words, “the real is accompanied by a dream-world reality so full of details that it turns into something more than reality itself, as in the native texts…The magical is a kind of second, almost complementary language to penetrate the universe that surrounds them” (the characters in his novels). He added the idea “that which is born of the imagination takes on a substantial nature of reality” (Scarano 1999: 12). These three Latin Americans began a movement that saw its foundations in nostalgia for their homeland and the memory of what they had left behind when they interacted with European writers and thinkers.

It cannot be denied that Asturias, Carpentier and Pietri incorporated ideas from Andre Breton’s Second Manifesto (1930), ideas about the real and the reconciliation of contradictory aspects. Breton’s preference for the world of dreams resulted from his
exasperation with the ‘prison of rationalism’ (Rave 2003:6). This definitely appealed to the Latin American “naïve- primitive” reality (Rave 2003: 3). This ‘naïve-primitive’ state is closely linked with the oral tradition of sounds, gestures and signs (Rave 2003: 3). Carpentier was influenced by Pierre Mabille’s observations of the marvelous and its origins in folklore, popular mythology and in religious syncretism. Carpentier picked up on this idea because of his association with the Santeria traditions and Voodoo practices coming from the Black Culture of Cuba. Many Cuban writers were attracted to Santeria’s religious practices and its attachment to oral legends. Carpentier was influenced by the anthropologist, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who focused on ‘primitive thought’ (Aldama 2003: 10) as being childlike and not governed by the scientific world of logic. Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ was rooted in this type of childlike innocence and ethnocentricism (Aldama 2003: 10). But knowledge of the contrast between French Surrrealism and Latin American reality took them back to their own land. This led to a fascination for the ‘exotic’ in their own land, making them no different from the Conquistadors.

Alejo Carpentier broke away from the Surrealists in his first novel, Ecue-Yamba-O; he used the linguistic innovations of the Avant-Garde of France but the content was steeped in the magic of Latin America. He realized that French Surrealism encouraged writers to be conjurers who had to instil magic and a sense of wonder into a reality that was devoid of magic. Latin American Literature from the time of the Conquest has conjoined with the landscape, the ‘locus amoenus’. The first records of the land came from the Conquistadors themselves, Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortez, who described the New World as ‘magical’. To the Western eye the landscape of Latin America echoed the literary motif of an idyllic ‘pleasant place’, a paradise filled with innocence and beauty. This is the perfect image that the Western writers, Theocritus, Virgil and others envisaged for pastoral poetry. The Western poets saw in this creation the Garden of Eden, the death of innocence and the Fall of
Man. The Spanish Conquistadors who spoke eloquently about the perfection of the land became responsible for the rape of the land. The ‘locus ameneos’, was tortured and tormented by the Spanish Conquest. To the Native American, the landscape was a part of his thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Arturo Uslar Pietri spoke of Magical Realism in an essay on the Venezuelan short story published in 1948, called ‘Letras y hombres de Venezuela’ (The Literature and Men of Venezuela). This was the first writer to bring the term into Latin American criticism when he said, “What became prominent in the short story and left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism” (Leal 1975: 120). He spoke of the short story writers of the mid 20s as being influenced by the Avant-Garde but they told stories in a way which was unfamiliar to the western world. Magical Realism became a technique in words, “to penetrate the great creative mystery of the cultural crossbreed” (Scarano15). It was a kind of ‘redescubrimiento’ of Spanish America (Scarano 1999:15). Pietri associated Magical Realism to the hybrid Latin American culture accepting that magic lies buried in the consciousness of the Latin American people.

While the French Surrealists relied heavily on the power of the imagination to conjure the world of magic, the Latin American writers, Asturias, Carpentier and Pietri, felt the magic in diverse realities of Latin America. Asturias focused on the oral traditions and language of the Native Indians, Carpentier integrated magic into the landscape of Latin America and Pietri focused on the ‘transcultured’ Latin America. Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier and Arturo Uslar Pietri, influenced by French Surrealism talked at length about the ‘magic reality’ in Latin America and contrasted it with its lacuna in Europe. James Clifford called it ‘ethnographic surrealism’ as the location had moved from France to Latin America.
Surrealism is defined by the Bedford Book as a convention that “expresses the irrational, the unconscious, especially the unconscious that manifests itself through dreams” (Murfin & Ray 1997: 309). This definition focuses on the psychological dimension of man. It is clearly seen as a result of the emergence of the science of psychology, which added one more aspect to the study of man. Surrealism belongs to a different time span from that of Latin American Magical Realism.

Roh’s approach to Magical Realism and his ‘reengagement’ with the ‘real’ sharply contrasted with Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ and its associations with the primitive-centric, magical land of Latin America. Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’ uses the word ‘magic but directs attention to the ‘real’ whereas Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’, without the use of the word ‘magic’ revolves around the ‘exotic’, ‘magical’, ‘superstitious’, ‘miraculous’ world of Latin America. ‘Magischer Realismus’ is a mode in art and though it is a painterly concept and is confusing when used to describe literary works, it became the foundation to pursue the narrative techniques of Magical Realism.

Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ is an ‘ethnographic artifact’ (Aldama 2003: 2). He talked of a reality that existed in Latin America which enabled the pursuit of the mode and emphasized the idea that faith in magical happenings leads to the acceptance of the mode. Imbert disagreed with Carpentier’s notion of the ‘marvelous’ reality in Latin America, questioning the tangible and the physical framework of the concept. To Imbert, the aestheticism of Magical Realism goes beyond the physical aspect of a place (Latin America). Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ is limited in that Carpentier’s European vision becomes an obstacle in him experiencing the American ‘real’; he is caught in the ‘marvellous’ like the Conquistadors. ‘Lo real maravillaso americano’ focuses on the dichotomies between the West and the Native; the rational and the illogical; reason and superstition. The essence of ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ lies in the ‘counterpoint between
European culture, rich but decadent and unable to restore its connection to the primal sources of creation, and Latino-American culture, still undeveloped but in touch with the primal essence of mankind’ (Pellon 1994:211). To that extent, Carpentier is more clear about what he wants of ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ than what was expected of Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’ in Literature.

Franz Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’ and Alejo Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ became the basis of the present ‘Magical Realism’. Roh’s definition of ‘Magischer Realismus’ produced the aesthetic approach to the mode; Alejo Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ focused on an anthropological approach resulting in a number of postcolonial discussions.

It is by studying Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’ and Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ that ‘William Spindler categorizes three types of Magical Realism-Metaphysical Magical Realism, Anthropological Magical Realism and Ontological Magical Realism. Though he concludes with the idea that all the three overlap and finds expression in both European and Latin American Magical Realism, he is, in the most part, of the view that Latin American Fiction uses Anthropological Magical Realism. He argues that ‘the strength of Magic Realism in the "periphery" (Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean) and its comparative weakness in the "core" (Western Europe, the USA), could be explained by the fact that collective myths acquire greater importance in the creation of new national identities’ (Spindler 1993: 82). This places Latin American Magical Realism in the ‘exotic’ and fails to examine the ‘real’ objects that come from the mundane spaces giving a ‘magical’ touch. Spindler’s statement that ‘Magic Realism gives popular culture and magical beliefs the same degree of importance as Western science and rationality’ (Spindler 1993: 82) focuses on the hierarchical position of Western thinking against the ‘magical beliefs’ of Latin America (Spindler 1993: 82).
Spindler’s definition of ‘Ontological Magical Realism’ is reductive to Latin American Magical Realism as he discusses the resolving of ‘antinomies’. His explanation- ‘the word "magic" here refers to inexplicable, prodigious or fantastic occurrences which contradict the laws of the natural world, and have no convincing explanation’ (Spindler 1982) decides that Latin American Magical Realism does not resolve these contradictions but exposes them. The resolution that he expects is in favour of the Western rational consciousness. He takes the example of the Argentinian Julio Cortazar's short stories and decides that ‘antinomy, in most of them, is left unresolved in order to produce a disturbing effect on the reader… These stories belong not to Magic Realism but to the related mode of Fantastic Literature’ (Spindler 1993: 83).

The Roh-Carpentier debate about Magical Realism is crucial to the study of Magical Realism. Roh’s phenomenological and Carpentier’s ontological approaches have given rise to a number of discussions till today about Magical Realism. Roh’s focus on the aesthetics of Magical Realism is an exploration of the mystery of man’s relationship with the world of ‘objects’. The dialectic in which Magical Realism works ‘opens’ itself ‘to a thousand spiritual possibilities’ is Roh’s main contribution to the understanding of the term (Roh 1995: 25). On the other hand, if it is examined in an essentialist, frozen, and simplistic manner, it loses its significance as has happened in the global construction of Magical Realism. For an insightful study of Magical Realism, it is important to look at the Roh-Carpentier debate not as a binary stance. In the careful study of the short stories of Latin America, both sides of the debate are activitated. The ‘engagement with reality’, the acceptance of magical events and the assimilation of European ideas are intrinsic to the study of Magical Realism in Latin America.
Angel Flores, Luis Leal and Amaryll Chanady took over from Roh and made serious attempts to describe Magical Realism, as a literary concept, focusing on Latin American Fiction of the 1930s. Flores called Magical Realism ‘an art of surprises’ and believed that Latin American writers found their true voice in “the amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (Flores 1995: 112). Though his essay is entitled ‘Magical Realism in Spanish America’, there is not much that we learn about Latin American Magical Realism in particular. Flores’ analysis centred on Franz Kafka and Luis Borges as the first writers to use the mode of Magical Realism. When using European writers like Kafka, Flores moves into the European type of Magical Realism and he focuses on ‘transnational aesthetic characteristics’ (Aldama 2003: 9). This aesthetics does not provide the features of Magical Realism in Latin America. Flores uses a broad base to discuss Magical Realism in order to make valid the literary compositions of the ‘periphery’ and to save Latin American writing from critics like Dudley Fitts who called it ‘invincibly second-rate’ (Flores 1995: 111). Flores’ observation about the general concept of Magical Realism being the realistic narration of the unreal and the unrealistic narration of the real, does not add much to bring out the intrinsic qualities of Magical Realism as represented by the Latin American writers.

Luis Leal, the Mexican critic, attacked Flores’ reference to Borges as the father of Magical Realism arguing that in the works of Kafka as well as Borges, there is a creation of hierarchies which does not happen in Magical Realism. Leal’s contribution to the study of Magical Realism centred on the contrastive discussions made to Fantastic Literature, Psychological Literature and Magic Literature. He said of Magical Realism that “Its aim, unlike that of magic, is to express emotions, not to evoke them” (Leal 1995: 121). Leal’s essay focused on proving that Magical Realism is unlike all the traditional modes of fantastic narration that have been accepted as the standard forms.
Leal examined Magical Realism as belonging to a space where logic and intellect are dismissed in favour of the magical mystery of life. Leal used Roh’s idea of “the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (Roh 1995:16) as his main contention to investigate into ‘Magical Realism’. Leal examined that the Magical Realist writer is bent on capturing the mystery of life and for this he “heightens his senses until he reaches an extreme state” (Leal 1995: 123). It is the hyperbolic that “allows him to intuit” the world of reality (Leal 1995: 123). All feelings, be it fear, love, joy, hatred, jealousy, pain, are heightened to experience the “multifarious world in which we live” (Leal 1995: 123). Amaryll Chanady observes in ‘The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms’ that ‘For Leal, magical realism is an “attitude towards realism”, not a literary mode or technique (Chanady 1995:132). Leal echoes the European Art Historian, Roh, when he focuses on the hierarchy of realism.

Leal drew from the main characteristics of Magical Realism in Alejo Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravilloso americano’; he stresses the idea that it is in the ‘existence of the marvelous real’ that Magical realism is based. In the article that he wrote in 1967, ‘Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature’ he prefers to take Carpentier’s views on Magical Realism but his essay is a study of the phenomenological aspect of the term. His understanding of Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravilloso americano’ is not tied to the land or the primitive culture of Latin America. He quotes at length from Carpentier’s essay to make his point- “the marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality…” (Leal 1995:120).

Imbert, Flores and Leal discussed Magical Realism keeping Latin American Fiction in mind; they were striving to define Magical Realism in the same way that Roh defined European Post-Expressionist Art. Their discussions centred on questions of comparison to
Fantastic Literature and a search for models in European contexts. They were not able to detach the discussions from the European world and thereby contributed little to the understanding of Magical Realism in Latin America. Magical Realism in Latin America has a particularity which is dismissed by the aforementioned critics. They were not able to see the varied facets of Magical Realism in Latin America. It is this lacuna in defining it in the spatial context of Latin America that has resulted in it being appropriated by the global world. It is used in a haphazard manner by all writers and it has very gradually moved from a spatial to a temporal place governed by a limited analysis. It is most often looked at as a ‘genre’, and most discussions revolve around the contrast between the fantastic and Magical Realism. This limits its immense possibilities.

Amaryll Chanady’s work, ‘Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy’ in 1985 also detaches Magical Realism from Latin America but defines the mode as is seen in Literature trying to achieve what Roh had defined in art. This is a seminal work used by scholars to study Magical Realism; her study revolves around the narrative features of Magical Realism. Her first observation is that there is a harmonious blend of both magic and reality in Magical Realism. Secondly, she discusses authorial reticence as the basis of the matter-of-fact technique in the magical realist narrative. The author does not judge either the magical or the real happenings in the story. Chanady asserted that neither the natural nor the supernatural are compromised in the magical realist technique. Thirdly, Chanady claimed for Magical Realism a status of a literary ‘mode’ rather than a ‘genre’. Later critics like David Danow, Zamora and Faris referred to Magical Realism as a ‘mode’ because they saw in Magical Realism an ability to transgress from one literary genre to another in a spontaneous manner. To Chanady, Magical Realism is not restricted by boundaries and hence does not fit into traditional genres but rather becomes a flexible mode of narration. Hegerfeldt in her book *Lies that Tell the Truth* prefers to use the word ‘mode’
rather than ‘genre’ to talk of Magical Realism because ‘mode’ explains the ‘manner of narration’ and not the ‘form or content’ (Hegerfeldt 2005: 49). Agreeing with these critics, Magical Realism in this thesis will be referred to as a mode and not a genre.

In her study, Amaryll Chanady tried to clear up some of the confusion that the term ‘Magical Realism’ brought about in comparison with Fantastic Literature. Most critics, studying Magical Realism, depend on Chanady’s work as the authoritative analysis of Magical Realism vis-à-vis the Fantastic. Shannin Schroeder observes that “Over the countless versions of the “definitive” definitions of magical realism, Chanady’s proves to be not only the most persuasive but also the most easily applicable” (Schroeder 2004: 14). Many critics apply Amaryll Chanady’s discussion about Magical Realism as an accepted yardstick to study Magical Realism even today. But Rachel Tudor in 2010 and Marissa Bortolussi in 2011 have contradicted her use of the term ‘antinomy’ and ‘resolved antinomy’ in discussing Magical Realism.

Rachel Tudor, in her article ‘Latin American Magical Realism and the Native American Novel’, objects to Chanady’s use of the term ‘antinomy’ which was first used by Immanuel Kant in ‘Critique of Pure Reason’ and later delineated by U.V.Quinn in his book ‘The Ways of Paradox’. She says that Chanady ‘bastardizes’ the term ‘antinomy’. The word ‘antinomy’ is nearly synonymous with the word ‘paradox’. Tudor professes that ‘paradoxes are not true contradictions’; whereas ‘antinomy’ is ‘the acceptance of two, not necessarily, contradictory, but disparate truths’. Tudor notes that Chanady’s argument for Magical Realism centres around ‘dichotomy’ rather than on ‘antinomy’. Quinn asserts that ‘antinomy’ revises ‘trusted patterns of reasoning’ but Chanady makes no mention of the change that takes place in a reader of a Magical Realist text. She presumes that the white reader would not be impacted by the magical contents of the text as s/he would decide that it belongs to the fictional space of the text and that it has no bearing on the real lives that they lead. Reader-
identification would be incomplete in the case of a magical real text, according to Chanady. She observes that the reader will ‘suspend disbelief’ at the textual level but not at the semantic level, thereby bringing about a synthesis, which is again not ‘antinomy’.

To problematize the concept of what is ‘real’ is the main strategy of Magical Realism. It disturbs the way we have looked at life around us in a ‘naïve’ or ‘common sense’ way. Magical Realism brings about a ‘conceptual change’ to what we thought is the basic understanding of ‘realism’. When basic concepts are ‘problematized’ then we embrace threshold concepts that transform us and this transformation is irreversible as we can no longer accept the world as we did earlier, in a ‘naïve’ manner. Quinn’s idea of ‘antinomy’ is relevant to discuss Magical Realism as a threshold concept (Davies and Mangan 2005).

Chanady confuses the use of the term ‘antinomy’ but a study of the short stories from Latin America prove that it is ‘antinomy’ in the same way as both Immanuel Kant and U.V.Quinn have discussed. The world of magic and the real world do not become dichotomous but rather allow the disparate truths to exist side by side. The ‘antinomy’ in Magical Realism allows the reader to explore the real in the world of magic and vice versa. In *One hundred years of solitude*, Gabriel Marquez focuses on truths that exist in both worlds. When the white man watches Remedios, the beauty having her bath, she is more concerned that he would fall down from the roof. She is not preoccupied in hiding her shame. When finally he proposes to her, she rejects, not because she finds him immoral but because she believes he will not be a good husband- a man who can spend so much of his time watching someone bathe. The basis of a good marriage is the focus and the notion of lust and desire is dismissed. From this incident, it is clear that it is impossible to decide that there is no rational truth in what happens in a magical event (Marquez 1978:192).
Magical Realism classifies magic and reality, allows crossing the borders and making both spaces rational, enlightening and truthful to life. Hence the word ‘antinomy’ describes these varied processes of Magical Realism. Chanady’s idea of ‘resolving’ the two spaces is not apparent in the stories of Latin America. The two spaces of magic and reality remain separated and give insights to life keeping their own logic and rationality. The Magical real text is ‘a narrative with its own kind of rationale’ (Aldama 2003: 7) and the problem of whether it fits into a reader’s empirical world or not is beside the issue. Every mode of writing- realism, romance, magic realism, fantastic, gothic, epic- differ in degree of referentiality- ‘referential density’ (Aldama 2003:32). The expression ‘referential density’ indicates a reference to the world of the here and now. Magical Realism ‘plays’ with ‘referential density’ as much as it promotes verisimilitude. It is up to the reader to negotiate the two-the play with referential density and the features that promote verisimilitude.

In Chanady’s later discussion, ‘Magical Realism Revisited: The Deconstruction of Antinomies’, she begins by saying that she has ‘abandoned the formalist-idealist quest for generic certainty’ of the earlier 1985 discussion. Chanady, in this discussion rejects antinomy and says that ‘A concept such as antinomy, with its strong implications of logic and rationality, is in fact irrelevant to most magic realist writing’ (Chanady 2011: 432). She, on the other hand, focuses on the fact that many magic realists partake in the task to ‘reconceptualize alterity’ (Chanady 2011: 432). She continues by saying that ‘Indigenous society was not seen from the explicitly affirmed position of the rational West (“us versus them”), but from that of a periphery; society in the process of consolidation as a new imagined community, of which the indigene was a part (“them” as part of “us”) (Chanady 2011:436). She observes that “Deconstructive strategies in these magical realist fictions often focused on specific discourses and values, and rarely became a postmodern free-play of sine; nor did they always involve a delegitimation of all values and discourses” (Chanady 2011:
Most magical realist texts constructed a ‘collective imaginary’, using a number of ‘heterogeneous cultural practices’ (Chanady 2011: 437). This is the main reason that there is a difference between Kafka and the Magical Realists from Latin America - ‘in terms of positionality and cultural practice’ (Chanady 2011: 437).

Marisa Bortolussi identified flaws in the previous theories of Magical Realism, especially that of Amaryll Chanady in her article ‘Implausible Worlds, Ingenious narrators, Ironic Authors: Towards a Revised Theory of Magic Realism’. Bortolussi observes that more than a coexistence of opposite world-views, there is a merging of the two, ‘which only heightens the sense of incongruity and thus unreality’. This is the method that magical realism uses to undermine or deconstruct ‘established codes of mimesis and representation’ (Bortolussi 2011: 352).

Bortolussi argues that Chanady’s concept of ‘antinomy’ between the supernatural and the real, is misplaced in that it is the fantastic that resolves the antinomy and that Magical Realism sustains it. “There is no intrinsic reason… why magical events must be presented and received as “natural”, or why the ‘antinomy’ must be resolved” (Bortolussi 2011: 355). Bortolussi notes that like “natural” the term “explanation” of magical events is a problem. The explanation may be an analysis of the existence of magical events or it may mean a reference to the real world. “The presence of ghosts…is rooted in universal popular belief systems, which constitute explanations in their own right”. She concludes by saying that “magic realism, fantasy and the fantastic can either include or exclude rational explanation of the supernatural, magical events” (Bortolussi 2011: 357).

Chanady then discusses authorial reticence. Authorial reticence is a direct influence of the oral tradition wherein the story-teller does not commit to giving an explanation of the magical events that he is talking about. It is left to the listener of the story to make sense of
the unreal in the story and make it a part of his reality. Bortolussi gives a revised theory of Magical Realism after refuting the ideas put forth by Chanady. The revised theory is based on the fact that Magical Realism “foregrounds the implausibility of the fictional world” (Bortolussi 2011: 357), focusing on features of the plot, the role of the narrator and the responses of the readers.

The level of the plot is important in order to understand the poetics of Magic Realism. She affirms that in the traditional genres of the fantastic, “all the magical, supernatural, fantastic, or bizarre events ensue from one single, obvious source, and are thus united by a coherent logic (Bortolussi 2011: 358). In Magical Realism, on the other hand, “there is a notorious lack of any such single cause of the magic or unifying logic underlying all the magical events” (Bortolussi 358). The strange events that take place in Magic Realist texts “can be traced to different belief systems: isolated mythologies, folkloric traditions, legends, popular superstitions, some literary heritage (fairy tales), even jokes, etc., but their coexistence can hardly be reduced to a coherent source…It is precisely this lack of unifying logic that engenders the sense of implausibility” (Bortolussi 359). Bortolussi takes the examples of Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Asturias’ *Men of Maize* to make this point that Magical Realism uses ‘many divergent belief systems’. Asturias’ observations that these belief systems “emphasize that aspect of social life whereby real events are transformed into legends by popular imagination, and legends come to incarnate real, everyday events”. (qtd from Bortolussi 359) is important for the study of Magical Realism. Bortolussi indicates that “He (Asturias) draws our attention to the fact that human perception is not pure and unmediated but conditioned by the historical and social context and inevitably influenced by memory and the imagination; knowledge, remembrance and the imagined merge” (Bortolussi 2011:360). Hence the antinomy is not resolved as the magical events remain “discontinuous or disconnected” (Bortolussi 2011:360).
Bortolussi distinguishes between two kinds of narrators—authoritative and ingenuous narrators. Bortolussi asserts that the narrators of the fantastic are authoritative and they are in control of the magical events in the narrative. But in Magical Realism, the writer undermines this authority. Yet he does not become an unreliable narrator. “The narrator of the fantastic is invested with authority; the narrator of magic realism is invested with ingenuousness…The distance between narrator and implied author is ironic” (Bortolussi 2011: 361). This implied author, according to Bortolussi, is ‘a playfully irreverent’ person (Bortolussi 362).

This ‘playfully irreverent’ author becomes apparent when the Latin American writer ‘exoticizes’ the Other and plays on the Western reader by giving him what he expects of the ethnic cultures, the stereotypes that he is used to. Stories like ‘The Case of Senorita Amelia’ by Ruben Dario seem to fit in with the western reader’s concept of the margins, the Other. Doctor Z is described in the early part of the narrative as a man who is scientific and intelligent. But the writer is already questioning the ‘absolute’ nature of scientific thinking and intellectual discussions; he has already ventured into the path of doubt about Western knowledge and the accolades given to a reputed intellectual. It is Doctor Z’s bald pate which stands out in all its splendour without being subject to doubt and questions. This ‘enlightened’ man, taking us on a journey into an unreal world, becomes significant.

The narrator’s chance remark, “If only we could stop time in its course!” is taken up by Doctor Z. The narrative strategy of Magical Realism is to work the magic into the real world gently and lightly. When Doctor Z asks probing questions about the narrator, he takes us to Alejo Carpentier’s concern that modern youth, influenced by the Western world, has lost faith in the magical world. The story-teller begins as all story-tellers of the oral tradition begin a story, by unsettling pre-conditioned views. The story plays with the idea that Latin America has faith in incredible stories that flout all logic. But in actual fact the writer is addressing the issue of how Western ideas of knowledge are fixed and absolute. The story
finally supplies a picture of the exotic primitive Other and simultaneously questions truths that have been accepted as fixed by the Western ideology. The story becomes an example of the use of parody which is a powerful technique used to ‘hybridize genres’ (Aldama 2003: 37).

Bortolussi uses Jean-Pierre Durix’s reference to ‘fictional manipulation’ (Bortolussi 2011: 363) as the factor that establishes a distance between the implied author and the narrator. Bortolussi disagrees with Chanady when she notes that magical realist texts do not create a coherent logic but undermines or even parodies that illusion. Bortolussi observes that critics like David Danow, Alfred Lopez and Theo D’Haen discuss magical realism and the use of “an ironic, irreverent tone which subverts the very legend it is propagating” ((Bortolussi 2011: 362). Danow refers to Magical Realism as ‘poetics of excess’ and Lopez calls it a ‘mimesis of excess’; yet all these critics end up referring to the discourse of the ‘Other’ when it comes to Magical Realism. Lopez’ attributes to Magical Realism the discourse of Postcolonialism –“writing-of-the-other-who-will-not-be-absorbed” (Bortolussi 2011: 363). Theo D’Haen says that Magical Realism “is a means for writers coming from the privileged centres of literature to dissociate themselves from their centres of power and to speak on behalf of the ex-centric and un-privileged” (D’Haen 1995: 195). These statements point to the fact that the West considers Latin Americans to be irrational and naïve.

Bortolussi notes that Magical realism is more than just a representation of a marginalized group of people, observing that “magic realist authors maintain a prudential distance with respect to both centre and margin, challenging accepted notions of reality that emerge from both, and showing, if anything, that all partake of a more universal, archetypal myth-making function of the human mind” (Bortolussi 2011:364). Brenda Cooper has warned that there are two dangers in taking such a view—“the twin dangers of assuming too much from the
classification and homogenization of whole worlds on the one hand, and the romanticization and exotification of the Third World, on the other” (Bortolussi 2011: 364).

Bortolussi’s argument is important as it discounts Alejo Carpentier’s ‘marvellous real’ and detaches it from the definition of Magical Realism. Many of the problems that arise in being able to study Latin American Magical Realism gets clouded by Carpentier’s reference to the marvellous reality of Latin America. It is necessary to detach Latin American Magical Realism from this concept of ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ and not associate it with Carpentier since he is focusing on the history, geography and the mestizage of the Latin American world. This association of Latin American Magical Realism has resulted in studying Magical Realism as the representation of a colonized country writing back to the Empire. This thesis “invalidates” (Bortolussi 2011: 364) references to Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’. Latin American Magical Realism looks at both the rational and the irrational as valid; it elaborates on knowledge which makes the Western world and the colonized world question their belief systems—“expose the illogical, constructed, mythical nature of all representations of reality”. In addition, “Often drawing from oral modes of storytelling, authors of magic realism recapture this playful dimension of the oral communicative pact” (Bortolussi 2011: 365).

Bortolussi’s ‘revised theory of Magical Realism’ is important for this thesis. Many of her observations like the “Disparity of incongruous events” (Bortolussi 2011:366) and the fact that readers need not partake in suspending their disbelief have been made keeping in mind Latin American Fiction. In fact, she refers to Latin American Fiction as the ‘classical’ models of Magical Realism. Bortolussi gives the example of Alfred Kubin’s 1908 novel The Other Side as the one novel that bridges the gap between European fiction and the continuity of Magical Realism in Latin America. She gives this novel the status of representing “the same playful, self-reflexive irony that is typical of some of the Latin
American classics” (Bortolussi 2011: 368). What is significant is that for Bortolussi, the ‘postcolonial dimension is not intrinsic to magic realism’. Bortolussi’s study focuses on the fact that it is necessary to study the textual evidence of Magical Realism and not get embroiled in discussions like “thematic content, individual style, or the relationship of a work to the context of production and reception” (Bortolussi 2011: 368).

This thesis focuses on Jean-Pierre Durix’s observation that Magical Realism is ‘one of the best known forms of generic hybridity’. He believes that the best description of New Literatures (an expression he prefers to Postcolonial Literature) is ‘hybrid aesthetics’ and he differentiates between fantastic literature and magical realism by saying that in the former the fantastic ‘serves to protest against the tyranny of ‘fact’ whereas in the latter, it serves ‘to incorporate the old values and beliefs into the modern man’s perception’ (Aldea 2011: 6). Durix’s differentiation between fantastic and magical realism is suitable for the study of Latin American Magical Realism.

Carpentier, emphasizing the magical reality of Latin America, made a distinction between the West and its rational approach to life and the Indigenous Latin America with its implicit faith in the irrational. He justified the Latin American lack of rational thinking and he subscribed to Said’s notion of how the West views the Orient. He attributed to the mixed cultures of Latin America the mode of Magical Realism. But when he talked of the mixed cultures of Latin America, he was referring to the ‘criollo’ and the ‘mestizage’; he dismissed the heterogeneity of the urban spaces which was very much a part of the reality of Latin America. His emphasis was on the “awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a criollo” (Carpentier 1995:100). He created a cultural identity for Latin America based on the indigenous past and ignored the hybridity that had evolved in Latin America. Discussion of a primitive past made for an essentialist understanding of Magical Realism and was frozen in the past. This ignored the fact that cultural identity is reconfigured
when “diverse but unique cultures are created by the sudden juxtaposition of the primitive cultures with those of modern society” (Rave 2003: 3).

Édouard Glissant’s concept of ‘creolization is of importance to study Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravilloso americano’. The Creolization Theory has its origins in the ‘plantation slavery’ where there was an exchange of culture on both sides - on the part of the slaves as well as their white planters. This took place in the Caribbean and the region was regarded as a “paradigm for modern syncretic cultures” (Fortier 2003: 275). Carpentier was introduced to the Creolization Theory via the music of Cuba which was a syncretization of African and Spanish music forms.

Édouard Glissant’s observation that “there will be no more culture without all cultures, no more civilizations that can make others theirs colonies, no more poets that can ignore the movement of History” can be seen as the basis of Magical Realism in Latin America which began the process of syncretization (Britton 1999: 16). It refutes the Eurocentric idea that all the colonized spaces are copies of the other metropolitan places. The Creolization Theory does not focus on the trauma and the ‘negative survival’ after colonization. Glissant looks at the space created by the interaction between the West and Native cultures as “a chance to renovate, dynamize, open and overcome “classical”, western concepts of identity and culture, based on essence, universalism and ancestry” (Britton 1999: 16). Glissant gives a different understanding of the creole language when he says that “… as it arose out of the contact between different, fragmented language communities, it has no singular ,organic’ origin, but is instead ‘organically linked to the worldwide experience of Relation’ (Glissant). It is literally the result of links between different cultures and did not preexist these links. It is not a language of essence, it is a language of the Related’” (Britton 1999: 16). As the Creolization Theory by Glissant advocates, a study of Magical Realism in the short stories of Latin America proves that it does not have a single origin but is ‘related’
to a number of sources that include both Roh’s ‘Magischer Realismus’ and Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’.

The Roh-Carpentier debate results in bewilderment when the origin of Magical Realism is placed in a European definition and a Latin American reality. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria says, “Magical Realism lies in a theoretical vacuum” (qtd in Hegerdfelt 2005: 11) and this is established when we try to define the term. This thesis is not based on the definitions of Magical Realism or ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ as both are limiting in their own ways. Roh’s definition focused on Art and hence it would not be a good enough definition to study the fiction of Latin America. It becomes necessary to find out the facets of Magical Realism as seen in the fiction of Latin America than to merely associate it with a European definition of Post-Expressionist Art.

Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ “reduces the Latin American Other to exotic sameness” (Aldama 2003: 4) and is not very different from the colonial gaze. It is an echo of what amazed the Spanish Conquistadors at the time of the discovery of America. Amerigo Vespucci, Hernan Cortez, Cabeza de Vaca, Christopher Columbus and others wrote back to their monarchs about the ‘marvelous reality’ of the newly discovered land. Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravillaso americano’ contributed to the telling of magical tales of the colonized peoples. It resulted in a postcolonial binary situation of the West versus the Indigenous. Carpentier stereotypes Latin America as a land of myth, folklore, superstitions and magic which is the image that most postcolonial countries were working against in postcolonial criticism. The ‘Other’ which was important to the West in order to create its own identity is used by Carpentier to create the Latin American identity.

Further Latin American writers, Carpentier, Asturias and Pietri, by focusing on what Clifford called ‘ehnographic surrealism’ paved the way to look at the Latin American reality as a
transcultured reality. Alberto Moreira refers to Angel Rama’s ‘literary transculturation’ as a commonly used concept to study Magical Realism. According to Rama, literary transculturation is a revitalized examination of local traditions, which had become sclerotic, in order to find formulations that would allow for the absorption of external influences. External influences would thus be diluted into larger structures that can still translate the problematic and the peculiar flavours they had continued to preserve.

(Moreiras 1997: 85)

Transculturation becomes a return to Latin American origins. Transculturation is a step away from acculturation and hence is more acceptable to the colonized world; it appeases as somewhere the feeling of not having lost one’s culture completely becomes the basis. But Magical Realism is not an expression of a ‘transcultured’ Latin America. It prides itself as being heterogeneous and resists all forms of hegemonic homogeneity. It is not used to mediate between two cultures; on the other hand it exposes differences that cannot be merged into one. It expresses a world-view that is equivalent to the ‘real’ and does not play an inferior position to the knowledge and concepts promoted by the Western-hegemonic world. Magical Realism goes beyond all types of ‘particularity’; it opens up a sense of community that is open to all others, even those who cannot speak, the subaltern. This type of literary practice goes against mimesis, is in fact antimimetic and by diversifying origins, it focuses on the heterogeneity of reality. This does not mean that the real in Magical Realism is elusive; on the other hand Magical Realism juxtaposes the magical tale related by the community with the tale that is accepted as real, focusing on the here and now, in order to problematize our understanding of the real.
The Roh-Carpentier debate has led to a lot of inconsistencies and has made a working definition of Magical Realism difficult to achieve. The Latin American Boom where the mode was best used could not define it in a contained manner. Hence it becomes important to look for the facets of Magical Realism within the body of texts. This research will not study texts to find a definition of Magical Realism or to investigate how the texts fit into the label of Magical Realism. On the other hand it will explore the interiors of the texts and work towards the facets which are not limited by a definition. The basis of this thesis is not to find the perfect meaning of the term Magical Realism because it keeps in mind that the literary mode is in a state of change and flux. From the time of the Boom which popularized Magical Realism, this mode has gone through many changes and its facets have been hidden in the mass production of fantastic stories that are labeled Magical Realism for the lack of a better description. Tomassa Scarano said in ‘Spanish-American Magical Realism’- “I believe we have to give up the idea of recognizing model authors, much less model texts; we should, rather, carry out a more systematic and refined examination of the narrative procedures, technical choices and expressive and linguistic peculiarities which are at the basis of Magical Realist texts” (Scarano 1999: 19).

The fact that Magical Realism has been appropriated by other writers from the third world and first world countries does not take away the importance of studying the mode in Latin America. It is not a question of proving Latin America’s predominance over the mode or the superiority of Latin American writers but a study of how Magical Realism of Latin America dialogues with the other parts of the world.

There is an eagerness to disassociate the term ‘Magical Realism’ from the literature of Latin America. Jean Franco’s study of Latin American Fiction refers to twentieth century fiction, the Boom period, as being the time when the Latin American writers came into their
own. But she makes no references to Magical Realism. This is due to the fact that she wants to foreground other types of fiction in Latin America. She emphasizes that there is fiction in Latin America that is interesting and hidden from the world, not necessarily focusing on Magical Realism. Her dismissal of Magical Realism becomes an indirect reference to its success especially when she says that “Latin American writers…were constantly faced with the odd, the extraordinary, the monstrous, seldom with anything that matched European middle-class norms; and it was only by devising and inventing literary forms which could encompass these weird mutations that they could achieve verisimilitude of their own” (Shannin 2004: 23).

The argument made by critics like Hegerfeldt, Clark Zlotchew is that it is not the exclusive property of the Latin American world and that to study a literary mode, it is important to go beyond the nationality of the writer. This thesis is place-centred, not because of the nationality of the writers but because the mode has found its best expression in Latin America. Zlotchew contradicts himself when he says that to study the literary mode, ‘Magical Realism’, it is better to “remove this condition” (the condition that Magical Realism is found solely in Latin America). At the same time, Zlotchew recognizes that “Magical Realism has flourished to spectacular proportions in the Latin American Fiction of the last half of the twentieth century” (Zlotchew 2007: 26). The contradiction lies in the fact that to explore the facets of Magical Realism, it is important to go to Latin American writers and hence this research becomes region specific.

These aesthetic discussions of Magical Realism, both from the European and Latin American world, were interrupted by investigations that related Magical Realism to Postmodernism after the 1980s. Most scholars were preoccupied in analyzing the term ‘magical’ in the expression ‘Magical Realism’; this explains the fact that we as readers believe that we have understood the ‘real’ as belonging to the ‘here and now’ and find that
there is an intrinsic need to analyze the ‘magical’. The problem for Eurocentric
writers/scholars was with the word ‘magical’ that was immediately associated with
superstitions, necromancy, folklore and mythology. This diversity of associations only
confused the expression even further. On the other hand, native/traditional cultures accept
the term ‘magical’ as intrinsic to story-telling. There can never be a story without a magical
element; it is through the world of magic that answers to the mysteries of life are given to
man. This simple acceptance of the ‘magical’ in traditional cultures is the uniqueness of
story-telling of the oral tradition. To the common reader in India, it is not the magical
elements that Salman Rushdie uses to tell his story that surprises him but it is the content of
the story that grips him. This is a difficult idea for the scholars of the West to accept and was
the main reason why they applied the theories of postmodernism to Magical Realism.

Early critics and debates focused on the technique of Magical Realism but work in the
1980s revolved around the connection between Magical Realism and the colonized world.
Stephen Slemon’s essay, ‘Magic Realism as Post colonial Discourse’ is a seminal work in
treating Magical Realism as being what Homi Bhaba said in the 1990s ‘the literary language
of the emergent postcolonial world’. Scholarly study of Magical Realism took on a different
turn when critics became attracted by the desire to pursue the recent trends in literary studies,
like Postcolonial criticism.

Popular literary output focuses on Magical Realism as a representation of
postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial critics have taken objection to adducing all texts of the
postcolonial world as being homogenous. It is seen by many theorists as a ‘decolonizing
agent’; written from the ‘margins’ to create a counter-argument to the view that the colonizer
has of them. Magical Realism functions in varied ways in the postcolonial world. Magical
Realism as a postcolonial tool is perceived mainly in the stories from the Commonwealth
countries, from writers like Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, Toni Morrison etc. Latin American
texts do not figure extensively in these arguments and so it becomes necessary to study Latin American texts in detail to reach a better understanding of the formalist definition of Magical Realism.

Postcolonial theory studied texts that were a result of the Enlightenment and concentrated on the colonial experiences discussed historically after World War II and the study of the migrations that took place thereafter to the varied metropolises of the Empire. The first articulations of anti-imperial discourse in Latin America could be seen in the literary texts of Inca Garcilaso, Guaman Poma, Cabeza de Vaca, Bartolome de las Casas and Aloso de Ercilla. The theorists, Angel Rama, Fernando Ortiz, Antonio Polar, Oswald di Andrade, had already examined the impact of colonialism in Latin America before such a study was taken up by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Since the early colonial experience had given way to the second wave of colonialism, the magical texts from Latin America cannot be treated as studies of post colonial criticism. It is important to look at textual evidence rather than a study of context and a thematic exploration to get to the facets of Magical Realism. Latin American Magical Realism has a context which differs from post war Europe and the postcolonial world; a study of the magical texts of Latin America will lead us to interesting facets of Magical Realism. Moreover, analysis of a few important novels of Latin America is not sufficient to study the mode; an intrinsic study of a number of short stories from Latin America will be a more useful area of researching into Magical Realism. The novel of the magical realist mode has been stereotyped and marketed as postcolonial discourse. The length of the short story is suitable to focus on the aspects of Magical Realism, lending itself to a variety. In order to study the text and the context, it is necessary to place the search on a premise that is suitable and the short stories of Latin America are the focal point for this thesis.
Santiago Colas’ article ‘Of Creole Symptoms, Cuban Fantasies, and Other Latin American Postcolonial Ideologies’ discusses the idea of postcoloniality in Latin America. He focuses on the fact that it is necessary to see “What can the culture of Latin America contribute to an understanding of the term ‘postcolonial’? He argues that it is time to reverse the situation when the term ‘postcolonial’ was used to understand the culture of Latin America. Taking this argument to the study of Magical Realism in Latin America, the short stories from Latin America will help in better understanding the mode, ‘Magical Realism’ rather than using the mode to study Latin America. The use of this argument is not immediate; its bearings are more envisaging.

It is significant to note that both Magical Realism and Postmodernism gained importance in literary studies at the same time, the 1960s and the 1980s. But in literary studies the term ‘Postmodernism’ is associated with the writers of the dominant US and European cultures who have broken boundaries and the term ‘Magical Realism’ is almost always connected with the colonized world and native cultures. Magical Realism is associated with Postmodernism in that it decentres the discourse of ‘realism’ and as Theo. L. D’haen says in his essay, ‘Magical Realism and Postmodernism’, “To write ex-centrically, then, or from the margin, implies dis-placing this discourse” (D’haen 1995: 201).

The centres of power like the US and Europe are averse to the use of the term ‘Magical Realism’ and prefer to refer to their literature as being ‘Postmodern’. This is because the term ‘Postmodernism’ focuses on ‘the technical side of literary achievements’ (D’haen 1995: 201) whereas ‘Magical Realism’ is not seen as a literary achievement; this explains why the contemporary writers in Latin America have begun to disassociate themselves from the term. The ‘McOndo’ anthology edited by Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gomez, was a movement which was geared to project Latin America reality as being different from what Marquez had delineated in One Hundred Years
These writers participated in a new Latin American narrative which was closer to the postmodern wave of urban spaces, hyperreality and the influence of new technologies. The word ‘McOndo’ is an ironic reference to Marquez’s imaginary town, Macondo and it emphasizes the new Latin America influenced by the McDonald culture of North America.

The indigenous way of looking at life and gaining knowledge is diverse and this should not be confused with Post-modernism. The story-tellers of the native cultures used a number of post modern features to tell stories. Post modernism fragments, deconstructs the mono-logical and the mono-theistic, and encourages multiple views yet privileging the rational/scientific/modern/logical view. Postmodernism encourages diversity as an exotic exercise, away from the normal. It is not enough to merely deconstruct meta-narratives of history, literature, sociology etc; it is also important to accept the multiple spaces that appear after deconstruction as important spaces of meaning production. In-between spaces are not passive but active cultural spaces where both stability and diversity gain importance. Placing the magical within the framework of the real does not privilege the real; it merely makes for spaces that are energized with ideas of life.

The study of Magical Realism leads us to explore texts that lie hidden in the margins. It also allows us to re-enter texts that have been dismissed as not belonging to the traditional, western genres giving readers an opportunity to discover literature in novel ways. But critics note that there are limitations in confining the study to a particular continent or language or canon. Most critics see Magical Realism as a contained literary form. The fact that needs to be kept in mind is that Magical Realism defies any easy definition, and when we read the texts from one continent, like Latin America, a researcher encounters varied types of Magical Realism. In place of a singular type of Magical Realism, the texts lead us to ‘Magical Realisms’ in Latin America.
There are innumerable definitions of Magical Realism and all of them give us different facets of the mode. Definitions lie passive and in a ‘theoretical vacuum’ till the creative artist activates it and gives it a feature. The reader, engaging in the text, touches upon the aspect without really defining Magical Realism. Hence it is the text that leads us to a better experience of Magical Realism by introducing us to a facet rather than the definition of Magical Realism. In the exploration of the short stories from Latin America, there is evidence that Magical Realism is used differently by different authors. The search for this variety leads to the idea that Magical Realism does not have a singular feature but can be described as ‘Magical Realisms’. The short stories of Latin America make it the best place to search for and identify the multi voices of Magical Realism.

In order to study the Latin American’s concept of time, it is useful to examine Carpentier’s story ‘Journey back to the source’ and Ruben Dario’s ‘The Case of Senorita Amelia’. Both stories explore the concept of time which is intrinsic to the world of science and logic. The linear progression of time is questioned in both stories. Carpentier’s story is built on contrasts; past and present, silence of death and the sounds of life, the majestic beauty of the house and the demolished castle, childhood and old age, European learning and native America knowledge, lust of the body and divine passion. The dying Marcial travels from the present to his childhood in a slow descending order, not all at once. The descending order of his thoughts results in the ascending order of his life which brings him to his death bed. When Marcial ruminates over the fact that “The furniture is growing taller. It was becoming more difficult for him to rest his arms on the dining table’, the reverse journey of one’s life gets highlighted (Carpentier 1974: 125).
Ruben Dario’s ‘The Case of Senorita Amelia’, on the other hand, depends on ‘a story within a story’ technique. The story is based on the gossip that is going around the place where Amelia lives. Just like any tall tale, its reality lies in the way people, who live around the house, relate the story. Amelia disturbs the traditional concept of time that the rational world has accepted; Amelia belongs to the ‘traditional’ Latin America which believed in the concept of time being cyclic.

The Latin American writer takes the magical tale from the everyday lives of the people. These tales come from the community and spread by way of rumors or tall tales or gossip. So the artist sets his story in a similar background to the stories that the community is engaged in, thereby in the magical realist story, he preserves the details of the culture of Latin America. European fairy stories begin with ‘Once upon a time…’ and this takes the reader away from the present to a world where ‘unreal’ situations are plausible. The stories told in primitive cultures are rooted in the immediate present- it begins with “You will not believe what I am going to tell you…”. It is a result of gossip, tall tales and rumours.

Critics from the Latin American world have proved that to define Magical Realism in Latin America leads to the manifestation of a complexity that takes both Roh’s study and Carpentier’s analysis into consideration. Roh’s theory of ‘Magischer Realismus’ finds its contemporariness in Marissa Bortolussi’s ‘Revised theory of Magical Realism’. Carpentier’s study is strengthened by Glissant’s ‘Creolization Theory’. These theoretical concepts are used in this thesis to celebrate Magical Realism as a kind of realism. Both the magical and the real are valid spaces in their autonomous states. This thesis does not subscribe to the idea of keeping them in rigid spaces or in merging the two spaces. Hence this thesis does not refer to Magic Realism because that expression would privilege the binary.
Magical Realism has its origins in that time in history when man was a part of the natural world, when the synthesis of being was important to man. It was a time in history that preceded the Western world’s preoccupation with the physical, intellectual dimensions in man. These divisions obstructed man from being treated as ‘whole’ and one with nature. The dangers of separating man’s ability to think from his feelings have resulted in the exploitation of nature, in hatred of other people and groups, in marginalizing others and in enterprises of terrorism. Magical Realism centres man in his whole self where opposing viewpoints find a space of understanding each other. It does not ask for amalgamation; on the other hand it encourages the building of respect for different points of view. And instead of focusing on Magical Realism as being an ‘Other’ to Realism, it is important to see it as a view of reality that exists in every one of us. This view has been suppressed in favour of ‘rationality’ and ‘positivism’.

It is time to study Magical Realism as intrinsically valuable in itself, as an expression of the native imagination. This ‘imagination’ is dismissed by Eurocentric readers and writers as being inferior and incapable of giving a true picture of life. This thesis is an argument against such a Eurocentric view; it emphasizes the fact that the ‘native imagination’ is no doubt different from the Western but it is in no way inferior. Difference is not an expression of inferiority but rather opens one to new viewpoints. The point at which Magic and Reality meet is the moment of enlightenment—a true understanding of life which only adds quality to the realistic, objective and scientific view of life.

This research ‘Facets of Magical Realism: A Study of Short Stories from Latin America’ places magical realism in the Latin American context. The stories of Latin America are chosen for this study in order to observe the multi-faceted ways in which Magical Realism functions. The focus is on extricating the mode Magical Realism from the
uni-dimensional approach taken by many critics, both in the Western and the Latin American world.
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