

Divine Funeral Games: A Discussion of Magical Realism and Theothanatology

The death of God is perhaps the definitive morbid subject; it is a matter that would seem to be better treated of in a blasphemous diatribe or a radical post-theological treatise as opposed to a magical realist novel. The arresting rhetoric of Nietzsche's *The Joyful Wisdom* comes immediately to mind: for modern, and for that matter, post-modern readers, the declaration "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" (Nietzsche 1910, 168) has become a slogan, a familiar mark of the drift away from theism that Nietzsche saw as a looming epidemic in his day, one from which much of the contemporary West, at the very least, has yet to recover. To seek in the putatively mad singing of this "*Requiem aeternam deo*" (Nietzsche 1910, 168) a melody that is also present in magical realist fiction might appear to be a rather bizarre undertaking.

To make matters worse, what exactly constitutes a *magical realist novel* does not appear to be a settled matter.¹ Positions with respect to the current state of the theory of magical realism range from the mildly dissatisfied and befuddled, as in Delbaere-Garant's work: "...I have been interested in the concept itself, but also increasingly dissatisfied with the way in which it is being used and misused" (Delbaere-Garant 1995, 249) to bald statements that the situation is rather dire, as in Slemon's account: "The concept of magical realism is a troubled one for literary theory" (Slemon 1995, 407). In order to

1 It ought to be borne in mind throughout this paper that, while magical realism has yet to be satisfactorily defined, it will be necessary to make use of that term in the process of searching for its most fitting definition. In other words, I will describe various features of magical realist texts or index certain works as magical realist for the sake of argument without implicitly taking it for granted that magical realism has been defined once and for all.

address the nature of the relationship between the death of God and two reputedly magical realist novels, I will therefore be obliged to essay a solution, albeit provisional, to *each* of these difficulties. Happily, the two will ultimately be seen to be fundamentally linked, such that my attempt to explain the capacity of magical realist fiction to play host to the problem of theothanatology will naturally lead to an argument concerning the defining characteristics of same, i.e. magical realist fiction. I intend to proceed as follows: I will argue that Amaryll Chanady's pioneering attempt to formulate a coherent and widely applicable theory of magical realism can be expanded upon in light of more recent work (Chanady, 1985).

More specifically, I will claim that Chanady is correct to argue against the position of Flores and others, concerning the extent to which magical realism may be said to be the exclusive product of a particular time or place. I will carry on to consider the core features that she indexes as signs that a given text is a work of magical realism. I will argue, based on evidence adduced from the works of McHale, Paris and others, that Chanady's position concerning the **resolved antinomy** could be enhanced by a more circumspect analysis of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural in the texts in question. I will also indicate that Chanady's analysis of **authorial reticence** could be replaced by the related but distinct **rhetoric of contrastive banality** introduced by McHale. I will also defend some of the accessory specifications of magical realism catalogued by Paris, with particular emphasis on the concept of **literalization**, although I will do so with the *proviso* that her capacity to introduce important new specifications all-too-frequently beggars her capacity to explain, and justify the acceptance of, said features. All of this will be buttressed by an account of magical realism inspired by, but finally different from, McHale's treatment of postmodernist fiction, which will include both an **ontological** element in the form of **process metaphysics** and an **epistemological** element in the form of **fallibilism**. Taken together, these elements should serve to establish magical realism as a literary mode in which theothanatology finds a comfortable, indeed heuristically potent, abode.

Chanady's Theory Considered

Amaryll Chanady's contribution to the theory of magical realism has been universally acknowledged as a pioneering effort. Chanady grapples with a significant number of the theoretical problems that orbit magical realism, including the struggle to determine the status of magical realism as compared to other forms of literature. Is it a genre, a mode of writing, a narrative technique or simply what might be termed a mode of existential comportment or "*special way of intuiting the world*" (Roh 1995, 27)? The difficulty of this task is compounded by the conspicuous lack of consensus in the critical and scholarly community as to how each of these terms ought to be employed. Frans De Bruyn laments the apparent senescence of the ancient concept of genre as follows: "Despite its long and impressive historical pedigree, the theory of genres is anything but a settled branch of criticism. The multiplicity of names that 'genre' has assumed in English—kind, species, type, mode, form—attests to the Babel-like confusion surrounding this critical discourse" (De Bruyn 1993, 79). Thus the debate about the status of magical realism appears to be an instance of quibbling over various terms all of which are, at bottom, synonymous.

However, Chanady's contribution to this discussion is clearly designed to oppose a narrow view of magical realism, i.e. a view that would dub literature "authentic" magical realism provided that it emerged from Latin America, to take the most obvious example. When Chanady asserts that

Magical realism, just like the fantastic, is the name of a literary mode rather than of a specific, historically identifiable genre, and can be found in most types of prose fiction. It does not refer to a movement, which is characterized by particular historical and geographical limitations, and a coherence which magical realism lacks. As Roberto Gonzalez Echaverria points out, this term is applied to completely different "moments" in the discussion of art and literature. (Chanady 1985, 21)

2 Chanady's work has been acknowledged as "seminal" (Faris and Zamora 1995, 7) by several contemporary analysts of magical realism. It is worth noting that hers would appear to be the first substantial study of magical realist literature as such, and therefore it ought to be judged as a successful attempt to promote the coalescence and advancement of the theory first, and then as an authoritative analysis.

she is implicitly rejecting the position taken up by Flores³ and others regarding the exclusively Latin American nature of magical realism. By describing magical realism as a mode, she makes it possible to recognize said mode in a host of genres. After all, it seems to be eminently logical to claim that the same mode could appear in several genres, but the claim that several genres might crop up in a single mode is not as intuitive. Granted, the foregoing admission that at bottom these terms melt into one another renders any further deliberation concerning this matter redundant, but that does not erase Chanady's contribution to liberating magical realism from a specific historical or geographical context.

In fact, Chanady goes so far as to identify a bald instance of self-contradiction' reasoning in Flores' essay on this matter. She claims that, "Even though Flores calls magical realism an authentic expression of Latin America, he traces it back to Franz Kafka and Proust, and claims that the writers of the First World War came 'to re-discover symbolism and magical realism'" (25). This charge serves as a reminder of the origins of magical realism in Europe, and causes Flores to fall on his own sword.

Furthermore, Chanady's efforts in this regard may be understood to foreshadow more recent comments of the same sort by analysts like Paris. The latter author confidently points to "...an important shift in literary relations and...an increased worldwide recognition of magical realism..." (Paris 1995, 163) that signals the steady erosion of more parochial views of this mode. It is also important to note that the two novels I wish to analyze below, as exemplars of the fusion of magical realism and theothanatology, are neither Latin American nor uniform in terms of genre. One, Morrow's, has been recognized as superb fantasy⁴ while the other, Findley's allegorical re-telling of the Biblical deluge, has had numerous labels foisted upon it, from "Gnostic parable" (Pennee 1993,83) to "...a narrative of both national ambivalence and

3 Flores argues that the advent of magical realism signals "... the inception of a genuinely Latin American fiction" (Flores 1995, 116) and in so doing echoes the sentiments of Alejo Carpentier and others. Chanady clearly advocates a more cosmopolitan, open understanding of magical realism that is nevertheless respectful of the Latin American contribution thereto.

4 In a biographical note on the cover of James Morrow's *Towing Jehovah* the publishers indicate that, "James Morrow has received the Nebula Award twice and the World Fantasy Award twice... About Morrow, the *Chicago Tribune* has stated simply, "The man defines fantasy."

sexual dissidence" (Dickinson 1998, 125). Therefore the efforts of Chanady and Paris may be said to have opened new vistas for the theory of magical realism by abandoning geographical and historical barriers.

Textual Evidence Weighed: Marquez

The seminal significance of Chanady's theory should not blind us to ways in which it might be enhanced; it is a first step in what promises to be a long journey toward full understanding of this mode. Her treatment of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural in magical realist fiction, for example, deserves careful scrutiny. For example, she contends that,

In magical realism, the supernatural is not presented as problematic. Although the educated reader considers the rational and the irrational as conflicting world views, he does not react to the supernatural in the text as if it were antinomious with respect to our conventional view of reality, since it is integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world. (Chanady 1985, 28)

While it is certainly possible to locate individual episodes in a given magical realist text, as Chanady does, that appear to confirm this line of reasoning, an abundance of evidence to the contrary has convinced me that this is not typical of magical realist texts nor of the specific texts on which the present project is focused.

For example, consider the following episode from Garcia Marquez' short story "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," collected in Young and Holloman's anthology of magical realist fiction (Young and Holloman, 1984) and generally recognized as a classic work in the magical realist mode. In the course of it, it is possible for the reader to detect a definite transition on the part of the protagonists from a state of horrified disbelief to a state of relative calm and familiarity with the supernatural being that appears in their midst. Marquez writes:

They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by a storm. (Garcia Marquez, "The Very Old Man", 1984)

Thus it would seem that one of two propositions must be true. Either the short story in question is not a piece of magical realist fiction, created by an acknowledged master of the mode in question, or Chanady's analysis of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural invites refinement.

After all, it seems obvious that the characters and the narrator *do not* seamlessly incorporate the strange arrival of the winged wanderer into their "norms of perception," at least not as spontaneously as Chanady invites us to expect. On the contrary, the horror and confusion experienced by the protagonists only subsides after prolonged scrutiny has allowed them to "skip over" the bizarre details of the interloper's person. That too is crucial, is it not? To anticipate somewhat, it would appear to be the case that the narrator has provided us with a rational explanation of the psychological mechanisms that have allowed these characters to overlook supernatural phenomena that *contravene their perceptual norms*. Only by denying that the wings exist and inventing an alternative explanation for the presence of the wanderer can the characters calmly tolerate his presence.

Moreover, this search for a rational explanation, the success of which is contingent upon an attempt to force the supernatural occurrence to conform to the standards of ordinary reality through deliberate omission, directly contravenes the tenets of Chanady's theory. She distinguishes the fantastic from magical realism as follows: "Since the supernatural is not perceived as unacceptable because it is antinomious, the characters and reader do not try to find a natural explanation, as is frequently the case with the fantastic"(Chanady 1985). As I have just demonstrated, Pelayo and Elisenda would rather resort to the preposterous, though rational (i.e. conforming to the natural laws of an ordinary universe in which sailors exist and wayward, grizzled angels do not!) explanation than accept the testimony of their senses and identify the man as an angel or some other supernatural entity. It is difficult to reconcile a further development in the story with Chanady's analysis as it stands. A series of individuals who are ostensibly endowed with the requisite knowledge of arcane matters approach the winged man, and each one turns out to be mistaken regarding the true nature of the entity. A woman "...who knew everything about life and death..."(204) recommends that the "angel" be sustained by a diet of mothballs, "...which according to the wise neighbour woman, were the food prescribed for angels. But he turned them down..."(206). The local priest is also made to look ridiculous when he "...had his first suspicion of an imposter when he saw that he did not understand the language of God or know how to greet his ministers"(205).

This situation makes the individuals who encounter the winged interloper look like vain fools, and the entire world view of which they are representatives seems laughably naive.

Chanady carries on to argue, albeit based upon textual evidence from another narrative, that "...the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgement of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world. This resolution of logical antinomy in the description of events and situations is our second criterion for the existence of magical realism" (Chanady 1985, 30). However, if the scenario had unfolded according to the analysis she provides, presumably the characters would have found the appearance of the winged man to be unproblematic, and the narrator would not have supplied an account of their attempts to make sense of his appearance. In addition, the various attempts made by the ostensibly enlightened denizens of the village would not have met with ridiculous failure; instead, they would not have been judged by the reader, the narrator or the characters.

Another, equally valid world view would have been on offer and the antinomy between the irrational and the rational would have been abolished. As it stands, "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" invites us to question whether the response of the aforementioned parties to magical phenomena can in fact be a defining feature of the mode. The subtle mockery of the villagers; the incredulity and terror of the protagonists that only gradually subsides into familiarity; the various events in the story and the reactions they elicit from the characters and the narrator can only serve to sustain the antinomy, though in an oddly inverted form.

Perhaps McHale's theory of the **rhetoric of contrastive banality** can be put to some use in this context. McHale writes, referring to another of Garcia Marquez' works:

On the one hand, the gypsies' flying carpet and Remedios the Beauty's ascension into heaven are regarded as normal everyday occurrences; on the other hand, the natural phenomenon of ice and the all-too-explicable massacre of demonstrators appear implausible, paranormal, and too fantastic to be believed. Thus, in Macondo not only does the fantastic become banal but, by a kind of chiasmus, the banal also becomes fantastic...*One Hundred Years* is still, in my sense, a fantastic text despite—or indeed because of—its banalization of the fantastic. (McHale 1996, 77)

An objection will inevitably surface at this point. It is the case that the supernatural visitor becomes banal, but what evidence do we have to confirm that this chiasmus effect is complete, that the banal has in turn become fantastic?

I can offer two pieces of evidence to confirm that McHale's model applies as successfully to "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" as it does to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Moreover, I believe there is something much more subtle and intriguing going on in both cases than Chanady's analysis suggests. Therefore, I will endeavour to elucidate the implications of McHale's theory for the works in question, and then carry on to buttress his theory by adducing further evidence of its applicability to the theothanatological magical realism to which this project is devoted.

First, it is the case that the behaviour of the characters *other than the old man* appears so misguided, exaggerated and outlandish that it risks being characterized as unbelievable. News of his arrival brings invalids, seeking a magical cure, to the village. They include: "...a poor woman who since childhood had been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars bothered him..." (206). These individuals are obviously just as strange as the winged man—in fact, more so. The ordinary inhabitants of the world are easily odd enough to make the winged man, or the spider-woman in the circus mentioned in the same piece, look banal.

In addition, it is important to note a seemingly innocuous line regarding the examination that the village doctor conducts of the winged man. The narrator reports that: "What surprised him [the doctor] most was the logic of his wings. They seemed so natural on that completely human organism that he couldn't understand why other men didn't have them too" (209). This is a telling instance of consternation, as it is entirely in keeping with the inverted relationship between the natural and the supernatural that is also characteristic of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. To the physician, the supernatural appears natural, and the ordinary state of human physiology seems oddly naked, incomplete. His reaction is symptomatic of a complete shift from the initial trepidation of the villagers at the enigmatic interloper's appearance to the incredulity of at least one of their number with regard to the dearth of winged men in the world. Note that the antinomy in this case is far from being resolved; instead, the natural and the supernatural have simply changed positions without abolishing any of the antinomious tension between them.

Findley and Morrow

Similar cases of this kind of inversion of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural are also apparent in *Towing Jehovah* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. In order to avoid embarking upon an analysis of these texts that will draw in theoretical elements that are not yet at issue, I will point to one episode alone in each novel that displays the same feature.

In Findley's novel, an ingenious retelling of the events of the flood in Genesis 6:9, a completely banal display of amateurish prestidigitation suffices to mold the intentions of Yaweh, while actual magical events are described as perfectly ordinary. Watching Noah Noyes unwittingly prefigure the events of the Biblical deluge, Yaweh is raptly attentive, even astonished:

"Like a miracle..." Yaweh almost whispered now, as the final flow of liquid spilled from the mouth of the silver jug into the mouth of the tall glass bottle — pouring, pouring down the insides... filling the bottle and, to all intents and purposes, obliterating the image of the penny, still in its place beneath the bottle. "By the sheer application—of water..." Yahweh said; "... *it disappears...*" (Findley 1984, 96)

Thus the banal usurps the powers of the fantastic, and God is duped by a conjurer's trick. This incongruous application of a fantastic description to a banal demonstration makes the inverted world of the text more vividly apparent: Findley has created a fictional world, primarily for parodic and allegorical purposes, in which the established chain of being is turned upside down. Yaweh is easily fooled, while cats and elephants are endowed with textured personalities and powers of deductive reasoning. I will return to *Not Wanted on the Voyage* in due course; at present, this illustration should serve to isolate a fundamental feature that Findley's novel shares with Garcia Márquez' fiction.

In *Towing Jehovah*, James Morrow invites us into a fictional world in which the dead body of God has literally fallen to earth, and a voyage to recover and inter the remains is undertaken. In a bizarre instance of the use of the rhetoric of contrasting banality, God's disintegrating corpse is rendered so banal as to form the actual surface on which a morally ambiguous encounter between a priest and a nun takes place. Morrow writes:

Taking his friend's hand, he encircled her fine, substantive waist. They waltzed: awkwardly at first, clownishly, in fact, but then some buried engram took over,

some latent feeling for rhythm and form, and he guided her across the rubbery floor with bold, sweeping strides. The strange fog hung everywhere, blankets of mist wrapping their spinning bodies in a thick, delicious warmth. Something stirred in his mothballed loins. (Morrow 1994, 157; emphasis mine)

This episode has the various features required to confirm the wide applicability of McHale's theory. It also serves further to call into question Chanady's position, in that the emphasized portion of the text serves to foreground the inversion of the fantastic and the banal that is brought about by the rhetoric of the narrative. To describe the flesh of God as "the rubbery floor" simply piles the bizarre on top of the bizarre: not only has God expired, but a priest and a nun, in this specific case, are waltzing clumsily about atop his corpse.

Just as the protagonists in "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" grow accustomed to their fantastic visitor to such an extent that he becomes mere background, as it were, so too do the characters in this case become so blasé concerning the *corpus dei* that it can be treated as a dance floor. What is really mad about this scene is the fact that a nun and a priest are dancing about naked in a mysterious, eldritch fog; that they are doing it on top of a dead deity is accepted by the narrator and the characters as banal. The reader is treated to a spectacle in which the real and the unreal, the ordinary and the bizarre, have in effect traded places without risking the disappearance of the antinomial charge that has built up between them. If anything, what the reader must be left with is a distinct impression that the code governing what can and cannot be expected to occur within the work is highly elastic, designed to create and then foil or surpass expectation.

Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to suggest, as Chanady does, that the reader suspends his judgement and blithely accepts what occurs, no matter how irrational it might be, within the text. It would also amount to an oversimplification to suggest that the antinomy between the supernatural and the natural is resolved within the text, such that the relationship is rendered unproblematic, and everything moves along smoothly without alarming the characters, the narrator or, ultimately, the reader. The foregoing illustrations should help to establish that the antinomy is sustained, but the constituent elements swap positions, making the ordinary seem problematic and the supernatural seem banal.

Moreover, the inverted or "swapped" relationship need not be static within a magical realist text. The characters and the narrator in Garcia Marquez, Findley and Morrow cooperate in the creation of a fictional world

in which the supernatural appears as such, then fades into banality. The banal then becomes increasingly strange and unnatural, thrown into relief against oddly banal elements of the supernatural. Finally, some elements of supernatural can recover their strangeness, while many of the ordinary law: naive realism remain in place.

This entire complex in no way allows for a smooth and uncomplicated experience for the reader. On the contrary, it disposes the reader to be w of new developments and abandon conventional codes and expectation; favour of a much more protean phenomenology. I will turn to this fascinating phenomenon again when arguing for the significance of process metaphysics and epistemological fallibilism below. This discussion was intended to establish that Chanady's account would benefit from both the implication: McHale's concept as well as a more careful consideration of the subtle dynamics that are at work within the text and between reader and text w. magical realist fiction is under consideration.

Another of the features of magical realism that Chanady attempts to come to grips with is what she terms authorial reticence:

This authorial reticence, or absence of obvious judgements about the veracity of events and the authenticity of the world view expressed by characters in the text, is our third criterion for the existence of magical realism. If the narrator stressed the exclusive validity of his rational world view, he would relegate supernatural to a secondary mode of being (the unreliable imagination character), and thus the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive logical cc which is essential to magical realism, would become a hierarchy. (Chanady 1 35; emphasis mine)

While it seems appropriate to give each of Chanady's criteria separate thorough consideration, it is probably obvious that the integration of these criteria into a complete theoretical schema renders the entire schema vulnerable to erosion once any of its components becomes unstable.

Hence the argument in favour of the rhetoric of contrastive banality was deployed against Chanady's resolved antinomy criterion, and somewhat simplistic view of the dynamic relationship between ontological levels, ought to have challenged the acceptance of this third criterion in advance. Still, said argument may not suffice in itself to make it possible to appreciate the worth of alternative approaches to magical realism, and to the role of the author's alleged reticence, or narrative techniques in general. It is of interest to simultaneously point out the difficulties with Chanady's theory

and offering an alternative, I will now turn to the more direct consideration of the more abstract concepts mentioned at the outset, i.e. process metaphysics and, with specific reference to the notion of authorial reticence, epistemological fallibilism.

In order to foster the internal consistency of my argument, I will proceed in this case as I did above, first elucidating the theoretical problem at hand and then adducing textual evidence to support a proposed solution. Fuller comprehension of authorial reticence and the attitude exhibited by the narrator to the events in magical realist texts might be achieved by considering the possibility that a distinct epistemological and ontological/metaphysical schema is present in magical realist texts.

In his lucid study entitled *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale tries to distinguish the eponymous kind of writing from others because the myriad manifestations of it, he claims, have an "ontological dominant" (McHale 1996, 11) in common. Basically, McHale implies that,

...postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls "post-cognitive": "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? (10)

It is important to note that there are clear connections between this theory of postmodernist fiction and several of the theoretical issues that are unresolved in the debate over magical realism. My invocation of McHale's theory of the rhetoric of contrastive banality should make it obvious that I am convinced, largely thanks to Paris, that magical realism and postmodernism are intimately related. She has argued that magical realism is, in at least *some* discernible ways, "... an important component of postmodernism" (Paris 1995,163). While I will leave it to others to make a case for this position in a more complete and persuasive fashion, I intend to argue that both *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and *Towing Jehovah* show signs of falling into line with McHale's theory and Paris' appropriation of it, to a certain extent.

Moreover, I am persuaded that a discussion of magical realist fiction that is exclusively oriented toward ontology would be incomplete, and therefore intend to argue that epistemological fallibilism, i.e. the willingness to subject

all of one's cognitive belief-habits to constant scrutiny and revision in the face of experiential shocks⁵, appears adequately to represent the attitude toward epistemological questions that most magical realist authors adopt, and invite their readers to adopt in turn. As McHale admits, "...we cannot raise epistemological questions without immediately raising ontological questions, and vice versa..."(11) and fallibilism seems to inform the way in which magical realist texts grapple with said questions.

Fallibilism and Process Metaphysics

Epistemological fallibilism is certainly not a postmodernist development. It has been clearly explained by the modern philosophical polymath C.S. Pierce, whose basic theoretical principles have been adroitly clarified in turn by Roderick Chisholm. In order to do justice to his fine summary, I have cited it at length below, in the form of list of the fundamental principles of Pierce's theory:

1. The inquirer must have some beliefs to begin with; for inquiry doesn't get started until experience, by shock or surprise, breaks in upon some belief-habit.
2. The inquirer should be guided by those of his beliefs which have survived the shock, many of which are indubitable.
3. As he ponders the surprising phenomena, conjectures or hypotheses instinctively suggest themselves.
4. He considers the relative plausibility of these in terms of what he happens to believe already.
5. Most of the hypotheses that he is thus led to adapt are false, but many of them are true.
6. Experience can eliminate a false hypothesis by causing further surprise; it can confirm one (i.e., strengthen a belief-habit) by satisfying expectation.
7. If experience causes surprise, the new surprise will be accompanied by a series of events similar to those which accompanied the first surprise.
8. If given sufficient opportunity, experience would eliminate all false beliefs and leave mankind with none but true beliefs; this follows from Pierce's definitions of "true" and "false."

5 I will go on to explain this term in some detail, with appropriate references to Pierce and Chisholm, below. For the moment, a fallibilist may be understood to be an individual who is always prepared to be mistaken, to subject formerly solid beliefs to the test of experience and revise or reject them when they are not equal to the test.

9. In order for experience to perform this function most efficiently, the inquirer should endeavour to submit all of his hypotheses and belief-habits to constant experimental test.
10. This requires, in turn, that he have a "will to learn" and a constant dissatisfaction with his state of opinion at any time. (Chisholm 1952, 96)

While it is impossible to explore the implications of this theory at length within the confines of the present project, this list of principles should make it possible to demonstrate that a similar epistemological attitude is at work within magical realist texts. Indeed, this list of principles could also serve quite admirably as an interpretive code or guide to the reception of magical realist texts for a reader who might find Chanady's theory to be inadequate for the same purposes. Bold stipulation cannot be allowed to substitute for persuasive argumentation, however. Therefore, I will now turn to specific textual evidence of the influence of fallibilism on some relevant works.

Findley's novel opens with the following lines from Genesis 7:7: "And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him into the ark, because of the waters of the flood..." (Findley 1984, 3) followed by the terse, surprising rejoinder from the narrator, "Everyone knows it wasn't like that" (3). The strategic use of this kind of surprising tactic privileges a fallibilist approach right from the beginning and simultaneously violates the principle of authorial reticence outlined above. The narrator has judged the Biblical account of the deluge to be inadequate, and carries on to supply one that is superior by his own lights. While the omniscient narrator of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* does not offer this kind of unmediated judgement again, relying instead upon the insight he affords us into the minds of his characters, it is important to note that the novel begins by shocking the reader, as in point 1 above, and instilling in her the "will to learn," as in point 10. Far from exhibiting the "...absence of obvious judgements about the veracity of events and the authenticity of the world view expressed by characters in the text" (Chanady 1985, 35), this text contains evidence of the narrator's definite skepticism with respect to the veracity of the Biblical narrative and the authenticity of the world view that it has helped to generate and sustain.

This fact does not, however, disqualify *Not Wanted on the Voyage* as a work of magical realist fiction. Instead, it calls Chanady's criterion into question. Recall that the narrator's comments in "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" also, by virtue of his account of the "skipping over" strategy of the protagonists, rendered their interpretation of a supernatural event problematic, even naive.

Similar events occur in another of Garcia Marquez' stories, "Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles," also collected in the aforementioned Young and Holloman anthology. This tale of a wandering illusionist and snake-oil salesman and his apprentice is told by a first-person narrator whose account of his own experience makes the naivete of the dominant world view in the text obvious and engenders a fallibilist strategy in the reader. After witnessing one of Blacaman's profitable efforts at a magical hoax (one that shares a great deal with the example of Noah's stage magic proffered above!) his apprentice indicates that "...only then did he have the courage to confess to me that his antidote was nothing but rhubarb and turpentine and that he'd paid a drifter two cuartillos to bring him that bushmaster with all the poison gone" (Garcia Marquez, "Blacaman" 1984, 257). Those who witnessed Blacaman's show were taken in by virtue of their superstitious beliefs and their supposed folk wisdom, which actually makes them all the more credulous: "...from his rear end came a hint of the last moments of death, so that everyone who had seen a person bitten by a snake knew that he was rotting away before dying..." (253). Thus the narrator's account forces us to question the veracity of events, for we might also have been taken in by Blacaman's performance, only to be told from his own lips that it was a sham. And the world view of the characters is also made to appear naive, parochial and, in the case of Blacaman, duplicitous and morally suspicious.

Furthermore, this story provides an excellent example of the dynamic of inversion that was described earlier, a dynamic that sustains the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural through a shift in their relative banality or familiarity, not a resolution of the antinomy. The apprentice spontaneously develops the kind of magical ability that Blacaman had always feigned: "...and then it happened, as if in a dream. The rabbit not only revived with a squeal of fright, but came back to my hands, hopping through the air. That was how my great life began" (258), and yet he continues on in his master's mendacious style, "...leaving them hallucinated with my dictionary rhetoric..." (259). *Sometimes* he performs genuine spells and miracles, and *sometimes* "...the sicknesses get all mixed up and people get cured of what they don't have..." (259) and his artful lying and showmanship suffice. The reader can understand and enjoy such a yarn only if she is prepared to be shocked, to submit previously held beliefs about the characters and the nature of the fictional world to the test of further events, and sustain a will to learn. The success of the strategies deployed by the narrators of both *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and "Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles" is contingent upon this

kind of sophistication on the reader's part as opposed to the blithe acceptance that a resolved antinomy might foster. If the reader of magical realist texts suspends her judgement, she does so for only so long as that approach can endure the shocks that the work holds in store. Ultimately, even the suspension of judgement and disbelief should give way to the adoption of a consistent fallibilism that, ironically, is not as fallible as other epistemological attitudes.

Wendy Paris points to the doubt, as opposed to resolution, that actually accompanies exposure to magical realist texts. She argues, "The reader may hesitate (at one point or another) between two contradictory understandings of events—and hence experience some unsettling doubts" (Paris 1995, 171). This observation lends further support to my contention that a fallibilist approach is required of the ideal reader of magical realist texts. It also makes Chanady's contention that: "This example illustrates the importance of a well-defined code of the supernatural in magical realism. The narrator must provide a consistent point of view so that the reader can accept the incredible" (Chanady 1985, 55-56) seem highly dubious. Rather than supply us as readers with a consistent code, the authors of magical realism seem to be intent upon adopting a heuristic method that relies on the tools of shock and surprise, making the real seem strange and the unreal seem banal.

Morrow's *Towing Jehovah* contains several delectable examples, rendered with real satirical expertise, of the folly of those who cling to a given world view despite the emergence of shocking evidence of its deficiencies. As is the case in Findley's novel, an omniscient narrator who seldom intervenes explicitly to judge the characters or events is present in Morrow's work. However, that does not diminish the effect of these episodes, which rely for their effectiveness on our appreciation of the author's satirical intention and the adoption of a fallibilist attitude that can produce the alchemy necessary to turn shock into insight.

For example, an order of staunch humanistic atheists tries to destroy God's corpse before this massive proof of their folly can reach the wider world. Not only is this a clear violation of their supposed principles, as one of the order's members makes plain: "...nor have I forgotten the scientific curiosity that is the *sine qua non* of this organization... We should be *studying* this corpse, not sweeping it under the rug" (Morrow 1994, 131), but it also foregrounds the importance of an approach to shocking events that is heuristically oriented rather than narrowly dogmatic. The crushing disappointment experienced by the order's leader is captured with comic brilliance:

For Oliver Shostak, learning that the illusory deity of Judeo-Christianity had once actually inhabited the heavens and the earth, running reality and dictating the Bible, was hands down the worst experience of his life. On the scale of disillusionment, it far outranked his deduction at age five that Santa Claus was a mountebank, his discovery at seventeen that his father was routinely screwing the woman who boarded the family's Weimeraners, and the judgement he'd suffered on his thirty-second birthday when he'd asked the curator of the Castelli Gallery in SoHo to exhibit the highlights of his abstract expressionist period. ("The great drawback of these paintings," the stiff-necked old lady had replied, "is that they aren't any good.") (128)

The subjective phenomenology to which we are privy here betrays the distance between apparent conviction and the capacity to follow through when one's world view is called into question by the naked facts of experience. It also primes the reader for shock and surprise and implicitly mocks a response to the macrocosm of the novel that would be reflective of the same kind of poverty of the imagination satirized within it.

Chanady does not comment on the role of satire or parody in magical realism, a rather telling omission given the evidence from both theothanatological and less specialized works of magical realism of its veritable ubiquity. Paris does mention its significance, however. The latter writes in fact:

In the light of reversals of logic and irreducible elements of magic, the real as we know it may be made to seem amazing or even ridiculous [NB — the rhetoric of contrastive banality. Paris acknowledges the influence of McHale throughout.] This is often because the reactions of ordinary people to these magical events reveal behaviours that we recognize and that disturb us. Grenouille's perfuming abilities and the uncannily entrancing scent he manufactures for himself are magical, but the mass hysteria that they engender and that tears him literally limb from limb and devours him at the end of the novel is real, and all-too-familiar as an analogue for the atrocities of persecution and scapegoating in recent history. Thus magic also serves the cause of satire and political commentary, as we see less seriously than in *Perfume* when the magical rebirth of La Loca in *So Far from God* serves to satirize the bureaucratic machinations of organizations. (Paris 1985, 168)

This specific element of magical realist texts, i.e. the presence of satire, parody and political commentary, compliments the epistemological fallibilism I have been discussing and intensifies its effects.

Findley makes masterful use of these devices. As Brydon points out:

Lucy, the novel's central camp character, most effectively wields the power of laughter as a weapon of resistance. S/he is self-described as "[s]even foot five; and every inch a queen" (249). Findley follows Blake in identifying Lucifer as the radical hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but he pushes the concept further in order to redefine Lucy/Lucifer's heroism as that of the transvestite performer who, "with his/her jet black hair, powdered white face, and Kimono, is figured as an Onna Gata from Japanese Kabuki theatre—the ideal distillation of the female that is always performed by a man." Although the Archangel Michael refers to his brother Lucifer as "he," the text refers to Lucy as "she." Michael argues that although his brother is not a man, he is a male. Lucy responds with a shrug, "I like dressing up"... (Brydon 1998, 80)

Using parody and satire to make established truths and rigid world views appear lamentably misguided is a hallmark of this mode and requires a much more sophisticated, fallibilist approach by the reader. This runs counter to Chanady's analysis, which seems to be devoted to ensuring that *all* of the world views that are in evidence in a given work of magical realism be treated with a kind of reverence and preserved from the rigours of analysis and evaluation.

As a final point in support of the importance of fallibilism to magical realism, both as a feature of the texts and also as an attitude that ought to inform the successful interpretation of them, it is important to note the different approaches to scientific inquiry that are selected by Noah Noyes and his son Ham in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Noah's hubris and inflexible obedience to doctrine make him appear ridiculous and frightening by turns, whereas Ham, in contrast, approaches the mysteries of the world around him with a readiness for surprise and learning that are clearly reflective of the fallibilist principles catalogued above. An episode that is illustrative of the contrast between their epistemological principles occurs when *something* begins to fall from the heavens:

Here it was the end of summer and though it hadn't rained, it had already snowed. Or so it had seemed. Small white flakes of *something* fallen from the sky and everyone had crowded onto the porch to watch. Doctor Noyes at once had proclaimed a miracle and was even in the process of telling Hannah to mark it down as such, when Ham went onto the lawn and stuck his tongue out, catching several of the flakes and tasting them. "Not snow," he said. "It's ash." (Findley 1984, 21)

Thus Noah is shown to be far too eager to characterize natural events as supernatural, and to "...impose his own arbitrary reading on others in order to ensure his power" (Pennee 1993, 30). He is made to look absurd in this case, as a representative of the sort of rigid dogmatism that refuses to learn from shocking events and adapt accordingly. An identical situation occurs in *Towing Jehovah*, as we have seen, when a supposed champion of enlightened skepticism cannot bring himself to accept the testimony of his own senses, even when he sees the corpse of God. In both cases, a fallibilist approach is advocated by virtue of the satirical mockery of the opposite, by both characters within the text and by the rhetoric employed by the narrator.

Lucy, the transvestite angel mentioned above, is not only adept at the use of camp humour for the purposes of political dissidence. S/he is also a symbol of the process metaphysics that seems consistently to shape the fictional worlds of magical realist texts. Before I carry on to discuss his/her specific significance in this regard, I will attempt to supply a condensed explanation of process metaphysics in general, and then root out evidence, including Lucy's ambiguous ontological status, of its presence in several magical realist works.

It is possible to trace the career of process metaphysics, at least in terms of its impact upon the philosophy of the west, to figures as ancient as the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus and to contemporary thinkers such as Whitehead and Hartshorne⁶. The cause of more thoroughly understanding the forces at work in magical realist fiction may be furthered by careful attention to two specific aspects of this philosophical system: the **processual nature of reality**, and the related area of **personal identity**, which has a fecund relationship with **literalization** in the relevant theothanatological texts. Fortunately, a brief analysis of Rescher's summary treatment of each of these subjects can be substituted for a prolonged philosophical excursus, and then the promised textual evidence for the influence of each in turn will be supplied. Rescher explains:

As process philosophers see it, the supposed predominance and permanence of "things" in nature is at best a useful fiction and at worst a misleading delusion. "Material objects" are ultimately comprised of energy that is in an ongoing state of flux and motion. All those supposedly constant things that seem to maintain a constant identity through the vicissitudes of time and change are, in fact, litt

more than loci of comparative (and transitory) stability within a manifold of continual change, engaged in an inexorable transit leading from birth through maturation to decline and destruction. (Rescher 1996, 28)

Obvious affinities exist between this kind of metaphysical schema and the otherwise diverse fictional worlds of magical realist texts. The fact that the rhetoric of contrastive banality relies for its very possibility on the changing dynamics between the natural and the supernatural in a given work bears witness to this fact. After all, McHale has emphasized the curious "flickering" ontology at work in postmodernist fiction:

Ambiguous sentences may project ambiguous objects, objects which are not temporarily but permanently and irresolvably ambiguous. This is not a matter, in other words, of *choosing* between alternative states of affairs, but rather of an ontological oscillation, a flickering effect, or, to use Ingarden's own metaphor, an effect of "iridescence" or "opalescence." And opalescence is not restricted to single objects; entire *worlds* may flicker.. (McHale 1996, 32)

And it is possible to discern the same phenomenon in works of magical realist fiction. When characters or phenomena from another ontological level or realm of existence, e.g. God; angels or their grizzled, senile equivalent; demons; dragons; fairies; rain that is variously mauve, milky and amber; intrude into a recognizably realistic fictional world, this kind of flickering between worlds is under way. A world in constant flux or process is a magical realist world, one that cannot be encompassed by a single code that is never transgressed against or questioned.

Conclusion

The combined powers of magical realist fiction and theothanatology can serve to illuminate the inherent weaknesses of any world view that is based on obedience to a monological code or tired platitudes that are not reflective of the reality that we as human subjects, and the reality in which we are ensconced, are the children of protean and enigmatic forces. No one theory or code is sufficient to exhaust the mysteries of our existence. Perhaps we ought to cultivate what Donna Pennee has dubbed, "...a. kind of cognitive patience with the necessarily provisional nature of the applicability, utility, and relevance of our rules and frameworks, to be patient with less certainty and with multiple, changing 'truths' by which to steer a course" (Pennee 1993,92).

The shock of God's death, which magical realism seems eminently capable of delivering, may be precisely the sort of impetus we require to achieve that patience.

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