

FEMINIST MAGIC REALISM

"THE SEA INSIDE THE WOMB": FEMINIST MAGIC REALISM
IN LATIN AMERICAN AND CANADIAN NOVELS

By

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines the recent phenomenon of feminist magic realism which is appearing in Latin American and Canadian novels. The Introduction outlines briefly the development of magic realism in Latin American fiction and the reasons why it is now being adopted by writers to express feminist themes and ideals. Chapter I examines the feminist magic realism found in Chilean writer Isabel Allende's novel The House of the Spirits, while Chapters II and III study this phenomenon in two Canadian novels, Susan Swan's The Biggest Modern Woman of the World and Jane Urquhart's The Whirlpool. This study reveals that the magic realist techniques employed vary from novel to novel but the magic realist and feminist philosophies these techniques help to illuminate are quite similar. The three novels explore the theory that women retain a sense of the necessity of the emotional, instinctual, and spiritual elements of human life--the elements which are denied and trivialized by Western rationalist patriarchal culture. Women's sense of the importance of connectedness with both the spiritual and the natural worlds is viewed as a potential source of power for bringing about changes in Western culture. Since the goal of magic realism is also to challenge the validity of

this same cultural system, it is appropriate that Urquhart, Swan, and Allende have adapted it to suit their purposes. The hybridization of their feminist theories with magic realism reveals an attempt to create newer and stronger voices for the common goals of feminism and magic realism.

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INTRODUCTION

These paintings only remind you that you're Indian. Inside somewhere, we are all Indians. I'm trying to bring out that Indianness in you, to make you think that everything is sacred.

Norval Morrisseau

Magic realism in literature was born in the early 20th century out of the need to fill a void in the culture of a continent. Its fundamental characteristics have since been adopted internationally as more and more writers embrace it to satisfy their particular needs. Many critics have tried to fix magic realism within a set of rigidly defined characteristics and this has created controversy because the forms which arise from it do not invariably fit into such fixed definitions. This indeterminateness, however, is in itself a magic realist ideal, and it is the reason why so many writers are attracted to it. It is more than just a mode of writing fiction--more than just a set of traits; it is an entire philosophy. There are fundamental philosophical ideals and basic techniques of magic realism, but these elements can manifest themselves in widely varying ways according to the needs of the writer. Magic realism is a gel of ideals which holds together a vast assortment of characteristics, any combination of which can be considered

magic realist in a text. The combinations and permutations according to need are many, as the vast array of magic realist texts from around the world testify.

The flexible nature of magic realism has made it the "focus of interminable controversy in Latin American literary scholarship for the past few decades," with various critics proposing that the term be abandoned altogether (Chanady, "The Origins and Development of Magic Realism in Latin American Literature" 49). Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski argue that "no final definition seems possible" (9). However, there are certain identifiable characteristics. Magic realism does have parameters, but they are quite elastic.

In fact, magic realism has expanded and been modified within different cultures and times to fill the particular needs of those cultures and times. It is not static. Since its beginnings in Latin America it has evolved from decade to decade and from author to author. The types of magic realism observed in Canadian literature today are obviously modifications of Latin American versions of the phenomenon, suited to various specifically Canadian needs. Ian McLaren points out that it is very important to "recognize a Latin American influence" in Canadian magic realism, but that "we have a long way to go towards understanding how that influence has been built and how many other factors conduce to produce that influence" (122). One of the most recent of

these new manifestations is the hybrid of magic realism with feminism which is appearing in both Latin American and Canadian literature. The present thesis examines this phenomenon in three novels: Chilean writer Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits (1982), Canadian Jane Urquhart's The Whirlpool (1986), and Canadian Susan Swan's The Biggest Modern Woman of the World (1983). First, though, in order to study the parallels between feminist magic realism in Latin America and Canada, it is necessary to examine briefly the historical development of magic realism in Latin America, and to define magic realism's fundamental philosophies.

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Art critic Seymour Menton describes magic realism as an "artistic and literary tendency that has manifested itself in Europe, the United States, and Latin America from 1918 to the present" (Magic Realism Rediscovered 13). As an aesthetic movement, then, magic realism has its roots in the visual arts in Europe. The 1918 date is Menton's arbitrary one for the beginning of "post-expressionism," of which he considers magic realism a part. In 1924, a German art critic named Franz Roh conceived the actual term "magic realism." The movement was a reaction against the elaborate deformations and abstractions of objects that characterized Expressionism. It was a movement which reached back to realism, but with a major difference: "It did not copy nature, but was a second creation" (Roh 49). Magic realist paintings are always of

recognizable objects, but the objects are so "clarified" and precisely detailed that a viewer of the painting must see them as never before. In magic realism, the world is "formed anew" (Roh 113); the magical quality given to the recognizable world ironically defamiliarizes it. Chanady states that Roh believed magic realism was an attempt to express "the magical spirituality of the external world and the miracle of existence" (49), an attempt to reveal the "mystery of reality" (Magical Realism and the Fantastic 26). These first characteristics of the new movement as they are outlined by Roh may seem quite vague, and this may be what prompted Chanady to say that Roh's "theories on art cannot be directly applied to literature" (17). However, these general principles can be discerned in all magic realist texts.

According to James Irish, the original magic realist movement in Latin American literature signified the "attempt by nineteenth and twentieth century Latin American thinkers to discover, analyse and define the truly characteristic features of the Latin American reality" (127), the reality which had been submerged by European cultural domination. Chanady observes that the "progressive resistance towards European positivistic models of thinking" and "North American economic hegemony" led to a "reevaluation of indigenous culture and beliefs" (Chanady, "The Origins..." 58). These "ideological changes in Latin America helped shape the emerging literature, especially in the case of magic realism"

(58). Philip Swanson defines the magic realist movement in Latin American literature as the result of "Modern man's crisis of faith in the values and systems which have traditionally guaranteed order and meaning in life" (2).

This "crisis of faith," he says,

led to a repudiation of the Western view, rooted in Christianity of a coherent world based on clear principles of right and wrong. Whereas the ordered structures of the realist text reflect a faith in an ordered, meaningful reality, the modern novelist feels that reality is much more problematic, contradictory and ambiguous" (2).

The Western rationalist/humanist ideology dominating Europe and North and South America is designed to order the world by denying or repressing all irrational phenomena and anyone or anything else that threatens the ultimate power and control of the ideology over society so that reality as we know it will be controlled by fixed "truths." This ideology is based on, and perpetuated by, a system of artificial dualisms within the society: reason and rationality obliterate irrationalism, instinct, emotions, and spiritualism; the urge for power and domination dismisses love and equality between people; "vertical hierarchies" rule over "lateral relationships" (Meyer 363); and male takes precedent over female. Reality is ordered and controlled through these dualisms, this value system of "right and wrong," of "centre" and "other," and is turned into a set of artificial universal and eternal truths. The hierarchical structure of the system keeps all of the threatening elements

relegated to the state of "other" and therefore keeps them trivialized, repressed, or denied. Geoff Hancock quotes Julio Cortazar's observation that "our daily reality masks a second reality which is neither mysterious nor theological, yet due to a long series of mistakes it has remained under a culture prefabricated by culture," a culture of "profound distortions" ("Magic or Realism..." 40).

It is the submerged "second reality" that the early magic realists sought to recover. Spirituality has been lost and with it the capacity for harmonious relations between people. Western culture has also lost contact with the rhythms and patterns that control the natural and the spiritual worlds and the human place in those patterns--a contact Indian cultures still try to maintain. The Latin American magic realists felt the need to break with the European ideology dominating their culture and explore the other possibilities they sensed existed. Swanson calls magic realism the phenomenon which gave Latin American writers the opportunity to "explore better the nature of an essentially Latin American reality" (4). They needed to "underscore the fantastic disproportions of Latin American history," reclaiming the voices submerged under European cultural domination, in order "to assert an alternative viewpoint based on Indian or peasant culture" (Swanson 12)--a world-view based on beliefs in the importance of the irrational and the spiritual to the visible, physical world. James Irish

believes that

the search for roots among [magic realist] writers in [both] Spanish and English is leading towards a literature that transcends territorial borders, narrow nationalism, and racism, and penetrates into the nuances of the regional experiences as a whole (137)

but "more significantly, it seems to be a decided move towards coming to grips with the transcendental value of our reality" (138).

One of the main tools by which the rationalist ideology is perpetuated is, of course, language. An assumed truth of the rationalist world-view is that reality can be reflected accurately in written language. In the realist novels of the 19th century, there is a perception of language as a system of ideas with eternal, universal meanings. Indeed, realism assumes that reality is ruled by rational, logical systems and that it can be captured and controlled by the fixed meanings inherent in language.

In contrast, the originators of Latin American magic realism were very aware of the power that language has to condition perception, and to imprison or empower the imagination. This power is something many literary critics and writers have been studying in recent years. Linda Kenyon points out that "there are things that we don't see and possibilities that we don't allow because they haven't been there in the writing" (14). The linguistic issue underlying magic realism is that authentic identities are lost when we do not have the means to express, and therefore empower, our

imagination. If language is restricted to fixed meanings then we can perceive ourselves and the world only within the boundaries of these restrictions. Artificial restrictions on language produce artificial perceptions, and individuals come to see themselves and the world only through what this restrictive language allows them to see. Language has been manipulated in Western culture to reflect and empower the ideals of the hierarchical value system, while disempowering any threatening elements.

The Latin American magic realists knew they had to appropriate language for themselves and challenge the assumptions of realism in order to find a voice for the reality they knew existed but was submerged. As Canadian magic realist Robert Kroetsch has said, "In a sense, we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" (qtd. in Kenyon 71). The Latin American magic realists knew the importance of re-establishing and keeping alive the roots of Latin American cultures. The tradition of oral story-telling is extremely important to Latin American cultures in general and to magic realism in particular. The myths and legends handed down through generations keep the original world-views and beliefs and the regional and individual differences alive despite the overwhelming totalizing systems that threaten to obliterate them. The oral stories also emphasize the vital dynamic nature of language; they act as reminders that language, both

written and oral, is a dynamic entity that is always evolving and can be modified and changed in order to suit different needs. Its dynamic nature also acts as a reminder that it cannot completely reflect reality, but can help individuals to experience the multitudinousness of their personal realities. As Bakhtin has said, language "becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (qtd. in Meyer 363). The expropriation of language involves a "hybridization," Bakhtin's term for the "mixing of various 'languages' co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language" (Meyer 363). By restructuring the existing language, the magic realists hope to reveal new possibilities for perception. As Walter Pache says, "to uninvent the word...is to uninvent the world" (74).

One of the most prominent Latin American writers to embrace magic realism for exactly these reasons was the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. Chanady argues that Carpentier felt the need to find an appropriate mode to describe Latin American reality, a reality which could not be accurately or satisfactorily reflected by European realism. Carpentier believed that Latin America was, in his words, "a pre-natal world" (qtd. in Chanady, "The Origins..." 52), which he feared would "disappear from the planet one day, without having been named, without having been re-created by the

Word" (52). He knew that recuperating lost identity depends on finding a voice, a "language" to express the particular experience of reality which has been denied.

From 1928 to 1939, Carpentier lived in France and became intimately involved with the Surrealist movement (Irish 134), attracted to it because it explored the concept of a "higher reality" (Irish 179). Edwin Williamson writes that the Surrealist movement in Europe "strengthened his [Carpentier's] belief that the rationalism of the Enlightenment had alienated Europeans from the life of instinct, desire and imagination" (82). Carpentier "sought to redeem the mind from the dead hand of rationality by unblocking once more the sources of the marvellous" (Williamson 84). Carpentier rejected Surrealism when he felt that it had moved away from its original goal of revealing the higher reality of the instinct and the imagination and had become merely "the marvellous, evoked in unbelief" (Irish 170), a "shock technique" (134).

His disillusionment with surrealism was one of the reasons Carpentier returned to Latin America. Another reason was that "the rise of fascism and Nazism made him lose the traditional Latin American reverence for European civilization: under the surface of the enlightened human there lurked a barbarous urge to power" (Williamson 82). This caused Europeans, Carpentier felt, "to tear up their roots in nature in their wish to become masters of their own

destiny" (82). The Western obsession with rationality and reason, and the beliefs and ideals this obsession leads to-- power, domination, individuation--caused Carpentier to repudiate the European world view. In Latin America, Carpentier and other Latin American writers found peasant and indigenous Indian cultures which had not been affected by European rationality and which still held to beliefs in the supernatural and in human spirituality. This prompted him to see Latin America as a place of immense possibility to "experience the marvellous quite spontaneously in everyday life" (Williamson 84). It was a place to experience what European rationalism and its correspondent in literature, realism, had excluded from human experience. Carpentier and other Latin American writers shared a disillusionment with the "rationalist humanism of the European Enlightenment," and by turning to "celebrating the supernatural and the miraculous," their magical realist works "inevitably generated antimonies between faith and reason, imagination and intellect, nature and culture" (Irish 85). It is the "hidden reality" behind the visible world which writers like Carpentier were trying to depict through magical realism (Chanady 54). Carpentier believed that there existed an "intrinsic magical quality in the land and the people" (Irish 133), and "that the writer's task was to capture this awe-inspiring fantastic world" (Merrell 9). Carpentier had to find a language which would give an identity to, and thus

empower, the reality he saw in Latin America.

Jorge Luis Borges is another Latin American writer whose theories on art and reality have greatly influenced the development of magic realism in Latin American literature. James Alazraki quotes Carlos Fuentes as saying that without Borges "there simply would not be a modern Spanish-American novel" (379). Fuentes claims that "the final meaning of his prose...is to attest that Latin America lacks a language and, consequently, must create it" (379). Borges believed that "since we cannot know the really real," then " 'created' reality is as real as observed reality and vice versa; any attempt on our part to describe reality is bound to be a fiction" (Shaw 34). He believes that it is questionable whether or not language can express reality (30) and his work satirizes "the artificiality of much realist fiction" (46). All language and literature, to Borges, is a "construct" (33), as are time and history (38). He sees time as a constructed chronological ordering of our perceptions which seeks to "grant them a seeming intelligibility" (39). Borges views reality as chaotic, a "labyrinth" of experience (31). Scholes says that Borges believed "Reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, by fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as humanity may come" (Scholes 13). This, Scholes believes, was Borges's goal. Donald Shaw argues that "the importance of fantasy in Borges, and by

extension in Cortazar, Garcia-Márquez or more recently Isabel Allende, is its relation to what we take to be reality" (35). When fantasy "begins to invade the 'real' world, a purely verbal construct begins to modify people's lives. Our sense of a secure, predictable universe begins to be undercut" (35). Therefore, a very important element of magic realism is to encourage the reader to contemplate an increasingly dislodged and tentative reality-to contemplate, for example, such irrational concepts as time occurring on a lateral plane, that past, present and future are simultaneous.

Magic realism has often been confused with fantastic literature, from which it is actually quite distinct. Amaryll Chanady's book Magical Realism and the Fantastic is a good source in which to find a detailed analysis of the fundamental elements of magic realism which distinguish it from purely fantastic literature. Chanady observes that magic realism is characterized "first of all by two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality" (21). The presence of both the natural (the "rational" world as we know it) and the supernatural is necessary to magic realism and, unlike in fantastic literature, the supernatural "is not presented as problematic" (23). The author makes no judgements and does not try to explain the strange occurrences being depicted

rationally, so the reader must accept them as natural. The same effect can be created through the presentation of "otherwise normal processes in an unaccustomed order" (119), or through the defamiliarization of reality in other ways (like the destruction of the usual perception of time as chronological). Chanady elaborates:

the description of a supernatural event as normal eliminates the antimony between the real and the supernatural on the level of the text, and therefore also resolves it on the level of the implied reader. Although the latter still perceives this antinomy, he suspends his normal reactions of wonder in order to conform to the requirements of the textual code (36).

There can be no "hierarchy of reality" (104) in a magic realist text, as there often is in a fantastic text. Magic realism, then, "integrates the supernatural into the code of the natural, which must redefine its borders" (30). The reader "must be willing to suspend any notions of what is possible or impossible, and participate actively in the ludic creation of an absurd, yet ordered, perspective" (120). Chanady's overall theory on magical realism is that by

presenting various different perceptions of reality... the narrator allows us to see a dimension of reality of which we are not normally aware. The supernatural, which is the product of an alien imagination, is juxtaposed with everyday reality in order to create a more complete picture of the world (27).

Therefore, the conventions of realism are ironically used to centralize the elements and ideas traditionally marginalized by the dominant ideology and the structures--the conventions

of the realist novel, for example--which reinforce it.

Despite the geographical and cultural gaps between Latin American countries and Canada, there exist certain similarities between them which have resulted in an abundance of Canadian magic realisms appearing in the last few decades. Linda Hutcheon argues that "perhaps the single largest international impact" on the Canadian novel of the 1970's and 1980's "was the internalized challenge to realism offered by Latin American fiction, a challenge that was often called magic realism" (208). One very important link between Canada and Latin American countries is that they are all "post-colonial cultures" (Slemon 10), products of the European cultures which conquered and settled them. A predominant reason for this great interest in Latin American magic realism, therefore, is that it challenges the same rationalist/humanist structures and ideals which control and manipulate Canadian culture. Latin American magic realism gave Canadian writers examples of how the dominating structures could be challenged, and how the marginalized elements of society could be given voice.

Magic realism in both Canada and Latin America is a challenging of the repressive European-based Western ideology and the systems of thought which perpetuate it. It is always a dialectical struggle between "imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures" and "the counter-culture of the imagination" (Slemon 15). Geoff Hancock believes that magic

realism is attractive because it "offers us a way of seeing truth somehow excluded from our vision" (13). Nancy-Lou Patterson calls magic realism the place "where the physical and the spiritual world meet" (24), and she calls it a "realism of spritual contemplation" (26). Linda Hutcheon calls the novels in her study of Canadian fiction in the 70's and 80's products of the postmodernist movement, yet she also says that the greatest impact on these novels was Latin American magic realism. Indeed, Latin American magic realism is one of the main influences on postmodernism in Canada. Postmodernist practises reflect many magic realist philosophies. Hutcheon explains that postmodernism in Canadian literature reveals the "eternal universal Truth" sought by the totalizing modernist ideology to be "deliberate and historically specific human constructs (not natural and eternal givens)" (x-xi). Postmodernism challenges the humanist ideal of universal truths with "a pride in heterogeneity and difference" (Hutcheon viii). Hutcheon characterizes Canadian postmodern writers as "taking pot shots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably a part but that they still wish to criticize" (3)--the same principle upon which magic realism is based. Walter Pache, for instance, believes that "the modernists sought to control both their world and their art; the post-modernists seek to participate in anarchic cooperation with the elements of an environment in which no one element fully controls any other"

(75). The urge to find a harmonious, non-hierarchical balance with the environment and in social structures is a particularly Indian one, and is fundamental to the Latin American magic realist philosophy. In addition, Frank Davey believes that "only the collapse of modernism as a normative and hierarchical model made it possible for regional and peripheral literatures to thrive" (qtd. in Pache 75) in Canada. This development of regional and traditionally marginalized literatures signifies the desire to explore alternative ideologies and perspectives of reality. An example of this is Robert Kroetsch's novel What the Crow Said (1978)--the text most often cited as a Canadian magic realist text. Robert Wilson says that this novel "must not be read as a reflection but as a transformation of Albertan reality. The novel transforms the predictable surface into a fabulous image of those submerged depths where irrational forces, atavistic yearnings and unsatisfied desire lie coiled in unexpressed readiness. It explores a structure of possibilities" (47).

In fact, magic realist texts are often what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction," those which feature the imaginative, self-reflexive re-creation of history; as Hutcheon comments, "we are lured into a world of imagination only to be confronted with the world of history and thus asked to rethink the categories by which we normally would distinguish history from 'reality'" (17). The re-

invention of history is important in two main ways. First, it seeks "to unmask history as just another kind of fiction" (Pache 66). It challenges the perception that time occurs chronologically and that written history can reflect reality accurately. Second, the "re-visioning" of history in magic realism forms a dialectic between the marginalized voices and the "dominant modes of discourse and cognition" which "works toward transmuting perception into new 'codes of recognition'" (Slemon 15). The recreation process recuperates the silenced elements, the "otherness,"--"those elements pushed to the margins of consciousness by imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures" (Slemon 16). Kroetsch points out that "the kind of story-telling we're calling magic realism should be very natural to the Canadian experience" since "one of the things the Spanish had going for them was gaps in their own story" (qtd. in Kenyon 12), the gaps left by conventional realism and historical texts. He implies that the situation is the same with Canada's past --"our history and our official stories were not about us" (Kenyon 15). He also believes that the oral story-telling traditions kept Canadian regional identities alive: "on that story-telling level, we could talk about ourselves and keep alive our individual existence and our shared place" (15).

Magic realism in both Canada and Latin American literature, then, reveals a belief in the need for a rediscovery of the natural, harmonious, non-violent, non-

hierarchical, spiritual relationships among humans and with the natural world. This rediscovery of the metaphysical is different from Jung's theory of the "collective unconscious," however. In fact, Jung's theories seem to be universalizing concepts which negate what magic realism stands for. Robert Kroetsch "attacks Freud and Jung for their dated concepts of the self, for their 'confidence in a locatable centre or explanation,' a notion that echoes the conception of character in nineteenth-century fiction" (Hutcheon 173) for he has a "radical suspicion of systems of thought that totalize experience" (Hutcheon 172). The individual, as well as ethnic groups and cultures, are always evolving, experiencing reality as a continual learning process that is never completed. Kroetsch, argues Hutcheon, "Like so many other Canadian writers...eschews the so-called 'universal,'" preferring to explore "the particular and the different, just as feminists and ethnic writers everywhere have also been doing" (Hutcheon 175). Magic realism strives to break down the barriers to the vital spiritual connectedness needed to build social structures based on equality and acceptance of difference. It seeks to re-create the world through literature by revealing the possibilities of what could be, if only it could be perceived. As Merrell concludes, "magic realism portrays not a world as *is* but a world of becoming, a dynamic, open system incessantly striving to synthesize the stubborn dualisms created by human culture" (Merrell 13).

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It is intriguing that a philosophy which became prominent in the 1940's--1970's in the literature of mostly male Latin American writers would be adapted and modified by women writers in the 1980's to explore feminist themes. It is less surprising, though, considering that the Western rationalist humanist ideology is also the foundation of patriarchal culture and that its dualisms are designed to uphold the patriarchy. Since it is the validity of this value system which both magic realism and feminism strive to change, it is natural that feminist writers are adapting magic realism to their concerns. The elements magic realism seeks to empower are those which have traditionally been associated with women.

There are many reasons why women have been associated with the "irrational." First, women are, in general, socialized to develop their emotional and nurturing, care-giving qualities, whereas men are socialized to withhold and deny their emotions, and are taught to seek power and domination. This socialization upholds patriarchal culture by labelling and relegating women to the category of the irrational, marginalizing them and thus controlling their potential power in the society. This relegation also perpetuates the attitude that women have less reasoning ability than men. Also, women are biologically linked to the mysterious cycles of nature--menstrual cycles and the cycles

of the moon, for example--which are not completely scientifically explainable. Women also have the biological and yet miraculous power of creating life. These natural feminine powers make women a threat to the power structures at work in patriarchal society, and therefore they must be denied and trivialized in order to keep the balance of power with men.

Because of this combination of circumstances, feminist theorist Hélène Cixous believes "Woman...has managed to stay in touch with her bisexual unconscious," while "hierarchical Western society had trapped and, ironically, victimized man on a psychic level, ensnaring him in his own 'rigid law of individuation'" (Meyer 360). Cixous says that the "bisexual unconscious" is the "presence of both sexes" within the psyche and it is "evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual" (qtd. in Meyer 360). Cixous believes that women retain a sense of something which has been more effectively erased from the male psyche--a sense that human reality is based on lateral equalities and balances rather than hierarchical dualisms. Women retain a sense of the vital necessity for a balance between masculine and feminine, and a sense of the importance and validity of the elements denied by the patriarchal value system--the emotional, the instinctual, the spiritual--all of the irrational elements of life which betray reason and logic.

Feminism strives to recover those same elements that

magic realism strives to recover. Both attempt to heal the destruction of the dualistic value system of Western culture. The new feminist magic realist text is one more evolutionary step in the inherently dynamic and ever-evolving magic realist phenomenon. This thesis focuses on just three examples of this fairly recent feminist magic realist hybridization, although it is visible as a growing phenomenon in many novels of the 1980's and 1990's.

I

RECREATING "ENCHANTED LABYRINTHS:" ISABEL ALLENDE'S
THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS

In her novel The House of the Spirits (1982), Isabel Allende adapts magic realism to her personal attempt to "synthesize the stubborn dualisms created by human culture." As Doris Meyer points out, in this novel Allende explores a theory of how Western culture has victimized both men and women which is similar to Cixous's theory of the "bisexual unconscious." Allende does this by portraying women as the predominant retainers of the denied human spirituality and human bonding. The novel also reveals Allende's belief that it is women, precisely because they have retained this knowledge, who have the potential power to transform the destructive patriarchal system.

In order to reveal this philosophy, Allende adopts the tenets and techniques of magic realism. Her feminist magic realist text is an attempt to empower women's knowledge of the hidden human reality by creating a language for it, and to challenge the ideology which trivializes and denies this reality. She says that "Imagination and a sense of the magical will not only serve to seduce the readers of the ill-named *literature of the Boom*; we will also be able to use these qualities in building an original society, one that is

happier and more just" (qtd. in Meyer 360). Allende believes that through the expansion of the imagination and a reborn sense of the magical she can reveal the hidden spiritual elements of human existence through her writing, giving her readers an opportunity to open their minds to new social possibilities and effect a transformation of Chilean society.

The House of the Spirits is Allende's response to events in Chile which directly affected her. She thinly disguises the novel as a fictionalized autobiography of her experiences as the niece of Salvador Allende, the president assassinated in the military coup which brought the brutal Pinochet regime to power. She defamiliarizes Chile in order to recreate it as a thoroughly magical place--it is obviously Chile being depicted, but it is also a place where the spiritual and the supernatural are ultimately triumphant over the systems that oppress them. The novel is, as Meyer points out, a "direct refusal to accept the patriarchal oppression historically practised by the upper classes and the military in Latin America" (Meyer 360). Such a recreation of Chile is a thoroughly magic realist one.

As in all magic realist works, one of the fundamental goals of Allende's text is to recreate or recuperate an authentic voice for those elements of the society which have been repressed and denied and therefore have no means to express their particular experience of reality. Through Alba's text, Allende can recuperate the experiences of all

the women from the past and the women she has known and been influenced by--experiences which have been marginalized. Meyer quotes Cixous as saying that women retain the sense of "hidden" realities, but this sense is kept "liv[ing] in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions" (360). Alba recuperates and empowers her grandmother's experiences and the experiences of all of the other women she comes into contact with through her life by breaking this silence. However, Alba's novel would not have been possible, she knows, without the private "texts" of these other women. All of the women work together in reciprocal relationships to create a voice for themselves that will be heard. The "voiceless" rebellions of the women Alba knows--Clara's journals, Blanca's letters, the prison camp women's stories, Transito Soto's and Ana Diaz's life stories--are all given much more strength and power to challenge the systems which oppress them because they now have a language. But Alba could not have written her text, created this voice, without all of their "texts." Through Alba, then, Allende externalizes and further empowers the strong but "private world of the feminine Imaginary" (Meyer 360).

It is also significant that the women's stories, such as those of the prison camp women, are oral, for they stress the importance of remembering and recuperating the stories which can reveal the reality of the people much more authentically

than official accounts. These oral stories which Alba hears, collects and writes down are recuperations of the identities of these women that have been kept alive by word of mouth.

Allende's narrative techniques help to create a new language for those who have been denied expression. One of these techniques is the combination of two main narrators, each representing opposing views--Alba, the "newly-born feminist" (Cixous qtd. in Meyer 360), and Esteban, the patriarch. This technique is magic realist in several ways. First, it juxtaposes, as in Swan's The Biggest Modern Woman of the World, the apparently unnatural with that which is conventionally perceived as normal. Alba's voice represents the elements which women embody--the spiritual, the instinctual--which have been denied or trivialized by patriarchal society. Esteban's voice represents all of the patriarchal ideals which effect this denial or repression. The juxtaposition of these two voices occurs exactly as in all magic realism: the marginalized voice is placed directly within and at the same level of validity as the centralized voice. Hence, the "unnatural" is depicted as completely natural by its placement side by side with what is usually considered normal. The juxtaposition of Alba's voice with Esteban's is, therefore, another way of challenging the dominant patriarchal ideology from within that ideology. It is necessary to have Esteban's voice heard in order to have Alba's voice heard as a challenge to it.

This narrative technique is also magic realist because it allows for the creation of a new voice which will give expression and identity to the previously silent elements of the society. Doris Meyer believes that the collaboration of Esteban and Alba in the narration reveals a reconciliation between the patriarchal and the matriarchal inheritances of the culture. As Meyer points out, Bakhtin says that such deliberate "hybridization" of voices, of differing "languages," is meant to "illuminate one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (363). In Allende's novel this newly reconstructed language comes in the form of a change of attitude on the opposed sides of patriarchy and matriarchy which reveals a ray of hope for change in the society as a whole. Meyer argues that "Essential to both characters' transformed vision is the dialogic interaction between themselves and among others: Alba must understand the 'language' of Colonel Garcia, just as Esteban must prostrate himself before Transito Soto" (363). The understanding which is struck represents the balance between masculine and feminine, between men and women, which is necessary if the system is going to be changed. The hope of reconciling such opposites lies in the resolution of the destructive dualisms which dominate the society--the hope intrinsic to Allende's magic realist and feminist philosophies.

Like all magic realist novels, Allende's novel is filled

with supernatural and strange occurrences, all of which are uncompromisingly depicted as real. All three narrators (the third being a third-person omniscient narrator) reveal at some point or other a complete belief in the validity of the spiritual and supernatural world which exists side by side with the scientifically explainable world. Alba quite often mentions the existence of spirits and ghosts in the house and the magic powers of Clara and Clara's spiritualist friends, and the entire text itself continually dramatizes the strange and magical events Clara wrote of in her journals. Alba writes as an extension of Clara and so it is natural that she sees these magical events as completely normal and absolutely true. For example, Alba matter-of-factly says that Nana often interrupted Clara's seances by coming in and "startling the spirits" (Allende 126).

The third-person narrator seems to be a composite voice made up of all of the voices which emerge in the text. This includes Alba and all of the women Alba writes for, Esteban (his transformed voice, after he has undergone his change of heart), and also Allende's own voice. This narrator makes such remarks as "Alba was almost born in a narrow-gauged train...That would have been fatal to her astrological chart" (263). This narrator also stresses that the portrait of Clara which depicts her in a levitating chair "captures precisely the reality the painter witnessed in Clara's house" (267). At another point, the narrator matter-of-factly

describes a young Alba's knowledge that she will be able to communicate with her grandmother Clara after Clara has died. She describes Alba's knowledge, taught to her by Clara, that "death would not be a separation, but a way of being more united" (290). Clara has clearly taught Alba that the spiritual world, the world beyond the visible world, is the world in which people can be united, can more easily bond together. This composite voice, the new "voice" Alba believes is vital to the transformation of society, is one which easily accepts the supernatural and the spiritual as perfectly normal.

Esteban's narration also reveals a straightforward belief in the supernatural as a natural element in his world, a belief he has always had. He recalls times when he had to cover up Clara's supernatural powers in order to avoid political embarrassment. For example, because he is "ever fearful of public ridicule" he has Nivea's head hidden in the basement so that no one would find out how Clara had discovered its location in a premonition. Esteban is often on the alert "to quell the rumors" of Clara's "strange behavior" (124). When Clara is pregnant with the twins, she announces to Esteban that she is going to "elevate." Esteban recalls that he shouted "Not here!" because he was "terrified at the idea of Clara flying over the heads of the passengers along the track" (113).

It is obvious that Esteban has no doubts about the

existence of Clara's powers, but merely wants to deny to the outer world that they exist. It is not until after his change of heart that he stops denying and fully accepts what Clara represents. His original stance is that of the male imbued with the ideals of the patriarch--a denial of the unacceptable spiritual world. The fact that he has always known it has really existed, and his ultimate acceptance of it, however, show Allende's hope for the possible recovery of the female spiritual element within the male psyche.

The formal structure of Alba's (Allende's) text and its significance subvert the dominant ideology of her culture. Magic realist philosophy, in this case, provides an alternative vision of chronology. The dominant Western rationalist/humanist perception of time is an arbitrarily designed construct. It is separated into the opposing realms of the past, present and future, and placed in a linear chronological order which suggests that the past can be fixed as eternal, universal truths. We are taught in chronologically "accurate" accounts of history and in realist novels to believe that the past occurs in a fixed, linear cause-and-effect pattern and that there are no other possible interpretations of the past. Clara senses, however, that time is not at all chronological. She writes every day in her "notebooks that bore witness to life," "in order to see things in their true dimension" (432). Knowing that some day Alba will need to piece together this "true dimension," she

carefully arranges them before she dies "according to event and not in chronological order" (433). Clara knows that the perception of time as chronological is artificial and creates barriers to an understanding of the correlations which exist among people and events throughout the years. Clara's view of the simultaneity of past, present and future is comparable to cyclical phenomena in nature; it is a cycle which holds the possibility of birth, death, and rebirth--the possibility of renewal. Clara passes this understanding on to Alba through her journals and, specifically, through the form of these journals. Alba learns from Clara that the problem with her world is that

memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events; we cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously (432).

It is through the recuperation of the past "texts," Clara's and others', that Alba is able to see the correlations between past and present, and to realize that time is not fixed and linear. Alba is able to perceive that the "terrible chain" which has trapped her family and all of the people of her country in an "unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love" (432) can be altered. She learns the "true dimension" of this pattern, and with this understanding she can change the pattern by repudiating the cycle of violence and hatred that has driven her family, and begin a new cycle of forgiveness and spiritual bonding.

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present
future

Alba's structuring of her text echoes this understanding. Her entire text is a cyclical structure, a series of flashbacks full of connections among past, present and future. This is also a structure of renewal because as Alba and Esteban create the text they return to the past, piece it together, and by the time they have completed the text they have come back to their starting position once again in the present: the text ends at Clara's first written words. Esteban and Alba have gone back to the past and have pulled themselves out of it transformed. They have renewed the past and it has renewed them. The fact that the text ends at the beginning also stresses the idea that the cycle of time is an on-going process.

The perception of time which Allende reveals here is magic realist, and yet it is also comparable to perceptions of women's experiences which have been explored by many contemporary feminists. The idea of time and reality as a multitudinous, labyrinthine, simultaneous phenomenon is closely related to theories of women's experience of reality which have been proposed by many feminists, especially their notion of the multitudinous nature of women's sensuality. The multi-dimensional sensuality of women is seen as opposite to the narrowly-focused, phallogentric sensuality associated with men (Irigaray 204, 210, 221). The magic realist perception of time then, is yet another example of how the magic realist philosophy accords so well with that of

feminism.

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It is predominantly through women that Allende shows the destructive Western ideology can be defied, and it is in the knowledge and power of women that Allende sees hope for the future of her country.¹ All of the women in the Trueba and Del Valle families, as well as the many other women portrayed in the novel, challenge the conventions and values of their society in a variety of ways. Nivea Del Valle is a sufferagette and she believes in helping the poor. She passes on her ideals to a young Clara, teaching her the importance of working for the justice and equality which transcend the artificial barriers of sex and class. From a very early age, Clara defies all of the rules and attitudes of her society. Her clairvoyant powers place her beyond the reach of science and reason. She is in communication with the spirit world, the world beyond the material world. Yet she also fully understands the everyday, natural reality of humans, and the need for humans to bond together spiritually through love. She spends her life concentrating on this spiritual reality, quietly ignoring and defying the artificial rules which deny it. One example of this spiritual reality is the love and care Clara gives to the poor. She does not see any distinctions between class and wealth, and so her genuine love for the people goes beyond the rules of her upper-class status. Money and

worldly possessions mean nothing to Clara, nor do the standards of feminine fashion and beauty--more defiances of her role in society.

Esteban's rages at Clara stem from his realization that "Clara did not belong to him" (96). His overwhelming patriarchal desire is to "have control over that undefined and luminous material that lay within her" (96). But it is because Clara is fully in touch with the spirituality which patriarchal culture denies that she gains the power to elude Esteban's control.

Another significant defiance of dominating ideology is the link between Clara's world view and beliefs and the spiritual, supernatural beliefs and practises of the indigenous peoples--world views based not on rationality and an artificial dualistic value system, but rather on the mystical and natural rhythms of the spiritual and natural world with which they live in harmony. Like the Indians, Clara lives with an instinctual sense of herself as a creature belonging to nature, as well as to the spiritual world. One example of this is when Clara nurses baby Blanca in public constantly, "without a set schedule and without regard for manners or modesty, like an Indian" (101). She refuses to enforce an artificial schedule on Blanca, and she refuses to let arbitrary male-designed rules of feminine behaviour make her feel embarrassed or ashamed about feeding her child in public.

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It is also significant, for the same reasons, that Clara is intimately linked to the peasants at Tres Marias, since the peasantry, like the Indian cultures, has retained beliefs in the supernatural and the spiritual world. For example, old Pedro Garcia magically cures the ant plague at Tres Marias (110). Clara understands this phenomenon; she is the "only one to whom the procedure seemed completely normal" (112). Clara is also intimately linked to the peasants through her spiritual relationship with Pedro Segunda Garcia. Over the years, the two come to understand and depend on each other, and give each other strength. They never speak of the love between them, but they do not have to speak to each other to understand what the other is thinking and feeling (165-166, 201).

Clara also defies Esteban's violent desire for control by escaping into the private world of her journals. These journal are her "voiceless rebellions" against what Esteban represents. Through silent defiance, Clara continues her activities, recording her personal observations, helping the poor, spreading the ideal of equality among all people and between the sexes, despite Esteban's violence. She triumphs over the systems which seek to oppress her beliefs and her activities. Her journals represent this triumph, for they are a witness to the fact that she has not been cut off from her true identity.

The house Esteban builds for Clara is also significantly

related to Clara's defiance. The "solemn, cubic, dense, pompous house, which sat like a hat amid its green and geometric surroundings" (93) represents the rigid and linear hierarchical rules and values which Esteban tries to enforce upon Clara and their family, the dominant values of the society as a whole. However, Clara spends her life quietly modifying this house whenever she has to in order to suit her needs. She makes innumerable changes in order to facilitate human spiritual and physical needs--needs which are denied by the structures already in place. The house ends up "full of protuberances and incrustations, of twisted staircases that led to empty spaces, of turrets, of...doors hanging in midair...portholes that linked the living quarters so that people could communicate during the siesta, all of which were Clara's inspiration" (93). Clara transforms the house "into an enchanted labyrinth that was impossible to clean and defied any number of city and state laws" (93). The modifications Clara makes to the house represent her rebellion against the artificial rules which restrict and deny the true nature of human reality as she knows it. The labyrinthine creation she makes represents a multitudinous, vibrant, non-linear, non-geometric, illogical experience of life, and it is significant that it is Clara, the matriarch of this house, who makes this creation.

Blanca also learns to defy the rules of her patriarchal world and live by the rules she senses within herself. She

lives her life completely for love, and yet is also driven by her need for independence in a world designed to make women dependent on men. Blanca refrains from marrying Pedro Tercero Garcia because she is afraid of losing her identity and independence. They never actually do marry: their love is the main thing that binds them together. Blanca is also in touch with her natural feminine spirituality. When she is pregnant with Alba, she "developed a whole system of communicating with the infant that was growing inside her" (251) just as Clara had when she was pregnant with Blanca.

Blanca also defies conventional perceptions of reality through her art, an ability she shares with the other women in her family. Art is a significant means by which the women emphasize and empower their alternative perceptions and beliefs. Rosa embroiders fantastical animals and plants which defy all known laws of physics and biology. Clara's writing, of course, deals with observations of everyday life which always reveal the spiritual reality, and defy the known reality. Blanca inherits Rosa's talent for imagining and creating strange animals, creating them in clay instead of embroidery. Alba carries on the tradition with her painted murals as well as her writing. The art of these women is an important outlet for expressing the elements denied by the dominating structures. It also emphasizes that art is a vital aspect of life in Latin America in general, a means of expressing the voice of the people, especially if that voice

is oppressed.

The importance of art is also revealed through the images of mutilated hands. The fact that both Pedro Tercero and Alba have their fingers cut off shows how the dominant systems try to oppress revolutionary artforms--Pedro Tercero's songs and Alba's writing--in order to stifle the potential power of the people. Both Alba and Pedro Tercero overcome this attempt to stifle their artistic creativity and continue to fight for social justice through their art.

Other women are also shown defying the dominant ideology and replacing it with their own alternative systems. The women in the prison camp and the independent Transito Soto, for example, develop co-operative systems which are based on equality and a system of work-sharing. The women in the prison camp develop a system where every woman does a certain share of work, like taking care of the children, in order to accommodate all of the women's needs. Transito Soto founds a co-operative for prostitutes, discarding the traditional madame- or pimp-run operation (a system similar to the exploitative tenant-patron system), in favour of a fair profit-sharing operation. These alternative systems are based on people working together to resist the traditional hierarchical and exploitative systems.

It is this spirit that brings the women of the country together as an underground resistance. One such example is the woman who gives Alba shelter the night she is released

from the prison. It is this woman who makes Alba realize that there is hope for her dream of a better world, that "the days of Esteban Garcia were numbered because they had not been able to destroy the spirit of these women" (429).

As mentioned earlier, Esteban represents the values and perceptions of the patriarchal culture. The system in place on Tres Marias, where Esteban is the father-figure who exploits his "children" for his own benefit, is a microcosmic manifestation of patriarchal society in general. The tenants, through lack of education and awareness, are kept slaves to the dominant ideology. Both Esteban and the tenants of Tres Marias are imbued with the values of the hierarchical class system and the artificial roles this system forces upon them.

Esteban's firm belief in the British school system is representative of his belief in the traditional Western ideology which denies the legitimacy of the beliefs of the Indians and the peasantry. He believes English is a superior language to Spanish, for example. Spanish "in his view was a second rate language, appropriate for domestic matters and magic, for unbridled passions and useless undertakings, but thoroughly inadequate for the world of science and technology" (301). It is significant that languages come to embody different ideological values. The English language expresses and endorses the Western patriarchal ideology which denies the spiritual elements of life, elements kept alive in

the peasant Spanish cultures and in Hispanic languages. Alba's reaction to the British school Esteban insists she attend reveals the differences between the two systems of thought; "for Alba, who until then had never heard of sin or proper manners for young ladies, who was completely ignorant of the boundary between the human and the divine, the possible and the impossible...the school routine was simply unbearable" (300).

The story of Esteban reveals the cycle of stagnation and ignorance inherent in the hierarchical patriarchal ideology. Esteban violently clings to the laws of the land in both his private life and his public life as a senator. The result of his support of the military coup to overthrow the Socialist president is a large-scale example of what has already resulted from his use of violence in his family. His violent attempts to oppress Clara and Blanca form a microcosm of the violence which the rightists and the military wreak on the Socialist government, its supporters, and the people. Both violent acts lead to disaster for Esteban. His violence toward his family alienates them from him, and he is cursed with never-ending loneliness. His support of the military violence in the country at large leads to a brutal dictatorship which backfires on him in the most direct way, by torturing the only person in the world who can still love him and ease his loneliness.

Esteban's decline emphasizes that the ideology he

represents can only lead to a continual cycle of violence and destruction and the loss of human progressive potential. His life, and his effect on the family show how the "terrible chain" perpetuates itself. As Alba pieces together the cycle of violence which is the legacy of her family and, by extension, of her nation, she comes to understand that everything that happens to her is "part of the design" which has been "laid down before my birth" (431), a design perpetuated by her grandfather. She realizes that Esteban's raping of Pancha Garcia "added another link to the chain of events that had to complete itself" (431). Esteban had cruelly raped Pancha and then discarded her because he was brought up to believe in the hierarchical values of his culture. These values then result in the perpetuation of the violence and hatred in the culture, a terrible legacy of revenge which ultimately results in Alba's torture. Esteban also perpetuates the cycle of violence when his mutilation of Pedro Tercero Garcia's hand eventually results in the mutilation of Alba's hand. However, Alba realizes that if she, too, allows herself to be imbued with the same attitudes which lead to her torture, the cycle of destruction will continue.

It is ultimately through Clara and all of the other women they come into contact with that both Esteban and Alba are able to halt the cycle of destruction. For Esteban, years of regret and loneliness bring him to a full understanding of

the ideals Clara stood for. It is through the creation of a text out of Clara's journals, and all of the other women's "texts," and through the understanding and forgiveness which they gain from each other in their collaboration, that both gain the power to break the "terrible chain." Esteban realizes the destructiveness of his life's work and redeems himself by helping those he has always violently oppressed. He ironically becomes friends with the revolutionary Miguel, brought together with him by their common bond of love for Alba.

For Alba, the women act as an influence on her to decide against revenge in order to save her descendents from the cycle of destruction. In the women's prison camp, for example, she writes of Adriana's children:

I thought about the fate of the children growing up in that place with a mother who had gone mad, cared for by other, unfamiliar mothers who had not lost their voice for lullabies, and I wondered as I wrote, how Adriana's children would be able to return the songs and gestures to the children and grandchildren of the women who were rocking them to sleep (427).

Alba despairs for these children, wondering how the future generations will survive the psychic and intellectual damage of the hatred and violence that plague their country, and how they will avoid perpetuating the cycle. But she has answered her own question. The future generations will survive it if they are given an example of love and human bonding to live by, a sense of human spirituality given to them by their mothers, grandmothers, and surrogate mothers, which they can

pass onto their children, continuing the cycle of renewal.

Alba's and Esteban's transformed visions represent Allende's hope that transformations are also possible on a larger scale, in Chile itself. Out of the tragedies she has witnessed in Chile caused by the militaristic and patriarchal systems that have historically ruled Chilean society, Allende has tried to create, through her feminist magic realist hybridization, a new hope for her country. She empowers, by giving a new voice to, the women of Chile, whom she believes hold the key to change in the culture because they have managed to retain a vital sense of human spirituality. She reveals her belief that it is the power in the spirits of these women that makes transformations, such as those of Alba and Esteban, possible. In the text that Alba and Esteban are helped to create, a new voice arises--the patriarchal and the matriarchal mixing together in a "hybridization" which reveals that a balance and an understanding between men and women is not only possible, but essential to the future of Allende's country.

NOTES

- 1 A few exceptions to this are Jaime and Pedro Tercero Garcia. Jaime's Christ-like generosity and love for his fellow human and his advocacy of non-violent revolutionary change indicate his awareness of the spiritual needs of humanity. Pedro Tercero Garcia does not seek violent revenge and bloody revolution either. He works for change peaceably, through his music alone. Also, Pedro Tercero rescues Esteban when he is a hostage at Tres Marias instead of retaliating to avenge himself. Unlike Miguel, who believes that change is possible only through violence, Pedro Tercero and Jaime understand the vital need for forgiveness and understanding.

II

"DEFYING GRAVITY:" SUSAN SWAN'S

THE BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD

Susan Swan is another female author who adapts magic realism to her own individual needs--in her case, as a Canadian woman writer. Her novel The Biggest Modern Woman of the World (1983) displays a combination of magic realist and parodic techniques which reveal both feminist and magic realist themes. Magic realism perfectly suits the feminist ideals Swan explores. In her novel, Swan presents "ironic challenges" to the "universalist pretensions" of "(male) literary and cultural history" (Hutcheon 133). Like the Latin American magic realists, Swan seeks to break out of the impotent forms and themes of modernism and realism which perpetuate patriarchal and humanist values.

Parodic and magic realist techniques often work simultaneously in this novel, for both work on the same principle. Linda Hutcheon says that parody "works to incorporate that upon which it ironically comments" because it is "simultaneously both inside and outside the dominant discourse whose critique it embodies" (120-21). This is exactly how magic realism works to challenge the centralized values of Western culture. In Swan's novel, parody working in tandem with magic realism is a doubly effective technique. Because the magic realist techniques create a sense of

apparent reality for the text, the reader has no choice but to accept Anna's story as it is. Once that sense of reality is established, the parodic elements are established firmly within the culture as the reader knows it, and thus they have more impact than if they had been placed in an fantastic text.

Through the parodic yet realistic re-invention of Anna Swan's life, Susan Swan depicts the denial and loss of feminine spirituality, how women have been cut off from their authentic identities by the patriarchal values ingrained in Western thought. However, it is the entire Western culture, men and women alike, which Swan depicts as suffering from this identity crisis. It is the loss of spirituality which is revealed as the fundamental problem in Western culture--the root of "powerlessness, victimization, and alienation" (Hutcheon 6). As Hutcheon argues, this novel explores "The question of the relation of the individual female experience of powerlessness...to a more generalized social and cultural experience" (204). Like the Latin American magic realists, then, Swan seeks to develop novelistic structures and a new language which will recover that "hidden reality" which has been "excluded from our vision" (Hancock 15).

Anna's gigantism is a magical realist device which reinforces the main issues of the novel. Her incredible size makes her an unnatural element which does not fit into a "standardized" world (Swan 3). She represents the

marginalized "other" of the world ruled by the values of "humanist Man" (Hutcheon 18). For example, she defies all of the standards for femininity in the society by being taller and stronger than every man in the world, thus posing great threat to the ideal of male superiority.

The challenges to the centred ideologies which she represents, however, are embodied not only in her "abnormal" giant size but also in the fact that she is a giant woman. Her size represents a vast resource of female spiritual power, embodied in her love for her fellow humans. The appearance of the crop of vegetables at the time of Anna's birth--"mammoth love-apples, squash as big as wagon wheels..." (Swan 9)--is a miraculous event which emphasizes Anna's potential power to make things grow. It is not a physical growth which she senses she has the power to create, but a spiritual, emotional and intellectual one. She feels it is her responsibility to help people to "grow" spiritually--"Height was my religion and my politics for I believed that if everyone was tall like me, nobody would feel unimportant, or unhappy" (29). Throughout her life Anna is alienated by her society, but she always seeks to connect herself with the people around her. She believes it her responsibility to "look after" people of her world, seeing them "as vegetables that needed to grow" (218). She dreams of "altering the face of the earth" by making everyone grow large like herself (117) and she becomes interested in

transcendentalism (87) because it fits her vision of the world. She hopes that this growth will create spiritual bonds between people and thus create a better world. As Anna says after seeing the Siamese twins, "Possibly a connecting bond is required before all promenade steps are mastered" (164).

As a result, Anna must combat her society's worship of physical size instead of spiritual or emotional capacity. Anna refers to this cult of size worship which views any man as "strong in all areas because he has strong muscles," as "sloppy thinking" (230). This valuing of the physical is fundamental to the gendered bias in favour of males because of their larger physical size and strength. She realizes that the "normal," the mainstream ideology, is concerned only with male-identified values of conquest and power and that these physical concerns cause a confusion within the society as to what is really important.

Anna's experiences as a woman in her society also reveal how and why the patriarchal Western ideology restricts women, and ultimately all people, to artificial roles, cutting them off from their true spiritual selves. For example, Anna's 10-day long menstrual period emphasizes her vast resources of creative energy. Anna's incredible out-pouring of fluids represents the energies flowing from her body and activating the energies of the women around her. She is reminded of the theory that when one woman begins her period she causes the

periods of the women around her to begin; Anna, because of her incredible amount of flow, "may have caused all of the women of Seville to spill over with the blood of creation" (272). This shows a sense of bonding between women--a bond which is mysterious and beyond scientific rationalism. The male doctor's theory that she is suffering from the "female weakness"--the blood flow draining her "mental faculties" (272)--is indicative of patriarchal society's denial of a woman's period as a sign of feminine power. His opinion that it is a weakness is an example of how women have been taught by authority figures to deny their natural creative energies, and to believe that these powers are actually weaknesses. The women who take care of Anna, however, treat this event as "a time of celebration and pride" in the tradition of Indian women. Anna then realizes the inconsistency of a culture which considers the "blood-letting upon which everything depends" (270) a weakness in women.

Mimicking the practices of Indian women, as the women taking care of Anna do, has important implications for the magic realist philosophy. The spiritual beliefs of the indigenous Indians of Latin American countries greatly influenced the development of Latin American magic realism. As I mentioned in the introduction, Latin American writers grew disenchanted with the "European positivistic models of thinking" and "North American economic hegemony" (Chanady 58) which they felt had alienated people from their spirituality

and from connections with the natural world. The spiritual emphasis of the Indigenous world-view appealed to these writers' urge to regain what had been lost and denied in the Western world-view--belief in the fundamental spirituality of humanity. It seems that magic realism is partially the result, in North as in South America, of a re-evaluation of Indian philosophies. It seems that now, in the late 20th century in North America, a continent ruled by patriarchal values, economic power, and enviromentally threatened by the attitudes and values of this culture, Canadian authors like Susan Swan are turning to indigenous peoples' beliefs for the same reasons as the Latin American magic realists. They are reevaluating beliefs in the spiritual element of humanity in an effort to seek alternatives to the values which are destroying the continent.

Anna's stage career as a giantess is especially indicative of the marginalization of women, of "difference" from the norm, and of the spiritual element of humanity. Instead of the serious and enlightening roles Anna dreams of playing for her audiences, her roles are designed to humiliate her for the amusement of the audiences. Her vast femaleness is threatening to the dominant ("normal") societal values, and so she represents a potential which must be thwarted. Of her New York audiences she says, "the mudsills are fond of mocking feminine behavior," for they "see women as a pretentious self-interest group out to thwart their

manly pioneering spirit. So any female who is prepared to have a pie thrown in her face will be a success" (93). This is especially true of a woman of Anna's stature, for the domination and humiliation of a woman of her size give people a great feeling of power over the threatening elements of female creativity. She is femininity incarnate so, as she says, "the more I made a fool of myself, the more the mudsills liked it" (94). She cannot realize her dream of teaching the people to accept her as herself--she is denied the opportunity to perform her script "Giant Etiquette." She cannot centralize what is now marginalized; she cannot make her audiences "grow" to be as spiritually large as she is.

Throughout her life Anna is dogged by the female sense of powerlessness in the face of the values of her society. For example, she constantly accommodates herself to the wills of the men around her in her desperate search to share her love and connect spiritually with the people of her world. She feels that she must make herself vulnerable to the men in her life in order to be loved and accepted by them. She says, "I can't meet a man without acting like a welcome wagon" (7). Through all her relationships, Anna seeks a spiritually "giant" man with whom she can share her great love, and with whom she can "alter" the world. But none of her relationships helps Anna to achieve her dream. Instead, they all emphasize the degree to which both men and women are caught in the spiritually stifling rationalist ideology of

the Western world.

Domination, abuse, and denial of Anna's creative potential are the results of all of her relationships with men. Each of the men attempts to mould her to his expectations, never truly loving Anna for herself, stifling her true human identity. Angus must deny Anna by leaving her altogether. He is too threatened by the ideals she represents. Anna says that he "will never understand an ambitious giantess like myself" (59). He believes that there is one right way for everyone to live. He tells Anna, "I credit my good works to my father's advice that it is better to follow one general principle than abide by many rules...Do you see, Annie? What is good for one bloke is good for another more or less" (138). This is an allusion to the universalist ideals of Western culture which conveniently control and eliminate elements of "difference." Angus sees Anna's refusal to accept that there is only one right way to live as a betrayal of the worst kind--a female betrayal of a man (88).

In the cases of Ingalls and Martin, both men are comparable to pimps in that they try to use Anna's potential for their own purposes--wealth and power, the goals Anna wants to change. Ingalls thinks nothing of using her to make money. His philosophy is that "Nobody but a fool would let romancing interfere with business" (169). Anna's pregnancy reveals Ingall's selfishness and complete lack of compassion.

He will claim paternity and support Anna only if the child is born a giant because then he can get rich from the involvement. He thinks "We'd live off what I'd make exhibiting her and the kid" (228). Anna knows that with Ingalls she has "no relationship which could be the basis for raising a child" (233).

Years later Ingalls again thinks nothing of humiliating Anna for profit by making her believe that the Thumbs' elixer is making her shrink. The elixer is significant because it is supposedly a "regulator" which can make people of "abnormal" heights attain average, standardized height. The desperation of people to be average reveals the extent to which the values of "averageness" have been engrained in them. They are denied celebration of their differentness. Both men and women are desperate to be "normal"; no one wants to be marginalized. This is evident in the midget Tim Delaney's joy at his apparent growth spurt after drinking the fluid, and in the crowds of women who flock to Anna after she gives her speech about shrinking, "screaming confessions of dissatisfaction with their physiques" (318). The women want to fit the diminutive standards society sees as desirable for women, for women are "normally" supposed to be weaker than men. Men want to be bigger, and since society sees size as indicative of power, a real man is supposed to be physically dominating.

But to shrink is completely against Anna's philosophy.

In her speech, written by Ingalls, she is forced to say she is "in the throes of a glorious plunging, a miraculous reduction of flesh that will shrink me into the zone of feminine perfection" (317). She is completely humiliated by her apparant shrinking. She does not want to lose her true identity--her largeness.

However, because of the shrinking incident, Anna realizes that her relationship with Ingalls has no potential for spiritual love and growth. The two doomed babies signify the lack of spiritual love between Anna and Ingalls. The deaths are symbolic of the fact that her dream of changing the future of the world and creating a world of people connected through spiritual love is stunted. They are also symbolic of the idea that it takes a spiritual bonding between both men and women to effect changes in the world.

Martin is both a magic realist and a parodic device. His largeness represents the opposite of Anna's largeness. Martin's gigantism and his dreams to create a race of giants signify the drive in Western thought for domination and power at the expense of spirituality. He believes that the "great Americanus species" he will found will "see over the heads of foreign nations" (173), for they will be superior to all other races as a result of their sheer physical power. Martin's dream is, therefore, a parody of the American Dream, the belief that Americans are superior. Unlike Anna's dream of populating the world with giants of spiritual

understanding, Martin dreams of a population of giants who would dominate and rule the world--a dream based on a love for power, not on a love for people. As Anna reads the paper in which he states his goals, she writes that "I cannot read such tracts without hearing the voice of male pride" (162)--the American Dream is also the patriarchal dream.

Martin sees Anna as the vehicle, the "unspoiled natural resource" (170) which could make his dream a reality. The idea of Anna as a natural resource also relates to the author's parodic comparison of Anna and Martin's relationship to that between Canada and the United States. As Hutcheon observes, many critics have noted the "relationship between the national search for identity and the feminist seeking for distinctive gender identity in terms of the paradoxical (and I would say postmodern) recognition and combatting of 'colonial' positions toward the power of dominating cultures" (6). Themes of "powerlessness, victimization, and alienation" (6) characterize both of these relationships. The comparison of Anna to the Canadas is apt because Anna is such a large woman. Her largeness and her vast creative potential are comparable to the vast landscape and natural resources of Canada. Also, in this novel, the United States symbolizes the patriarchal rationalist Western culture that trivializes any alternative social systems, such as that of Canada, in the same way that the alternatives that women represent are marginalized. As Anna writes to her mother of

her marriage to Martin, "I feel like I am acting out America's relation to the Canadas. Martin is the imperial ogre while I play the role of genteel mate who believes that if everyone is well-mannered, we can inhabit a peacable kingdom. That is the national dream of the Canadas, isn't it?"...We possess no fantasies of conquest and domination. Indeed, to be from Canada is to feel as women feel--cut off from the base of power" (273).

Anna's goal of "Canadianizing" Martin represents her dream of having difference accepted. She wants to create a world where the authentic identities of women, their alternative systems and perceptions, and their vital human spirituality will be acknowledged. But it is easier for Anna to tell Martin in a performance "I'll be damned if I'll be crammed on the seat of your imperial fantasy" (183), than it is to achieve this aim in reality. When she resigns herself hesitantly to her engagement to Martin, she mysteriously loses her voice. This signifies her sense that she is losing her grip on her own identity and all of the ideals that go with this identity. Years later, in a letter to her mother, she confesses that she feels trapped and powerless in her role as Martin's wife. But she cannot leave him because she feels it is her duty to try to change him, to "Canadianize" him. But she is trapped and stifled in her seemingly futile purpose of "moderating the behaviour of her husband" (273). She tells her mother she is "becoming bitter" at her lack of

progress in changing Martin, and even more frustrated that this futile role "is the best way I've found of feeling useful in a world of limited choice for the female" (290).

Martin's impotence represents another obstacle to Anna. The fact that his genitals are only the size of an infant's ironically reflects upon the potential of the ideology he represents, revealing it as impotent. But because his ideals are impotent, Anna's goals are rendered impotent as well--another suggestion of the idea that it takes both men and women to work toward spiritual understanding. Anna's spiritual goals are stifled by Martin's lack of spirituality. This lack is also emphasized in the fact that Martin, like Ingalls, never truly loves Anna for herself; he never truly accepts her real identity. Anna realizes this when Martin confesses that he wanted her to sleep with Ingalls in order to get her pregnant. It is a "bitter revelation" to Anna to realize that Martin had "abandoned me for a silly dream" (322). Anna is embittered that she has not been able to find "a man who suited me," but has "had to accept what each one of you had to offer as you came along" (322). Martin sums up Anna's search for someone who will accept her and help her to attain the full potential of her ideals when he says, "You are romantic, beloved. None of us are big enough to meet your expectations" (322).

Her explanation of the fire at the museum is symbolic of her failure to achieve her goals. Anna realizes that Barnum

has the fires deliberately set during the "slow periods" of the year in order to attract attention. The source of Anna's anguish is that even she, with her great powers, can do nothing to stop the suffering. When she describes one fire, she implies that her dramatic rescue from the burning building is a spectacle which is designed specifically to "make the profits climb" because it "would so thrill the crowds" (143). Once again, her largeness is used and abused as a source of amusement, while its real power is treated with indifference. The fire scene in the newsroom is a magical realist scene since the newsroom is described very matter-of-factly by Anna as filling up with her tears and urine and the people swimming and almost drowning in the fluids as though this were a perfectly normal event. This scene emphasizes Anna's sense of failure. When she finds Krista the Albino doing the strip tease in the newsroom, she realizes that she cannot stop her society from exploiting people such as herself. In her words, the tremendous outpouring of fluids from tears and urine creates a "woman-made sea" (145). This vast body of liquid generated by the women represents the vast creative potential in women, a potential which has the power to bond people together spiritually. However, Anna's despair stems from her realization that this potential has no place in this world. She realizes that the sea is made too late to save any of the creatures at the museum. She says, "If only we had put our glands together

earlier...What tragedies we could have quenched" (145). This refers to the idea that Anna alone cannot change the destructive ideology of her culture, but that a spiritual bond among women is the only possibility for change. She cannot, however, see how this can ever be achieved. Anna also sees this femininity as embodying the potential of human spirituality itself. She despairs because she and other "freaks" like her are unable to challenge and change the "small"-minded attitudes of their society. She feels that her vision of creating a world of "dancing giants" ascending up into the sky "jubilantly defying gravity" (331), a world which defies the values which deny the spiritual, is not attainable in her world. She says her life has been a "farce acted out on the Ohio plain where the marvellous was diminished by the perception of those who dwell within material reality. And I was a prisoner in the thin dimension of ordinary life, looking for a way out" (306). It is a "thin Dimension" because people cannot envision possibilities beyond the empirical. Western ideology has created a world of "scoffers who don't understand the need to dance up to the aurora borealis" (332). She tells her mother, "it seems I am doomed to feel a kinship that few can recognize. Suffering makes me understand my connection with the small irascible beings who share this earth with me although my size--the thing that brings my suffering--keeps us apart....I am certain, Momma, that to be a freak is no different than to be

human" (282). To be a freak like Anna is to have spiritual love within but to have this spiritual potential denied. Anna believes this is the fate of everyone in our society. She resigns herself to the idea that "I was born to be measured and I do not fit in anywhere. Perhaps heaven will have more room" (332).

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As Linda Hutcheon has noted in her book on postmodernism in Canadian novels, "the universal (but somehow male) concept of humanist Man is giving away to a more diversified concept of experience based on difference," and that this has meant a "turning to forms that accentuate difference, especially in the face of a mass culture that tends to homogenize or obliterate anything that does not seem to fit in" (18). Susan Swan uses many forms and technical innovations which accentuate difference and challenge the humanist ideology, all of which are common to magic realism in both Latin American and Canadian novels. She makes use of many of the technical innovations associated with magic realism in order to appropriate the old forms of language and rebuild them into a new voice, a new language which can express ideas which are trivialized or ignored by realism and modernism. Like all magic realists, Swan has appropriated the language and the forms of realism in order to subvert realism's underlying values. As Walter Pache says, "the ironic destruction of realistic narrative" gives "emancipation from

foreign literary models" (71). Magic realism is one of those literary philosophies which have facilitated this emancipation and the growth of peripheral literatures-- literatures which break from the dominating values of Western culture in theme, form and technical structure.

One of the ways in which Swan challenges canonical forms and values is in her re-invention of the experiences of the historical Anna Swan. As Steven Slemon argues, the "re-visioning" of history allows for a "recuperation of lost voices and discarded fragments, those elements pushed to the margins of consciousness by imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures" (16). This is exactly Swan's goal. Her revisioning of Anna Swan's life helps to break down the humanist notion of fixed truths and universals embedded in history by revealing history to be fictional. This allows for other possibilities of the past to be explored. And, by recreating Anna's life, Swan has recuperated a person who has been forgotten in history, and uses her life to explore the elements which our culture has trivialized and ignored. By recreating Anna's life as a woman, a Canadian, and a giant, Swan legitimizes elements which have always been marginalized. Through Anna, the forgotten experiences of women in history are recuperated. This gives the contemporary reader new insight into the present situation of women. The novel stresses Anna's menstrual experiences, the traumatic birth process, the agony of feeling "female and

flawed" after losing a child, the sense of responsibility to please, serve and stand by a husband, the sense of feeling trapped and enslaved in marriage, the guilt of desiring freedom from marriage, and the sense of loss of identity in marriage.

The autobiographical framework of the novel has many important implications. The novel is set up as Anna's story told by Anna directly to the reader. At no time does a third-person narrator or Swan herself step in to contradict Anna; the reader, therefore, has no choice but to identify with Anna, to use her as the focalizer. The reader must re-adjust his/her sense of reality to coincide with Anna's reality. This expands the reader's sense of what may constitute reality. It also gives the reader an opportunity to see and identify with elements which are marginalized and to realize how these elements are repressed by the dominant cognitive systems of our culture.

The autobiographical method also allows Swan to create sarcasm and irony in the forms and tone of language Anna uses, which add to the sense of Anna's alienation and victimization. She tells her story as though it were one of her "spiels" from her performances as an oddity. She begins, "I promise to tell all, what really happened to the Biggest Modern Woman of the World in a never-before-revealed autobiography" (1). And she concludes, "And so I come to the end of the Real Time Spiel in which all the diaries,

testimonials, and devices that I've inserted to entertain you are done and my conclusion is known" (332). It is as though she is sarcastically treating the reader as just another audience which will perceive her as an aberration, and will only be fascinated by the gritty details of her life out of a morbid fascination for the strange and unnatural. The tone of defeat and resignation which registers here emphasizes Anna's sense of having failed to achieve her goals. It also brings the reader onto the level of those people who rejected her, situating the reader within the value system which defeated her. This is an attempt to make the reader step back and re-evaluate the ideals Anna stands for.

Another way in which Swan does this is by having Anna ironically label herself and the other "freaks" by using various attention-grabbing names throughout the novel--names which apparently would have been applied to them for performances. She refers to herself as "THE INCREDIBLE KNOTSUCKING LUMBER LASS" and "THE LIVING LUMBER GIRL" among others, adding emphasis with capital letters. It is ironic that Anna stresses the same names which label people like her as freaks in order to marginalize, alienate, and disempower them. This ironic self-labelling emphasizes a few things to the reader. One is the idea that if a person is told something long enough they will believe it. Anna does not necessarily believe that she is merely a freak, but her sarcasm shows how this could have been easily done to her.

Labelling reveals the power language has in perpetuating the control dominant ideals have over society; language is the empowering tool.

Another important way Swan shows how language is used to empower the dominant ideals of rationality and patriarchy, and to disempower alternative ideologies is through the cliches with which Anna is bombarded throughout her life. These cliches represent the encoding of patriarchal attitudes and values within the language so that the values expressed in these common sayings are taken for granted as truisms. Hubert incessantly bothers her with comments such as "As you know very well, a lady's conduct is at the mercy of critics when she is in a public place" (50). When Anna is attacked by a group of boys because of her odd appearance, her aunt tells her she must have "provoked" the attack because "a lady sets the tone of a gentleman's behavior" (54)--the old argument for placing the blame of sexual assault and rape on the woman. Barnum compliments her on her shyness, saying, "A retiring nature excites a gentleman's interest" (68). When Anna is ill a doctor reassures Martin, saying ironically, "We'll fix up the little woman in a jiffy" (237). Other echoes of patriarchal encoding within language include phrases such as "Frailty thy name is woman" (15). The unobtrusive scattering of such well-worn cliches throughout the novel is a subtle and effective commentary on "the history of women's literal 'inscription' into language"

(Hutcheon 9). It effectively reveals that "These attitudes encoded directly into everyday language cannot help but influence the self-image and behavior of individuals in the society. The gendered bias encoded in the language which we so unself-consciously use everyday" (9).

This realization of language as the key to empowerment makes the appropriation of language by marginalized elements all the more important. As is well-known, without a language which can express authentic identity, that identity is lost. This makes Swan's innovative use of language and technical forms all the more important in resisting and challenging conventional values, and in empowering her feminist and spiritualist ideals.

Through the story of Anna Swan the giantess, then, Susan Swan has been able to adapt magic realist themes and techniques to feminist themes. Through Anna, Swan reveals what she sees as the main problem with our society--that, as Anna says, "to be a freak is to be human" (282). Anna's experiences show that to be human in the rationalist patriarchal society we live in is to be cut off from our humanity, to be denied our differences and the spiritual nature that allows differences to be accepted. Positive human potentials are therefore abused and distorted and we are left, like Anna, powerless and alienated from our fellow humans. Anna's story ends on a sad note because of this sense that she has failed, as it seems humanity in general

has failed, to overcome the systems that damage her. However, by recreating Anna's story in the way Swan has, through the magic realist techniques she adapts, new importance and hope are given to Anna's life. If it is true, as Swan suggests in her novel, that Anna felt her purpose in life was to challenge the ideals of her time, then this purpose has been given a second chance. Even if Anna was nothing like the character in Swan's book, this character has still given purpose and power to the real Anna Swan's existence by using it to challenge the "universalist pretensions" of patriarchal society which attempt to obliterate alternatives and difference in human culture. It is through such imaginative recreations of voices like Anna's that Susan Swan believes changes in our human culture become more attainable.

II

SEEKING THE LOST "SECOND RIVER:" JANE URQUHART'S THE WHIRLPOOL

In form and theme, structure and content, Jane Urquhart's novel The Whirlpool (1986) is an excellent example of a specifically Canadian and feminist adaptation of the fundamental forms and ideals of magic realism. The novel reveals how Urquhart turns to magic realism for her particular needs as a Canadian woman writer.

The main theme of The Whirlpool is the rediscovery of lost identity, and the vital role which language plays in both the loss and the recovery of identity. The novel deals with three identity crises linked by a common cause: the all-pervasive Old World rationalist ideology which emphasizes fixed and universal truths, and therefore inherently defines an artificial "centre" in opposition to an artificial "other." The challenge to realism and the Western rationalist ideology it upholds lies in the magic realist ideals found in these three identity crisis sub-themes. The identity crises include: the shrouding of possible perceptions of new realities in the New World, the shrouding of feminine identities, and the shrouding of the individual imagination and, thus, the metaphysical and irrationalist elements of human existence. Through these

themes, Urquhart reveals the devastating effect which the disease of Western rationality has had on the Western world, and, as in The House of the Spirits, on both men and women.

Within the anecdote of the English crape company, which begins the main text following the prologue, lies an analogy illuminating the theme of lost New World identity. The narrator notes that within twenty years of operation the "whole [Canadian] empire could have been wrapped; a depressing parcel with a black sheen" (Urquhart 21). This image implies that Britain has shrouded Canada, a fledgling independent country at the time in which the novel is set (1889), denying the new country an opportunity to establish a myriad of possible regional differences, ideologies, and social structures of its own. Canada is literally wrapped up and bound by British conventions. The crape analogy is apt because there has been a death, the death of the many possibilities of an independent Canada. Ironically, the Canada of Urquhart's novel has won its independence, but cannot develop a separate identity or, more aptly, separate identities. Instead, the people seek to recreate British culture within Canada, a culture emphasizing that "man," through his reasoning abilities, controls the entire natural world. They try to tame the vast and unpredictable Canadian wilderness. For example, as Fleda takes the bus down to the Niagara River, she notices the incredible dichotomy between the actual wilderness on the riverbank side of the road and the carefully cultivated farmland on the other side. The

"rigidly planned" (31) side shows the attempt to create a civilization out of the Canadian wilderness much like that of the European classical civilizations. However,

the hill country of England, as Fleda imagined it, or gentle undulations of the Tuscan country side, had nothing to do with this, nothing to do with this river side of the road....It was a geography of fierce opposites. Order on one side and, nearer the water, sublime geological chaos (31).

This geographical dichotomy is a physical manifestation of the people's struggle to force order upon the area's rugged wilderness. But the whole Western ideal of land as something to be conquered and controlled is inappropriate technology in a land like Canada. Instead of humans responding to the landscape, as the native Indians did, the landscape has been forced to respond to human demands. This idea of responding to the natural world, instead of trying to manipulate and control it, has great relevance to the novel as a whole and is fundamental to the magic realist philosophy.

Language is a major way in which Old World ideology is perpetuated in the New World of The Whirlpool. The frustrated young poet Patrick represents how the Canadian people are influenced by British and European culture and how they attempt to continue the manipulation of thought and environment through language. Patrick's mission in life is to capture and express his world through the conventions of "the art of poetry" (69) as he perceives them. In so doing he hopes to control both the landscape and people with his words. He is fascinated by the great British poets like Wordsworth, Browning, and Coleridge,

and he attempts to recreate their style of poetry in order to control his environment the way he believes they controlled theirs. However, Patrick is "unable to deal effectively with either the body or the soul of the new country" (69). He is unable to capture "his" landscape within the conventions of poetry as he knows them--the conventions of the language of his European idols. His wife, frustrated with the futility of his quest, perceptively tells him, "You're never going to find Wordsworth's daffodils here" (69).

It is uncontrollable elements, elements which are beyond reason and logic, which Patrick fears because they undermine the entire Western ideology to which he desperately clings by proving the true fragility of the human condition. He is haunted by a vision of the environment around him as a world of "fierce places, wild with growth, crazy with weather. Places where, a hundred miles north, huge fires ate their way through darkness" (56). He desperately desires to control the irrational through language. Throughout the text, architecture is a metaphor for this desired controlling language. Patrick has a recurring dream in which his uncle's farmhouse becomes a "series of paragraphs" categorized properly in a logical order with no mixing of subjects between paragraphs, "each one containing a subject entirely separate from the last" (189). In this series of paragraphs, every idea is fixed within rigid parameters. Every room is isolated; there is "no transitional stage of a hall" between the rooms. Also, the series of

paragraphs "could not be taken within a single phrase of thought" (190). This implies that there is no influence possible between sets of ideas, since this may lead to new and unpredictable combinations of ideas and fixed truths would be lost--the entire rigid system of knowledge would be shattered. Patrick's "dream architecture" represents his need to satisfy his belief in a humanist perception of language as fixed within eternal structures, with words concretely defined by eternally and universally true meanings. The entire house analogy implies that language, when rigidly restricted, upholds the dominant ideology.

However, as Patrick's worst nightmare reveals, language unleashed is a dangerous threat to this ideology. His greatest fear is that the house will turn into a labyrinth of rooms, "the contents of which would be entirely scrambled" (191). The shining surfaces of the parlour, for instance, would reflect "not its own contents at all, but those of rooms Patrick had never even imagined until that moment" (191). It is freedom of the imagination that frightens Patrick, and the fact that life is full of things he will never be able to understand or control. For Patrick, as he tells Fleda, "the imagination is a trap" (158). He must deny everything inexplicable and illogical in order to keep his world "compartmentalized and exact" (191), because "a simple shift of objects, events, emotions, from their rightful place brings chaos," the "world scrambles, becomes unidentifiable, loses its recognizable context" (192). He

clings to his belief that he will be able to capture the true essence of life within fixed structures of language.

Fleda, like Patrick, is also trying to interpret her environment. She becomes interested in Patrick because she believes that he, as a poet, may be able to supply her with a language with which to do this. Indoctrinated by her society's ideology, especially "the fixed idea of the poet" (174), she still believes that the only way she will be able to understand her world is through the language of a male poet. She sees Patrick as "The poet. Released from boundaries, from rectangles, basement, attics, floors and doors" (142). Initially, she, like Patrick, is caught up in idolizing the great British poets. She wonders "how Wordsworth or Browning would interpret a landscape such as this or events such as these" (119). Before living in her tent by the river, she had lived in a house, and had made a shrine to her favourite British poets within this house. Architecture again becomes a metaphor for language and the modes of perception it offers. Fleda's house and the shrine it holds are metaphors, like Patrick's dream house, for language. It is not until her husband David is transferred to Niagara Falls and they are forced to leave the house and the shrine that Fleda begins to realize she is leaving a prison and entering "the real landscape of her own country" (141). She does bring her poetry books with her, however, signifying that she is still searching for some way to recocile the Old World conventions of poetry with the interpretation of

her own world. Yet it is obvious that she feels these poets to be too distant from her experience and she has "secretly, all the while been imagining poems filled with the smell of cedars carried on the breath of a northern wind" (119). Fleda chooses to live in the landscape which surrounds her in the tent instead of in "calm, quiet predictable rooms."

Fleda's dream home becomes a piece of imaginary architecture whose walls and windows existed in the mind and therefore could

be rearranged at will. A house where the functions of the rooms changed constantly, here a wing could be added or a staircase demolished, where furniture could re-upholster itself, change shape, size, period (141).

The "dream house" represents Fleda's need for a more flexible language, a language which goes beyond the rigidly defined limits of language as she knows it. She needs a language which responds to the environment, and does not fix the world into permanent meanings. Fleda's need to change the "architectures," both the actual houses and the language which imprison her, is comparable to Clara's need to make modifications to her house in The House of the Spirits. The houses built by the husbands in both novels represent patriarchal culture's attempt to contain women both physically and mentally. Both Fleda and Clara realize their need to escape this containment and reconstruct their physical and mental environments according to their needs as women. Fleda's "dream house," for example, reveals her growing doubt about the ability of the structures of language as

she knows them to express her world.

However, she is still caught up in the idea of the male poet as the means to defining any new experiences: "Every cell in her body, every synapse in her brain, demanded the presence of the poet" (174). But she grows increasingly frustrated with Patrick and her favorite poets as it becomes obvious that they cannot provide her with the new type of poet she seeks. One night she writes in her journal that she had been at the whirlpool when the sky had "exposed its black distances" (151) and, at that moment, "Everything around me became unsurveyed...unsurveyable" (151). Later that same evening, she tries to read Browning: "Pulling in around Browning, trying to avoid the pull of the open dark, the limitlessness of the stars over the whirlpool" (151). She still vacillates between the ideology which emphasizes rationality and the sense of her world as something limitless and vast, something beyond reason. She tries to read poetry but "still listens to the night...to the larger experiences: the low, constant sigh of the whirlpool, the gentle steady breeze at the top of the pines" (152). Fleda is compelled to *respond* to the "subtle invitation" of the "open dark" just beyond her tent, the "limitlessness" of life (151), and she can no longer focus on the male poets.

Control of women, like the taming of the landscape, is essential to perpetuating the rationalist ideology. Women must be defined as "other" in order to justify systems which will control them. The novel's theme of women rediscovering their

own identities is relevant to the overall theme of the Western obsession with the control and denial of elements which threaten this control. Both female characters, Maud and Fleda, go through processes of emancipating themselves from this patriarchal system, as do the female characters in The House of the Spirits and Anna Swan in The Biggest Modern Woman of the World.

In Fleda's case, both David and Patrick try to mould her to their expectations of who they think she should be. David plans to build a house so that she will once again be a regular housewife. He also gives her a book which subtly reminds her of her place in the world. The book, Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House, which eventually became the emblem of Victorian male expectations of female behaviour, is dedicated to his wife as a "tribute" to her "domestic demeanor" (34). Fleda is "deeply interested in this book, interested in the poet's perception of the perfect wife, his belief in matrimony as the heavenly ideal" (33) because she is searching to understand why she feels, as a housewife, like a prisoner. She is still trying to reconcile herself to her society's attitudes toward women while struggling with the forces compelling her toward a discovery of her own identity. Her interest in this poet's perception shows that she still believes that a male poet can tell her who she should be. However, her doubts are increasing. She admits to herself that she would never want to be "Patmore's wife, Patmore's angel" (54). She is beginning to realize that she must have the

freedom to rebuild the architecture of her identity.

The name "Patmore" is clearly linked to "Patrick." Patrick's idea of women is akin to Patmore's in that they both see women as objects to be captured and romanticized in art. The idea of women as unpredictable human beings, and as holding the possibilities of sensual and emotional involvement, with all of the accompanying irrationalities, is too threatening to Patrick. He cannot accept that he cannot understand, and thereby control, women. Since he has recently escaped from a failed marriage and a disappointed wife, Fleda becomes for Patrick a challenge, another chance to prove to himself that he can capture the essence of "woman" in his art.

He first spots Fleda through his fieldglasses and is excited to have this "whole woman within his range" (39). He sees her as "a woman in a painting, as though she had been dropped into the middle of the scene for decorative purposes" (39). He wants to believe she is part of the landscape the destiny of which is to be captured in art. In his fantasy she is "whole," a finished product, a completed text. It is with great frustration that Patrick begins to realize that his fears are well-founded. He cannot reconcile the reality of Fleda as a human being with his fantasy of her as the "silent, unconscious partner..of his, the landscape" (127-8). He cannot accept that she has "a voice" of her own, because this would "change the shape of her mouth" (98). Anything that is capable of changing itself of its own volition, Patrick knows all too well, is

dangerous because this signifies an independent source of power. He wants Fleda to stay within his binoculars "where he could control the image" (126).

Maud, like Fleda, is a woman forced to conform to the ideals of her society. For example, because of her social position as a widow, Maud is "duty-bound" to wear real crape for a mourning period of two years after her husband's death. Men must wear only a band of black in their hats. Maud is "encased" in "a suit of armour" which "lacerated the spine if that series of bones ever dared to relax" (222). This garb is merely a physical manifestation of society's attempt to keep women in controlled roles. Guilt is the main motivator which keeps women in their prescribed roles, as Maud's dream of her late husband shows. He refuses to wear the uncomfortable crape Maud gives him to wear and Maud "once again drapes the heavy material on her own shoulders, realizing, as she did so, where it rightfully belonged" (23). Also, the black crape which lacerates her skin and stains it black marks her out as a woman with no identity other than that of a dead man's wife. She sees herself as "the keeper of his memories" (93) instead of her own. Even two years after his death, her husband's identity still usurps her own. As Maud slowly comes to realize, being a woman in her society means that "they are always dressing you up as something and then you are not yourself anymore" (149).

Control of women and the landscape are examples of the false assumption upon which Western ideology is based--the

assumption that the irrationalisms of the natural world, including humanity, can be controlled through rationality. But the novel reveals that this denial of the supernatural reality cuts people off from experiencing life fully. This is the third magic realist theme to be examined.

The Browning story framing the novel introduces and concludes this theme of the denial of the instinctual and supernatural nature of humans. Urquhart characterizes Browning as a commercially successful poet who finds at the end of his life that he does not consider himself artistically successful. He can write poems about human emotions, but only through someone else's voice--in the form of dramatic monologues. He cannot feel the emotions himself. He realizes in his final days that he has failed because he has not been able to put his own soul into his poetry.

Browning is portrayed as a meticulous man in both his art and in the ordered routine of his everyday activities. He "never once broke the well-established order that ruled the days of his life" (10). He reluctantly admits to himself that he has had "a fairly conventional life" and will have an "ordinary death" (11). It is this ordinary life and death which begins unexpectedly to haunt him as he feels his life slipping away. He begins to wonder how he had allowed himself to live his life "with the regularity of a copy clerk" (11). Suddenly his ordered world begins to fall apart. He perceives the season as "disordered" with "No predictable blocks of weather with

definite beginnings and definite endings" (8). He begins to realize with horror that he has denied that which could have provided his life and art with soul. Browning imagines that Shelley, both the man and his work, encompasses all that he has denied in his own life. His knowledge of Shelley's wild life and spectacular death begins to haunt him incessantly, "like an annoying, directionless wind" (12).

Shelley is characterized as the perfect foil to Browning as Browning, near death, begins horrifyingly to realize. Browning was at one time infatuated with Shelley's poetry but had long since dismissed it as "too impossibly self-absorbed and emotional" (14). He rejected Romantic idealism and subjectivity in favour of rationalism and "objectivity." The problem with Romantic idealism for Browning is that it just could not be understood, and therefore controlled, with reason. This is too threatening. Shelley had *responded emotionally* to life; he had moulded himself to the state of chaos which is life, while Browning had attempted to order reality.

Yet in the last few days of his life, Browning is haunted by doubts about his ability to do this. For example, he thinks of the fact that he can depict lust and sexual desire in his poems, but he "could never understand or control it" (11). He thinks with irritation of Shelley's much wilder life and artistic heights and that Shelley probably went beyond all bounds of acceptable behaviour to follow his instinctual sensibilities--the *menage a trois* with Mary and Clare, for

example.

Browning's dream of restoring a Renaissance palace represents his unconscious desire to accept the philosophies of the Renaissance era and of Romantic idealism which was influenced by the Renaissance. The fact that he is dissuaded from this dream represents the pressures of his Victorian society to deny the elements which the earlier philosophies valued. His questions to Shelley--"Where have you been? Where have you been? Where did you go?"--reveal that Browning now perceives Shelley as his denied doppelganger. Browning searches the night sky for his "double," and is unable to find him (13).

As Browning lies dying he finally understands the meaning of his life. He regrets his words, his poems, his objective and distanced description of "reality," because he feels they mean so much less than Shelley's actual experiencing of, and dramatic response to, life itself: "All this chatter filling up the space of Shelley's more important silence" (235). Browning realizes that his mistake lies in his refusal to respond to life, as Shelley had responded, so that he has "never possessed and was never possessed by" the "formless form" (236) which is human experience. Shelley had been "Responding, always responding, to the elements" (237).

The Browning/Shelley story mirrors the stories in the main text. Urquhart's Browning character, like Patrick and David, has denied the vital spiritual and irrational elements of life. What Browning, Patrick, and David deny, Fleda, Maud, and the

child try to rediscover. It is the women, Fleda and Maud, who can respond to these elements, while it is the men, David and Patrick, who cannot. The profoundly magic realist themes of the Browning/Shelley story, then, are linked closely with the feminist (and magic realist) themes of the main text.

Water imagery is central to Urquhart's unfolding of this theme. Browning thinks of Shelley's death by drowning as a death of "absolute grace" (236). He thinks of Shelley's supple corpse flowing gracefully like seaweed in the ocean. Shelley is perceived by Browning as at one with the elements of the natural world in that he lets them control him. The ocean is a metaphor for the irrational elements of life.

This metaphor is paralleled with Fleda's idea of the ocean and her corresponding metaphor of the whirlpool. She writes in her journal that "you have to enter the whirlpool by choice," and that "It's only the ocean's maelstrom that you slip into by chance" (175). Both represent the natural chaos of existence, but Urquhart uses the whirlpool to depict the obsession with ordering this chaos--the Browningsque attitude to life. The many yearly suicides in the whirlpool represent the compulsion to control life. Because nothing is truly controllable in life, people are compelled to control their deaths. The daredevils also represent the attempt to control human existence. Browning and Patrick are such "daredevils," and as the text stresses, those who try to conquer the falls and the whirlpool are never successful.

Entering the ocean, on the other hand, represents a Shelleyan acceptance of, and response to, the "maelstrom" of human experience--acceptance of the fact that experience is ruled by chance. This acceptance and response opens the way to a more approximate experience of reality than that which pure reason offers. Fleda begins to realize that in order to "know who you were" (176), you have to be dislodged from who you think you are, and from what you are told is reality. She thinks, "Perhaps the knowledge comes at the moment of departure" (176)--that is, departure from the obsession with reason. The "demon lover" of this maelstrom is the inevitable reality of life which cannot be stopped from "attacking the architecture" (176)--from destroying the rational systems of thought which try to contain life. This is the demon lover Fleda has waited for to enter her "architecture" of thought.

The image of the whirlpool which represents the inherently unknowable essence of life is similar to that of the paper boats Fleda sends out into the whirlpool. Fleda claims that her boats are "Just like people" (59); they are controlled by the unknowable patterns of the currents swirling gigantically under them, forces much more powerful than themselves. Fleda, though, realizes that the whirlpool is unknowable and accepts the fact that she will "never truly understand it" (60). Instead, she studies it; she experiences it sensually. She realizes that life must be "investigative," "an exploration" (60), not something which can be fully known through reason.

The whirlpool is also, "in one sense," "like memory; like the obsession connected to memory, like history that stayed in one spot, moving nowhere and endlessly repeating itself" (49). In this sense, it represents the rationalist desire to fix history into ordered patterns. This obsession with memory is most clearly dramatized in David and Patrick's view of history. David and Patrick cannot accept that history cannot be coherently ordered to reflect reality accurately. They cannot accept that the interpretations of the past are always in flux, that it is not a set of indisputable facts. The idea that history cannot be fixed in words threatens the rationalist ideology because it asserts that history cannot be controlled within fixed meanings. For example, David and Patrick have "both decided that war is an abstract theory meaning something else entirely" (198). They want to fix the meaning of the war of 1812 as a glorious undertaking. David leaves the actual suffering out of his study of war. He wants to order history logically by eliminating all of the confusing and chaotic elements, such as human emotions.

Water imagery is also used to depict the consequences of the denial of the spiritual elements of life. For example, David tells Patrick that there used to be another branch in the river, a second river, but that the ice age filled this second river with soil and rocks. Patrick answers him by saying, "And now some of the water still wants to go that route. But, of course, it can't because there is nowhere to go so it turns back

on itself" (103). The "second river" represents the "second" reality of human experience which is denied and therefore lost. With this loss there is the inevitable loss of people's ability to connect spiritually. Because the spiritual is denied, people end up turning in on themselves; everyone in the physical world is then an isolated unit. The inability of Patrick to connect with Fleda is an example. Such a connection with another person is, like the suspension bridge over the turmoil of the river which suddenly snaps when it has seemed so secure, an "untrustworthy connection" (179) to Patrick. Patrick's fear of the unpredictability of relations with others, is, like the bridge, threatening. If you "get too close" to someone else, he realizes, reason goes by the wayside, and the precious compartmentalization of all things in their place is scrambled. Patrick therefore needs "distance" from Fleda. When Patrick tells her that she got too close to the bridge, that she forgot it was dangerous, she counters by saying that if she had never gotten close to the bridge she would never have seen the river from above, meaning she had to risk losing "control" over her life in order to experience the metaphysical. Fleda accepts that "connections" are often tenuous and she is not afraid to risk them to experience life, while Patrick hides from experience in fear. For Patrick "To merge" was "Impossible and undesirable" (188).

Another example of water representing the spiritual and the supernatural is that of the miraculously perfect corpses which

the whirlpool sometimes yields. To Maud these corpses "spoke of beings at home in water, content with the voyages it took them on. They spoke of ancient rivers and the sea inside the womb" (183). These images depict humans as naturally spiritual creatures, living harmoniously with the mysterious forces of the natural world, but losing this spiritual nature in a world ruled by rationalism.

Like Anna Swan's "woman-made sea" of tears and urine and her sea-like menstrual flow in The Biggest Modern Woman of the World, the fluid imagery in The Whirlpool is also associated with the supernatural, irrational elements of life, and is used to depict female biological systems and all of the inherent mysteries of these functions. For example, Maud speaks of the "sea inside the womb." In the novel the "sea" refers to spiritual elements, and yet a woman holds this "sea" in her womb. The linking of women and the spiritual adds to the theme of women as the retainers of the lost sense of the spiritual. It is the women of this novel, like Anna Swan and the women in The House of the Spirits, who sense and attempt to rediscover the spiritual. The child also has retained this sense, showing that the child is closer to the "sea of the womb"; he has not yet lost the spiritual nature completely. The adult male characters, however, have lost this sense and either never recover it, like Patrick, or else, like Esteban Trueba, they recover it only with the help of the women characters.

Fleda, unlike Patrick, progresses toward a freedom of

thought which opens up new possibilities for recovering her spiritual reality. Fleda begins by living in her tent, where, unlike in her previous home, "there is hardly any call to order at all" (140), bringing her one step away from her housewife identity. The tent home, again unlike the house, is "capable of motion and of response" (142) to its environment. She, unlike Patrick, does not feel the physical world to be a chaotic burden on her. She does not desire "to live weightless" (177), freed from this chaos of experience, as Patrick does. For her, as for Clara Trueba, the world is something to be experienced in all of its unpredictability.

Fleda's ascent toward the discovery of her own identity is made possible after she is "abandoned" by Patrick and suffers "a sense of loss so brutal it stunned and confused her" (193). As a result, she decides to forget her ideal vision of Patrick: "The man who visited had nothing to do with the other, the one in her dreams, the absent one" (195). Of Patrick's poetry Fleda says, "there is nothing there for me" (197). The coldness and distance in his work reveal to Fleda a language which cannot possibly be a response to the natural world as she senses it. The essence of life, Fleda realizes, is the process of experiencing without searching for a completed product. Her abandonment of Patrick and his poetry represents her abandonment of the values of her society and the language used to perpetuate these values. Fleda also rejects all of her previous notions about herself, and about the reality around her. She

realizes she cannot continue in her artificial role as wife, that "she could not live, forever, in the dream house of this grey, obsessive, landscape" (218).

Patrick decides he must swim the whirlpool to prove he can conquer the natural world. His intended swim expands, by virtue of the whirlpool metaphor, to represent his attempt to gain complete knowledge of the unknown. He wonders if he will "be able to tour it like a museum or caress it as he would a woman" (102). The idea of caressing it like a woman relates to the connections between controlling women and controlling the landscape. In fact, Patrick confuses the whirlpool with Fleda. He thinks to himself that "Perhaps this woman was part of the landscape" (102). He believes she holds the secret to the mysteries of the natural world because she has been able to "turn away" from "closed spaces" "in order to embrace the open" (107). He therefore wants to know exactly what she is thinking, to capture the "information" he believes she has. By swimming the whirlpool, he feels he can understand all of the mysteries of existence. The narrator states that "Patrick's whole life had been a departure from certain dramas which should have been his destiny" (220). He has escaped, like the Browning character, experiencing life in the dramatic way that he could have, trying instead to "document" it. He still believes he can somehow learn the true essence of the whirlpool. He thinks, "So many decisions concerning this river...how to enter..where to cross...Whether to turn away from it entirely. Still, it was

decipherable once you had the knowledge" (220).

When the River Man retrieves Patrick's corpse from the river he does so by hooking onto Patrick's belt and pulling the corpse back "from its centre, the rope looking like a thick umbilical cord" (225). This rebirth reveals that Patrick is irrevocably tied to the limited, deathly rational world view.

The story of Maud and her son parallels Fleda and Patrick's stories. Maud's role has kept her surrounded with death and has made her, at great cost, more comfortable with death than with life. Indeed, death becomes, for her, the perfect state because it is calm, eternally fixed, predictable, and free of the agonies of human emotion. She, like Patrick, is afraid of the vulnerability and unpredictability of the human condition. For example, she calls the little girls she prepares for burial her "little friends" (138), develops an attachment to them, and mourns for them, but she ignores her own child "as if he had never been born" (138). Maud's death-in-life syndrome is a result of both her enforced role as a part of her husband's life, like Fleda, and her fear of life caused by the pain she has suffered in seeing death everyday and having her husband and in-laws die horrible deaths in a plague which, like all plagues, strikes victims at random.

Maud's fear of the inexplicable is dramatised in her futile attempt to explain and order the baffling objects found on the corpses the River Man delivers to her. She keeps all of the unclaimed objects in a closet which she calls "her museum" (96),

trying to give the objects some sense of logic: "This was how she maintained order, how she gathered together some sense out of the chaos of the deaths around her" (165). She cannot accept the randomness of these objects and the impossibility of ever discovering the meaning behind them.

Similarly, the child is always "locked into a stiff, unbreakable pose" and for the first four years of his life does not respond to anything except the fish in the pond. The death-in-life syndrome afflicting the child reveals that he is a product of his society. He is burdened with the ideals of Western society which his father stood for and which his mother is also upholding. He could be said to be the product of a "spider-mentality." His father Charles was fascinated with only two things in life: embalming and spiders. His fascination with the art of embalming signifies his fascination with preserving an experience in a permanent state. His fascination with spiders stems from the predictable, mechanical, unemotional and independent nature of the insect. These obsessions compose the heritage of the child.

However, even though he is shrouded in this denial of the spiritual world, he represents a magical power which transcends this shroud. He himself is identified with water and, therefore, considering the meaning of water in this text, he represents the spiritual realm which has been denied existence. His wish to free the fish in the pond from their "monotonous, seasonal journey from pool to tank and back again" so that they

will have "the rest of the garden, the rest of the world" (75) signifies his desire to free his mother and himself from the ideological confines which imprison them.

The child, like Fleda, somehow has the ability to break out of the limitations which have been set on him by the ideals of his society. His seemingly random manipulation of language is one way in which he challenges the limitations his society places on language and the perception it allows. This randomness is a "revelation" to Patrick because it represents something which he has been too threatened by to confront in his work: For Patrick, the "ridiculous yet poetic associations" (111) of "This child's uttered nonsense was a revelation, not unlike the intoxicating leaps he had known himself to take, only once or twice" (112). For example, because the child associates the word "river" with "streetcars," Patrick knows he will be unable to see the river "without conjuring streetcars in his imagination" (112). Patrick, however, will obviously never be able to accept this freedom of language. The boy's magical power is lost on him.

The boy's power is not lost on his mother Maud, however. The child frees Maud from her imprisonment by taking out and sorting the objects of Maud's closet. He causes "all the objects that surrounded her, all the relics she had catalogued, to lose their dreadful power. He had shown her what they really were...merely objects" (215). He makes Maud realize that she has been obsessed with these "dead" objects and the impossible

task of making sense out of them, to the point of not allowing herself or her son to experience life instead of death. She now realizes that

he was the possessor of all the light and that it was she, not he, that had been the dark wall. She had never, since her husband's death, allowed the child access to the other, brighter side of that masonry, she had never allowed him to pull it down (215).

The description of the boy as the possessor of all light reinforces his image as the representative of the denied metaphysical element. The "architecture" of Maud's wall is the same as the architecture of the original Trueba house--the same as the architecture of Western culture. It is "dark"--dead--because of its obsession with order and control.

The objects of Maud's closet also represent the collection and placing of language in a "museum" of fixed ideas, similar to David's dream of a museum of military objects. Once language is seen for what it is, merely words which can take on whatever meaning is needed to express the multitudinous experiences of life, then language and thought are freed--the imagination is freed to experience life as a process and not as a fixed plan.

As she and her son stare at the corpse of Patrick, the boy repeats the word "Man" and "swim," and reaches out to touch Patrick's cuff. This is the death from which the boy, Maud, and Fleda have escaped. Maud pulls the boy away from the dead body, "closer to her own warm body" (233). This act is symbolic of the new life Maud has discovered, her new spiritual connection with her son.

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As in all magic realist texts, the emphasis on challenging the boundaries of language and perception in order to challenge conventional perceptions of reality appears formally as well as thematically in The Whirlpool. Urquhart's novel is replete with the techniques which challenge the conventions of the realist text.

One such textual strategy is the "curving back into history" (McMullin 19) in order to redefine it--the magic realist "re-visioning" process which recuperates lost voices. This process simultaneously emphasizes the magic realist theory of history and time: time is a cycle of renewal which is ever-evolving and cannot be fixed into eternal truths. Like the Latin American magic realists, Urquhart recuperates the past in order to reveal denied possibilities, as well as to subvert the idea that history can be accurately fixed in writing. The novel reveals that the past is always a living and changing aspect of the present, and that there are a myriad of correlations between past and present that have been hidden from our vision. If we can perceive the correlations, we can see that time is a cycle and that renewing the past in the present can help us to renew the present.

Urquhart "curves back into history" in her novel to recreate several different historical events and groups of people. The main text is set in Niagara Falls in 1889, and the framing text recreates Browning's final days before his death,

also in 1889. In the Browning story Urquhart subverts the idea that history is fixed by taking the liberty to redefine Browning to suit her own purposes. Urquhart has recreated Browning in such a way as to give new meaning to his life and death, as well as to Shelley's. She has created correlations between the two men and the characters in Niagara Falls in order to illuminate the main themes of the novel. The correlations illuminate the denial of the spiritual, and how it affected people in 1889. The recreated past illuminates the problems of Western society in the present. The creation of the Browning character shows the reader what forces imprison people in general, and the narratives of Fleda and Maud are juxtaposed tales of female imprisonment. The characters of the text fill in an imaginative way those gaps which have been left by official history.

Urquhart also subverts the rationalist/humanist perception of time occurring linearly, and emphasizes that experience is a process of learning and not a completed "text" in the form of the novel. The structure emphasizes that experience in life is labyrinthine because everything is subject to a multitude of irrational forces. First of all, the reader reads the entire main text before the framing story of Robert Browning is completed and this arrangement stresses the non-linear perception of events--the idea that events cannot be reflected chronologically, but in relation to other events. This is why the Browning story is correlated with other events of the year 1889, even though they are apparently completely unrelated. The

story shows readers the synchronicities which are possible between seemingly unrelated events. The reader becomes actively involved in the creative process of the text by establishing correlations between the Browning story and the main text, and between the text as a whole and the reader's world.

In addition, the main text vacillates between two seemingly unrelated story lines. The lack of a clear linear progression and the vacillation between the two different stories pose a challenge to conventional depictions of reality as linear, with clear-cut causes and effects. The lack of obvious and logical causality between the events in the two story lines challenges the notion that reality can be deciphered through logic. Again, the reader also has to make correlations between the two stories, becoming part of the process of recreating the past. Also, especially in the case of Fleda and David, the story is left incomplete. We do not know what happens to Fleda, just that she heads off on her own to continue her experiencing process. The fact that we do not know where she goes emphasizes that the "text" of life is always in a state of being created.

Fleda's journal entries, like Clara's in The House of the Spirits, are another important subversive feminist-magic realist technique in this novel. First, this act of exploring the individual experiences of everyday reality is especially relevant to women as a means of rediscovering the feminine identities shrouded by patriarchal ideology. Journal writing stresses that women need to get in touch with the elements of

femininity which are trivialized in order to empower themselves. Second, the journal entries suggest the need for people to have the freedom to use language in whatever form necessary to express reality as they perceive it. The journals are Fleda's "poetry," the poetry she ironically sought for years in all other sources except herself. The journals emphasize that experience of reality is an individual interpretive act--an ongoing exploration of the everyday activities which make up a person's reality. Both the rediscovery of feminine identities and of individual identities in general relate to the fact that it is the same ideology which distorts both, and that it is the feminist-magic realist challenging of this ideology that allows for the recovery of both.

Several structural subversions in The Whirlpool are directly linked to the supernatural. During the year in which the novel is set, there are many strange connections between people and events--connections which are explicable only on a supernatural level. These synchronicities are not logical cause-and-effect relationships. For example, in the year in which the novel is set, 1889, Browning dies and, because his story frames the other stories, it seems as though his death sets off a chain reaction of events in the summer of the same year in Niagara Falls. His death comes before Patrick's suicide, the child's emergence from his silence, the end of Maud's mourning period and the beginning of her new life, and Fleda's decision to begin her new life. Another connection is

that it is the summer both Maud and Fleda change their perceptions of life. Their simultaneous realizations reveal an odd synchronicity in the lives of two women who do not know each other. It is as though Browning's death gives new life to Maud, Fleda and the boy. His death, the metaphorical death of the Victorian rationalist ideology, frees the others to begin experiencing what this ideology has always denied them.

Also, Maud and her son's release reveals a strange synchronicity with Patrick's death. Patrick dies and the spiritual element in Maud and her son is freed. Patrick's death also occurs simultaneously with Fleda's abandonment of David and her false identity as a housewife. Again, it is as though the two events are correlated supernaturally. These magic realist supernatural synchronicities subvert conventional notions of causality, of how things happen in reality. They also dramatize that we do not really know the complete truth behind why things happen--there are many possible "explanations" for events which go beyond logic.

There are many other supernatural elements in the novel which also force the reader to re-examine and redefine his/her own perception of what is real. As in other magic realist texts, they are all described matter-of-factly by the narrator and are therefore supernatural elements enfolded "seamlessly" into a realistic setting. Some of these events are not necessarily supernatural in the conventional sense of the word, but, like the strange synchronicities described above, can be

defined as Chanady defines the supernatural: anything which "contradicts the laws of nature as we know them," and things which are described in an 'unreal' manner--defamiliarized. One example is Maud's recollection of Charles's story about meeting a man in the woods who had a large rattlesnake coiled around his walking cane, with its head tied near the bottom of the stick. The oddly-displayed snake represents not only the unpredictable forces of nature, which humans repeatedly try to control, but also the undeniable strangeness of certain experiences. Maud, at this point still attached to logical explanations, is annoyed that she will never know why this man had a snake wound around his walking stick.

The River Man is another example of the magic realist "unreal." He is depicted as a strange hermit who seems to belong to the more to the river than to the world of people. No explanation is offered by the novel for his strangeness. He has no name, no social identification; he somehow exists in the caves by the river, apparently with alcohol as his only sustenance; he is oddly associated with the river, the chaotic metaphysical realm, instead of with the physical world; he disappears and appears without a trace; he pulls the dead bodies from the river. All in all, he seems quite inhuman. However, in the magic realist style, neither the narrator nor the characters see him as particularly unnatural. Fleda, for example, completely accepts that he is not part of the world outside the river, the rational world, but is a completely irrational element. She

does not bother trying to understand him through logic, but merely accepts him for what he seems to be.

Other curious phenomena which are never explained are the strange cycles associated with the whirlpool. The whirlpool is described in such a way that it seems to have a mysterious yet natural, magnetic power over people. For example, every year when the ice breaks up and the whirlpool begins to flow again, people begin to "drown themselves in it" (48). The whirlpool seems to be a living entity in the natural world. Another example of this "life" in the whirlpool is its mysterious pattern of sometimes keeping the bodies for a long time before letting them out, and sometimes giving them up right away. Also, on rare occasions, according to an undefinable mysterious pattern, the whirlpool will release a perfect corpse, not a mangled and decomposed mess. Patrick's corpse turns out to be one of these perfect corpses which the river yields. There is no logical, scientific explanation for the perfect corpses, nor for the pattern of their ejection from the river. The mysterious cyclic nature of the whirlpool and the powers these cycles have over people relate to the mysterious cycles of birth, death, and rebirth in the natural world, cycles which are often not totally explicable by science as we know it. Also, this emphasis on the cycles of renewal in nature relates to the spiritual beliefs Indian cultures in both North and South America hold about these cycles and their mystical implications. This emphasis on the spiritual elements of the natural world,

also very evident in Latin American magic realist texts, show this mystical world working interdependently with the physical world.

Of all of the strange elements depicted in the novel, Maud's child and his association with Patrick is the most strange and the most recognizably supernatural. Everything about the child seems supernatural and yet, in keeping with the techniques of magic realism, also very human. His character and behaviour are described matter-of-factly by the narrator, and there is no explanation given for his strangeness. Like the River Man, he has no name, and there is never an explanation given as to why. He is in no way described as abnormal, inhuman, or a figment of someone's imagination. His birth is very casually associated by Maud with the death of a spider; Maud remembers that "the night of the daddy-long-legs quarrel she had dreamt about spiders, egg sacs, and webs, and that nine months later the child had been born" (96). This association is not given any "rational" explanation by the narrator. Since neither Maud nor the narrator sees any other explanation for his birth, neither can the reader. For all intents and purposes, the child is conceived through Maud's spider dream. He is the child of a daddy-long-legs. Neither Maud nor the narrator expresses any surprise at this, nor is any alternative explanation ever given for the conception of this child.

Metaphorically, one might argue, the child is that which is left out of Charles and his spider-like rationalism:

supernaturalism and free-association. So he is born as a foil of sorts. His mother Maud is dismayed by his strange behaviour, but ultimately she accepts it as normal and significant. She is influenced by his ordering of her closet objects, believing that it is her own behaviour which has been abnormal, and that it is she, not he, who has cut herself off from the natural world. Here magic realist techniques are working at their best. The child's apparently strange and supernatural behaviour is ultimately seen as significant and natural, while the apparently normal mother sees her own behaviour as abnormal. This is quite similar to the ironic reversal of normal and abnormal in The Biggest Modern Woman of the World. Anna Swan, as the main narrator and heroine of the story, is necessarily seen by the reader as normal.

The child is also clearly telepathic. He intuitively senses that Patrick, "the man," is in danger because he is going to swim the whirlpool. When Patrick first meets the child, the boy repeats apparently random words to him, but emphasizes the word "river." When Patrick says "whirlpool," obviously sensing that this child possibly knows something he does not and testing to see what he will say, the child "tenderly and carefully" says, "oh, oh, oh" and holds onto Patrick's cuff, rubbing it on his own chest (112). It seems that the child knows the significance of the whirlpool to Patrick, and knows that Patrick is in danger of killing himself.

His telepathic powers are also depicted when he desperately

repeats the phrase "the man" to Maud as he anxiously searches up and down the street. It is about this time that Patrick is actually entering the whirlpool. It is as though the child knows this and is feeling the loss of Patrick already. He is relieved when Maud acknowledges his phrase, as though he thinks she may be able to help him in his desperation. But after she rejects his words once again as random and meaningless, he seems to give up. He then builds a small replica funeral mound and begins to mourn, as though Patrick is already dead and the boy must mourn the loss (155).

The supernatural relationship between the boy and Patrick is a type of doppelganger relationship. This becomes evident when Patrick meets the child for the second time. The boy confuses his own identity with Patrick's: "The boy pointed at Patrick and said the word 'I.' Then he pointed at himself and said the word 'you.' " (188). The boy identifies himself and Patrick as two elements of the same person. He is the absent other half which Patrick has denied all his life. This denial is signified by the child's insular behavior which results from the others' misunderstanding and rejection of his mode of expression. However, he embodies the sensual, emotional, metaphysical element which survives after the denial has been overcome.

This doppelganger relationship is directly related to the Shelley and Browning doppelganger characters, which emphasizes the split between humans' physical, rational sides and their

spiritual lives. The Patrick/child doppelganger pair also suggests that Patrick, standing for the rationalist mentality, dies because he cannot accept the child--the metaphysical part of himself. Patrick clearly denies the child when he carefully separates himself from the child by correcting the child's identification "mistake." A spiritual communion with the child is "impossible and undesirable" (188), he decides. Patrick must cling to his image of himself as a rational and logical unit set apart from anything irrational. It is, furthermore, significant that the spiritual element is manifested in a child, for the text implies that spiritual knowledge is with us in the womb, but is lost when the child enters into the world, into society. This stresses the magic realist theory of the naturalness of supernatural experience to humans, and that it is the artificial structures of society that obliterate this naturalness.

Patrick and the child are again related as doppelgangers when Patrick's corpse is brought to Maud. This scene implies that, through Patrick's death, the child is granted a second chance to experience his whole self. The myth of the caul plays a significant part in this scene. The child had been born with a caul, which is supposed to be good luck according to Irish myth. But his caul has been disposed of, not kept by the family as the Irish tradition demands. The loss of the child's caul signifies the denial by the society of the full experience of his whole self. A piece of him has been destroyed. However, the film over Patrick's dead eyes reminds Maud of her child's

caul. Here, in Patrick's death, the boy's "caul" has been recovered. Also, the body seems to Maud "like a dead child" (232). He is the half of the boy which had to die in order for the boy himself, the "other" half, to come into full existence. The boy is freed from his dead life and pulled into the warmth of his natural identity--the emotional, sensual world which has, to this point, been denied him. The Western obsession with rationality has to die before people will be able to experience their spiritual selves as a natural part of their identities. Only then will people be able to communicate with other people spiritually, to abolish "self" and "other," "I" and "You," and to break out of their insular units as separate human beings.

In The Whirlpool, Jane Urquhart explores themes common to both feminism and magic realism. She has revealed the search for regional Canadian identities distinct from European cultures. She has explored the situation of women in patriarchal Western culture that dominated Canada in 1889 and still dominates it today. She has explored the denial of the spiritual and how it has affected our Western society. And she has linked all of these themes together under the common shadow of the rationalist/humanist ideology which dominates Western culture to reveal a feminist magic realist philosophy very similar to that found in both The Biggest Modern Woman of the World and The House of the Spirits. Like Allende's and Swan's novels, Urquhart's text views women as a source of hope for change in this culture because they retain a sense of the vital

metaphysical reality. Like the other two texts, The Whirlpool glimpses possibilities of what could be created if spirituality is re-awakened.

CONCLUSION

The early magic realists were greatly influenced by the beliefs of various indigenous and peasant cultures in Latin American countries--cultures which had been pushed to the periphery of society because they did not fit the Judeo-Christian, rationalist European culture which dominates Latin America. Writers like Carpentier and Borges began to reassess the validity of Western cultural values in the Latin American reality they knew. They found that indigenous and peasant cultures still retained values and beliefs which they believed had been denied and lost in mainstream Latin America, as they had been lost in European society. They found that Indian and peasant populations had managed to keep their beliefs in the vital connections between humans and the spiritual and natural worlds. Magic realism, then, became a re-evaluation of the validity of these repressed and all but obliterated alternative world views and an attempt to centralize them within Latin American society. The philosophy of the magic realist movement is that through languages created in fiction, alternative perspectives on reality are empowered. Through these languages the imagination is liberated from the Western rationalist values that dominate and control it, allowing it to perceive

possibilities beyond the rational, to see the vital spiritual connections between natural world and people, and among people.

The alternative world views, the "otherness," that magic realism seeks to empower has much in common with the "otherness" that feminists seek to empower--the alternative perspectives that women have managed to retain despite being marginalized by Western culture. The three feminist magic realist texts studied here dramatise theories that women, like indigenous peoples, retain knowledge of the instinctual, emotional, and spiritual sensibilities, as well as a sense of belonging to the natural world, not owning it. The feminisms in these novels reveal another hope for the recovery of these vital connections with the natural and spiritual worlds-- other sources of power with which to liberate imaginations and allow people to see alternative social possibilities, possibilities for breaking the cycles of violence, hatred, racism, and sexism which impede and destroy human potential. The feminist magic realist hybridizations of these novels create newer and stronger voices to empower the goals shared by feminism and magic realism. These three novels reveal that magic realism and feminism are intrinsically linked in that they both, like British Columbian Native artist Norval Morrisseau, seek to rediscover through art the "Indianness" in all of us, that part of us that "holds everything sacred:" the earth, ourselves, and each other.

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