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VOLUME I: LITERATURE

‘Lost, Unhappy and at Home’: The Impact of Violence on Irish Culture

Volume I: Literature

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Othering Reality: Magic Realism in Jan Carson's *Malcolm Orange Disappears* and *The Fire Starters*[1]

Magic realism is a surprisingly recent phenomenon in Ireland, considering the country's history of appropriation and resistance and the cultural weight of magic, legend, myth and folklore. However, in the last years, more and more writers have adopted this subgenre to engage with harsh realities and conflicts within or outside Ireland, among which we could include Anne Enright, Bernie McGill, Roisín O'Donnell, Oisin Fangan, Mia Gallagher or Cathy Sweeny. Given the unresolved tensions of the North and the new concerns and challenges triggered by Brexit, it does not come as a surprise that Northern Irish authors have also tended to a mode that favours the handling of problematic and controversial issues by means of fantasy and indirection. This is the case of Northern Irish writer Jan Carson, who has found in magic realism a most suitable form of expression to tackle her recurrent themes of violence, neglect and precarity, with humour and a certain lightness, especially in her first two novels, *Malcolm Orange Disappears* (2014)[2] and *The Fire Starters*

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2 Carson's debut novel has been out of print for some time, so it has remained largely ignored by critics, a circumstance initially celebrated by the author at the public interview delivered in the 20th AEDEI Conference (in Burgos, in May 2022). Though one can find narrative flaws in *Malcolm Orange* – an excess of digression and some disjointed stories – in comparison with the stylistic accomplishments of her well-crafted subsequent works, the novel forms an integral part of the present

(2019).[3] Though set at different times and places, these narratives address various forms of vulnerability, neglect and power, blending the magical and the real through fantasy, humour, defamiliarisation, exaggeration and the grotesque, in an attempt to challenge normalized societal wrongs and subvert political structures. By means of the blurring of all kinds of boundaries, the novels disclose a continuum of realms that fuses and confuses the very concepts of the real and the possible through which Carson renders marginal subjects visible to ultimately let them raise their voice against hostile environments.

Considering that literature is instrumental in bringing up sociopolitical concerns that invite to be scrutinized, and that narratives have a potential for transformation, the present proposal probes Carson's adoption of magic realism as a subversive mode that addresses problematic subjects and precarious forms of living in difficult times. Reversing the established order, characters in her novels engage in individual and communal ethics of care, which empower their lives to instate the necessary change of a disheartening world, though with different degrees of success. Examining how otherness is constructed and sustained, I will contend that, in the blurring of all kinds of boundaries, magic realism opens an alternative space where unreconciled positions can be thawed and where the vulnerable others of society might find a means to problematize dominant hierarchical structures. Consequently, as I hope to be able to demonstrate, the resulting otherness of magic realist novels, often simplistically interpreted as exotic or bizarre, carries with it a political ideology that unveils a deep-rooted potential and an agenda to uplift the underdog, the defenceless and the dependent, main concerns in Carson's fiction.

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analysis, since I will argue that the origin of Carson's magic realist approach is to be found in her early fictional accounts.

3 Her second novel has been the recipient of various literary awards, including the EU Prize for Literature in 2019, and the Kitschies Prize for Speculative Fiction in 2020. Her third, *The Raptures* (2022), also slightly engages with magic realism, though the uncanny prevails. Carson has also written several collections of short stories, including *Children's Children* (2016), *Postcard Stories* (2017), *The Last Resort* (2021), and her more recent *Quickly, While they Still Have Horses* (2024).

The term magic realism was coined by German critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a reality that was being expressed in the visual arts, much in tone with the German post expressionism of Max Beckmann and Georges Grosz, which used a realist aesthetic to expose the fantastic and the absurd. For him, magic should not be equated to mystic, since it existed outside its own realm, displaying a world of recognisable objects that looked estranged: 'I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world but rather hides and participates behind it' (Roth 1995: 16). In their adaptation to the literary medium, the Latin American writers Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel and many others adopted the term, making an extensive and multifarious use of it. To keep the narrative moving forward, fiction introduced the element of surprise, turning the unexpected into the probable and the incredible into the possible. From the 1960s, magic realism and its ramifications, including Carpentier's own term 'lo real maravilloso/the marvellous real',[4] developed in many countries within and outside Europe. It became then a global phenomenon mainly embraced by countries with a colonial or conflictive past, among which well-known figures such as Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Italo Calvino, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Ben Okri, Mia Couto or Louis de Bernières made a significant contribution.[5]

Nonetheless, in Ireland, magic realism is a relatively recent trend, as McAlinden has noted, in spite of the fact that 'Irish writing abounds in mysticism and fairy tale' (2005).[6] Carson has claimed that here 'almost

4 He had introduced this concept in the prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949) to separate the European from the Latin American tradition.

5 See Galván, Fernández and Elices' monograph for a thorough analysis of magic realism in contemporary literature written in English and of its subversive potential for critique (2001).

6 McAlinden adds that: 'We do myth and legend really well, building huge complicated Celtic middle earths for our creations to inhabit … As for gritty nail-on-the-head realism, we've got Dubliners, O'Casey, Banville, right up to Donal Ryan. Yet try to put the words 'Irish writer' and 'magical realism' into the same sentence. Try adding the words, Northern Irish, Protestant, theology graduate and the sentence seems absurd in the extreme' (2015).

every ordinary experience is infused with a sense of the mystic, while even our most transcendent moments feel rooted in the brick and dirty realism of everyday life' and that, for that reason, 'Ireland, with its healthy litany of bread-crustsmake-your-hair-go-curly superstitions, along with its hand-me-down myths and often illogical way of doing things, would seem like the ideal climate in which to cultivate a culture of what many simply refer to as "Strange Fiction" ' (qtd. by O'Donnell 2016). In this like vein, writers who have one way or another celebrated the mode in their fiction include O'Grady's *Motherland* (1991), Enright's *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), McGill's *Sleepwalkers* (2013), O'Donnell's *Wild Quiet* (2016), Fangan's *Hostages* (2016), Gallagher's *Shift* (2018), or Sweeny's *Modern Times* (2020), among a list that keeps growing. Deeply embedded in this mode, Carsons's writing 'makes her a one-person genre in Northern Ireland' (McCullough 2021), whose recurrent themes of identity and belonging find in magic realism the best form of expression.[7] Albeit, as she has clarified, the Bible was her peculiar source of inspirational interaction between the fantastic and the grotesque:[8]

> if you grow up on the King James Bible, the language is really beautiful. It's not just the meaning of the sentences, it's how they flow together … And the other thing is those allegories and metaphors and absurd, exaggerated images which are all through the Bible stories. They come to me quite naturally because that was my first language that I learned. (qtd. by Carey 2019)

Carson's debut novel, *Malcolm Orange*, tells the enduring story of an 11-year-old child, growing up in North America in a dysfunctional family always on the move. They literally travel for nine years in an old Volvo across nineteen states with 'eight whole grandparents' and a collection of objects, until he settles down with her mother and baby brother in a

7 Sherrat-Bado distinguishes magic realism in the Republic, 'primarily linked to ancient Celtic myth, folklore, or Catholicism' from that of Northern Ireland, with 'predominant[ly] explorations of psychological phenomena' (2018: 8).

8 Though Carson has recently admitted that she sees herself 'as a magic realist writer within the traditions of socio-political magic realists such as Gabriel García Márquez or Salman Rushdie' (Barros del Río 2023: 200).

Baptist Retirement Village in Portland, Oregon (Chapter 1).[9] Abandoned by a father and neglected by a self-absorbed and troubled mother, he is distressed when, one day, he suddenly finds holes in his body, perforations that keep growing but that nobody can see except himself: 'There were thousands of holes, millions perhaps, all across his face and belly, speckling his knees like sandpaper' (Chapter 1). With the assistance of a cohort of grotesque residents who live in the care centre where his mother works, he probes into his own disintegration, while he takes up the mission of saving the little community of elders affected by dementia from a precarious and neglected living. He befriends Soren James Blue, the daughter of the mentally disturbed Director of the clinic, her talking trans cat, Mr Fluff and the blind Cunningham Holt, a kind-hearted patient who has marbles for eyes and acts as a kind of surrogate father. Throughout the narration, the protagonist is often displaced by the stories of these bizarre characters, told in an episodic manner. Their prominent voices underscore Malcolm's impending disappearance, until the plotline eventually resolves into an ethics of care that contests the hazardous existence of the vulnerable at the hands of an unsettled order.

The Fire Starters is set in East Belfast in the summer of 2014, when the marching season is about to start. Threatened by menacing loyalist bonfires, which acquire such disproportioned heights that the town is engulfed by violence and chaos, magic realism emerges once again as a medium through which historically unhealed wounds are addressed. Amidst reality and fantasy, two stories of male trauma, emotional blockage and psychosocial maladjustment intertwine the lives of the protagonists Jonathan and Sammy, separated otherwise by class, opportunity and background. An ex-paramilitary haunted by a violent past, Sammy has inadvertently passed down his hatred to his son, the hazardous star fighter of the title, who is responsible for leading others into destruction, burning buildings and public spaces down. Jonathan, for his part, is an unconcerned doctor troubled by family neglect, who is seduced by a mysterious siren with

9 As I have used an eBook edition of *Malcolm Orange Disappears*, the numbers that appear in brackets refer to the chapters, not to pages. The same will apply to *The Fire Starters*.

whom he fathers a baby daughter, a liminal half-human, half-mythical creature with a potential to harm. In their distressed journeys towards redemption, the two characters will cross paths, unveiling, in turn, the existence of marvellous doomed children whose bodies carry the burden of an endemic sickness provoked by decades of hostility and terror. Only when the reality of Northern Ireland outshines fiction, blurring the boundaries between the real and the (im)possible, their specular narratives of trauma and vulnerability will have the transformative potential for change.

The adoption of a typically magic realist ethos in the two novels exposes how realism and logic fail to explain such consequential historical grievances. Instead, magic is the driving force that superimposes the supernatural, the grotesque and the unfamiliar with the credible and the possible in an often comic style: 'The left eye was never found. The right eyed popped clean out of the socket – removing a small section of eyelid in the process – and was located hanging by the thinnest wire of nerve from the tip of his nose' (Carson 2014: Chapter 6).[10] Ultimately, magic realist novels, in their hybridity, foreground the fantastic to reveal the artificial construction of reality. Discussing the duality involved in this mode, Suzanne Baker has explained that: 'While the reader need not believe in the possibility of the extraordinary events narrated, the characters and, above all, the narrator must believe that all events recounted are equally real. The narrator cannot raise questions or treat the events as puzzling' (1993: 83). In its capacity to blur the categories of the real – the tangible objects that are apprehended by the senses – with the surreal – phenomena that exist beyond the sensorial system –, the magic realistic novel transcends given categories and subverts dominant narratives raising pressing concerns about harsh, hostile or unruled conditions, to denounce precariousness, vulnerability and impotence:

10 Techniques of estrangement or defamiliarisation were initially employed by the Russian formalists, who believed that art had to represent reality in an original way in order to challenge our tendency to take things for granted: 'The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important* [sic]' (Shklovsky 1965: 4).

> Nothing has been resolved or achieved but this is not considered failing. This is how it has been in Belfast every summer since the Agreement. The same hot anger rises at the end of June and goes stamping up and down the little streets. Stamping and shouting and raising Cain all the way through July until, by August's end, the energy's gone right out of it. The spite leaves gradually, like a pendulum losing swing. (Carson 2019: Chapter 14)

In the case of *Malcolm Orange*, the othering of reality is carried out by means of its engagement in extreme forms of vulnerability at individual and communal levels. As scholarly work on the vulnerable has proved, though everybody might experience it throughout the different stages of life, it mostly affects children and the elderly, since they are dependent in the physical, cognitive and emotional domains (Dodds 2014: 184). Carson's novel cleverly makes her novel gravitate around the two: while child vulnerability is embodied by Malcolm, his 3-month-old unresponsive brother Ross and the neglected Surey – whose nickname Sorry bears the weight of her unwanted birth – the dependent elders at the centre are extreme examples of neglect. The novel unwraps the dysfunction of several institutions around them: the family, which proves unable to provide or bond, normalizes violence against women – Malcolm's mother is abandoned by his father to give birth in a parking lot without medical assistance – and neglects children; and the institutionalisation of elderly patients affected by dementia and other impairments, who have been left behind by their families and by a health care system that does not cater for their needs. In fact, the director of the centre, Dr Blue, is a mentally disturbed man, a danger to society and one of the targets of Carsons's criticism.

Accordingly, the author's magic realist account functions as a resistance narrative that gives voice and agency to vulnerable others, challenging received assumptions about the weak, the defenceless and the dependent. The opening of the novel is superb, in this regard, blurring reality and magic in a comic but solemn statement: 'Malcolm Orange was beginning to disappear. On Monday evening, preoccupied by the tiny perforations which had just that morning appeared across his forearms, he excused himself from the supper table early' (Chapter 1). Taking the holes as extended metaphors for the various losses of the patients at the clinic, including sight, movement, strength or memory – and with it, their own stories – Malcom's body

becomes a text that pleads to be read at the backdrop of a ruthless world that renders them invisible. Such othering of reality rests upon two distinct mechanisms: on the one hand, the artificial literary devices that allow the real to be suspended in fantasy, through exaggeration, the absurd, the bizarre or the unfamiliar; and on the other, the focus on the real marginal characters alternating their protagonism. Since dementia affects memory, their lives are also at the risk of disappearing. In their struggle to be listened to before they vanish, their stories digressively compete for space, displacing Malcolm's and creating a rich and diverse narrative tapestry that contests common prejudices and preconceptions.

Traditionally the impaired, the disabled and the demented have been socially stigmatized, concealed in families and largely absent from public life. Therefore, people tend to think that they are a minority, whereas research has shown that the real proportions are usually higher than estimated.[11] Promoting disabled people's rights and making them visible is a relatively recent concern now that societies have grown more and more aware of these issues. Still, they tend to be noticed by their own limitations or dysfunctions, and not as individuals.[12] Carson's rendition of their stories in an atmosphere of fantasy and magic, evading the rules of reason, invest their funny and bizarre behaviours of a weighted truth amidst slack medical practices. Contrary to McAlinden, who believes that the novel 'does not require a suspension of disbelief, and such a suspension is not possible. At no point does the reader lose touch with the sensation of being a reader'

11 As a recent study demonstrates, still nowadays over 90 per cent of websites hide disabled men and women, 'the disabled community is still severely overlooked, and more often than not, all that is focused on is their disability. While they are 'valued'. by focusing only on their disability, we hinder their full integration into society' (Turner 2022).

12 Dementia has become a growing concern in academia. See the following studies for further insight: Rebecca Bitenc's *Reconsidering Dementia Narratives: Empathy, Identity and Care* (2020), Martina Zimmermann's *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing* (2017), or Lucy Burke's *Representing Alzheimer's: Writing, Memory and Subjectivity* (2009). Besides, Carson, who apart from being a writer is a community arts facilitator, is the editor of *A Little Unsteadily Into Light – New Dementia Inspired Short Fiction*, with Jane Lugea (2022).

(2015), I contend that the textual fabric of the nonlinear narrative rests precisely upon a suspension of disbelief that engrosses the reader in events and circumstances that escape the rational apprehension of the world. Thus, the truth of the text and the truth of the upended realm of the novel become contested sites. Not only are mental disabilities, impairments, dysfunctions or other often-hidden issues unveiled, they are seen through a distorted lens from which the reader can confront a merciless and precarious realm ruled by unexpected occurrences. Take for instance how the disorganized, though cohesive group, 'The People's Committee for Remembering Songs', is created. Glimpsing that without memory their existence might disappear, the elders gather to remember the old songs that shape their identities and give meaning to their lives. The resulting empowerment is thus brought out by their sense of togetherness, their commitment and their celebration of aging, effecting a communal ethics of care absent in society.

The patients suffer from memory loss, but not from the capacity to see through the practices of the Director of the clinic, Mr Blue, who is a menace to their mental stabilities. In a distinctive magic realist disclosure, a reversal of reality is at play, featuring the sinister Doctor as a psychopath in need of assistance. He is, in fact, the most sordid and grotesque character in the novel and the object of a harsh criticism against the abuses and neglect of mental health and care centres. Such resistance to dominant power structures and to invisibility, transmitted through the reversal of the hierarchical order, is intrinsically linked to the socio-political ethos of the magic realist mode, which, as Slemon has observed, 'display[s] a preoccupation with images of both borders and centres' with the aim at 'work[ing] toward destabilizing their fixity' (1988: 13). The novel ultimately undermines how the life experiences of the people affected by different forms of impairments have been articulated, while also underlying the wrongs of dogmatic discourses on mental issues and ageing.

Against the menacing world of careless adults, the imaginative Malcom is the most emotionally intelligent and imaginative character in the novel. His rationality and devotion to research in his relentless inspection of evidence, 'draft[ing] a chart to monitor the progress of his own disappearance', contrasts with the magical realm of the novel, when he concludes that it is likely that: 'every young man, approaching puberty, is temporary struck

down with perforations and I, with my absent father and not-quite-right-in-the-head mother, have simply never been warned' (Chapter 1). Besides, his disappearance due to an extreme lack of attention, makes him apt to read human emotions and recognize vulnerability in others, and places him at the centre of a transformative narrative with a healing potential. His friendship with Cunningham Holt is mutually educational since, through them, the narrative unveils a wealth of other resources in the elders, mainly creative, musical and artistic, celebrating an often-hidden reality. In the downturn realm of the novel, Malcolm is the one who minds his disturbed mother and his baby brother –permanently left unattended in a shock drawer used as a crib – practising an ethics of care shared with the residents, genuinely interested in feeding each other with their individual stories. At the end of the novel, neither Malcolm nor the residents are at risk of disappearing anymore, since they have found that belonging and social support are antidotes against vulnerability. Their purpose, gathering strength to help Malcolm and Cunningham Holt and to free themselves from the merciless director, proves to be the communal force that shifts Carson's narrative of resistance against silence and forgetting into one of transformation through care and support.

In the case of *The Fire Starters,* magic realism finds a more attuned scenery in Northern Ireland. A mode intrinsically associated with power concessions, clashed identities, control and hierarchy, make this setting fit to engage in a 'conflicted consciousness … that discloses the antagonism between two views of culture, two views of history' (Wilson 1995: 222). Though, as Heidemann has argued, 'the complexity of Northern Ireland's colonial history does not lend itself to an easy articulation of self and Other' (2016: 21), I will argue otherwise. The wonders that permeate the reality of East Belfast, subverting the limits of the existing order, generate an alternative (dis)placed, where irreconcilable positions are challenged, consigning the others of society to centre stage. Attesting to this liminality, a modern siren drives the plot of the *Fire Starters* making its double literal and metaphorical meaning playfully resonate all throughout the narration. While the siren allegorically personifies the mythical creature who

lured men through her magical voice,[13] sirens are an unceasing presence warning people of danger. Haunted by the two types of sirens – in fact, the dual meaning of the word is provided in the first page of the novel – Jonathan and Sammy navigate their individual journeys towards an (im) possible redemption: 'One morning I was I. The next, I was we. There was not enough time to prepare; not enough time to run away' (Chapter 1).

On the one hand, the loud sirens that alert people of the menace of the Tall fires across Belfast are Sammy's nightmare once he recognizes his son Mark behind a black hoodie and mask, and realizes that he is the fire starter of the title, causing havoc and fuelling the minds of vulnerable others. With a past of indiscriminate violence and brutality perpetrated on 'the others', he has involuntarily passed down his hatred to his son, a young man with no ideology or political vindications. Acknowledging such blatant truth does not change anything: 'He needs to tell his son that violence is a passed-down thing, like heart disease or cancer' (Chapter 3). More so, Mark is a victim of an ingrained wrath that carries the wounds of intergenerational trauma and, subsequently, a perpetrator of further harm. On the other, the rational, educated and sceptical Jonathan finds himself answering an emergency call of a despaired woman one night, only to discover that she is a siren. Seduced by her, he is lured into her magical world and ends up fathering a half-human, half-magical baby siren, Sophie, a liminal creature with alleged powers and a potential to harm. Embodying hybridity, her otherness has the ability to shatter the foundations upon which Jonathan's life has been sustained. As an unloved son and a loveless person, he does not hesitate to carry out the savage act of cutting his daughter's tongue, before she is able to speak and turn into a dangerous evil. Resuming his work as a doctor and adopting his new role as father, while lacking essential social and emotional skills, he is confronted with the truth that lies at the heart of the town, and to which he has kept a blind eye. Belfast is affected by an

13 Interestingly, in Greek mythology, sirens were bird-women, not mermaids, as Elbein clarifies, explaining that their 'seductive power lies with their otherworldly, avian knowledge'. According to a new translation of Homer's *Odyssey*: 'They inhabit the water, the air, and the earth', and are 'also associated with song; they have voices that are not human voices, and kinds of movement that are not the same as human kinds of movement' (2018).

endemic illness and now risks being swallowed by historical unresolved grievances that have been passed on to the young generations.

Thus, Jonathan and Sammy's individual distress as (ir)responsible wounded fathers mirrors each other at the backdrop of the real Northern Irish troubles.[14] Whereas Sammy carries his guilt by pilgrimaging across Belfast in search of a doctor who might release his burden, Jonathan's visit to the underworld propels him back to a life that overthrows his solipsistic nature to embrace fatherhood, once the word 'da' comes from his daughter's lips. With a respective offspring menacing society, the two fathers initiate a journey towards redemption in a town sick with hidden symptoms – I am evoking here Deirdre Madden's first novel of the same title – that cry to be unveiled. And these hidden symptoms are further embodied by a community of characters with magical superpowers, who also occupy a liminal space. The so called 'Unfortunate children' have been magically affected by terrible gifts – a boy with wheels instead of feet, a daytime vampire, a flying child … –, which condemn them to marginal lives as others from society. Like Malcolm, whose body carried the trauma and scars of the neglected others, these children, with their extraordinary dysfunctional capacities embody the ingrained pain of a troubled society. Analogously, a community of parents exercise an ethics of care providing support for each other while they try to manage their misfortunes: 'Doctor, we meet every Thursday evening in the Portakabin behind Inverary community centre. Sometimes the children come. Sometimes it's just the parents. It's been a godsend having people to talk to, people who understand' (Chapter 11). The socio-political critique of the novel is once again carried out through subversion. In the realm of the novel, an upended reality exposes how the curse of the baby siren or of the magic children seem more real than the dangerous Tall fires destroying Belfast, since their afflictions are metaphors for the overlooked symptoms of a suffering community from endemic and intergenerational violence.

14 In Carson's *Children's Children*, there are stories of parents who are responsible for the sinister and sad lives of their children, to whom they have passed down their anger and hate.

Yet, in contrast to the endowed magic of these characters, the Tall bonfires are the true leitmotivs of the novel, moving action and blurring the two realms with such menacing presence that they look unreal: 'In the East, people are torn. It is part of their culture to burn things, yet they cannot possibly condone burning without order' (Chapter 1). Interestingly, Carson has recalled how the writing of her novel was partly inspired by a talk given in the United States about the traditional bonfires of the Protestant community in July, when the audience believed that she was narrating an instance of magic realism: 'They couldn't get their heads around a 70-foot bonfire in an urban environment. So that was a starting point between combining magic realism and the culture in east Belfast' (qtd. by McGoran 2019). Indeed, a reality so intrinsic to Northern Ireland but so alien to other cultures is an extremely powerful way to defamiliarize truth through the distorted lens of magic realism. In a recent interview, the author has added that:

> I like the way unusual or fantastical elements can be used as extended metaphors to explore complex or even problematic socio-political themes in a way which provides a kind of lens to see these themes through fresh eyes. An unlikely, absurd or fantastical element in a story about something which the reader might feel they are quite familiar with – say the story of the Troubles in Northern Ireland – can often arrest the reading experience and shock the reader into seeing things from a new perspective or in a different context. I often use supernatural elements to this end. (Barros 2023)

To conclude, I have tried to argue throughout the present analysis that though the term magic realism seems oppositional in its oxymoronic configuration, there is no divide between the real and the magical. In fact, the resulting blurring of boundaries discloses a continuum of realms that fuses and confuses the very concepts of the real and the possible. In the novels covered in this chapter, Carson renders visible vulnerable subjects that find a means with which to raise a voice and defend themselves against a hostile environment. Through them, she challenges existing assumptions about the weak, the dependent and the impaired as well as received ideas about institutional support. Reversing the established order, they engage in individual and communal ethics of care that bring transformation through healing and challenge prevailing artificial borders between health and illness or reason and emotion. The author's most significant achievement

in this regard is the subversion of hierarchical narratives and dominant discourses that transgress power and establish new orders. The resulting otherness addressed in magic realist novels, often interpreted as exotic, carries a socio-political ideology that reveals its intrinsically subversive potential and its political agenda to empower the underdog, the vulnerable and the dependent. In contrast to the apparent lightness of magic realist novels, I hope to have been able to demonstrate that they should be read as political artefacts that through indirect devices unearth unresolved and ingrained societal issues.

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