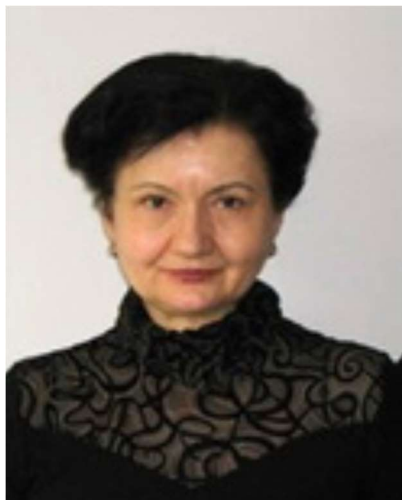


***IN HONOREM
MARIA-ANA TUPAN - 75***

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing), *The Key to Change. Interdisciplinary Essays in Cultural History* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017), *The Kantian Legacy of Late Modernity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), *Realismul magic* (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Române, 2013), *Relativism/Relativity: The History of a Modern Concept*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), *Modernismul si psihologia. Încercare de epistemologie literară. Modernism and Psychology. An Inquiry into the Epistemology of Literary Modernism* (Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Române, 2009); *Genre and Postmodernism* (Bucuresti: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, 2008), *A Survey Course in British Literature*, 2 vols. (Editura Universității din București, 2004). Publishing mainly in the areas of literary theory, with a focus on the nexus of literature, science and philosophy, her works are as many occasions for revisiting and reinterpreting canonical status (such as Wilhelm Wundt as philosopher of phenomenological constitution), tracing travelling concepts (objective correlative), or identifying non-literary sources (Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Plato's *Timaeus*, *Othello* and the *Quran*).

MIRCEA ELIADE AND ALEJO CARPENTIER IN LIGHT OF R.G. ECHEVARRÍA'S ONTOLOGICAL/ EPISTEMOLOGICAL BINARY IN MAGICAL REALISM¹

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Abstract:

Associated with German post-expressionism, new objectivity, French surrealism and dadaism, magic realism is regarded as an ontological scandal, a violation of the logic of identity through the invention of a third level of reality. The name was coined by a German critic and art historian, Franz Roh, in his book Nach-Expressionismus. Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei, published in 1925, and employed again in Foto-Auge, a book on the new photography jointly published by Roh with Jan Tschichold which served as a catalogue for the avant-garde Film und Foto exhibition (FiFo) held in Stuttgart between May and June 1929. By then, however, Roh's essay had already been translated into Italian and Spanish and promoted by prominent thinkers of the day, such as Jose Ortega y Gasset, who published it in the influential Revista de Occidente in Madrid in

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² <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=55375717500>

1927, and by Massimo Bonterupelli, who translated it for the Italian journal, 900 [Novecento].

The prompt and resonant international echo generated by Roh's new art can hardly be understood otherwise than on the assumption that it was striking a familiar ring in the rapidly changing and polyphonous score of European modernism. Reputed for its international and heterogeneous character, modernism is thus revealed to have been crossed by some common currents of poetic matter and energy. The present essay sets out to dig up the roots of a hybrid, literary and plastic artistic mode in the earlier half of the last century, and to identify legacies in the aftermath of Roh's celebrated manifesto.

Keywords: magic; realism; idealist pragmatism; surrealism; new objectivity; magic deed; Mircea Eliade; Giovanni Papini; Franz Roh; Alejo Carpentier.

INTRODUCTION

In light of recent research, The New Objectivity that had succeeded expressionism in the Weimar Republic benefited from Rudolf Carnap's analytical philosophy of language and formal studies of the new physics (relativity theory), which he applied to a theory of space.³ Conceived as a gloss on the post-expressionist painting of the Weimar Republic (19128 – 1933), Roh's book was, in a way, the art critic's counterpart to a philosophy which was looking for a third way: cooperation of experience and reason, a synthesis of traditional empiricism and traditional rationalism. By positing a relation of equivalence between thing and concept, Carnap filled the empirical world with intelligibility. As he defends his

³ See Hans Joachim Dance, "Rudolf Carnap: Philosoph der Neuen Sachlichkeit", in *Der junge Carnap in historischem Kontext: 1918–1935 / Young Carnap in an Historical Context: 1918–1935*. (pp. 75-105), Springer, 2021 (pp. 75-105)

theory in *The Logical Structure of the World*, this superposition of thing and concept does not mean reification of the concept but functionalisation of the object, being endowed with a specific function in the structure of the world, which has its logic. The thing is no longer created (Kantianism) or apprehended (realism). (Carnap 1967, 10). It is constructed. Alternatively, we may say that it is reborn as a thing endowed with meaning, which is its essence that comes forth gradually in a process of phenomenological constitution.

Out of his discussions with Carnap, Roh will have associated the construction of the thing with an act of magic, of conjuring it before the observer's eyes. Here is a passage in *Nach-Expressionismus* where he emulates Carnap's model of the constructional system:

We recognise the world, although now - not only because we woke up from a dream - we look at it with different eyes. We are offered a new style that claims and celebrates the world. However, this new world of objects is foreign to Realism. It uses techniques that lend everything a more profound meaning and reveal mysteries that perpetually threaten the safe tranquillity of simple and naive things. This offers a subdued admiration of the magic of being [...], which means that the ground on which the most diverse ideas can take root has been recaptured, albeit in a new way. The new art is reduced to representing before the eyes, intuitively, the inner figure of the outer world. (Roh 1925)

Magic and concomitantly realism amount to a superposition of opposite states analogous to the corpuscle/ wave duality, which had recently been certified as the nature of light by quantum physics. Quantum

entanglement and the polyvalent logic it had inspired provided epistemic founding to the new aesthetics considered by Franz Roh appropriate for that age dominated by the mundane. The object of the new style was reality but looked at in new ways. *Foto-Auge*, the title of the album of what was qualified as post-expressionist art, entrusted photography with the function of realist rendering of the object, whereas the eye was coping with the burden of its construction and positioning within the general scheme of things.

The new genre was to pay attention to accurate detail, this close observation being an exercise whose finality was activating the mystery of life. The eye keeps looking at the object until its essence bursts into the open.

Functionalism implies meaning arising from positionality. A thing gathers meaning from the structure within which it is inserted. Discontinuity in time and space is made up for by the unexpected relationships among objects gathered from heterogeneous spaces. The stress falls on language, which is supposed to be constructed rather than named or mirrored. Roh created a taxonomy of the technical devices of magic realism in comparison to expressionism, for instance:

ecstatic objects
the stifled object
obvious
.....

plain objects
the explanatory object
obvious and enigmatic
.....

This stress on language rather than vision, world outlook, theme, ideas, etc., was another legacy from Carnap, and it explains the vitality of magic realism after the linguistic turn in postmodernism.

1. The Magic Realism before Magic Realism

Currently in use were in the earlier half of the twentieth century such oxymoronic phrases as *inner fantastic* (Giovanni Papini), *magic deed* (Mircea Eliade), *magic idealism* (Julius Evola), *magic realism* (Franz Roh), sometimes created under the influence of radical changes in science by prominent thinkers in their attempt to reach a unified view of being. Although they carried different names, they were underwritten by a common pursuit: the defamiliarisation of the everyday, infusing a sense of magic in the most ordinary things humans encountered daily. It was Evola who looked for an epistemological justification of this radical break, not only with the rationalist and materialist school of thought but also with psycho-physics, which had dominated the later half of the nineteenth century, let alone German idealism, Hegelianism, Kantianism – except a left-wing Hegelianism represented by Nietzsche. For Wundt and James, the masterminds of psycho-physiological pragmatism, the action of the world on the body was the primary source of psychic life, no matter how subjective it might become on the way of its processing through associative processes complexifying the bond between the mind and its objective correlatives.

The new philosophy was centred on the self – which might not sound different from Descartes or Kant – with an essential difference from the earlier tradition: the self is auto-originated, and the world is its projection through abstractions and dependent on its will. The ego can will a world into existence – precisely what magic had always been supposed to do.

Evola's explanations evolve around the late outbreaks in science. The matter had practically vanished. In light of the new scientific theories, the world was a map of the mind's faculty of abstraction, wholly disconnected from any empirical determination: blown up into quantum particles, the atom had been left "a mere

pragmatic hypothesis"; entropy and energy were a matter of integrals, algebraic functions; the hyperspace and the multi-dimensional systems of Riemann (6) and Lobatschewsky were not existences in the realistic and materialistic sense of the term. The realisation that science is a creation of the spirit, both autonomous and arbitrary, opened the door to the myriad worlds of dreams and occultism. Magic was the force, manifest in primitive man since prehistorical times, of bringing a world into existence, and the name of the new field was concrete or material idealism. This force defined man as *potenza* (potency) and "absolute individual."⁴

Evola was writing his "Essays on Magical Idealism" in 1925, the year of the birth of Magical Realism as an aesthetic manifesto. However, ideas like those articulated in these essays have long been brought to public consciousness.

As early as 1903, **Giovanni Papini** wrote in the *Leonardo Journal* about the "Death and Resurrection" of philosophy. The philosophical turn could be summed up as the shift from dualism (between theory and practice, generality and particularity, internal and external consciousness) to the holism of the particular and the personal in the magic act. The magical attitude implies converting ideas, as the fruit of creativity and imagination, into facts. The "Florentine Pragmatist Club" was the new version of an idealist pragmatism, open to the ideas of the esoteric Guénon circle in France.

In 1906, Papini published his essay *Il tragico quotidiano* (*The Tragical Everyday*), where he elaborated on the idea that an inner sense of the fantastic wraps up

⁴ Julius Evola's world picture derived from his works, *Saggi sull'Idealismo magico* (1925), *L'Uomo come Potenza* (1926), and *Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto* (1927)

things into colours that make them look marvellous. What Mikhail Shklovsky was to relegate to the technicality of writing in 1917 ("Art as Technique"), Papini reserved for the exercise of imagination's magic potential:

Our wonder and our fear come from the rarity of things that produce them, and nothing can make us believe that the usual things are not, virtually, greater marvels than that which some seek out the most singular adventures and spectacles. [...]

I set out to arouse wonder and fear but didn't want to resort to strange adventures and exceptional inventions such as those designed by "fantastic novelists". The marvellous and the terrible of these stories [...] are the result of something extraordinary but external, almost always, to the souls of the personages. The terrible consists of the strangeness of the abnormal situations in which ordinary men find themselves, and amazement arises from the contact between ordinary people who suddenly find themselves in an exceptional world. There, the source of the ordinary fantastic is material, external, and objective. I have been looking for another source. I wanted to bring out the fantastic from the very soul of men, I imagined making them think and feel exceptionally when faced with ordinary facts. (Papini 2010)

In a review of the 2022 edition of Papini's *Stories (I raccoti)*, Rpberto Pacifico calls Papini a "precursore del realismo metafisico", comparing his geographical and anthropological fantasy to the narrative mode of Poe, Kafka, or Borges, which explores what Freud defined as *unheimlich*, unfamiliar.

Published one year before Roh's essay on Magic Realism, **Andre Breton's** first surrealist manifesto exalted the same capacity in the artist to stir a sense of wonder at the everyday encounter with the world. The world of art was so disconnected from ordinary life that practically the poet's work began at night when going to sleep and dreaming. The names mentioned by Breton as elective affinities are Jonathan Swift, a master of fantasy, absurd and the grotesque, Alfred Jarry, with his absurdist plots and geographies, the nonsensical Dadaism, the morbid and sardonic Lautréamont a.o. He quotes Pierre Reverdy on the new poetic idiom grounded precisely in the magic realist trespassing of the logic of identity: "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and accurate, the stronger the image will be, the greater its emotional power and poetic reality..."* (*Nord-Sud*, March 1918)

As well as magic realism, a hybrid plastic/ textual mode, surrealism relied on visual but disconcerting images, conveying some symbolic meaning. Breton's image of a man cut in two by the window, walking the streets with the window perpendicular to the axis of his body, could be read as an allegory of the reversed relationship between inner and outer, world and mind when looking at reality through the magic mirror of art.

While glossing on two articles published by **Mircea Eliade** in 1928-29, "Cuvinte despre o filosofie" (A Few Words on Philosophy) and "Schiță pentru un îndreptar," (Sketch of a Guidebook), Liviu Bordaș identifies in Evola the epistemological source of Eliade's distinction between the mystic and the magical act.

Dincolo de teorie, pentru Evola, idealismul magic concordă pe deplin cu „gnoseologia orientală” [...] A cunoaște înseamnă a proiecta Eul înăuntrul ființelor, a transfera propria interioritate dintr-o individuație în alta, intus-ire. [...] Ceea ce există în afara Eului apare ca atare numai pentru că există la fel înăuntrul lui (saṃskāra din filosofia indiană). Principiul fundamental al magiei este că modul în care apare lumea nu constituie o instanță extremă, că ea nu e un în sine inconvertibil, ci un fenomen în funcție de pura putere a Eului. Acționând în plan transcendental asupra saṃskāra, se pot înlătura condițiile sub care apare realitatea și, prin urmare, experiența concretă a Universului. (Bordaș 2012)⁵

The possibility was thus created for the existence of a form of cognition where to know meant to be, as one's consciousness was the object of the quest.

The source of the mystic/ mythic dichotomy which crops up in the debates over the late 1920s was Franz Roh, who, in his 1925 *Post-Expressionism*, is pitting "mystic" – the descent of mystery to the world – against "mythic"

⁵ “Leaving aside theory, for Evola, magical idealism is similar to ‘oriental gnoseology’ [...] To know means to project the Ego into beings, to transfer one’s interiority from one individuation to another, empathy. [...] What exists outside the Self appears as such only because it also exists within it (saṃskāra in Indian philosophy). The fundamental principle of magic is that the way the world appears is not an extreme instance, which is not inconvertible in itself, but a phenomenon depending on the pure power of the Ego. Acting transcendently on the saṃskāra, one can remove the conditions under which reality appears and, therefore, the concrete experience of the Universe.” (Liviu Bordaș, “Faptul magic și faptul mistic. Prima întâlnire a lui Eliade cu opera lui Evola.” *Revista de Istorie și Teorie Literară* (București), s.n., VI, nr. 1-4, 2012, pp. 355-400.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368720107_Faptul_magic_si_faptul_mistic_Prima_intalnire_a_lui_Eliade_cu_opera_lui_Evola_Revista_de_istorie_si_teorie_literara_Bucuresti_XLVIII_nr_1-4_2012_pp_355-400

where the mystery is in hiding, lurking and stirring behind things.

It is true, however, that the influence supposed by Bordas to have been exerted by Evola's essay, *Sulla metafisica del dolore e della malattia*, over Eliade, who received in Calcutta the last two issues of the journal *Ur* in 1928, may indeed be traced to his novel, *Isabel and the Devil's Waters*, where the protagonist tries on Evola's scheme of the three attitudes to the spiritual - devotional, intellectual and magic. Focusing on his studies in the beginning in search of glory, living as a devoted husband in a dream induced by malaria, he finally chooses the force of his spirit to do an existentialist project, which proves the magical force of his will. Living begins by gainsaying life, as Eliade says in "Apologia virilitatii" (*Gandirea*, August-September 1928), by going against biology, against society. Like Jesus, the spirit incarnated; he will be reborn through the newly born child of Isabel by another man, but his own in spirit. Like a magician acting on the surrogate object of his target, the self's will becomes a reality.

Mademoiselle Christina, the short novel published by Mircea Eliade in 1936, mixes reality and fantasy on the same timeline in a characteristic magic realist fashion. The archaeologist digs into the remote past - the antiquity - only to find correspondences with the near past of a decayed family of boyars (the centre scene is that of supper, common to the two worlds and suggesting the successive incarnations of some universal spirit in the "body and blood" of the world of matter) is the disciple of a historical person - Romanian historian, Vasile Parvan. Giovanni Papini's idea of the fantastic as a psychological rather than visionary experience - *fantastico interno* rather than the *fantastico esterno* of the previous century (*Poesia*

483) - is threading Eliade's plot in a way which comes very close to Papini's *Gentiluomo malato*. With Papini, the fantastic changes from an experience of transgression to one of dreaming (from "esperienza di trasgressione" in the nineteenth century to "un carattere onirico" in the twentieth). Similarly to Papini's character, Eliade, the protagonist in this novel, believes that he is imprisoned in someone's dream who turns out to be himself and is satisfied that nobody is trying to wake him up. He is afraid of Christina's ghost as long as he believes her to be intruding from the outside. He no longer fears The ghost when he expells his reality-attuned self (the character's name is Egor, maybe a pun on Ego). It is part of his inner world. Roh says he looks at the world as if he had just woken up from a dream but is trailed by its dreamy clouds of tamed unreality.

In 1932, J.L. Borges published an essay, "Narrative Art and Magic", exploring the opposite way of creating a sense of the marvellous in fiction. His object lesson is *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) by William Morris, while his avowed purpose is that of explaining the Preraphaelite's technique of creating a solid appearance of factual truth in order to achieve that willing suspension of disbelief which, for Coleridge, is the essence of poetic faith. Morris succeeded, concludes Borges, and he would like to determine how.

He dwells fastidiously on the multitude and precision of details which render mythical scenes life-like, on the simulation models of actual feelings and emotional responses to events, as if to realise the generic parameters of Roh's magic-realist poetics.

2. The Aftermath

On his return to Cuba, Alejo Carpentier felt that the twin European poetics of surrealism and magic realism

could no longer engage his imagination or serve as an adequate lens for embodying the sensibility of the people there or attending to the sore issues engendered by colonialism.

Judging by the title of his first book written in the new environment, *The Kingdom of This World*, Carpentier saw himself as an explorer who was, however, inclined to get familiarised with *spiritus loci* rather than try to naturalise the worldview brought over from Europe. According to Roberto González Echevarría (*Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, 1991), Carpentier could not get over his sense of uprootedness, of feeling a stranger on a pilgrimage away from home. What in Europe had been a matter of aesthetic affiliation – surrealism and post-expressionism – had become, by now, an existential mode of experience. He was living among people who did not need to magnify the glass through which they were looking at things, rendering them threatening or unfamiliar as if perceived inadvertently upon being suddenly awakened from sleep; they no longer took a distance from the supernatural; they believed that the dead could talk or that magic practices are as efficient as back then when prehistorical people went hunting.

Carpentier's "On the Marvelous Real in America" (1949) is a travelogue in front of his novel, *The Kingdom of This World*. After reasserting again and again a Heideggerian distrust of the possibility of understanding a people's sense of space (the way a space is revealed to them as presentness, being there, Dasein) as long as their language remains inaccessible, he goes on to compare Europe and Latin America. He concludes that, while Lautréamont's Maldoror left behind a literary school of fantastic adventures, Haitian François Mackandal, the voodoo priest and fighter against slavery, is credited with

the legacy of "an entire mythology, preserved by an entire people and accompanied by magic hymns still sung today during voodoo ceremonies." (Carpentier 1953).

Echevarría, the author of a study in Carpentier's magic realism, is persuaded into accepting that there is indeed an essential difference between the European and Latin American versions of the genre: the former is phenomenological, stemming from Roh's book"; the latter is a tributary to the "marvellous American reality," being classified as ontological.

Let us look at the book selected by Echevarria as representative of Carpentier's practice of magic realism, *The Lost Steps* (1953). We identify a difference in politics/ideology rather than in poetics from European models.

The first-person narrator steps onto the scene as the victim of life in an alienating modern civilisation, where history has vanished under empty representation, feelings have decayed into the mechanical exercise of marital duties, and art has been massified and commercialised. Somehow resembling Joyce's Bloom – alienated from his wife, writing music for advertisements, planning to compose an *Odyssey* but wandering along the streets of New York – the musician gets a chance to flee with his mistress to South America sponsored by the curator of a university who expects him to search for indigenous instruments still in use among the primitive tribes in the Orinoko jungle.

A Greek miner, Yannes, is searching for gold as so many Europeans uprooted from their nations and families in search of fortune in the New World. By giving the narrator Homer's *Odyssey*, he symbolically tears himself off from home and gives up on the possibility of going home like Ulysses. Fray Pedro is the missionary prototype of religious colonialism accompanying the military

conquest. Only Adelantado belongs to that world, is familiar with its customs, artefacts, and values, and has become the founder of a community ruled by the law and archived for history.

The composer's life is fractured, imitating the grand design of the rise and fall of civilisations. In magic realist fashion, a double thread of reality and unreality is being permanently woven. A heavy rain precedes his encounter with the curator, who changes the course of his life, while, in the end, when he wants to go back to Santa Monica de los Venados, the village in the jungle, the path is flooded. When the waters withdraw, his return is pointless because he has discovered that Rosario, a creature of nature unspoiled by civilisation, had married someone else. The floods and other natural calamities that ended civilisations also suggest the passage of time and the provisional character of any human pursuit. The South American city the composer and his mistress visited before continuing to the Orinoko jungle symbolises the thwarted colonial venture. In magic-realist fashion, the illogical and counterfactual steal in, the architecture with European design being shattered by the roots of palm trees growing beneath all over the town, mud, moss and fungus gnawing at the pillars of the colonial order. Ironically, the ceremonies celebrating the President of the republic are performed by Romans and indigenous people, Signification takes priority over historical truth: Romans had never been there, yet they stand for imperial grandeur and the memory of conquest.

Because of the ontological paradox on which it is built, magic realism is best defined by discontinuity, as in Rene Magritte's *The Blank Signature* (1965), where blank spaces cross the image of the riding lady. The trodden path, in literal and figurative sense, cannot be retraced. The steps on the way back home are permanently lost. If

the message holds good regarding the postcolonial mix of races and fractured history, it also suits a Europe caught between two world conflagrations in the last century.

CONCLUSION

By broadening the cone of light cast on either side of the year 1925, when German art critic Franz Roh published a book on the postexpressionist turn in art, especially on avant-garde photography, which became the manifest of a new mode of literary and plastic magic realism, we have identified the historical context in which analogous ideas were launched and similar signifying practices were tested. While it is true that Papini's phrase, "magic idealism", was also used by Novalis, while Shklovsky's defamiliarisation also occurred in Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, their meanings entail important categorical distinctions. In Novalis and Wordsworth, magic idealism and defamiliarisation do not refer to distinct levels of reality. In Novalis, both God in whom are unified the subject and the object (there is no antagonism, no discontinuity), and the artist engaging in *imitatio dei* are set over and against the *res extensa* of the material world, which is placed within brackets (Novalis 1995, frg.292, p.128). There is a unified and ideal field of consciousness. Contrariwise, Papini's magic idealism, Eliade's magic deed, and Roh's magic realism include the material world as a member of the equation which defines Being. Life's events are not less actual for being perceived as tragical; the magic act will end up in a realised state; reality and magic are superimposed as in the quantum wave-particle duality. Magic realism is not an act of phenomenological reduction (placing things within brackets) as with the romantics but of ontological realisation. It is still the world out there, but with its soul showing off. Something essential about its inner nature is

forced into the open. Reality is not diminished but enhanced.

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