Magical Hyperrealism: A Reading of Orbitor through Magical Realism and Maximalism

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Abstract: In this stylistic study I propose a reading of Orbitor [Blinding] through two literary modes: magical realism and maximalism, as Mircea Cărtărescu's trilogy contains elements that fit into both literary modes, albeit with some differences. Such a reading would allow the formulation of the term magical hyperrealism as a new literary mode. The understanding of magical realism is based on three features: authorial reticence, amplification of reality through "faith" and social comprehension. Regarding authorial reticence, Beatrice Amaryll Chanady compares magical realism with the fantastic as defined by T. Todorov. Unlike the fantastic, which creates doubt between a real or a supernatural explanation for unlikely events, magical realism allows the ordinary and the marvelous to coexist as two components of a harmonious reality that is given without explanation (authorial reticence). The amplification of reality through faith in the marvelous and the social comprehension of the marvelous are concepts based on Alejo Carpentier's lo real maravilloso. In Orbitor all of these features appear in many episodes, although unlike traditional magical realism, faith in the marvelous is expressed through personal-intellectual convictions rather than social-collective beliefs. As for maximalism, Orbitor fulfills most of the ten characteristics of this genre as defined by Stefano Ercolino. The main difference is point 10: "hybrid realism." In this case, maximalism usually distorts reality for representational purposes, but Orbitor distorts it for purely literary purposes or for a psychic-subjective exploration of the author. From comparing Orbitor with both literary modes, magical hyperrealism as a literary mode is defined as follows: a totalizing-encyclopedic vision of reality that, with authorial reticence, harmonizes the real and the marvelous through a strong faith. Some applications and future possibilities are discussed in the conclusions.
Keywords: magical realism, maximalism, hyperrealism, fantastic, Mircea Cărtărescu, Orbitor, literary modes, postmodernism, Hispanic literature, English literature, Romanian literature.

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1. Magical realism: a matter of faith

To understand the formal or stylistic procedure employed in *Orbitor*, which I will call *magical hyperrealism*, two fundamental concepts must be considered: magical realism, which I will explore in this section, and maximalism, which I will discuss in the next.

Considering Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Todorov stated the following: "Kafka's narratives relate both to the marvelous and to the uncanny; they are the coincidence of two apparently incompatible genres."[1] This hybridization of genres would generate an effect that, eventually, "naturalizes" the marvelous. But *The Metamorphosis* was only the beginning of a long series of authors, narrative modes and movements that fit this description. One notable case is Surrealism. Another is magical realism, which consolidated this hybridization in fictional prose. We will understand it through three essential characteristics: authorial reticence, amplification of reality through "faith" and faith as a consequence of a "social comprehension" (the two latter corresponding to Alejo Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso*). All of them appear in *Orbitor*, although there are also differences that prevent us from affirming that the Trilogy is a work of pure magical realism.

Although it is now a recognized and consolidated literary term, magical realism lacks a definition free of ambiguity.[2] As a first approach, Gonzáles Echavarría's chronology might be relevant for understanding it. He recognizes three crucial

moments in its history with Franz Roh, Alejo Carpentier and Angel Flores[3].

The first moment consists of the seminal formulation of the term in 1925 with the publication of *Magical Realism, Post-Expressionism: Problems of the Newest Painting*.[4] In this book, German art critic Franz Roh saw in post-Expressionist paintings a "New Objectivity." Unlike the 19th century realism that lacked expressivity, and unlike the excessive abstraction of expressionism, New Objectivity would be a middle ground for the real and the spiritual, a penetration into the "magic" of reality.[5]

From then on, magical realism would be a widely used term. Two years later, Massimo Bontempelli introduced it into the Italian language. It is uncertain if he knew about Roh's publication, but both shared an interest in a metaphysic vision of reality through art and the Surrealist paintings of De Chirico[6] (after all, Surrealism's influence was also starting to grow after Breton's manifesto from 1924). In the case of Latin America, Arturo Uslar Pietri used the term for the first time in *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (1948).[7] He was probably influenced by M. Botempelli, whom he met in Paris, as well as while traveling to literary debates in Italy.[8]

The second moment is represented by the publication of Alejo Carpentier's novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949), in whose prologue he defines his concept of *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous-real). After highlighting the magical thinking in the culture of America, Carpentier proposes that literature in the New World should explore this autochthonous dimension. For him, *lo real maravilloso* is the "enlargement of the scales and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a mode of 'extreme state' (*estado límite*)."[9] The main distinction from the marvelous in Europe would be that it appears through a faith[10] that is shared in the social collective, while in the Old World it would appear only artificially. In this sense, for example, he accuses the Surrealists of being thaumaturges who end up becoming bureaucrats.[11]

Finally, in 1955 the third moment occurs with the first use of the term in an academic literary examination given by Angel Flores. After reviewing the old Latin American classics, who would have been saturated with a detailed realism and a romantic sentimentalism, Flores identifies in Jorge Luis Borges and Eduardo Mallea new voices that would finally give the region its own identity.[12] This new trend is called by him, of course, magical realism, which he identifies as an "amalgamation of realism and fantasy."[13] Flores compares it to Kafka's work, of which Borges had made translations two years before, and from which he could have taken (among other traits) the practice of presenting the supernatural without giving any explanations.[14]

Although the three moments may be conceptually dissimilar, it is worth noticing that in all cases magical realism is a response to traditional realism and a reconciliation of the real with abstract elements such as the spiritual and the marvelous.

After Flores's first academic approach, Luis Leal started the long critical discussion directed towards a formal definition of magical realism. In a 1967 article, he reviewed the three moments already mentioned[15] and expressed his dissatisfaction with several of Flores's statements.[16] Later, Leal separated magical realism from many other concepts such as Surrealism (for him, more focused on dreams)[17] and the pure fantastic:

> "Let us keep in mind that in these magical realist works the author does not need to justify the mystery of events, as the fantastic writer has to. In fantastic literature the supernatural invades a world ruled by reason. In magical realism 'the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it.'[18] In order to seize reality's mysteries the magical realist writer heightens his senses until he reaches an extreme state [*estado límite*][19] that allows him to intuit the imperceptible subtleties of the external world, the multifarious world in which we live."[20]

Thus, it is confirmed that magical realism does not give explanations about the supernatural, embracing it as part of a more lucid reality. This absence of explanations may lead us to A.B. Chanady's definition of authorial reticence.

Before discussing Chanady, there is a remark that would be worth noting. Magical realism is part of a long literary evolution that can be partially explained through Romanticism, Kafka, Surrealism, Faulkner and traditional realism itself. Later, its influence would continue with Pynchon and maximalism. It would be reductionist to claim that magical realism is an entirely Latin American invention or that it can be written only from there. We must understand that in this long literary evolution there are no discrete, compartmentalized changes, but rather a continuous progression of influences and authors looking backwards in order to look forwards. The characteristics I am going to present below stand out in Latin American magical realism (we can call it traditional magical realism), but they can be found sometimes, for example, in Surrealism. I am focusing my stylistic analysis on magical realism because, unlike Surrealism and others, it developed almost exclusively in fictional prose. This brings more specificity than the multiple types of creations belonging to the other currents. Moreover, magical realism's prose shows three particular features: 1) it employs authorial reticence; 2) it harmonizes the natural and marvelous with faith; 3) it displays this faith as a consequence of a social comprehension. Within this tripartite frame it is possible to see magical realism as a literary mode comparable with that of *Orbitor*.

Authorial reticence was defined by Chanady; faith and the social comprehension are both belonging to Carpentier's concept of *lo real maravilloso*. Although Chanady's authorial reticence might suffice to study magical realism, Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* (which is not the same as magical realism, but it can appear as a part of it) brings some aspects that are worth examining.

Authorial reticence

Amaryll Beatrice Chanady probably made the most successful formalist effort to distinguish magical realism from the

pure fantastic in her often-quoted monography from 1982, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy*. From Todorov's fantastic, Chanady understands his distinction between the natural and the supernatural (uncanny VS marvelous) as an antinomy proper to the Western paradigm.[21] For the case of the fantastic, the supernatural breaks into the real world because a conflict exists between these two domains.

But magical realism thinks "outside the box" proposed by Todorov: the irruption of the supernatural is not problematic because it coexists in harmony with the real.[22] Moreover, if in Todorov's scheme the pure fantastic is an unresolved hesitation between explaining events rationally or supernaturally, in magical realism there is no hesitation because there is no attempt to explain anything. There is an *authorial reticence*[23] to explain the supernatural and the reader suspends his disbelief.[24]

A prototypical example of magical realism can be illustrated in the ascension of Remedios, *la bella*, in *Cien años de soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude].[25] Over the course of several pages, the narrator has described her ethereal beauty alongside more mundane events (she used to eat with her hands; as a child she used to paint on the walls using her excrements). Her life has not been strictly unreal, even if she used to behave as if she was detached from the material world. But one afternoon, while hanging laundry, the culmination of her beauty ends with her ascension to heaven. The miracle occurs in the middle of an everyday activity. The description is detailed, but as detailed as other mundane episodes. Instead of being a climax, it is placed in the midst of other unrelated events. Many inhabitants of Macondo do believe in the miracle (they even sanctify the woman by lighting candles); others, the foreigners (those outside of magical realism?) take the story for a hoax. In any case, the fact is recognized as supernatural, but it is assimilated. Because there is no need to explain what happened (authorial reticence), everything is just a fluid and harmonic wonder.

The ascension of Remedios, *la bella*, would have been talked about for a long time, had it not been for an aggravating event that overshadowed it: the extermination of the Aurelianos. This procedure of overshadowing a miracle (and so normalizing it) through another relevant happening of natural dimensions is also employed in *Aripa dreaptă* [The Right Wing]. Many places in Bucharest (preferably those relevant to Mircea's life) dawned covered with gold. The phenomenon was reported on television, but it was soon engulfed by another of greater importance for the whole city: the arrest of the country's dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena.

Many other supernatural events are absorbed with authorial reticence as well. Globally, *Orbitor* [Blinding] has a pure fantastic mode all over the three volumes because there is a hesitation between the real and the unreal, but at the end of the third volume this duality disappears in the style of magical realism when all poles of existence are united in harmony and the real and unreal coexist.[26] Specifically, also many episodes prefigure this harmonic coexistence.

For instance, in *Aripa stângă* [The Left Wing] the migration of Mircea's Bulgarian ancestors to the place where they founded Tântava has many naturalized miracles: the dead wake up starving because they did not receive their offerings; the reason was another astonishing but mundane fact: the living people were addicted to poppy seed cakes and they were not working. Later, giant butterflies appear swimming under the ice, but they are devoured by the hungry nomads in a narration describing the chewed flesh in detail. This migration could also be compared to the Buendías's exodus towards the lands where they founded Macondo.

In fact, most of Mircea's maternal lineage, including Maria, his mother, had supernatural experiences that ended up being accepted as part of a normal reality. Vasili's shadow is one case among many others: during his childhood, he was chosen to deliver it in the Danube as a sacrifice during the village's migration. Such a supernatural detail, the absence of a shadow, is casually mentioned even during some of the most mundane descriptions of Vasili's adult life in the city of Bucharest.

Not surprisingly, *Aripa stângă*, more focused on the maternal side of the family, has more episodes that could be related to magical realism. On the other hand, *Aripa dreaptă* includes several realistic[27] descriptions linked to the Romanian revolution and the overthrow of the communist regime[28], the ideology that ruled Costel's life, Mircea's father and a man with a rational mind. Even the story of Witold, an ancestor on the paternal side, although it has fantastic elements, concludes with a sexual encounter which is much more descriptive and carnal than the poetic sexual evocations of the "left" volume. As for *Corpul*, being a mediator between the other two volumes, there is a bit of both literary modes: Maria's stories continue and communism starts gaining ground.

There seems to exist a hypertextual attempt to combine the spiritual and the material between one volume (one wing) and the other; the fantastic and the ordinary; the unconscious and the sensible experience; thus creating a wider vision of the world just like magical realism's attempt to place the real and the marvelous in harmony. Additionally, by not making it clear where the author's world ends (with Cărtărescu) and where the narrator's fiction begins (with Mircea), *Orbitor* not only describes supernatural worlds that break into the real in the style of the pure fantastic, but the real (and I am talking about the world of Cărtărescu, the author) breaks into the narrated fiction: "[...] and suddenly I wondered whether the world might also be a form of reality, perhaps as consistent as fiction, whether life might not also be as true as dreams..."[29]

It's easier now to understand the end of *Aripa dreaptă*. Throughout the three volumes, an encounter is presented between the magic elements – more preponderant in the first volume – with the strictly real – more present in the third one; the union of both "wings" makes them partakers of one same space, so that in the end it could be reaffirmed that this apparent duality is indeed a hyperreality accessible with a vision lucid enough to reach the great *estado límite*. In this sense, the constant uncertainty of the fantastic that has been

present throughout the story is finally resolved. But unlike Todorov's fantastic-marvelous mode, here we don't have a resolved doubt, rather a reaffirmed faith. And the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural is absent, since both are constitutive parts of a Whole accepted as a great miracle. Concretely, Mircea and Victor (his twin-Doppelgänger, his ontological antiparticle, his complementary polar opposite) meet on doomsday at the "center" of the world (represented by the maximalist megastructure of *Casa Poporului*), and the apocalypse (the end of the world-book) occurs as the culmination of the miracle, when the natural and the marvelous are One.

Indeed, as in *Cien años de soledad*, the whole world in *Orbitor* comes to an end with a big cataclysm. Nonetheless, as it happens with Macondo, everything that existed until then is hermetically eternalized when the story (comparable to an acheiropoieta) closes itself by narrating its own appearance in the form of a book. This last metastrategy is the final and definitive consolidation of the miracle, as the reader has the evidence in the palms of his hands. The miracle, then, coexists with the real with no need for an explanation.

Paul Cernat criticizes the effectiveness of Cărtărescu's realism, claiming that *Aripa dreaptă* treats Romanian communist history superficially and with conventionalisms. It is hard to disagree when he points out that Cărtărescu focuses his mythology on the personal rather than the local environment.[30] Herein lies the main difference from magical realism, always rooted in local social concerns, as we will see below.

Faith and the social comprehension (*lo real maravilloso*)

There have been no subsequent formalist definitions of magical realism that depart significantly from Chanady's[31]. Years later she refused to reelaborate her definition regarding subsequent approaches that had led the term to be "anything you want it to mean"[32]. It seemed that magical realism had acquired a plasticity like that of surrealism, which went from being a concrete literary movement to a flexible adjective. Perhaps the case of traditional magical realism from Latin America is more uncertain, for there was never a group of writers assembled together for the stated purpose of writing magical realism. The "canon" was carried out by critics and publishing houses, the former sometimes biased by regional vindications and the latter by marketing strategies. Inevitably, this led to ambiguities.

This is why I prefer to understand magical realism as a flexible literary mode and not a current or a genre. By doing so, it is possible to differentiate magical realism from other modes, admitting it can appear intertwined with them.

We could stop at Chanady's definition for a formal analysis in prose. But also, we can add more specificity and differentiation with Carpentier's formulation of *lo real maravilloso*. Then, authorial reticence must be displayed with a faith in the marvelous that occurs due to the comprehension of local social beliefs, just in the same way Carpentier does when he looks back on the cultures of America. Usually, this comprehension also leads to the representation of wide social issues.

Traditional magical realism (when it includes *lo real maravilloso*) works as a response to the restrictions of traditional realism, a common trait that it shares with the pure fantastic and Surrealism. We should not ignore the contact shared by Europe and the first Latin American authors who are usually linked with this term.[33] Carpentier worked with the surrealists before departing from them[34]; Uslar Pietri used the term after Botempelli[35]; Miguel Ángel Asturias was in direct contact with French surrealists and expressionism[36]; Cortázar lived a big part of his life in Paris from 1951; García Márquez was motivated to start writing (and with authorial reticence) after reading Borges's translation of *The Metamorphosis*.[37] If we think about Borges and Sábato, although it is debatable to what degree they belong to magical realism, they were also influenced by Surrealism: the former through a complex network of literary agents including Victoria Ocampo and Adrienne Monnier who circulated Surrealist works[38] and the latter during his years in Paris while he was researching radioactivity and spending his nights close to the Surrealists in bAlthough Carpentier, Flores and Leal insisted on forging it as an autochthonous literary identity of Latin America, magical realism is profoundly linked to European tradition. Together, they reject traditional realism by expanding reality towards the marvelous; but there is one difference, and that is the focus on a faith echoing social or collective beliefs. Unlike a Romantic Nerval suffering a delirium that isolates him from the others, or a Surrealist Breton (or Dalí) portraying his personal dreams/psyche, magical realism sees the marvelous as an asset taken from collectivity in culture, folklore, etc.

Even when European modernism returned to mythology, as in Joyce's *Ulysses*, there was an intellectual *tour de force* around already fossilized myths[40]. In the case of Latin American prose, it is not that authors believed in the myths of their regions as much as natives would, but after experiencing European daily life, they remarked how much myths were a latent phenomenon in American culture. In the case of Surrealism, they saw a more daring and inspiring vision of the immaterial[41], but Surrealism was still an intellectual group breaking away from European society. Only then did they resolve to borrow the American society's *faith*.

But active mythological and spiritual consciousnesses are not to be found only in Latin America. Traditional magical realism's features may also appear (even independently) in other literatures of the world when they are inspired by African, Asian or Eastern European cultures. In the case of Romania, Cărtărescu's birthplace, Elena Crasovan identifies two authors who developed some characteristics of this literary mode independently from the Latin American trend: Mihail Sadoveanu and Vasile Voiculescu, who wrote archaic histories during the first half of the twentieth century, blending them with myths and using authorial reticence. She also infers the influence of Massimo Bontempelli on them[42]. Later, for the communist regime, Crasovan identifies Ștefan

Bănulescu, D.R. Popescu, George Bălăiță, Sorin Titel and Ștefan Agopian as writers who, this time under the influence of Latin American works, created imaginary worlds and rewrote history with mythical patterns and a magical-grotesque carnivalization of the world[43]. For the period following the fall of communism, she identifies Cărtărescu (along with Bogdan Popescu, Doina Ruști) as an author who -also influenced by postmodernism- shows features of magical realism when this became a worldwide mode also detected in Rushdie (for India and the United Kingdom), Toni Morrison (United States), Ben Okri (Nigeria) and Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique-France).[44]

As for *Orbitor*, faith is a centripetal force throughout the three volumes, although it functions differently from traditional magical realism. Now and then *Orbitor* goes back to Romanian folklore and Orthodox Christianity, both derived from Mircea's maternal influence and from Herman's discourse when he speaks about the Bible. Then the style can be compared to traditional magical realism. But there is a more prominent difference when that faith is functioning at an intellectual level, manifesting itself toward pure literature and psychic exploration. For instance, when Witold loses his shadow, there seems to be a literary reference to Peter Schlemihl rather than the use of a folk story[45]. This difference occurs because all stories must take Mircea to the creation of his book and the quest for his *imago*, mystically and magically.

Additionally, if we consider that traditional magical realism was seeking to amplify the reality of a social collective and its issues (like America), in the trilogy faith amplifies first Mircea's cognitive individuality, and only then it also amplifies the Romanian revolution of 1989.

Thus, *Orbitor* combines the real and the marvelous with authorial reticence by using faith, but that faith is based first and foremost on personal-intellectual convictions; only then does it move on to social-cultural manifestations. There is magical realism, but not in the traditional way.

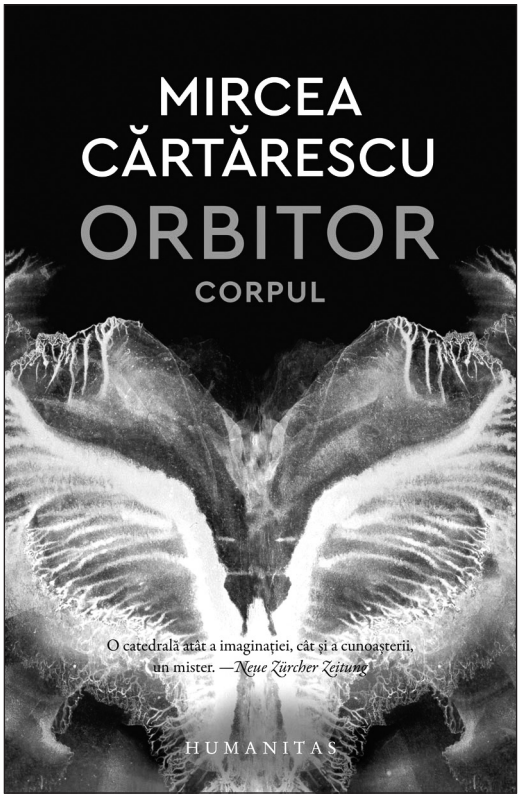
Before ending this section, it is worth mentioning that both Romania and Latin America can be regarded as peripheries of the "centers" of the world: the former as an earlier "satellite" of the Soviet Union (in *Orbitor*) and at the other side of the more economically developed Western Europe; the latter as a former colony of Spain and geographically located below the more developed North (US and Canada). Chanady reflects on whether peripheries are a common trait in the countries that mostly fertilize magical realism. She observes that this literary mode is often critical of hegemonic models[46]. In our comparison, Latin American magical realism would rebel against the colonialism of the past[47] and the dictators of the present[48] (later backed-up by the United States during the Operation Condor); *Orbitor* would confront the dictatorship of Ceaușescu and the totalitarian ideology of communism[49]. It has also been claimed that magical realism is an expression of postmodernity occurring in Third World countries (and postmodernity, by itself, an expression predominantly of the First World)[50]. Whether this is true or not[51], Malcolm Bradbury acknowledges the influence of magical realism on works of postmodern fiction from the United States, such as Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*[52], which belongs to our next step on this journey.

2. Maximalism: a hysterical encyclopedia

To approach postmodernism, a relevant but wide subject in the case of Mircea Cărtărescu, it is useful to consider *Orbitor*'s relationship with the postmodern author Thomas Pynchon from the perspective of maximalism.

Stefano Ercolino defines the maximalist novel as an "aesthetically hybrid genre" that appeared in the second half of the 20th century in the United States and then migrated to Europe and Latin America.[53] As its ten constitutive elements, he identifies: length, encyclopedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, intersemioticity, ethical commitment and hybrid realism. Maximalism would have been "dialectically coexistent" with minimalism, since both were avoiding each other's excesses[54].

Although *Orbitor* is arguably not a novel, it matches remarkably with the full decalogue of the maximalist novel, being Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* a paradigmatic work for both cases[55]. Ercolino considers maximalism a genre, but I prefer to perceive it as a literary mode, just like magical realism and the fantastic can be. By this, we will avoid falling into the categorical statement that *Orbitor* fully belongs to maximalism, since there are also differences that I will point out.



1) Length

It's a matter of the number of pages. The entire *Orbitor* trilogy is almost 1,500 pages long, while *Gravity's Rainbow* has 912 pages[56]. Ercolino explains the length of the maximalist books through their potential and appeal.

The *potential* for literary experimentation increases with the length of a book, as the space for a totalizing quest (both stylistically and in terms of knowledge) is bigger. Regarding *Orbitor*, the length is crucial, as the author-narrator searches exhaustively for his *imago* by writing-exploring many variations of one same archetypal underground episode. Moreover, there is a lot of experimentation with several registers, in addition to the literary modes of the fantastic and magical realism. The presentation in three volumes, with the first and the last being the wings of a symbolic butterfly, heaven and hell, maternal and paternal heredity, the marvelous and the real, shows a purpose to unify the opposite poles of existence; a totalizing aim that requires a considerable amount of space for its development.

In terms of their *appeal*, books can be particularly attractive when showing a mammoth volume. In physical format, they can become inorganic fetishes of desire, commodities that give their holder a cultural or intellectual status[57]. This could partially explain why *Orbitor* was a commercial success when each of the volumes appeared for the first time in Romania.

2) Encyclopedic mode

As early as Modernism, an ambition to write an encyclopedic novel appeared, a desire for an archive about existence in a virtual world. But reality turned out to be more complex (and sometimes more relative) than the Enlightenment encyclopedists had imagined it to be. Postmodernism understood this situation (in part through poststructuralism), and the weight of all the accumulated information and perspectives came to crush any project of arriving at a totalizing, univocal, absolute view of the world. But in order to face such a problematic, attempts to multiply perspectives and the awareness of their relativity and limitations flourished in postmodern narrative[58].

In *Orbitor*, the attempt to totalize the whole universe is highly relativistic (everything happens in Mircea's mind) but absolutist at the same time (when he divinizes himself as the creator of his world-book), in a hyperbole of the personal experience (the only one accessible and real).

Encyclopedism has two elements: syntheticity and heterogeneity[59]; it must provide condensed and delimited information (syntheticity) from various branches of knowledge (heterogeneity). For *Gravity's Rainbow*, Ercolino highlights the use of statistics, rocketry, systems theory, and behavioral psychology, and praises Pynchon as a pioneer in the use of mathematics and physics in post-war fiction from the United States.[60]

Pynchon is, indeed, a major influence in the fictional use of exact sciences. This can be seen in Cărtărescu's trilogy and its use of mathematics (especially fractals). Other applied fields in *Orbitor* are neurology, entomology, psychoanalysis and, to a lesser degree, astronomy, quantum theory, special relativity, chaos theory, cytology, anatomy, phylogenetics, physiology, ontogeny, etc. But its great novelty is the addition of religious and esoteric knowledge: Gnosticism, theology, Hinduism, Buddhism, Orthodox Christianity, the Kabbalah, the Eleusinian mysteries and Hermeticism are some recurring themes.

In order to face the imminent truth that the encyclopedic project will never conclude, maximalism often resorts to self-irony in its attempt to sympathize with its frustrated condition[61]. Here, there is a great difference from *Orbitor*, which, instead of breaking the tension of a proverbial discourse with humor, makes use of the same faith that was discussed regarding magical realism; this way, the postmodern frustration can even disappear.

3) Dissonant chorality

It is divided into two concepts: chorality and polyphony.

Chorality means that one story or character does not predominate, but many appear in fragmented narratives of variable length. Likewise, there are changes in the point of view (not necessarily in the person narrating), transitions in time or space, and the introduction or resumption of narrative threads. Typographical spacing between paragraphs is often used to articulate these changes. All this would reinforce the impression of a decentralized, relativized world with multiple autonomous components[62].

Bakhtin's carnivalesque ritual can be discussed in relation to chorality and *Orbitor*. The difference between the last two is that, unlike chorality, the whole trilogy does actually have a center: the author-narrator. However, Mircea's carnivalesque crowning-decrowning as a creator of worlds and as an earthly character allows multiple stories and characters to appear, to "parade" almost independently. The only element uniting them is their teleological relationship with him, writing them all in the book.

In almost all cases Mircea is the narrator in first person,[63] but oftentimes he narrates stories so distant and independent that he uses the third person[64]. In these cases, he travels back in time to previous generations, to different episodes of his life and to places outside Romania (Bulgaria, New Orleans, Amsterdam, Poland, Bellagio). Characters break into each other unexpectedly, with digressions that sometimes interrupt of postpone the climax to pick up a previous narrative thread. For instance, Vasili is barely mentioned in *Aripa stângă* after having lost his shadow, but he reappears in *Corpul* in a sequence that is several pages long. The same happens with Witold's reappearance in *Aripa dreaptă*, interrupting the Romanian revolution centered on Mircea's father.

Orbitor's chorality can be illustrated by the architecture – and some of the art - of the orthodox church (referenced in many chapters): it sets the creator in the center, but amidst a bigger and vast arrangement of many other elements circling

around. Perhaps Cărtărescu was reaffirming individual identity as a counterattack on communism, which ideologically totalized the collectivity. This would explain his different attitude from that of the United Statian maximalists, who rebel against an over-individualist capitalism and propose more decentralizing worldviews.

Chorality, according to Ercolino, seems to refer more to the diegetic content; *polyphony*, on the other hand, seems to be about aesthetics. It consists of a plethora of languages, registers, character voices (if multiple characters speak), contrary to the realist style of the 19th century, which provided a single, dominant vision[65].

To what extent does *Orbitor* use polyphony? Considering the voices of the characters, it is very limited, as almost everything is told from Mircea's solipsistic perspective. Considering the registers (although this is no longer the polyphony originally defined by Bakhtin), *Orbitor* is very rich, as it mixes prose with poetry, as well as other forms such as short philosophical essays, autofiction, framed short stories, diaristic registers.

4) Diegetic exuberance

This element was partially discussed in the previous section: there is an extremely large number of stories, and digression is a recurrent technique used to articulate them. As a consequence, in many cases it is difficult to identify a main plot and explain "what a maximalist book is about"[66]. In *Orbitor* there is no plot either. In a Proustian manner, Mircea narrates that he writes the book itself during the communist revolution, a book in which he creates (or recreates) reality, but there is almost never any tension, any plot; nonetheless, that does not affect the dynamic nature of the whole.

5) Completeness

Decentralization and superabundance do not prevent maximalism from having an ordered structure while pursuing its plan to totalize the world. Ercolino points out three structures that can contain "the whole": geometric, temporal and conceptual structures[67].

Geometry in *Orbitor* can be taken as tripartite, considering the three volumes as the body and the two wings of a butterfly, which are the extremes of the polarities discussed. The W.A.S.T.E. Mailing List channel proposes a geometry related to Sierpiński's fractal triangle, as each of the three volumes is subdivided into three parts, along with other recursive resources based on the number three.[68]

Temporal structures consist in a chronological order. They do not seem to stand out in *Orbitor*.

Conceptual structures can be based on a leitmotif, on a myth (such as *The Odyssey* in *Ulysses*, although this novel is not maximalist) or on intertextual forms (such as *Hamlet*, which is echoed in *Infinite Jest*).[69] *Gravity's Rainbow* could be read through the leitmotif of the child separated from their home (and through the story Hansel and Gretel), hinting at human alienation from mother Earth and the need to reconnect with Her.[70] *Orbitor* also speaks of a quest for reconnection, not with the external world but with the internal *imago*, the supreme and blinding truth.

6) Narratorial omniscience

Todorov synthesizes three narrative aspects of how the reader perceives events through the narrator: when the narrator knows more than the characters (N > C), when the narrator knows as much as the characters (N = C) and when the narrator knows less than the characters (N < C)[71]. Oscar Tacca calls these narrators omniscient, equiscient and deficient, respectively[72].

Ercolino compares this typology to Genette's focalization[73]. Thus, the omniscient narrator (N > C) has zero focalization, since he perceives and *knows* how everything happens as a whole; the equiscient narrator (N = C) has an internal focalization, since the facts are focused and filtered in detail through his inner mind; the deficient narrator (N < C) would have an external focalization, since he has an "outsider" perspective, without knowing important matters concerning other characters.

The maximalist narrator would be fundamentally omniscient and externally focused on a macrostructural level, even if there may be microstructures with other narrative aspects and focuses. For Ercolino, the reason is that omniscience makes it possible to order the totalizing amount of information[74].

This claim should be revised if we consider that *Orbitor* commands a story of a maximalist nature flowing from omniscience to deficiency on a macrolevel[75]. Mircea is described as a narrator and an author, a creator of worlds and a pedestrian being; thus, his narrative voice is equally deficient and omniscient.

For instance, Mircea, the narrator-character, does not know what to expect from the Romanian revolution and his dreamlike experiences; also, if we take Cărtărescu's (the author's) claims for granted, he started writing *Orbitor* without a plan or not knowing what was coming up next[76]. However, in other parts the narrator also takes pleasure in illustrating his characters in a deterministic manner, emphasizing how much they ignore their destiny (when he does). More paradoxically, at the end of the trilogy Mircea himself is surprised (or not?) to find out that all characters were *Those Who Know* (*Știutorii*)[77] conspiring "against" him to inspire his book.

In both cases, however, there is an internal focalization, since everything happens in Mircea's mind[78]. Therefore, the text as a whole has a narrator with ambivalent knowledge ((N > C) ∨ (N < C)) and internal focalization.

When omniscience and external focus are more prevalent – as in many stories about past ancestors – it is very common for supernatural events to happen normally. Indeed, accepting the supernatural with an omniscient narrator is a common feature shared by some parts of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, magical realism and some parts of *Orbitor*. However, the latter differs by narrating in the first person (and not in the third, as

Pynchon and García Márquez usually do). This feature may be due to the fact that the trilogy also gives great importance to another literary mode: the purely fantastic, which, as Todorov had already observed, is usually narrated by the "I"[79].

7) Paranoid imagination

It is the driving force of the maximalist imagination: the hypothetical idea of a threat, a conspiracy theory[80]. The paranoid imagination might be a consequence of postmodern relativism, exacerbating skepticism to the point of an overly suspicious doubt. Paradoxically, paranoid imagination tries to explain and connect everything in the world in order to find a meaning or an ultimate truth, be it portentous or sublime, perhaps trying to restore the charm of a world already lost. Paranoia is often accompanied by a belief in an imminent apocalypse or the establishment of a new world order[81].

Judgment day comes at the end of the communist revolution in *Aripa dreaptă*, and the trilogy closes with a transfiguration that resolves a conspiracy theory that had galvanized the three volumes: the preparations conducted by *Those Who Know* for the birth of Mircea and the writing of *Orbitor*. In a hyper-connected way, everything that Mircea has lived, even in its most insignificant details, was conducted by them and stamped each word of the book with pan-determinism and pan-signification; conversely, everything narrated is hyper-connected through the denominator that it has been written by Mircea and prepared by that "lodgeBut let's look at the way this paranoia appears in the United States. Novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* seem to discuss the reintegration of the individual into the collective, considering that the former had been alienated in a capitalist and individualistic (postmodern) condition. In this context, paranoid imagination delves into the possibility of a reintegration by using the premise that "everything is connected." Some drug experiences described by Pynchon, as Ercolino remarks, illustrate this:

> "About the paranoia often noted under the drug, there is nothing remarkable. Like other sorts of paranoia, there is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination—not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route In for those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge..."[82]

"Not yet blindingly One." But *Orbitor* (*Blinding*) does achieve this blindingly One. Written in a polarizingly opposite context to Pynchon's, it reacts to the excesses of integrationist communism. The paranoid imagination consists in rediscovering not the connection with the world, but in finding the One through the sovereignty of the individual.

> "That is why the Creator will be man and light, but also woman, black and slave. The mind of an angel and the heart of a bitch. Only in this way will the hemispheres, schizophrenia *and paranoia be overcome*; the sexes, male and female, will be annulled; the powers, the master and the slave, will become one and, miracle of miracles, good will corrupt through evil to shine brighter, and evil will rise through good to become darker and, when they meet and arc out of themselves and mate with each other, they will prove to be identical, light and darkness in a single ecstatic word: BLINDING."[83]

This Blinding One prefigured in *Aripa stângă* is finally achieved in *Aripa dreaptă* "in a dense light, in a dense world, that shone blinding, blinding, blinding..."[84]. In the end, paranoid imagination can be resolved through a personal-intellectual faith. Pynchon shares a common interest in the sacred, but the paradigm of his novel does not resolve Chanady's antinomy between real and unreal. *Orbitor* does.

8) Intersemioticity

It is about resorting to other artistic languages and concepts. Their articulation can occur on two levels: thematic and formal[85].

As themes, cinema, painting and architecture have an inspiring semantic value in *Orbitor*. During her youth in *Aripa stângă*, Maria used to frequent the cinema with such assiduity that she acquires the ability to manipulate films at will. Some real films are then referenced. The paintings of Monsù Desiderio are also described several times. Detailed descriptions of buildings, houses and all kinds of human edifices emerge. Other times the panoramic view of Bucharest is used in detail in all its architecture. From this city, moreover, many statues are mentioned in the first volume and they come to acquire mobility and speech in the third. Additionally, the art of living statues in Amsterdam is explored in *Corpul* with almost metaphysical conjectures. Already of lesser importance, there are nostalgic references to popular songs and television programs.

On the formal, more functional level, Ercolino argues that cinematic rhetoric could have been adopted to innovate the narrative discourse in literature and maximalism.

We can call to mind a single episode from *Corpul* that, perhaps, contains a quasi-cinematographic procedure: Mircea looking through his magnifying glass at the city and the past as if using a magic camera. Here the descriptions can be compared to different framing and shifting techniques, starting with an aerial shot of Bucharest. Then he seems to focus on a detailed shot of an insect, zooming in subatomically and zooming out astronomically, two procedures that lead to the same result here because the concept of fractals is explained. Then the framing moves on to other details of the whole, with close-ups of some people composing the scene, up to an overall shot of the space in which the episode about Vasili takes place over several pages. For its conclusion, the description of the fractal returns to the insect, and then Mircea withdraws his magnifying glass. It turns out that the whole episode had happened in a single frame, in a hyperdetailed shot of the insect: it had been the universe in a nutshell.

9) Ethical commitment

Postmodernism has often been considered a mere aesthetic game outside moral commitments, perhaps because of its disenchantment and suspicion of absolute values. Still, Ercolino insists that there is an ethical effort in maximalism[86]. The topics that he finds are usually of large-scale interest, such as history, politics and society.

In the case of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Ercolino identifies war, minorities, ecology, capitalism, the sacred, information, technology and drugs as the ethical issues addressed. For *Orbitor*, some corresponding themes can be: poverty, communism, suffering, transcendence, revolutions, the sacred (with a different perspective), sex, the psyche. Overall, its ethical commitment to literature as a mystical, ontological and transcendent experience is clear.

10) Hybrid realism

Throughout this text I have endeavored to point out that the fantastic, romanticism, surrealism and magical realism clash with the 19th century traditional realism and end up expanding it. Postmodernism (and maximalism) are no exception.

Ercolino calls this expansion a *hybrid realism* because it contains realistic elements, as well as others that are not so realistic. For example, implausible characters and situations stand out, which, while not violating any physical law, lack verisimilitude and have a grotesque or ridiculous character.[87]

James Wood calls this style *hysterical realism* and understands it as the dehumanization of the individual faced with an enormous amount of information in our contemporary world[88]. Based on statements by David Foster Wallace, Ercolino prefers to see it as a critical and aesthetic position that resorts to unreal fictions – paradoxically – to make the reader notice some aspects of the real that he would otherwise ignore.[89]

Here is where *Orbitor* distances itself from maximalism the most. In the trilogy the unreal is not a distorted representation of reality; it somehow exists as a part of it; the natural and the marvelous are both represented as entities that coexist harmonically. The aim is not to represent the reader's everyday reality, but to create purely literary manifestations and explore the author's subjectivity. To reach such state of harmony and psychism, there is a faith in what is being stated that differs from the skepticism driving maximalism. Here Pynchon and Cărtărescu differ.

> "But I have begun to realize that my use of disturbing dreams may be equally inspired by Thomas Pynchon. It was probably while reading *Gravity's Rainbow* that I was pushed in the direction of visionary literature. You may recall that one of the novel's characters is clairvoyant. Everything that occurs in his subconscious instantly becomes a reality. A fantastic ability that I have tried to incorporate into my own novel: all the thoughts and dreams of Mircea—who is not myself, just as Marcel in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is not Proust himself—become reality, in a grotesque way."[90]

Cărtărescu's unconscious exploration was motivated by Pynchon, who created such an impossible character in his novel with an authorial reticence that might well recall magical realism. But in Pynchon's case, there is no mystical conviction or faith. The purpose of the novel is still to represent objective reality. We can call this maximalist expression *hyperrealism*. *Orbitor*, in its turn, executes the same hyperreality with a faith and mysticism that condense into magical hyperrealism.

3. Magical hyperrealism

We have seen that *Orbitor* combines different modes of the fantastic as defined by Todorov, of which the indeterminacy between the real and the supernatural gives predominance to the purely fantastic. Magical realism and maximalism are relevant as well. The former because *Orbitor* harmonizes reality and the marvelous with authorial reticence and a faith in what is being stated; the latter because it develops a complex totalizing view of the world. This *ad hoc* term, magical hyperrealism, can be useful to understand this particular literary mode that combines both magical realism and maximalism with some differences.

Let's recall that, unlike in traditional magical realism (with *lo real maravilloso*), faith in *Orbitor* is based more on personal-intellectual convictions rather than social-collective beliefs, and there is an exploration of the inner self before than the outer society. Unlike maximalism, *Orbitor* does not distort real everyday life to depict it (with skepticism), but it illustrates a psychic subjectivity and purely literary manifestations using a strong faith in the marvelous (and in literature). Additionally, unlike maximalism again, *Orbitor*'s polyphony is limited since it is centered in one character, and the narrator (in first person) is both omniscient and deficient.

Magical hyperrealism is, then, a totalizing-encyclopedic vision of reality that, with authorial reticence, harmonizes the real and the marvelous with a strong faith. In Cărtărescu's case, such faith is predominantly personal, but it remains to be seen whether in the future other authors will apply this literary mode with a predominantly social approach, or whether there will be someone who will create more balanced perspectives.

With this expression I combine the terms *magical realism* and a prominent current in postmodern paintings: *hyperrealism*, which can very well be related to the hyperdetailed maximalist descriptions. *Suspension of Disbelief* by Jason de Graafs may be a good example for the stretch from hyperrealism to magical hyperrealism. With a photographic precision, it illustrates a sheet of comic strips and some marbles over it; one of them is floating for sure, and two others seem to be doing it as well. The general effect is of a hyperreal verism but with the addition of a supernatural element so subtle and harmonic that it becomes part of the whole reality. Such addition is never explained, but self-justified with a suspension of disbelief.

Mihai Iovănel considers that the main problem in Cărtărescu's style is the use of antiquated metaphors that are insufficient for the complexity of the 21st century.[91] The

argument, in principle, is interesting. On the one hand it may explain why critics such as Paul Cernat attribute to *Orbitor* a lack of depth with realism and the social; on the other hand it can be argued that these metaphors are also anachronistic and decontextualized, therefore more adaptable to an audience unfamiliar with Romanian (or any other) history. It might also explain why *Orbitor* attracts readers of maximalist novels (*Gravity's rainbow*'s readers, a more restricted niche) but also mass audiences with more classical tastes (some readers of *Cien años de soledad*, which does not employ old-fashioned metaphors but remains timeless). Iovănel sees the future of Romanian letters as unlikely to play a central role at a global level, Cărtărescu being one exception only for adhering to the European and North American canon.[92] However, magical hyperrealism, started by *Orbitor*, could articulate a literary style of transnational potential, without being just a retrograde or derivative literary mode if well executed by future writers. And it could reach both the canonic "centers" and "peripheries" such as Latin America maybe for starting in Romania, an European but not central country, an underdeveloped but not postcolonial phenomenon; a middle ground where postmodern maximalism and traditional magical realism met to be reexplored and "re-exported."

Why can magical hyperrealism be relevant today? *Orbitor* might be one answer to today's English and Hispanic literatures, bringing faith to US postmodernism and bringing it back to Hispanic letters now that they face a hypercomplex world. Magical hyperrealism is relevant not only because it amplifies reality through the marvelous, but because it brings back faith over skepticism, even when it is dealing with a hypercomplex postmodernity that tends to the contrary.

The way Cărtărescu looks at himself in *Orbitor* makes him a sort of the handsomest narcissist in the world, but that gaze runs the risk of falling to drown[93] if a critical look at his style is not employed. New works of magical hyperrealism could (and should) project a deeper look at otherness. Beyond Cărtărescu, it might be interesting to see new authors writing in a magical hyperrealist mode with different social approaches than that of *Orbitor*, in order to focus more interactively on local and transnational aspects. One other new possibility to be explored is the psychology of "the other" beyond "the self."

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Note

1. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 172.
2. Eva Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 1.
3. Roberto Gonzales Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim At Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 108 *Apud* Aldea, Eva, *Magical Realism*, 1-2.
4. *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus. Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*. The translation of the title to English is mine, based on the first translation of the book in Spanish: *Realismo mágico, post expresionismo: Problemas de la pintura más reciente.* Note that the first Spanish translator repositioned "magical realism" before "post-expressionism." Franz Roh, "Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. L. Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris, trans. Wendy B. Farris (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 30-31 (translator's footnote No.1).
5. Ibid., 18-23.
6. Irene Guenther, "Magic Realism in the Weimar Republic," in *Magical Realism,* ed. L. Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris, 60.
7. Luis Leal, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature," in *Magical Realism*, ed. L. Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris, 120.
8. Irene Guenther, "Magic Realism," 61.
9. "[...] ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de 'estado límite'." Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1993), 13. My translation.
10. Ibid., 13.
11. Ibid., 12.
12. Angel Flores, "Magical Realism in Spanish America," in *Magical Realism*, ed. L. Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Farris, 111.
13. Ibid., 112.
14. Ibid., 113-115.
15. He also recognized Arturo Uslar Pietri as the first to use the term in Hispanic America in *Letras y hombres de Venezuela (*1948), where Uslar Pietri describes man as a mystery surrounded by reality, a poetic denial of reality, something that he calls *realismo mágico*. Luis Leal, "Magical Realism," 120.
16. Ibid., 121-122.

17. Ibid., 121.
18. Here Leal is quoting Franz Roh. Ibid., 124 (Leal's footnote No. 11).
19. Here Leal is making a reference to Carpentier.
20. Luis Leal, "Magical Realism," 123.
21. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, "Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy" (PhD Diss., The University of Alberta, 1982), 16.
22. Unlike the pure marvelous (the fairy tale), where everything is accepted as supernatural, in magical realism the supernatural is eventually accepted and cohabitates with the natural.
23. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, "Magical realism," 167.
24. Ibid., 30.
25. Chanady also considers this episode as a relevant example of authorial reticence in a brief description. Ibid., 41.
26. Alina Bako also analyzes the binary structure of the world in *Aripa stângă*, comparing it with the dualistic view of Empedocles's philosophy (the higher is fire-life; the lower is earth-immobility). Alina Bako, "Blended spaces in Mircea Cărtărescu's novel Blinding. The Left Wing," *World literature studies* 13, no. 4 (2021): 110-111.
27. Paul Cernat criticizes the effectiveness of this realism, as we will see below. However, Cărtărescu's intention of writing in a realistic style is clear.
28. It is not a strict rule. There are episodes that have elements of magical realism: the aforementioned one of the cities covered in gold; a child gestating in Herman's skull; the rebellion of the statues. The case of a giant woman who is "literally" the Romanian revolution and her rape by the new rulers, all circus performers, could perhaps be another case, although this one seems much more like an allegory of political corruption.
29. "[...] y de repente me pregunté si el mundo no sería también una forma de realidad, tal vez tan consistente como la ficción, si no sería también la vida tan verdadera como los sueños..."
[a] Mircea Cărtărescu, *El ala derecha: Cegador*, vol. 3, trans. Marian Ochoa de Eribe (Madrid: Impedimenta, 2022), 176. My translation into English.
30. Paul Cernat, "Cum se ascunde literatura sub „fustele murdare ale istoriei" [On How Literature Hides under "History's Dirty Skirts"], *Observator cultural*, no. 387, August 30, 2007. https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/cum-se-ascunde-literatura-sub-fustele-murdare-ale-istoriei-2/. Accessed on April 21, 2023.
31. Eva Aldea, *Magical realism*, 16.
32. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, "Magic Realism Revisited: The Deconstruction of Antinomies," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 30, no. 2 (June 2003): 429.
33. For more information regarding this bilateral contact, see Melanie Nicholson's *Surrealism in Latin America: Searching for Breton's Ghost* (2013) and Stephen Henighan's *Two Paths to the Boom: Carpentier, Asturias, and the Performative Split* (1999).
34. Chanady, "Magic Realism Revisited," 437.
35. Irene Guenther, "Magic realism," 61.
36. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, "Magic Realism Revisited," 436.
37. Gabriel García Márquez, *Vivir para contarla* (New York: Random House, 2002), 298.
38. Delia Ungureanu, *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 80.
39. Ernesto Sábato, *Antes del fin* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Editora Espasa Calpe Argentina S.A., Seix Barral, Grupo Editorial Planeta, 1998), 40-41.
40. Elena Abrudan, *Structuri mitice în proza contemporană* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa cărții de știință, 2003), 58-59.
41. Breton would compare surrealism with alchemy. André Breton, *Manifiestos del surrealismo*, trans. Aldo Pellegrini (Buenos Aires: Editorial Argonauta, 2001), 173-174.
42. Elena Crasovan, "Magical realism avatars in the Romanian novel," *Research Gate*, 37-39.
43. Ibid., 40-48.
44. Ibid., 49.
45. Peter Schlemihl, a character written by Adelbert von Chamisso in his homonymous novella (1814), trades his shadow to the devil for a bottomless wallet. The term *shlemiel* (inept) is used by Yiddish culture, but not referring to a person who lost his shadow, like von Chamisso's character.
46. Ibid., 432.
47. Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*, for example, is inspired by the Haitian revolution, an early fight for independence in Latin America.
48. Colonel Aureliano Buendía in *Cien años de soledad* is a paradigmatic example.
49. To a lesser extent, it also describes the Nazi occupation and the Legionary Movement (*Mișcarea Legionară*) from the past. Elena Crasovan reflects on how magical realist tendencies in Romania were nonconformist against the conjunctures of the present[a]: Sadoveanu echoed the literary perspective of a brutal European interwar period; writers of the communist period evaded the restrictions of the communist regime (which demanded works illustrating the socialist utopia), but at the same time adapted to them by showing the marginality and the exceptions of social reality (where magic could also happen)b; post-communism writers, such as Cărtărescu, turned against the ex-regime as it was recalled from their (magical) childhood and youth memories. See Elena Crasovan, "Magical realism." Here Crasovan agrees with

Ștefan Baghiu, who identifies a common left-wing affinity in Latin American and Romanian magical realisms: both resorted on the social and would manifest themselves against an official regime. In Romania's case this also implied an implicit rebellion against the socialist dictum, even if writers managed to accommodate themselves to the literary demands of the government. Ștefan Baghiu, "Geocritique: Siting, Poverty, and the Global Southeast," in *Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual Commons*," ed. Alexandru Matei, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian (New York/London/Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 245-246.

50. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, "Magic realism revisited," 435.
51. Toni Morrison's work is worthy of attention: coming from a "central" country (United States), it seems to show features of magical realism, although it deals with the marginal parts of this central country.
52. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel*, *Apud* Elena Abrudan, *Structuri mitice*, 98.
53. Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's* Gravity's Rainbow *to Roberto Bolaño's* 2666 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), xi.
54. Ibid., 70.
55. Ibid., xii.
56. Ibid., 19.
57. Ibid., 24-25.
58. Ibid., 29-31.
59. Ibid., 42.
60. Ibid., 42; 45-46.
61. Ibid., 46-47.
62. Ibid., 48-49; 56.
63. Some exceptions are the voices of Silvia and Victor in *Aripa dreaptă*.
64. That is, with an apparently intradiegetic narrator (that is, narrating a story within his own other story); although in the end he may be the one who witnesses everything from his mind in an autodiegetic way (witnessing everything at the level of his primary experience).
65. Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 59-60.
66. Ibid., 72-74.
67. Ibid., 78.
68. W.A.S.T.E. Mailing List, "Blinding Vol. 1 by Mircea Cărtărescu | BOOK REVIEW," Youtube, accessed February 17, 2023, video, 23:27-27:54. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxzGZg0W2Gk&t=1748s&ab_channel=WASTEMailingList.
69. Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 85.
70. Ibid., 87-88.
71. Tzvetan Todorov: *Les catégories du récit littéraire*, Apud Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 97.
72. Óscar Tacca, *Las voces de la novela* (Madrid: Gredos, 1985), 72.
73. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, *Apud* Ercolino, Stefano, *Maximalist novel*, 161-94.
74. Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 98-99.
75. Doris and Andreea Mironescu show that in *Solenoid*, also by Mircea Cărtărescu, maximalism is applied on the basis of a first-person narrator who is not necessarily omniscient. Their analysis is approached from the perspective of autofiction[a], which is also an essential procedure in *Orbitor*. Indeed, both cartarescian works show continuity in terms of using a maximalist autofiction, although *Solenoid* seems to abandon the kind of realism that prevails in *Orbitor* (especially in *Aripa dreaptă*), describing communism with surrealistic, marvelous techniques. It seems that *Orbitor* is closer to magical hyperrealism than *Solenoid*, which is, perhaps, closer to hyper-surrealism. See Doris Mironescu and Andreea Mironescu, "Maximalist Autofiction, Surrealism and Late Socialism in Mircea Cărtărescu's *Solenoid*," *The European Journal of Life Writing* 10 (2021). https://ejlw.eu/article/view/37605.
76. Audun Lindholm, "The Mircea Cărtărescu interview," Vagant, June 20, 2016, accessed on 21 April, 2023, http://www.vagant.no/the-mircea-cartarescu-interview/.
77. Thus, reversing the inequation from (N > C) to (N < C). Notice the narratological value of the term *Those Who Know*.
78. In this case, then, Genette's three concepts are not univocally equivalent to Todorov's like in a bijective function.
79. Tzvetan Todorov, *Fantastic: Structural*, 82.
80. Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 105-106.
81. Ibid., 108-109.
82. Thomas Pynchon: *Gravity's Rainbow*. Apud Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 110.
83. Mircea Cărtărescu, *El ala izquierda: Cegador, 1*, trans. Marian Ochoa de Eribe (Madrid: Impedimenta, 2018), 325. My translation into English and my emphasis.
84. Mircea Cărtărescu, *El ala derecha: Cegador, 3*, trans. Marian Ochoa de Eribe (Madrid: Impedimenta, 2022), 552. My translation into English and my emphasis.
85. Stefano Ercolino, *Maximalist novel*, 123.
86. Ibid., 134-136.
87. Ibid., 159.

88. Ibid., 158-160.
89. Ibid., 164.
90. Lindholm, "Mircea."
91. Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* (Iași: Polirom, 2021), 379.
92. Ibid., 679.
93. *I.e. el ahogado más hermoso del mundo*, the handsomest drowned man in the world.

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