An Overview of Diasporic Marvellous Realism and History in Literature

Certainly, Caribbean history has been an important source of literary inspiration, above all when dealing with slavery; Latin American and Caribbean literature in recent decades has “endeavoured to accomplish the task of restoring, filling, and correcting history.”¹ From a postmodern perspective, there is no place for a single reading of the past as an object of examination. Writers of marvellous realism provide different points of view in order to open the text to a variety of interpretations. Carpentier achieved this effect in the bonfire episode that he describes in The Kingdom of This World when the narrator offers a switch in perspective from the slaves’ point of view to that of the French soldiers. Similarly, diasporic marvellous-realist authors will challenge epistemological discourses in order to explore the internal inconsistencies that might appear while regarding the way the past has been told in historical master-narratives.

Silences in history, human discourses consciously constructed to serve imperial interests, can become a text to be read and reinterpreted. They are connotatively meaningful, opening the gateway to the imagination. Historical silences are, then, textually re-created by authors to be subsequently discovered by a reader who “replaces the challenged author–text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse.”² In this respect, Waugh acknowledges the importance of novels such as One Hundred Years of Solitude in showing “the

relationship between the ‘real’ and the ‘fictive’ world [which is] maintained and understood, while Hutcheon goes one step further to consider this particular novel as an example of historical metafictive work that employ[s] parody not only to restore history and memory in the face of the distortions of the ‘history of forgetting’ but also, at the same time, to put into question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality.

Further, Hutcheon retrieves Hayden White’s postulate that historical writing is a means to “familiarize the unfamiliar through (very familiar) narrative structures [where] the ontological line between historical past and literature is not effaced, but underlined.” This is done in order to suggest that historical events might really have existed, but that they have reached contemporary times in the form of a narrative, be it oral or written, which takes us once again back to the idea that both history and fiction are discursive constructs. Apropos of this contextualization, there are any number of contemporary writers who “insist that the past had and continues to have profound impact on the minds, emotions, and beliefs of individuals, families and communities.”

Many treatments of magical realism in literature label certain literary works as magical-realist on the grounds that they include ghosts, apparitions, or folkloric figures. However, most of these texts demonstrate ‘moments’ of magically inflected realism rather than a magical or marvellous narrative through and through. There are works by Caribbean authors in the diaspora in which some of these ‘moments’ can be identifiable, above all if we consider the use of history in these narratives. Some authors include “significant irruptions of nonrealist tendencies into a realist text” that show traces of marvelous realism in terms of both their literary philosophy and their narrative technique. In the particular case of Diasporic Marvellous Realism, this can

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3 Waugh, Metafiction, 37.
5 “Historiographic Metafiction,” 10.