

Magical Realism

- *the name of the genre as a misnomer: oxymoron
- *a genre/ a mode of writing/ representational strategy/ lit. device/ attitude twds reality/ a modality of interpreting existence/ a way of seeing?
- * defamiliarization & fantastification
(magic revealed as real, real revealed as magical)

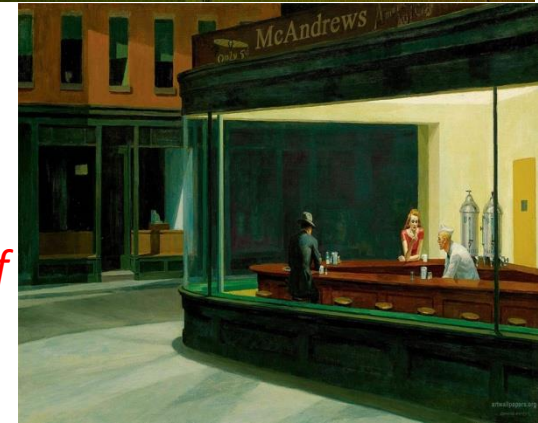
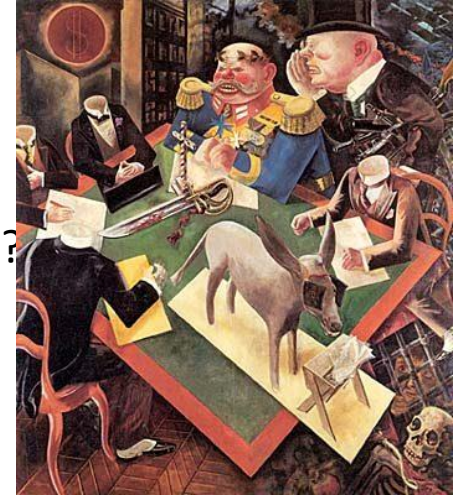
1.MAGIC REALISM (*MAGISCHER REALISMUS*, 1920, GERMAN PAINTING

2.MARVELLOUS REALISM (*LO REAL MARAVILLOSO*, 1940) LATIN AMERICA AS SOURCE OF WONDER

3.MAGICAL REALISM (*REALISMO MAGICO* 1950) LATAM FICTION

- „a simple matter of the most complicated sort”,*
- „a capacity to write about all dimensions of reality” (Allende)*
- „all narrative fiction that includes magical happenings in a realist matter-of-fact tone, the supernatural as an everyday occurrence, integrated into rationality and materiality of literary realism”,*
- * the realistic mingles with the unexpected and inexplicable, elements of dream, mythology, fairy-story combine with the everyday in a kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction+recurrence
- *” **A reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, & that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty”**

(Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Nobel lecture, 1982)





Otto Dix

War cripples playing cards, 1920

German post-expressionist painting

Magischer Realismus

Neue Sachlichkeit (new objectivity)

◇ „a mystery that hides and palpitates behind the represented real”:
see secret interior of external world &
reach a sense of unreality

◇ aim at a deeper understanding of the
non-material aspects of reality
hesitation+ epiphany

◇ terrestrial horrors of own times are
worse than the horrors of hell

◇ focus on absurd, inexplicable aspects
of being (trauma of war)

◇ politically/ethically self-conscious
admiration of magic of being

1942 MoMa: US MR: urban fantasy: nightlife, metropolitan solitude, the un/making of the American dream
something familiar seen in a different light, defamiliarization, uncanny
lure of public, „transitional” places: which belong to no one & everyone (hotel, bar, mall, museum, library)



**Edward Hopper - *Nighthawks*, 1942 - Oil on canvas,
The Art Institute of Chicago; Friends of American Art Collection
Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**

Postmodern revision of Hopper's Nighthawks painting:
intrusion of unexpected element within a familiar scene
pastiche: work of art that imitates the style or character of another work in a
mocking, lighthearted manner --canon revision



Magical realism: intrusion of fantastic/mythic element within everyday life reality
Tests limits of credibility: What is imaginary? What is real?

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/lloullabelle/edward-hopper-nighthawks-a-parody/>

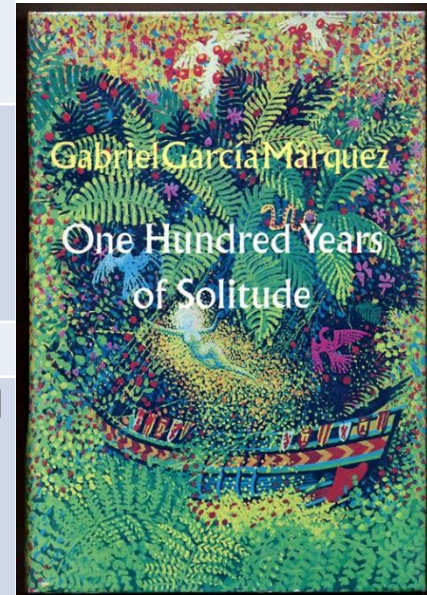
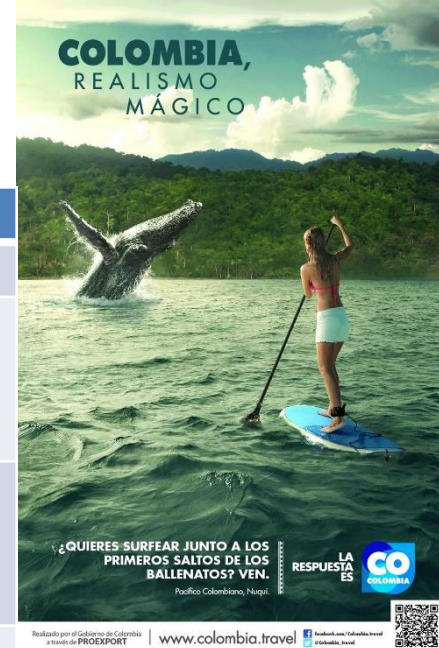


Marvellous realism (lo real maravilloso, 1940)

Latin America as a source of wonder

Combine rational & superstitious perspectives,

EUROPEAN MAGIC REALISM	LATIN AMERICAN MAGIC REALISM
epistemological, scholarly type	ontological, mythic, folkloric type
magic as narrative/pol. strategy (Postcolonialism, feminism)	mestizaje cult. heritage-based, visionary (superstitions, legends, rituals)
magic stems from observer's visions, author's stylistic feat, word magic	America itself is marvelous, magic resides in the land/cultures: hist, geogr, pol, demogr. diversity
postmodernist formal innovation recycles, myths, Fairy tales, surrealism, modernism	inherited tradition: family legends, folk lore, slave narratives, oral tradition
destabilization of rationality: magical causality, retellings of familiar (his)stories, hesitation, unreliable narrators, madness	miracle, epiphany, vision, FAITH
defamiliarization	supernaturalization
Angela Carter: Nights at the Circus 1984 Mikhail Bulgakov: The Master & Margarita (1941) Günter Grass. The Tin Drum (1959) Michel Tournier. The Erl King (1970) Toni Morrison: Beloved (1987) Patrick Süskind. The Perfume (1985)	Gabriel Garcia Marquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967)



Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967)

„Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.,,

- *multigenerational family saga in fictitious town of Macondo, Colombia –strange events
- *fatalism, ideological/historical entrapment, ghosts of past, folk lore, individual delusions
- *ends w tornado washing away everything, baby w pig's tail devoured by ants
- * glories and disasters of a family= tragedies and comedies of humankind

How can we reconcile the fictional world of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, populated by characters ascending to heaven amidst bedsheets, mysteriously levitating while drinking cups of chocolate, and turning into snakes or puddles of pitch, in a world benighted with deluges lasting several years and yellow flowers falling from the sky with the claim that the New World fiction is subject to a control of the imaginary based on the mimetic representation of the continent's reality, especially bearing in mind the importance of positivism in Latin America? (Zamora & Faris on Marquez)

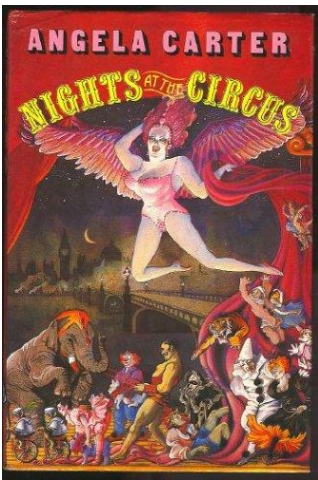


- magical realism (realismo magico 1950) LatAm fiction
 - **the main fantastic characteristics of a magical realist narrative:**
 - --narrates magical happenings in matter of fact tone as inherent part of reality
 - --fantastic illogic not questioned but accepted by characters
 - -- presents extraordinary events as ordinary, and ordinary events as extraordinary
 - --plays of cyclical, deadened time, kaleidoscopic perspective, mirrorings, open endings, magical causality confusing cause and effect
 - --magical transgressions implying hybridity, excess, metamorphosis
 - --universal quality yet historically specific, political potential
 - --explores/ transgresses ontological, pol., geographical, generic, gender boundaries
 - --richness of sensory details, lively simulated orality
- F: unresolved antimony ↔ MR: resolved antimony (no uncertainty ab. magical events)
- MR as a postmodern genre: relativize hierarchies, demythologizing rewriting, metafictional quality, alternative identity positions



Problematic dilemmas of Magic Realism

- What counts as magic? (matter of readerly judgment, authorial intention, cult. context)
- Belief and Incredulity cultural context-dependent
- Escapist & apolitical or overpoliticized?
- Preserves tradition, lends voice to othered minorities OR cultural appropriation, consumerization of exotica, colonized magic?
- different kinds of magic blur within 1 text: Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*: circus' carnivalesque space, confidence trickster birdwoman, pure marvellous picaresque, Siberian shamanistic tribe (a culture of high semioticity), pathologized magic in Museum of female monsters, uncanny puppet master, household magic, the wonder of romantic love, the miracles of storytelling: fictional worldmaking, play w readerly doubts
- label used for marketing purposes
- new names: neofantastic, hysterical realism. Neosurrealism, irrationalism, neo-gothic



Michael Gibson: Apocalypto.
Epic adventure film, 2006



Change of perspective

Spectators of the film are shocked by the strangeness of the 16th c Maya culture (human sacrifice ritual, tribal customs, „uncivilized” looks)

In the end the Spanish conquistadors are seen through the eyes of the Mesoamerican hunter as strange creatures emerging from the mysterious realm of sea

→

see myth of [Quetzalcoatl](#) (Aztec Indian serpent *god*): possibly inspired by the landing of Cortes



Ambiguous posture: repose or immobility? Relaxing or paralysed body? Sense of being fixed to the ground, waking dream, sleep paralysis , play w perspective, open air but claustrophobia
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>



Andrew Wyeth, (1917-2009) - " Christina's World ", 1948 - Tempera on gessoed panel - The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Surrealism. Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog) a 1929 silent surrealist short film directed by Luis Buñuel and artist Salvador Dalí. [Click here to watch film.](#)

The opening filmshot of an eyeball being slit open challenges the limits of spectatorship

Surrealism plays with imagery borrowed from dreams, resonates with ideas of psychoanalysis (stages unconscious, unspeakable desires and dreads)



An Andalusian Dog

As in the „word magic“ characterising literary fantastic modes: poetic metaphorical expressions are visualised literalised (hand itching: palm crawling w ants)
visions of excess (Fr phil Bataille), symbols emptied of meaning, powerful corporeal imagery
a testament to surrealist art or a hoax?



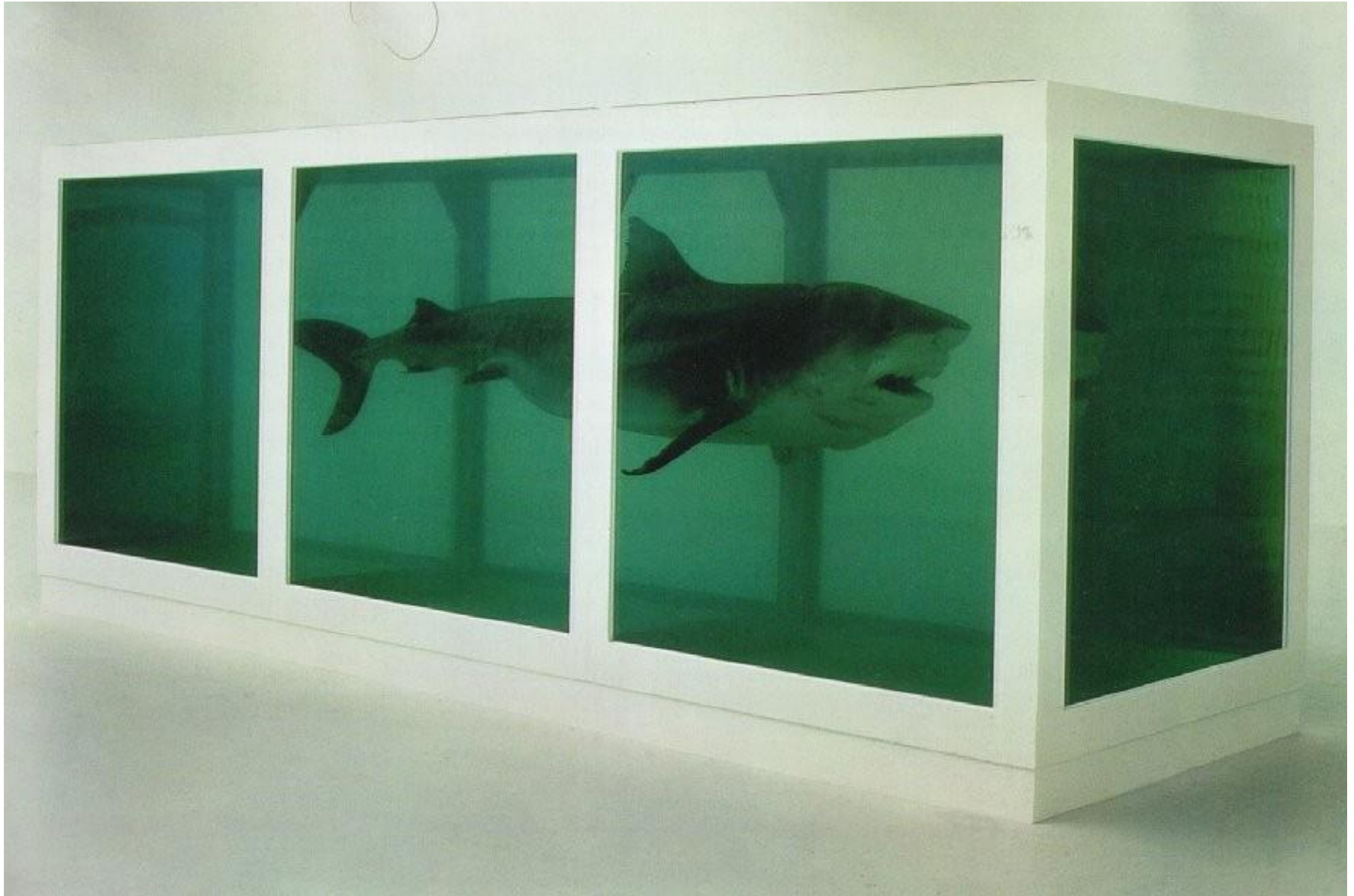
Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain, *The Fabulous Life of Amélie*, dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001
children's innocent imagination as inspiration for creativity
naivety, kindness, curiosity, empathy as a way of seeing
overactive fantasizing: seeing mysteries where there are none, quest initiated by finding a childhood treasure
celebration of beauty of life, trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kY_qRvBKNaA



Ron Mueck: hyperrealist sculpture
becomes uncanny because of its life-likeness
blurring dividing line bw animate/inanimate (like puppet,
cyborg)
simulation of reality
play w proportions: small turns huge
mundane (human body) becomes magical
invites microscopic attention/ spectatorship from a distance



Damien Hirst. The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living,
shock art, taxidermy art, ethically dubious, uses animal bodies to communicate metaphorical message
telling title: try to represent the unrepresentable
YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS, 1990s: part of a movement but singularly unique





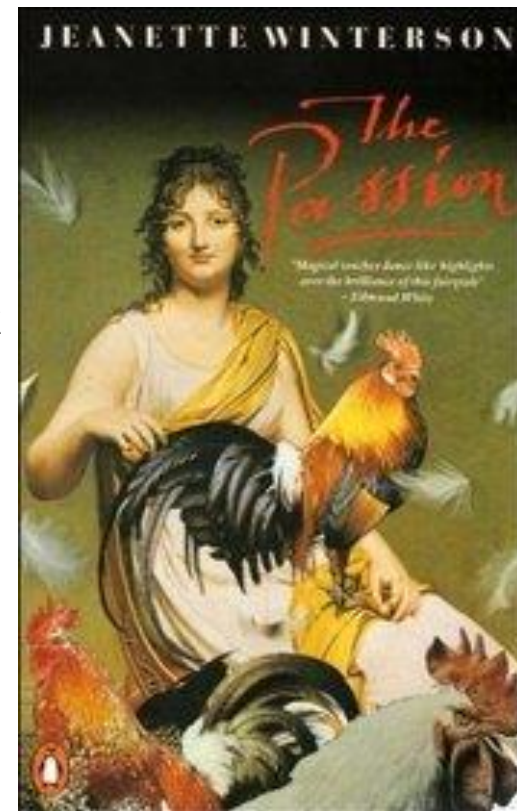
Salvador Dali, "Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening" (1944)

- inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis
- interpretation of unconscious psychic processes:
- condensation/displacement function like metaphor and metonymy in poetic language
- works in dreams, phantasies, neurosis
- Dreams might be more vital experiences than waking life
- Dreams offer endless stimulation for the creative artist's imagination

Surrealism is an artistic movement popular between the 2 World Wars –its unique alienation from/revisioning of reality is akin with the Magical Realist agenda

Jeanette Winterson. *The Passion* (1987)

- **Historiographic metafiction:** term by Linda Hutcheon in *Poetics of Postmodernism*: „popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages”
 - fact & fiction fused: Napoleonic wars + magic (girl w webbed feet can walk on water)
 - recognition of fictionality of hisSTORY and factuality of fiction (telling about historical era when written/read)
- **Metafiction** (Patricia Waugh): “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality”
 - „I’m telling you stories. Trust me.” (Winterson. *Passion*)
 - Question of (un)reliability of storyteller
- **Magic realism’s new perspective on truth(s):**
 - History seen through eyes of Venetian warwhore + Napoleon’s cook
 - oral histories of minor characters
 - magically enhanced bodies. Vilanelle walks on water, hearts can be stolen and weaved in a tapestry, Patrick’s telescopic eyesight
 - defamiliarization of language: literalized metaphors: poetic prose
 - magical space (Venice the mythical city further fictionalised)
 - lesbian desire as alternative to heteronormative sexual economy



Jeanette Winterson. *The Passion* (1987)

Passion: multiple meanings:

1. Biblical religious, pain+redemption+sacrifice (Jesus Christ)
2. turbulent emotion: youthful exuberance: ritualistic murder to save a fellow human being, sacred+profane, crime+punishment (madness), killing of cook next to the church: religious/erotic/mortal transgression: tabboos violated
3. erotics of risk, chance, gift: „You play, you win. You play, you lose. What you risk, reveals your value. „
Lure of haphazardness instead of safety, nonproductive expenditure, ecstasy of excess, taboo breaking
4. erotics of storytelling, libidinal feminine writings:
--Like Sheherazade in 1001 Nights
--Nonlinear text, writing from an endless body without end/ writing beyond
--unconventional bodies in text challenging conventional happy ending
--Lesbian writer, queering of the text, fluidity of desires:
city on water, masked ropedancers' stolen kisses, carnivalesque role-playing
protagonists' gender bender (girs dressed up as boys, feminine guys)
5. Rave of getting lost
Spatial symbols: Mazes, seawaves, gardening in madhouse garden

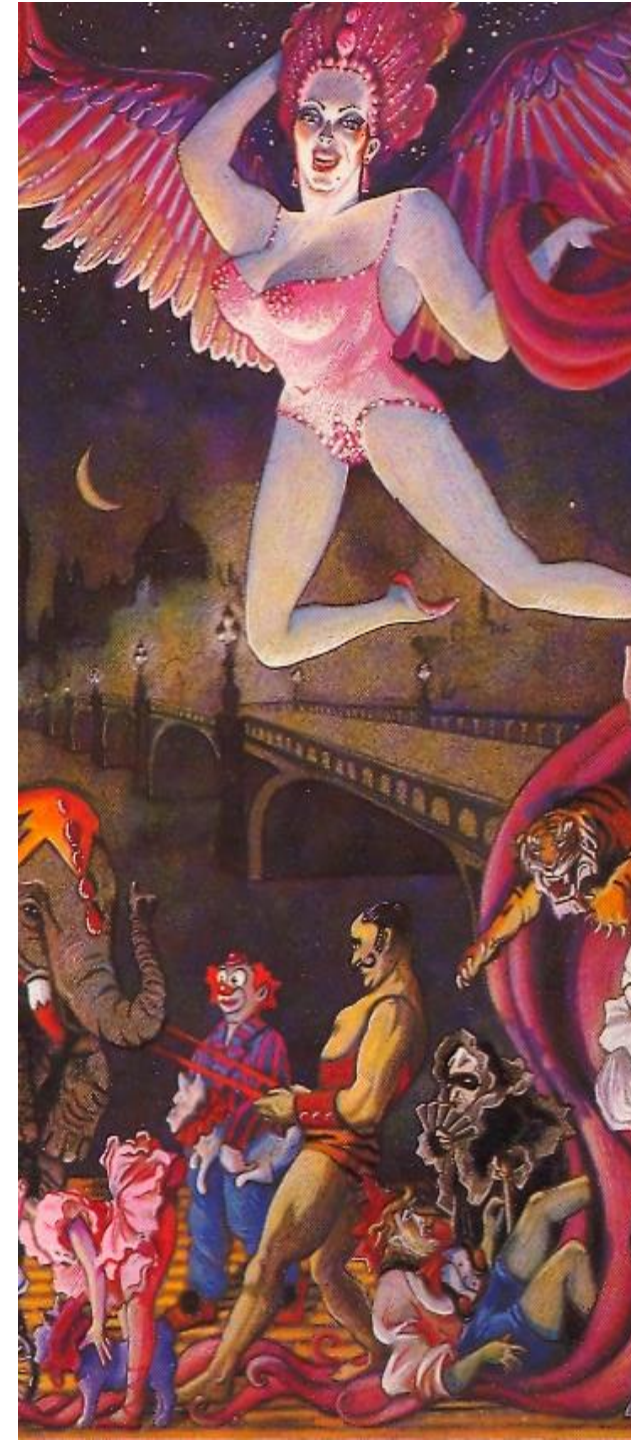


- Venice as an enchanted space
- Real city w a mythology/ history (Serenissima)
- City on water (fluid, undefinable, shape-shifting, labyrinthine)
- City of illusions and delusions (carnival, self-masking, gambling, flirting)
- Heterotopia (Foucault): space beyond all other spaces (library, museum, prison, zoo, ship)
- Psychogeography: the emotional investment/private experience of space is more important than its consensual rational mapping
- Venice= „less a city than an experience”
- Eroticised/sentimentalised place (fav honeymoon destination)
- Winterson’s Venice: an invented city, overflows maps, enchanted realm where all thing seem possible.
- „Time stops. Hearts beat. The laws of the real world are suspended. God sits in the rafters and makes fun of the Devil, and the Devil pokes our Lord with his tail. „
- Spatial symbols: Mazes, seawaves, boats, gardening in madhouse garden



Angela Carter. Nights at the Circus (1984)

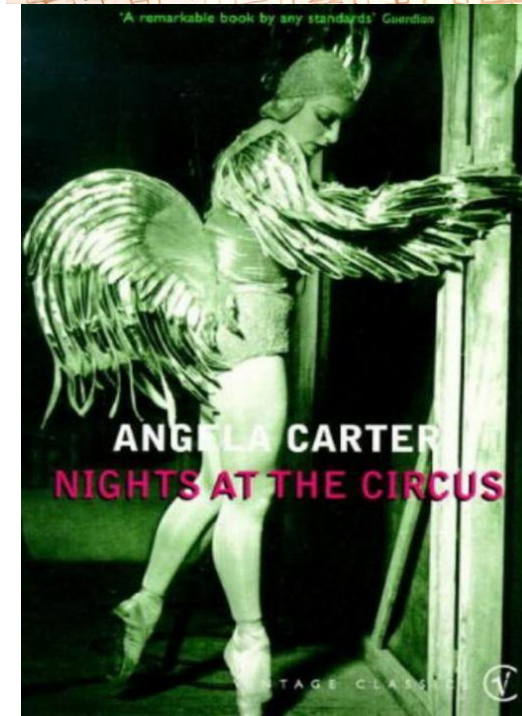
- „Demythologizing business”: undoes the tradition
- Postmodern, feminist, magical mannerist
- Recycles fairy tale, myth, Bible, arts, pop+high culture
- Storytelling as magic act: fibbing, flirtatious, forgetful narrative –unreliable narrator, plays w reader’s doubts
- Autofiction, heroine gives interview to journalist Jack Walser who will fall in love with her (mock romance), she self-stylizes, fantastifies her identity, show-woman act
- Heroine: Sophie Fevvers: (fever+feather): *Lusus natura*, fact or fiction? a birdwoman, a giantess who never appears without her wings, an aerialiste ropedancer, the Cockney Venus, lower class goddess, huge Gargantuan proportion, self-freaking: a miracle or a monster or a hoax? – undecidability (≈hesitation of fantastic)
- Circus: carnivalesque space, grotesque bodies, clowns’ dance of disintegration, dancing tigers, professor ape, strongman
- marvellous picaresque, travelogue: story of a journey, tour of travelling circus (London-St Petersburg-Siberia)
- confidence trickster birdwoman (might fool everyone) she has her final laugh that shatters the entire globe



Angela Carter. Nights at the Circus (1984)

- DIFFERENT MODES OF MAGIC thematised in text
- Siberian shamanistic tribe (a culture of high semioticity: everything holds magical symbolical meanings),
- pathologized magic in Museum of female monsters (freaks of nature are exhibited for gentlemen's erotic entertainment)
- uncanny puppet master's misogynist alchemy,
- the male collector's fetishization/ commodification of magic cherished for its market value
- Lizzie's household magic, (goodies in her handbag)
- the wonder of romantic love, (Fevvers and Walser)
- Trick time and space, (illogic of magical realist narrative)
- Ambiguous ending: The Birdwoman's spiralling tornado of laughter → questions: Who has the last laugh? Who fools whom? What is the difference between laughing at & laughing with someone
- Different laughter: *clowns' apocalyptic merriment, *blond as clown , *infantile joie de vivre

For more on Carter: https://www.academia.edu/1583609/Body-Texts_in_the_Novels_of_Angela_Carter_Writing_from_a_Corporagraphic_Point_of_View



Historiographic metafiction

All of my work, including *Oranges*, manipulates history. The past is not sacred. The past is not static. There are a few facts we can rely on – dates, places, people, but the rest is interpretation and imagination. I like that freedom. I liked the idea of setting an intensely personal story against a brutal impersonal background. Anyway, Napoleon has always fascinated me, probably because he was short. The real answer to why is not a fact it's a fiction. It wasn't an objective choice, it was a hunch. I hadn't been to Venice when I wrote about it – which is perfect because Venice doesn't really exist. (Winterson on „*The Passion*”)

Fictional autobiography of monstrous, marvellous birdwoman

‘Lor’ love you, sir!’ Fevvers sang out in a voice that clanged like dustbin lids. ‘As to my place of birth, why, I first saw the light of day right here in smoky old London, didn’t I! Not billed the “Cockney Venus” for nothing, sir, though they could just as well ‘ave called me “Helen of the High Wire”, due to the unusual circumstances in which I came ashore – for I never docked via what you might call the normal channels, sir, oh dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was hatched.’ (from Angela Carter. *Nights at the Circus*)