Magical Realism*

*This PowerPoint Presentation is a modified version. The original is from http://www.fl.nctu.edu.tw/~pcfeng/THE%20FANTASTIC/.
Márquez and magic realism

• From http://www.themodernword.com/gabo/gabo_mr.html:

• “Like many Latin American writers, Gabriel García Márquez has been inextricably linked to a style of literature known as "magical realism."

• Literature of this type is usually characterized by elements of the fantastic woven into the story with a deadpan sense of presentation.

• The term is not without a lot of controversy, however, and has come under attack for numerous reasons. Some claim that it is a postcolonial hangover, a category used by "whites" to marginalize the fiction of the "other." Others claim that it is a passé literary trend, or just a way to cash in on the Latin American "boom." Still others feel the term is simply too limiting, and acts to remove the fiction in question from the world of serious literature.”
Defining magic realism


• The term magic realism, originally applied in the 1920s to a school of painters, is used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel García Márquez in Colombia, Gunter Grass in Germany, and John Fowles in England.

• These writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.

• These novels violate, in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic -- and sometimes highly effective -- experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic.
Magical Realist Authors

- From Lindsay Moore’s page (www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/MagicalRealism.html):
  - Gabriel Garcia Marquez
  - Ben Okri
  - Isabel Allende
  - Syl Cheney-Coker
  - Kojo Laing
  - Alejo Carpentier
  - Toni Morrison
  - Kwsme Anthony Appiah
  - Mario Vargas Llosa
Background

"The term ‘magical realism’ was first introduced by Franz Roh, a German art critic, who considered magical realism an art category.

To him, it was a way of representing and responding to reality and pictorially depicting the enigmas of reality.

In Latin America in the 1940s, magical realism was a way to express the realistic American mentality and create an autonomous style of literature."
Characteristics

• Hybridity—a postcolonial feature
• Ironic Perspective—distancing
• Authorial reticence—lack of clear opinions
• The mixture of the supernatural and natural
• Compression of time and space
Themes

• “The idea of terror overwhelms the possibility of rejuvenation in magical realism. Several prominent authoritarian figures, such as soldiers, police, and sadists all have the power to torture and kill.”

• “Time is another conspicuous theme, which is frequently displayed as cyclical instead of linear. What happens once is destined to happen again. Characters rarely, if ever, realize the promise of a better life. As a result, irony and paradox stay rooted in recurring social and political aspirations.”
Themes--continued

• “Another particularly complex theme in magical realism is the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is carnival’s reflection in literature. The concept of carnival celebrates the body, the senses, and the relations between humans. ‘Carnival’ refers to cultural manifestations that take place in different related forms in North and South America, Europe, and the Caribbean, often including particular language and dress, as well as the presence of a madman, fool, or clown. In addition, people organize and participate in dance, music, or theater. Latin American magical realists, for instance, explore the bright life-affirming side of the carnivalesque.”

• “The reality of revolution, and continual political upheaval in certain parts of the world, also relates to magical realism. Specifically, South America is characterized by the endless struggle for a political ideal.”
Creation

• Michael Parkes