made in a 250-page book. Either way, let us hope that some time in the future we will have access to the full versions of all the interviews as well as more leftover bits and pieces from Zoltán Abádi-Nagy's drawers – first of all, to what he has on Coover and Barth, if I may suggest.

Judit Bakos

Legitimising the Apocryphal?

Tamás Bényei, *Apokrif Iratok. Mágikus realista regényekről* [Apocryphal Texts. Magic Realism in Novels], Orbis Litterarum Series 3, Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1997.

The term 'magic realism' itself is rather contradictory so far as it interpolates the subjective, the magical, and the spiritual 'mode' within the objective, the realistic, and the physical 'mode' of writing. According to the author the supernatural is 'immanent' in magic realist texts, a 'hidden property of reality,' growing organically out of the represented world.[3] Are they meant to be sacred texts, the apocryphal versions or

simulations of holy books (R. p. 174)? Bényei's compact, well balanced study supplies the reader with an answer to this question among many others.

The introduction, by observing the 'popular' connotations of 'magic realism' – that is, the allusions to the exotic, the fantastic, the unknown – emphasises the need for a closer analysis, a possible rereading of the term, suggesting new approaches to the understanding of this 'mode' of writing. Following the critical canon, Bényei defines the texts of magical realism to be analysed as 'paradigmatic' and 'typical.' There is a wide range of authors and works he labels 'magic realist' out of which his paradigmatic texts will be: García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981); and the 'typical': Tony Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983).

The author's underlying assumption is that the magic realist 'mode of writing' is a part of the postmodern mode, although the two terms should not be blurred, or understood as synonyms. It is, as he sees it, close to the postmodern novel-poetics elaborated by Linda Hutcheon in the 1980s. Though he accepts the theory that most 'magic realist' texts have been born in a postcolonial context, Bényei emphasises that this mode of writing itself is not necessarily, 'per definitionem' the

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[3]Tamás Bényei, 'Rereading "Magic Realism"' *HJEAS, vol.3, No.1* (1997) p. 152., further referred to as 'R'

monopoly of the literature of peripheries, minorities, oppositions (postcolonial or feminist) or of any specific geographical region (Latin America, the past colonies; pp. 15-16).

The first chapter surveys the history of the use of the term 'magic realism' going back to the 1920s when the term was first used in Europe, in the context of art history, by Franz Roh, the German art historian, in his book *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus* (p. 21). The ambiguous nature of the term used in the European context, for paintings mainly, was quite different from that of the Latin American usage, for literature, from the late 1920s, and later on, from the postcolonial and postmodern notion of 'magic realism' in the 1980s. Bényei agrees with Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon that the postmodern features of ontological fear, carnivalistic textuality, the polyphony of discursive realities can all be found in agreement with the characteristics of the so called 'magic realist' texts (pp. 45-46).

In the second chapter Bényei redefines magic realism as a mode of writing in his discussion of the aspects of the fantastic as critical heritage, its appearance in inversion and 'adjunction,' magic and reality; the rhetorics of magic: causality and figurativity; the pragmatics of magic: storytelling; writing and speaking (narrating); genealogy; magic as the transgression of taboos; magic as apocryphal and the magic word.

The rhetoric inversion between fantastic and real, supernatural and ordinary, is a basic strategy in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* the first sentence, – "I was born in Bombay … once upon a time"– in Bényei's analysis, already performs two conflicting codes, the realistic and the fabulating (p. 64). It is rather the subversion of boundaries, the use of hyperboles, the adjunctive logic of magic realist texts whereby the nivellation and not simply the inversion of the elements at the level of narration takes place. The miracles are "self-sustained, taking place independently of the other miracles, neither reinforcing them nor invalidating them" (R. p. 154).

Magic and realism should not necessarily be read in the term of 'magic realism' as an oxymoron. If one reads realism as 'mimesis,' its meaning will correlate with 'magic' (p. 74). Magic itself is representational, the magical activity is largely mimetic. One may as well say that mimesis is in itself magical: "the wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (Taussig, qtd. p. 74; R. p. 156). Thus magic and realism have, instead of an oxymoronic, a rather complementary, or supplementary, 'adjunctive' relationship (p. 77). There is no synthesis, however, between the two 'worlds,' those of magic and realism, they

are not two alternatives (pp. 79-80).

Magical figurativity influences magical causality. Bényei goes back to Nietzsche's thoughts on causality: "In the phenomenalism of the 'inner world' we invert the chronological order of cause and effect. The fundamental fact of 'inner experience' is that the cause is imagined after the effect has taken place" (*The Will to Truth*, quoted, p. 84; R. pp. 160-161). The interpretation of magic (metaphorical and metonymical) in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Cassirer's concept of the magic of language are among a series of other antecedents also considered. Magic as such cannot be translated to conceptual language. The 'immanent transcendence' of magic can be understood as both an interpretation of the world and a praxis, an interpretation of the world that is a praxis (p. 95; R. p. 167). "Magic provides a language or grammar by means of which the elements that make up the world can be inserted into a meaningful system" (p. 97; R. p. 168).

The ontological and pragmatic features of the language of magic realist narratives come to the focus when one observes magic not as an interpretation of the world but as an activity. "On the thematic level magic realist narratives are full of activities that can be called magical" (p. 99; R. p. 169). There is name magic, love magic, black magic, prophecy, alchemy, incantations and spells, witches, magicians; there is stage magic, confidence trick, and where the magical activity is a "verbal act," that is a possible "selfreflexive metaphor" of storytelling (p. 99; R. p. 170). There is an anthropological interest in the act of narration, not as an aesthetic self-reflexivity, but as "a broader curiosity concerning narrative understanding and the narrative transaction in general" (p. 100; R. p. 170). "The primary objective of story-telling can be persuasion, understanding, seduction, confession and therapy," though in some cases it can be of existential importance, that is a 'matter of life and death' (in *Waterland* and *Midnight's Children*; pp. 101-102; R. p. 170). "Narrative equals life, the absence of narrative, death" (Todorov's *Poetics*. qtd. p. 103; R. p. 171). Storytelling can become a "life-metaphor," or elsewhere, more profanely, a "magical trick of performance."

The dramatising of the act of narration can be linked with the imitation of the oral tradition. The author claims that the heritage of oral storytelling, that is, its imitation, or illusion, what Bakhtin called 'skaz' is only simulating the oral tradition (p. 105). With writing comes the absence of living memory (Derrida, qtd. p. 107), orality is living memory itself and life without living memory does not exist (cf. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Writing itself is the loss of the subject (R. Barthes), the trope of forgetting, of loss, of death, and at the same time, through a postcolonial

understanding, it can imply symbolically a transgressive meaning as well (p. 108). In the texts of magic realism the difference between the subjectivity created within the narrative text and the living presence expressed in the oral narration appears at a linguistic level.

The notion of genealogy is interpreted, relying upon the concepts of Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault, as an archetypal form of the story, a paradigmatic form of the story of origins. Bényei concludes that in the magic realist novels genealogy is basically a figurative space of the search for self-identity and that of origins, where the code of naming and that of the body meet. He also claims that genealogy is the ambiguous space of writing, the space of security of belonging to a family, being part of a family tree, and, at the same time, it is 'the empty space,' the figurative space of insecurity, of a loss of identity, a non-presence. The written text (that is, the names themselves, the family tree) is recited (here the written narrative and the oral narration mingle) and becomes finite, liturgical, scriptualised (p. 121). Thus takes place the rite of the losing of identity. On the other hand, the body can also become the symbolic space of genealogical identity (cf. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Bényei uses here the notions of 'bodywriting' and 'bodyreading' referring to Michael Ragussis's theory that the signs on the individual body will be symbolic and will contain all the 'texts' of the family in a latent form (p. 123).

Magic is traditionally a transgressive human activity; through magic, with the help of the magical rite, man can get in touch with the supernatural, get beyond the profane, 'thiswordly' existence. Thus Bényei says that magic conceived as an act of rite can stand as a metaphor for transgression. Hybridity (incest), carnivalisation and textual excess, that is, hyperbolic figurativity, narrative excess, a tendency toward all-inclusiveness, are the characteristic features of magic realist texts the author finds to be relevant and obvious markers of magical transgression (R. p. 172). As Bényei remarks, in the storytelling code of magic realist novels there is an emphasis on the binarism of history and storytelling, that is, the written, 'official' story versus the fictional, narrated story. Magicality is not only the trope for the rhetoricity of these texts but can stand for their performativity too (p. 138). The "desire to push outward, to project forms and figurative strategies outside, connects the magical figurativity and the performative pragmatics of these texts in the transgressive effort to cross the boundary that separates language from the world" (p. 140; R. p. 172).

"The multitude of magical-figurative links established between elements of the narrated world – that is, the semiotisation of the entire fictional universe – are features that simulate the

structure of a sacred text" (p. 140; R. p. 172). Declaring this, Bényei explores the underlying difference between the sacred text and that of magic realism. The textual, rhetorical, pragmatic characteristics of sacred texts are borrowed, and thus, the profane, historical existence "begins to resemble sacred existence, at least in a formal, structural sense" (p. 140; R. p. 173). "Several magic realist texts conceive of themselves as sacred texts, or rather as apocryphal rewritings of sacred texts, borrowing their thematic, structural, rhetorical, and performative features but, of course, lacking their absolute authority of signification and presence" (p. 141; R. p. 173). Sacred texts, that is, "the holy book is the archetype of the book as totality: it names/creates/reveals the world in its totality" (p. 144; R. p. 173). Magic "is a fallen trope of the performative capability of sacred language" (p. 145; R. p. 174).

After the theoretical chapters the author turns to 'practice' and offers most interesting and carefully elaborated analyses of the chosen novels according to special categories, selected from the characteristics of magic realist texts demonstrated previously. The chapter 'The Book of Meanings' explores Latin American magic realism in García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The central category is presence, and the analysis focuses on how it is questioned in the fictional world by the apocalyptic

character of time and history in the novel. The novel postulates and then questions the logocentric opposition, and uses writing as the trope for non-presence, for death that is already present in the oral narration. Writing is present as 'catastrophe,' the losing of memory and presence. The author looks for possible centres the text could offer to be organised around, like the cosmos (the world), sound, repetition, oppositions, none of which, as discussed, proves to satisfy the expectations.

In *Song of Solomon* – analysed in the chapter 'The Book of Names' – the logocentric opposition is postulated and questioned again. The opposition of speech and writing is explored in the contexts of self identity, name-giving, genealogy and magic.

It is magical causality and figurativity that Bényei examines in *Midnight's Children* – in 'The Book of Salim' chapter. The author reads the novel as an allegory according to Paul de Man's understanding where allegory is a metatrope that implies and at the same time questions totalising figurative systems. The figurative systems Bényei focuses on are based on the tropes of typology, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche. He also examines the apocryphal features of the text, the rhetorical, figurative, and performative strategies of the imitation of the totalising sacred book and the problem of allegory and imitation. Then he turns

to the description of the role of magic, magical rite.

In the chapter 'The Book of Clowns' *Nights at the Circus* is analysed centring on the category of self identity. Bényei disagrees with the accepted critical reading of the novel that regards the text as a feminist pamphlet. The clowns, he argues, play an important role in the novel's questioning of subjectivity, the model of self identity offered by the novel itself, in the form of performance. Magic, conceived as performance, 'stage' magic, can stand as the most important self-metaphor of the novel. Writing, note-taking, read as a metaphor for fixing reality, is opposed to oral narration (p. 332). The confidence trick, which is a central element of the novel, is played, first and foremost, of course, upon the reader.

Waterland, discussed in the chapter 'The Book of Wounds,' offers repetition as the central category of analysis. In the novel's narrative logic all the events are wounds, traumas, the repetitions of previous events. The novel thus has an apocalyptic time dimension. Bényei explores the act of narration as the symbolic repetition of the narrated events with the help of the psychoanalytical transference model. Repetition also works with magic causality, it brings defacement and wounds (as opposed to Garcia Marquez's novel). Storytelling appears as the foundation of the tradition-preserving act of speech; naming and storytelling become the foundation of knowledge, in the same way as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Storytelling, the selection of repetition, however, has the function of forgetting too. The hermeneutic search for authenticity of existence, first at a historical then at an individual level is, doomed to failure.[4]

Bényei's flexible use of definitions provide a panoramic outlook, attempting to widen further the circle of cultural and literary phenomena studied.

Among the many important merits of *Apokrif Iratok*, the most challenging one, perhaps, is its extended use of so far largely fixed categories and definitions. The author's all inclusive historical and theoretical knowledge of his subject and his brilliantly fresh, manifold and energetic arguments throughout the analyses convince of the success of his challenge, of the validity of his rereading.

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[4]Tamás Bényei, 'Narrative and Repetition in "Waterland"' *British and American Studies, vol.1, No.1* (1996) p. 112.