American Mackandal, on the contrary, leaves an entire mythology, preserved by an entire people and accompanied by magic hymns still sung today during voodoo ceremonies.[2] (It is also a strange coincidence that Isidore Ducasse, a man who had an exceptional instinct for the poetic fantastical, happened to be born in America and that he should boast so emphatically at the end of one of his poems of being *le montevidéen.*) Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [*mestizaje*], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?

Translated by Tanya Huntington
and Lois Parkinson Zamora

Notes

Alejo Carpentier, "De lo real maravilloso americano," in *Tientos y diferencias* (Montevideo: Arca, 1967), pp. 96–112. The final part of this essay was published as the prologue to *The Kingdom of this World* in 1949; the parameters of the earlier text are noted in Carpentier's first footnote.

1 I turn here to the text of the prologue for the first edition of my novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), which did not appear in later editions, even though I still consider it to be, except for certain details, as pertinent now as it was then. Surrealism no longer constitutes for us a process of erroneously directed imitation, as it did so acutely even fifteen years ago. However, we are left with a very different sort of *marvelous real*, which is growing more palpable and discernible and is beginning to proliferate in the fiction of some young novelists on our continent.

2 See Jacques Roumain, *Le Sacrifice du Tambour Assoto.*

ALEJO CARPENTIER

The Baroque and the Marvelous Real

You all know the title of the talk I've proposed to give today on two elements that, in my opinion, enter decisively into the nature and meaning of Latin American art, of this Latin America, America *mestiza,*[1] as José Martí called it, which Madame Vice President of this athenaeum has just evoked with her words of introduction: "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real." It is a theme rich in vicissitudes and one about which I don't want to try your patience, so I will begin without preamble, in a somewhat dry and perfunctory manner, with a few dictionary definitions.

Before I begin to talk about the baroque, I would like to settle a linguistic dispute: what is the baroque? Everybody talks about the baroque, everybody knows more or less what the baroque is or can feel the baroque. The same thing happens with Surrealism. Today, everybody knows what Surrealism is, everybody says after witnessing an unusual occurrence: "How surreal." But if we go back to the basic text on Surrealism, to André Breton's *First Manifesto,* written in 1924, we must face the fact that the definition given by the founder of this movement hardly corresponds to what happened later. Breton himself was incapable of defining what he was doing, although he knew very well what he was going to do. Let's turn to the dictionaries. Let's start with the *Petit Larousse.* We are told: "Baroque: neologism. Synonym of Churrigueresque. Gallic in its extravagance." But we look for *barroquismo*[2] and are told: "Neologism, extravagance, bad taste." In other words, the baroque betrays Gallic characteristics and is identified exclusively with the architecture of a man named Churriguera, who was not the best representative of the baroque period but rather of a kind of mannerism; this does not explain anything at all, because the baroque is something multiple, diverse, and enormous that surpasses the work of a single architect or a single baroque artist.

Let's turn to the *Dictionary of the Royal Academy*. Under *baroque* we are told: "Style of ornamentation characterized by the profusion of volutes, scrolls, and other adornments in which the curved line predominates. Also applicable to painted and sculpted works in which both the movement of figures and the division of segments are excessive." Frankly, the academic gentlemen of the Spanish Royal Academy couldn't have come up with a poorer definition.

Turning to a similar dictionary, we find that we are given these synonyms for the baroque: "Overladen, mannerist, Gongorist (as though it were shameful to be Gongorist!), euphemistic, conceptualist," and again "Churrigueresque," and (but this simply isn't possible!) "*decadent*."

Every time they speak to me of "decadent" art, I fall into a state of blind rage, for this business about decadence, when a certain art is called decadent, has been systematically applied to a multitude of artistic manifestations that, far from representing decadence, represent cultural summits. For many years, the French impressionists, Cézanne, Manet and others, were classified as decadent. In Beethoven's time, the masters of composition forbade their students to listen to or study the works of Beethoven because they were decadent. The atonal composers were called decadent. When we pick up a music historian such as Riemann from the beginning of the twentieth century, he tells us that all music written after Wagner is decadent. (When Debussy went to Russia at the turn of the century to conduct his works, the great master Rimsky-Korsakov—who was no fool—upon seeing that his students were enthusiastic about the works of the brilliant French innovator, told them: "Well, go and listen if you want to, but let me warn you that you run the risk of getting used to it." In other words, he spoke of Debussy's music just as one might say to a friend: "Smoke opium if you like, but be careful; it's addictive." In this case, the baroque would have been "decadent" as well.)

There have been attempts to define the baroque as a style. There have been those who have tried to enclose it within the boundaries of a particular style. Eugenio d'Ors, who doesn't always completely convince me of his artistic theories but who is certainly extraordinarily insightful in some of his essays, tells us in a famous essay[3] that what the baroque displays is, in fact, a kind of creative impulse that recurs cyclically throughout history in artistic forms, be they literary or visual, architectural or musical; and he gives us a very fitting image by saying that there is a baroque spirit, just as there is an imperial spirit. That spirit, arising through the centuries, can be equally attributed to Alexander, Charlemagne, or Napoleon. There is an eternal return to the imperial spirit, historically speaking, just as there is an eternal return of the baroque in art through the ages, and this baroque, far from signifying decadence, has at times represented the culmination, the maximum expression and the richest moment of a given civilization. As an example, I would like to use someone whom I will mention later on, namely François Rabelais, the brilliant French Renaissance humanist who, in the five volumes of his prodigious novel, *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, gave us what is perhaps the most complete, extraordinary, and juicy expression that the fullness of the French language can provide. Rabelais, who was the prince of French baroque artists, represents the pinnacle of French literature because, although certain comparisons are dangerous, it is evident that his great book of Gargantua is unique in all of French literature, situated on the same pinnacle of exceptions and prodigious feats as *Don Quixote*, *The Divine Comedy*, and all of Shakespeare's plays. Rabelais is the culmination of French culture and Renaissance humanism, and he was a profoundly baroque writer. An inventor of words, an enricher of the language who, when he lacked verbs, gave himself the luxury of inventing them, and when he did not have adverbs, invented those as well.

According to Eugenio d'Ors—and it seems to me that his theory is irrefutable in this respect—the baroque must be seen as *a human constant*. Thus, a fundamental error to be erased from our minds: the generally accepted theory that the baroque is an invention of the seventeenth century.

For most people, the words "baroque art" refer to a certain kind of very ornamental architecture from the seventeenth century, like that of Borromini in Italy, or a kind of sculpture with extraordinary movement and expansive forms like that of Bernini, whose most representative work, a definitive and complete baroque work, is the famous "Ecstasy of Saint Teresa," one of the culminating pieces of universal sculpture. Those who see the baroque as pejorative, as a sort of strange phenomenon or mannerism—because it is true that there were certain minor strains of baroque mannerism in the seventeenth century—contrast it to another concept. What concept is this? So-called classicism.

Now if the word "baroque" is taken in its generally understood sense, or the word "Surrealism" is understood according to Breton's definition, and these definitions still cannot explain Surrealism or the baroque, then I must say that "classicism" is the hollowest word of all, the most meaningless term that could possibly occur to anyone. Let's turn once again to the

dictionary. The *Larousse* says: "Something outstanding and worthy of imitation. Applicable to a writer or work that is considered to be the model for any type of literature," and cites examples like Calderón or Lópe de Vega. We're in trouble already, because if any writer represents the baroque in the Spanish language besides Quevedo and Góngora, that it is Calderón. And those who have read one of Calderón's most famous works, *El médico de su honra*, will recall the passage in which Doña Mencía tells the story of a young knight who is accidentally thrown from his steed, one of the most frequently anthologized fragments in all baroque poetry.

In the *Dictionary of the Royal Academy*, we are told: "*Classicism:* Literary or artistic system, based on the imitation of the Greek and Roman models. Used in contrast to Romanticism." Where does this leave us? Classicism is *that which copies Roman and Greek models*. But in another dictionary, we are told that classicism can be copied from Calderón, who was baroque. As you see, the word classicism has no meaning or impact whatsoever. And I would say that as all *imitation* is academic, so all academies are governed by rules, norms, and laws. Classicism is academic, and all that is academic is conservative, vigilant, obedient, and therefore the declared enemy of innovation, of anything that breaks rules and norms.

In short, to attempt to understand what people are trying to tell us when they talk about classicism, there is no better way than to choose examples everyone knows, characteristic examples of things that we all have engraved on the retina of our memories. Let's consider three monuments representative of what is considered to be classical, three monuments that have constituted an academic style and as such, have created the norms to be imitated. These three archetypal monuments would be the Parthenon, Herrera's Escorial, and the palace at Versailles.

Now then, these works are characterized by a central axis with proportionally smaller lateral axes. Those of us who read Vignola in our architecture courses know that when copying the façades of those Greek temples, the Parthenon and the Erechtheum, the first step we took was to draw the central axis from which the frontispiece sloped away to either side, dividing the entablature in two. Each column had its lateral axis, and each axis was proportionally removed from the central axis in a kind of Pythagorean cross-section that divided the building into two equal and symmetrical parts.

In the architecture of Versailles, the Escorial or the Parthenon, there is something very important, which is that empty spaces, naked spaces, spaces without ornamentation are in and of themselves as important as adorned spaces or the shafts of grooved columns. If we begin to look at those great naked planes in the Parthenon or Versailles, their boundaries marked by columns, we see that their value is in their proportions: they create a sort of geometrical harmony in which filled and vacant spaces are equally important. In the Parthenon, the space between the columns is as important as the columns themselves. I would go so far as to say that the column serves to mark the boundaries of empty spaces, the spaces of air. Somehow, in the structure of the Greek temple or Herrera's Escorial, the construction is complemented by vacant space, by space without ornamentation whose beauty resides precisely in its circumscription, in its expression of an emotion, an impression of severe, majestic beauty stripped of every superfluous element—all corresponding to a kind of linear geometry.

We have, on the other hand, the baroque, a constant of the human spirit that is characterized by a horror of the vacuum, the naked surface, the harmony of linear geometry, a style where the central axis, which is not always manifest or apparent (in Bernini's Saint Teresa it is very difficult to determine a central axis), is surrounded by what one might call "proliferating nuclei," that is, decorative elements that completely fill the space of the construction, the walls, all architecturally available space: motifs that contain their own expansive energy, that launch or project forms centrifugally. It is art in motion, a pulsating art, an art that moves outward and away from the center, that somehow breaks through its own borders. A typical example of the baroque can be found in Bernini's cathedral, Saint Peter's in Rome. Every time I see that explosion of forms, that explosion of vaults, that seemingly static luminescence surge from the ground through the frame that encloses it, I think of those paintings by de Chirico in which suns are stuck in cages, caged suns. To me, Bernini's Saint Peter's Cathedral is just that: a caged sun, a sun that expands and explores the columns that circumscribe it, that pretend to demarcate its boundaries and literally disappear before its sumptuousness. In the Cathedral of Toledo, behind the main altar in the ambulatory, there is a gigantic, proliferating sculpture, a sculpted composition that rises to the uppermost skylights, where the baroque sculptor has not just hung the figures that descend toward us (angels falling, men falling, saints falling in prodigiously choreographed motion, life-sized figures): he has persuaded form to collaborate with light. The light entering through the skylights com-

bines with the sculpture in such a way that, depending on the time of day, all of the figures seem to move. In my opinion, herein resides one of the most beautiful baroque archetypes I could ever contemplate.

Going back to what we were saying about seeing the baroque as a human constant that absolutely cannot be limited to an architectural, aesthetic, and pictorial movement originating in the seventeenth century, we discover that the baroque has flourished in all ages, sporadically at times, and at times as the main characteristic of a culture. To cite clearly typical examples that everyone knows, I'll say that the baroque—and this is obvious—flourishes in all aspects of Indian culture: in the distant temples and grottoes of India there are meters and meters, if not kilometers, of more or less erotic bas-reliefs that are formally baroque and erotically baroque because of the imbrication of figures, the constant arabesques, the presence of what we called a moment ago a series of proliferating foci—in groups and individually, dancing and always united, interlocked like plants—foci that extend to infinity. There comes a moment when the bas-relief ends, but it could easily continue to cover incredible distances with its accumulated energy, if only there were more surface to sculpt.

We've spoken of Hindu sculpture. What about the Cathedral of St. Basil the Beatified in Moscow? Is it not a perfect example of baroque architecture, with its domed cupolas of different colors? Where is the central axis of St. Basil's, which everyone has seen in photos? Where, in that play of cupolas? Is there any symmetry of colors or forms? The Cathedral of St. Basil in Moscow is, I would say, one of the most extraordinary examples of the Russian baroque. In Prague, an entirely baroque city, the sculptures on the Charles Bridge form a legion, as do the figures of bishops and saints and doctors of the church, who are almost dancing in spite of the heavy bronze, who fly in spite of the weight of the material; in the Church of Saint Clementine, at the entrance of the Charles Bridge, there is a veritable theological ballet that unfolds before our eyes in an absolutely baroque style. Later, it will be the Viennese baroque in the time of Maria Teresa and the Emperor Joseph II; take Mozart's *Magic Flute*, if you will, where the baroque lives in the scenery, in the meaning of the work and the music itself—one of the masterpieces of the universal baroque from every point of view.

Now then, I have spoken of the baroque as an art that fears a vacuum, that flees from geometrical arrangements, from the space of, say, Mondrian (white surfaces, dark surfaces, above all clear surfaces, or surfaces upon which one appreciates the quality of the materials). You will ask me: "And what about the Gothic? Because that, after all, is also the nature of the Gothic." Take, for example, the façade of the Cathedral at Chartres, or the façade of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. We discover porticoes and we discover that in all of the elements of their façades not one space is left unfilled; there are figures of demons, of Judgment Day, scenes from the Bible, figures of different kinds mixed together.

And yet in the Gothic period, something also happens that Eugenio d'Ors noted very clearly. D'Ors establishes the difference between a human constant such as the baroque and what he calls *historical styles*. It is evident that the Romantic and Gothic periods are historical styles; the Gothic period responded to a historic moment that was superseded by the Renaissance, deprived of its architecture, relegated to the past. Absurd is he who tries to erect today, in 1975, a gothic cathedral by copying the best models. It would be a useless, absurd pastiche, bearing no relation to anything whatsoever. On the other hand, the baroque spirit can reappear at any moment and does, in fact, reappear in many of the creations of today's most modern architects, because it is *a spirit* and not a *historical style*. To conclude his argument, d'Ors tells us: "You may have observed that there is no Gothic style in literature." Whereas there is, of course, a baroque style in literature. And turning to tangible, visible examples (using ones that everybody knows), we realize that Aeschylus or Sophocles or Plato or Livius Andronicus or Cicerone, the Frenchman Racine or Bossuet or the Voltaire who wrote tedious and forgotten tragedies in Alexandrines (the by-product of Racine's classical tragedies that obeyed the rules of the Aristotelian unities and survive solely as literary curiosities for students of literature and the erudite)—we realize that not one of the authors I have just mentioned could assimilate himself to the baroque. They do not have a baroque style, nor is it possible to find in one of Plato's dialogues or in a tragedy by Aeschylus the essence and spirit of the baroque. On the other hand, all of Indian literature is baroque, and all of Iranian literature, including that monumental epic, the *Book of Kings*, by Firdousí, is baroque; and skipping through the centuries, we find ourselves in Spain among those peaks of baroque literary style, *The Dreams* [*Los Sueños*] of Quevedo, the eucharist plays [*autos sacramentales*] of Calderón, the collected poems of Góngora, and the collected prose of Gracián. The proof that there exists a baroque spirit is Cervantes, the contemporary of some of the authors I have just mentioned, who does not seem baroque to us.

Don Quixote is obviously not baroque in terms of style, although Cervantes, at times in the *Exemplary Tales* [*Novelas emplejares*] and above all in the *Interludes* [*Entremeses*], shows himself to be baroque, just as Lope also occasionally tends toward the baroque.

In Italy, the emperor of the baroque is Ariosto in his *Orlando Furioso*. In England, Shakespeare clearly approaches a baroque spirit in his tumultuous, profuse, apparently disordered theater without empty surfaces or dead moments, where each scene in itself is a proliferating cell, subordinate to the action of the next. Shakespeare is full of short, extraordinary scenes that are small units in themselves, inserted within the greater whole of the tragedy. If he isn't baroque in *Julius Caesar* or *Timon of Athens*, he is supremely baroque in Act V of *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

I mentioned Rabelais a moment ago. In his work, which carried the French language to its highest, fullest, most extraordinary expression, there are already fragments that—let's say—foresee the baroque. There is a very interesting episode in the third book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, as the vicar of Meudon titled his masterpiece. And there is, in this third book, a completely imaginary episode in which Rabelais invents a story (Rabelais invented everything). The story goes that one day Philip of Macedon decided to attack the city of Corinth. Diogenes lived in Corinth, Diogenes the skeptic, Diogenes the misanthrope, Diogenes in his barrel. Naturally, given his philosophic attitude toward life, he is not a man who cares whether Philip of Macedon takes the city or not. But suddenly—Rabelais invents this—Diogenes acquires the vice of patriotism. When he sees troops coming closer to the city, he gets into his barrel and starts it rolling, causing such devastation, knocking down every means of defense, that he ends up bringing about the retreat of Philip of Macedon's soldiers with his barrel.

Rabelais, who tells us this story in two pages in order to adumbrate for us the arms carried by Philip of Macedon, uses seventy nouns, seventy words (a catalog of the arms carried by the enemy), so that the devastation caused by Diogenes' barrel requires *seventy-two* consecutive verbs in order to say that it "destroys," "breaks," "shatters," "pierces," "terminates," "burns," "upsets," etc.; seventy-two verbs in two pages to tell us of the devastation caused by Diogenes' barrel.

As we go on, we find that Romanticism, which in the *Dictionary of the Royal Academy* is contrasted to classicism and academism, is completely baroque. It had to be baroque, since Romanticism, which is generally illus-

trated by the absurd moonlit engraving and the character who composes verse, isolated from the world in which he lives, that is, the character who "lives in the clouds," who was really nothing of the sort: the Romantic man was action and vigor and movement and will and declaration and violence. He breaks away from the Aristotelian unities in the theater, finishes off classical French tragedy (in France, anyway), demands the rights of man to proclaim his interior being and exteriorize his passions, invents Sturm und Drang, that is, an atmosphere of "storm and desire." And let's not forget that those Romantics who were seen by the bourgeoisie of the era as lost souls, loonies [*gente en la luna*], people incapable of logical thought (because, of course, their morals, ethics, and politics were incompatible with the bourgeois conformity of the era) were, in fact, men of action and men who expressed action. Almost all of them were involved in the first utopian movements. We must not forget that Delacroix, the most important Romantic painter, was the one who left us the true painting of the *Parisian Barricades*, a revolutionary painting that can be placed next to Picasso's *Guernica*. And don't forget that the young Wagner was driven out of Munich for being an anarchist, or that Lord Byron died in Missolonghi in an ardent attempt to liberate Greece.

We find, in the Romantic period, that Novalis, for example, offers us a completely baroque novel, namely *Heinrich von Ofterdinger*. The second *Faust* by Goethe is one of the most baroque works in all literature; Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (see the first poem in *Illuminations*, "After the Flood") is a masterpiece of baroque poetry. *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont—and Lautréamont called himself "the Montevidean" because he was born in Montevideo and was very proud of having been born in America—is a monument to baroque poetics. Marcel Proust (especially Marcel Proust, and here again we recall Eugenio d'Ors, who was right on so many points in his essay) Marcel Proust gives us one of the great moments of universal baroque prose, prose in which are inserted—as d'Ors notes—parenthetical asides, further series of proliferating cells, sentences within sentences that have a life of their own and sometimes connect to other asides that are also proliferating elements. I believe that there is no page more beautifully baroque in all of Proust's gigantic novel than that episode in *The Captive* where the protagonist, the narrator, who is Proust himself, is lying in Albertine's bed in the morning and listening to the cries of the vendors passing in the street below, and with that marvelous power of intertwining thoughts and concepts by means of his prodigious

knowledge, Proust writes that these cries can be related by their melodious inflections and the ways they modulate their voices to medieval liturgical chants. And not only they, but the dog groomer, the birdseed seller, the scissor sharpener, all those who come to sell their small household articles evoke for him not only the Gregorian chant but also certain fragments of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and suddenly Proust constructs, using those lowly street cries, one of the pages in which he plays vertiginously with time, relating the shout of a woman selling birdseed and the cry of a woman selling sweets or slices of fruit to the great medieval liturgical chant and the Ambrosian chant. This is also the baroque, just as the development of Surrealism was totally baroque.

Academism is characteristic of settled times that are complete, sure of themselves. The baroque, on the other hand, arises where there is transformation, mutation or innovation: I don't need to remind you that on the eve of the Soviet Revolution, the one who represented Russian poetry was Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose work is a monument of the baroque from start to finish, his plays as well as his poetry. The baroque always projects forward and tends, in fact, to a phase of expansion at the culminating moment of a civilization, or when a new social order is about to be born. It can be a culmination, just as it can be a premonition.

America, a continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, *mestizaje*, has always been baroque: the American cosmogonies, where we find the *Popol Vuh*, where we find the books of the *Chilam Balam*, where we find all that has been discovered and studied recently in the works of Ángel Garibay and Adrián Recinos, with all of the cycles of time delineated by the appearance of the cycles of the five suns. (According to ancient Aztec mythology we would now be in the era of Quetzalcóatl's sun). Everything that refers to American cosmogony—and America is big—corresponds to the baroque.

Aztec sculpture could never be seen as classical sculpture—think of the great heads of Quetzalcóatl at Teotihuacán,[4] think of the ornamentation of the temples. It's baroque; of course it's baroque, with its geometries of both straight and curved lines, its particular fear of empty surfaces. There is almost never even a meter of empty surface in an Aztec temple. During a two-year excavation in the area of Teotihuacán, archaeologists recently discovered some delightful residences of Aztec nobles dating back to before the Conquest. Imagine the archeologists' surprise to find the walls covered with highly refined paintings representing the daily life of the time: their pools, gardens, sports, banquets, children's games, pastimes, women's lives, daily life, all of this represented in a series of paintings that can only be described as baroque. They project the most authentic baroque spirit.

The *Popol Vuh*, I repeat (and those who have read it are aware of this) is a monument to the baroque; so is Nahuatl poetry, which was unknown until thirty years ago and was brought to light by the work of Garibay, who has so far given us eleven first-rate pre-Conquest poets in an extremely copious anthology that fills two heavy volumes. It is the most baroque, the most brilliantly baroque poetry one can imagine, with its polychromatic images, its interweaving and merging elements, the richness of its language. The "Goddess of Death" at the Museum of Mexico[5] is a monument to the baroque, a female figure covered with entwined snakes. And there is (I always cite this as an example) what I consider to be the amplified baroque in America: the temple at Mitla. Mitla, near Oaxaca, gives us, in a façade of marvelously balanced volumes, a series of boxes of the same size in which each develops an abstract composition different from the one before; that is, the work is no longer symmetrical; each one of those boxes—there are eighteen of them—is a proliferating cell of a baroque composition inserted into a baroque ensemble. I cannot, when I contemplate the façade at Mitla, help recalling the thirty-three variations of Diabelli's theme by Beethoven, in which Beethoven offers us thirty-three monumental variations stemming from an initially innocuous theme that a fashionable critic recently declared to be thirty-three sonorous objects rather than musical variations. The boxes at Mitla are eighteen plastic objects. In the same vein, when I see these compositions at Mitla, I also think of Schoenberg's *Variations* for orchestra.

I know that this resemblance, established across the centuries, between the temple at Mitla and Schoenberg's *Variations*, may seem arbitrary. But in fact, there exists a spiritual resemblance between the two things that again validates d'Ors' theory.

Neither the Romanesque nor the Gothic periods reached America; in other words, two *historical styles* that performed a central role in the development of the artistic culture of the old continent are entirely unknown to us. The Gothic has not reached us simply because in some city, in 1920, it occurs to an architect with bad taste to make a false Gothic cathedral. Neither the romanesque nor the Gothic arrived in America. What did arrive was the plateresque, a type of baroque, though perhaps with more atmosphere—with more elegance, let's say—than the Churrigueresque

baroque. Ah! But when the Spanish plateresque arrives in the ships of the conquerors, what does the craftsman who knows the secrets of the Spanish plateresque find? An Indian work force that, having already built and sculpted and painted with baroque spirit, adds to the Spanish plateresque its New World baroque materials, baroque imagination, baroque zoological motifs, baroque botanical motifs and floral motifs, and so we reached the heights of glory of baroque architecture, the American baroque whose most prodigious examples are the church in Tepotzotlán in Mexico (where a central, pyramidal, and very high cupola shows us the most enormous accumulation of proliferating cells imaginable, where the play of light is similar to that of the Cathedral in Toledo), the façade of San Francisco de Ecatepec in Cholula, where baroque materials are added to baroque forms through colors, tiles, and mosaics; the famous chapel in Puebla, baroque in white and gold, where a celestial concert appears and angels make their appearance playing the lute, harps, the clavichord, all of the great instruments of the Renaissance; the árbol de la vida [tree of life] in Santo Domingo in Oaxaca, a monumental baroque composition covering the vaulted ceiling, a great, expanding tree whose branches are entwined with figures of angels, saints, human figures, figures of women, all blending into the vegetation. Then there is the baroque that we find in Ecuador, Peru and in a much more modest fashion on the façade of the Cathedral in Havana, one of the most beautiful baroque façades to be found in the New World.

And why is Latin America the chosen territory of the baroque? Because all symbiosis, all *mestizaje*, engenders the baroque. The American baroque develops along with *criollo*[6] culture, with the meaning of *criollo*, with the self-awareness of the American man, be he the son of a white European, the son of a black African or an Indian born on the continent—something admirably noted by Simón Rodríguez: the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a *criollo;* and the *criollo* spirit is itself a baroque spirit. To this effect, I would like to recall the grace with which Simón Rodríguez, who brilliantly saw these realities, reminds us in a passage from his writings of the men who speak Spanish and yet are not Spanish, the men who legislate and litigate in Spanish and yet are not Spanish, because they are *criollos*. Simón Rodríguez adds: "We have *huasos* [peasants], Chinamen and *bárbaros* [barbarians], gauchos, *cholos* and *guachinangos* [people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood], blacks, browns and whites, mountain- and sea-dwellers, Indians, *gentes de color y de ruana* [people of color and people wearing *ruanas*], tanned, mulatto and *zambos*

[black Indians], *blancos porfiados y patas amarillas* [stubborn whites and yellow shanks] and a world of crossbreeds: *tercerones*, quadroons, octaroons and *saltatrás* [throwbacks]."[7] With such variety, each contributing its version of the baroque, we intersect with what I have called "the marvelous real."

And here a new linguistic quarrel arises. The word "marvelous" has, with time and use, lost its true meaning, and lost it to the extent that the words "marvelous" or "the marvelous" produce a conceptual kind of confusion as serious as that caused by the words "baroque" and "classical." Dictionaries tell us that the marvelous is something that causes admiration because it is extraordinary, excellent, formidable. And that is joined to the notion that everything marvelous must be beautiful, lovely, pleasant, when really the only thing that should be gleaned from the dictionaries' definitions is a reference to the *extraordinary*. The extraordinary is not necessarily lovely or beautiful. It is neither beautiful nor ugly; rather, it is amazing because it is strange. Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous. The Gorgon with her snaky locks is as marvelous as Venus arising from the waves. Deformed Vulcan is as marvelous as Apollo; Prometheus tortured by the vulture, Icarus crashing to earth, and the goddesses of death are all as marvelous as triumphant Achilles, Hercules, conqueror of the Hydra, or goddesses of love (which in all religions and mythologies appear paired off with goddesses of death). Furthermore, the creators of the marvelous take charge of telling us what they thought about the marvelous. And what man has ever done more for the marvelous than the one who has overpopulated our minds since childhood with figures belonging to the world of the marvelous? Charles Perrault, author of the *Mother Goose* stories, inventor of "Tom Thumb," "Sleeping Beauty," "Blue Beard," "Puss in Boots," "Little Red Riding Hood," etc., stories that have accompanied us since childhood. In the preface to his stories, Perrault says something that defines the marvelous. He speaks of fairies and tells us that fairies would just as soon spew diamonds from their mouths when they are in a good mood as reptiles, snakes, serpents, and toads when they are angered; and we mustn't forget that the most famous fairy from all the medieval tales, who led up to Perrault and whom Perrault recovers, is the fairy Melusina (what a beautiful name!) who was an abominable monster with the head of a woman and the body of a serpent, and yet she belongs to the marvelous. Perrault tells us a horrendous, terrible tale in the story "Tom Thumb," the one where

the ogre, instead of beheading the seven small brothers who arrived asking for shelter in his home, cheerfully and mistakenly beheads his seven daughters and then goes to bed. This horrendous, terrible scene belongs to the marvelous—as does the incest that also appears in Perrault.

So we should establish a definition of the marvelous that does not depend on the notion that the marvelous is admirable because it is beautiful. Ugliness, deformity, all that is terrible can also be marvelous. All that is strange is marvelous.

Now then, I speak of the marvelous real when I refer to certain things that have occurred in America, certain characteristics of its landscape, certain elements that have nourished my work. In the prologue to the first edition of my book *The Kingdom of this World*,[8] I define what I think the marvelous real to be. But at times people say to me, "We have something that has been called *magical realism;* what is the difference between magical realism and the marvelous real?" If we stop to take a look, what difference can there possibly be between Surrealism and the marvelous real? This is very easily explained. The term magical realism was coined around 1924 or 1925 by a German art critic named Franz Roh in a book entitled *Realismo mágico*, published by the *Revista de Occidente*.[9] In fact, what Franz Roh calls magical realism is simply Expressionist painting, and he is careful to choose examples of Expressionist painting that have nothing to do with concrete political agendas. Don't forget that in Germany at the end of World War I, a time of misery and difficulty and drama, a time of general bankruptcy and disorder, an artistic tendency named *Expressionism* appears. One of the most authentic representations of Expressionism is Bertolt Brecht's first play, *Baal*. However, there is combat there, sarcasm, a social agenda, just as there was a social agenda in the play by Karel Capek that created the character of the robot, just as there was a social agenda in the play by Georg Kaiser that had characters named *first man, second man, first lady in black, green lady, red lady*, or in the piece by Capek with *robot one, robot two, robot three;* that is to say, depersonalized characters who created a certain atmosphere of criticism and polemics, expounding more or less revolutionary ideas, etc.

Not Franz Roh: what he called *magical realism* was simply painting where real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality. And on the cover of the book appears the *Douanier*, Rousseau's famous painting in which we see an Arab sleeping peacefully in the desert, a mandolin to one side, with a lion standing there and a moon in the background; that is magical realism because it is an unrealistic image, impossible but fixed there nonetheless. Another painter whom Franz Roh liked very much and identified as magical realist was the painter Balthus, who painted perfectly realistic streets, stripped of all poetry and all interest: houses without character, little roofs, white walls and in the middle of those streets without atmosphere or air or anything to remind us of the lessons of the Impressionists, some enigmatic figures pass by each other without speaking, engrossed in their diverse, unrelated tasks. A picture of a street full of people, and yet deserted for want of communication among them. Franz Roh also considered that Chagall was a magical realist, with his painted cows flying through the sky, donkeys on rooftops, upside-down people, musicians among the clouds—elements of reality but transferred to a dreamlike atmosphere, an oneiric atmosphere.

As far as Surrealism is concerned, we shouldn't forget that Surrealism pursued the marvelous through books and through prefabricated objects. Breton said in his manifesto: "All that is marvelous is beautiful, only the marvelous is beautiful." However, we must also remember that when Breton spoke of the marvelous, like Perrault, he did not consider that the marvelous was admirable because it was beautiful but because it was strange. When he cites the classics in his *First Manifesto*, or those that end up as Surrealist classics, he begins with the totally macabre book, Young's *Nights*, followed by Swift, one of the cruelest and most terrible writers produced by eighteenth-century England, with the famous episode of the butcher shop that sold the flesh of children. Then he speaks of Edgar Allan Poe, who is not always pleasant; on the contrary, he is often necrophagous and macabre. Breton also speaks of Baudelaire, who sang equally of carrion and women, who sang of the poor masses just as he sang of the invitation to the voyage or the immense sea; Jarry, cruelly polemic; Roussel, and many others.

Now then, if Surrealism pursued the marvelous, one would have to say that it very rarely looked for it in reality. It is true that for the first time the Surrealists knew how to see the poetic force of a window display or a market, but more often their fabrication of the marvelous was premeditated. The painter who stood before a canvas would say, "I'm going to make a painting with strange elements that create a marvelous vision." You have all seen Surrealist painting and know that it is undoubtedly very successful painting, but on its canvases everything is premeditated and calculated to produce a sensation of strangeness; I would cite as a typical example

the soft clocks by Salvador Dalí, those clocks made of taffy dripping over the edge of a terrace. Or else, that other canvas by a Surrealist painter that shows a perfectly banal staircase with doors opening onto a hallway. On those stairs there is only one strange element. There is a *visitor*. It is a snake meandering up the steps. Where is it going? What is its purpose? No one knows. A mystery. A *manufactured* mystery.

On the other hand, the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace. The stories of knighthood were written in Europe but they were acted out in America because even though the adventures of Amadis of Gaul were written in Europe, it is Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who in *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* gives us the first authentic chivalric romance. And constantly—we must not forget this—the conquerors saw very clearly aspects of the marvelous real in America; here I want to recall Bernal Díaz's phrase as he contemplates Tenochtitlán/Mexico City for the first time and exclaims, in the middle of a page written in an absolutely baroque prose: "We were all amazed and we said that these lands, temples and lakes were like the enchantments in the book of Amadís." Here we have the European man in contact with the American marvelous real.

How could America be anything other than marvelously real, if we recognize certain very interesting factors that must be taken into account? The conquest of Mexico occurs in 1521, when François I ruled France. Do you know how big the urban area of Paris was under François I? Thirteen square kilometers. In Garnier's *Universal Atlas*, published less than one hundred years ago, we are told that the metropolitan area of Madrid was twenty kilometers in 1889 and that the area of Paris, capital of capitals, was eighty kilometers. When Bernal Díaz del Castillo laid eyes for the first time on the panorama of the city of Tenochtitlán, the capital of Mexico, the empire of Montezuma, it had an urban area of one hundred square kilometers—at a time when Paris had only thirteen. And marveling at the sight, the conquerors encountered a dilemma that we, the writers of America, would confront centuries later: the search for the vocabulary we need in order to translate it all. I find that there is something beautifully dramatic, almost tragic, in a sentence written by Hernán Cortés in his *Cartas de Relación* [Letters from Mexico] addressed to Charles V. After attempting to tell the king what he has seen in Mexico, he acknowledges

that the Spanish language is too narrow to identify so many new things and says to Charles V: "As I do not know what to call these things, I cannot express them." And of the native culture, he says, "There is no human tongue that can explain its grandeurs and peculiarities." In order to understand and interpret this new world, a new vocabulary was needed, not to mention—because you can't have one without the other—a new optic.

Our world is baroque because of its architecture—this goes without saying—the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation, the many colors that surround us, the telluric pulse of the phenomena that we still feel. There is a famous letter written to a friend by Goethe in his old age in which he describes the place near Weimar where he plans to build a house, saying: "Such joy to live where nature has already been tamed forever." He couldn't have written that in America, where our nature is untamed, as is our history, a history of both the marvelous real and the strange in America that manifests itself in occurrences like these that I'll recall quickly. King Henri Christophe, from Haiti, a cook who becomes the emperor of an island and who, believing one fine day that Napoleon is going to reconquer the island, constructs a fabulous fortress where he and all of his dignitaries, ministers, soldiers, troops could resist a siege of ten years' duration. Inside, he stored enough merchandise and provisions to last ten years as an independent country (I refer to the Citadel of La Ferrière). In order that this fortress have walls capable of resisting attacks by the Europeans, he orders that the cement be mixed with the blood of hundreds of bulls. That is marvelous. Mackandal's revolt, which makes thousands and thousands of slaves in Haiti believe that he has lycanthropic powers, that he can change into a bird or a horse, a butterfly, an insect, whatever his heart desires. So he foments one of the first authentic revolutions of the New World. Benito Juárez's little black carriage, in which he transports the whole nation of Mexico on four wheels over the country's roads, without an office or a place to write or a palace to rest, and from that little carriage he manages to defeat the three most powerful empires of the era. Juana de Azurduy, the prodigious Bolivian guerrilla, precursor of our wars of independence, takes a city in order to rescue the head of the man she loved, which was displayed on a pike in the Main Plaza, and to whom she had borne two sons in a cave in the Andes. Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, is worshiped even today in Brazilian churches. While Rousseau's *Emile* never led to the establishment of a European school, Simón Rodríguez founded a school in Chuquisaca based on the principles of that

famous book, thus accomplishing in America what Rousseau's admirers in Europe could not. One night in Barlovento I stumbled upon a popular poet named Ladislao Monterola who didn't know how to read or write but, when I asked him to recite one of his compositions, gave me his own decasyllabic version of the *Chanson de Roland*, the history of Charlemagne and the peers of France. In our nineteenth-century history, there are many more interesting figures, secondary figures who leave minor Scottish kings like Macbeth far behind. There is a Latin American dictator in the mid-nineteenth century who, after having had a brilliant start, falls prey to a phobia of betrayal and persecution and who systematically gets rid of his most faithful ministers, his best generals, his relatives, his brothers, his sisters and even his own mother, until only he remains, absolutely alone, on the top of a mountain, surrounded by an army made up of the crippled, the aged, and children. This is a story, in my opinion, more extraordinary than that of Macbeth. There are also the lives of conspirators on this continent whose novels have not yet been written and who are much more interesting than conspirators such as Pío Baroja's Aviraneta.

If our duty is to depict this world, we must uncover and interpret it ourselves. Our reality will appear new to our own eyes. Description is inescapable, and the description of a baroque world is necessarily baroque, that is, in this case the *what* and the *how* coincide in a baroque reality. I cannot construct a so-called classical or academic description of an *árbol de la vida* from Oaxaca. I have to create with my words a baroque style that parallels the baroque of the temperate, tropical landscape. And we find that this leads logically to a baroque that arises spontaneously in our literature. Modernist poetry is the first great literary school that we offered to the world, and our Modernismo transformed Spanish poetry in Spain, profoundly marking the work of, say, Valle Inclán. What, then, is modernism, especially in its first stage, if not extremely baroque poetry? Such is Darío's entire early period. And there is also a baroque that reaches the absurd, becoming an excessive scrawl, as in the poetry of a Herrera y Reissig. José Martí, so direct, so eloquent, so explicit in his political discourse, when he lets his pen go and writes for pure pleasure, as he did in the anthropological study he dedicated to Charles Darwin's memory, we have a marvelous example of baroque style. His fundamental essay, "Our America," where all of the problems of America are defined in few pages, is also a marvelous example of baroque style. The works that taught my generation—*The Vortex* [*La vorágine*] with which you are all familiar—are perennially baroque. And how could *The Vortex* be otherwise when the

jungle is nothing if not baroque? I hardly need to mention that Rómulo Gallegos' *Canaima* is a baroque novel. There are, for example, descriptions of flowing water in *Canaima*, water leaping from waterfall to waterfall, moving from one pool to another, water that jumps, flows backward, intermingles. There is a masterful page where he speaks of unnavigable rivers in motion, of water that is perpetually becoming, constantly furious, bursting, rising, destructive—one of the most admirable baroque pages ever to flow from the pen of that great Venezuelan novelist. Compare the water of Gallegos to the water that Paul Valéry paints for us in *Le Cimetière marin* [Seaside Cemetery]: calm, harmonious, peaceful, tame water. Given what he sees, Gallegos is baroque, and the most baroque of his novels is, in my opinion, *Canaima*, because it's a matter of expressing a baroque world.

Asturias, writing from the thirties to the fifties more or less, forms a link between Gallegos' generation and mine. In Asturias, the influence of the *Popol Vuh*, the books of *Chilam Balam*, and the *Book of the Cachikeles* is a constant. All great mythologies, the great cosmogonies of the new continent, inspire the images in his prose.

The baroque that you are familiar with in the contemporary Latin American novel, which is often called the "new novel," or the "boom"—and the "boom," as I have said before, is not a concrete thing nor does it define anything—is the result of a generation of novelists still alive today who are producing works that translate the scope of America from its cities to its jungles and fields in a wholly baroque fashion.

As far as the marvelous real is concerned, we have only to reach out our hands to grasp it. Our contemporary history presents us with strange occurrences every day. The mere fact that the first socialist revolution on the continent should occur in the country least likely to sustain a revolution—I say "least likely" in the *geographical* sense—is a strange event in contemporary history, a strange event added to many strange events that, to our credit, have occurred in American history from the Conquest to the present, and with magnificent results. But faced with strange events that await us in that world of the marvelous real, we must not give up and say, as Hernán Cortés said to his monarch: "As I do not know what to call these things, I cannot express them." Today, we know the names of these things, the forms of these things, the texture of these things; we know where our internal and external enemies are. We have forged a language appropriate to the expression of our realities, and the events that await us will find that we, the novelists of Latin America, are the witnesses, historians, and interpreters of our great Latin American reality. We have prepared our-

selves for this, we have studied our classics, our authors, and our history. In order to express our moment in America, we have sought and found our maturity. We will be the classics of an enormous baroque world that still holds the most extraordinary surprises for us and for the world.

Translated by Tanya Huntington
and Lois Parkinson Zamora

Translators' Notes

Lecture given in the Caracas Athenaeum on May 22, 1975; published in Spanish in Alejo Carpentier, *La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1981), "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso," pp. 111–32.

1 *mestizo:* descending from different races, generally caucasian and native American.

2 Carpentier uses the noun *barroquismo*, as well as *barroco*, with the connotation of "baroque-ish" or "baroque-ness." We have translated *barroquismo* as "baroque" throughout.

3 Carpentier refers to d'Ors' book *Lo barroco*, which he likely read in the French edition: Eugenio d'Ors, *Du Baroque*, trans. Agathe Rouart-Valéry (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1935).

4 Carpentier refers to the ceremonial center of San Juan de Teotihuacán as an Aztec city but, in fact, it had been abandoned by 850 A.D., whereas the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán—now Mexico City—was founded only in 1325. The Aztecs claimed the Teotihuacanos as ancestors.

5 Carpentier refers to the monolithic Aztec sculpture of Coatlique in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

6 We leave this word untranslated, because "creole" in English might suggest Louisiana culture to some U.S. readers. In fact, both words—*criollo* and creole—refer to the racial and cultural mixing that produces new cultures.

7 Here follows a list of vernacular describing the great variety of racial mixings (*las castas*) in colonial Latin America. Literal translations are misleading, for these idiomatic terms do not refer literally to their object but rather metaphorically to a racial category. We nonetheless give literal translations to suggest some of the cultural assumptions inherent in these metaphors, and provide synonyms where literal translation is impossible.

8 The reference is to the preceding essay, "On the Marvelous Real in America."

9 Roh's name in the Spanish edition of this essay appears as "Roth," no doubt an error made when Carpentier's lecture was transcribed; We have substituted the correct spelling throughout. Here, Carpentier refers to Roh's book, a partial translation of which begins this volume.

ANGEL FLORES

Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction

Spanish American literature has been studied mostly through the thematic or biographical approach. The thematic approach has dwelt on geographical settings, classifying the works of fiction as "novels of the pampa," "novels of the sierra," and "novels of the selva." The biographical approach, on the other hand, has surveyed the literary production chronologically—"novel of the Colonial period," "novel of the Period of Independence," "novel of the Mexican Revolution," etc.—supplementing historical considerations with biographical notes on the writers of each of the periods. However interesting these approaches may be in relating literature to ecological patterns or to history, they have contributed but little to *literary* criticism. They have not been very helpful, for instance, in evaluating the intrinsically aesthetic merits of a work and have paid little or no attention to the complex problems of form, composition, and stylistic trends. Such classificatory terms as "Romantic," "Realistic," "Naturalistic," "Existentialist" do circulate in their writings but in rather superficial, desultory, or indiscriminating ways. We are told, for instance, that Echeverría was a "Romantic" poet, disregarding completely his *El Matadero* [The Slaughterhouse], a precursory masterpiece of Naturalism; or that *Doña Bárbara* and *La vorágine* [The Vortex] were robust specimens of Realism, overlooking their romantic tirades and psychological distortions. Hence the frequency with which one meets in university theses such titles as "Romantic, Realistic and Naturalistic Elements in the Novels of Rómulo Gallegos and José Eustasio Rivera" and "El romanticismo esencial del realista José Rivera" ["The Essential Romanticism of the Realist José Rivera"]. Had the line of analysis followed a more rigorous examination into the emotional and stylistic peculiarities, it could have been ascertained that, at least in Latin American prose fiction, it is difficult if not