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An Ever-Expanding World Literary Genre: Defining Magic Realism on Wikipedia

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Magic realism is a disputed genre in world literature scholarship today. While many Latin American critics have advocated for its historical and geographical significance, others see it as an inherently postcolonial aesthetic formation, a worldwide literary trend, and even a global commodity. Indeed, since its emergence in the first half of the 20th century, magic realism has remained an attractive and active category, as new artworks are classified as such worldwide. To address these tensions, this essay engages with definitions, general information, and lists of authors and literary works classified as magic realists on Wikipedia. To do so, we compile a thorough database of all writers mentioned in Wikipedia's entries for magic realism in fifty-six different languages. We visualize this data and close-read Wikipedia entries to understand better which writers are most often identified as magic realists, to which literary and linguistic traditions they belong, and how definitions of magic realism in different languages interact. We trace how the narrow and broad definitions of magic realism tend to both compete and overlap on Wikipedia. We argue that magic realism on Wikipedia can be better understood as a glocal phenomenon. In this sense, we reflect on what the worldliness of magic realism means in a non-academic context and ask how the broad circulation of magic realism can inform our understanding of world literature.

The popular US crime drama *Narcos*, set in Colombia, revolves around the world of the drug trade. Yet it opens with affirmations bound to spike literary scholars' interest—they problematize the relationship between reality and fiction and define one of the most disputed literary genres, magic realism. If we turn on S1E1: *Descenso*, we first read on a black screen:

> This television series is inspired by true events. Some of the character names, businesses, incidents and certain locations and events have been fictionalized for dramatic purposes. Any similarity to the name, character or history of any person is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

While, on the one hand, it is a pretty standard statement of non-responsibility, on the other hand, it is striking, as it is at once a claim and a disclaimer. The events are true. They are also fictionalized. And any connections to reality are coincidental. Probably it is not a joke or provocation but a delicately crafted legal construction. In any case, this opening appeal to both fact and fiction becomes more interesting when we read the following phrase.

The plain black screen turns into a misty landscape, in which we might believe to make out mountains and trees. As we hear the blowing wind, another sign appears, this time in a fancier font: "Magical realism is defined as what happens

when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe." After a few seconds, most of the passage disappears, leaving just the four last words that ominously turn red: "too strange to believe." It is not just wind that we hear now, but intensifying background music. This music turns into "Latin guitar music" (as the captioning specifies) when another red sentence appears in place of the previous one: "There is a reason magical realism was born in Colombia."[1]

The series proposes a short and straightforward definition of magic realism–it abides by the genre's rules of realistic representation until it suddenly incorporates extraordinary and unbelievable elements. The birth of magic realism in Colombia is a reference to Gabriel García Márquez, whose famous novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) is widely considered the genre's example par excellence. But why, then, would the writers of *Narcos*–a gruesomely realistic representation of the world of drug cartels–choose to associate the show with a literary genre like magic realism? In this essay, we aim to unpack this broad appeal of magic realism by looking into how it is presented, discussed, and exemplified on Wikipedia.

From *Narcos*'s definition, it might seem that there is a consensus on what magic realism refers to and what its roots are. Academic debates, however, would suggest otherwise. For decades scholars have been asking what magic realism can and should mean, and today it is still a disputed genre in both area studies departments and world literature scholarship. In this sense, what we could call "narrow" and "broad" definitions of magic realism compete against each other. While many Latin American scholars have advocated for its historical and geographical significance, others see it as an inherently postcolonial aesthetic formation, a worldwide literary trend, and even a global commodity. At the same time, despite the time that has passed since its emergence in the first half of the 20th century, magic realism is still an attractive and active category, as new works of literature and visual arts are classified as such worldwide.

To address these tensions, this essay engages with definitions, general information, and lists of authors and works classified as magic realists on Wikipedia. Hube et al. argue that the study of Wikipedia can provide insightful responses to a rather complicated issue—how to measure the global significance of an author or literary work, that is, how to determine what works pertain to world literature. Rather than focusing on aspects such as the number of translations of a particular literary work or author or their sales worldwide,

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1 Following Franz Roh and Salman Rushdie, respectively, Maggie Ann Bowers distinguishes between "magic realism," on the one hand, as the mystery that "does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it", and "magical realism," on the other, as the "commingling of the improbable and the mundane". While contemporary critics mostly use the expression "magical realism," here we use "magic realism" because this is how the term is introduced to readers in Wikipedia. See Bowers 2-3.

they consider it is productive to consider "Wikipedia data as a representation of world literature from the point of view of expert or non-expert editors and readers" (Hube et al. 2).

But while Hube et al. focus their analysis on particular writers, we see world literature as a perspective and framework of critical literary analysis, rather than a corpus of texts and authors. Still, we agree that Wikipedia can provide valuable insights into the different ways in which magic realism functions as a world literary genre. As Mariano Siskind argues, "genre" as a literary analysis category fell into disgrace during the second half of the 20th century, with opponents as prominent as Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. However, following in Wai Chee Dimock's footsteps, Siskind claims that genre "could still be a compelling traveling vehicle for the realization of world literature as an interpretative project" (Siskind, "The Genres of World Literature" 346).

Neither Siskind nor Dimock thinks of genre in a traditional sense, in any case. Instead, Siskind hypothesizes that "world literature produces new genres, or rather new generic formations, constellations of texts whose identity is defined in accordance with new needs and new critical and aesthetic desires translated into new organizing principles" (Siskind, "The Genres of World Literature" 347). Magic realism would be one of these new world literary generic configurations, conceived by Siskind as "a taxonomic constellation aggregated by contingent scholarly endeavors in reading literature from around the world" (Siskind, "The Genres of World Literature" 349). To complement this view, here we propose to look at magic realism as a constellation of contingent definitions and classifications aggregated by Wikipedia readers and editors and to compare their definitions and classifications to those provided by literary scholars.

To do so, we first review how magic realism has been defined in recent scholarly debates and its main controversies. Second, we analyze the many ways in which magic realism is defined in Wikipedia across different languages. To do so, we compiled a thorough database of all writers mentioned in Wikipedia's entries for magic realism in fifty-six different languages.[2] We visualized this data to understand better which writers are most often identified as magic realists across all languages, to which literary and national traditions they belong, and how definitions of magic realism in different languages interact with each other. We find that writers not identified as magic realists in contemporary

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2 We have excluded entries in "Simple English," Esperanto, and Latin from this list because our goal is to render visible how magic realism is defined and redefined in Wikipedia entries that users actively resort to in their everyday lives. At the same time, the number of Wikipedia entries that we analyze is fifty-eight, as two languages, Byelorussian and Norwegian, have two separate pages each, that reflect different orthographic standards used in the languages. There are 329 language versions of Wikipedia, thus the total of 61 linguistic versions on magical realism means it is represented in under 20% of languages present on Wikipedia. Nonetheless, we consider it to be a significant number. As we can learn from Wikipedia itself, out of the 329 linguistic versions, only 18 have more than a million articles; 42 language versions have less than a thousand articles (among them, 11 have been closed, having less than 10 articles). Given that, having definitions of magic realism in almost one-fifth of languages represented on Wikipedia confirms its popularity—particularly if we consider that, in scholarly terms, it is a rather specific notion, unlike other literary terms that have similar or only slightly higher number of entries (such as, for instance, literary realism, expressionism, or postmodernism).

scholarly debates are often labeled as such by Wikipedia users across different languages (for example, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, to name just two). However, we also find that the three writers usually identified as the Latin American founders of magic realism in scholarly debates (Alejo Carpentier, Arturo Uslar-Pietri, and Miguel Ángel Asturias) also rank high in mentions across all languages, even if their work is little known outside of the Spanish-speaking world. This suggests that, unlike in scholarly debates, narrow and broad definitions of magic realism compete and overlap in Wikipedia. Furthermore, we argue that magic realism on Wikipedia can be better understood as a *glocal* phenomenon. In this sense, we reflect on what the worldliness of magic realism means in a non-academic context and ask how the broad circulation of magic realism can inform our understanding of world literature.

While this analysis might not necessarily lead us to refine scholarly definitions of magic realism nor come up with a brand new one, we hope that it shows that Wikipedia is a valuable tool to reflect on how magic realism functions as a world literary genre across different languages and cultural traditions.[3] Because students, scholars, and readers in general actively use Wikipedia as a source of information, we believe it is important to provide a picture of how a world literary genre such as magic realism can either expand or contract depending on how users decide to define it. In other words, although we do not seek to read Wikipedia as if revealing certain truths about discourses on magic realism or world literature that lie outside of academia or other institutions and practices, we intend to pose questions that further complicate current debates on the topic. In turn, we believe this can prompt further research questions that will animate futures studies, such as who and why edits Wikipedia entries on magic realism and other literary genres, to what extent readers trust such information, and how such information travels across languages and disciplines both within and outside of Wikipedia.

Magic Realism in Scholarly Debates

Scholarly definitions of magic realism can be divided into two groups—narrow and broad definitions. Narrow definitions of magic realism tend to consider it "an aesthetic that belongs organically to non-Western, or rather marginal, cultures," while broad definitions argue that magic realism is instead "a universal aesthetic that unveils the supernatural core of the real anywhere" (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 834). The former highlights magic realism's cultural emancipatory potential, while the latter underlines magic realism as a narrative mode. Still, as we will see, even within this second set of broad and

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3 Although here we will focus only on how magic realism is represented as a world literary genre in Wikipedia, we also wish that our essay might serve as the basis to examine its reach in other arts, such as painting and cinema.

rather formalist definitions, critics have argued that magic realism overlaps with the fantastic, the absurd, and other genres that defy realistic representation conventions.

Because definitions of magic realism vary, there is also a debate around which writers and works of literature should be identified as magic realists and which should not. As we will discuss below, *Narcos*'s statement that magic realism was born in Colombia could be easily disputed from a historical perspective. Still, the claim is clearly a reference to the literature of Gabriel García Márquez, whose name and novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) have unarguably become synonymous with magic realism (Damrosch 6; Moretti). In an interview published in 1968, García Márquez described his writing process:

> Una vez estaba bordando en el corredor cuando llegó una muchacha con un huevo de gallina muy peculiar, un huevo de gallina que tenía una protuberancia. No sé por qué esta casa era una especie de consultorio de todos los misterios del pueblo. Cada vez que había algo que nadie entendía, iban a la casa y preguntaban y, generalmente, esta señora, esta tía, tenía siempre la respuesta. A mí lo que me encantaba era la naturalidad con que resolvía estas cosas. Volviendo a la muchacha del huevo le dijo: 'Mire usted, ¿por qué este huevo tiene una protuberancia?'. Entonces ella la miró y dijo: 'Ah, porque es un huevo de basilisco. Prendan una hoguera en el patio'. Prendieron la hoguera y quemaron el huevo con gran naturalidad. Esa naturalidad creo que me dio a mí la clave de *Cien años de soledad*, donde se cuentan las cosas más espantosas, las cosas más extraordinarias con la misma cara de palo con que esta tía dijo que quemaran en el patio un huevo de basilisco, que jamás supe lo que era.[4]

> (Once, I was embroidering in the corridor when a girl came with a very peculiar hen's egg, a hen's egg with a bulge on it. I don't know why this house was a kind of consulting room for all the mysteries of our town. Every time there was something that nobody understood, they went to the house to inquire about it, and, generally, this lady, my aunt, would have the answer. What I loved about it was how naturally she would solve such matters. Coming back to the story of the girl with the egg, she said: 'Look, why does this egg have a protuberance?' So my aunt looked at it and said, 'Oh because it's a basilisk egg. Light a fire in the yard.' They lit the fire and very naturally burned the egg. I think that 'naturalness' was the key for me to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the most frightening things are told, the

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4 Quoted in Rama 56. All translations to English are ours, unless a translated edition is cited.

most extraordinary things are narrated with the same wooden face with which this aunt said to burn a basilisk egg in the patio, which I never learned what it was.)

As Ángel Rama has argued, García Márquez's description of his writing process summarizes the main aesthetic contentions of magic realism as a conjunction of the real and the marvelous (Rama 53). In Irlemar Chiampi's words, magic realism is the synthesis of "the denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvelous" (quoted in Siskind, "Magical Realism" 834). *One Hundred Years of Solitude* offers countless examples of how this dialectic works. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator famously describes the day the novel's main character saw and touched an ice cube for the first time in such a way that this everyday object turns into a thing of magic. Likewise, a series of extraordinary events proliferate throughout the novel (a character is followed by a cloud of yellow butterflies wherever he goes; a woman ascends into the sky in front of her family) without further explanation, just like García Márquez's aunt did not feel the need to explain what a "*huevo de basilisco*" was, nor why it had to be burnt. However, regardless of how fitting this definition of magical realism might be to describe García Márquez's and other writers' work, there are competing definitions whose scope we will discuss in this section.

As mentioned, one could challenge *Narcos*'s definition of magical realism from a historical point of view—the scholarly consensus is that its origins are not to be found in Colombia but early twentieth-century Europe. Indeed, it has become almost commonplace to tell the story of magical realism starting with the term's coinage in 1925 by German art critic Franz Roh, not to describe literature but post-expressionist painting.[5]

Franz Roh saw *Magischer Realismus* as a way of describing the work of German artists who tried to "reconcile the referentiality of impressionism with the expressionist attempt to uncover the spiritual and mystical nucleus of reality" (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 835) Shortly later, in 1927, Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, founder of the influential journal *900 (Novecento)*, proposed an aesthetic formula that is still very dear to magical realism today: "*precisione realistica e atmosfera magica*" ("realistic precision and magical atmosphere" (Camayd-Freixas 5)) . Erik Camayd-Freixas argues that Bontempelli called on European writers to resort to traditional myths and archetypes to renovate literature. Soon after, Bontempelli's magic realist agenda would be associated with nationalist movements and straightforward Fascism (Camayd-Freixas 6).

In a very different fashion, Latin American writers Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Arturo Uslar-Pietri, all of whom were living in Paris in the late 1920s, adopted magical realism and "reformulated the concept to propose

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[5] Among others, see Siskind, "Magical Realism" 835; Bowers 7-8; Camayd-Freixas 3.

it as an aesthetic form derived directly and organically from the hybrid nature of Latin American culture and society" (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 837). In Latin America, Alejo Carpentier wrote, one could find "the marvelous real at any turn," while in Europe, the surrealist marvelous was merely "manufactured by tricks of prestidigitation" (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 843). It would still take three decades from there for magic realism to have its Colombian birth.

Tracing the European origins of the term magic realism is productive because it challenges *Narcos*'s definition of the concept in yet another way—is magic realism a world literary genre, a universal aesthetic that can be embraced by anybody regardless of political or linguistic traditions, or is it an aesthetic expression of the political experience of the oppressed? It is in the latter sense that the past few decades have witnessed "the coupling of magical realism and the postcolonial" (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 834), perhaps best condensed in Homi Bhabha's claim that magic realism is "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world" (Bhabha 7). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak considered magic realism "paradigmatic of Third World literary production," and wondered why a style of "Latin American provenance" had such a strong effect on subcontinental English-speaking writers, referring mainly but not exclusively to Salman Rushdie (Spivak 201). A quick review of scholarly books and articles published on the subject suggests that such a connection between magic realism and the postcolonial has long surpassed the limits of both Spanish and English, extending to Western African fiction (Cooper) and contemporary Romanian novels (Crașovan), just to mention two examples.

However, before magic realism as a concept made its way to postcolonial scholarly debates anchored in American institutions (of which Bhabha and Spivak would be the most prominent exponents), Latin American critics such as Ángel Rama laid claim to it as a literary phenomenon best understood within the boundaries of Latin American historical dialectics between power and resistance, and the global and the local. In his book *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982), Rama considered magical realism yet another expression—albeit not the most accomplished, neither politically nor aesthetically—of a broader process of emancipatory transculturation where forces of modernization and local traditions embodied in the myths and beliefs of Indigenous and Black communities could be fused (Rama 56). Chiampi's definition ("the denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvelous") stands, but the real and the marvelous are redefined within a geographically marked political context and in relation to specific historical aesthetic formations.

The subsequent coupling of magical realism and the postcolonial in the 1980s and 1990s within American universities opened up those historical and geographical boundaries to other timeframes and geographies but still retained this political and emancipatory specificity as a critical feature of magic realism. To scholars like Walter Mignolo, the fact that Latin American critics like Rama

remain absent from the postcolonial debates on magical realism they first shaped, might evince academic colonialism (Mignolo). Be that as it may, magic realism gained momentum among postcolonial theorists with the publication of novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), both of which have been outspoken about the significant influence that García Márquez had on their work.

Curiously, also around the same time, magic realism underwent two very different processes. On the one hand, a group of young Latin American writers reacted violently against it. In 1996, Chilean writers Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez edited a short-story anthology entitled *McOndo*, a satirical reference to Macondo, the imaginary town where *One Hundred Years of Solitude* takes place. In the prologue, they wrote that while they did not mean to account for a new Latin American aesthetic program fully, what brought them together was that they were not, in any sense, magic realists (Fuguet and Gómez). Paradoxically, although writers and critics have understood magic realism as a way to render visible the contradictions that animate Latin American cultural identity, to Fuguet and Gómez, magical realism had become a commodity for export. New Latin American literature, they claimed, should appear as if it could have been written anywhere. Magic realist literature, from this perspective, would be redefined as an allegorical narrative about a collective entity produced for consumption abroad. And although Fuguet and Gómez only discuss Latin American literature, one could argue that, following this line of reasoning, the exact definition might apply to other postcolonial magic realist novels.

On the other hand, after García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982, magical realism became the subject not only of scholarly papers but also of literary world-literature anthologies such as *Magical Realist Fiction*, edited by David Young and Keith Hollaman in 1984, which served as a textbook for students around the Anglophone world (Hollaman and Young). There, Young and Hollaman included, alongside texts by Carpentier and García Márquez, writers whose work has most often been associated with other literary traditions within Latin American literature (such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar) and outside of it (like Italo Calvino and Milan Kundera), as well as authors dating back to the 19th-century and the early 20th century (such as Gogol and Kafka).[6]

Scholars have pushed back against such broad definitions of magic realism. Mariano Siskind claims that magic realism is both a "formal and historical" cultural phenomenon (Siskind, "Magical Realism" 850). Ato Quayson, on the other hand, argues that although it shares "elements of the fantastic with other

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6 Within Latin American scholarship, Ángel Flores had already made a similar case for magic realism as a broad aesthetic narrative mode in his 1955 essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction," identifying as magic realists authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, whose most famous works are widely read within other genres such as the fantastic and science fiction, respectively.

genres," magic realism's formal specificity lies in that it "generates a scrupulous equivalence between the two domains [the real and the fantastic]" (Quayson 728). Still, as we will show in the following sections, Wikipedia users often resort to a certain of undifferentiation between literary genres. As a result, magic realism often works as a catch-all term that can describe many of the writers included in Young's and Hollaman's anthology, as well as others, from E.T.A. Hoffmann to Haruki Murakami. It might even be the case that, among other things, magic realism is a literary commodity of sorts, as Alberto Fuguet and the "McOndo" generation claimed, but a rather global one with particular local inflections.

Magic Realism on Wikipedia

Just as it would be the case of a traditional encyclopedia, Wikipedia is meant to be explanatory rather than exploratory—even though, as we will see, this rule is at times broken. Unlike its monolingual counterparts, printed or electronic, it allows an immediate comparison between entries in different languages. At the same time, its collective authorship makes it more likely to lack coherence. This characteristic, however, can be helpful in this case. On the one hand, it highlights the contradictions and tensions within the understanding of magic realism; on the other, tracing how, within each particular entry, certain elements or sections are privileged over others can shed light on the roots of such imbalances. Thus, in many ways, we will read Wikipedia pages like secondary sources, such as literary criticism—trying to capture their main characteristics and asking for their implicit premises. We consider Wikipedia an interesting basis for this analysis because it is positioned at the crossing of different discourses. While it incorporates many elements of academic debates from scholarship written in multiple languages, it also includes non-academic sources and elements introduced by Wikipedia editors that are not attributed to any bibliographical sources. Consequently, it allows us to zero in on different contradictions and tensions in understanding the term, both within a particular article and between entries in different languages. Through our analysis of Wikipedia, we will not discuss what the most interesting or productive understanding of magic realism is, nor whether the definitions provided by users are more or less accurate than those in scholarly texts. Instead, we wish to focus on what we can learn about magic realism from its reception and circulation through the study of Wikipedia.

While our linguistic capacities do not allow us to dive deeply into each page on magic realism that we can find today as part of Wikipedia, we visited all of them. This overview enabled us to compile some of the critical information from all of them (mainly which authors and titles appear), as we show below. After this general impression of the structure and salient points of different pages, we focus more in-depth on a few that stood out to us for reasons we explain in each case.

We could see immediately that most of the Wikipedia pages were fairly similar—in length and in their approach to the subject. Interestingly, the Wikipedia page in Spanish also pertains to this group, even though we expected it might be different from others, given the strong connections of the genre to Latin American literature. Some articles were not far in their general shape from most entries on the subject but included important shifts in emphasis regarding the most common approaches to the topic. The page in English was more significantly different: it is by far the most extended entry, with multiple subdivisions, a long list of footnotes, and a couple of parts marked as problematic according to Wikipedia standards. It is also constantly being tweaked and edited—as we continue checking the edition history while writing this article, new changes keep showing up.[7] While the analysis of the Wikipedia pages is not necessarily representative of how the genre is conceived in each language, it allows us to analyze the different elements that influence the popularization and wide circulation of scholarly terms.

In what follows, we discuss our findings, organizing them into two sections. In the first one, we describe the great majority of Wikipedia entries, tracing the dominant tendencies in understanding the genre. To do so, we visualize the compiled data and discuss the different ways in which magic realism is represented throughout Wikipedia. In their listing of magic realist writers and works, some entries show a more localized point of view, but usually, global and local forces tend to coexist, not without tensions.

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Reviewing the fifty-eight entries for magic realism in all fifty-six languages, we counted 322 authors mentioned as magic realists.[8] We compiled these mentions and divided them into languages to visualize which authors are most identified as magic realists, in which language they are mentioned as such in Wikipedia, and how these authors overlap. [Figure 1] shows the number of mentions of any given author in the Wikipedia article on magic realism for each language. Four languages do not have any mention of authors, while some have plenty because they include long lists of authors identified as magic realists without further explanations (see, for example, the cases of French and Occitan). As a result, despite some entries being lengthier and more detailed than others (English being the longest of them all), they mention fewer authors than others that otherwise are not as thorough. [Figure 2] shows, for each author, the number of times they are mentioned across the fifty-eight Wikipedia articles (only authors with more than five mentions are plotted). Some authors are mentioned frequently, and others are less so. Gabriel García Márquez is, by far, the most

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7 Although we will not deal with magic realism in cinema here, it should be noted that most updates in the English entry as far as titles go, have to do with listing films that users consider magic realist.

8 All data and quotations taken from Wikipedia entries on both magic realism and specific authors correspond to the entries' versions as of April 26, 2022. Later changes and additions have been made to these entries that might not be reflected here in their entirety.

mentioned author, followed by Jorge Luis Borges and Isabel Allende. Salman Rushdie is the first non-Spanish speaker to appear on the list, but many follow across different languages (Günther Grass, Haruki Murakami, Mikhail Bulgakov). Figure 3 is a word cloud, which emphasizes which authors are most mentioned throughout the articles. In Figure 4, we plot a histogram showing that some authors are mentioned a vast number of times, whereas most of the authors are mentioned fewer than five times. As we will see, this is because each entry tends to identify as magic realists with a number of authors working in the language of the entry that is not present in any other languages (for instance, the Turkish Wikipedia names fifteen Turkish authors as magic realists that do not feature in other languages). Finally, in different ways, Figures 5 and 6 visualize which languages show similarities in the authors they mention. Both show how there are two bigger groups of languages where similar authors are mentioned (groupings 1 and 8 in Figure 6), as well as a few smaller clusters and some languages more isolated in their take on magic realism.

Going through the data, we find that the standard approach that most entries adopt is to highlight the connections of magic realism to Latin American literature (see Figures 2 and 3). Most pages refer to Gabriel García Márquez as its leading exponent—and, more, in particular, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. They also frequently refer to the authors identified with the understanding of magic realism as a broader genre present in the postcolonial context or the Global South—most of all to Salman Rushdie and, to a lesser degree, Toni Morrison and Ben Okri. On many occasions, they point to the roots of magic realism—citing the origins of the term within visual arts, and enumerating authors that are at times considered by scholars to be predecessors of the movement (but whom the Wikipedia articles most often plainly identify as magic realists), such as Jorge Luis Borges, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Ernst Jünger. Frequently, we find references to authors that qualify among the writers of magic realism under the broad umbrella of the genre understood as a set of universal—and in this case somewhat ambiguous—aesthetic practices: for instance, Franz Kafka, Haruki Murakami, Günter Grass, and Milan Kundera.

Moreover, besides these references common to most Wikipedia pages, almost all of them enumerate authors creating in the language in which the Wikipedia entry is written and other languages of the region where the language is most used. For instance, in the entry in Basque, beyond the usual suspects, we find five authors writing in Euskara (Irati Jimenez, Felipe Juaristi, Joan Mari Irigoien, Bernardo Atxaga, and Joseba Sarrionandia), as well as authors writing in Catalan (Joan Perucho) and Galician (Álvaro Cunqueiro). The page in Malayalam mentions authors writing in Malayalam (Sethu, K. V. Mohan Kumar, Vinod Mankara) and several authors writing in Bangla (Nabarun Bhattacharya, Akhtarussaman Elias, and Shahidul Zaheer, Jibanananda Das, Syed Valiyallah, Nasreen Jahan and Humayun Ahmed). The Polish page references Wacław Kostek-Biernacki, the Hebrew page—Meir Shalev, the Estonian page—Karl Ast-Rumor and Jüri Ehlvest, and the list could go on.
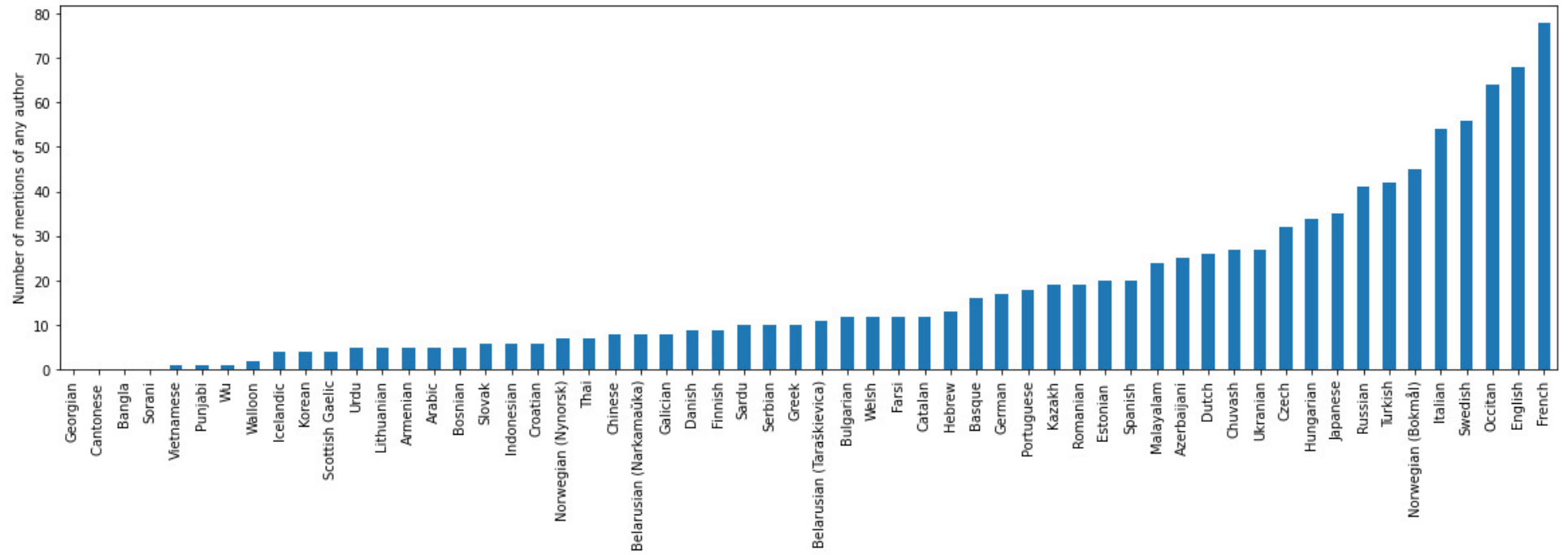
Figure 1. A number of mentions of an author in the Wikipedia article on magic realism for each language. Four languages do not have any mention of authors.
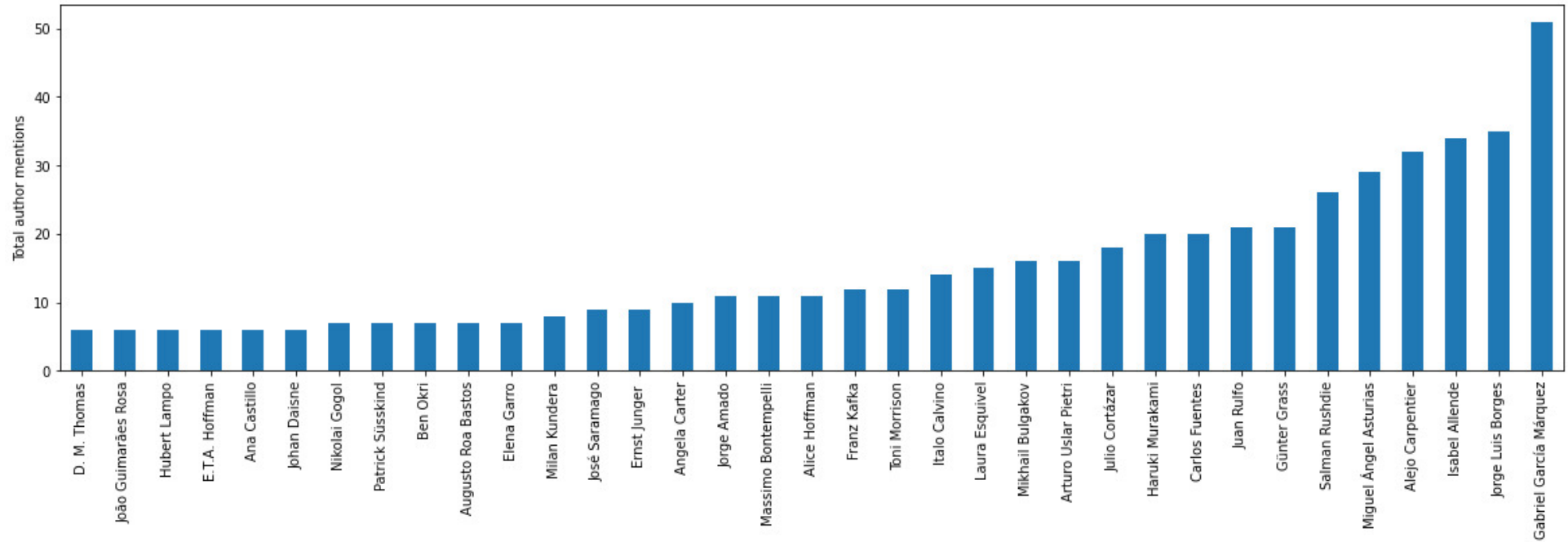
Figure 2. For each author, the number of times they are mentioned across all Wikipedia articles. The authors with more than five mentions are plotted. As we can see, only 35 among the 322 of all the authors that appear throughout the pages have mentions in more than five articles.

Figure 3. The word cloud gives the authors names in size order according to their number of mentions (for authors with more than five mentions).

Many of these authors appear only in the Wikipedia entries in the languages they write or in a few pages within the neighboring regions. Among the 322 authors that appear across all entries, only thirty-five are mentioned more than five times. This combination of authors commonly recognized as magic realists and authors writing in a particular language or cultural circle connects with the sources cited in each entry. While not all articles include a bibliography or footnotes, most of those that incorporate such references mention some sources in English and Spanish, yet point primarily to scholarly and non-academic sources written in the language of the Wikipedia article.

A few of the Wikipedia entries differ from these general trends. In these cases, we see that the more generally accepted connotations of the term are implemented, but the localized understanding or transformation of the concept takes precedence over more widespread definitions. Firstly, while in the vast majority of the languages, magic realism is emphasized as a literary genre, some pages highlight its use within the visual arts. For instance, the German, Dutch, Italian, and Finnish pages give more importance to the European roots of the concept. They start by discussing how magic realism has been used to describe the 20th-century movement in painting, listing numerous artists, most of them Western European—and only afterward describe the literary dimension of the concept. This insistence on the visual aspect of magic realism can be seen as related to the fact that the painters considered representative of it come primarily from the cultural circles that speak the languages in which the articles are written.

Secondly, some entries dedicate more attention to the authors that are said to represent magic realism in their most immediate cultural context. For example, in the article in Russian, while the term is first explained through the most common reference to Latin American literature and a handful of other
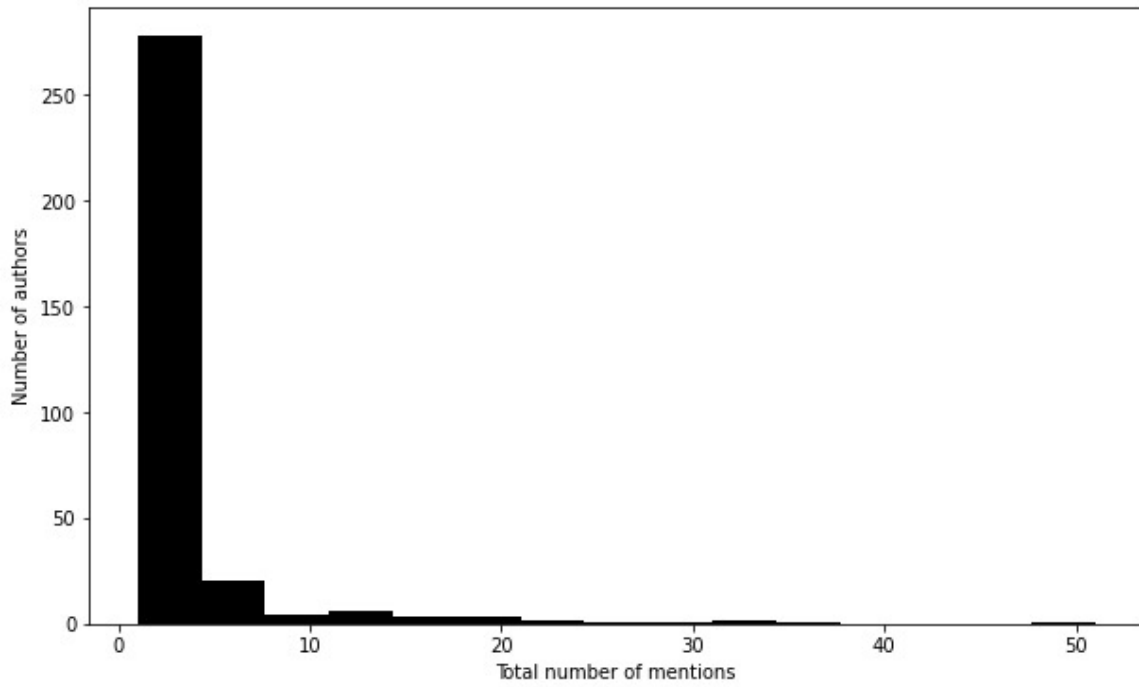
Figure 4. Histograms show that some authors are mentioned a vast number of times, whereas most are mentioned fewer than five times. It is worth noting that the authors mentioned once or twice are mentioned across a wide range of languages.
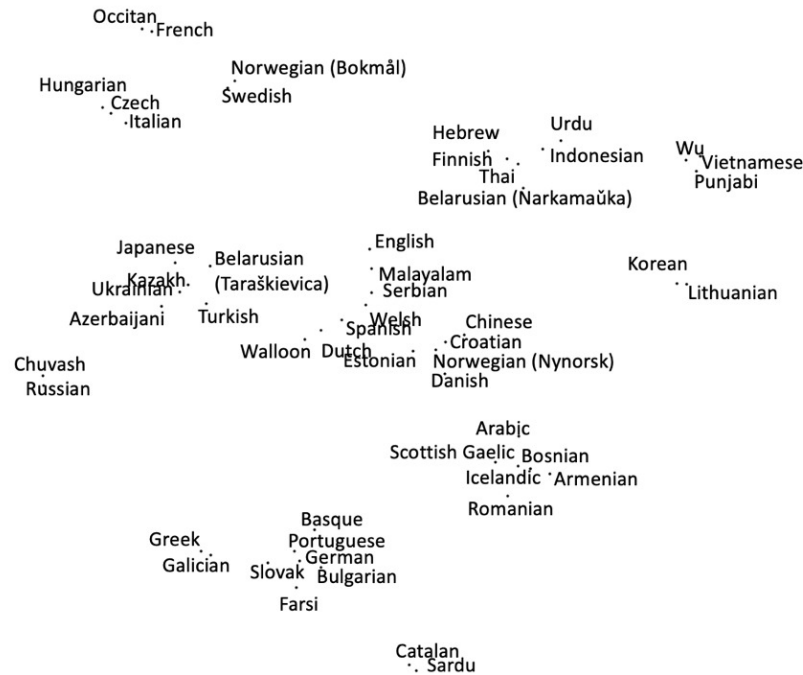

Figure 5. Visualization of the similarities between the authors mentioned in different languages. A t-SNE plot was constructed using "intersection over union" (IoU).

authors, it is followed by a long list of Russian-language writers, which Wikipedia editors flag as not complying with the rule of balanced representation. The page in Chuvash is similar to the one in Russian, as it references predominantly Russian authors. While a few Wikipedia entries about magic realism are concise and do not mention any authors by name, the
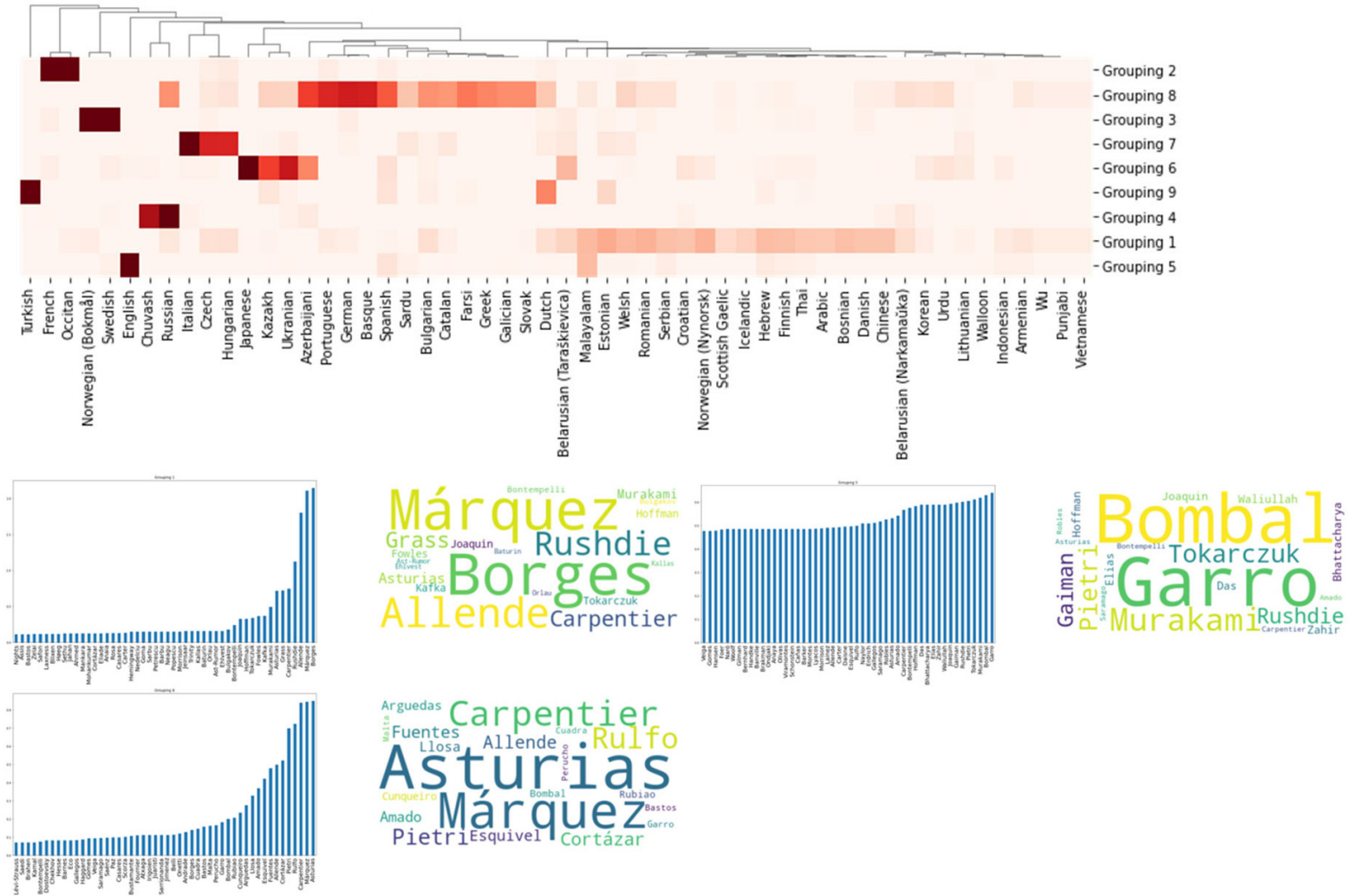
Figure 6. Visualization of the similarities between the authors mentioned in different languages. An analysis using non-negative matrix factorization. Visualization of three groupings included (groupings 1, 5, and 8) to illustrate some of the commented observations.

entry in Chuvash is one of just two pages that enumerates some writers, but none of them Latin American. The other one is the entry in Walloon, which is very short—marked by Wikipedia editors as just a stub of an entry, that is, "an article too short to provide more than rudimentary information about a subject"—and mentions just two authors, both writing in Dutch (Simon Vestdijk and Johan Daisne). While the appearance of some authors can be associated more in general with cultural ties within specific geographic regions,[9] sometimes we might also assume a more direct translation from one Wikipedia article to another, especially when many speakers of a language are multilingual (as, for instance, could be the case in the aforementioned connection between Chuvash and Russian Wikipedia articles).

Broadly speaking, the Wikipedia pages could be seen as a somewhat eclectic collection of references to the different ways magic realism has been understood and theorized, paired with some interpretations of the term that do not have much support in scholarship, leading to a series of omissions and additions. The omissions could be ascribed to different reasons—some occur in languages in which Wikipedia is less robust; others in linguistic traditions within which the cultural importance of the term seems lesser and thus its descriptions are more succinct; and in some cases, there are possible sociopolitical or cultural reasons to present the term as more local.

The elements added to what usually appears in the scholarship are also of a few different types. Some Latin American authors that keep on popping up throughout the pages are not traditionally considered part of magic realism in Latin American studies because their work does not abide by the genre's rules, as most usually understood within scholarship (Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, Jorge Amado). This can point to the role magic realism played in the circulation of Latin American texts: the intertwining of magic realism with the Latin American boom, which we have seen analyzed in scholarly debates, can be one reason leading to putting all famous Latin American fiction under the same—and exoticizing—umbrella. It can also show that scholarly narratives on how magic realism was born out of the contact between European intellectual traditions and Latin American literature have made their way to Wikipedia. This would explain why writers like Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Arturo-Uslar Pietri are regularly mentioned across all languages, despite their work being little-known outside the Spanish-speaking world. Indeed, as pointed out in the previous section, they were the original group who adopted Franz Roh's term and made it their own. Other Latin American writers who could be more easily labeled as magic realists,

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9 Hube et al. find something similar regarding the presence on Wikipedia of world literature authors.

such as Isabel Allende or Laura Esquivel (and whom Wikipedia acknowledges as such), have been disregarded by Latin American scholars for their allegedly derivative nature.[10]

The authors coming from more immediate cultural circles that the Wikipedia pages bring up can be seen as another addition, given that not all of them have been read in terms of magic realism in academic studies. Their introduction into the definition can be seen as two-fold. It is how the term is made more familiar—closer to authors that might be well-known to the reader. At the same time, it inscribes the literature from the familiar circles into the worldly movement.[11]

As mentioned above, the English article on magic realism stands out in a few ways. The only page that could compete in the number of users with the English article is the one in Spanish.[12] That the English and Spanish articles about magic realism have a similar number of views, editors and edits is significant, particularly if we consider that, as we can read in the Wikipedia article on Wikipedia itself, "As of January 2021, the English Wikipedia receives 48% of Wikipedia's cumulative traffic." That would, once again, point to the strong ties of the concept to Latin American literature and scholarship. Yet, the English entry is, by far, the most extensive of all. If we compare the length of the article, we see that the length in bytes of the English article is about nine times greater than the Spanish one. This points to the other aspect of magic realism that we discuss—the way in which Latin American magic realist authors traveled to readers of other languages, as well as the entanglement of the genre with postcolonial and world literary discourses. It is interesting to note that the definition of magic realism that the English article offers is also the most capacious. Moreover, unlike in other languages, the English Wikipedia entry is a battleground where different definitions of magic realism compete. As we will see, users have edited this article to comment on the article itself, turning it into an active forum to challenge each other's views. As was the case in scholarly debates, here conversation also turns to whether magic realism should be considered a specifically Latin American cultural phenomenon or a global aesthetic. In this case, we argue that the latter prevails.

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10 See Siskind, "Magical Realism" 867. These two authors that tend to be left out of academic studies are as well the two Latin American women writers that are consistently identified as representative of magic realism. While this is not the main object of this study, it touches upon the question of different sorts of bias present in the judgement of literary value.

11 Recently in both scholarship and in the Wikipedia pages some Olga Tokarczuk's work has been described as magic realism. This can be read as yet another dimension of this tendency: after Tokarczuk won the Nobel Prize, connecting her to magic realism offers a framework through which to bring her work closer to a broader set of readers who might not be familiar with it, as well as use an already well-established path to connect of the author to the worldly literary scene.

12 In terms of number of views, the daily average of visits is 1300 for the English article and 1104 for the Spanish one (while the third most-visited article, in Russian, has 174 daily visits, that is, over 7 times less). Similarly, in terms of number of edits and editors, the English articles counts with 1429 editors and an average of 141.6 edits per year, while those numbers for the Spanish article make it a close second—1093 editors and an average of 112.3 edits per year.

Indeed, a quick look at the first paragraph of the English entry shows that the English Wikipedia's primary definition of magic realism is more aligned with what we labeled ahistorical and broad definitions in our previous section.

> Magic realism (also known as magical realism or marvelous realism) is a 20th-century style of fiction and literary genre. The term was influenced by a German painting style of the 1920s, given the same name. As a literary fiction style, magic realism paints a realistic view of the world while adding magical elements, often dealing with blurring the lines between fantasy and reality. *Magical realism*, perhaps the most common term, usually refers to literature in particular, with magical or supernatural phenomena presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting commonly found in novels and dramatic performances. Despite including certain magic elements, it is generally considered a different genre from fantasy because magical realism uses a substantial amount of realistic detail and employs magical elements to make a point about reality, while fantasy stories are often separated from reality. Magical realism is often seen as an amalgamation of real and magical elements that produces a more inclusive writing form than either literary realism or fantasy.

Like most scholarly accounts of the term, this definition starts by acknowledging the German roots of magic realism and its emergence in art criticism. Moreover, it borrows from this historical fact to describe literary magic realism as "painting" a world that blurs fantasy and reality, similarly to Ángel Flores's "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" and the anthology *Magical Realist Fiction*, edited by David Young and Keith Hollman, both reviewed in the previous section. In this way, magic realism is deprived of its historical context as an emancipatory cultural project in Latin America and the post-colonial world more generally and of its particular dialectics between the real and the marvelous. The latter is, however, alluded to by the clarification that, unlike other fantasy subgenres, "magic realism uses a substantial amount of realistic detail and employs magical elements to make a point about reality." Still, the definition fails to detail to what extent this "point about reality" is historically and politically situated, on the one hand, and to account for how realistic detail is not separated from magical elements but rather embedded in them (and vice versa).

To sketch this broad definition of magic realism, users point readers to both scholarly introductions to magic realism, such as Maggie Anne Bowers' *Magic(al) Realism*, and popular websites like MasterClass.com, whose article "What Is Magical Realism? Definition and Examples of Magical Realism in Literature, Plus 7 Magical Realism Novels You Should Read" is a perfect example of how narrow and broad definitions of magic realism coexist and even

overlap in non-scholarly publications. Sure enough, the suggested readings list in this article begins with García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, but it also includes Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994) and even Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013), a brief description of which already suggests how capacious magic realism becomes under such broad definitions ("A novel about a man who reflects on his past after returning to his hometown for a funeral.")

The English Wikipedia entry reflects on such ambiguity, as it points out that "the term *magic realism* is broadly descriptive rather than critically rigorous, and Matthew Strecher (1999) defines it as 'what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe.'" It could be the case that the writers of *Narcos* borrowed from Strecher's definition the phrase "too strange to believe" concerning magic realism (Strecher). Indeed, both definitions are as capacious as they can be, and both also blur the boundaries between magic realism and all other non-realistic genres, like the marvelous and the fantastic. Furthermore, like *Narcos*, the English Wikipedia relates magic realism to Latin America and Colombia ("magical realism is often associated with Latin-American literature, especially in Colombia, including founders of the genre").

However, at the same time, the English Wikipedia entry for magic realism lists the genre's foremost exponents in languages other than Spanish, such as English, Bangla, Japanese, and Polish. It should be noted that magic realism, in such a list, becomes a surprisingly capacious category across languages and within them. In Spanish, for example, a writer like Jorge Luis Borges, known for his fantastic short stories that resort to different traditions, is paired up with Venezuelan writer Rómulo Gallegos, whose realist novel *Doña Bárbara* (1929) is usually considered the ultimate expression of Latin America's regionalist literature. Further down the article, such disparities even translate into art forms other than literature, such as the visual arts and cinema.[13]

The "Etymology" section of the English Wikipedia follows the historical accounts we saw above (from German art criticism to Massimo Bontempelli and from European avant-gardes to Latin American literature). Interestingly, the detailed description of the stylistic "Characteristics" of magic realism in literature challenges the broad definition given above. It highlights elements such as the fact that "the story proceeds with 'logical precision' as if nothing extraordinary had taken place," and it quotes Alejo Carpentier's claim that magic realism expresses a particularly Latin American understanding of reality

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13 In this sense, a film like Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies*, which explores the folk traditions of the Romani people in a realistic setting, is paired up with Seth MacFarlane's comedies *Ted* and *Ted 2*, which tell the adventures of a Bostonian grownup whose teddy bear comes to life.

and history. In this section, unlike in the first paragraph, Wikipedia authors draw mainly from Latin American or Latin Americanist critics, such as Luis Leal, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, and Jean Franco, among others.

There is, however, a long section in response to this one titled "Latin American Exclusivity" that also sets the English entry for magic realism apart from Wikipedia pages in other languages. Interestingly, in this section, the tone and syntax diverge from the rest of the article, and we find some spelling mistakes. At times, the sentence structure or expressions seem taken directly from Spanish.[14] Drawing from critics Ángel Flores (Flores) and Irene Guenther (Guenther), this section argues against claims that magic realism should be considered a Latin American aesthetic. Some of the alleged non-Latin American predecessors of magic realism are, in fact, mentioned in Flores' "Magical Realism in Spanish Fiction," such as Gogol's "The Nose" and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Overall, the section produces a relatively uncommon metacommentary on the Wikipedia entry itself, concluding that "magic realism's foundations are more diverse and intricate than what the Hispanic origin theory, as defined in this article," and that "the Hispanic magic realists should perhaps have a proper designation as such, but not the overarching umbrella of the broader term as this article suggests." And, in turn, produces yet another metacommentary when it is flagged as not sufficiently grounded in existing scholarship: "This section possibly contains original research. Please improve it by verifying the claims made and adding inline citations. Statements consisting only of original research should be removed. (May 2020)." Still, the definition sketched by other users in the first paragraphs of the article is, by our standards, broad, and it is especially so when compared to Wikipedia articles in languages other than English.

Glocal Magic Realism

The analysis of these articles reveals a set of characteristics of the circulation of the concept, which, we argue, can be described through the notion of the *glocal*. Framing the circulation of magic realism in the theorizations of the glocal can shed light on the tensions and contradictions in how magic realism is employed to speak of different cultural products, as well as their reception and circulation.

The persistent play between the different aesthetic, geographical, and political dimensions of magic realism makes it possible to read it in terms of a glocal understanding of the genre. The concept of *glocal* is another notion with multiple and disputed roots—dating from the 1990s and including Japanese business circles, ecocritical art, and scholarly responses to the rise of global studies in both the humanities and social sciences (Roudometof 775–77).

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14 "Flores is not alone on this front"; "there is argument between those who see…"; among others.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as "the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems." It is used to defy the monolithic ideas of globalization:

> Glocalization indicates that the growing importance of continental and global levels is occurring together with the increasing salience of local and regional levels. Tendencies toward homogeneity and centralization appear alongside tendencies toward heterogeneity and decentralization. But the notion of glocalization entails an even more radical change in perspective: it points to the interconnectedness of the global and local levels (Blatter).

The fusion of the two terms, thus, is meant to show them to be a false binary—as Arjun Appadurai argues, locality both requires and produces the context for other localities, therefore always has a projection outside of its boundaries and is affected by its exterior (Appadurai 210). At the same time, national and global structures can lead to a "situation, in which the power-relations that affect the production of locality are fundamentally translocal," which can interrupt the mechanism of creation of locality (Appadurai 212).

The irresolvable conflict between different geopolitical inscriptions is not the only dimension shared by the concepts of magic realism and the glocal. How the terms have been constructed also shares important similarities. The notion of the glocal has its roots in a series of other conceptualizations of cultural contact, most of all those that emerged in the study of postcolonialism and the Global South—notions such as hybridization, creolization, or transculturation (Roudometof 776). The glocal is understood as a similar sociopolitical and cultural process of cultural exchange, which recognizes the violence and conflicts behind it, but that at the same time is generalized, moving away from the context of colonization. The trajectory of the concept, thus, is not dissimilar to that of magic realism—which points to the explicative power of both notions but also puts them at risk of losing some of their force through their broader application.

We can see that in how the term *glocal* is discussed in scholarship. Some scholars point to the possibilities that the application of the concept opens—for instance, Theo D'haen advocates for the creation of what he denominates "glocal anthologies" of world literature—constructed from perspectives so far marginalized in the study of world literature and thus also adopting different criteria of choice when assembling an anthology of texts, and combining different ways of reading, close and distant. In D'haen's words, this would give way to "a more truly global perspective on what constitutes 'world literature'" (D'haen 17). Similarly, when using the term "glocal memory" to analyze contemporary novels, Birgit Neumann defines it as a "a minor and rooted cosmopolitan memory" which is "a genuinely localized memory that refuses to stay still and cannot be tied to a single culture" (Neumann 222–23). In other

words, the theorization of glocality allows scholars to reflect on the importance of the local for how we imagine the world, as well as rethink contemporary locality, most of all in terms of recognizing its multifaceted construction.

On the other hand, according to William Thornton, the concept has severe limitations—he argues that it more aptly designates "the ersatz localism" that actually promotes a globalized idea of space and finding one's place within it. As he writes, "local resistance is always 'rooted,' but that is not to say it is monadic. A cultural politics of location can be compared to a forest ecosystem—a world composed of infinitely variegated smaller worlds, like the Mexico of Octavio Paz. By contrast, a congeries of 'glocalities' can well be compared to a tree farm" (Thornton 87). Thus, he sees glocal space as a depoliticized locality, which does not destabilize the top-down power dynamics and subjugates the local to the global.

Interestingly, both the arguments for and against the use of glocal can be confirmed in the way magic realism is defined in Wikipedia. Magic realism proves once again to be a potent category. It shows something important about the reception of magic realism—it reveals that many readers identify with the defiance of realism, mainly with how magic realism shows that the dominant narratives don't make space for many marginalized perspectives. In other words, since it speaks to the readers how this aesthetic device sheds light on the limitations of realism, which they readily perceive works of fiction familiar to them as representative of the category. This points to the cultural exchange through translation and circulation of literature—the Latin American boom left a mark on how many of us read, while the exact local versions of this mark on reading practices are not necessarily the same. In a certain sense, Wikipedia articles propose a decentralized anthology of magic realism—a variation of what D'haen proposes in his study of world literature anthologies. This glocal wiki-anthology is partially connected to the scholarship written in non-dominant languages and to the scholarship concerning literatures in non-dominant languages.

At the same time, we could hardly treat Wikipedia as such an anthology, as not all elements seem informed by non-mainstream scholarship—rather, they often appear as somewhat capricious. The term's popularity leads also to a simplified vision of Latin American literature, offering a domesticated image of difference under the umbrella term of magic realism, imprecisely defined. The anti-colonial and anti-imperialist potential within magic realism is at risk of being incorporated into a version of difference acceptable within the global structures. We also saw that in the case of some authors from outside of Latin America, who were placed on the worldly map and market through their alleged adherence to magic realism, even if the term does not elucidate much about their works. The most paradigmatic case, in this sense, might be that of Borges, who ranks second only to García Márquez as a magic realist writer

on Wikipedia, even if his work has circulated widely in languages other than Spanish throughout the past decades without being labeled as such by academic and non-academic critics.

This tendency is connected to the linguistic politics of literary circulation and world literature. Gabriel García Márquez said of the famous translator of Latin American literature, Gregory Rabassa, that he was "el mejor escritor latinoamericano en lengua inglesa" ("the best Latin American writer in English" ("Gregory Rabassa, El Sutil Arte de Traducir Literatura Latinoamericana.")). Given how crucial the circulation of Latin American literature in English was for the world fame of magic realism, these words have great weight. While this circulation is immensely valuable in terms of how it allowed many readers to access Latin American literature, it also decontextualized magic realism; while it highlighted the appeal of this aesthetic for multiple contexts of marginalization, it might take away its potential to denounce the particular conditions created by colonial violence.

The Broad Appeal of Magic Realism

Let's go back to *Narcos*. Right after the second sentence about magic realism disappears ("There is a reason magical realism was born in Colombia."), a narrator starts speaking—in English. He immediately references the US government in the very first sentence. This establishes a context the viewer can understand to describe its difference from Colombia in 1989. Clichés of a domesticated yet exotic difference superpose cocaine and magic realism.

Yet Wikipedia shows us more than that—and ties into broader conversations about the role of translation in world literature and magic realism as both a world literary genre and an aesthetic emancipatory project. The Wikipedia articles reveal important local variations is that the ways in which books are read, studied, and understood. Looking at how the term is used in different languages gives us a sense of how complex it is. It also ties into the debates on how world literature is a useful category if we see it through a broader spectrum of languages rather than just a handful of dominant ones.[15] And it shows the manifold ways scholarly debates interact with Wikipedia: they are often cited but also contested, followed, and disregarded. It is curious to see what it is in each case Wikipedia users take from scholarly sources and what they discard. For example, the Latin American roots of magic realism as a literary genre seem to be as present on Wikipedia as in scholarly narratives. The same can be said about the term's coinage in art criticism in the early 20$^{\text{th}}$ century. And yet, when identifying authors as magic realists, personal opinion, taste, and linguistic expertise (and perhaps even pride) seem to weigh more than scholarly sources. Why else would Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, or Julio

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15 See, for instance, Mufti.

Cortázar be consistently classified as magic realists, even when their proper Wikipedia entries offer alternative labels for their work based on scholarly bibliography?

Reading different Wikipedia pages shows us that we need to pay attention to other worldly combinations, connections, and dialogues, which are not necessarily conducted in or between dominant languages. In doing so, we might be able to challenge conventional and unidirectional conversations. Many contemporary narratives of world literature have been criticized for equaling world literature with global circulation, thus positioning literature and scholarship in English (whether in translation or not) as the center of knowledge creation and dissemination. Here, however, we see how the connections between the pages do not always pass through the one in English, and the multilingual editors of the English Wikipedia bring perspectives and insights elaborated in other cultural circles. For instance, what would it mean that the Malayam entry for magic realism shaped the English one rather than the other way around? And what does it mean that contemporary Latin American authors such as Sara Gallardo and José Donoso are named as magic realists in the Turkish Wikipedia without the mediation of other dominant languages (or even translation, for that matter)? Such questions open a world of different multilingual clusters. It can be messy. But messy is better than monolithic.

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