

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Vaught, Anna Catherine (2024) 'Go there on a wing in your imagination.' A critical and creative exploration of magical realism as therapeutic writing in novel *Saving Lucia* and memoir in-essays, *These Envoys of Beauty*. Doctoral thesis, York St John University.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorksjs.ac.uk/id/eprint/11405/>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorksjs.ac.uk

‘Go there on a wing in your imagination.’

A critical and creative exploration of magical realism as therapeutic writing in novel

Saving Lucia and memoir in-essays, These Envoys of Beauty.

Anna Catherine Vaught

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (by

Published Works)

York St John University

School of Humanities

June 2024

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material. Any reuse must comply with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and any licence under which this copy is released.

© 2024 York St John University and Anna Vaught

Contents

Abstract

About the author

Chapter 1.

Introduction. I was born a magical realist. Trauma and magical realism; overview of my work in this context with key biographical information

Chapter 2.

Saving Lucia. Pretence, rehearsal, freedom.

Chapter 3.

These Envoys of Beauty. Memoir, magical realism, memory, history, and time.

Chapter 4.

Conclusion. Hope, rebellion, colour.

Acknowledgements

Works Cited

Additional Works

Abstract

The first part of this critical commentary focuses on *Saving Lucia* (2020). Violet Gibson, incarcerated, conceives a grand scheme, involving others who are suffering and silenced, thronged by the beautiful companions of her world: the birds of the air, paintings, the imagination and the transformation of suffering through the Catholic faith. The worlds of real and fantastical blend; I offer her an adventure, abetted by her co-patient, Lucia Joyce, in which love and freedom are conjured through the imagination into bold life. Lucia is encouraged to save the story and, thereby, save the stories of lost women, intellects, loves and lives. I shall show how I have used the magical realist mode to explore trauma, interrogating how this abuts theorists' trauma writing, together with the work of contemporary psychiatrists. In the second section, I will also parse these theoretical and medical studies as I explore memoir-in- essays, *These Envoys of Beauty*.

While *Saving Lucia* centres the imagination as a mode of survival and its own substantial self in fiction, the second text investigates more directly what I personally learned to do through reading and deep immersion in the natural world, for its own sake, as a conduit to thought and new worlds; it was as if I had, without knowing the form, made magical realism of my life. We know from the pioneering work of psychiatrists and trauma specialists Judith Herman and Bessel Van der Kolk in works such as *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) and *The Body Keeps the Score. Mind, Brain And Body In The Transformation Of Trauma* (2015), that survivors of childhood abuse may shut down their imaginations so that responses are concrete; moreover, that when we are pulled back into our past experience we may suffer from a failure of that imagination which gives us flexibility of thought, places to go to and hope for our future. As a child, I developed, without adult guidance, a way to rely on the imagination and on magical thinking to navigate. In addition, I will posit that, as a neurodivergent author managing trauma response, magical realism as a literary mode feels like a safe home, the equivalent of an atypical mind, imaginatively freewheeling.

I will show how I have, through theme, character, imagery, refrain, repetition, inflexion, sound and even the use of punctuation, on a granular level, employed the magical realist mode to explore trauma in short fiction, a further novel, and nonfiction work, where the theme of intergenerational trauma and our release from it are uppermost. Contextually, I offer detailed reading of magical realist fiction texts, including those written in the last two years, and demonstrate the wonderful potential for exploring distressing themes in prose fiction and

nonfiction, as I survey how this is all closely related to my own trauma experience, with its subsequent and permanent mental health challenges.

About The Author

Anna Vaught is an author, creative writing mentor, community project tutor and occasional secondary English teacher. She is a graduate of the university of Cambridge where she won two academic prizes in English Literature. She has taught in FE, at secondary level alongside being an examiner and Head of Year, in EAL and in community projects. She has also worked in the charity sector, with homeless and potentially homeless people. She is the author of ten books. *Killing Hapless Ally* (autobiographical fiction, Patrician Press, 2016), *The Life of Almost* (novella, Patrician Press, 2018), *Saving Lucia* (novel, Bluemoose Books, 2020; published in Italy as *Bang Bang Mussolini*, 8TTO Edizione, 2023), *Famished* (short fiction, Influx Press, 2020), *Ravished* (short fiction, Reflex Press, 2022), *These Envoys of Beauty* (memoir-in-essays, Reflex Press, 2023), *The Zebra and Lord Jones* (novel, Renard Press, 2023), *The Alchemy* (creative writing teaching book; first of a series, Renard Press 2023), *To Melt the Stars* (essay collection, Broken Sleep, 2024) and *Her Winter Song*, a novella (Renard Press, 2024) and forthcoming, *The Elixir* (creative writing teaching book; second of a series, Renard Press, 2025).

To date Anna Vaught has published fifty shorter pieces: reviews, short fiction, features, memoir, flash fiction and both creative and narrative non-fiction. In addition to her columns for *The Bookseller* and *Mslexia Magazine*, she has contributed to *Litro*, *Hinterland*, *Contemporary Small Press* (Westminster University), *Losslit*, *New Welsh Review*, the Shelf Life bibliotherapy project at University College London), Leicester University Creative Writing blog, *The Independent*, *3:AM*, *Severine*, and to the *Trauma* collection (Dodo Ink, 2020) and contributed to the Ulysses 100 Project with University College Dublin and Moli Museum Dublin and ‘The Walls of Limerick’ mentoring project with Limerick University. She has edited two anthologies, *Tempest* (Patrician Press, 2017) and *My Europe* (Patrician Press, 2018), contributed poems to *The Anthology of the Sea* (The Emma Press, 2019) and is the creator of the Curae prize for writer-carers, writing the foreword for the inaugural anthology, *The Curae Anthology* (Renard Press, 2023). In 2025 she will run the Curae prize for a second time and, in 2026, she launches the Renegade Festival, which will focus on wellbeing, inclusivity and access as it offers a range of events on books and writing.

Anna Vaught is currently mentoring with Jericho Writers and running community classes. She is a mental health campaigner and lives alongside chronic illness. She suffered developmental trauma during her upbringing and manages anxiety, periods of depression and dissociative

episodes. She has also been a carer for extensive periods in her life: all of this is central to her creative work and what she hopes to achieve with and from her writing. She is currently drafting a new novel, a series of nonfiction texts and a commercial fiction series and is represented by Kesia Lupo of the Donald Maass Literary Agency in New York City. She is the mother of three sons, comes from a large Welsh family and lives in Wiltshire.

‘We are creatures of air, Our roots in dreams and clouds, reborn in flight. Goodbye.’

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*.

Chapter 1. Introduction. ‘I was born a magical realist’

My first encounters with the magical realist mode were with Jorge Luis Borges, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Mikhail Bulgakov and Angela Carter. I realised, when I began to author my own books, that I was naturally using magical realist techniques, particularly to write about trauma and its survival. I was drawn to creating stories where transgression might offer new worlds and new adventures. Violet, the main protagonist of my third novel, *Saving Lucia* (2020) is a magical realist. Thus, Violet manipulates the cold world about her through the powerful force of her imagination. She prompts the reader to question what is real and true and turns the world on its head, inhabiting her own vibrant world in a life of incarceration. In *These Envoys of Beauty* (2022), my memoir, you see how a child learned and incorporated similar techniques. I shall foreground these two texts in this critical review.

In my work, more broadly, I show you an individual managing the results of complex developmental trauma and the mental health problems which have occurred alongside. I am an individual who had, from an early age, to work out, unaided, how to view the world and how to find additional succour and interest in it. I will show the potential of magical realism to analyse brutality and cruelty in a family home, to manage trauma, to make sense, illuminate memory, and understand what it means to survive when you are told that you should not be alive and have brought illness and death and catastrophe to others. I shall show how what Eugene Arva (2008) has stated as ‘the ineffable’ (78) was transliterated, made tolerable, and brought fully into the light. How my imagination was that of a magical realist, and thus its techniques and ideas were explored and remembered in memoir. That here is magical realism as a global mode, this time in the hands of an Anglo-Welsh writer living with the results of complex and extended – and long untreated – trauma. Finally, that magical realism as a way of thinking was natural and instinctive to me, and

so fed into my writing. Moreover, I was inspired by my reading of magical realist writers to explore how it might be interrogated across forms in my own work.

What is magical realism as a mode?

A standard description of magical realism is taken first from Marion Wynne-Davis's *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature* (1989):

A term applied in literature primarily to Latin American novelists such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez and Alonjo Carpentier, whose work combines a realistic manner with strong elements of the bizarre, supernatural, and fantastic. This technique has influenced novelists such as John Fowles, Angela Carter, and Salman Rushdie. (693)

Wendy B. Faris (2004) explains that ‘magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them.’ (1) While most of the academic scholarship on magical realism initially focused on a Latin American context, studies have considered this literary practice as it grew elsewhere. Thus Faris, Lois Parkinson Zamora and others have argued for the internationality of this literary practice and that the form is not solely a postcolonial style. Recently, scholars have approached magical realism across cultures, ranging from Latin American, African American to European literature. Among these are Brenda Cooper’s study of the development of magical realism in the African context and the work of Faris who has stated that, magical realism, ‘now designates perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction’ explaining that has happened because, ‘it has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work; its texts, marginal voices, submerged traditions and emergent literatures have developed’ and it is ‘a mode of expression worldwide.’ (1)

Faris adds that ‘realism does not believe in miracles’ (28), but explains further of realism that,

It has given the magical realist the means to describe them. Thus, even when a magical realist text overturns the assumptions of Western empiricism and questions the binary opposition of magic and realism from the perspective or another cultural or narrative

tradition that lacks those assumptions and that opposition; they persist, because they are embedded within the conventions of realism the text employs. (28, 29)

Magical realism blurs boundaries and even, according to Faris, ‘begins to erode the categories themselves’ (23) and, as a mode, continues to sustain interest. It is, in fact, an ever-expanding world literary genre. I argue that its broadest definitions are most helpful; that one might regard it as a universal aesthetic which discloses the supernatural core of the real. In offering a description of magical realism, we should, however, counter with a description of literary realism. Turning to the *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature* once more, we read that, ‘Since the middle ages...realism means that reality exists apart from ideas about it in our mind’, and that, ‘as a 19th-century conception’ it means, in general, ‘the use of the imagination to present things as common sense supposes they are.’(836) That is, as a rejection of the Romantic period’s idealised depiction of reality. ‘Realist texts render close readings of the everyday, perhaps the mundane.’ (836) Examples might be from Daniel Defoe, owing to his factual description and narration, or George Eliot, where realism is described by Nancy Henry and George Levine (2019) as, ‘the energizing principle of Eliot’s art.’ (3)

For Sister Mary Francis Slattery (1972), ‘realism is reference that gives an exact illusion of correspondence with reality’(1). García Márquez, however, had argued in *The Fragrance of Guava: Conversation with Gabriel García Márquez* (1998), that strict realism offered too static and exclusive a vision of reality; that, ‘disproportion is part of our reality. Our reality is in itself out of all proportion.’ 60) Moreover, as Ayyub Rajabi has argued (2020), a notion of balance is valuable:

In magical realism the elements of reality and imagination are so elaborately interwoven that the reader simply accepts them, in such a way that all artificial and imaginary incidents in the storyline seems completely real and natural...it can be realized that literature aims to surrender itself to the real world and, by the means of imagination and imagery, balances the truth. (1)

It is helpful to think of magical realism and realism as complementary modes, and to understand, as Faris puts it (1995), that, ‘an essential difference, then, between realism and magical realism involves the intentionality implicit in the conventions of the two modes.’ (3) That is, realism intends its version, its depiction, of the world as a singular version; realism offers an objective, a universal representation of realities. In short, as she says, ‘realism functions

ideologically and hegemonically.’ (3) Magical realism does this too but to a lesser extent because it is preoccupied with plurality and, ‘its program is not centralizing, but eccentric; it creates space for interactions of diversity.’ (3) In my work, often focused on ontological disruption, I hope this is something I have achieved.

On magical realism and trauma

In recent years, there has been much scholarship on the link between magical realist writing and trauma. While recent works have linked magical realism to postcolonial trauma, Arva (2008) has expanded the trauma-theory-based analysis of magical realism, centring the phrase ‘traumatic imagination,’ (60) which is helpful here. Arva explores how configurations of time and space become unstable time-spaces marked by extreme events. That is, they are impacted upon by traumatic experiences. This is a notion of the way in which trauma affects our experience of time – that is, of memory - as outlined by trauma pioneers Van der Kolk and Herman.¹ We are also invited by Arva to explore what we understand reality to be and how this impacts on our texts.² In his paper, ‘The Meaning of Working Through the Past’ (1959), Theodor W. Adorno has written of the necessity of retrieving the conditions for memory and suggests that art can furnish us with this first stage of this process and as a way of reconciliation between subject and object. Such an idea is pertinent here. Moreover, the traumatic imagination defines the empathy-driven

¹ Arva discusses a series of concepts, such as ‘spectacle’ and ‘hyperreality,’ (62,64) to create an analogy between the hyperreal - a spectacle without origins – drawing on the theory postulated by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) of a state where we can no longer distinguish between reality and representations of reality - and magical realism. The latter, a representation of events without a history, or a recreation of an absence that first needs to be acknowledged before it can be assigned any meaning. Magical realist hyperreality is meant, Arva explains, to be a reconstruction of events that were missed in the first place because of their traumatic nature. While it might not explain the unspeakable event, it allows the ineffable to be vicariously felt and re-experienced. This is an unorthodox but fascinating conversation, between magical realist writing (viewed primarily as a postmodern literary phenomenon) and trauma (understood both as an individual and as an often-invisible cultural dominant)

² Note Arva (2008) in a footnote to an essay, offering a distinction between concepts outlined by Baudrillard and Jacques Lacan, across his seminars: ‘Baudrillard does not understand "real" and "reality" in their Lacanian sense; he uses "the real" only as the noun form of the adjective "real" in order to designate the perceivable aspect of reality. The Lacanian "real," spelled mostly with a capital initial (the Real), is that which escapes any kind of signification—what fails to become accessible through signification.’ (81)

consciousness that enables authors and readers to act out and/or work through trauma by means of magical realist images. Corroborated by elements of trauma theory, postcolonial studies, narrative theory, and contemporary theories of representation, magical realism is an essential part of my own creative process. It turns traumatic memories into narratives, lending traumatic events an expression that traditional realism could not, seemingly because the magical realist writing mode and the traumatized subject share the same ontological ground: being part of a reality that is constantly escaping witnessing through telling.

Cathy Caruth (2016) argues for the ‘legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience.’ (60) She goes further: ‘at the heart of Freud’s rethinking of history in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) I would thus propose the urgent and unsettling question, what does it mean to survive?’ (60) I suggest that magical realism illuminates and articulates Caruth’s ‘incomprehensibility’ and turn to Susanna Clarke’s *Piranesi* (2020) as a literary guide. The words near the end of Clarke’s novel, in its penultimate entry, mirror my own experience of trauma and what I have placed in the hands of Violet Gibson in *Saving Lucia*. A process of withdrawal, of noticing and recording and of prodigious reliance on the imagination.

In my mind are all the tides, their seasons, their ebbs and their flows. In my mind are all the halls, the endless procession of them, the intricate pathways. When this world becomes too much for me, when I grow tired of the noise and the dirt and the people, I close my eyes and I name a particular vestibule to myself; then I name a hall. I imagine I am walking the path from the vestibule to the hall. I note with precision the doors I must pass through, the rights and lefts that I must take, the statues on the walls that I must pass. (243)

Piranesi’s utopia is a refuge from violence and a reminder of violence and its escapism an act of defiance and of courage; the same is true of Violet Gibson in *Saving Lucia*. She may be incarcerated, in fact for violence, but the escapism she proposes is bold, transgressive, and joyful. Moreover, Piranesi carries with himself all his past selves and cares for them but does not become them once more. He is profoundly alone in the labyrinth, and yet he is never alone because the world speaks back to him. It does so within a fantastical, isolated setting, an admixture of Narnia and Borges, compelling and comforting: suffering is articulated, then salved.

Magical realism and trauma, my own life, imagination, and writing

In *What my Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma* (2022), Stephanie Foo articulates a ghastly discomfort perfectly: 'I kneeled and said the same prayer, over and over like a mantra. "Please God let me not be such a bad girl. Please make me be able to make Mommy and Daddy happy. Please make me into a good girl."' (6) This was me. The pressure felt intense and unrelenting. Foo writes, 'As a child I knew exactly why my mother was sad all the time. She was very clear on the source of her misery: me.' (8)

I was a determined little child, however, because I did three things. One, I became an acute observer and analyst of the world about me, at first the natural world, and then any world I was in; this child watching the strangeness and fascination of human encounters. It was as if I had been born a magical realist, or at least operated as one from my earliest memories. I have always accepted peculiarity, poltergeists, angels, the natural world full of personality and voices, monsters and that the spectacular and spectral live and breathe as part of my reality. I hypothesise that this was key to my survival in complex and extended trauma, experienced developmentally. There was no-one to tell and then, when I did tell, no-one believed me. I watched to find something which would.

Two, I burrowed into and lived in my imagination and felt it expand into the real world. When Violet Gibson, of my novel *Saving Lucia*, creates an expansive and extraordinary world, it is because 'those who are confined have the best imaginations.' (43) She is empowering herself; moreover, it is natural to this character in the book, as it was for me: trapped, stymied, frightened and with no-one who would listen. Magical realism involved a joyful, energetic twist and turning the real world: looking out of the corner of your eye at the supernatural; preternatural. Hyperreal: a seamless blend of the real and the imagined.

The third thing was, as an adult, to write it all down, across many books and a myriad short pieces; imaginings congested in my head until, in a moment of rage, of insight, stimulated by reading, I started writing and did not stop. García Márquez was a journalist until he read Kafka: in an interview with the literary critic Peter Stone (1981) noting that,

When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into monstrous vermin." When I read the line, I thought to myself that

I did not know anyone was allowed to write like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago. (184)

For me, seeing that other writers *did* write like this, what a liberation it was, and as to García Márquez, so for me: an extraordinary prompt, it was like being given *permission*. Until recently I did not trust my own voice. I was frequently terrified of being annihilated, being found out.³ I think here of Hon Violet Gibson, certified insane and committed for life, in my *Saving Lucia*. In that novel, Violet Gibson voices Bertha Pappenheim, Anna O, ‘Fraulein O,’ subject of Freud and Breuer’s *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and treated for an extended period by Breuer. Violet’s address here, speaking for Bertha and in a voice she has imagined for her, is to both the men, in a fury. Violet, incarcerated for life, is furious because, as at other times in my novel, she is adamant that it should not be for another to set limits on what is possible in difficulty for an individual. It is not for another to set limits on what is possible because of vigorous imagination. Noting that, in Anna O’s case, there was, according to Breuer, ‘an overflowing mental vivacity’ (25) and ‘surplus of psychical liveliness and energy’ (43) and cultivation of her daydreaming, which she had described to Breuer as a ‘private theatre’ (26), I gave her a theatre in *Saving Lucia*.

Here the imagined voice of Bertha Pappenheim, speaks to the doctors in *Saving Lucia* (66)

Oh, but I was ill. Inside, though, Dr Freud, Dr Breuer, I knew who I was, but I could not speak it. And later, as Bertha, pronounced better, I was sometimes ill again. Your talking cures did not wrest this from me, but still I was strong! I have learned, and I won’t have been the only one, that you do not have to be completely well to care, love, or dance. To work. And anyway: define well. Then mad. I challenge you.

This is a strident riposte to those who impose limits and, by extension, to the weary insistence on a recovery or triumph trope in depictions of disability. Earlier in the book, Lucia Joyce, as Violet’s scribe, attests to Violet Gibson’s reasonableness and sanity. She is broken, ‘walled up’ (13) but knows exactly what to do and how, because her imagination is so deft.

She’s a frigid; she’s a clever; a rustling old bird; capable of absconding, self-harm, homicide and jokes at the wrong juncture.

³ To help me recover from the results of developmental trauma, I am engaged in the specific trauma therapy which is increasingly accessible in this country, thanks largely to the pioneering work of Herman and Van der Kolk, I hope to recover and that I will do that with an excellent specialist psychotherapist, EMDR - and magical realism

Can't tell a hawk from a handsaw,⁴ probably.

That's what they say. They're wrong. (13)

Here is a turbulent world, enclosure, and illness. Here, also, are resilience and the magical realist mode where the barriers between worlds are permeable and where trauma necessitates extreme means, even down to the invention of nouns - 'a frigid' and 'a clever' as Lucia describes her. Syntax and grammar rules are frequently inverted, and words transposed because the women of the book transgress.

Magical realism is effective, natural, for turning unspeakable events into articulated stories and to reconstruct things that happened in a way that is manageable. While it is agonising to remember, it is *also* agonising to forget because this is also witness and testimony. Magical realism, with its allegory, its gentle and playful tilts of the world, its delicate webs of magic woven into a recognisable quotidian world, opens up wonderful possibilities for the expression of horrible events; as a form, it feels, at least for this writer, extremely comfortable because traumatic memory does not, as specialists such as Van der Kolk and Herman have repeatedly shown, work in a linear way. This type of memory is, rather, sustained in the expression of fragments; of eruptions. Van der Kolk has extensively catalogued the nature of traumatic memory. For example, 'The imprints of trauma experiences are organized not as coherent logical narratives but in fragmented sensory and emotional traces: images, sounds, and physical sensations.' (211).⁵

When I was a child, I absolutely believed – already stymied and lonely with these 'fragmented' experiences – that if I had a bad thought, the product of that thought would be harmful to someone else, leading me over a period of years to have to express it to the individual so that it could be exorcised. That is, if I were to think of certain words, those words would come true. I believed I had the power to cause illness, disfigurement, and death because that is what I was told. This was from trauma, of a self-loathing brutally instigated and then reinforced within the family

⁴ Recalling Hamlet.

⁵ Judith Herman has explained how hyperarousal and intrusion are cardinal symptoms. That, traumatised people suffer from 'chronic arousal of the autonomic nervous system' (52), the ways in which 'trauma repeatedly interrupts', and 'the traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep.' (53)

home. I also developed obsessive compulsive disorder⁶, with frightening ruminations, intrusive thoughts, and paralysing anxiety. If you take this belief in the power of words to hurt and then to expunge harm by being said aloud, and then understand the mighty power I believed words to have, you might also understand how books and reading their texts aloud acted as talismans for me, things that grounded me. In addition to this, my world was frightening so I added many imaginary elements, going way beyond the concept of an imaginary friend into an imaginary community. These characters - from my imaginary mother, sister to my imaginary best friend, then lover, Albert Camus, are all explored in my autobiographical novel, replete with magical realist flavour, *Killing Hapless Ally* (2016) and again in my novella, *The Life of Almost* (2018). There, I had set out how my imagined world had become real and my real recessed into fantasy and compressed into chapter epigraphs; like little prisons for the family which was cruel and divisive. I have also cradled a passionate belief that reality was subjective, and I could tweak sections of it. I was also madly in love with the natural world, which I felt spoke to me with a kindness lacking in my immediate family. All of this built me as a magical realist, before I knew or understood anything of the term or its auspices, because I had a real world with a quite different one grafted onto it; where real existed I would aim to tweak it, mould it; turn real people into characters from an imagined book I was writing - and I did this even as a very young child.

The life that did bad things to me also gifted me with its own dark resources, which might remind us of something García Márquez said, in interview, of his own realisation ‘- that everything that had occurred in my childhood had a literary value that I was only now appreciating.’(1981) I learned early and know now that a lonely child was not ever *really* alone because there were fantasies and the world of books could be carried over into the real life. The shadowy world could be illuminated by pinpricks of light - good words, gorgeous words, talismans, mnemonics. I did not shut down, either as a child or an adult. I believe that, as I have begun to describe above, my imagination is what saved me and my imagination used in particular ways - in my life, my navigation of the world and, finally, my books, as I shall show.

⁶ The NHS website has definition of mental illness and mental health conditions. [Overview - Obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) OCD is much parodied and referenced. It may be about order and repetition, but may also manifest in extreme anxiety and sustained intrusive thoughts, which was the case with me.

The notion of magical realism in narrative exploring trauma is neatly summarised by Arva and Hubert Roland (2014), ‘As a textual representation of the unspeakable, magical realism gives traumatic events an expression that traditional realism failed to accomplish.’ (9) Moreover, like García Márquez so, to me: *the magical realism is the realism*.

Pablo Neruda has a line in a poem that says, ‘God help me from inventing when I sing.’

It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes for the imagination, while the truth is that there’s not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality.

The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination. (1981)

In *Saving Lucia* and *These Envoys of Beauty*, I explore trauma with a linear and realistic narrative hand in hand with a magical realist mode as I dispute the impossibility of representing the trauma directly. My writing, drawing on the magical realist mode, has been a form of rebellion and daring; a blaze; a joy and this can be seen across nine texts in seven years and a myriad other cited works. Writing out these stories and threading in personal detail to all and using the modes of expression which kept me alive as a literary voice is deeply thrilling. It is also witness and testimony and we might think of magical realism as reclamation, its nature celebratory, spacious, and inventive: there is room for me and the story of my peculiar life. There is room for us to move between rooms, between worlds in this global literature. It may be that magical realism articulates what realism cannot, but also its mode is instinctive and as I show, it is possible to write in it and confront trauma directly.

Chapter 2

Saving Lucia. Pretence, rehearsal, freedom

This is exactly why Rupert could not have come into this house. How could I even be sure if, stepping across the threshold, we would arrive in the same place.

Karina Lickorish Quinn (2022) *The Dust Never Settles*. (161)

In *Saving Lucia*, The Honourable Violet Gibson admonishes then encourages Lucia Joyce, her co-patient in St Andrew's, insisting that both rely on a prodigious imagination. Reiterating that this is possible during ongoing trauma,

But we have things we both know, in this hard, barren place of boiled wool and no-hope where we have been left. You, my darling, are a mountain in that small body, old before young, screaming poetry, talking about Giotto's and I wail with *The Wake* and the dancing vocabulary which was once precious. (49)

Violet encourages Lucia to look within and find strength, to ignite her imagination to understand how to bend time, and thus freedom, to her will. At first Lucia had been perplexed, frightened even, yet she is soon beguiled and feels she is entering into a thrilling adventure and, what is more, will get to save it, to be Violet's scribe for the story and to provide a record of herself. The events of the book flit between hard historical fact and fantasy; the text tilts, dips, and time warps, sometimes so quickly that your head might spin. Violet is a magical realist; she sees so many curious things and imagines so many curious strategies because, in forced confinement, I have imagined her as leaning on these capacities to survive and to feel as whole as possible. This is, as I shall show, not a great distance from my own experience; she is violated, misunderstood, left, her forms of communication to the outside world unsent and placed in the filing cabinet at St Andrew's hospital.

Violet Gibson as a magical realist

Violet Gibson, like Lucia Joyce, was committed to St Andrew's hospital for life. My own place of incarceration was the family home and, beyond that, the sense that I could be neither believed nor helped. I enjoyed giving Violet adventures and freedom with other women, confined for life,

surging back and forth through history. Here she sends a letter back through time to Blanche, Queen of the Hysterics at the Salpêtrière in Paris, under Charcot, and then speaks as her, fully inhabiting the character. It is easy for the reader to forget that there are only two people telling the story in the book because it feels richly populated, owing to the energetically polyphonic narrative. Nonetheless, everyone other than Violet and Lucia (bar Violet's doctor and a nurse) is a confection and the book, presenting Lucia in Paris, free, itself ends on a fantastical note, just as it begins on one. Even the rational doctor we meet is thrilled by it and trying not to be; his imagination is piqued, and poetry remembered. He is stimulated by the sense of unfolding drama in the book which tugs at his clinical certainty, making him unsettled but fascinated. My intention as a writer here was that this might mirror the response of a reader. That they might ask, what, after all is possible? Here Violet speaks as Blanche.

But how is this letter possible? Generations and seas away?

What do you know what is possible, who has not been mad?

Who'll sing a psalm/

I, said the thrush, as she sat on a bush, I'll sing a psalm.

Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest.

What? -

These things. They keep coming to me like a prompt or a conversation I started once with a dear friend. Or a momentary insight in childhood, that opened up a door. (57-58)

In 1926, the Honourable Violet Gibson went to Rome and tried to kill Mussolini. Violet was certified insane in Harley Street and locked away for the rest of her life in what was the General Lunatic Asylum, then St Andrew's Hospital, as it remains today, one of the UK's biggest psychiatric units. Lucia Joyce, daughter of James Joyce, was a dancer and artist. Having already undergone tests in the same hospital before being detained, she was then compelled to spend time in isolation in Maison de Santé Velpeau in Vésinet, then the Maison de Santé of François Achille Delmas at Ivry-sur-Seine. Finally, in 1951, she is moved to St Andrew's where she becomes a contemporary of Violet Gibson.

On facts and the fantastical in *Saving Lucia*

These (above) are the facts. I came to the book by accident, itself like a tiny preternatural moment: I saw a picture of an elderly lady in a greatcoat, in a garden, back to the camera and she had birds sitting on her arm, her shoulder, her arm extended like a pietà; a vision of grace in gaberdine with withered roses around her. She was only feeding the birds, but in embracing this beautiful yet faintly disturbing scene, I went on a trail where magical realism led the way. It felt like taking dictation from Violet. The fact is that Violet Gibson loved to feed the birds. As is explained at the end of *Saving Lucia*, I was able to contact the last surviving nurse (188,189) who explained that pouches had been sewn into her dress and coat by the nurses; these were filled with birdseed so that the creatures would alight on her. The picture is of Violet in the hospital garden.



Fig. 3. Untitled photograph by unknown photographer. Violet Gibson in the grounds of St Andrew's Hospital Northampton, 1935.

The photograph is a fact. However, in *Saving Lucia*, the birds are loud but not everyone can hear them, and Violet has used the winged messengers to communicate with women across time and asked them to deliver letters, to Blanche Wittmann, Queen of the Hysterics under Charcot and Bertha Pappenheim, first known to history as Anna O in Breuer and Freud's study, *On Hysteria*. Now, through her miraculous imagination as offered in *Saving Lucia* and the stories she has rehearsed, of liberation and of fun, Violet stretches and warps time. Lucia Joyce is to be her

scribe and partner in crime, in adventure, she has begun to unroll a play which she has been preparing for decades. It is a song of freedom. Violet, Lucia, and Blanche never leave the hospitals; Bertha (Anna O) can work and have freedom but never fully recovers.

Recovery is not always possible: it has not been and will not be for me. The question is, what might we change in our constraints? In *Saving Lucia*, that change is to dwell in mental adventures, imagination, and reveries: the things that the hospital staff cannot notice, but which are the work of deep rebellion.

But oh, they'd missed the whispers, glissando of the winged helpers no louder than a heartbeat through a greatcoat; rustles of paper and scratches of soft pencil. A tremendous thing. Nothing could stop it now. (40-41)

What Violet has is her imagination; it is all she has because she is never getting out of St Andrews and neither, as history shows us, was Lucia⁷. '*Saving Lucia*' should thus,' writes academic and critic Annika J. Lindskog (2020), be seen as, 'a work of the imagination, not only in the sense that it describes events that are made up but largely because it seems set in the imagination itself.' (58, no 1, 221.) In *Saving Lucia*, I take the literal passerine and subvert it. Once because I endow it with supernatural potency; it is a time traveller. Then, because I turn it into a swallow, part of the same group of birds, a passerine like the sparrows on Violet's arm in the photograph, above. We know from Frances Stonor Saunders's biography of her, *The Woman Who Shot Mussolini* (2010), that Violet kept a copy of Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints* (1756-1759) in her room, that she was a Catholic convert, devout and loved art. These things together prompted me to think of the multiple versions of Fra Angelico's 'The Annunciation,' an early Renaissance fresco, because in some, as Mary receives the news from Gabriel, there is a swallow present; in other versions, it is missing. I conceptualised what Violet could have constructed from the materials at hand and from the key resource she had: her imagination.

Here are two versions of the painting by way of explanation.

⁷ The reviewer hated the book, saying that Lucia had been fragmented, which was missing the point, because she had written the book and while the references to Joyce were not 'biographical', they were all there in the language, the phrasing and the dense allusions to the texts. THAT was also the point.



Fig 3 and 4. Giovanni Fiesole, of, better known as Fra Angelico, The Annunciation, 1443, Convent of San Marco,

Florence and The Annunciation, Museo de Prado, Madrid. There are fifty frescos housed in different places, dated 1439 to 1444.

Thus, I present the swallow as working for Violet, an article of faith, through time and overseas to deliver letters to Blanche and Bertha. As the two women feel the excitement of their escape and the fantastical pageant only one person, Dr Griffiths, is aware of, yet inchoately, they run and laugh in an appalling but beguiling enchantment, which plays with sounds, rhythms, images, refrains and, importantly, pastiches of Joyce, made by Lucia and echoed by Violet and sometimes the other way round. Real birds; birds of the imagination in flight; intense and incendiary meetings: to me it is all real and the fantastical is substantial and satisfying. An energetic riposte to the tired life of ‘routine and mahogany’ (10) offered by the asylum, where the best pastime was to feed songbirds, Violet plans an escape not to the outside, but into imagination’s infinite possibilities. Lucia and Violet depart on a fantastic time-travelling adventure, to visit their past and more remote times, where they meet Blanche and “Anna O.” (Bertha Pappenheim). ‘To complete the picture of misunderstood and maltreated women, Vivien Eliot also makes a few appearances’ comments Laura Cernat (2022, 21-22).

On mental illness and magical realism

Saving Lucia is not only about psychiatry, psychology, and mental illness; it is about friendship, history, the possibility of a different history, families, happiness, and the potency of the imagination. And it is playful, too; there are James Joyce and Samuel Beckett threads running through it. There are allusions, jokes, references to paintings, religious texts, and poems. Reading, thinking, imagining and noticing are key themes in *Saving Lucia*: the potency of the imagination. The stimulus for writing about mental illness comes from my own jagged experience and our shifting notion of what constitutes sanity and who it is defined by. Society? The DSM?⁸ Is it culture bound? Sometimes, labelling someone as insane has provided an excuse to rid civilisation of its undesirables, whether it be from eugenics, being round the bend, up a curved drive, or having your records burned and your letters unsent. Now you can be contained.

⁸ The DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, is used in practice by mental health clinicians and researchers.

Laura Cernat comments further on my work that,

Vaught also tries to rectify this imbalance in the realm of fantasy. As the four main characters travel through time, they revisit their tragedies and humiliations, and also decide to fix some things, including the killing of Mussolini in 1926 (this time successful) and the freeing of the patients at the Salpêtrière in 1887. Surpassing even Gold in its degree of escapism Vaught’s narrative nonetheless drives home in original ways the point that “insanity” is not something that can be sealed and isolated, that the risk exists in everyone (“we are all ill sometimes; maybe all mad: no one is immune”), and that this should not prevent creativity and life from flourishing—in the words of Bertha’s character, ‘You do not need to heal completely to be effective. (92).

For me, this is one of the best things that a critic might say of the book, or of my work as a whole. We are all vulnerable, but we can aim to preserve thought and creative life, even so. Moreover, that escapism may be fantastically productive. It might even produce a shelf of books.

If you have been mentally ill, you can feel disenfranchised and disempowered. It depends on your carers and the attitudes of those around you, your friends and family, of course, but the feeling of being patient perpetual is wretched. This proscription of personal possibility made me aware of creating possibilities for others in my books. For the women of *Saving Lucia*, certainly, but also for the miraculous Anwen of *The Zebra and Lord Jones* (2023) or the lost and misunderstood characters who appear frequently across my two short fiction collections, *Famished* (2020) and *Ravished* (2023). During significant periods of my life, I have felt silenced not because I did not speak and was not articulate, but because my testimony was not listened to; my judgement doubted. Or because someone seemed to speak for me.⁹ A reader may enjoy a work of magical realism, with much fascinating history woven into it, in *Saving Lucia*, but there are biographical strands being explored too. If we could tell our stories, what would we say? If we could have an adventure and experience time as something flexible, where would we go, what would we do and with whom might we travel? Might magical realism be our vehicle?

⁹ I decided very early on that I would always speak openly about what has happened with me – major depression, generalised anxiety, OCD, insomnia, auditory hallucinations and flashbacks (because of developmental trauma) and dissociative episodes – to make it easier for maybe one other person. Managing a chronic illness exposes you to shame, disbelief and frequently medical gaslighting, as is evident from the experiences of those in a myriad support or action groups.

In *Saving Lucia*, Violet Gibson offers some suggestions.

I also wanted to ask, as I wrote, what would have happened had she not missed that day, Rome, 1926? What if she had had help and the target was hit? Might we be lauding her? To deconstruct history and provide a full alternative version of events was beyond the scope of this book, but some offers are made. A reader might be reminded of Hilary Mantel's 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher' (2015), where a captive woman shares her captor's loathing for the target, there is scope for humour, for machinations and metaphysics and a sense of history unravelling along a different path. We see the killer parodying the target's language, just as Violet Gibson does Mussolini and her captors in the psychiatric hospital in which she is permanently detained.

What might Violet Gibson have become, possessed of steely determination, wit, cunning, a beautiful imagination and a devout soul, if she had been free; if she had been well? Or rather, imperfect, and out? As her case had been discharged, she could have been released from St Andrew's, but she was not, though she petitioned for her release over many years. Some of the notaries to whom she wrote—including our present queen as a young woman—are mentioned in *Saving Lucia*. The character of Lucia Joyce was irresistible to me, so was my wondering about her co-existence in St Andrew's with Violet Gibson, and what might have occurred, both ordinary and magical, of preternatural power. Alongside this, is the language of Her father's books. While James Joyce is not known as a magical realist, yet I shall call the way in which *Finnegans Wake* refuses to be controlled, magical. It invents new orbits and while it clearly difficult, it is not difficult because it makes no sense. It is difficult, thrillingly, for it capaciously allows for what Len Platt, in the introduction to the Wordsworth text (2012) called, 'potentialities of meaning' (4). This complements magical realism beautifully because in its elusions, elisions, and gorgeous vibrancy of word play, it speaks rebellion and freedom. Throughout *Saving Lucia* there are phrases and single words taken from Joyce's books, particularly *Finnegans Wake*, for these reasons. It sits well with the neat notion of Catholic scholar and educator James Moran, (2020) of the women 'flourishing in confinement.' Here is the spirit of the novel, and it is *my* spirit, sitting well with the magical realist mode, where 'potentialities of meaning' thrive.

Violet's repetition is furthermore about poetry - and as part of it, rhythms, rhyme, meter, cadence, counting. With these things at hand, we comfort ourselves and manage in a troubling

world and to me, those textural qualities, and that aural delight, are reassurances. As I wrote for *Writers and Artists*, (2020),

Poetry is intensely valuable to me, and it always has been. It is my antidote to despair, tiredness, and loneliness; a thread that runs through my life. I solve problems with its lines—not just their lexicon, but the life breathed into form by rhythm, rhyme, or meter: a riddle; a moment of joy. It is my borrowed voice.

I was not only thinking of poetry here, but of language. As a child, I would devour text to assuage fear and it seemed that, through reading and then through the eruption of its words into the world, came something to hold onto, as if those things were protection or talisman. That language could be performative felt like an enchanting gift. To me, this is keenly in line with a magical realist perspective and something that you see in *Saving Lucia*. Here Lucia speaks and, as she does, adventure beckons, time bends and Lucia joins a discourse Violet already has with Blanche, now making her own ‘painting’ of Blanche, simultaneously idealised and repressed in Brouillet’s painting. She speaks Blanche’s rebellion into being through her own rage:

She was famous, too, as a sort of glamorous defective. Violet said it made her mad as hell, the way Violet got painted: blouse glossy and voluminous, like a gorgeous thing, but that she’d set this to rights, so we could hear her voice too. And I remembered: somewhere in Paris I saw a little copy of this painting of a fine woman. Blanche, on display - and even then, I understood the anger in myself that would be nursed by Violet. There she was, so pretty, buxom and velveteen, not all skew-eyed and jutting jaw like me. But she was not free: she was a subject, and she was an object. (42)



Fig. 2. André Brouillet, 'A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière', 1887. Descartes University, Paris.

The painting by Brouillet represents an imaginary scene of a contemporary scientific demonstration, based on real life, depicting the eminent French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) delivering a clinical lecture and demonstration at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Blanche, the hysteric in question, is a woman alone in a room full of men (save one nurse) and she is both subject and object as the neurologists, pathologists and psychiatrists of the day look on. I am uncomfortable looking at this painting and drew on this in *Saving Lucia*. For most of Blanche's adult life, the hospital was her home. She died there too, but we do not know where she is buried. She is at once entirely known and unknown. In *Saving Lucia*, Violet insists that Blanche must be part of her great adventure, and has whispered to the birds of the air, to whisper to the dove from Fra Angelico's 'Annunciation' that it must find her, across time. *Saving Lucia*, in addition to my 2023 novel *The Zebra and Lord Jones*, has been categorised as historical fiction, but both are magical realism with strong historical traits.

Monsieur Brouillet came to paint me; I was quite the thing against the stygian black of the doctors, don't you think? The tendrils of my hair escaping down my neck. I had poise

and gravitas in the pictures: he did not paint the days I crawled and slavered like a dog from la grande hystérie. (45)

I imagine Blanche as a creature full of buxom, organic life, plant-like, spreading, with those ‘tendrils.’ In allowing Blanche to have, with the other women, powerful voice, mocking and sardonic, I make the text explicitly feminist and the magical realist style a liberation, playful: darkly fun.

Hysteria grew and grew under his hands. Do you suppose that he created it? I worry that I helped. Made madness into a show and circus or made hysteria more, forgive me, more hysterical. When he died, it stopped. I did not think of it anymore and, obviously, neither did he! (47)

Challenging boundaries and misrepresentations in *Saving Lucia*

In *Saving Lucia*, Violet and Lucia challenge boundaries and misrepresentations. Thus, Violet has Blanche ponder, rebelliously, whether, ‘in years to come, ideas and imaginings will be written down as facts and what I did not intend or become will be transfigured into untruth’ (49). Blanche has not been reduced to patient and show but allowed an expansion. Through speculation, a voice is offered to someone who seemed voiceless, or at least a range of possibilities. At the Salpêtrière, Charcot had kept a vast number of photographs of patients; he also had a lasting visual record of Blanche, in Brouillet’s painting, with Blanche providing an arresting, even glamorous figure, under his own mesmerism and quite the spectacle. I think of how it is not to know what time of day it was or where my feet were; whose hands I was looking at or where my fingers ended. Tremors at night, flashbacks of shimmering visceral beauty that were death and horror to me. I have been a case; I have been treated abruptly and called indulgent, ‘hysterical’ and ‘prone to exaggeration’ including by my own family, particularly my mother. I have felt reduced to a cipher, a composite of only other people’s opinions of me, instilled in childhood when I was aberrant, an eldritch child.¹⁰ I will *never* be entirely free of the results of trauma. Thus, I meet the eyes of another

¹⁰ I have been picked up from the floor by brilliant and diligent hands and I have been cured as best I can be by a brilliant psychologist in our NHS, helped by an attentive and determined GP when there was one and now, in private medicine because there is a huge shortfall in specialists and functional medicine is still in its infancy in the British Isles.

woman and wish to sit with her and say, ‘Tell me about you. May I tell you about me?’ Liberty, adventure, and this, through the contortions of the magical realist style, is what I make. I would have cleared the room of all those men so she and I could talk, and she might have said, as Violet imagined it, conjured it into being, ‘Am I a gimcrack show; a performer? What then, will they know about the workings of our minds and bodies? (52) And. ‘Everything else is the narrative you made for me and not my own legend. The one you accepted for me, not I.’ (55)

A note on therapeutic writing

I would argue that it is here, in the development and navigation of a narrative we choose, that the notion of magical realism as therapeutic writing is centred for me. Stefan Hammel, a child and family therapist and chaplain in a psychiatric and general hospital, explains that, ‘The stories that we tell ourselves and others shape our world’ (2019,18). This seems obvious. But it is what Hammel says next, about storytelling, understanding our own psychological terrain and our trauma, which is apposite to the magical realist mode: he encourages us to play with possibility and with our assumptions about reality.

What we suppose to be certainty about what is real and possible imposes limits...on what is possible...I believe that a certain degree of uncertainty over what we suppose to be reality and the blurred boundaries between mere visions of the future and incipient reality really must be tolerated in order to endow the stories with the transformative power which my experience has shown rests within them. (19)

In *Saving Lucia*, what Violet Gibson does is not only to tolerate such boundaries, but to cross them, back and forth; to transgress. This is the ‘metamorphosis’ referenced by Lucia at the end of the book, reflecting on the extraordinary events invented by Violet for the two of them, and involving two other women, in different time periods and separate places. That is, Blanche Queen of the Hysterics and Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O). Lucia also draws on the wildness, the experimentation of her father’s *Finnegans Wake* and asserts her place in *this* story, too.

Did all this really happen? Of course. But what do you know, who has not been mad. *You must believe it*, for I am a weird, haughty, naughty, beautiful Niluna of *Finnegans Wake*. I am my father’s daughter. Violet Gibson was not just part of history. She *was* history and she changed it with the birds of the skies and a polish of the cross she held up

as she died; the detail she noticed, and the imagination she sustained. I know this is a lot to take in, but a metamorphosis was hers and she let us help her. And we love her. (185)

Magical realism as a challenge to authority and as an expression of autonomy

Growing up, my story, my identity, had been set: the eldritch child whom everyone knew to be so. The iterations of my mother and the theme of metamorphosis I describe here and across my books are deliberate infringements. Like Violet, who refuses to be the good patient, I refuse to be the good child. ‘On Mother. Mother’s Day, Every Day,’ in *To Melt the Stars: Essays on Love*, (2024) I imagine a multiplicity of meaning, where mother both loves and hates, just as in *Saving Lucia* I offer what Faris (2004) terms, writing about Rushdie and Carlos Fuentes, ‘The sense of contiguous worlds and proliferating narratives’ which magical realism offers as contrast to ‘an exclusive attitude that opposes proliferation and democracy.’ (142)

I believe I became her hate figure, because she needed one: pain drives us to dark places. When she told me how I had weakened her, I believed her. When she told me how everyone thought I was a burden and the bringer of harm, I believed that too.

Did she love me? I think in her own way. Did she want me? I think she hadn’t, but loved me, at least sometimes, against her will and grew to hate me too. (16-20)

My first book, autobiographical fiction, *Killing Hapless Ally* (2016) and thereafter, two short fiction collections, *Famished* and *Ravished*, look at the idea of imaginary friends and telling stories, flipping between the real world and the imagination. This is also Violet’s magically assembled company in *Saving Lucia*. All these texts repeatedly explore the scapegoat figure (which in our household was me), the person assembled from spare parts, a composite of others’ opinions. All these books look at profound loss, yet what can be gained through dwelling in the imagination, what company, and at the permeable membrane between life and death. It is not clear in much of this material which of the characters are alive or dead; they inhabit a liminal space. These books are dark, weird yet they are, I believe, suffused with joy. Joy at storytelling and at what we can do with words; how we can shape the ghastliest things, if we turn inwards, to our own version of reality, just as Violet Gibson has done. In *Ravished*, a Welsh gravedigger tells the reader how to shape both life, death, and the journey between them.

...care for your own heart and devise a vocabulary for your loss, unique to you. It comes to us all, but with a word-hoard, you will not be alone. Remember, too, that in darkness, as I have seen, there are navy and lavender lights and a star which laughs. And know that I, your humble gravedigger, will inter you with love and chuck in some sherbet lemons or taffy for your journey, like. (20)

On magical realism and the uncanny

Magical realism and the notion of the uncanny entwine satisfyingly. In his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) Freud states that fiction, in 'creative writing, imaginative literature' (155) offers us a survey of the uncanny which is rich enough to deserve to be considered separately because, 'It is above all much richer than what we know from experience; it embraces the whole of this and something else besides, something that is wanting in real life' (155). Might we even describe the uncanny as a sister to the magical realist mode? Nicholas Royle (2003) suggests 'a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality.' (2) This is what the magical realist mode also affords us; an undecidability. David Miciks, in writing about the uncanny and magical realism (1995) has noted the affinity between the two, that a 'mesmerizing uncertainty' suggests 'the ordinary life may be the scene of the extraordinary' and furthermore that, 'Such dreamlike suspension on the border between the fantastic and the mundane offers a utopian, if evanescent, promise of transfigured perception, the hypnotic renewing of everyday existence.' (372) While we might define the uncanny in Freud's work as a frightening thing which leads us back to what is known and familiar, it is, in literature more broadly, not only that, but also something strangely beautiful, quixotic, and of secrets coming fleetingly to the surface.

Furthermore, while an experience or depiction of the uncanny may be to do with the brevity and uncertainty of life, with gruesomeness, corpses, or death, we might find a festive quality innate in this. Thus, my gravedigger from *Ravished*, in his extreme morbidity and the fantastic nature of his language, inspires joy, just while he reminds you, he might already be digging your grave. By inviting you to sit in an uncomfortable place and consider this, relief is offered: relief from a feeling of dread otherwise carried. Furthermore, he plays, as he jokes, teases and puns, with the idea of the grave being a welcome home. Relevant here is Royle's assertion (2003) that the uncanny may be bound up with 'a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to

die, a death drive' (recalling Freud's 'Thanatos', the death drive, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2). This is something positively encouraged by the gravedigger, whose wit and play also support Royle's notion that, 'the uncanny is never far from something comic.' (2)

Expanding fictional space in magical realist texts

The gravedigger instructs you to make a 'word hoard' that is particular to you. Because of 'vocabulary' and telling stories, a spaciousness is created. A place in which to play. This is something delightfully described by Rawdon Wilson (1995) when he tells us of reading García Márquez's 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings' to his children, whom he has called inside from play outside. They are stunned: not a fairy tale, a myth, but somehow both those things.

My children had come from actual-world play (which, of course, might have involved make-believe) and entered Gabriel García Márquez's split world of enfolded possibilities where they remained a short while before returning to their world of play. Several different places were implicated in their experience, but they easily navigated them all and were never lost nor never unaware of their own position. (209)

Wilson goes on to describe the flexibility, fluidity, and potential for superimposition of fictional space in the magical realist mode, arguing that it 'focuses the problem of fictional spaces...by suggesting a model of how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like quicksilver, can superimpose themselves on one another.' (210)

With this extraordinary mutability, shifting forms, the 'irreducibly hybrid nature of experience strikes the mind's eye' (210), conceptual codes are doubled, and things that are bizarre are co-present with things that are ordinary. To me this is the nature of experience, of survival mechanisms in the face of sustained complex trauma and of rebellious play; it is also what Violet Gibson does and in which her companions, and the reader, collude. It is a liberation - an invention of a 'fresh existence' in Wilson's invigorating phrase (211) and quite at home with the way in which, 'Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and his *The Satanic Verses* or Robert Kroetsche's *What the Crow Said* incorporate the extratextual world even while constructing a textual space that makes unlikelihoods possible.' (220). To quote Rushdie at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), 'Mutation? Yessir, but not random.' (5). There is a point, a logic beating within all this. A pattern. Rushdie's novel goes on to show us real cities and the fictional Jahila; to give us zones

that are real and those which are fictional, moving in and out of one another, of characteristics acquired and lost. Yet also, to express the extraordinary events of everyday life alongside the fictional space created in the magical realist mode. I recall Rushdie's beguiling statement about García Márquez, in the essay collection, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (1991): that, 'Impossible things happen constantly and quite plausibly, out in the open, under the midday sun.' (300) Rushdie adds that, 'It would be a mistake to think of Márquez's literary universe as an invented, self-referential, closed system. He is not writing about Middle-earth, but about the one we all inhabit. Macondo¹¹ exists. That is its magic.' (302)

When I describe my life to people, they are invariably startled. When I describe what I did, the same occurs. But neither was this, 'Middle-Earth'; it was my life and the extraordinary nature of it was a stimulus for style of writing as well as those I chose to write about.¹² As Roland and Arva have argued (2014), magical realism can turn traumatic experience 'into images, that is, perceivable objects that language is able to capture and convey to an audience.' (10) Thus, unbearable memory becomes a social act. In the presence of an audience, a reader, engaged and willing to listen, it may therefore become part of a collective memory; part of a narrative. Whereas if it been held as traumatic memory, the addressee might only have been the victim of trauma. Art and community are witness.

¹¹ Macondo, mentioned by Rushdie here, is a fictional town described in Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It is the hometown of the Buendía family.

¹² I was a person who had grown up with developmental damage owing to strenuous wear and tear on the self. *You are bad. You deserve violence. You deserve shame. You do not deserve to be protected from your sibling.* I took the idea of the whispers about me and the known facts about me in my imagination and I was angry. As I write, we explore in specialist therapy the impact of all this as part of developmental trauma which causes me flashbacks and to dissociate because of tension and fear within myself which I cannot tolerate. I have recourse to EMDR, the process of which is releasing memories trapped in the amygdala and released into the brain for them to be processed and committed to narrative memory; as this happens, I feel my physical health improves and my mind settles. The application of EMDR looks not unlike the mesmerism of Charcot in *Saving Lucia*; it looks fantastical. But it works. Moreover, I notice a settling of bodily tics and physical pain which Van der Kolk or Gabor Maté would explore in their work as trauma or stress/distress related, I feel righteous, energetic anger for what has happened to me and sorrow, too, for myself, but also for the women of *Saving Lucia*.

Movement, adventure, and liberation in *Saving Lucia*

While Violet Gibson, Lucia Joyce, Blanche - really Marie - Wittman are themselves, in them there is, for me, a feeling of sisterhood and compassion. In fact, the addressees are legion. Women in their thousands in the great asylums, for example, assumed to be a certain way. When I reacted against my upbringing with rage or upset, my mother would tell me I had invented it. She told me that moods, mental health problems, these were all weaknesses. If any element of what I had described were to be true, who would believe me anyway? That was a refrain. I took Violet's birds, including Fra Angelico's missing swallow, and liberated them so that she might have a voice and satisfy adventure and that I was there wishing I had had the same. Faris considers magical realism as a poetics or mode of writing that combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them.' (1). This is exactly what is going on here. In *Saving Lucia*, the birds migrate from the garden, and their kind become an envoy for Violet and for Lucia, and they go back again to the beginning, to be real birds. It is this kind of thought which comforted me in life and in what I sought to do across my books: to take an object, a familiar one, and trace it through various scenarios so that it was spectacular. The critic and author Andrew Gallix, writing in *The Irish Times* (2020) noted that,

A network of associations running throughout the novel connects whispering to murmuration (a keyword) and rustling to both avian wings and writing...In the beginning was the bird, and the bird was with Violet, and the bird was Violet. Through a process of transubstantiation or recirculation that James Joyce would have approved of, Lady Gibson feeds the birds "with her words" which themselves turn into birds, thus enacting the oft-repeated idea that confinement liberates the powers of the imagination.

I enjoyed adding movement and dynamism to Violet's life in incarceration; what is more, I aimed to add volume, texture, and exuberant colour. I offer the boldest of feasts, where the banquet at Charcot's house somehow expands to accommodate all the thousands of patients from the Salpêtrière, and langoustines are crunched on a grand piano, a scene inspired by the dark festivity of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, (1966-7) To arrive at such decadence, maps change so routes are made easier for this rabble of women, and crimson fills the night in this festive scene from *Saving Lucia*.

Alors, I have the key, announces a jubilant Blanche and in we rush, the many, in past the gilded mirrors, the lilies in tall white vases (Bastards! I will always hate lilies! They are coffin flowers! says Blanche) and there is the front room with the piano and its vast table and the serving women, who rush out in horror and then, through curiosity, creep back in, and point to the delicacies and the book, the Brillat-Savarin, is open on this page and thus in dinner. Blanche cannot read, Bertha is exhausted from their journey, and so it falls to me to read aloud, and I so I do. (160-161)¹³

As a child, a recourse into unfamiliar, novel words and worlds was an area of my room where I would group items of similar colours and I would imagine a tiny version of me scaling their depths and shallows and wandering for days, refreshed, safe, between them. It felt like freedom, luxury, and space.¹⁴ The colours and textures were intoxicating, and this inspired the banquet scene in the novel, where it was satisfying to draw out pigments and blooms in *Saving Lucia*, both literally and more figuratively in the deliberately technicolour world I had made, prompting Gallix to write (2020), that,

The pages of *Saving Lucia* are so joyous and full of life that they seem about to flap away. Reading Anna Vaught's third novel is akin to catching your first glimpse of London's parakeets. It produces a similar sense of wonderment and disorientation — a feral flash of exotic technicolour splashed across a monochrome canvas.

Wonderment, yes; disorientation, no; at least not to me: what I offer here is, instead, order, of the kind I know.

¹³ A comment on speech punctuation here. An editorial decision was made to remove all speech punctuation from the text to have a clean look to the text. There are only two speakers, with Violet - later also Lucia - speaking the voices of the two other women and conjuring them into being; sustaining a fantasy. To have retained all the speech punctuation was considered too messy on the page. Removing it made the novel harder to follow, but perhaps added to the idea of it being fantastical: you were not sure who was speaking at first and which world – real? Magical? - we were in.

¹⁴ However, I am quite sure that, in my own life, by behaving like a magical realist and then writing as one, I was first able to imagine other possibilities, an enormously hopeful prospect. Through this, and with later clinical help and writing them out in my books, I was able to process them. I was able to speak directly and indirectly of what happened to me and explore how the trauma experience might be for others.

A Companion Text. *The Dust Never Settles*. Karina Lickorish Quinn (2022)

Karina Lickorish Quinn's splendid debut novel is set in Lima, the author's home city, and it is the most joyful novel about grief and loss I have read. Its protagonist, Anaïs, must negotiate with the living and ghosts to achieve understanding and find freedom. It is a book in which I felt immediately at home; it is full of luscious colour; of heat, song, foliage, perfume together with the flips and dips of the imagination. Also, its protagonist is misunderstood, frequently assumed to be *loca* and, in early years, mute: until she bursts into enthusiastic chatter, having been listening and learning attentively, all along. I felt a kinship between and my child self and with Anaïs, grown, attempting to navigate her world, as an adult. It is not only the sense in which the child, then the adult, is isolated and misunderstood, but also the rampancy of her imagination as she describes a world in which space-time is twisted and cavorting; 'A tiny speck of time past scratching at the cornea...Fragments of time, irritations to the eye, the substance of the universe, fractured and ground to powder...' (53)

On time, *The Dust Never Settles* and *Saving Lucia*

In my *Saving Lucia*, all concepts of time are flexible because Violet, rehearsing a freedom, an end to trauma, to incarceration has bent them, so it is that the central motif, the bird – the passerine – is able to flit from Fra Angelico's 'Annunciation' and act as postman, back into history to contact the other women, just as the real birds on Violet's arm in the image above, comfort and inspire her (which records confirm -188). As with Lickorish Quinn's book, time is given a personality, or an embodiment, so that we feel its sensations and understand it in our imagination. It is also an enfolded thing, present in the now, but sometimes, it is not apprehended. Here, the layout of the words on the page of a book amplifies the mystery, the fragmentary quality. Not only of time, but of the life, puzzling, traumatic yet majestic, of which it is part. As the narrator lies awake in the early hours, the 'little pink fish' (12) of the growing baby, seen from the corner of her eye, questions her about the past. '...when it opens its mouth, it seems to have swallowed the whole universe.' (12) This leads her to think of far out to sea and to ask a sleeping whale what it thinks, recalling that her psychiatrists told her how, 'the subconscious mind is artful in wish fulfilment'

and her mother screamed at her to stop ‘this obsessive mourning!’ Anaïs concludes that, ‘the things I have been told have never resonated with my idea of reality.’ (22)

‘What happens to the past?’

The whale groans and rolls over.

The sea rushes over her back like a landslide

‘What happens to the past?’ I insist.

The whale opens her eye and fixes it on me.

It passes, the whale replies.

‘It passes?’

It passes through. It passes on. And, sometimes, it passes by. (22)

Moreover, *pacha*, the Andean concept of space time, feels like something which would have been lovingly embraced by Violet Gibson. Pacha is made of the here and now, the realm of the living, ‘literally Being-Time’, the non-visible realm, ancient space time, and the second visible realm, comprising the skies of stars and birds, and the space-time ‘that comprises aboveness and recentness’ (368). The gorgeousness of this detailed, expansive vision lends itself so beautifully to the layers of meaning and adventure in the novel. Julia, recently dead and immediately sainted, can move freely through the world and space-time, while the imagination of the protagonist, Anaïs, can roam freely alongside her. Similarly, in my *The Life of Almost*, (2018) the disconsolate and unnamed protagonist is led by the mysterious Almost into stories of past and future to help them want to continue living. ‘This is when you need a story. He had a sort of indeterminate form...he moved through house and garden as if there were no boundaries for him: his whole world was a little room for him to loll in and all of time a place to walk in, as he pleased.’ (2) Time is a moveable feast for the titular character and implicit in their name – Almost is non-binary, protean, in any way you can imagine; everything is flexible and when you think you have grasped things, you were only almost there: ‘We are fluid, protean, girl: like angels, unconfined.’ (88) There, Almost invokes the sublime nature of angels in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, as well as John Donne’s ‘Aire and Angels.’ A transgression of form and temporal context.

In *Saving Lucia*, time flexes because Violet, through the tremendous power of her imagination, allows herself and her friends to go on an adventure, reshaping pasts, and futures, too. It is, as you are told, ‘because those who are confined have the best imaginations.’ (178) prompting Lucia to explain to the reader that, ‘as we know, possible can be stretched (183) and

Violet ‘made little tears at the fabric of our lives’ because she attentively ‘nibbled at books’; she changed stories (101) and encourages Lucia to do the same, to have ‘things to ask for, bodied forth by imagination.’(144) Violet invokes a world of possibility: of flexibility and freedom. Where a release from trauma is not possible, imagination will do the job, and she encourages the reader to use it to try and heal, or at least, to love vigorously with what there is. And to live alongside grief.

**Death, decay and deep sensuality. *The Dust Never Settles* and a selection of explorations
from my books**

I had interviewed Lickorish Quinn about the text; she expressed that the novel ‘began as me working through my grief over the passing of my Peruvian grandparents’ and explained that as she began to write, she realised she was grieving for the place that they bound her to; to ‘the culture and ancestry’ and ‘for ancestors more broadly, and the legacies beautiful and painful’ which include ‘the traumas and guilts of history.’ (2024) Something I explore across my work is what it means to face and atone for the ghosts of our past and this is a key theme here. Anaïs’s trauma is, as Lickorish Quinn explains, ‘a metonymic reflection of much wider trauma in the novel.’ In a different context, so is Violet Gibson’s - psychiatric patients of the time; or those whose maladies or temperaments are misunderstood. So is Anwen’s Llewelyn’s in my *The Zebra and Lord Jones* (2023) - her plight that of an unsung genius, metonymic of the structural inequality that oppresses the working classes, the incursion of the English aristocracy and the suppression of Welsh culture and language in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the profound and traumatic stress within the family home which many, myself included, have experienced.

In *The Dust Never Settles*, the protagonist’s fiancé, Rupert, is unable to see what Anaïs sees. It is explained to us that where Rupert sees degradation, ‘a backdrop of decay...you really want to raise a child in this environment’ (274) in the yellow house in the hill and its environs, Anaïs sees the ‘yellow canaries’, ‘lime-coloured parakeets’, wave after wave of sensation evoked by real things and knows that Rupert doesn’t ‘understand how it feels when the pretty birds sing’ (274). Moreover, he cannot hear the dead people around them which are natural companions to the living, and he cannot understand the extraordinary imagination wielded by Anaïs, or that she is a collage, a ‘bricolage.’ To clarify, Levi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage, formulated in *La Pensée Sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*, 1962), was first presented as an analogy for how mythical thought

works, selecting the fragments or leftovers of previous cultural formations and re-deploying them in new combinations. It is a process of invention and reinvention; also, of rejection of those things which do not serve you. In the bricolage of Anaïs, ‘...so I start to fill the void by swallowing antecedents – the jumbled members and body parts of my mother and Mambue and Tia Consuelo and all the ghosts thrown together.’ (332) Anaïs moulds and re-moulds like ‘plasticine’ (333) because this is what she has learned but also what she must do to survive. This is a familiar concept to me, as a trauma survivor, both in terms of moulding myself to stay safe, to be acceptable and not be beaten or demeaned (learned in early childhood). Then in terms of the struggle to know what was authentically me, and what a composite of other people’s opinion, the sense of being protean pressed down hard on me because, as for Anaïs, ‘there were always eyes, the watchful eyes of family, at first, dead or alive.’ (333) Finally, as for Anaïs, so for me and so for Violet and Lucia in *Saving Lucia*. That notion of ‘bricolage’ also gives you a sense of freedom because you lean hard on your imagination, on your internal landscape, and you know you can create yourself anew.

Each space that Anaïs goes into is richly populated. From the hotel in which we meet her at the beginning, to the house on the hill. Thus, ‘Even with the hotel unlighted and unpeopled, the slivers of light found me and cast my shape on the mirrored wall.’ (7) So far, so pretty. But look what follows.

She fascinated me, the woman in the glass, this midnight fugitive, a racing figure draped in a white robe...As she ran, the Vivaldi statuary seemed to come to life. The semi-naked women draped in falling linens gathered into gossiping huddles...Under these watchful eyes, she did strange things in the night-time – kissed the open mouths of the clean white orchids in the stairwell... (7)

So, there is a splitting within Anaïs, a brilliant dissociation in which the reflection comes to life, or shows another side of Anaïs, perhaps; meanwhile, the carvings and statuary animate the hotel and the orchids are personified. Everything changes all around her. Minutes before, the voices of ice-cream sellers had become substantial in her room, insistent and colourful. It is all dizzying, troubling and adventurous. Later in the text, when we see her at her ancestral home, Anaïs guides us through the constant shifts in time, the simultaneity of life and death – with the newly Sainted Julia straddling both worlds and all time – and the protean nature of her home. She

is very aware that her fiancé, Rupert, soon to be rejected, will be seeing something different. Or, in fact, not seeing anything at all. However, for Anaïs,

Are the shutters pristine or peeling. Lucuma or some other shade? Are the shutters, from where he stands, secure or hanging loose? Every time I see this house, it changes, ageing and transfiguring, sweeping backwards and forwards across the decades as if time were a wardrobe of costumes to be donned and discarded, or as the present, the past, the future, were painted scrim, dropping from the flies, appearing and reappearing as the light changes. (157)

So, in *Saving Lucia*, the hospital opens into different vistas, because Violet has learned to see them, has rehearsed them and has conjured them into being because of boredom and the tired proscriptions of hospitalisation. Things have been forced upon her, and her sense assailed: ‘the sleeping draught she would not have been able to refuse...the sighs of desperation coming from those permanently incarcerated...somewhere in the hospital a girl danced.’ (10) The girl is Lucia Joyce, Violet’s accomplice on sojourns, where things around them aid them and come to life about them, just the places in Anaïs’s Limenian world rise and dance and mock. In all cases, here, the women are alive to possibilities, however extraordinary, born of the way in which their imaginations have been expanded by extraordinary things and by trauma. There is a central conceit running through *Saving Lucia*, just as there is in *The Dust Never Settles*. In the former, we witness monstrous behaviour – such as the actions of Mussolini, the lynching, drowning, and beating of his regime and the appalling treatment meted out to his first wife and his own son. Yet it is Violet Gibson who is called mad because of what she sees; the impossibilities – such as talking to the birds of the air - developed through a fertile imagination. In *The Dust Never Settles*, we witness terrorists, the guerillas of the Shining Path, experts tossing off anecdote as fact for money, and the egregious actions of families towards their children, their siblings. Nonetheless, it is Anaïs who is repeatedly referred to as ‘loca’ and repeatedly packed off to doctors as a child and adolescent because she hears things, sees things and they think she might be mad. The conceit is that the wrong decision is made. Anaïs is alive to possibility and the unlikely. Violet misses nothing. Lucia Joyce makes this clear; hammers it home, in fact.

And I’ve asked you before. I know that everything Violet tells me to write down asks you the same question: who is mad here?

W.B. Yeats comes down the steps. He's been having a private conversation with Madame Blavatsky. (103)

And,

There's a fine line between laughter and crying, of course and soon they are commingled—and with disbelieving talk of who gets to be out and about and who might be considered a crazy. There are people in our loony bin conducting more civilised lives, and with thought far less opaque or disordered than this lot. Violet knows this; it's partly why we're here. For us, but also for you, reader: this is her testament and a lesson if you've not caught on. Who is mad here? ...we stop and we laugh. It is deep booming, uncontrollable laughter. We are *hysterical*. (109)

Flexible forms and hybridities

I want to draw attention more to the way in which the yellow house in Lickorish Quinn's novel, the ancestral home, Casa Echeverría, is formed and reformed with spectacular, juddering energy; what the author calls, 'maddening restlessness.' (249) This mutability of form, just as in time, is typical of magical realist works. For example, we see the flexible and unreliable time scheme in García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), where the catalogue of events does not form a linear narrative, but a series of concentric circles, spinning off the event; the murder. Then, in *The Dust Never Settles*, or in my own *Saving Lucia*, there is a juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic to explore the themes of hybridity, foreshadowing and fantastic elements. In the passage we have just seen a room subverted and a feast stolen. All three texts are characterised by their hybridity; that is, by their fusion of the binaries of fact and fiction, space, and history; the idea of time becomes polyphonic – a term derived from the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) where Bakhtin discussed the concept (borrowed from music) to mean multiple voices, each with its own perspective, validity and narrative weight. The author does not place his own narrative voice between the character and the reader, but rather, allows characters to shock and subvert. It is thus as if the books I am discussing here were written by multiple characters, not a single author's standpoint. Instead of a single objective world, held together by the author's voice, there is a plurality of consciousnesses, each with its own world.

The reader does not see a single reality presented by the author, but rather, how reality appears to each character.

In the multiperspectival and polyvocal world of *The Dust Never Settles*, times, generations and civilisations are felt and experienced simultaneously or out of sequence; in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, time is fragmented, does not follow a linear framework and all three books seek to create a world in which the boundaries between the marvellous and the quotidian, the mythical and the real, are dissolved. All in the context of trauma: of murder, colonial dispossession, the pain of the diaspora, the lost and misprised and the radically misunderstood.

To return to the mutability and personality of the family house in *The Dust Never Settles*, we are asked by Anaïs, of Julia the maid, now Saint Julia, ‘How many times had she gasped at the aggressive way, the cupboard doors would fly open at their own volition?’ The house appears to arrange itself, settle, then rearrange itself.

How disconcerting she had found it in the beginning. The first time it happened...a vertiginous dizziness blossomed behind her eyes, the floor seemed to give way like a trapdoor, and she had to grab the frame to stop herself from falling, It was true, then, what people said: that the Echeverría family house was cursed. Or perhaps not cursed, but certainly only precariously attached to the time and space in which it was built. (249)

The language is interesting here. It describes an unstable world in space and time, and Julia is taken to the limits of normal proprioception; that is, of where she ends, where she fits, within a space but also of where the house does so. It sounds terrifying, and yet the verb ‘blossomed’ also suggests beauty, fecundity, and growth. What is more, the notion of the house being ‘cursed’ is then qualified, so it becomes also about the precarious place of the family estate in pacha, in space-time (‘Glossary,’ of Quinn’s novel, 368). While events are disturbing it is made clear in the novel that the giddy changes are also fascinating and absorbing, so that, ‘On the hill stands a yellow house...that glows in the night like a beacon, but by the morning it is gone, replaced by another house of avocado green, its shutters painted the orange-red of rocoto salsa...’ (351)

There is a ‘vertiginous dizziness’ in the change and movement to be sure, but it is also delicious, evoking the green of the avocado and the piquancy of the sauce, made with the extremely hot rocoto chillies: spicy, sometimes creamy. The avocado, smooth, oleaginous. Lickorish Quinn’s book is a feast for the senses, and in providing this, she is also complementing the deep grief and disorientation of the story with things that are good: bountiful; delectable. As a reader, I found

myself being greedy for what came next; what rich colour, which delicacy, which salsa. In *Saving Lucia*, the darkness, the sterile white of the hospital, are deliberately made less monochrome by Violet, borrowing as she does, throughout, from the works of James Joyce, Lucia's father, just to be playful, to provide rhythm and texture to her dull world. She thinks of art, 'bold-splashed, like Gauguin,' of oils, 'green, gold and pomegranate, that salmon pink which is flushed love and devotion.' The camellias – '...a touch on my skin and a camellia at dusk; once, jasmine and something lingering, so fine...' (17) recall those in García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) and the glorious pungency of the scent of camellias mingled with orange blossom. For Violet, they are something blowsy, fulsome in a world of disinfectant and prescription. They are rebellion.

In *Saving Lucia* Violet seeks liminal spaces to share her thoughts and possibilities with Lucia. She seeks things that pull her away from trauma and, more to the point, from terminal boredom. Her appeal is not to the neat borders seen through bars, but to something that is, to her more erotic, indefinite, and exciting: things that to her are forbidden, though not in her imagination. These are sometimes the things of dusk, and I have deliberately repeated the word through the novel, to reveal to the reader how Violet thinks and, as an adjunct, how I do. That is, how I have learned to as someone managing the after-effects of developmental trauma. Magical realism, more broadly, turns to things that do not make sense in a logical sense. Lickorish Quinn, in her interview with me commented that, 'Writers often turn to magical realism, I think, to capture those experiences which feel too extreme to be real. That's when we reach for the magic that might not resonate on a logical plane, but resonates on an emotional, psychic or spiritual one.' (2024)

Communication, seeing and being seen; reality

The women of *Saving Lucia* communicate telepathically, uncannily, bound by their trauma, and find a community with others, debating what they find there and questioning the limits of both worlds, as Lucia, here. Energy, beauty, and rapture are to be experienced there; to be savoured.

...perhaps I have misunderstood the dimensions of this world, and I am in a panopticon.

On, Lucia.

They'd not locked the doors yet and we sneak out in the purple twilight.

I extend a hand and the passerines come and the air is lyrical with rushed beauty. Small miracle...

Back in, before they see. (39)

We meet the panopticon again in García Márquez's *Chronicle Of A Death Foretold* (1981) Here, parents watch and repress their daughters, transgressions are seen and accounted for, and the unnamed narrator repeatedly tells the reader of seeing, looking and observing, showing and being in broad daylight, in the 'glow of the streetlight' (46) in the small town. Then, in chapter four, the view of the characters takes place through 'the panopticon of Riohacha' (49) where the murderous twins are housed. Lucia, (in *Saving Lucia*) conversely, wonders if she is in a panopticon, hidden, able to see everything: it is a deliberate inversion and about both being hidden and being empowered by seeing; or, at least, the teasing possibility of that being the case. It is difficult for a patient to have privacy and when they have a mental illness, many people have an opinion, frequently based on anecdotes and reckonings. Here, in the 'purple twilight' (above) is privacy, both literal and figurative: no-one in the hospital would be able to untangle what the women are up to: 'They'd missed the whispers glissando of the winged helpers no louder than a heartbeat through a greatcoat.' (40)

Finally, the way in which history, the house, and linear narratives reconfigure themselves in *The Dust Never Settles*, complements the way in which Anaïs comes to terms with ghosts, the dark truths of previous generations, and grief, and then remakes herself. She is helped by the earth itself: while the house collapses into the force of an earthquake, she has just given birth and is pulled out to safety. She is evolving a new identity and growing in power. And 'the people of Lima called it a miracle', with the 'infant rising from the dust and debris' (347). New life from catastrophe occurs both literally and metaphorically out of the collapse and a new building is made nearby, so 'pay close attention to the sky-blue building on the corner': a maternity unit, a mural 'of smiling women framed by flowers' and 'half a dozen red plastic chairs.' All is colour and fecundity, and we learn it is funded by Anaïs. She is the life force behind it all and sees all clearly. It is interesting to note texts by psychologists and psychiatrists which state how important it is to understand the subjectivity of reality for a mind; to approach this thoughtfully would mean that if an individual were to become unwell, those tasked with care would have a clearer picture of how best to do this.

The psychiatrist Dr Jon F. Carey writes (2021) thus,

So, to understand an individual's reality we need to change it from something that they perceive to something that they project, their reality then includes all the experiences, influences, characteristics, nuances, and beliefs that contribute to making them who they are. Seeing individuals as emergent complex systems in their own emergent present. This allows for a more collaborative and holistic assessment to take place. (2)

Carey is speaking about diagnosing and treating, but what is fascinating here is the magical quality of individuals as emerging and being remade, unboundaried. He also notes that, 'Reality can be uncertain, vacillating, and unresolved and will increase in its complexity when viewed from different perspectives.' (3) It is clear in *The Dust Never Settles* that the psychiatrist de las Casas is quite the opposite. He is full of machismo and keen to shame and quieten the young Anaïs precisely because he does not entertain a variable sense of (subjective) reality: 'How had I coped all this time? Through repression, he could only assume.' (117) Anaïs has tolerated 'tremors since childhood' which 'take possession of my hands as if they were not mine but a stranger's, clumsily grafted onto my wrists without sympathy for my instructions or wishes.' (9) This experience of dissociation is something we encounter multiple times in the book, as a response to traumatic memory and experience; a reality not at all entertained by Anaïs's doctor. She imagines she is being watched by de las Casas 'behind a one-way mirror' and 'humming critically' -

She's seeing things

She's always seeing things.

Loca, loca, loca. (161)

Instead, thoughts are turning inwards to protect the psyche, entirely logical and part of the way that an individual has learned to adapt to and react to and to look after memories and Anaïs, in rebellion, picks up the doctor and her other interlocutors, her family, unknown others, and places them like Russian dolls, one aside another, emphasising what it is not to have one's reality understood or to you have your world a source of bewilderment to others. From an autobiographical point of view this is familiar to me, and we shall return to it in the discussion of my memoir, *These Envoys of Beauty*, below. Anaïs's ancestor, Ana, was assumed to be possessed, but Ana was not possessed; instead, she was working through her memories, her reality, to protect it: 'her eyes turned inward and focused on the needfulness of remembering.' (109) Ana's focus is on herself, but also her people; she is a chattel, a slave, sold to the Jesuits and at the point of reacquisition, when she turns inward, 'working intently and laboriously on the artefact of her

memory. Not only her memory but the memory of her people.’ (109) Ana Angola was not, after all, her name. All this is the work of sanity. I offer a nod to sanity, to compassion, in Dr Griffiths, Violet’s hospital psychiatrist in *Saving Lucia*, who finds himself led away from what the medical notes say to a fascination with Violet’s preternatural world. I have considered a sequel to the book in which he becomes a magical realist. It would be an interesting study.

A Companion text. *Let Them Float*. Katy Wimhurst (2024)

For this critical review, I interviewed poet and short fiction writer Wimhurst about her latest collection *Let Them Float*. The author is housebound with severe ME/CFS. While for me, chronic illness has occurred because of developmental trauma, we nonetheless share common attitudes to the magical realist mode for the expression of trauma. Where Anaïs in *The Dust Never Settles* can mock the misunderstanding of others regarding realities that are not congruent with their own, Wimhurst and I have endured the disbelieving gaze of medical practitioners in real life.

Trauma, magical realism, chronic illness

How had Wimhurst used magical realism to explore trauma in the context of chronic illness, in her story, ‘Duskers’? Then, had she drawn on specific magical realist writers in the story?

‘Duskers’ looks at a chronically ill woman, misunderstood, increasingly absent from the world and the subject of medical gaslighting, which is a common feature for many who are managing chronic illness and the process begins as the narrator notices that her skin has become ‘a greyish hue with a pearly tint’ (93) and she suddenly thinks of the word ‘dusker’ to describe herself. It fits: the woman is in a liminal space between worlds. She begins to notice others like herself, ‘see-through as if reduced to about 35% opacity in photoshop. (94.)

Nonetheless, there is a degree of privacy and complicity accorded to Wimhurst’s protagonist because she exists in the shadows. The story cleverly uses a self-consciously concrete metaphor – that is, the main character, Helena, becoming transparent - to explore the trauma of invisible disability and, what is more, the ableist attitudes of others to an unnamed illness. As the story unfolds and Helena becomes increasingly transparent, the people in her world abandon her

and medical experts scoff, Helena exclaims, ‘how can there be no medical understanding when my body is this horrendously sick?’ (98). Recording traumatic human experiences through the structures of magic and wonder is something speculative storytelling has always done well. Helena’s transparency symbolises how chronically sick people become invisible to medics and even to loved ones—a lack of understanding and abandonment is common; but it simultaneously examines the physical experience itself—how, when sick, the body can feel alien. As the secondary character Leona says about her see-through body: ‘It’s uncanny... Or like I’m part of my body but not part of it, all at once’ (101). This is reminiscent of Royle’s description of the uncanny as, in part, feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced.’ (1) Leona’s sense of drifting recalls Royle’s phrase, ‘a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality.’ (2)

The story’s magical realism thus allows Wimhurst to explore the trauma of chronic illness in a way that is both direct and complex; more nuanced. As Arva and Roland argue (2014),

If we can assume that imagination can compensate for the “objectlessness” of pain, it follows that magical-realist writing is in fact apt to simulate pain because it can turn it into images, that is, perceivable objects that language is able to capture and convey to an audience. (9)

Wimhurst conveys, through the image of the translucent body, a sense of fear and dispossession engendered by chronic illness but also of not being believed. One does not have to travel far to hear how ME is rejected as an illness and those who endure it gaslit by the institutions from which they seek support, and the sense of being penned up this engenders. Here is witness.

Wimhurst had previously interviewed me, (2020) commenting with reference to my *Famished* (2020), that,

The magical is rooted in the mundane and several of your stories. In ‘Sherbet’, Geraint attains a kind of spiritual bliss whilst eating a licorice sherbet dip and begins prophesying. In ‘Choracle,’ a kind of oracle appears within the chocolate fountain. (2021)

My response was that I saw magic everywhere, just as my character Geraint sees the miraculous in a sweet shop and becomes a prophet of confectionery. To me the world often looks like magical realism: the arcane, spiritual, miraculous and the numinous are there in the ordinary as well in a hallowed or exalted place. In *Saving Lucia*, the reader, the witness to someone’s

precious testimony, is asked, by a laughing Lucia, ‘Did all this really happen? But what do you know, who has not been mad?’(185) We have already been told that, ‘as we know, possible can be stretched’ (182) and, in a self-consciously magical realist mode, ‘...how full and real a story—but, like I said, those who are confined have the best imaginations.’ (185-186)

Magical realism and the interrogation of ableist mindsets

Wimhurst’s characters are misunderstood, unnoticed or confined. They are not part of cultural hegemony, but an underclass, that must find ways to be transgressive so as not to be erased altogether. The ghosts of classic magical realists like Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter also haunt ‘Duskers’ because their kind of magical realism attaches itself to dominant cultural discourses that a story tries to undermine or question, such as racism or patriarchy. Wimhurst, instead, looks at the way those who suffer chronic illness such as ME, must challenge the status quo, which often tells them – tells us – that to get better is merely a matter of will. To quote my online interview with Wimhurst (2024), when I asked her, first, about her reading influences in ‘Duskers’.

Salman Rushdie uses concrete metaphors to illustrate racist attitudes. *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is about migrant communities in London. When he comes to Britain, the Indian character of Saladin Chamcha is literally turned into a devil/goat. Lying in a guarded hospital, sprouting horns and a tail, he is asked how this metamorphosis is possible, and replies, “They [white British society and culture, including the police] describe us,” other whispered solemnly “That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.” (168). This idea of Rushdie was very much in my mind when writing ‘Duskers’, which interrogates ableist structures and mindsets.

Wimhurst’s point links back clearly to Arva and Roland (2014) where magical realism explores pain and can ‘turn it into images, that is, perceivable objects that language is able to capture and convey to an audience.’ (9)

As I write in *Saving Lucia*, ‘What do you know, who has not been mad? *You must believe it.*’ (185) There is something transgressive in the magical realist mode. I am as thankful for that as I am entertained.

Chapter 3

These Envoys of Beauty. Memoir, magical realism, history and time

My ten published books and large collection of shorter anthologised or single-published works have strong autobiographical strands or are memoir, or autobiographical fiction. I regard them all as testimony and something for my sons. On the surface, *These Envoys of Beauty* (2022) is a nature memoir. Sweetly it begins with one story, but then it dives more darkly into the ‘second story.’ (16-17) I have taken fantastical elements, but in doing so I show a world as it was naturally lived; that is, with plants and the natural world as they were, but also in the language I felt with them and the companionship; the stories I shared with elements of this world and the safety I felt there.

Trauma, its management and my memoir-in-essays

Before we begin readings of *These Envoys of Beauty*, I should first contextualise my own nature writing and memoir hybrid within a contemporary wider form. I think specifically of texts by women which are deeply steeped in the natural world and which both explore trauma and challenge, to varying extents, the constrictions of the ableist recovery arc. We might mention Amy Liptrot’s *The Outrun* (2018), a memoir of recovery from alcoholism and a return to Papay, on Orkney, the book an invocation of wild land and sea, tides, the moon, and standing on the edge of a cliff, then pulling yourself into something new. Less explicitly about traumatic experience, Olivia Laing’s *To The River* (2011) explores her journey down the river Ouse, precipitated by a series of minor crises and carries with it moments of ecstatic happiness as well as melancholy and grief. Neither of these authors offers us an easy conclusion to the pains we bear, the weaknesses we navigate and the destruction we have wrought. Josie George’s memoir, *A Still Life* (2021), gently probes at the recovery arc, in reminding us of the simultaneity of difficult experience with our joy in the natural world.

There is room for grief here. Room for loss, for pain, for the pervasive disappointment that my happy hour in the garden has left me here, for the secret whisper of ‘not fair.’ There is room for everything. There’s no need to ignore... I can always keep turning towards

something, like the sweet pea seedlings on my windowsill, whose elongated, wiry bodies stretch and shift as I turn them, reaching for the light. (142)

George's book was written mostly from bed, as the publisher makes explicit on the cover, and it is a testimony to careful thought, observation and choice in looking at things in the natural world; of study, whether it be a sweet pea seedling or a person, but never sentimental, because George is still, 'sick or held back...There is devastating truth in that.' (251-252.) A comparable text is Polly Atkins's *Some of Us Just Fall. On Nature And Not Getting Better* (2023), which reads, like George's book, partly as manifesto. Atkins also tackles the subjects of not being seen, or heard, of medical disbelief and gaslighting, so familiar to those managing chronic illness, or caring for those who navigate it. These things are also, as I have explored in my books, and discussed here, familiar to those who experience trauma within the family home. Finally, Noreen Masud's *A Flat Place* (2023) is very specifically about the impact of trauma and subsequent cPTSD¹⁵ owing to an oppressive father, the experience of crime and repeated dangers and the impact of the denial and unspoken truths for the children of post-colonial societies. Masud is focused on flat landscapes, from the fields of the Punjab that were 'perfectly shimmeringly flat' (though she has since failed to identify them on a map), through to many flat places in the British Isles, so that, according to Clare Saxby (2023), 'The landscapes – like the author's memories – are sheets of paper with symbols to decipher, to misunderstand and reinterpret.' My own memoir is about how I read but also communicated with the landscape about me, and navigated by it, so that while all these wonderful books contextualise my own, there are peculiarities which are different. Here, in my text, are accounts of the child, the adolescent trying to cope, together with the current needs and predilections of the adult me. Moreover, there is a distinctly magical realist mode which differentiates the book from those of its contemporaries, as we shall see.

There are twelve essays in the collection, and each looks at some element - or elements - in the natural world and what it has meant to me. When I say that, I mean in terms of how I look at it, how I feel, how that has changed but, for the scope of this book, what any of it has to do with trauma and its management. Let me offer a sketch of what this meant in terms of magical realism.

Typically, as Arva (2008) has argued,

¹⁵ cPTSD – complex post-traumatic stress disorder – is generally supposed to have adult onset and is differentiated from PTSD in that it arises from repeated or prolonged trauma.

Readers of magical realist fiction must look beyond the realistic detail and accept the dual ontological structure of the text, in which the natural and the supernatural, the explainable and the miraculous, coexist side by side in a kaleidoscopic reality. (61)

This pleases me greatly because while Arva is describing the experience of the reader, he inadvertently encapsulates both how I navigated my world from an early age and how I came to thread that experience across my body of work. *These Envoys of Beauty* is introduced as two stories. The first story is the one that everyone saw because the things that stymied then nearly annihilated me were spun from secrecy and the fact that if you are well mannered, a pillar of the community and good at your job, it is unlikely that you will be suspected of wrongdoing. What do you do if you do not fit the pattern? As a child, young person, adult, parent? You turn inward. Thus, I started my first novel, at the kitchen table and set on paper my world and imagined new ones, as real to me as a room where people were cruel and arrogant, but a beautiful room in which possibilities glided on water. This idea of the substantial imaginary room, mixed up in harmony and for interest and salvation with the real narrative world, is at the heart of my *The Life of Almost*, (2018), Almost is a creature to summon up, an imaginary friend, a guide to the world, creating, altering and burnishing as they go. Almost rejoices in the phrase, ‘There is a whole world in what I have noted.’(6). In both *Killing Hapless Ally* and *The Life of Almost*, there is a central spine of a fabulous journey with a guide, the real world spinning on its axis and preternatural merging with the natural; there is a sense of the fluidity of identity and of the interconnectedness between all things in the world, beyond and after, a marvellous story to discover.

To offer commentary on specific sections of *These Envoys of Beauty*, I should explain that its structure is deliberately unusual; a memoir in essays. Its introduction examines how I would read botanical texts and then recite the names aloud, repetitively. I did this to soothe myself, to fill my head. Thus, ‘At night, I would recite Latin names from plant books like mantras and talismans. I had awful ruminating and intrusive thoughts. I would feel a bad thought about someone ushering in - not something I felt, but a collocation of words, a fit of diction, that was all.’ (18)

From here, I would have to find recourse for the words because I became convinced that if they were not expelled things would come true, as if I were some kind of magician capable of converting thought into deed, whose terrible magical thinking came true and buoyed up by the fact that my own parents and much older sibling developed a narrative around me as the ‘bringer of

harm.’ (17) That, ‘I was evil, the bringer of harm, a blot, a brat. A slut, a terrible, selfish thing.’ (17-18) We were in this territory with my *Killing Hapless Ally* where the child (me),

...thought that if she really tried to be less herself and more Hapless, then perhaps less harm could be done. The heart raced: while she was out there tree hugging, might at least one person in the house die and she would be found responsible, aged seven? What if other people would die because of things she did in times to come? To keep hidden from charge for a while she built a den inside the creepers near the beech tree; a crawl space. (9)

This illuminates the topics and natural settings in my memoir. ‘Hapless’ of *Killing Hapless Ally* (2020) was my alter ego, the child I tried to be, an identity splitting, the eldritch that was me and the decent child, the suitable child, that was the alter ego. As no help was available, I developed methods of comfort. One source of consolation was that, it having occurred to me that if the world were this strange, it could continue *good, strange*, too, nourishing, exciting, strange, my observation of the world was honed and intense. Moreover, I developed much of my written style and the way I thought about things from my wild and charismatic maternal grandmother, who was a storyteller and believed in witches, visions, poltergeists, and a filmy barrier between the live and the dead. I also focused, as she did, with passionate attention on the natural world, but this was more the concern of *These Envoys of Beauty*, as we have seen. Reading Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* on García Márquez again, I note a pairing of which I am, in my own life, extremely proud: ‘It seems that the greatest force at work on the imagination of Márquez himself is the memory of his grandmother...Márquez decided to elevate the village worldview above the urban one: this is the source of his fabulism. (300-301)

I bring the spirit of my semi-literate village grandmother with me and therein, together with the necessity of which I have written above, is the source of *my* fabulism. She believed in extraordinary things around us. She regarded them as normal, as reality. I found this divergent reality comforting and natural as I did the fervour of her imagination.

Then, I also developed a litter of imaginary friends as a child and kept them, unusually, as an adult. I have always seen myself as plural while now, with therapeutic support, I am embracing the peculiarities of my identity. I would argue that this has keyed me into the idea that life is not binary, something so skilfully discussed by Meg-John Barker and Alex Iantaffi, (2019). The authors posit that, ‘Living beyond a binary – of gender, of sexuality, of body and mind – can lead

to new experiences of both knowledge and happiness.’ (9) Perhaps relying on imagination, as I had learned to do, has prompted breadth of insight.

Creating a plural and seeing beyond the horizon

As a child, I needed to develop my own plural, so I had company that was imagined but substantial (the imaginary friends) and a way to feel better about myself, away from my mother’s hard-driven and binary good child/bad child notion, with its assurance that I was the bad child perpetually, and good children were regularly identified for me so I would understand what I was not. Where does this leave the central theme of *These Envoys of Beauty*? It is simple. Because nature was magic and I lived in it, yearning for it. It gave way to fables and stories, and it was never a simple, single thing, but part of a story. Everything I saw, touched, smelled, or tasted in the natural world, was a symbol of something eternal; something in heaven. That I did not know *what* was part of the excitement. How is it connected with magical realism? Because the mode seamlessly weaves together the fantastical and the mundane within the fabric of narrative realism. With taproots in indigenous cultures and folklore, it has long coexisted cordially with the mystical and the real. Authors create narratives that challenge and subvert normative ideas about gender, sexuality, and identity – as well as our appreciation of physical entity, and what reality is.

The postgraduate researcher author Kathy Hoyle wrote (2024) that,

This is also the story of a child who is curious, and despite her harsh reality, she finds beauty in the natural world around her, in the landscapes and seascapes, in dens and hollows, caves and cliffsides, in the trees and flowers, the roaring weirs and crashing waves. The child deftly slips between reality and imagination, between nature and dreams.

As the writer of the book and as the child in question, relief is found in such understanding and in noting its nod to the appetite of the magical realist; the ‘slips’ and that they occur deftly: it is a natural, fluid, and organic process. I would add that beauty is instructive and might explain this, by way of Ursula le Guin’s assertion in her essay ‘Living in a Work of Art’ (2019) that, ‘I think it possible that early and continuous experience of aesthetic beauty may foster an expectation of order and harmony that may in turn lead to an active desire for moral clarity.’ (61) Reality and imagination, plus fine teachers, and guides; in a bleak place, I still had all of this in the natural

world. What is more, those ‘slips’ ensured that even in an ugly place, I could see or invent beauty, allegory, or device if I needed to and I did it so often, it became automatic.

Thoughts on detail and the relief of finding unnoticed and secret beauty

In ‘Rosebay willowherb and a cure for loneliness,’ I share ‘cotton and gossamer magic...I venerate them...’ (23). The plants were often unnoticed, thought of as weeds, but I looked at them in detail, their survival like magic, occult even, because whatever you did to them, they came back, and I saw that as hope and a language I could understand. When I describe these most ordinary yet spectacular of plants in the book, I am also drawn to sound, assonance, and consonance to describe them and I feel it on my pulse; it affects me bodily and soothes me: the ‘fire, fuchsia and the flagrancy of thrown seed and cotton threads.’ (26) In my work, the natural world overlaps with notions of home and safety and one of the ways in which it does this is by my listening in and then being naturally drawn to rhythm and alliterative patterns to describe it. If you have experienced developmental trauma, that is, trauma as a child and young person, this deep experience of a place can elevate the place or the thing from painful memory or just melancholy nostalgia, changing its dynamics, imagining it anew and thus empowering yourself: it is the eye and ear of the magical realist and I believe that magical realism is also a conduit to reclamation. I grasped, writing this, that there were familiar tropes of the magical realist in my teaching book, *The Alchemy*, (2023) threaded through it in the writing exercises I offer, many of which invite you to see the flagrant, the miraculous and the magical in the ordinary, by leaning in and casting off your binary preconceptions. It is as if the genre permeates everything; I do not know how to do or be otherwise and it is an interesting figment of my teaching.

In ‘On Drinking from Leaves and Bells. Creating Hope’ a troubling incident is recalled of the child wanting parental reassurance and instead being curtly told that the older sibling is preferred, and they would rather spend time with him. My father was, like my mother, a gifted teacher who resolutely believed you should never crush the spirit of a child. People used to quote that to me, the difficulty being that *I* was being crushed. I remember the Pembrokeshire coast path that we were on and that I screwed up my eyes and it seemed to change in front of me; at my hand, gorse flowers and a meadow seemed, to me, to be blooming at a caress and I was comforted. I took,

a drag on the tiny pocket at the base of the gorse flower: xanthic, royal and lemon...the world is only a series of pictures you made, pictures which were prompted by others, your elders and betters who told you some things were incontrovertibly true. It is the work of the imagination to tease that apart and think, *What do I see? What do I feel?* (34)

Colour and its glory, its life, is vital to me. Its energy is part of the extraordinary, the magical, against the real: salve and safety: ‘- my yellow punch for the cold, limp touch of your dimming sapphire. Or your blazing fire for a sad, damp fireplace that warms and beckons no-one. (35)

This describes a way of finding in nature an extraordinary thing and it is interesting to reflect on the way in which critics of magical realist texts tend to differentiate, when talking about geographical stylistics, between two discrete styles. Faris notes ‘the existence of a, tropical lush and a northerly spare variety of the magical realist plant. In the northerly variety, there is less magic, and its range is more circumscribed...’ as she compares *Perfume* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* with ‘the more pervasive magic’ of García Márquez and Rushdie. (24) I found, in navigating a world - and I am sure that this is trauma-bound - that my imagination grew wild but also that I saw the world as extraordinary. I do not - and I do not think I ever did - accept what is effectively the assumption of Western Empiricism: magical and real in binary opposition. To me they merge, or dovetail, or fly in and out of one another and that is how the ‘yellow punch’ I offered above from *These Envoys Of Beauty*, arises quite naturally from the gorse flower sucked on a coast path on a day when I felt desperate, frightened, and alone. It is a simple and common coastal plant, but it has taste, glowing and glorious colour and vibrancy that flow out and into the world and illuminates the worst thoughts on the worst day and back again into the simple and common coastal plant. That is, it is both realistic and magical and this has been, for as long as I can remember, my ordinary experience. I theorise that it evolved through the liberation possible through my imagination, as a child, through trauma, through abuse, and it never left me. Moreover, what I describe moves quite naturally into the way I write, whether in novel, short fiction, memoir, autofiction, or, in fact, in teaching book. All of it serves a therapeutic purpose, because to tell my story, or weave my experience through that of my characters, is to give testimony and ask for witness.

On an inchoate understanding and magical realism: the dream of Caliban

In 'On Depression: Flood and Mud' I explore the idea of the natural world as something marvellous and 'faintly, inchoately understood' (39) and how, as a child, the idea of the natural world as calling to me, was entirely natural and thus, I was startled and immensely comforted by the notion of the animals standing still with tears running down their faces in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and shocked into a warm recognition in reading. It was because of its liminality; that their understanding was inchoate, seemed exciting and freeing to me. They could only begin to grasp what they were seeing, and the natural world around them becomes more beautiful because it is mysterious and thus full of exhilarating possibility. I then saw Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in my last years of primary school and the idea of Caliban's dream in Act III, scene ii, with its 'isle full of noises' and 'thousand twangling instruments/Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices' brought me up short with familiarity. Again, a sense of not fully understanding, of joy and of wonder. The animals forget, by the gift of Pan in the first, and Caliban 'cried to dream again' in *The Tempest*. (39-40) I would cry on waking, because that state brought me closer to the certainty of cold eyes and disapproval and the fear that the world was unsafe. I felt that I could cease to exist by lore of my parents, particularly my mother and much older sibling. This is the mockery that developmental trauma makes of your mind, unfortunately. It is also why magic, and the imagination are so important. These are illimitable and as wild as dreams.

In this section of the book, exploring depression, I explained the idea of colour and how it spoke to me and then of how I would run into the fields, as if they siren-called me and know I was safe because, 'water, weeds and mud do not judge; they just are.' (30) Of particular interest to me, because its noise and danger drowned out the buzz in my head and my mother's recalcitrant cursing voice, was the weir. That I waded in and became so absorbed in its spectacle was the magical realist as a child, a surreal internal life, a conversation with water, images leading onto images and back again. Note also that the weir has a voice and that it is - quite naturally, I thought - 'supernatural.' In the passage below, there is also a keen sense that the child has of being one of the 'weirdos,' the dark and rich and imaginative life which has become essential, but also the view of the world. I was always seeing, assembling, and collecting. I once had nightmares because the

school bully killed my snowman; I make hecatombs of hagstones and sea glass and my house is filled with what feels to me like living and breathing miniature worlds. I have frequently been described as weird, odd, peculiar and, lately, neurodivergent. It is the hot flagrancy of my interactions with the world which upsets people. So, the water, pounding over the weir:

On it went. It didn't see me or care for me and that it could kill me without even knowing was a comfort: it made sense of how very tiny I was, and that, for some reason, made me feel safe. The roar of the weir was at my back, supernatural, and its volume made my anxiety and my cry small too.

I would go home, wet, calmer, and slope to my room, or sometimes curl into a ball in my den in the creepers. I remember being in year nine in secondary school and feeling a sense of separation and my oddity.

I was certain that no other fourteen-year-old in school curled themselves into a ball in a creeper den and wished themselves away. I was certain that no one else would have understood the weirdo pressed into the riverbank. What you do not know until you grow up a bit more is that the world is full of weirdos like you: water lovers, chuggers in the mud, wailers in the fields where the cows have been. That is an encouraging thought. (42-3)

Dissociation, lexical sets and little worlds

In 'The Whorls of New Worlds' the clue to how my eye and ear work is in the title. First the assonance which is part of my natural diction and then the way in which a 'whorl' of a flower is a world. I was thinking, here, about the bloom and detail of a flower head and how it is as a microcosm of a world; a *better* world: a conduit to new ways of thinking and seeing and, as such, blessed with therapeutic value. Because, historically, I have had dissociative episodes owing to the impact of developmental trauma, the detail of a beautiful object - although in fact any object observed closely will do - acts as an anchor. I would say its lexical set aloud like a spell, because the words therein were bewitching - stamen, sepal, whorled, alternate, rosette - and feel like I had slipped between worlds and, 'honeysuckle, rose, marsh pennywort, clover, wood anemone, frogbit, I could see them, feel them.' (52) Also, here,

I have always felt that imagination is extraordinary and, at many times in my life, thought of it as substantial. Moreover, I have sometimes even wondered about the definitions of real and imagined. Now my imagination was populated with some of the more common grasses, and, at night, I would count them like sheep: Meadow grass, Timothy grass, Couch grass, Ryegrass, Meadow foxtail – and on and on. Observance, names, and detail. Always. (52)

There is a great emphasis on pattern in the memoir; how it is soothing and how it is an adventure. Jane Alison (2019) is an excellent companion here. She identifies patterns in narratives, so, although,

- we think of narrative as a temporal art, experienced in time like music, of course it's interestingly visual, too. Reading on, we travel not just through places conjured in the story, but through the narrative itself...once you've finished reading, that motionless movement leaves in your mind a numinous shape of the path you travelled. A river, roller coaster, wave. (5)

Alison uses the structure of the natural world to inform her arguments, for example in her discussion of fractals, a 'mathematical system that involved splitting and splitting again' (221) and, 'The most fractal works – meaning fractals of fractals- were stream of consciousness narratives...fractals forming the shape of a whole narrative are what interest me: texts that start with a "seed" or blueprint that spawns several more.' (223)

I would argue that my memoir in essays is highly conscious of fractals in the real world and shows how my awareness of them governed thought; that is, a calming awareness of what Aristotle called hylomorphism, 'shape ordering life,' as Alison defines it (247). Moreover, the stream of consciousness narrative of *Saving Lucia*, particularly where Violet is controlling narrative, is constantly seeding, growing refrains, inversions. This is part of the text's polyvalency. When Lucia Joyce refers to the whole book as her *Work in Progress*, she is reminding the reader of this in the book as a whole: that it is organic, evolving and the reader is part of these fractal branches. This is why Lucia invites you, at the closing of the novel, to, 'feel free to annotate the margins of this *Work in Progress*. This strange story of women who lived and laughed and loved and left.' (185) You are part of the 'saving' of the title. *You*, as reader, are helping to keep a text alive by writing in the margins, adding your own branch of the story and, of course, the closing lines arise from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

Patterns, fractals, magical things and the traumatised mind

In *These Envoy of Beauty*, ‘Snowflake Bentley’ is introduced to the reader. He was a Vermont farmer who came to be a global authority of snow crystal formation because of his lifetime study and the system of microphotographs he devised, working in his woodshed. This extraordinary story, its very unlikelihood, sounds like magical realism, but that is not the point. His reading of them was exquisite and that *is*. He understood snow crystals as ‘dainty hieroglyphics.’ My traumatised mind looked for order and pattern; it was comforted and inspired by fractals and snow crystals are fractals, with a finite area but an infinite perimeter.

I look for patterns and try to think of the story and the wonder compact with that. Bentley read the snow crystals, thinking how, in their wonderfully delicate and exquisite figures, much could be learned of the history of each crystal and the changes through which it had passed in its journey through cloudland. He thought it was as if a life history had been written in “dainty hieroglyphics” and imagined a momentous journey as he read that history. And all of it was secret until you seized the moment while the crystal was intact – and looked. (87)

This is extraordinary. Here is a snow crystal. Read it. Here are flowers. Are they whispering? It is not, this is not how it is supposed to be, flowers should not be whispering, but *what are they saying? Are they saying, Pass the marmalade?* I make a comparison here with the ‘little pink fish’ introduced early on in Lickorish Smith’s *The Dust Never Settles*, as just something that *is* - and which is not foregrounded with explanation and whose origin is not adumbrated, but whose role grows and is accepted, all of which seems to me quite at home in the magical realist style, ‘It can only be the size of a poppy seed, no bigger, but when it opens its mouth, it seems to have swallowed the whole universe.’ (13-16)

How might the magical realist mode help us to see things as if for the first time?

In my memoir, I discuss how the faces of trees and the shapes of clouds – fractals again - offered distinct personalities. Under the care of a clinical psychologist, I described the intimate relationship I had with the natural world and the multi-layered meanings I saw in things. The psychologist said to me, ‘But a tree is just a tree’ and I explained that no, it is not. It might be a wishing tree, a

smiling tree, the more intellectual end of tree; I have always instinctively ascribed personalities and perspicacities to items and I think that this, too, comes from trauma and feeds quite naturally into a magical realist perspective - and so into the writing of a book. Hand in hand with this has been the need to see things anew and bat back the painful nostalgia associated with an item: a beautiful tree underneath which my mother kicked me, shamed me, told me I was nothing but trouble; a tree under which I felt that everyone might line up to hurt me, abash me. So, I move from the ground to the tree, to cloud formation and I make it anew,

- a tree held memories, and shivers, and nightmares and scowling mouths and eyes. I say repeatedly in this book that part of my lifetime challenge has been to free gorgeous natural forms from association and live freely in them, just as they have been my blessing— a place of succour and locus of ideas. (57)

Once I thought how I might change things around me through the force of my imagination, I would look at other natural forms. Some of these are discussed in the memoir. Cloud, for example:

Cirrocumulus. Ah, extraordinary sheets of clouds with the constituents arranged like grains or ripples. Even now, this spectacular sky seems granular and particular to me, solid, as if pieces of milky quartz were suspended there. I could make myself imagine that they sparkled. (59)

I have always loved the sea, and it is a recurring subject in my books and there is a recurring image, both literal and figurative, of a sea cave. I would imagine it as ‘a lacuna’ and came to genuinely believe it was such a thing. A door into another way of being for me in the ‘lonely nerd-world’ of my childhood and adolescence, where ‘magical thinking’ and the embrace of the ‘sea-smack’ and the ‘tiny and wondrous worlds.’ (68) It was as if the walls of the cave spoke to me and I answered back lovingly to them and still do, because for decades I have been climbing through the sea cave, sometimes a little too close to the tide, and hearing it whisper and encourage me. If I had seen an angel descend, even a dirty, smelly, mud-spattered angel like García Márquez’s in ‘A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,’ (1968) I wonder if I would just have said, ‘hello,’ just as I would have listened to the flowers as they whispered. Surely the main point is that they whisper because they have a thing to share, an intimacy to confide, not that it is odd for plants to whisper.

In *These Envoys of Beauty*, I show the reader how the natural world and the patterns therein, the meanders, spirals, and fractals, as it turns out, anchored me, and helped me to orient when

memory felled me. So, in ‘On Lichen and Moss. Patterns, Fractals, Futures, Grief and Survival,’ (81-88) I explored the notion of symbiotic relationships in nature, and balance within ecosystems and as I learned about it all as a child, I tried to make it a textbook of my world, to flip the notion into another context, a hope for my human world and also to see the natural world as a series of symbols. Emerson affirmed a belief in his essay *Nature* (1836) that every natural fact was a symbol of some spiritual fact and I held on to this, losing myself further in patterns and repetition. That I was an observant child is not remarkable. That I was an observant child who was alive to second stories, allegories, and a world of symbols connoting, quite naturally, something vast and magnificent and in a language too strenuous yet to understand but nonetheless accepted, more unusual. It marked me out as a small magical realist. It was my natural state and, as such, I had a challenging time talking to other children because they considered me odd. Developmental trauma alters your modus operandi; if there is no sympathetic adult to tell or no-one who would believe you, you must fall back on your own resources and who is to say what my interaction with the world might have been otherwise As an adult, plenty of adults consider me odd, but I notice that children like me, as if, I hypothesise, my imagination and my storytelling were as wild as theirs. Finding a story, a shape, a name, a ‘second story’ have been and continue to be vital to my sense of sanity and survival. As Hammel says, ‘Stories impose new priorities in complex ambivalent (polyvalent) systems, which introduce new states of balance (homeostasis).’ (12-13) Which is to say, the application of one’s imagination and the making of a story help to order and bring balance to all parts of us. We tell stories to reimagine situations and ourselves and to make sense of what at first seems incomprehensible.

There is a rock which I still visit today, and it is at once entirely normal and magical. It changes, lashed by the sea, eroded, and carved, but it also changes because I changed it with words and the heft of my imagination; this required a little work to begin with and then was entirely natural, so that a hostile rock is something welcoming and understanding. I had imbued it with personality quite naturally and partly because of what happened there, as it were altered by the cruelty which occurred there, but it was not the fault of the rock, and it was in a beautiful place, so I had to accord it new memory, new life, as I rebuilt my mind and told my story in *These Envoys of Beauty*. Likewise, there was a stretch of sand, and I could identify it on a wide beach because it stood where freshwater met the beach. This was also a place of cruelty and, to enable me to visit it again, in separate times, I had to remake it in my memory. None of this - the natural and

automatic placing of feeling and character and echo in landscape - in this case geological phenomena - is never far from the spirit of the magical realist.

First, the rock. I was thrown off it into the sea to teach me to swim and was terrified. The stretch of sand. A little further down the coast and where the person who threw me off the rock, my fear laughed at - and I can see those other faces present now, transmuted into mocking doll-faces in my mind's eye - threw another young child, fully clothed, hard at the sand where the freshwater came down onto the beach because the child had been cheeky. I watched it happen, my heart pounding. 'He deserved it.' But who deserves cruelty? What of those landscapes?

- back come the pounding feelings. But it is not fair and, anyway, a beach, rock, tree - a place - is broader than that, so you have that horrid recollection and on you go, moving fast maybe, in the body's peace and safety; chewing on your wrack or kelp, if you like, and happy in the salt slaps to your face. There is grace, but it does not come to you, I have found. You must go and find it, in a place or in your imagination, which is a storehouse for all your life. (102-103)

Here, the salt slaps, is personified, in a heartbeat, becomes food and sustenance, and the bounty of place for interpretation, and remaking is demonstrated. In trauma-focused therapy works on the actions of the amygdala to free stuck memories and associations that leap out, as flashbacks and PTSD shocks, the fragmented trauma memory which I noted earlier by way of Van der Kolk and Herman, and integrates them into normal, narrative memory so past is not - or less readily - experienced in the present. The impulse towards polyvalency¹⁶ - of multiple meanings - in magical realism, in thought, in writing, in perception - has been extraordinarily useful for me. It is conveyed here in my memoir and stands comfortably with specialist trauma healing work. A tree in my garden is a 'galleon' and, in 'lichen and moss' I observe fractals and my mind is cheered and soothed. (57, 89) That is, a new place can be made, and an old place can be remade: magical realism encourages such flexibility and amplitude.

¹⁶ Polyvalency as a term is used in literary criticism, but also in translation, with rich discussions by biblical scholars and theologians. Joyce's work is sometimes discussed in this context - in his refusal to conform to single linguistic interpretations - but also in terms of cultural polyvalency, that is, coexistence and interplay of multiple cultural influences within a given text. Cultures are not monolithic but rather dynamic, because they are shaped by historical, social, and political forces - such as Ireland's colonisation by the English, as reflected by Joyce in 'Araby', from *Dubliners*. (1914)

Tamás Bényei, referencing Franz Roh, is relevant. He states that (1997)

Roh's divinatory poetics' defined 'magic realism as an attitude of 'serene wonder at the magic of existence' and at the same time as the intuitive reconstruction of the 'inner form' of the world left the door open to potentially contrasting definitions of whatever it is we call magic realism. His definition allows an ontological interpretation, which conceives a Platonic idea of the magic, the miracle of existence or the metaphysical Idea, as an inner property of the world; in this case the artist's task is to achieve the kind of spiritual intensity necessary to experience and divine the mystery of the world. On the other hand, many of Roh's remarks suggest a 'phenomenological' approach, according to which magic is brought to the world through the contemplating gaze of the artist, or is sparked by a miraculous encounter between the creative gaze and the world that is full of mystery... (4)

I would argue that in *These Envoys of Beauty*, both these things occur: the 'serene wonder at the magic of existence' and that which arises between the contemplating gaze of the artist (me, if I dare). In other words, the experience described is both ontological and phenomenological, as described by Franz Roh and revisited by Bényei.

A bright imagination forged in darkness

From childhood, I have had aural and olfactory experiences which I could not explain, saw ghosts and was not afraid and experienced poltergeist activity, just as my grandmothers had done before me and to me this is something which has informed the content and style of my writing and, along with the impetus of an Anglo-Welsh writer to hear well, which informs rhythm and repetition in my work, I have a sense of haunting, of memory, and my books are part of that. This is why, in my work, such as in 'It is not age that withers her' from *Ravished* (81) a house on a quay of the Daugleddau in Pembrokeshire and land about it are very much alive and sentient. It is why a house is hungry in 'Feasting; Fasting' from my *Famished* (13-17), with its chilling epigraph from Angela Carter's 'The Lady of the House of Love' from *The Bloody Chamber* (1979): 'You will feel no pain, my darling'. (119) Here is a world where (Vaught) 'strangeness is a winged thing, brushing your arm in aliform delicacy, and going dark.' (17) This is a piece of short fiction, but what is described is entirely believable to me. I argue that this is the work of an imagination forged in darkness, loneliness, and trauma. 'Divinatory poetics,' if you like.

A Companion Text. *Things They Lost*. Okwiri Oduor (2022)

I have found a familiar world in the brilliant debut novel *Things They Lost* by Okwiri Oduor (2022) and turn to it now. The (magical realist) novelist and critic Leone Ross wrote in *The New York Times* (2023) that it is ‘a complex work, brimming with uncompromisingly African magical realism about the ambiguity of toxic mother-daughter relationships.’ It is a book of wonder and trauma; of worlds being permeable and space liminal. Of appetites, pattern, wraiths, paradoxes, and a suffusion of rhythm, which comes from its repetition – sometimes with one or two key words added, like the fractals we have already mentioned. A story about intergenerational trauma, wrapped up with love and longing in mother-daughter behaviour. The book is also wonderfully enriched by its depictions of the natural world and the memories and lives recorded in it.

Wrongness and intergenerational trauma. *The Things They Lost* - with brief biographical exploration from me

‘Wrongness’ is quickly identified in the book. Wrongness from damage done in colonial times – Ayosa is the great grandchild of the cruel and capricious white settler, Mabel Brown, in whose decaying mansion she now lives – but also deep wrongness between mother and daughter and then into the next generation, with collateral damage: the loss of a young son, the killing of a small dog and of an irritating child, killed by Lola Freedom and left in a chest in a back room of the house. Also, an end to the relationship between the twin girls, Nabumbo Promise and Rosette. Wrongness radiates out. This is what trauma does through generations. Furthermore, ‘Traumatic bonding,’ is described by Herman as ‘a malignant relationship with the perpetrator may be mitigated by attachments to people who share their fate’ (134). Herman also outlines the way in which ‘the unbonded child lives in the central nervous system of a prey animal, with predators all around, both real and imagined.’ (393) As far as I have been able to ascertain, my own mother believed that she was bonded to me because she grew up with violence and thus used it on me, as I have explored in several of my works. I bonded with her and still miss her, despite my having no sense that I would want to see her again, which dysfunction mirrors the relationship between Ayosa and Nabumbo Promise. To this day, I have a fear of someone coming to get me, at the behest of my

mother, and with the acquiescence of my father and sibling; I have been hyper-vigilant for as long as I can remember. I scan any room I go into for exits and always remember as much as I can in case it is useful later; this is not dissimilar to Ayosa and is a result of sustained trauma within the family home. It was and is a lonely experience.

The protagonist Ayosa is said to be ‘the loneliest girl in the world’ (6), with a sharp and troubling sensibility because she remembers everything and records time before she was born, slipping fluently in and out of natural time’. The narrative structure unsettles and beguiles, and it may take the reader a moment to reorient: who is speaking, to whom and when? It – the puzzle at the heart of the book - was a point of criticism for *Saving Lucia* and, as here, no speech punctuation is used, which compounded the problem for some readers, but the effect is interesting and suits the transgressive nature of the magical realist mode. It also makes us alert and alive to the curious composition of things in the book - ‘Her shinbones were made of paper. Different people’s shinbones were made of different things’ (7) - and to the ‘wrongness.’ Ayosa’s mother is there, then she is gone away without explanation, then she is with her daughter, but crumbling; ‘turned inside out. She’s fallen into herself.’ (53) Repeatedly Ayosa’s ‘jinamizi’, from the Swahili, meaning nightmare, comes, puncturing the chronological time and setting her down in times past and visions of memories that are not her own: ‘It was a dark, horrible thing that visited her sometimes, bringing her memories that were not hers, that had never been hers.’ (47)

Unbidden memories and the unspeakable secret

In *Things They Lost*, this – the unbidden flood of memories described above - is a parallel to her mother’s drop inside herself; to me both are a response to acute trauma, inter-generational trauma, as it becomes apparent that Nabumbo Promise, Ayosa’s mother, has been treated with intense cruelty by her mother, Lola Freedom, who, like my own, was seen as a pillar of the community. This might recall the discussions of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987). Central to their approach, whether in a clinical setting (psychoanalysis) or literature, is the concept of the unspeakable secret as a symptom of trauma, which is revealed only in behavioural or linguistic codings. Meaning is fractured and pain and illness are present. ‘All secrets are shared at the start. Hence the “crime” under consideration cannot be a solitary one since it was turned into a secret.’ (158) In *Things They Lost*, Ayosa, like her mother before her, is

immensely burdened by secrecy, unspeakable shames, failures to love. She longs for words, to be wanted: to vocalise and transcend. In the narrative, some counterpoint is provided by her new friend Mbiu, who has, at least to some extent, transcended such experience and whose ‘foot was solid as could be.’ (340)

Lola Freedom, Ayosa’s grandmother, is a flying doctor, (ironically) a healer, but the nemesis for her own twin daughters. She allows them to be accused of the murder of their younger brother, Maxwell Truth, whom they had in fact drowned as an act of love, of euthanasia, as it is described because Lola Freedom had paralysed him through her violence. The girls are sent to a convent and then, later, accused of the murder of their mother. The thread of damage, as well as of collusion – that no one from the town will accept that Lola Freedom was anything other than a healer – is painful to read. Ultimately, Nabumbo Promise drowns herself, but her twin sister Rosette is sustained at first by the life of a nun, though she does not believe in God, then as the voice of ‘Ms Temperance’ on the radio. Rosette can stabilize her world, the wrongness and ‘that terrible heaving, as though a great sadness is in the room with you’ (143) with writing and reciting poems and with her attention to the rosary. She enjoys ‘the regimented life’ and is attentive to the rosary because, ‘it soothes the tight ball in my chest.’ (168) This is something I explore across *These Envoys of Beauty*: finding comfort in structure and then in patterns, mysterious creations, such as fractals, which, ‘the laws of nature repeat at different scales. I have always found I could get lost in them, and that what I could not see, I would imagine hard. When I was not counting sheep at night, I was counting fractals.’ (85)

Meanwhile, the poetry recited on the radio acts as therapy for the whole town and on the day, Miss Temperance does not read, Molotov cocktails are thrown. Okwiri, interviewed in *Guernica* (2022), noted that, ‘There is generational trauma built up through such communal nailing on the cross. The town listens to poetry on the radio because it helps them come to terms with this, helps them see the roles that they play in other people’s grief or trauma.’ Ayosa carries the collective trauma of her mother, of her grandmother, and of the entire town, and, Okwiri explains further in the interview with ‘Guernica’ that Ayosa speaks to her mother about it, because her mother understands, despite the deep toxicity of their relationship – and is writing it down in her notebooks – Ayosa carries a notebook with her,

And Ayosa says, there are memories in it, and she explains some of the memories. Like this prehistoric memory of what it felt like the first time the sun warmed the frost on the

ground. It's really beyond the memory of herself before she turned into a girl, going into the memory of Mother Earth in her own girlhood. And her mother reacts to that saying, you know, that must be extremely heavy. And Ayosa says, it's incredibly heavy.'

As for Ayosa's mother, 'Your mother,' says Jentrix the beatific apothecary, a force of glorious kindness in the book and deeply immersed in the natural world and its seasons, in plants and their properties, 'has been running from herself so long. She falls inside herself for the same reason. To forget. To be another person for a spell. (274)

As I say in *To Melt the Stars. Essays on Love* (2024), I have fallen inside myself (to borrow from Oduor) because of my mother,

Yes, I loved her with passion. She loved with spite and flame. It was complicated. Part of me hated her because each day brought with it a fresh knowledge of what a trial and a burden I had been, of the baby that should never have been and who had better atone for having been allowed to survive. I internalised that and I can feel tears pricking my eyes and that my fingers are clammy with a little anxiety as I write this. The hoarse chuckling is there, just at my back. (21)

I may appear to write like a realist, as if I were writing a letter or diary for therapy, but the text here, as all through the connection, drifts, sometimes vaults, into the other world; the world of the dead, of hauntings, good and bad, and that my mother trails me everywhere. She was very badly behaved at my wedding. She was there, though not alive; but I could hear her, smell her. As I said at the beginning, 'I was born a magical realist' and I have been able to name and account for my trauma and, in so doing, hope not to pass it on.

Nature, memoires, water

Returning more explicitly to the theme of nature in *Things They Lost*, the river is a key feature of the book's landscape. It is kind, it wants Ayosa and she thrills to it. It is also full of things, though it is frequently unclear when Ayosa is looking at physical refuse and when she is observing the vestiges of other lives – memories exemplified by the items floating around her. Her mother has once 'thrown her away in the water' (274) and she says goodbye to her mother – figuratively and literally - in it and enters its darkness before she is born again into a new family, with Mbiu, her adoptive sister, saving her and announcing, in the last line of the book, 'Wallahi, my sister, will it

always be like this – you constantly trying to die, and me saving you?’ (356) Its presence in the narrative is constant. Kind, but also full of the detritus of ended lives, of memories: baffling. A comparison might be made with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) where Morrison’s circular narrative structure begins and ends with the stream where Beloved emerges and disappears. This stream running behind 124 Bluestone Road assumes the nature of a larger body of water, principally, the Ohio River and the ocean lying between Africa and America. Giving and sustaining; a powerful metaphor for bodily life, time, and memory. We might recall what Morrison says of the Mississippi and of memoir, in an interview, *The Site of Memory* (1995),

All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that, remembering where we were, what valley we ran through...It is emotional memory – what the nerves and skin remember, as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our ‘flooding.’ (98)

Otherworldly, speculative; moving in and out of real and magical so that we might look at the world in a different way; imagine it anew, even though the instability of not knowing may trouble us, *Things They Lost* offers us a radiant world of shadows, of wraiths, the dead who come in the shape of living people, the dead all around us, of unspoken terrors, permeable boundaries, as in all my books, short and longform fiction, between the living and the dead, of shadows, a magical realist world.

Illusion, magic, survival

Arva (2008), notes that, ‘Magical realist authors turn to illusion and magic as a matter of survival in a civilization priding itself on scientific accomplishments, positivist thinking, and the metaphysical banishment of death’ (60) and I would add that they also play with those things and derive deep satisfaction from them; from the non-binary and spacious worlds that reject the positivist tenets of intuition, introspection, religious faith or, in fact, the sense that there are permeable walls between worlds. It is, instead, a thrilling ‘kaleidoscope’ (60). Anjali Sachdeva’s John Milton, in her story ‘Killer of Kings’ in *All the Names They Used for God* (2018) is a gloriously seamless integration of magical realism and the decidedly earthbound. Milton is composing *Paradise Lost* and ‘The Angel sits at John’s bedside.’ Milton, blind in both eyes, by the time he composed the poem, has an angel to dictate to, ‘a quill in her hand that may be one of

her own feathers.’ (90) The most interesting thing about the way the mode works here is that the angels are tremendously workaday, attentive, yet flippant in the way in which they speak to the poet; ‘He’s boring her,’ and “John,” she says, “we will be here all century at this rate. Tell me something or the Old So-and-So will be wroth with us both.” (91)

The beautiful angel, granite and ice, the grace in the room, the very real poet, the real story behind the title. Milton’s *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* asserts that a tyrannical ruler should no longer be regarded as one of the powers ordained by God and may therefore be resisted like a private person who employs unjust force; he disputed The Divine Right of Kings and was protected in the Restoration by influential friends. One of them was Andrew Marvell. Both men appear here simply as ‘John’ and ‘Andrew.’ The tale is intimate but with historical weight and resonance behind it, the divine, numinous, and supernatural. The ghost of Milton’s mother, the production of a book, its miraculous composition over years gently laid out for the reader. Finally, the book is finished, and ‘John’ is missing his ‘seditious angel’ (104) - the adjective mirroring Milton’s own activity in defiance of the king (sedition) and his description of Satan in Book One of *Paradise Lost*. The angel is herself in rebellion, grumpy; she is both divine and deeply human. We slip between times, words, realms in a story that is at once playful and deeply serious; about a ‘sick old man’ (105) Moreover, the book is finished, there are no secrets and words have been unpacked.

That we might entertain and explore and pass through permeable walls between worlds is deeply thrilling and of comfort when we are in pain; when we are in trauma or live, longing for a better clearer way ahead, with its detritus in our lives.

Chapter 4. Conclusion. Conclusion. Hope, rebellion, colour

In her illuminating piece on the PhD by Published Works model (2013), Maggie Butt writes that, ‘The writer needs to demonstrate the freshness and originality of their work by showing a clear understanding of the context of publication through some kind of literature review.’ (12) She continues,

It is impossible to demonstrate that one is doing something new without discussing what else is being created by others. Creative work does not come out of a vacuum, it needs proper location in terms of its influences and what others are doing, and perhaps discussion of what it is trying *not* to do. (12)

Here, those influences, that other creative work, is brought it into the light. Its location is, however, not solely in creative work. Moreover, I offer an agenda: that we bear witness to text particularly in its interrogations of dilemmas and its deepest often unheard pains. What does the work try ‘not to do,’ as Butt says? It tries not to contain the magical realist mode only in the novel form and suggests that we can look forward to a greater expansion of this global literature, across a range of literary forms and in nonfiction works too, where they embrace it as a mode of thought or show how its features may even be concomitant in a teaching work. The mode also refuses to let terrible things go without interrogation and thus bears witness, is a social act and serves a therapeutic purpose. This critical review attests to that.

Caruth postulates that,

As a paradigm for the human experience that governs history, then, traumatic disorder is indeed the apparent struggle to die. The postulation of a drive to death, which Freud ultimately introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, would seem only to recognise the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence. (65)

However, Caruth later adds that key to ameliorating this is being heard, adding that ‘symptoms of trauma may actually arise from the anticipation of denial by others.’ (178) It is discussed at length by Herman, who writes about reconnection and the ability of the traumatised one to ‘establish an agenda.’ (287) It is important to state that my books, whether they tell my story

directly (*These Envoys of Beauty*) or explore trauma, informed by own experience, through others (*Saving Lucia*), attempt to establish that agenda.¹⁷

In *The Zebra and Lord Jones*, the character, Anwen, is making sure that others find their voice and say who they are and what has been done to them: by war, natural disaster and by the suppression of indigenous culture – here by the prohibition of Welsh speaking in schools by the English. Anwen, also born a magical realist (and modelled on my great grandmother), lives and breathes a colourful world of fables, comical inversions and fantastical stories which are true when you think she is lying and untrue when you think she is being honest. It is through her that the titular Lord Jones wakes up to a plural, dynamic and mysterious world; she is the reason why the grieving Myfanwy can say, though heartbroken, ‘I can feel my voice getting louder, even in these straitened times.’ (120) Moreover, there is an autobiographical thread across my books and here, I identify as the narrator for whom the story was taken down. I am,

- a strange but loved girl – *she* took down this story for you. A strange creature to whom owls whispered at night and to whom hummingbirds spoke in an emerald dream. She has been thinking over this story all her life. (290)

For me, the survivor mission, the reconnection, the agenda – not to mention that ‘emerald dream’ - were a potentiality in my thoughts and reading, then given narrative in my writing through a magical realist mode. I read, to use Flaubert’s phrase, ‘in order to live,’¹⁸ then I dared to write, to explore. I found freedom, excitement, and the opportunity to play with my reality while enjoying and not being ashamed of the ways in which I had crafted a way of thinking which is unusual, but understandable. Caruth states that, ‘To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event’ (4,5). Because I am a trauma survivor as well as a writer, I can not only attest to this but

¹⁷ The reader may have surmised that this PhD is written by someone who is, still, fundamentally unwell, but healing; someone who is undergoing specialist trauma psychotherapy during the writing of this critical review, and whose books occurred because of trauma and express it, through a sustained magical realist mode or using tropes from it, across multiple books, and forms therein. What you have, here, is, in part, my autobiography, across novels, poems, short stories and other short fiction, features and teaching material. You also have my agenda, my testimony and my rage.

¹⁸ The 1867 letter from Flaubert to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie is referenced in my essay, ‘In Order to Live’ (2020) in which I examine how reading was a powerful force for me. Flaubert asserts in the letter than one should not read ‘as the children read, to amuse yourself’, but in the essay I countered that I was the child who read both for amusement and for my very survival.

also express gratitude that I found a literary mode which gave me so substantial a room in which to roam. Magical realism offers us possibilities for indirect representations of trauma, allowing us to express what is too dreadful to say explicitly. It also complements a more direct depiction of horror because its mode is resolutely flexible: that is its gift. It is a way of surviving and thinking; fabulism spilling out from a proscribed and frightening life. A life that was mine.

Acknowledgements

First, let me acknowledge what I have done here and could not fully emphasise in the body of a text which is about being a creative writing practitioner. *I have told my story*. That is, the story of a child in an unsafe world, frightened, confused, lonely, what the child learned to do, the stretch of this into adulthood and the confusion which continued because of damage done developmentally, misdiagnosis and lack of therapeutic support. That I was able to do so means there are people to thank who understood the importance of this work for me.

First, to Professor (of Joyce studies) Anne Fogarty at University College Dublin. It was contact here which prompted me to take my work more seriously. When *Saving Lucia* was published, at the start of the first lockdown, I felt – it seemed trivial even to think about it – that the book just entered oblivion. It was through Professor Fogarty’s praise of the novel that I began thinking differently. I began to think that I might have something to contribute to Joyce studies and to scholarship more broadly. Then Professor Jonathan Taylor at Leicester University invited me to speak to his postgraduate Creative Writing Students and has remained a cheerleader of work ever since. Thanks also to Shelley Taylor at Reading University – not to mention her support for my family more broadly - for her encouragements and to Dr Kate Mattacks for the same, and for specific pointers – particularly in terms of therapeutic writing, in which field she is an expert. Writers, academics, and other universities absorbed me into their communities and give such help and I am also grateful to all the independent publishers – and their editors – without whom this piece of work would not exist. Represented here, Bluemoose Books and Lin Webb, the book’s editor, Reflex Press, Influx Press, Dodo Ink and the now gone Patrician Press, Renard Press and Broken Sleep. A nod to Milan’s 8toEdizione for bringing *Bang Bang Mussolini* (*Saving Lucia*) so skilfully to an Italian audience and a wide one at that. Thank you to the writer and doctoral student at Leicester University, Kathy Hoyle, who contributed thoughts on *These Envoys of Beauty* and to Katy Wimbhurst, who was so generous with her time in allowing me to interview her about her work, which features here. Also, to Dr Karina Lickorish Quinn at The University of Leeds who spoke to me about magical realism in her novel. To my lovely lads, Elijah, Isaac, and Caleb and to my husband, Ned, without whom...

There are people who have helped me manage my mental health over the years. Few, resources being what they are. I would, however, like to offer heartfelt appreciation to G, the specialist psychotherapist supporting me while I wrote this critical review. A truly gifted individual.

Finally, most importantly, my thanks and appreciation to Professors Rob Edgar and Abi Curtis from York St John University for their kind and attentive interest in this project. I had been thinking for a little while about whether this PhD by Published Works was a possibility and they extended a hand and guided me towards it, Amazing. Abi has been my main supervisor, but it is very much a team. They have changed the trajectory of my life, and I am profoundly grateful. If you two ever wonder about whether what you do is important, here is just one little example. With love.

This work is dedicated to all those who are trauma survivors and who live alongside its catastrophic consequences. You are not and were never alone.

List of Published Works

- Vaught, Anna. *Killing Hapless Ally*, Manningtree: Patrician Press, 2016. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *The Life of Almost*, Manningtree: Patrician Press, 2018. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *Saving Lucia*, Hebden Bridge: Bluemoose Books, 2020. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *These Envoys of Beauty*, Abingdon: Reflex Press, 2023. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *Famished London*: Influx Press, 2020. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *Ravished*. Abingdon: Reflex Press, 2022. (Paperback)
- The Alchemy*. London: Renard Press, 2023. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *The Zebra and Lord Jones*. London: Renard Press, 2023. (Paperback)
- Vaught, Anna. *To Melt the Stars. Essays on Love*. London: Broken Sleep Books, 2024. (Digital; ARC; publication was forthcoming at point of submission.)
- Vaught, Anna. *Her Winter Song*. Renard Press, 2024. (Paperback)

Works Cited

- Abraham, Nicholas, and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel. Volume I*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994.
- Alison, Jane. *Meander, Spiral, Explode. Design and Pattern in Narrative*. New York: Catapult, 2019.
- Apuleyo Mendoza, Plinio. *The Fragrance of Guava. Conversations with Gabriel García Márquez*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988.
- Arva, Eugene L. 'Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism.' *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 38 no. 1, 2008, p. 60-85. Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.0.0002> .
Accessed 1st September 2023.
- Arva, Eugene and Hubert Roland, 'Writing Trauma: Magical Realism and the Traumatic Imagination,' in: *Interférences littéraires/Littéraire interferences*, 'Magical Realism as Narrative Strategy in the Recovery of Historical Traumata.' Eugene Arva & Hubert Roland (eds), October 2014, 14, 7-14.

- https://www.academia.edu/6516844/Writing_Trauma_Magical_Realism_and_the_Traumatic_Imagination Accessed 30th August 2023.
- Atkins, Polly, *Some of Us Just Fall. On Nature And Not Getting Better*. London: Hachette, 2023.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press. 1st edition, 1984.
- Baraka, Carey and Okwiri Oduor. Okwiri Oduor: "What is your specific lonely like?", *Guernica*, April 11th, 2022. <https://www.guernicamag.com/what-is-your-specific-lonely-like/> Accessed 10th January 2024.
- Barker, Meg-John and Alex Iantaffi. *Life Isn't Binary. On Being Both, Beyond, And In-Between*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2019.
- Bényei, Tamás. "REREADING 'MAGIC REALISM.'" *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1997, pp. 149–79. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41261604>. Accessed 22 May 2024.
- Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margerita*
- Butt, Maggie. 'One I Made Earlier. On the PhD by Publication.' *TEXT Special Issue 22. Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards* eds Jen Webb, Donna Lee Brien and Sandra Burr, October 2013 Middlesex University, [file:///C:/Users/annav/Downloads/28309-one-i-made-earlier-on-the-phd-by-publication%20\(8\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/annav/Downloads/28309-one-i-made-earlier-on-the-phd-by-publication%20(8).pdf) PDF download.
- Carey, Jon F. Carey, D.J. (2021). *Projected reality, critical realism and boundary objects: a new model for assessment in forensic psychiatry*. *Academia Letters*, Article 1388. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL1388>. Accessed 3rd January, 2024.
- Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016
- Cernat, Laura. 'Fictional Futures for a Buried Past: Representations of Lucia Joyce.' In: Novak, J and Ní Dhúill, C. eds. *Imagining Gender in Biographical Fiction*. *Palgrave Studies in Life Writing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09019-6_3, pp. 75-108. Accessed 5th December, 2023.
- Clarke, Susannah. *Piranesi*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature (1836). Nature and Selected Essays*. London: Penguin, 2003.

- Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments. Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.
- Gallix, Andrew. 'Saving Lucia: Psychiatric Flight of Fictional Fancy.' *The Irish Times* 10th May, 2020.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/saving-lucia-psychiatric-flight-of-fictional-fancy-1.4240155> Accessed 10th May 2020.
- Glaser, Sheila Faria, translator. Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation.* (1981.) Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Internet Archive. Opensource.
<https://archive.org/details/simulacra-and-simulation-1995-university-of-michigan-press/mode/2up>
- George, Josie. *A Still Life.* London: Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Hammel, Stefan. *Handbook of Therapeutic Storytelling.* London and New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery.* New York: Basic, 1992, 2022
- Hoyle, Kathy. 'Review of *These Envoys of Beauty* by Anna Vaught.' *Everybody's Reviewing, Creative Writing at Leicester University*, 14th January 2024,
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1132748073419558/search/?q=these%20envoys%20of%20beauty> Accessed 16th January 2024.
- Hurley, Andrew. Translator. Jorge Luis Borges. *Fictions.* London: Penguin, 2000.
- Laing, Olivia. *To The River. A Journey Beneath The Surface.* London: Canongate, 2011.
- Le Guin, Ursula K., 'Living in a Work of Art,' *Words Are My Matter.* Boston, New York: 2019 pp. 51-66.
- Levine G, Henry N, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot.* 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press; 2019.
- Lickorish Quinn, Karina. *The Dust Never Settles.* London: Oneworld, 2022.
- Lindskog, Annika J. Review of *Saving Lucia*, by Anna Vaught. *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 58 no. 1, 2020, p. 221-223. Accessed in Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjq.2020.0046>. Accessed December 20th, 2023.
- Liptrot, Amy. *The Outrun.* London: Canongate, 2018.
- Luckhurst, Nicola. Translator. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer. *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). London: Penguin, 2004.

- Masud, Noreen. *A Flat Place*. London: Penguin, 2023.
- McLintock, David, translator. *The Uncanny* (1919.) By Sigmund Freud. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Mantel, Hilary. *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher And Other Stories*. London: Fourth Estate, 2014.
- Mehlman Jeffrey, (Translator), John Leavitt (Translator). *Claude Lévi-Strauss. Wild Thought: A New Translation of La Pensée Sauvage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021 by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Author).
- Mikics, David, ‘Dereck Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History and the Caribbean Writer’ in Parkinson Zamora, Lois, and Wendy B Faris eds., *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, pp. 371-404.
- Moran, James. ‘Flourishing in Confinement.’ *The Tablet*, 4th June 2020.
<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/books/10/18212/flourishing-in-confinement>. Accessed 5th June 2020.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Vintage, 2007.
- Morrison, Toni. ‘The Site of Memory.’ In William Zinsser ed., *Inventing the Truth*. New York: Houghton Mifflin company: New York, 1995. Washington State University extract.
https://public.wsu.edu/~hughesc/morrison_memory.htm. Accessed 13th February 2024.
- Oduor, Okwiri. *Things The Lost*. London: Oneworld, 2023.
- Parkinson Zamora, Lois, and Wendy B Faris eds., *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Pickford, Henry W., translator. Theodor W. Adorno. ‘The Meaning of Working Through the Past’ (1959). In *European Perspectives. A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism*. Lawrence D. Kritzman ed. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 89-103.
https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Adorno_MeaningOfWorkingThrough.pdf PDF download.
- Rajabi, Ayyub, Majid Azizi, and Mehrdad Akbari. ‘Magical realism: The magic of realism.’ *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 12.2 (2020): 1-13. Accessed 9th November, 2024.
- Rabassa, Gregory, translator. *Gabriel García Márquez. Chronicle of a Death Foretold* London: Penguin, 1982.

- Rabassa, Gregory, translator. Gabriel García Márquez, 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.' (1968) North Dakota State University, <https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/CreativeWriting/323/MarquezManwithWings.htm>. Accessed 14th November, 2023.
- Ross, Leone 'THINGS THEY LOST. By Okwiri Oduor,' New York Times, April 12th, 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/12/books/review/things-they-lost-okwiri-oduor.html?smid=url-share>. Accessed 12th March 2024
- Platt, Len. Foreword. Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake* (1959). London: Wordsworth, 2012.
- Reddick, John, translator. Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. (1920) London: Penguin, 2003.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Picador, 1981, 1982.
- Rushdie Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. London: Vintage, 1988
- Sachdeva, Anjali. *All The Names They Used For God*. New York: The Dial Press, 2019.
- Saxby, Clare. 'Clear stark lines. An exploration of Britain's flattest places, from the Cambridgeshire fens to Morecambe Bay.' *Times Literary Supplement*, October 6th, 2023. <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/regular-features/in-brief/a-flat-place-noreen-masud-book-review-clare-saxby>. Accessed 10th November, 2024.
- Slattery, Mary Francis. 'What Is Literary Realism?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1972, pp. 55–62. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/429611>. Accessed 9th November, 2024.
- Stone, Peter. 'Gabriel García Márquez, *The Art of Fiction* No. 69', Issue 82, Winter 1981. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez> Accessed 12th September, 2023.
- Stonor Saunders, Frances. *The Woman Who Shot Mussolini*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keep the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. London: Penguin, 2015.
- Vaught, Anna. *Killing Hapless Ally*, Manningtree: Patrician Press, 2016.
- Vaught, Anna. *The Life of Almost*, Manningtree: Patrician Press, 2018.

- Vaught, Anna. 'The Value of Poetry in Today's Society.' *Writers and Artists*, 23rd February, 2016. <https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/advice/the-value-of-poetry-in-todays-society>,
- Vaught, Anna. *Saving Lucia*, Hebden Bridge: Bluemoose Books, 2020.
- Vaught, Anna. *These Envoys of Beauty*, Abingdon: Reflex Press, 2023
- Vaught, Anna. *Famished London*: Influx Press, 2020
- Vaught, Anna. *Ravished*. Abingdon: Reflex Press, 2022
- The Alchemy*. London: Renard Press, 2023.
- Vaught, Anna. *The Zebra and Lord Jones*. London: Renard Press, 2023.
- Vaught, Anna. *To Melt the Stars. Essays on Love*. London: Broken Sleep Books, 2024.
- Vaught, Anna. Personal communication with Katy Wimhurst. April 10th, 2024
- Vaught, Anna. Personal communication with Karina Lickorish Quinn. May 1st, 2024
- Wilson, Rawdon. 'The Metamorphosis of Fictional Space: Magical Realism. In Parkinson Zamora, Lois, and Wendy B Faris eds., *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995 pp. 209-235
- Wimhurst, Katy. Personal communication with Anna Vaught. October 2nd, 2020.
- Wimhurst, Katy. *Let Them Float*. Alien Buddha Press (Amazon) 2024.
- Wynne-Davis, Marion ed. *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature*. London: Bloomsbury, 1989.

Additional Works

- Arva, Eugene, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction*. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2023.
- Asubel, Ramona. *Awayland. Stories*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2019.
- Bender, Aimee. *An Invisible Sign of My Own*. London: Windmill Books, 2012.
- Joyce James, *Ulysses (1922)*. London: Wordsworth, 1992.
- Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake (1939)*. London: Wordsworth, 2012.
- Manguel, Alberto. 'Naming his fear. The Brutality of Portugal's colonial past. Review of Antonio Lobo Antunes, *By the Rivers of Babylon*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Boston: Yale University Press, 2023. *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 23, 2023, p. 17
- Link, Kelly. *Get In Trouble*. New York: Random House, 2015.
- Mate, Gabor. *When the Body Says No. The Cost of Hidden Stress*. London: Vermillion, 2013.

Mills, Sam et al., editors. *Trauma. Essays on Art and Mental Health*. Disley: Dodo Ink, 2021.

O'Keane, Veronica. *The Rag and Bone Shop. How We Make Memories and Memories Make Us*.
London: Penguin, 2022

Okoje, Irenosen. *Nudibranch*. London: Dialogue Books, 2020.

Price, A.R. translator. Jacques Lacan. *Anxiety. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book X (1962-3)*,
Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

Punter, David. *Angela Carter's Magic Realism. Chapter 4, The Contemporary British Novel*, eds.
James Acheson, Sarah C. E. Ross. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. (1610-11)

Rushdie. Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 2008.

Shaw, Donald L. "Chronicle of a Death Foretold: Narrative Function and Interpretation." *Critical Perspectives on Gabriel García Márquez*. Eds. Shaw, Bradley A., and Nora Vera-Godwin.

Lincoln, Nebraska: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1986. 91-104.

Punter, David. *Angela Carter's Magic Realism. Chapter 4, The Contemporary British Novel*, eds.
James Acheson, Sarah C. E. Ross. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005

Vine, Steve, editor. *Literature in Psychoanalysis. A Reader*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,
2005.

