

Editorial: Magic Realism

It is not only in philosophy that realism is a hotly contested topic. There is a thesis in literary circles that the true spirit of the novel is that of fantasy, the 'magic realism' of the South Americans and their followers in the English language; on this view the realism of 19th century writers like Flaubert and George Eliot is a deviation from the line running from Petronius and Longus to Marquez and Rushdie. The literary thesis has connections with the revisionary metaphysics of post-modernism: conceptual distinctions are impositions and value judgments expressions of power and bad faith; science is as factitious as romance; and what we call reality a crumbling veneer disguising intellectual and moral chaos within. The names of Kuhn and Feyerabend are invoked, along with Rorty, Foucault and Derrida, and further back Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and even Kant.

This century, perhaps, 'human kind cannot bear very much reality'. Anti-realism and magic realism alike are responses to a prevailing loss of confidence in ourselves and our powers. The true magicians in philosophy as in literature would be those able to restore some of what has been lost; in doing so they might tell us things we do not know and things we would rather not know, and in their pursuit of truth, reconcile us to what we are.