

Ava Linda Feliz-Sutter  
 RL&L 409: Senior Thesis in Romance Studies  
 Spring 2026

## Senior Thesis Prospectus in Romance Studies

### I. INTRODUCTION & PROBLEMATIC

In her landmark 2010 essay “Cosmopolítica indígena en los Andes,” Marisol de la Cadena identifies a deeply sedimented exclusion at the core of modernity: the separation of the human from the natural world. This anthropocentric divide is not merely conceptual but historical and political, produced and sustained through mechanisms of colonial erasure and epistemic violence that misrecognize, diminish, or deny the existence of nonhuman beings and, in doing so, delegitimize Indigenous and other non-Western modes of knowing, relating, and being. As de la Cadena demonstrates, when Indigenous cosmovisions are dismissed as primitive or irrational, the nonhuman beings central to everyday life within those worlds are rendered illusory, and the worlds themselves—along with their inhabitants—are relegated to epistemic and political insignificance. Against the disenchanting horizons of modernity, she argues that Indigenous peoples inhabit not merely alternative worldviews but entirely different worlds. In the Andean context, *tirakuna*, or sentient earth-beings, participate in political life alongside *runakuna*, human beings, thereby making animacy, agency, and ontology inseparable and politics and cosmology mutually constitutive. This relational mode of existence exceeds the binary rationalities underpinning the hegemonic—and ultimately illusory—edifices of Western modernity, reframing nature not as inert matter or an extractable resource but as a sacred, relational domain that demands reciprocity and care.

In an era of accelerating ecological devastation and potentially irreversible climatic change, the restoration of reciprocal relations with nonhuman and more-than-human worlds has become an existential imperative. The continued exclusion of Indigenous and non-Western worldviews thus constitutes not only an ethical failure but a potentially fatal error with irrevocable consequences for the future of human life. Any movement toward a more just and enduring world therefore requires dismantling Eurocentric philosophical and political paradigms in favor of what Marisol de la Cadena conceptualizes as cosmopolitics (*cosmopolítica*): a pluriversal political formation that affirms the coexistence of multiple beings, knowledges, and ontologies. Resisting universalizing frameworks, cosmopolitics insists on irreducible ontological and political plurality. Within this pluriverse lies the possibility of interrupting modernity’s linear drive toward annihilation and opening alternative pathways of relationality, reciprocity, and co-becoming that gesture toward more viable horizons of human dwelling.

### II. WORKING HYPOTHESIS & SIGNIFICANCE

This thesis theorizes a pathway toward healing: the literary genre of magical realism. Situated within its Latin American historical and cultural matrix, it traces the genre’s emergence from Indigenous metaphysical and cosmological roots to its cosmopolitical, transgressive, and revolutionary articulations.

Following Alejo Carpentier's formulation of *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous real), magical realism is understood not merely as an aesthetic mode but as the ontological enactment of a reality in which the extraordinary inheres within the ordinary. The most philosophically radical texts, however, exceed even this formulation. Rather than advancing an explicit agenda, they intervene through narrative textures, spatiotemporal disjunctions, and linguistic distortions that destabilize modernist-colonial regimes of power by resisting interpretive closure, teleological linearity, and mimetic constraint.

By examining the interplay of dualities that structure the magical realist text, this thesis advances the working hypothesis that Latin American magical realism is governed by a distinct metaphysics and philosophy of language—one that dissolves presumed separations between language and reality, the human and the nonhuman, and the everyday and the sacred. Within these texts, language functions not as a closed representational system predicated on absence or lack, but as a generative, even cosmogenetic force that participates in the production of the real. Freed from dominant Western linguistic and metaphysical constraints, magical realism renders legible a historically marginalized mode of being grounded in complementarity, relational interdependence, and ontological continuity, capable of unsettling, reconfiguring, and rewriting the architecture of the modern world.

Central to this logic is the continual fusion of primordial dualities—being and becoming, life and death, presence and absence, order and chaos—that modern Western thought typically isolates as binary and hierarchical. Rather than resolving these tensions, magical realism dwells within them, cultivating a language of coalescence that resonates with Indigenous Mesoamerican and Andean cosmologies. In this sense, the genre assumes a function analogous to spiritual mediation. As Wendy B. Faris observes, magical realism's remystifying effects parallel shamanic practice insofar as the mode traverses ontological planes and opens alternative modalities of perception, knowledge, and existence. The magical realist text thus performs a ritualized mediation: it moves between worlds, translates across ontological registers, and returns with forms of knowledge oriented toward collective healing. The works examined in this thesis both echo and reactivate pre-Columbian ritual, aesthetic, and cosmological practices structured around the traversal of visible and invisible strata of reality. In Mesoamerican contexts, narratives from modern Mexico and Guatemala materialize metaphysical structures aligned with Mexica philosophies while drawing on Mayan conceptions of recursive, relational temporality. Reality emerges not as a static given but through the perpetual tension of opposing forces, whose interweaving sustains both cosmic continuity and narrative movement. In Andean magical realism, distinctions between human and nonhuman, material and spiritual similarly dissolve, as ancestral memory, sacred geography, and spiritual interiority converge within a single relational continuum. Mexica metaphysics, Mayan spatiotemporality, Andean ontological continuity, and the internal logic of magical realism thus converge in an ongoing

cosmic process of becoming—a language of continuity intelligible only within a pluriversal ontology, or, in the terms of Marisol de la Cadena, an enactment of cosmopolitics.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

This thesis is organized around interrelated research questions addressing both the formal operations and philosophical effects of magical realism. At its core, it asks how magical realist texts mobilize literary form to transcend—and ultimately transform—colonial, objectivist, positivist, and universalist conceptions of language, reality, and representation. More specifically, it examines how aesthetic and linguistic strategies materialize a distinct metaphysics in which language is ontologically constitutive of the real. Central to this inquiry is how magical realism destabilizes entrenched binaries—subject/object, signifier/referent, representation/existence—to articulate modes of continuity, reciprocity, and relationality foundational to Mesoamerican and Andean worlds. The project further considers how this destabilization challenges dominant Western philosophies of language while resonating with Mesoamerican conceptions of speech as sacred and generative and Andean understandings of language as relational attunement.

### IV. RESEARCH & WRITING PLAN

Addressing these questions requires an interdisciplinary methodology. While grounded in literary criticism—particularly close reading, formal analysis, and genre theory—the thesis also draws on decolonial theory, Indigenous studies, philosophy, religious studies, philosophy of language, linguistics, and comparative literature. An initial task is to determine whether to adopt a comparative framework linking Mesoamerican and Andean cosmovisions and literary traditions, or to focus on a single regional constellation. To refine the project's scope and clarify its central claim, the early research phase will prioritize close reading and comparative analysis of primary texts by Carlos Fuentes, Juan Rulfo, Elena Garro, and Miguel Ángel Asturias, with the provisional inclusion of José María Arguedas, Alejo Carpentier, and Sara Gallardo. This phase will be followed by targeted engagement with scholarship on Indigenous Mesoamerican and/or Andean cosmovisions, Latin American philosophy and decolonial thought, and philosophies of language—particularly the work of Miguel León-Portilla, James Maffie, Rodolfo Kusch, Jane H. Hill, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, in dialogue with critical scholarship on magical realism and the Latin American marvelous.

### V. WORKING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Primary Literary Texts

- I. *Aura*
  - A. Fuentes, Carlos. *Aura*. Ediciones Era, 1962.
  - B. This Gothic novella destabilizes linear time, fixed identity, and representational realism through erotic obsession and uncanny doubling. Desire functions as a metaphysical force collapsing life and death, past and present, self and other, exemplifying Mexican magical

realism as a relational, recursive metaphysics aligned with Mexica cosmology and philosophy.

- II. ***Instinto de Inez***
  - A. Fuentes, Carlos. *Instinto de Inez*. Alfaguara, 2001.
  - B. This late philosophical novel interweaves desire, memory, music, and mortality across historical and mythic registers, foregrounding language as world-constituting. Its transhistorical correspondences echo Mesoamerican mythic structures and a Mexica-inflected dual ontology, offering a framework for examining relational temporality, desire, and being beyond the present.
- III. ***Pedro Páramo***
  - A. Rulfo, Juan. *Pedro Páramo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955
  - B. A foundational work of Mexican literature, *Pedro Páramo* dissolves boundaries between life and death, past and present through fragmented temporality and a polyphony of the dead. Memory and presence persist beyond biological life, articulating a cosmivision in which human, nonhuman, and dead coexist within a single continuum resonant with Mexica perspectives on mortality.
- IV. ***Los recuerdos del porvenir***
  - A. Garro, Elena. *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. 2nd ed., Joaquín Mortiz, 1977.
  - B. This novel constructs a collective, memory-driven narrative shaped by cyclical violence and desire, privileging recursion over linear history. Its collective voice and non-individualist subjectivity align with Indigenous Mexican cosmo-ontological models of shared memory and temporal continuity, placing the text in close dialogue with Mesoamerican philosophy and cosmology.

### Books & Monographs

- I. ***Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs***
  - A. Bierhorst, John. *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs*. Stanford University Press, 1985.
  - B. León-Portilla, Miguel, ed. *Cantares mexicanos*. Tomo 1, del folio 1r al 42r. UNAM, 2011.
  - C. *Cantares Mexicanos* is a central primary source for Mexica/Nahua metaphysics and philosophy. Embedded in ritual practice, the songs articulate a cosmology in which language, spirituality, and cosmic order are inseparable; their use of *difrasismos* is key for analyzing Mexica non-dual philosophies of language and being.
- II. ***Magical Realism and Literature***
  - A. Warnes, Christopher, y Kim Anderson Sasser, eds. *Magical Realism and Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
  - B. This volume offers a critical framework for magical realism grounded in indigeneity, alterity, temporality, space, and belief, with several chapters directly engaging the cosmological and epistemological concerns central to the thesis.
- III. ***Realismo mágico, cosmos latinoamericano: teoría y práctica***
  - A. Bautista Gutiérrez, Gloria. *Realismo mágico, cosmos latinoamericano: teoría y práctica*. Librería-Editorial América Latina, 1991.
  - B. This monograph frames magical realism as a specifically Latin American cosmivision rather than a stylistic device, grounding readings of magical realist texts in embedded cosmo-ontological frameworks aligned with Indigenous metaphysics and philosophies of language.
- IV. ***Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative***
  - A. Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

- B. This foundational study reads magical realism as a ritual or shamanic mode oriented toward re-enchantment and collective repair, identifying core formal features that frame the mode as cosmological and spiritually reparative rather than merely aesthetic.
- V. ***Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion***  
 A. Maffie, James. *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*. University Press of Colorado, 2014.  
 B. This work presents Mexica philosophy as a metaphysics of motion (*ōllin*), process, and relational becoming grounded in a dynamic, non-dual ontology, providing essential grounding for linking magical realism and Mexica thought to Latin American ontologies of becoming central to the thesis.
- VI. ***América profunda***  
 A. Kusch, Rodolfo. *América profunda*. Editorial Nuevo Mirador, 1962.  
 B. This work critiques Eurocentric metaphysics by articulating an American ontology grounded in Indigenous and popular modes of inhabiting the world. Kusch's concepts of *estar* versus *ser*, existential rootedness, and communal, affective being provide a core framework for the thesis's engagement with Indigenous cosmology and relational ontology.
- VII. ***El pensamiento indígena y popular en América***  
 A. Kusch, Rodolfo. *El pensamiento indígena y popular en América*. Editorial ICA, 1971.  
 B. Extending *América profunda*, this work analyzes symbolic logic, ritual knowledge, cosmological ethics, and collective ontology, grounding Indigenous cosmologies as ontologically generative philosophical systems and further developing Kusch's theory of *estar*, central to the thesis's analysis of becoming.
- VIII. ***Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology***  
 A. Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*. Edited and translated by Peter Skafish, University of Minnesota Press, 2014.  
 B. This text advances Amerindian perspectivism as an alternative to Western metaphysics, articulating a multinaturalist ontology in which perspectives constitute worlds. By rejecting representational epistemology and redefining anthropology as conceptual translation, it provides a core framework for reading magical realism as a literary site of ontological plurality and contestation.

### Scholarly Articles & Essays

- I. **“Cosmopolítica indígena en los Andes: Reflexiones conceptuales más allá de la ‘política’”**  
 C. de la Cadena, Marisol. “Cosmopolítica indígena en los Andes: reflexiones conceptuales más allá de la ‘política’.” *Tabula Rasa*, no. 33, 2020, pp. 273–311, <https://doi.org/10.25058/20112742.n33.10>.  
 D. This article reconceptualizes politics through Andean Indigenous ontologies that recognize nonhuman beings as political agents, framing Indigenous worlds as political–cosmological formations and providing a theoretical basis for the thesis's reading of magical realism as literary cosmopolitics grounded in ontological plurality.

### Additional / Potential Works (Books & Monographs)

- I. ***Hombres de maíz***  
 A. Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *Hombres de maíz*. Editorial Losada, 1949.
- II. ***Los ríos profundos***  
 A. Arguedas, José María. *Los ríos profundos*. Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1978.
- III. ***La semana de colores***  
 A. Garro, Elena. *La semana de colores*. Universidad Veracruzana, 1964.
- IV. ***El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo***

- A. Arguedas, José María. *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*. Editorial Losada, 1971.
- V. ***Eisejuaz***  
A. Gallardo, Sara. *Eisejuaz*. Editorial Sudamericana, 1971.
- VI. ***Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community***  
A. Zamora, Lois Parkinson, y Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Duke University Press, 1995.
- VII. ***Realismo mágico y primitivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo y García Márquez***  
A. Camayd-Freixas, Erik. *Realismo mágico y primitivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo y García Márquez*. University Press of America, 1998.
- VIII. ***La filosofía náhuatl: estudiada en sus fuentes***  
A. León-Portilla, Miguel. *La filosofía náhuatl: estudiada en sus fuentes*. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1966.
- IX. ***Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas***  
A. Schroeder, Shannin. *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*. Praeger, 2004.
- X. ***The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies***  
A. Bassett, Molly H. *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies*. University of Texas Press, 2015.
- XI. ***Transculturación narrativa en América Latina***  
A. Rama, Ángel. *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982.

#### Additional / Potential Works (Scholarly Articles & Essays)

- I. ***Prólogo a El reino de este mundo***  
A. Carpentier, Alejo. "Prólogo." *El reino de este mundo*. Edición y Distribución Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1949.
- II. ***"El alma en llamas: visiones mesoamericanas de Pedro Páramo"***  
A. Arce, B. Christine. "El alma en llamas: visiones mesoamericanas de *Pedro Páramo*." *Chasqui: Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2013, pp. 147–164.
- III. ***"When Opposites Unite: Fuentes' La muerte de Artemio Cruz"***  
A. Longo, Teresa. "When Opposites Unite: Fuentes' 'La muerte de Artemio Cruz'." *Chasqui: Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1991, pp. 87–94.
- IV. ***"El movimiento en Pedro Páramo: creencias y motivos indígenas"***  
A. Gacińska, Weselina. "El movimiento en *Pedro Páramo*: creencias y motivos indígenas." *Revista de Letras*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2018, pp. 93–106.
- V. ***"Without Sin, and with Pleasure': The Erotic Dimensions of Fuentes' Fiction"***  
A. Faris, Wendy B. "'Without Sin, and with Pleasure': The Erotic Dimensions of Fuentes' Fiction." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1986, pp. 62–77.
- VI. ***"The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan"***  
A. Hill, Jane H. "The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan." *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 48, no. 2, Summer 1992, pp. 117–144.
- VII. ***"The End of Magical Realism: José María Arguedas's Passionate Signifier (El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo)"***  
A. Moreiras, Alberto. "The End of Magical Realism: José María Arguedas's Passionate Signifier ('El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo')." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1997, pp. 84–112.
- VIII. ***"Cosmovisión mítica en Los ríos profundos: conceptualización de luz y música"***  
A. García-Antezana, Jorge. "Cosmovisión mítica en *Los ríos profundos*: conceptualización de luz y música." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, no. 43–44, 1996, pp. 301–311.
- IX. ***"Pan-American (Re)Visions: Magical Realism and Amerindian Cultures"***

- A. Walter, Roland. "Pan-American (Re)Visions: Magical Realism and Amerindian Cultures in Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*, Gioconda Belli's *La mujer habitada*, Linda Hogan's *Power*, and Mario Vargas Llosa's *El hablador*." *American Studies International*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1999, pp. 63–80.
- X. **“With One Lip, with Two Lips’: Parallelism in Nahuatl”**
  - A. Bright, William. “With One Lip, with Two Lips’: Parallelism in Nahuatl.” *Language*, vol. 66, no. 3, Sept. 1990, pp. 437–452.