

Cultural Identity through Magical Realism: Through the Looking Glass of Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude

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Abstract: *Magical realism is the genre which deals with questioning of reality, rationality and progress, identity, magic and myth in relationship with particular contextual and political reflections. In this paper the researcher is about to deal with Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude through textual analysis method.*

Keywords: *Magical Realism, Latin America, Culture, Reality, Modernity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Until the mid-1960s, the journalist and the writer Gabriel José Garcia Marquez was not popular outside his native, Colombia. He did not sell more than 700 copies of any of his books. But things changed when he had a sudden vision while he was driving through the roads of Mexico. He visualised a key to an imaginary village called Macondo while reimagining the storytelling technique of his grandmother. He returned home and rushed directly to a back room to write what has since been recognized as a masterpiece all over the world. The copies of the first edition of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* were sold out even before they were kept in the shelves. Later it was translated into more than thirty languages. In addition to creating a career for the author, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was also one of the major works in the "Boom" of the Latin American literature.

The extraordinary achievement of the novel also enabled Garcia Marquez to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. The central idea of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the history of the Buendía family which continues for many generations. They are the creators of the fictional Colombian town, Macondo. Along with that, the story also revolves around the social, political and economic turmoil of the hundred years of the Latin American history.

The global acclaim received by the novel has led to an unearthing process by critics and readers of other Latin American writers to taste more of "magical realism." This genre intertwines realistic sketches of social and political conflicts with the notes of supernatural and mystical events. Garcia Marquez is considered as one of its leading experts, although he states that everything in his work of fiction has a deep root in reality. However, his inventive representation of his motherland is one of the major reasons which has made the most celebrated writers in the modern world.

When being interviewed for a magazine Marquez said, "Clearly, the Latin American environment is marvelous. Particularly the Caribbean.... To grow up in such an

environment is to have fantastic resources for poetry. Also, in the Caribbean, we are capable of believing anything, because we have the influences of [Indian, pirate, African, and European] cultures, mixed with Catholicism and our own local beliefs. I think that gives us an open-mindedness to look beyond apparent reality."

What is Magic Realism?

Magic realism is "a style of writing or technique that incorporates magical or supernatural events into the realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events" as defined by the Columbia Encyclopedia. It inquires the very nature of reality and draws attention to the act of creation with the usage of new combinations of fact and fancy.

The term 'magical realism' was first used in 1925, by Franz Roh, the well-known German art critic. He attempted to define a return to a very realistic version after the abstraction of Expressionism. In the early stages, the movement 'magical realism' began with the Latin-American authors and their description of reality added with magical and extraordinary elements to showcase their society and culture as lively and complex. It is considered to begin from the 1940s by the Spanish American authors like Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Angel Asturias with their representative novels *The Kingdom of this World* and *Men of Maize* respectively. These writers utilized many aboriginal aspects like myths, cultural beliefs, and folklore along with particular political as well as geographical landscape.

Most recurring features of the novels from this genre include slaves being helped by the dead, human characters change into animals, time moving backward and so on. The movement became famous in English literature with the emergence of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1970. Few female writers also experimented with this technique. Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison and Laura Esquivel are some among them. Salman Rushdie and Sherman Alexie are the male writers who used this technique to name a few.

One Hundred Years of Solitude

The epic novel of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tells us the very history of the native South American family called Buendias. The narrative style is not just a genealogical fiction. It is also an autobiographical and a historical allegory in the meantime.

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CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH MAGICAL REALISM: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF MARQUEZ'S ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

The novel not just belongs to multiple genres but it also deals with various themes such as death, love, history, solitude, time, progress, innocence, identity, culture and nature. The novel's reputation does not depend upon the great space of its main idea, nor in the originality and the poetical style of the work; but in the universal connectivity of the concepts it plants. 'Culture' is one of such great idea planted throughout in the novel. Marquez sees culture as antagonised to development while drawing his portrayal of history where development inescapably overcomes and then demolishes culture once and for all. It does it by alluring and disordering the individual and eventually the collective memory of the people of the culture. Insomnia plague is the major key used as one of many events in the novel. They help the reader to extract Marquez's concept of Culture. To maintain the clarity of thoughts this analysis takes up only the major incidents from the text.

Analysis & Results

Culture is based on the hierarchies of values and their opposites. For instance, Good/Evil, Work/Home and Sin/Virtue. Yet all the above-mentioned oppositions create a meta-opposition. That is mundane/sacred; it controls the steadiness of a culture. All the hierarchies are created only inside a language structure. These are ordered and organized within the mind of the people as a memory by their cultural and historical experiences. Home is an idea believed to be higher than the job In all cultural societies. So the job is done only to fulfil the needs of the home. The job is done only for home. But in the capitalist society, people are situated to forget this simple hierarchy and eventually, it is registered backwards in their collective memory. It makes the job to exist as the sole purpose of life.

When insomnia gets worse in the village, amnesia begins to take over and gradually it results in all the inhabitants starting to forget the names of things and their uses. To come up with a solution to solve the problem; Jose Aracadio Buendia notes down the names of things and their uses on papers and pastes them onto those specific things. To mention an example, Jose Aracadio Buendia hung a sign the neck of a cow saying, "This is a cow. She must be milked in the morning so that she will produce milk, and milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk (García, 1978)."

A cow is not a product, it is a living creature. The people of the villagers take care of it and take milk from it as a return. Even though it makes sense, in a traditional society, the cow is a lot more than an object which could be benefited from. The cow is considered to be a part of life in many societies and it is considered to be sacred. When its sacredness is removed, it is reduced into a machine which produces milk, with no regard for its life. Sadly, this pathetic state is not just limited to animals and things. It is disastrous to the entire conventional worldview.

When time passes the situation gets worse in Macondo by the effect of the insomnia plague. Because when the villagers start to lose their memories they have also started to lose their identities as well since identity is a collection of ideas one create. It results in losing the sense of who they were and what they wanted to be. Since they only follow the notes and instructions to carry on a daily routine, the people

start to become more like the machines which follow commands. The seriousness of the issue can be understood when the family members become mere descriptions, "Where a father was remembered faintly as a dark man who had arrived at the beginning of April and a mother was remembered only as the dark woman who wore a gold ring on her left hand." (García, 1978)

A fortune teller called Pilar Ternera who used to tell the future of the people, started telling their past since no one is interested about their future. Because without knowing their past, they do not have any reason to be curious about their future. It makes the reader to realize that one's future is meaningless without their past.

The situation reaches the point when Jose Arcadio Buendia starts to fear the remembrance of God at one point. So to escape from the effects of amnesia they fix a signboard which says 'GOD EXISTS.' Yet to knowings His existence like a newsfeed is not even similar to experiencing the holiness of Him. The novel criticizes the image of the modern world. When a society is occupied by modernity everything becomes like a mere functionality, as an object without a life. The modern world is the example of a society without any culture, identity and meaningful communication.

These are just some best examples from the countless many from the novel sketching the cultural meaning of things; the very loss of their sacredness with their historical and metaphorical groundings.

II. CONCLUSION

The genre of magic realistic literature works with politicized readings, following the so called 'Boom' period of 1960s. Even though there are many authors like Carpentier, Fuentes, Lous Borges, Isabelle Illende and Laura Esquivel who presented magical realist elements, it is Garcia Marquez who stands out in the frontline with his literary power. These are just some best examples from the countless many from the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* sketching the cultural meaning of things, and the very loss of their sacredness with their historical and metaphorical groundings.

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