

Away from Marquez's 'Magic Realism'

*Critical Essay

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Gabriel Garcia Marquez was a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, a screenwriter who eventually is considered one of the most significant authors of the 20th century. It is often said that the works of Colombian novelist and short-story writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez are quintessential examples of 'magic realism': fiction that integrates elements of fantasy into otherwise realistic settings. The deep sense of fatalism expressed in Garcia Marquez' works has been interpreted by critics as "a metaphor for the particular part that ideology has played in maintaining historical dependence in Latin America." Not only are the characters victims of underdevelopment and social injustice, but they themselves also continue to perpetuate these conditions, as well as the ideology that reinforces them. Marquez actually did not coin this term or invent this genre for that matter. The term 'Magic Realism' was coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe "a magic insight into reality." But Marquez definitely made it his own genre. In fact, at the articulation of Marquez's name, the term which immediately crosses the readers' mind is magical realism. Marquez's imagination, human insight, and literary skill, more than his genre, provide the best explanation for his art and popularity. As observed by one critic, "The magic realism in Garcia Marquez's novel forms a broad and diverse spectrum ranging from the literally extraordinary though nonetheless possible to the farthest extremes of the physically fabulous and unlikely" (Bell-Villada, 2002, p.108).

'Magical realism', Marquez once famously said, "expands the categories of the real so as to encompass myth, magic, and other extraordinary phenomena in nature or experience which European realism excluded". From this very notion, we must expand the realm of his political positions on Cuba, the US, and much else to accord with that expanded conception of reality. Carpentier (1995) who coined the term 'Lo Real Maravilloso Americano' referred to magic realism as, seemingly miraculous occurrences in Latin America. He opines, "The marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace" (Carpentier, 1995, pp. 102-104). One observer thus put it: "*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a text which Latin America had to write in order to understand itself." Marquez, with his captivating narrative style, examines the ordinary events and details of the exiled Latin American characters by combining realistic, everyday details with the elements of fantasy, folk legends, and stories of magic. Equally typical of Latin America is the work's literary style, which came to be labeled as magic realism - magical elements used in otherwise realistic situations. The style, popularized by Garcia Marquez, was influenced by European and North American modernism as well as the Cuban Vanguardia. According to Ashcroft et al. (1989), "Magic Realism is a concept first conceived by the critics in the 1920s and 1930s as the contribution to the development of black consciousness and their suppression by the colonizers" (Ashcroft et al.,

1992, p.122). Zamora and Faris also views the thing in the same way. They also mention that "Magic Realism originated as an antagonistic reaction to the European Rationale to demean the dignity of the colonized people" (Zamora & Faris, 135-136).

Luis Leal, an internationally recognized scholar defines Magic Realism as "an attitude toward the reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles in closed or open structures" (Leal, 1995, pp. 119-123). That is why it can be said that Garcia Marquez clearly saw himself as a representative of Latin American magic realism. When he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, he said, "I have the impression that in giving me the prize, they have taken into account the literature of the sub-continent and have awarded me as a way of awarding all of this literature." Marquez once said, "A person does not die when he should but when he can." Had he truly meant it, he would have chosen to die much later. However, death comes when it comes. Marquez is dead. True, but who will carry the legacy of Marquez's brand of magic realism in the coming days? With Marquez leaving for eternity there sure will be a vacuum in the world of magical realism writing. He also taught us one important lesson about the genre of magical realism and that is: develop your style and technique based on all that has happened in your life rather than imitate. Garcia likes the principles of surrealism but not the surrealists themselves. Given a choice, he prefers the painters to the poets, but he does not think of himself as being like any of them. And it is true that his work is based more on the anecdote than on the symbolic or random flow of events so important to the surrealists; true also that his aim is to be accessible, not obscure. And yet, a surreal quality, a rendering of the improbable and impossible as real, pervades his work.

The three common elements, found across many of his works are the theme of solitude, the setting of a village called 'Macondo' and 'La Violencia' (which refers to a brutal civil war between conservatives and liberals that lasted till the 1960s). No wonder these elements helped him to create stories that would eventually chronicle a nation's life, culture, and history. By the time Garcia Marquez and his fellow members of "el boom" in Latin-American fiction came to maturity, the re-emergence of the fantastic heritage in fiction appeared no less revolutionary than the region's politics. In a number of his works, he experimented with a less traditional approach to reality. As a result, an unusual event has been described rather too ordinarily. In his writings, there are the ingredients of pure realism too. But for which one would you compliment him? Realism or magic realism? Of course, we compliment him for his thoughts, patterns, and techniques, for his type of magical realism. His famous short story 'Light is like water' shows his type as a magical realist writer. And the fascinating bit is that Marquez's magical realism in many places sprang out of bizarre incidents unfolding in ordinary circumstances. Added to that is his deliberate use of folk tales, myth, and history to entertain his readers by giving them the feel of realism which seems more of Marquez realism than magical. The most talked-about example in this regard (especially among students) is the physical and spiritual ascension to heaven of a character while she is hanging the laundry out to dry in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Well, there could be endless hours of debate regarding the characteristics of Marquez's magic reality writings. But actually, it can be found in his quotes to be equally realistic as magical. For instance, regarding marriage in his 'Love in the Time of Cholera' he writes: "The problem with marriage is that it ends every night after making love, and it must be rebuilt every morning before breakfast." Look through the words and you'll find clear elements of humor, satire, and magical elements in it. In another place of the same book he says, "Wisdom comes to us when it can no longer do any good".

In most cases, wisdom comes at such a time when there is little or no use for it. Probably the funniest among all is about fiction, of which he says, "Fiction was invented the day Jonah arrived home and told his wife that he was three days late because he had been swallowed by a whale", and the cleverest one is perhaps: "One can be in love with several people at the same time, feel the sorrow with each, and not betray any of them." The most important Spanish-language author since Miguel de Cervantes, Garcia Marquez's powerful impact on the literary world will never be forgotten for another reason: style. If you go through the books then you are to notice that he is one of those who never stuck to a particular style when it comes to writing. The magic of this is that one way or another he was capable

of creating a huge readership. There is even an important commentary by him that is worth mentioning: One does not choose the style. You can investigate and try to discover what the best style would be for a theme. But the style is determined by the subject, by the mood of the times. If you try to use something that is not suitable, it just will not work. Since they understand how to seduce their readers, maybe that is why writers like him become masters. Take, for instance, the work, 'No One Writes to the Colonel' where the main characters of the novel are not named, adding to the feeling of insignificance in an individual living in Colombia. And the 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold' is a queer combination of journalism, realism, and a detective story. In the end, Marquez may be remembered for his rare talent and contribution to the literature world but that too is very eerily similar to his saying on death— "Nothing resembles a person as much as the way he dies."

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