



MAGICAL REALITY AND SURREALISM IN *ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the element of magical realism and surrealism in One Hundred Years of Solitude. How Marquez's surreal and magical realist elements emerge out in this novel. The function of magic in this novel of Marquez makes the reality more interesting although surreal flight of Remedios the Beauty takes novel in other dimension. Keywords - surreal, magical realism, fundamentalism, homogeneity, fantasy, mesmerism etc.

INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a genre which contains two contradictory terms; one is magic and other is realism. Magical realism is genre which combines the fantastical elements with reality. According to Brenda Cooper, "magical realism at its best opposes fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism, ethnicity and the quest for tap roots, origins and homogeneity" (Bowers 4). In an interview with William Kennedy in 1973, Marquez says, "Surrealism runs through the street, it comes from the reality of Latin America." He means by saying that whatever he has written in his novels is already there in reality. He explained to Kennedy in an extensive interview, why he and other Latin American authors chose to weave fantastical details into their stories:

In *Leaf Storm*, the old doctor sits down to a pretentious, bourgeois dinner and startles everybody by saying to a servant: "Look, miss, just start boiling a little grass and bring that to me as if it were a soup." "What kind of grass, Doctor?" the servant asks. "Ordinary grass ma'am," the doctor says, "the kind that donkeys eat." (*The Atlantic*)



It seems like surreal but not to Marquez. “A man said that in my house,” he said. He believes that Faulkner differs from him on this matter in that Faulkner’s outlandishness is disguised as reality. Although Faulkner was not a magical realist but he found a wonderful and marvellous sense in his world and it is the central theme of some of his best books for an example, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Like Faulkner, Marquez invents Macondo village which is in reality based on his past life. Aracataca is a town of Columbia, where Marquez spent his childhood. As Dr. Harley Oberhelman in his “Two Literary Giants: Gabriel Garcia Marquez and William Faulkner,” suggests:

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the development of the Buendia family through seven generations parallels Faulkner’s creations like the Bundrens, Compsons and Sutpens – many of whom recur throughout Faulkner’s works. Both novelists offer a panoramic view of the vicious circles of civil war and incestuous societal decadence. (Two literary Giants //www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/two-literary-giants-of-the-twentieth-century/all)

“Faulkner was surprised at certain things that happened in life,” Marquez said, “but he writes off them not as surprises but as things that happened every day”(The Atlantic). Despite the influence of Faulkner, *Leaf Storm* is not a derivative work in fact it paves the ground for Macondo village like Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha country, which we later see in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with its uniqueness of narrative style that is told in “third person.” Robert Krotesch in his *Crow Journals* claims that “Marquez solved the problem of how to write in third person without seeming to impose a ‘strict sense of point of view’ and Marquez’s narrative mode had provided the means to ‘forget the conventions of realism’” (Bowers 47). Unlike Faulkner’s work *Leaf Storm* is more surreal, but Marquez gets his best flight in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Marquez makes a jump while narrating the events and these events are filled with surreal and fantastical elements. For instance, the flight of Remedios the Beauty to heaven:

Remedios the Beauty stayed there wandering through the desert of solitude, bearing no cross on her back, maturing in her dreams without nightmares, her interminable baths, her unscheduled meals, her deep and prolonged silences that had no memory until one afternoon in March, when Fernanda wanted to fold her brabant sheets in the garden and asked the women in the house for help. She had just begun when Amaranta noticed that Remedios the Beauty was covered all over by an intense paleness.

“Don’t you feel well?” she asked her.



Remedios the Beauty, who was clutching the sheet by the other end, gave a pitying smile.

“Quite the opposite,” she said, “I never felt better.”

She had just finished saying it when Fernanda felt a delicate wind of light pulled the sheets out of her hands and open them up wide. Amaranta felt a mysterious trembling in the lace on her petticoats and she tried to grasp the sheet so that she would not fall down at the instant in which Remedios the Beauty began to rise. Ursula, almost blind at the time, was the only person who was sufficiently calm to identify the nature of that determined wind and she left the sheets to the mercy of the light as she watched Remedios the Beauty waving good-bye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o’ clock in the afternoon came to an end, and they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her (*OHYS* 242-43).

Remedios the Beauty is the daughter of Santa Sophia de la Piedad and Arcadio. She is simple-minded and the most lucid person according to Colonel Aureliano Buendia. She is the most beautiful character with innocence and like other Buendias she is plagued by the incapacity to love. She lacks the sense of self as she wanders naked in front of the family and has no ability to empathize with others as many people died in her love. She is one of the most inexplicable characters of the novel. Macondo is corrupted by technology and knowledge, Remedios the Beauty is too pure for the world. She believes nakedness is the only natural way and she is the only one who retains her calm and innocence during the tragic disturbance of the Banana plague. The natural smell of Remedios the Beauty produces such anxiety and suffering that “. . . kept torturing men beyond death, right down to the dust of their bones (239).”

Surrealism is the depiction of reality with the help of such tools as automatism, fantasy and mesmerism. The magical realism describes the real world in a combination with a fantastic realm. Overall both surrealism and magical realism appeared as the revolutionary movements that challenged the civilised reality and the crucial role of rationality, considerably influencing the formation of new consciousness in South America and Europe in the twentieth century (<https://ukdiss.com/examples/realism-surrealism-europe.php>).

When Remedios the Beauty gives off a breath, it is perceptible for several hours after she had departed from that place. She provokes a state of intimate calamity, from wherever she passes (237). She always treats men gently, innocently and without any harshness that upsets them. One day, when she goes to take bath, a stranger lifts a tile from the roof to see her. She tells that stranger that he will fall because the tiles are rotten but he says that he just wants to see her. He begs her to marry him but she tells him that “she would never marry a man who was



so simple that he had wasted almost an hour and even went without lunch just to see a woman taking a bath.” After that he tries to remove more tiles and the rotten tiles break and the man cracks his skull on the cemented floor and dies. The angelical innocence of the Remedios the Beauty reminds of piousness of the Garden of Eden. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez keeps returning to varied things such as earth-eating, a plague of insomnia, and ghosts of characters that grow old. His unlikelihood extends to an everyday reality. For an example, Jose Arcadio, son of Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula is shot to death in his bedroom and the cause is unknown. And it is perhaps the only mystery of Macondo that is unsolved. He closed the bedroom and the shot of the pistol is heard in the house. Then:

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendia house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlour, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta’s chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano Jose, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.

“Holy Mother of God!” Ursula shouted.

She followed the thread of blood back along its course, and in search of its origin she went through the pantry, along the begonia porch where Aureliano Jose was chanting that three plus three six and six plus three is nine, and she crossed the dining room and the living rooms and followed straight down the street, and she turned first to the right and then to the left to the Street of the Turks, forgetting that she was still wearing her baking apron and her house slippers, and she came out onto the square and went into the door of a house where she had never been, and she pushed open the bedroom door and was almost suffocated by the smell of burned gun powder, and she found Jose Arcadio lying face down on the ground on top of the leggings he had just taken off, and she saw the starting point of the thread of blood that had already stopped flowing out of his right ear (*OHYS* 135-36).

These surreal lines show unconnected things getting connected as in a dream. They don’t just get connected as in a dream but also contain something extraordinary narrated as if it were ordinary. We see in this dream-like sequence a happening that is improbable although it is described as though it were mundane. The umbilical cord that is mentioned below could mean that connectedness which is beyond the rational in a world where things are magically



perceived. Such a surrealist aspect is seen throughout the novel but Marquez dismisses the improbable quality of it, by saying “It is umbilical cord.”(*The Atlantic*, “The Yellow Trolley Car in Barcelona, and Other Visions” by William Kennedy January 1973 Issue)

Both the magical realism and the surrealism resist the conventional portrayal of reality. They try to give their own way of understanding the human existence. They share many traits, especially the way of presenting and understanding reality but the magical realism and the surrealism are not of the same genres. Surrealism started in the twentieth century and spread in Europe after the First World War. It has its roots in the Dada movement. The literature of surrealism is based on positivism, and also it challenges the traditional structure of understanding art. After the tyranny of war, the surrealists tried to renew the lost culture and art, cohering with realism and truthfulness of expressionism. According to Andre Breton, the founder of surrealism, “surrealism is expressed in the balance between the unconscious and conscious spheres; in this regard, dreams and rationality constitute a perfect reality in surrealist literary works.” (Comparison of Magical Realism and Surrealism <https://ukdiss.com/examples/realism-surrealism-europe.php>)

Magical realism tries to evoke the belief in supernatural things and gives us a different dimension of reality which can only be perceived through the reality projected through a magical perception, not by realism alone. Marquez shows the unusual world of Latin America that is torn between modern civilisation’s technological advancements and primitive state, cultural and social conflicts. Magical realism rejects the notion of rationality, and takes readers to a different realm which cannot be understood rationally.

After reading the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, one begins to wonder whether this novel of Marquez can be read only as a fantasy or as a magical realist text. The answer is probably not because Marquez’s novel is full of political incidents which are based on real life events. As Rushdie says,

When people say magic realism, usually they only mean “magic” and they don’t hear “realism,” whereas the way in which magical realism actually works is for the magic to be rooted in the real. It’s both things. It’s not just a fairy tale moment. It’s the surrealism that arises out of the real. ([//youtu.be/TtxK_y5cBcw](https://youtu.be/TtxK_y5cBcw))

Sam Jordison gives the answer of the above question in *The Guardian* (16 May 2017), he says that we get taken away by the magical description of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* such as the flight of Remedios the Beauty to the heaven, resurrection of Melquiades (gypsy) etc. It is the magic of the novel which keeps it interesting for generations since its publication. The boundary of magic and realism is cleverly blurred. From the starting of this



novel Marquez gives us “several reminders of the tangible material world.” The description of gypsies returned in March and they bring with them things like “a telescope and a magnifying glass the size of drum, which they exhibited as the latest discovery of the Jews of Amsterdam” keeps us in real world (*OHYS* 2-3). There are several hints of reality which are fused with things that seem like magic: “the train line that eventually comes to town is even worse, bringing with it all the baffling and crazy apparatus of market capitalism,” then the strike of banana workers, and their massacre. As Jordison says:

The strike is a good example of the way Marquez makes wider points about our world. The United Fruit Company wreaked similar havoc in Marquez’s home town, across Chile and in numerous “Banana Republics” throughout Latin America. Even the machine-gunning of a crowd is based on a real event.

Hence, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* incorporates many realistic as well as magical and surreal features. Scott Simpkins tells us that magical realists present familiar things in unusual ways to prevent an overwhelming sense of disbelief. For example, amnesia plague, flying carpets, Nabokovian butterflies, etc. He continues:

By doing this, magic realists use what the Russian Formalists called defamiliarization to radically emphasize common elements of reality, elements that are often present but have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity. And through a process of supplemental illusions, these textual strategies seem to produce a more realistic text. (“Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism”145)

Magical realism not only gives us multiple perspectives but it also supplements the reality. Marquez believes that despite many seemingly magical episodes of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, “he was able to write this work simply by looking at reality, our reality, without the limitations which rationalists or Stalinists through the ages have tried to impose on it to make it easier for them to understand (Scott Simpkins 144).” In an interview with Peter H. Stone, Marquez discussed the creation of novel. There he gave certain examples of how he created magic from reality. He says that his grandmother use to tell the stories of supernatural things with complete naturalness, and that is the tone of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. He further tells us that initially he tried to tell the story of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* without believing in it, but, he finds out that we have to believe in stories and then write it down (86). Marquez himself tells about his riddle of Sphinx of writing this novel. His journalistic quality of presenting things makes his novel more real. He gives the source from where he got the idea to create characters like Mauricio Babilonia and Remedios the Beauty. He says:



I remember particularly the story about the character who is surrounded by yellow butterflies. When I was very small there was an electrician who came to the house. I became very curious because he carried a belt with which he used to suspend himself from the electrical posts. My grandmother used to say that every time this man came around, he would leave the house full of butterflies. But when I was writing this, I discovered that if I did not say the butterflies were yellow, people would not believe it (86-87).

We have instances in this novel; wherever Mauricio Babilonia goes, he is surrounded by the yellow butterflies. While talking about Remedios the Beauty, Marquez says:

When I was writing the episode of Remedios the Beauty going to heaven it took me a long time to make it credible. One day I went out to the garden and saw a woman who used to come to the house to do the wash and she was putting out the sheets to dry and there was a lot of wind. She was arguing with the wind not to blow the sheets away. I discovered that if I used the sheets for Remedios the Beauty, she would ascend. That's how I did it to make it credible. The problem for every writer is credibility. Anybody can write anything so long as it's believed (87).

As Scott Simpkins mentions in his "Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism," in an interview which is published as *The Fragrance of Guava*, Marquez says that:

"Realism" (he cites some of his realistic novels as example) "is a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality. However good or bad they may be, they are books which will finish on the last page." A "realistic text is hardly a satisfactory mode, much less an accurate presentation of the thing in itself, Garcia Marquez contends, because "disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself out of all proportion." In other words, Garcia Marquez suggests that the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than a "realistic" text. And this realism is conjured up by a series of magical supplements—such as those of found in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (143-44).

So one can say that for Marquez, realism seems incapable of showing everything which is rooted in reality. He believes that disproportion is equally as a part of reality as any other thing. Magical realism and surrealism seems to share many traits which is like the rainbow in which one cannot draw a line and tell from where one colour starts and it is the beauty of the rainbow as well as the beauty of this narrative technique.



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