



MAGICAL REALISM AS A TOOL OF INDIRECT POLITICAL SATIRE IN ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about how magical realism can be used as a tool for indirect political satire as Marquez has used in One Hundred Years of Solitude. The real incidents and oppression of the Colombia can be seen indirectly and directly in both ways. Magic is deliberately used to make the effect of realism more subtle and deeper in this novel. This narrative technique gives multiple perspectives the oppressive events which are denied by the authoritarians.

Keywords- *super-reality, colonisation, political satire, and massacre etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's writings have been acknowledged, particularly by Western readers, as one of the best examples of magical realism in literary fiction. He lived in the West and was affected by what was unjust in his region. His magical realism is different to the magical realism in authors such as Amitav Ghosh and Ben Okri because he relies more on dream and a surrealist vision—both of which have entered in Western discourse in a greater measure. Both dream and the surreal element are generally linked with realism and myth by Western thinkers such as Freud, Lacan, Northrop Frye, André Breton, etc. André Breton, particularly, linked the surreal with “super reality.” Barbara Howard Meldrum's edited book (*Under the Sun: Myth and Realism in Western American Literature*, 1986) shows how the Western world links myth and realism. Marquez's magical realism is marked by the fact that even though he perceives the world through machinery that is magical, he believes that he is always linked with the real world in some measure. In his world dreams seem to keep man connected with Magical realism is very often the result of colonisation. It is the challenge of the colonised to the coloniser. Whereas the coloniser tries to give the impression that his own culture is superior because of his materialistic advancement, the colonised literary author can try to suggest, through magical realism, that he is spiritually superior. Spirituality cannot be

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understood or felt rationally. It needs intuition and other inner routes to arrive at. Marquez and other writers in this genre try to build a world that cannot be rationally explained. It can be spiritually felt through the force of this category of fiction. They try to suggest that whereas they, the colonised can listen to their inner voices; the colonizers are deaf to these inner and spiritual callings.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez used magical realism as not only a tool of “indirect political resistance” (Bowers 39) but also a colonial resistance. From the starting of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (henceforth to be referred to as *OHYS*) we see that the author goes back almost to the time when the world began to figure in human consciousness: “the world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point (1).” Jose Arcadio Buendia, father of Colonel Aureliano Buendia, took his son to “discover” ice. Here “discovery” is a recent phenomenon in Macondo village. This novel is an indirect political satire also on capitalists, those who maximize their profit on the sweat and blood of common people and after that they deny the existence of those events. They use “logic” to deny justice to humanity and probably that is why Marquez uses this genre as an “indirect political resistance” in a world devoid of logic in its most stark sense. There are many events that seem magical in the novel but they also confirm to historical happenings; if we look at the history of Latin America it is full of bloodshed and oppression. Marquez starts a new way of telling things because realism cannot be relied upon to discourse reality as it objectively is. And this narrative technique, which is called magical realism, incorporates multiple perspectives and multiple realities.

According to some critics, the writing of Marquez loses its political power due to use of nostalgia and magical elements. Others, however, find it a very powerful tool of political resistance in an indirect way. Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s writings are often related with historical tragedies, brutal army acts, civil wars etc. Marquez fused reality with the magical or with the surreal. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether an event is real or not. But it seems that he deliberately created such confusion in his writings. Incidents in the novel are witnessed by a character, though denied by others, just as colonisers of Columbia had denied occurrences that had actually taken place. Bower maintains that due to the denial of these events by the government, they are transformed into “complete ignorance” (Bowers 39):

Suddenly, during the program of the celebration, someone broke the delicate balance. ‘Long live the Liberal Party! He shouted. Long Live Colonel Aureliano Buendia!’ The rifle shots drowned out the splendour of the fireworks and the cries of terror drowned out the music and joy turned into panic. Many years later there were those who still insisted that the royal guard of the intruding queen was a squad of regular army soldiers who were concealing government- issue rifles under their rich Moorish robes. The government denied the charge is



a special proclamation and promised a complete investigation of the bloody episode. (*OHYS* 206)

Despite the promise of the government, the truth never came out and a manipulated version of the story that was propagated suggested that “the royal guard, without any provocation of any kind took up combat positions upon a signal from their commander and opened fire without pity on the crowd.” (206)

It should be pointed at this stage that some of the names given to major characters are shared by other characters, at least in part. Such characters share their family traits too. Hence, it can become confusing for the reader to understand which of the several characters, bearing the same name, is being referred to. It has, therefore, been necessary to use the complete names of such characters instead of describing them with personal pronouns such as he, him or his.

Jose Arcadio Segundo (son of Arcadio) rescued Remedios the Beauty & Aureliano Segundo carried the Queen (Fernanda del Carpio) in his arms. More than twenty people died in that incident. There are other similar incidents which were denied by the government. (*OHYS* 206)

Macondo is a fictional village in the novel where people live simply in harmony. But when the people start coming from all over the world, it gets devastated in the name of development. People come here with their technology and uproot all the naturalness and harmony of Macondo. It seems that Marquez implies not only the manipulation of truth and political resistance but also suggests that the “development” is a very sophisticated tool of the colonizer. People of Macondo are amazed after seeing many marvellous inventions of science. They look at the electric bulbs which Aureliano Triste has brought all through the night. (*OHYS* 229-230)

They become furious after seeing the living images projected in the theatre of a Merchant Bruno Crespi. A character dies and is buried in one film, and then reappears as an Arab in the next one. An audience that pays two cents feels as if it were cheated. It breaks the seats of the theatre. Bruno Crespi’s mayor explains to them that cinema is an illusion. After hearing this, people return and decide not to come again. This description shows the simplicity of the people before the scientific advancement and progress. People of Macondo are cut off from the world of scientific discoveries and inventions. But science and discoveries destroy the order, peace and innocence of Macondo. “Railroad was inaugurated and had begun to arrive with regularity” (*OHYS* 231). Like all the colonialists, people of the other world visit Macondo with their technology and start exploiting the people. “The town transformed into an encampment of wooden houses with zinc roofs inhabited by foreigners who arrived on the

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train from halfway around the world . . . (OHYS 232-233).” “Gringos,” as Marquez called the foreigners, established their equipment and made all the possible arrangements. But no one knew what they wanted. They interfered in everything. They accelerated the harvest cycle and built the dam on the river (OHYS 233). They displaced the old markets with their new bright coloured things. They invaded the whole village and started building their own houses without any one’s permission. There were so many changes in the town that after the eight months of arrival of “gringos”, it was hard to recognize their town. Colonel Aureliano Buendia said: “Look at the mess we’ve got ourselves into, just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas”. (OHYS 234)

Like Dickens, Garcia Marquez had also the potential to create such humour with irony in serious situations. We get similar humour when a young commander of the guard declares his love for Remedios the Beauty and she rejects him simply because of his frivolity. She tells Amaranta: “See how simple he is.” He says “that he’s dying because of me, as if I were a bad case of colic” (OHYS 202). The guard was found dead beside the window of Remedios the Beauty.

Salman Rushdie remarks about Marquez in “Magic in Service of Truth”, that magical realism is not invented by Garcia Marquez. Machado de Asis, Jorge Louis Borges, and Juan Rulfo wrote before him and Marquez was an erudite author. He continues:

Dickens unending court case, Jarndyce v. Jarndyce in *Bleak House*, finds a relative in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the unending railway train that passes by Macondo for a week. Dickens and Garcia Marquez are both masters of comic hyperbole. Dickens’s circumlocution office, a government department that exists to do nothing, inhabits the same fictional reality as all the indolent, corrupt, authoritarian governors and tyrants in Garcia Marquez’s work. (“Magic in Service of Truth”)

Foreigners came there and the Buendia family served them food in their own house. Gradually more and more people started coming there and they “muddied the porch with their boots, urinated in the garden, spoke without regard for the sensitivity of ladies. (OHYS 234-235)” Fernanda was troubled after seeing that many were eating twice.

Gringos arrived in Macondo have neither the gratitude nor any respect for the villagers. After a year of their arrival they start planting banana trees. This banana plantation resembles the incident that occurred in 1928 known as “Banana massacre.” Garcia Marquez used the fantastic version with unbelievable magical happenings of this massacre in this novel. The army shot and killed many strikers who were demanding their rights related to abolition of payment through coupons rather than money, proper dormitories sanitation etc. In fact three

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hundred soldiers were sent in the town of Cienaga, near Santa Marta, Columbia. They set up their machine guns on the roofs of the law buildings and closed the access streets. They opened fire on the crowd and the families including children after issuing a “five minute warning that people should leave.” The number of people killed is still unknown. According to some sources, it is between 42 to 2000 people, but it is not proven yet. (“Fiction as History: The bananaeras and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.”)

A similar incident happened in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Jose Arcadio Segundo witnessed the massacre but no one believed what he saw and it became a “myth of little interest.” Here, Garcia Marquez is playing the idea of denial, which is transformed into complete ignorance” (Bowers 39). This is the way how magical realism works. It reflects the manipulation of reality by a corrupt government and later on it is difficult to believe whether this incident really happened or not.

In Garcia Marquez’s version of the Banana massacre, there were 3000 people who got killed. And it is described as if it is a common thing. Rushdie says “sinister magicians who use their logic to deny humanity.” We can justify any inhuman, insane activity through logic and that is why magical realism is a narrative technique which defies all the logic and conventions. Real incidents were fused with imaginary and fantastical elements in order to create the impression that sometimes magical things seem more real than reality itself (Garcia Marquez).

The magical realism of Marquez also shows the frivolous behaviour of modern man because no one cares what happened to the Banana workers. In between these incidents, Marquez jumps from one story to the other without any clear connectivity with the previous. Another important feature of this novel is that characters die as if they were guinea pigs. The deep emotions of people are rarely seen.

Many people died in the love of Remedios the Beauty. All seventeen sons of Colonel Aureliano Buendia were hunted down. Garcia Marquez indirectly satirized the colonial mentality. He shows colonizers coming there, making the necessary developments and looting the innocent people of Macondo. This happens all over the World wherever colonizers go. Rushdie says:

Reading the works of Marquez, I found myself thinking, how much of these worlds I recognize from my own experience in India and Pakistan. In both places Latin America and South Asia there was and still is a conflict between city and villages powerful and powerless, there are similarly profound gulf between the rich and the poor, the great and the small. Both are places with powerful colonial histories; with different colonialists but the same results. And in both places religion is of great importance and God is alive and so, unfortunately, are

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the godly. I knew García Márquez's colonels and generals, or at least their Indian and Pakistani counterparts; his bishops were my mullahs; his market streets were my bazaars. His world was mine, translated into Spanish. It's little wonder I fell in love with it — not for its magic (although, as a writer reared on the fabulous “wonder tales” of the East, that was appealing too) but for its realism. My world was more urban than his, however. It is the village sensibility that gives García Márquez's realism its particular flavour, the village in which technology is frightening but a devout girl rising up to heaven is perfectly credible; in which, as in Indian villages, the miraculous is everywhere believed to coexist with the quotidian. (“Magic in Service of Truth”)

Since *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is full of magical episodes from the beginning to end, it is not possible to mention each and every one of them. However, it is necessary to make a note of some of the major magical episodes which occur in the novel and without which the novel would lose its basic nature. These episodes include the surrealist, the dream-worlds, the intuitive parts, clairvoyance etc. The real incident of massacre is shown in this novel in a great detail, but this story contains realistic details. Marquez tries to bring out those details in the novel which were wiped out by the authoritarian government. Hence magical realism could be considered as the tool which can be used as indirect political satire.

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