

# Magic-Realism and Marquez

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A brief glance of modern critical theory may suffice to show that a large number of critical terms in literature are borrowed from painting. Magic-Realism is also one of these terms. In painting, it is marked by “a use of skill, sharply defined, smoothly painted images of figures and objects depicted in a somewhat surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects are often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic with a certain dream like quality.

Later, the term was caught on in literary circles and was frequently used by critics. By 1980s, it had become a well-established label for some forms of fiction. Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction are “ the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or strange, skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic descriptions, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable”.

The major exponents of this kind of fiction are Argentinean Luis Borges, Colombian Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Cuban Alejo Carpenter. Others who experimented in this technique and got success are Gunter Grass, Emma Tenant, Angela Carter, John Fowles and Sulman Rushdie.

The key practitioners of Magic-Realism are South American writers but they do not appear to be fond of this term. Norman Thomas de Giovanni, who has translated much of the work of Borges, described it as a pernicious phrase rejected by every South American writer of his acquaintance; and over whose meaning there is no agreement

whatsoever. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' popularized the term in Europe and North America, does not like to be considered a writer of Magic-Realism. He claims only to be realist without much exaggeration in his work. He states, "As the final judgment runs, the source of all creation is reality".

On the other hand, European and North American critics insist on the appropriateness of the term Magic-Realism aptly coined for these writers. Their stance is not mistaken, as the incidents related by South American writers are also true when they claim that these narratives are not based totally on free working of the writer's imagination but on the social and political realities itself. Infact this difference of opinion rises from socio-cultural and political differences of Latin American countries from the rest of the Western world. Marquez often maintains, "Things which cause astonishment to Europeans are very much ordinary matters of routine life for Columbians".

In "One Hundred Years of Solitude" for example, the banana company treats its workers so badly that they all go on strike. They assemble in the main square of the town, where the government has them surrounded by soldiers armed with machine guns. When the crowd refuses to disperse, the order is given to open fire, and three thousand people are killed. Their corpses are, then, put into the trains and sent off to the sea, and the whole incident is officially denied to the point that Jose Arcadio Segundo finds it impossible to persuade anyone that it has taken place. For a European observer, the ability of a government to hide such incidents is indeed unbelievable. However, in Latin America, as well in the most of the third world countries, the situation is still worse than can be imagined.

To the eye of European and North American common sense, the career of the Central character in "One Hundred Years of Solitude" Colonel Aureliano clearly belongs to the realm of magic and fantasy and not of reality. For, in the course of his career he,

" Organized thirty two armed uprisings and he lost them all, he had seventeen male children by seventeen different women and they were exterminated one after the other in a single night..... he survived fourteen attempts on his life, seventy three ambushes and a firing squad. He lived through a doze of strychnine in his coffee that was enough to kill a horse. He refused the Order of Merit... He rose to be the commander in chief of the revolutionary forces with jurisdiction and command from one border to the other and the man most feared by the government... Although he always fought at the head of his men, the only wound that he received was the one he gave himself. He shot himself in the chest with a pistol and the bullet came out through his back with out damaging any vital organ".

Andre Breton, the self-appointed head of French surrealism said that there was really no point in trying to spread his movement to South America. Life there, already possess a surreal quality, which Europeans could only dream of. Albert Camus also noted and described two strange matters during his visit to Mexico i-e the celebration of the Day of the Dead and museum of mummified corpses.

If what Breton and Camus saw was anything like life in Garcia Marquez' Macondo, they were obviously telling the truth. Macondo appears to be a town of fantasies and magic. It is a place where strange events are taking place. A man's arm is lifeless as he raised his hand against his parents. Aureliano touched ice and exclaimed, "It's boiling." No body knows the exact age of Ursula, the wife of José Arcadio, who

founded the town. She was already between 115 and 122 at the time of banana plantation.

Sometimes, Marquez creates something which can be appropriately described by the adjective “Kafkaesque”. It is at places, something very much similar to “Catch 22” situation. Such situations and incidents can go perfectly into a Kafka novel with the only difference that in Kafka, a story as a story is not going to go anywhere and its interest lies in the intensified circling around a central focus, which cannot itself be stated while Marquez is less metaphysical and usually intends to move forward.

Early in the novel, a mysterious girl arrives who either cannot or will not speak and whom they call Rebecca. She brings with her the sickness of “insomnia” of which the most fearsome part, as an Indian woman explains, “was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution towards a more critical manifestation; a loss of memory.” Melquiades, a man of letters discovered its remedy but before him, Jose Arcadia has already invented a memory machine in which he has recorded almost fourteen thousand entries. World, in this way, becomes a slave of dictionary as it refuses all possibility of change by overcoming the loss of memory.

It is not difficult to count a number of reasons for these apparently incredible details, which Gabriel Garcia Marquez provides in his work, but the most convincing one is, perhaps the obvious mundane purpose of enabling him to avoid censorship. Isabel Alendy points out, “A censorship-induced symbolism happens in all dictatorships. New keys and symbols are invented to make points, to get round the censors; but sometime, in eluding the censor, a writer may elude the reader too.”

However, Marquez is an exception. He is successful in eluding all possible censor as well as he successfully kept the reader in his charm. He

is a spellbinder who gives his readers an experience of incomparable richness. He is concerned with laws & principles, which establish reality, and to lesson down the harmfulness of reality, he takes the help of fantasy. Thus, he makes the reality and fantasy indistinct and inseparable from each other. Infact, magic and fantasy in his writings is a revolt against the restrictions and the limitations of logic and science; the ratiocinative, and his interest in fantasy is well-expressed in his statement made to Plinio Apulyeo Mendoza,

“I felt my determination of becoming a writer when I discovered that Kafka’s storytelling is exactly like my grandmother’s”.

And the stories of his grandmother possess a strange amalgam of earthly and ethereal, natural and supernatural, real and surreal. It is a great mistake to try to interpret everything in these stories, just as Rosencrantz observes to Guildenstern after one of their meetings with Hamlet,

“Half of what he said meant something else and the other half didn’t mean anything at all”.

What Camus says of Franz Kafka is something without which the central motive of Marquez in applying Magic-Realism cannot be described. It is the very point around which all debate and discussion of Marquez’ art revolves. With the only change of name, the comment becomes the final word on Marquez. It runs,

“The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread”.

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