



## Unique Way of Application of Magical Style of Narration in Marquez’s Literary Discourse

Mohammad B. Aghaei<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 12 January 2014; accepted 5 April 2014

Published online 16 April 2014

### Abstract

Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s extraordinary artistry in blending different stylistic devices for narrating his stories makes him stand out as the only writer whose literary orientation fascinatingly deviates from the narrating norms of the other prominent Latin American writers. His main style of writing is in fact to juxtapose the reality and fantasy in such an ingenious way that every unusual and fantastic phenomenon appears real and believable and carries numerous connotations. His literary discourse possesses in abundance the magical scenes and images and many complex figural devices. In order to depict the multiple dimensions of his society, Marquez has adopted different narrative techniques and styles for his novels, by carefully focusing on the message and originality of the story.

**Key words:** Magical realism; Figural devices

Mohammad B. Aghaei (2014). Unique Way of Application of Magical Style of Narration in Marquez’s Literary Discourse. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(2), 93-98. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/4430>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4430>

Gabriel Garcia Marquez manipulates magical realism as an effective literary technique for representing the realities of his society. Although this technique has been applied by many magical writers in different periods, he employs this technique in a unique way by blending it with other literary techniques such as figural devices, which makes him more remarkably distinguishable among those writers who have taken recourse to the technique of this kind. In fact, his main aesthetic goal

is to mix the fantastic with the real in such an eloquent and realistic manner that everything becomes believable and every trace of the distinction between them is erased in his literary discourse. The key aspect of his writing style is thus the idea of saying incredible things with a perfectly straight face. This kind of literary language enables him to magnify the extraordinary phenomena that are deeply rooted in the culture and history of Latin America. Therefore, every magical and figurative element in his novels serves as an indirect reference to the social realities, historical events and political conflicts of either his country or of the Latin American continent. Because of this, the magical scenes and images and the figurative elements are the organic and integral parts of his literary discourse and are inseparable from his aesthetic scheme and his overall social and artistic vision. He also applies other techniques over which he has a commendable mastery, such as the application of hyperbole and journalistic style of narration, which has gained him a huge following and also made him more prominent and distinctive among other writers of this style. Although other kinds of literary techniques such as the use of symbolic elements, dominated his literary discourse, he does not always follow a predetermined style for the narration of his novels. In an interview with Simons in *The New York Times*, he says that “In every book I try to make a different path. One doesn’t 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 won’t work” (Simons, 2006, p.155). In this chapter, the intention is to indicate how he has organized and developed the narrative elements of his novels such as contexts, characters, plots and other formal features of the texts and how he has applied the literary techniques such as magical realism, journalistic style and figurative language for the structural organization of his novels. Before elaborating on the structural organization,

it is intended first to give a general perspective on the scope of contexts, characters and events or phenomena that his novels cover, and then to explain the salient aspects of his literary style that he has acquired during his long writing-career and the inspiration he has drawn from other outstanding writers.

From 1940s to 1970s, the famous European and American writers, especially those who experimented with novelistic structure and chronology, had a great influence on the Latin American writers such as the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, the Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias, the Mexican Agustin Yanez, the Argentine Leopoldo Marechal and Marquez. These Latin American writers tried to orient their narrative techniques towards a new way of representation of realities. One of the techniques that came into being and changed the direction of the Latin American literature is 'magical realism' which is a kind of reflection of realism in surrealism. Alejo Carpentier was the first one who used the term of magical realism when he recognized the tendency of the Latin American writers to illustrate the realities by means of the extraordinary.

Another well-known Latin American writer who had a significant effect on Marquez's magical writing is Borges whose works have served as narrative models for organizing his novels. The narrative models of 'cyclical time', 'magical things' and 'universe as a labyrinth' that Marquez has applied in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The General in His Labyrinth* have been mainly adopted from Borges's works. Therefore, the common distinctive feature of these writers is that they have treated the reality in the form of magical realism that blurs the demarcation between what is real and what is magic. Certainly, of all these writers applying magical technique, Marquez's name is more brilliant and associated with this technique.

The Latin American society has a particular potential for the application of magical realism; the existence of superstitions and political oppression, effects of colonialism and domination of other cultures made the way flat for the writers to represent the social realities in the form of magic. In fact, magical technique serves as an efficient literary tool for representing them to the world. Because of this, it is not really surprising that this kind of genre of literature is truly rooted in Latin America.

Therefore, Marquez has immensely applied 'magical elements'<sup>1</sup> in his novels, particularly in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Among his novels, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be considered as the most magic realistic one. When speaking of this novel, it is wondered how he came to create such richly composed imaginary world so similar to the real world. Basically, his main purpose in applying this technique is to focus the

reader's attention on the fantastic aspects of extraordinary phenomena such as characters or events and to make them more highlighted. In this novel, he has mostly applied the magical technique for describing the characters. For instance, Melquiades is described with the following statements: "He had survived pellagra in Persia, scurvy in the Malaysian archipelago, leprosy in Alexandria, beriberi in Japan, bubonic plague in Madagascar, an earthquake in Sicily, and a disastrous shipwreck in the Strait of Magellan" (p.6). Another instance is that old Father Nicanor Reyna levitates twelve centimeters above the ground after drinking hot chocolate. As levitating he says: "Just a moment, now we shall witness an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God" (p.85). Marquez melds the grotesque into the fictional world so naturally that no one can suspect about its existence. Gullon says that "Marquez's practice of magic realism in an 'unperturbed expression' renders a 'satiric' style throughout the novel. The stabilized and 'normalized' atmosphere in the novel assimilates marvelous things with village [Macondo] and household events, and converts them into acceptable phenomena which the reader can easily admit" (Gullon, 1987, p.133). Thus, he creates a narrative discourse whose authenticity is related to its oscillation between possibility and impossibility. Example of this type is that, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colonel Aureliano Buendia shoots himself in the chest, and the bullet exits out of his back without injuring a single organ. Although the occurrence of suicide may be possible by shooting, the chance to be alive seems to be impossible. Another similar point happens in this novel when Jose Arcadio goes into the bedroom to change his clothes and later the sound of a pistol shot signals his death and its strange aftermath. This condition is explained with the following statement:

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 parlor, 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, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread (p.135).

Therefore, Marquez fuses the prodigious events with ordinary so dexterously that their combination seems to be realistic, as it is completely apparent in the statement: "This time, along with many other artifices, they brought a flying carpet. But they did not offer it as a fundamental contribution to the development of transport, rather as an object of recreation" (p.31). Although the existence of a flying carpet is obviously a fictional element of the novel, he does not make it appear unreal; rather he places it side by side with equally true events so that they are connected with each other inseparably. Furthermore, he manipulates

1 . See the appendix: *Magical Elements in Marquez's Novels*.

the prodigious events and extraordinary things in such a completely fluid and realistic manner that even characters themselves consider them as normal. For instance, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the encyclopedia describes a stream of blood as the death of husband of a female character and they simply accept it as normal event in their lives. For this reason, the reader never gets confused about the magical things of the novels because they are integrated within the perception norms of the characters in the story.

In this book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez has immensely applied not only magical elements, flashback and forward techniques but also techniques of understatement (litotes) and overstatement (hyperbole). They are used to represent an absolute understatement when describing the incredible situations and overstatement when dealing with the commonplace as in the following statements: "On one moonlight night Fernanda saw a beautiful woman dressed in white crossing the garden toward the chapel" (p.222). "It was an intricate stew of truths and mirages that convulsed the ghost of Jose Arcadio Buendia under the chestnut tree with the impatience and made him wander all through the house even in broad daylight" (p.242). "It was so deep in his body that the cracks in his skull did not give off blood but an amber-colored oil that was impregnated with that secret perfume" (p.252). Other apparent overstatement is that Remedios ascends to heaven one day when she goes out to hang up the sheets. Another instance of overstatement is that Colonel Aureliano Buendia fathers seventeen sons during the war and that all these young men come and stay in the Buendia house for a time.

Marquez installed more himself in Colombia's literature by creating another works that was actually a historical drama entitled *Of Love and Other Demons* published in 1995. As he announced, the novel was mostly adapted from Jorge Issac's *Maria* (1867) that was the best-known and most loved novel in Colombia before the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The novel *Of Love and Other Demons* is one of his humanitarian works in the history of Latin America. Indeed, it basically fictionalizes the social condition of Latin America in the two past centuries.

The story is about Sierva Maria, a twelve-year-old daughter of a decayed family, only child of the Marquis de Casalduero. She and her peculiar parents live in a town near the Caribbean Sea in the colonial period. Her father belongs to the class of decayed nobility. He is a weak man with poor judgment. Her rapacious mother is addicted to abuse cacao tablets and fermented honey. Sierva Maria has been raised by her father's slaves in a shack behind his mansion. On her twelfth birthday, she is bitten by a dog in the public market. No one thinks of her bite until an Indian woman tells the Marquis that the dog that bit her was rabies and those who were bitten by the same dog died. Before long, the dog itself had also died of rabies.

When Sierva Maria begins exhibiting bizarre behavior, no one is quite sure of the cause and everyone starts to give their own view about her illness. No one absolutely knows about it, even the physician Abrenuncio is in doubt about his diagnosis. The Bishop believes that the demon enters to her body and that she requires an exorcism. Ninety-three days after being bitten by the dog, she is locked in a cell in the Convent of Santa Clara by the order of the Bishop. When she later develops a fever, the skeptical physician Abrenuncio says the disease is probably not rabies. Her father brings various folk healers to visit her, but, in contrast, their brutal methods cause the girl to be more sick and raving. Then she is sent to the convent for spiritual cures.

The Bishop appoints thirty-six-year-old Father Cayetano Delaura to investigate the matter. But, in a short time, this priest falls in love with her. When the Bishop realizes Cayetano's hidden love for her, he sends him to care for the lepers at the hospital as punishment. Then, the Bishop takes matters into his own hands and he performs the exorcism on her. After five sessions of exorcism, she is found dead in bed.

The story of *Of Love and Other Demons* actually takes place in Cartagena in the eighteenth century, when the city was under colonialism of Spain and was one of the centers of the Spanish slave trade and colonial headquarter of the Inquisition. The story originally stems from an event Marquez witnessed early in his journalistic career. As a reporter in Cartagena in 1949, he was assigned to make a report about a convent's tomb that was going to be opened till its burial remains could be transferred since a hotel was going to be built in its place. Marquez in Preface of this novel explains that the stone of tomb shattered at the first blow of the pickax and a stream of living hair the intense color of copper spilled out the crypt. The foreman, with the help of the laborers, attempted to uncover all the hair, and the more of it they brought out, the longer and more abundant it seemed, until at last the final strands appeared still attached to the skull of a young girl. Nothing else remained in the niche except a few small scattered bones, and on the dressed stone eaten away by salt peter only a given name with no surnames was legible: Sierva Maria de Todos Los Angeles. Spread out on the floor, the splendid hair measured twenty-two meters, eleven centimeters (Marquez, 1995, p.2). By witnessing this view, he remembers his grandparents' story about a twelve-year-old marquise with hair that trailed behind her like a bridal train, who had died of rabies caused by a dog bite and was venerated in the towns along the Caribbean coast for many miracles she had performed. In fact, these two experiences, witness and his grandmother's story, are the main origins of the novel. Then, he began to reconstruct the life and death of a character named Sierva Maria. In this novel, his style is almost entirely melancholy.

For the narrative organization of *Of Love and Other Demons*, Marquez has blended the journalistic style

with magical realism that is a style of writing that combines realistic phenomena with fantasy. He always emphasizes that the fantasy in his writing is derived from his journalistic approach to the realities of his society. It means that "surrealism comes from the reality of Latin America" (Kennedy, 1973, p.56). Therefore, like many of his earlier works, he also colors this novel with magical elements. By this way, he actually muddies the water of reality from the beginning of the novel. In the preface, he says that he as a journalist witnessed the transferring of the remains of tombs; on the other hand, he says that he saw a skull of a girl with twenty-two meters hair. It indicates that he blends the reality with fantasy; in fact, his presence in the crypt is a reality of his life, but skull with such a long hair is fantasy. There are also other magical elements such as "the smell of onions in girl's perspiration" (p.31), changing of "color of blood" (p.87) or "exceptional size and color of flower" (p.80). Actually, the magical scenes are parts of this story and provide a basis for unfolding the tale of a haunting, bittersweet romance between a young girl and a bookish priest.

The relationship between author, narrator and reader is also apparent from the initiation of the story. The author clearly explains the reality of the event in the preface of the novel. Although he states that the novel is based on his experience, it begins with an unbelievable fact so that even a less skeptical reader would have difficulty in believing. In fact, he builds a novel which is at once straightforward and at the same time utterly magical. He faces the reader with his own judgment what is real and what is not. This is more intensified by the traditional style of its narration that creates an uncertainty about the interpretation of the reality.

Marquez's literary discourse represents the realities of Latin America from different angles by employing and integrating various literary devices or styles in a unique way. He represents them especially by surrealism which is a fantastic mode for the fictional depiction of the unfamiliar facets of the human world. For this reason, he manipulates 'magical realism' along with other literary

devices, mainly figural ones, using them as effective tools in his craft of writing. He applies magical things in such a realistic manner that they seem plausible and real and, as a result, the distinction between magical and real always disappears in his literary discourse. Marquez has also integrated the magical technique with 'hyperbole'. One of his works where this technique has been applied along with hyperbole is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in which the rhetorical exaggeration is utilized for describing some of the characters and events in order to give them a sense of reality. For instance, Melquiades is described in this way: "He was a fugitive from all the plagues and catastrophes that had ever lashed mankind" (p.6). The application of hyperbolic or exaggerated elements thus serves as an important rhetorical device for the depiction of extraordinary people or things in extraordinary conditions. It is indeed one of the principle stratagems that Marquez employs also to give a comic effect to his literary discourse. Events and the personal traits of characters are spectacularly exaggerated and made quite absurdly larger than their realities. This type of style intrinsically causes a defamiliarizing effect on the description of characters and events because it provides a magnifying glass, enabling the readers to conceive the realities better.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Gullon, R. (1987). Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the lost art of storytelling. In G. McMurray (Ed.), *Critical essays on Gabriel Garcia Marquez* (pp.129-139). Boston: G.K. Hall and Co..
- Kennedy, W. (1973). The yellow trolley car in Barcelona, and other visions. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 231(1), 50-59.
- Marquez, G. G. (1995). *Of love and other demons*. (E. Grossman Trans.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.
- Simons, M. (2006). Gabriel Garcia Marquez on love, plagues and politics. In Bell-Villada, G. H. (Ed.). *Conversations with Gabriel Garcia Marquez* (pp.154-162). Jackson, US: University Press of Mississippi.

## APPENDIX

### Magical Elements in Marquez's Novels

Novels	Magical sentences
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	1 And the dead ghost of Jose Arcadio Buendia, who at times would come sit down with and inquisitive attention in the half-light while she was playing the clavichord (277).
	2 She saw it (ghost) because it was a woman dressed in blue with long hair, with a sort of antiqued look, and with a certain resemblance to Pilar Tenera (299).
	3 It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen, but not the slightest
	4 Reaction was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability (328).
	5 It rained for four years, eleven months and two days (339).
	6 It did not rain again for ten years (355). The roses smelled like goose foot, a pod of chick peas fell down and the beans lay on the ground in a perfect geometrical pattern in the shape of a starfish, and one night she saw a row of luminous orange disks pass across the sky (369).
	7 He described him as a cross between a billy goat and a female heretic, an infernal beast whose breath scorched the air and whose look brought on the birth of monsters in newly wed women (369).
	8 And a green and greasy liquid flowed from its wounds (370).
	9 Suddenly there was no fork in the silver chest and she would find six on the altar and three in the washroom (389).
	10 By the noise of the dead people who walked through the bedrooms until dawn (420).
	11 Snakes with twelve rattles, and a turtle with a glided shell who dove in a small artificial ocean (423-424).
	12 An infant born with the tail of a pig, being carried away by ants as (443).
	13 The officer who shoots Colonel Aureliano Buendia and all the soldiers in the squad, one by one, will be murdered, with no escape, sooner or later, even if they hide at the ends of the earth (13).
	14 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 the 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's house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, 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, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amarnata'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 (145).
	15 They found no wound on the body nor could they locate the weapon (145).
	16 Take good care of Papa because he is going to die (152).
	17 Through the window they saw a light rain of tiny yellow flowers falling. They fell on the town all through the night in a silent storm, and they covered the roofs and blocked the doors and smothered the animals who slept outdoors (153).
	18 Ursula took the cover off the pot of milk on the stove, wondering why it was taking so long to boil, and found it full of worms (193).
	19 One day Santa Sofia de la Piedad gave one of them a glass lemonade and as soon as he tasted it the other one said it needed sugar (198).
	20 Against the light from the window, sitting with his hands on his knees, was Melquiades (200).
	21 His mares would bare triplets, his hens laid twice a day, and his hogs fattened with such speed that no one could explain such disorderly fecundity except through the use of black magic (206).
	22 The pot was firmly placed in the center of the table, but just as soon as the child made the announcement, it began an unmistakable movement toward the edge, as if impelled by some inner dynamism, and it fell and broke on the floor (16).
	23 Two nights later Ursula saw Prudencia Aguilar again, in the bathroom, using the esparto plug to wash the clotted blood from his throat (25).
	24 They brought a flying carpet (34).
	25 One day Aramanta's basket began to move by itself and made a complete turn about the room (39).
	26 They realized that they had gone more than fifty hours without sleeping (49).
	27 He really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude (54).
	28 Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground (90).
	29 In the Caribbean he had seen the ghost of a pirate ship of Victor Hugues (99).
	30 The ascension into heaven of the girl who was too beautiful for Earth
	31 The stream of blood racing across the village to tell the woman of the death of her husband.

To be continued

Continued

Novels	Magical sentences
	32 The strange thing is that the knife kept coming out clean...I'd given it to him at least three times and there wasn't a drop of blood (117-118).
	33 Santiago dreams about the soft rain, just like the one that falls at the moment of his death
	34 He was healthier than the rest of us, but when you listened with the stethoscope, you could hear the tears bubbling inside his heart (37).
<i>Chronicle of a Death Foretold</i>	35 She only took the time necessary to say the name...and she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written (47)
	36 Burning with fever of literature, margins written with blood (100).
	37 The town was an open wound (99).
	38 It was said that an accidental bullet wrecked the cupboard in the room, went through the living room wall, passed through the dining room of the house next door... and turned a life-size saint... into plaster dust" (6).
	39 Superstition about combing hair (31).
	40 Symbolism about tress in dream (superstition) (99).
	41 Negative imagery "Lagoon of lost causes" (100).
<i>Of love and Other Demons</i>	42 Human hair grew a centimeter a month after death, and 22 meters seemed a good length for 200 years (4).
	43 Mirror Miracle: She saw her husband in the mirror and said without acerbity: "Who are we to go around giving away horses as presents?"(29).