
Major Project II

On

Understanding Magic Realism in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Anosh Irani's *The Cripple and His Talismans*

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for Award of Degree of
B.A. English Hons.**



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DECLARATION

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I, Vrinda Maheshwari student of Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, hereby declare that I have completed the Major Project-II on “Understanding Magic Realism in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Anosh Irani’s *The Cripple and His Talismans*” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of B.A English Hons.

I declare that it is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for award of any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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This Major Project II titled “Understanding Magic Realism in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Anosh Irani’s *The Cripple and His Talismans*” submitted by Vrinda Maheshwari, Enrollment No. A0706115096, of Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of B.A. English Hons. is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or full, for award of any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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Understanding Magic Realism in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Anosh Irani's *The Cripple and His Talismans*

Magic Realism is a relatively newer form of expression and is used by post-modernists, or post-colonial writers to express themselves in a world that was trying to find itself all over again. The loss of identity, the creation of a whole new world order or even socio-political developments are traced in the genre but by adding a touch of magic in realism.

Magic Realism's innovative and stylized technique of storytelling incorporates fantastical elements into seemingly realistic settings. Magic Realism comes from the world of Latin America. It is a relatively newer style of writing. Created around 1940s, it was Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban novelist who initiated this genre into Latin American Literature.

This research paper shall try to analyze the way this technique was used in the works of Gabriel García Márquez like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and Indian Canadian writer, Anosh Irani's, *The Cripple and the Talismans*. The books will help in evaluating this genre of writing which always seems to be a little too complex. By taking the literature from two colonized countries, the paper will also attempt to understand the impression of Magic Realism in Post-Colonial Countries.

Other authors famous for writing books in this genre are the Brazilian, Jorge Amado; the Argentines Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortazar; Chilean Isabel Allende; and the controversial British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie. Each writer takes Magic Realism and give it their own

personal understanding of the subject. The treatment of this genre can be subjective to culture, social-political scenario, the understanding of the author and even the perception of the audience.

Magic Realism came to actuality in the past 50-60 years, and is fore mostly associated with Latin America. The term was initially coined to explain the art work that was increasingly coming into existence during that time of Latin America's history. After which it was adopted into the field of literature. Hence, it becomes important to make a distinction in the artwork and literature of Magic Realism.

Before Magic Realism was recognized in literature, it was conceived by a German art Historian, Franz Roh. He wanted to recognize reality through a magical lens and create an alternative to the Expressionist movement of the 19th century. His work was characterized by accurate details, photographic elements with clarity and most importantly, a fantastical portrayal of an otherwise realistic and scientific world. Yet, the European genres of Neue Sachlichkeit and Surrealism soon over shadowed this movement which was later on revived by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier.

“Roh saw this tendency as post-Expressionism, a return to figural representation and yet a departure from realism (de Chirico, Picasso, Grosz). Although the movement in art that Roh wrote about was eclipsed by Neue-Sachlichkeit and Surrealism, the concept took hold in literature and film, an appellation for some of the most important creations of the twentieth century in those genres” (Lee 27)

The artistic style of Magic Realism curtailed from the class of Realism which in turn came from the denunciation of the Romantic (idealistic) representation of life after the French Revolution of 1848. Idealization of reality was abandoned and a pragmatic outlook of

reality came to be represented. It took the idea of Surrealism that was gaining momentum in Europe and England after the wars.

“The momentum in the literary movement which also adopted the name Magic Realism moved in an opposite direction, away from Realism toward alternative consciousness and frequently embracing the fantastic” (Kremer 65)

Literature saw “writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism.” Magic Realism tries to incorporate elements of fantastical proportions in a world where the ‘normal’ is continuously changing and adapting, where the ‘normal’ is seen from an unexpected angle, something which Franz Roh referred to as “metamorphosis in perception.”

For example, In Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, the idea that the children born at the stroke of midnight of 15th August, 1947, the time of India’s Independence, had magical abilities. From a strong sense of smell, to be able to travel through shadows seems like an utterly unbelievable feat. Yet, in this novel these magical children play an important role in the social, cultural and political aspects of a newly freed country. The language used by Rushdie and the nonlinear narration takes the reader on a ride filled with fantastical concepts that are almost tangible manifestations in reality.

Understandably, Magic realism can be confused with the genre of Fantasy or mythical writing. It is important to understand the difference between all three genres which may seem the same but are in actuality, quite different from each other. These literary genres seem to share a blurred line of similarities. But, when these are individually examined, remarkable distinctions can be made for each and hence, can be separately understood and can be independently appreciated.

Fantasies are created and bred in alternative dimensions in the universe, where the supernatural or mystical elements is a normal part of life and the world. Magic is a central theme pertaining to fantasy. A few famous examples of brilliant fantasy fictions are *The Harry Potter Series* (J.K Rowling) or *The Lord of the Rings* (J.R. R. Tolkien) to name a few classic children fantasies.

William Bascom's article "*The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives*" defines myths as "tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters.

Myths involve the elements of Gods or mere humans with unimaginable power. They are concerned with the historical and the 'religious' aspect of the stories. Myths are found in traditional 'folklore' of the bygone days when science, technology and other areas of study had not developed much. The myth of Hercules stealing the golden apples can be taken as an example. Or, the use of myths and biblical stories in Milton's worldly acknowledged epic, *Paradise Lost*. In India, the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, the greatest epics of the Indian cultures are completely based on mythological storytelling.

While in the literary technique of Magic Realism, the author retains the normal and natural order of the world, with reality as it is. In this reality, he blends the elements of 'magic' and supernatural in such a manner that it is accepted as something that is a 'normal' part of everyday life. Having innumerable yellow butterflies follow Rebecca everywhere in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is seen as an ordinary occurrence to the otherwise peculiar. The ideas of a ghost of a travelling gypsy in a locked room, the blood of a son that finds its way to his mother, or even the discovery of ice in a world that was still being discovered. The novel of Marquez is packed with such fantastical elements that are so deeply engrained in a

fantastical reality that even a reader finds it difficult to remember at times that these are, in fact, magic realistic elements and not fantastical ones. In Anosh Irani's novel, the unnamed protagonist finds himself sans an arm and hence commences a journey that will take him across the numinous underbelly of Bombay on a journey of self-discovery, meeting unimaginable characters during his expedition.

Although Magic Realism cannot be contained to a single definition. There are a few major characteristics that all of the writers tend to follow. These are not hard set rules but help in giving a more concrete base to the genre of Magic Realism. The narration takes a very straightforward tone. There is no beating around the bush and things are stated as they are. A human turning into a butterfly is nothing extraordinary and is treated as what is normal in the reality of that novel. There is a post-colonial aspect of Magic Realism, more of which will be discussed later on. Hybridity, a feature of post-colonial literature, also shows up in Magic Realism. It is the melding up of things that are unexpected and simple, the reality and the illusion, the amalgamation of the magic and the realist. Time doesn't have a defined nature in Magic Realism. It can be linear, or in a zigzag line, there can be revolutions of time, or time as concept can itself cease to exist. This genre of writing wasn't just about trying to create a work of fantastical proportions. The writers were all trying to experiment with new forms of literature in the Modern Era. In the works of Magic Realism writers, the readers find a lot of allusions and symbols attributed to political events and situations. They are subtly incorporated in the story line. Magic Realism is a way for writers to explore the themes of the horrors of wars, or other perplexing political events in subsidiary tones. An extremely important feature of Magic Realism is perspective irony. The author, at all costs, must maintain an ironic distance from this created world of magic so that the reality is not broken and dissected. If the author tries to explain the

magic, the magic is not there anymore. By trying to contain the reality of a written universe with set rules and style, the entire genre of Magic Realism gets broken down.

“The term “magic” relates to the fact that the point of view that the text depicts explicitly is not adopted according to the implied world view of the author.”

Gabriel García Márquez is considered as one of the pioneers of this literary technique and to talk about Magic Realism without addressing *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967 would be a crime against literature. Originally written in Spanish, the book was translated into English in 1970 by Gregory Rabassa. It was in the year 1982 that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and the novel was even compared to the literary classic, *Don Quixote* written by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Márquez had become successful in creating a distinct identity for Latin America in the field of literature and there would forever be his mark on the field.

Márquez had spent the initial years of his life cooped up in his maternal home. He had always wanted to bring to life the union of superstitions, folklore, magical stories, the history of his nation, religion, and his own personal experiences, that he had grown up with. Writing a novel with so many elements is a feat not many writers have still mastered. Yet, within the span of nine months, Marquez was able to produce a manuscript that so well written, and nothing like what had been published before. Elements like a monotonous cyclic life, a narcissist family, a town without an open mind and most importantly, a narrator whose commentary on the events of the novel are never completely unbiased or made sense. It was a novel which was a fantastical feat in itself and Marquez had been able to in his expertise as a literary genius to bring this to life in the sheets of papers.

When Marquez was asked why the Europeans did not get Magic Realism, he had this to say “This is surely because their rationalism prevents them seeing that reality isn’t limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs.” (Marquez 31)

Garcia had a special affinity for the concept of surrealism. And, true to this understanding of Marquez, a reader realizes that his work is deeply set in the folklores and stories of the bygone days, rather than symbolism or the fluidity of events, something that surrealists are very finicky about. His work is transfused with surrealism and a melding of the impossible as the accepted reality in the universe of his novel.

In probably one of the best books ever in the history of literature, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* narrates the story of the day when the world was still young and was being discovered. Set in small town of Macando, it reflected the history of Latin America, from the liberation of Spanish colonies from Bolivar, to the middle of the twentieth century, the culture and socio political conditions and society where the people are driven by ambition, lust, greed and power. He seamlessly brought together the elements of a stark reality and fiction writing, something that he learned from Alejo Carpentier. In the novel, a reader sees the unfolding of the life chronicle of the Buendías, with the beginning of their life at Mocondo. The society is started by one of the very first members of the family José Arcadio Buendía and sees an almost fantastical and witty representation of the family life. This can be somewhat related to the wandering tribes of Israel which can be understood through their history of family.

The opening lines of the book are not what a reader expects them to be. Without any context, Marquez immediately jumps into the description of the imaginary town of Macondo, which was still a small village during the initial phase of the book. The world, and the

town itself, was so young that things still did not have names. The world, and the materialism that existed in it was being discovered.

“At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.” (Marquez 1)

The novel is written in a nonlinear manner and there is a continuous shift in memory, in time and in space. There is no set linearity in the novel, or the fact there is any constant narration. Time is in flux and the reader is presented with a surreal setting, almost ghost like in perception and with an omniscient tone. A stark feature that of the novel is that Marquez used the same name José Arcadio Buendía for all of the seven generations. While the novel is anti-climactic in the sense that no characters ends up with their true love, the alluring charm of magic instills a sense of wonderment, rather than unhappiness, into the mind of a reader.

Magic Realism cannot be given an exact definition in today's day and age. By trying to contain this category into constricted bubble, the bubble can pop and can render the whole of this literature debatable. Each writer takes this concept and uses it with their own understanding of the same. While Salman Rusdhi wrote of superhuman kids in *Midnight's Children*, Marquez wrote about a talking parrot in *Love in the Time of Cholera* or Anosh Irani's *The Cripple and the Talisman*. The artwork changes with the writer's perspective and, is given a form through each individual writer. But, the basics of this remain the same. They all take inspiration from the Realist tradition of writing, talking of a believable reality, with everyday tasks. Now, Magic Realism comes into play when the author subtly and quite deliberately makes a departure from this reality. He employs the use of supernatural or magic elements to add to the

story. And thus, by creating a work of art where the lines between reality and fantasy get blurred to such an extent that it is hard to wrench them apart, is the work of an author successful. Trying to fathom and explicate one will immediately render the other half of this fusion of no use.

Marquez used his brilliance as a genius and an intelligent writer to incorporate the history of Columbia. By doing so, he was also able to mirror the harsh history that Columbia faced into a more subtle and softer into the novel. The Civil War, about reform and reaction; religion or state; or conjunction or separation directly echoes the war in which Buendio would later on face the firing squad. Somehow the first and also the last part of the novel. Time as a concept does not exist in the novel. A lot of Columbian history makes its way into the history of Macondo. But, instead of dealing with this history in a matter-of-factly way, Marquez decided to introduce the arrival of the railway, or certain businesses, or even the carnivals as things that are exotic or foreign. The people of Macondo distrust the theater, yet believe in the ascension of a maid to heaven. There is no logic. By indirectly referring to grotesque events like La Volencia (1946-1966), Marquez creates a setting that is politically charged in the novel. The character of Colonel Aureliano Buendio fighting against the Conservatives is used to refer to real life incidents of Columbian wars, drug history and other political issues. By weaving a mixed reality of fantasy and fiction, Marquez is able to critically analyze the history of Columbia from a third party perspective.

“Aureliano thought without saying so that the evil was not in the world but in some hidden place in the mysterious heart of Petra ... Intrigued by that enigma, he dug so deeply into her sentiments so that in search of interest he found love, because by trying to make her love him he ended up falling in love with her.”(Marquez 35)

This particular paragraph marks the genius of Marquez who was able to write of the way Aureliano is able to go through his emotions just like one would go through a book, through the pages, one by one. Marquez writes of the ironical way in trying to understand how Aureliano, who was in search of evil instead fell prey to the love of Petra.

Magic Realism can be considered to be “an expression of the New World reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilization, and the irrational elements of a primitive America,” according to Ray Verzascon.

In another novel, *The Cripple and His Talismans*, written by Anosh Irani, an Anglo-Canadian writer from Bombay, the employment of the Magic Realism is very different. He doesn't try to create an illusion but instead, with subtlety adds various unexpected exceptions in the novel. Born and brought up in Mumbai, Irani wrote about the underbelly of this metropolitan city and the incorporated the spirit of Mumbai in the surreal characters that he created.

The novel follows the life of an unnamed protagonist who wakes up and finds that he is missing his arm. He has no recollection and wanders through the city of Bombay to find out what happened and is taken on a bizarre journey to the Ultimate In-charge. The novel is a pseudo-bildungsroman in the sense that a reader is able to trace the life of this man through his memories and is able to understand the impact of life, and its events on his mental and physical health. Whilst on his journey, the protagonist comes across various random and weird characters like a woman who sell rainbows, a giant born out of the love affair between a river and a peacock, and even a coffin maker who makes tiny coffins, for fingers.

The novel does not have a linear plot and this narrator falls in and out of his memories and time, as a concept does not exist. Time is circular, which is characteristic of Magic Realism. Things do not make sense and if a reader tries to make sense of what is happening and why it is happening, the illusion of magic in this made up reality will immediately shatter and the book will not be able to be a fragment of Magic Realism's absurd reality.

By not giving a name to this protagonist, Irani probably wanted to create a character that could be associated with the every man who was trying to figure himself out in a world where loss of faith and belief had become an expected way of life. An unnamed character also adds to the mystic and supernatural charm of the novel.

The novel is a quest for searching for an arm, which can be symbolic of the search of the self for the protagonist. It can also be considered a search for the whole world. By steeping the novel in divinity, folk tales, and surrealism, Irani was able to talk about the idea of illusion in a materialistic reality, something that Magic Realism is trying to do all the time. When the narrator finally embraces the reality of his amputated arm, he is able to accept his own reality and hence, come beyond the physical world.

“A loss of any kind is horrible. Not because it takes away, but because it makes you believe- in newspapers, in tomatoes and in empty whiskey bottles.” (Irani, *The Cripple and His Talismans*)

Anosh Irani, in an interview with Elizabeth Glixman, Irani said that “living in Bombay can be a nightmare,” and a prostitute, a businessman or a street child wouldn't have a similar perspective about it. Irani's *The Cripple and His Talismans* has a narrator who is pessimistic, self-effacing and hence, his perception of Bombay and his own experiences shape how the story will take form. Anosh Irani tried to be very particular about the time period in

which he sets the novel. The entire journey had to take place within the span of few days. It was almost like a treasure hunt like story and each new character introduced would be a propelling factor for the novel's progress.

“I always leave room for God's Plan--the beautiful accidents that occur, that derail you and make your journey of a higher nature.” (Irani 24)

The idea for this book came to Irani as an image. It was the image of limbs, human limbs that were hanging from a dungeon ceiling. This is the main imagery of the novel. The conception of the entire novel itself is very surreal. For Irani, this seemed like an exciting way to create a story that had never been thought of before. With witty and dark humour, he used the genre of Magic Realism and created this story.

Anosh Irani's understanding of Magic Realism is different from Gabriel García Márquez, he finds that balance to be an important part of Magic Realism. The reality needs to be the basis on which the story will stand. By adding witty humour, he is able to give an otherwise dark and cynical story line a lightness. For example, while the narrator's relationship with the prostitute Malika and his overbearingness and possessiveness borderlines on the crazy, yet at the end of the novel, his reaction to her death makes him almost a human. For Irani, it is the story that determines the style of the story. A person who is on a quest to look for an arm can only be understood through the genre of Magic Realism.

The novel seems to be reminiscent of works from authors like Kafka. It has a nonsensical plot line. A journey of a person who is trying to search for his missing arm, losing of which he has no recollection of. The absurdity and ludicrousness in the novel comes from Anosh Irani's personal favourites, the famous playwrights Samuel Beckett and Ionesco. Samuel Beckett

is known for his incongruous, open ended plots. His play, *Waiting for Godot* is considered the benchmark of Absurd Theater. The absurdity of the plot and unconventional characters and the sense of what is meaningless and what is not is something that makes this novel a success.

The novel has a first person narration, and the author uses the concept of a Modern narrative technique, Stream of Consciousness as well. But, not in the original way the narration had been devised. The narrator shifts from one thought to another rather quickly and the thoughts are not always connected and do not make sense. He recalls incidents from his childhood, family situations and school incidents. This all connects in his present reality in some way or another and ultimately results in the loss and the “finding” of his arm with Baba Rakhu.

The novel is proliferated with the use of metaphors, similes, imagery, and even lyrical phrasings of the sentences. The way the novel is written gives a mystical allurement to otherwise grotesque topics like the gory school incidents with Vivek, or the amputation of fingers or the way he beats the prostitute. For his protagonist, he always has reason for why he takes a particular step. This reason can be logical, or illogical but it doesn't matter to the narrator, as long as his work gets done. The way the entire novel is written is suggestive of Irani's own sense of humour which is dark and sarcastic.

“There is an unwritten rule, or, if it is written, it lies sculpted on God's arm. Once your journey begins, you cannot end it. You can propel yourself off track, skid in different mud, but it will only make your journey that much longer.” (Irani, *The Cripple and his Talismans*)

For Anosh Irani, Magic realism is not just something that is a reality detached from its own self, but a reality that is set in a world where the uncanny or the bizarre is an

authentic way of life and if even the author tried to interpret the reality that he had woven, the magic and illusion would break apart and the entire novel would not make sense in any way.

Magic Realism was also born out of a postcolonial understanding of literature. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, there are three ways in which Magic Realism is reminiscent of post-colonial writing - To be able to write from the point of view of the colonizer and the colonized, it is to be able to create a work of literature that grapples with the reality of a colonized country and by giving a voice to the otherwise forgotten or downtrodden, and appropriating the cultural and socio-political history.

Post-colonial writing is a generic and broad term for the literatures that were produced in colonized countries. Yet, a single definition cannot be enough. Postcolonial writing is suggestive of each country that had struggled with the horrors or colonization by the hands of the British, or other nations, but now are free. These writings talk of the social, political and cultural aspect of an independent and freed nation. Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, etc. are few of the famous names in this arena. Each country, or continent, had its own individual experience of being dominated and came out with experiences of their own. A person from Africa, like Achebe, cannot compare his struggles with that of an Indian, like Ghosh. They both have in common the impact of imperialism on their lives, but the end result and the journey and freedom struggle vastly differ.

Magic Realism from Latin American brings into view a very individual experience of the country in the works of Marquez like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the time of Cholera*, and many more. By talking of colonization, in an indirect way with the use of this genre, Marquez and other post-colonial writers are able to bring out a stark veracity which

is a reality for most of the world. Some scholars saw the outcome of magic realism is a natural result in a post-colonial mindset. In Homi Bhabha's *Orientalism*, the idea of the 'self' and the 'other' are representative of the identities of the colonizer and the colonized. The idea of being the exotic 'orient' and magic being an important aspect of this 'unknown' land against the logical and masculine 'self' of the colonized brings forth a reality which is intermixed which is deeply entrenched in this.

Magic Realism is also political in nature in the sense that it takes up the verily truths of the history of a colonial past and brings into view this reality in a magic filled, almost supernatural world based on a reality that has existed in some way. It can be understood as political subversion.

Franz Roh, the initiator of Magic Realism, an artist from the 1920s, said that it seemed like the painters looked at the world through "wonderstruck eyes" and recreated them with a "magical" perspective. These painters tried "to portray the strange, the uncanny, the eerie . . . aspects of everyday reality." What these Post-Expressionists painters wished to do was not to create a new reality, but instead wanted to make the realization that it is possible to see then same thing through varying perspectives.

Post-colonial understanding of Magic Realism brings to life a colonial past of countries like India, Latin America, Canada, etc. Magic Realism is a way to bring to life a reality that in actuality exists but has random and weird elements of magic incorporated in it. The way Marquez talks of the memories of Aurlino Buendio, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or the way the unnamed protagonist in *The Cripple and his Talismans* recalls his life and his past and

how these memories play an important role in the way life has turned out for these characters is an important aspect of Magic Realism.

Magic Realism is something that cannot be understood with mere definitions of literary theories. To actually appreciate how this genre of writing, one must read works of writers who spin these realities in such a manner that it becomes hard to distinguish what is true, and what is not. In the works of Marquez, Irani and other writers, this genre of literature comes to life. Magic Realism, as a genre of Literature is not something one can easily compartmentalize. To truly appreciate the beauty of this, one must make sure to completely let themselves go while reading a book. Only by letting go will a reader allow the author to take them on a journey in a universe where the reality and the fantastical meld together in a way that defies the boundary of the real world order. And, only then will the author be successful when the reader accepts this magic as a part of reality, without questioning this authenticity or raising the question of logic and sense.

By carefully analyzing the texts, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Cripple and his Talismans*, this paper was able to expound the literary field of Magic Realism in terms of two post-colonial nations, Columbia and India, and how the history, the cultural background of the authors and even the socio-political scenarios can influence the works of literature that come under the same genre of writing.

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