



## Literary Techniques of Marquez’s Literary Discourse

Mohammad B. Aghaei<sup>[a],\*</sup>; Safar Hayati<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Assistant professor, PhD. Department of English Language, East Azarbaijan Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran.

<sup>[b]</sup>Department of Social Science, East Azarbaijan Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 17 September 2013; accepted 22 November 2013

### Abstract

The literary techniques of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novels deal with his literary devices and figurative language which he has applied in his novels. These devices basically serve as socio-symbolic mediations that relate the literary text to his culture. For this reason, Marquez has immensely applied the figurative elements in his novels, making a bridge between his works and the world to which he belongs. These elements can be thus interpreted by taking into consideration the cultural aspects of his society. Hence, this article surveys the figurative dimensions of his novels and the intention here is mainly to decode the figurative elements such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole and other symbolic components of his literary discourse.

**Key words:** Signification; Symbolic; Figural devices; Institutionalized discourse

Mohammad B. Aghaei, Safar Hayati (2013). Literary Techniques of Marquez’s Literary Discourse. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 7(3), 94-99. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320130703.2872> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130703.2872>

### INTRODUCTION

The novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in a unique manner, create a metafictional and self-reflective discourse which offers a new way of seeing the realities of Latin America. They mainly fictionalize the socio-cultural

peculiarities through a symbolically institutionalized world in which the symbolic components construct with surgical precision a comprehensive image of the Latin American society. Marquez’s main purpose seems not merely to introduce an aesthetically formulated idea to the mind of the reader but to transform the way the mind perceives realities. He has produced an astutely crafted body of work by manipulating different literary techniques and styles in an original way. Very few writers have so compellingly evoked the delicate nuance of Marquez’s homeland, the joyful richness of Latin American life. In fact, his literary discourse invites the reader to confront a kind of mystification and intrigue; sometimes it puts the reader in a state of bewilderment when he tries to explore the signification of figurative elements and the symbolic constituents that are artfully interwoven within the discourse. Due to the use of various complex figural devices, his literary discourse is marked by rich suggestibility and carries multiple layers of meaning. Therefore, in order to interpret Marquez’s intricate fictional discourse, the reader needs to reconstruct a spatio-temporally relevant image of it by closely following the textual threads and clues and considering the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the text.

Because of the unique cultural aspects of Latin America where the fantastic beliefs abound and dominate the daily affairs of its people and every extraordinary and unbelievable thing easily becomes believable among the community, it has become a privilege for the Latin American writers to treat any simple phenomenon of their society by applying the technique of magical realism. But, Marquez believes that the technique of “pure magical realism’ as it is applied by the Latin American or other traditional writers is not so effective in representing the essence of Latin America. So, he always employs it in combination with other literary techniques, mainly with his exquisite figural devices. This conglomeration of the techniques creates a new style of magical realism that

makes it remarkably distinguishable from the magical style of other European and Latin American writers who have applied it in their works. His masterly manipulation of an incredible variety of figural devices gives an enthralling symbolic structure to his literary discourse in which the social conventions, cultural values, religious beliefs and myths of his country are all presented in a highly provocative manner. Thus one of the distinctive features of his works is symbolic presentation of his ideology and creative conviction through an aesthetically grounded discourse which is aptly constructed by dexterously applying and integrating various figurative elements in a coherent way.

---

## 1. SALIENT FEATURES OF MARQUEZ'S LITERARY DISCOURSE

---

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. An excellent example is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a microcosm that portrays the Latin American continent from the social, historical and political points of view.

One of the profound styles of Marquez is to symbolize the narrative world with the cleverly contrived symbols that are mostly related to the biblical stories, events, figures and settings. He has aptly given an aesthetic treatment to some of the stories, characters and events of his novels by using the source from the holy books Genesis, Exodus and Revelation of the Bible. For instance, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Macondo inhabitants symbolize the Egyptian people at the time of Moses. Its stormy rainfall symbolizes the biblical flood; its plagues symbolize a series of plagues sent by God as punishment; its annihilation symbolizes the apocalypse of Revelation. "One hundred" in the title of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* also parodically carries a Biblical reference. In *The General in His Labyrinth*, the General is characterized as Christ. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the names of majority of characters are adapted from the names or titles of biblical figures. Marquez also symbolizes the local, national and continental places and figures in his novels. An instance is Macondo that is clearly modeled on the village of his childhood, Aracataca. Indeed, the

name of the banana plantation just outside of Aracataca is Macondo. The setting of *Love in the Time of Cholera* certainly refers to a city like Cartagena and the settings of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *No One Writes to the Colonel* resemble that of an inland port like Sucre according to the description of the novels. Furthermore, many of the episodes of the novel are based on events that Marquez has experienced during his childhood, especially with his grandparents. For instance, the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* refers to the episode of Jose Arcadio taking his son to see ice that is certainly modeled on a similar incident when Marquez's grandfather took him in his childhood to see the ice for the first time. The first sentence of this novel, "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (p.1), also refers to the episode involving his grandfather who was a colonel and who fought against the Conservative party and survived various attacks by different groups of people. So, there are several components in his novels which have direct or indirect reference to existential situations of his society and to a significant extent his personal experiences. Hence in order to explore the subtleties and wisdom of his literary discourse, the reader should have the full awareness of the biblical descriptions, socio-cultural aspects of his society and the geographical details of that region.

---

## 2. SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF HIS LITERARY DISCOURSE

---

Marquez's literary idiom acts as an effective tool for reshaping and representing his artistic conceptualization of the world around himself in a symbolically contextualized discourse in which every textual sign is enriched with multiple connotations. The textual signs mainly appear in the forms of "mythical symbols" and "figurative elements" in his literary discourse. In some traditional narratives, the mythical symbols have been applied in the narrative to represent a mythical version of the world. These kinds of symbols were mostly presented in the form of mythological metaphors such as the "sun" that metaphorically represents the eye of the sky or "water" that symbolizes "goodness". Following a similar narrating style, Marquez symbolizes "sun" as knowledge in the novel *Of Love and Other Demons*, when Father Delaura becomes blind in one eye as he looks at an eclipse. Its myth goes back to Plato's period. In Plato's allegory of the cave, the cave dweller attains enlightenment when he leaves the cave and gets the chance to see the sun. Therefore, the eclipsed sun symbolizes the knowledge being covered up, as is seen, happening with Sierva Maria in this novel. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Jose Arcadio Buendia is a symbol of a mythical figure like a Renaissance man with pioneering ambitions and energies;

his son Aureliano becomes a legendary military leader. In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Marquez has applied several other symbols which are required to be taken into account in terms of their mythological originality for their interpretation. For instance, the parrots are used as symbols of prostitution. This sort of usage goes back to the nineteenth century when a number of famous courtesans owned parrots. Possibly, they symbolize courtesans because both are slightly gaudy and they are kept in gilded places. In *The General in His Labyrinth*, the cups and poppies allude to the Host and the wine in the Catholic Mass. In the Christian mythology, the cup is a symbol of God's gift, eternal life, wisdom and happiness. It was also considered as a sacred symbol of chalice used by Christ at the Last Supper; later it was associated with the blood of Christ. In the ancient Celtic legend, it metonymically symbolized revitalization and fertility. But nowadays, the cup is a symbol of friendship and unity.

Therefore, in his novels, Marquez has immensely and dexterously employed the figurative elements not only to increase the aesthetic aspects of his works but also to add more connotative implications to the text, mainly by applying metaphors, metonymies, allegories, ironies, parodies and other symbolic elements. For instance, Macondo is a metaphor for Garden of Eden. In this garden, Ursula Iguaran is treated as a symbol for "Eve" and Jose Arcadio Buendia as a symbol for "Adam".

In his literary discourse, these figurative elements which are seemingly conventional symbols have popular references to the essential features of Latin American society; in fact, their adequate interpretation significantly contributes to the understanding of the cultural, religious and historical aspects of that area. But, sometimes, some of the symbols leave the reader with his own interpretations since they do not have any specific referent such as the "yellow flower" in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* wherein when Jose Arcadio Buendia dies, the natural world weeps for him with tiny yellow flowers. Although these kinds of unusual literary symbols create difficulty in the interpretation of his literary discourse, he intentionally applies them as a doctrine of mysticism in order to give a shadow of reality to the discourse. Thus, his literary discourse actually presents before the reader a fascinating fictional world in which the existential conditions of his life-world are astutely symbolized and hence the reader has to decipher them by not only analyzing the numerous textual clues of the narrative but also having awareness of Marquez's past personal life. By applying this kind of literary style, his main intention is in fact to focus the reader's attention on the important aspects of realities that most often seem to be more real in his fictional narrative than they actually are in reality, as in the case of the foundation of Macondo. He offers the reader a concrete, tangible vivid description that actually in turn possesses more abstract and subtle significance, such as the biblical traits of some characters, namely

Vicario brothers, Angela's father and mother in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

Marquez excessively employs metaphors and symbols that are required to be interpreted appropriately since they are the significant elements in the literary discourse that not only carry the connotative meanings or concepts in the text but also make a connection between the text and the culture. For instance, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Macondo is used as a metaphor for Latin America, the rain as a metaphor for the fall of Macondo, the arrival of Melquiades and his gypsies with their modern instruments as a metaphor for the beginning of modernism and scientific awareness, Ursula Iguaran, who in her senility and extreme old age has become childlike, serves as a metaphor for the annihilation of town, the English encyclopedia as a symbol of the domination of foreign company, the golden chamber pot as the royalty of community of Macondo, the presence of two Indians Cataure and Visitacion as a symbol of whole Indian population in Latin America, Macondo itself as a symbolic representation of his native land, the rain also serves as a symbol of Ursula's death, the railroad as a symbol of the arrival of the modern mechanized world. At the beginning of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the house with a mirror wall becomes a symbol for the darkness of the material world and the recreation of a new world. Some of the character-names also act as symbols; they indirectly refer to or suggest the characters' position, personality and mindset in the story; for instance, the character Remedios the Beauty is renowned throughout the region for her incredible beauty. As a whole, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* itself becomes a metaphor for man's sense of abandonment and fear on the earth. In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, cholera is used as a metaphor for love, the yellow flag as a symbol of plague of desires, the tiger as a symbol of tension. In *The General in His Labyrinth*, Marquez has also utilized many metaphors and symbols that are rooted in his culture. For instance, the General is metaphorically represented as a redeemer sacrificed by his own community; he is indeed a scapegoat who purges and redeems his society by sacrificing himself. Because of this, the rain and fiesta are two factors that imply the ritual purification of the General. The General's death becomes a metaphor for the end of his wishes, and for him Latin American turns into a symbol of labyrinth. In this novel, he has applied some symbolic elements on the basis of their general cultural semantic content; consequently, they mostly have a clear and fixed significance for the members of his community. For instance, "water" is used as a symbol for purity, cleansing agent and renovation.

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the presence of Bishop is a metaphor for the townsfolk's guilt. The murdering of Santiago Nasar symbolizes the crucifixion of Christ and brutality, his dress on the day of murder becomes a symbol of his purity and innocence, the cholera

is used as a symbol of Divine Cholera, and finally the novel itself becomes a symbol of a real social condition that exists in the world. In *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, the deadly ocean symbolizes the environment of war, oppression and injustice. In *No One Writes to the Colonel*, the rooster becomes a symbol of defiance in the face of despair and the colonel's life is a symbol of the deplorable living condition in Latin America. In *Of Love and Other Demons*, Sierva Maria's disease of body and soul becomes an intricate metaphor for the Spanish culture, the forbidden love between her and Cayetano becomes a symbol of barriers-breaking and cultures blending trend, the eye is a symbol of perception and understanding, a vision of snow on the Caribbean coast and a cluster of grapes become a symbol of her death, her full name Maria Mandinga is a symbol of her mixed cultural background. As a whole, the novel *Of Love and Other Demons* itself becomes a symbolic representation of the colonial period. All these suggest that behind the concrete world of his literary discourse, there exist an abstract world which is created by applying the biblical, mythical, figural elements and other symbolic components. These elements mainly create a complicated fictional discourse, whose appropriate interpretation depends on the reader's creative imagination, cultural background and literary competence.

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. For instance, in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, it is 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 with the thunder of war, and turned a life-size saint on the main altar of the church on the opposite side of the square to plaster dust. The reader knows that shooting of a bullet may be accidental (realism) and also simultaneously knows that the probability of the passing of bullet from several walls is completely zero (magical). Due to the adroit and skillful application of magical technique, his novels remain attractive, convincing and seductive to a large number of readers all over the world.

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). Another character of this novel, Jose Arcadio Buendia, is also described in an exaggerated way: "There was a giant with a hairy torso and a shaved head, with a copper ring in his nose and a heavy iron chain on his ankle" (p.21). In the description of Jose Arcadio, Ursula's eldest son, an exaggerated tone is employed: "His square shoulders barely fitted through the doorways" (p.93); he has a "bison neck" (p.93); he is "mane of a mule" (p.93); his presence "gave the quaking impression of a seismic tremor" (p.94) and he has jaws of iron and eats whole animals in one sitting. Marquez mainly applies magical realism in an exaggerated way in order to magnify or highlight the realities so that the reader can mostly focus on them. As it is more obvious at the beginning of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, he describes the world in an exaggerated way: "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point" (p.1).

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez also exaggerates the number of people killed in banana massacre. In reality, the number was not more than 500, but he mentions it as 3000. In this novel, he also refers to rain in an exaggerated manner: "It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days" (p.339). Here, he employs a hyperbolic expression in order to emphasize on the severity of the rainstorm that destroyed the town. Although such a long period of rain is very unlikely to occur, he applies numerical value for the duration of rain in order to give the incident a considerable sense of reality. And another instance of exaggeration is that when Colonel Aureliano Buendia shoots himself in the chest, the bullet comes out through his back without having injured a single vital organ.

The exaggerated elements mostly possess extra-implications as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* wherein every time father Nicanor Reyna gulps down a cup of hot chocolate, he is about to rise from the ground. It implies that even a humble beverage has something to do with priest's powers. Or Fernanda sees invisible doctors. This implies that how much underdeveloped Latin America is; they don't even have doctors and simple health care system in order. In another case, Amaranta sews her own death clothes and after finishing them, she dies. This implies that how many people kill themselves due to their unreasonable mind and reckless behaviours. It also conveys that death is personified among them.

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.

But the application of these techniques is not the only factor that differentiates Marquez from other writers. The "journalistic style" of narration that he has applied in most of his novels is also another prominent feature of his literary discourse. He employs this style along with other literary techniques, especially magical realism and symbolism. By combining the journalistic style with these techniques, he constructs another exclusive craft of writing that distinguishes his works from that of others. This type of style actually offers his works literary richness because it enables him to convey the realities in a framework of surrealism that enhances the aesthetic value of his works. On the other hand, most importantly, it teases the reader with provocations and paradoxes by drawing his attention on certain important parts of the message, mainly those parts representing a contradictory reality involving the period of colonization. In fact, the contradiction is at the heart of his literary discourse that creates a polysemous fictional world. Because of this, in his literary discourse, the textual signs go beyond their conventional meanings and signify not only the social realities of the colonial and post-colonial periods but also the crucial political tensions of Colombia in the twentieth century. Therefore, Marquez's mastery over figural devices and journalistic style enable him not only to construct his fictional world with captivating images but also to fill it with profound messages for humanity by offering insight about the essence of realities of Latin America in different periods of its history.

### 3. SIGNIFICANT MESSAGE OF HIS LITERARY DISCOURSE

Marquez's literary discourse offers a multifaceted perspective on the Latin American continent, particularly Colombia and the Caribbean coast. In his novels, he does not merely chronicle the surreal, poignant plights of the Latin Americans but offers a mesmerizing portrayal of human conflict and folly. In fact, he dexterously relates the past realities to the present conditions of Latin America and then to the problems that one will probably face in the future. He wants to inform the reader about the root of all predicaments of this continent. At the same time, he offers effective suggestions and solutions for eliminating these problems and improving the present condition. However, by blurring the borders between the past, the present and the future, he portrays a new image of Latin America that is different from the one that has been depicted by other writers of the continent. At the end of the reading, the reader makes a connection with not only his past but also his traditions, conventions, culture

and myths; the reader becomes aware of his identity and the identity of other groups and communities. In fact, his literary discourse attempts to restore the Latin American identity by making Latin Americans aware of their own culture, society and history.

For this reason, most of his novels have the political orientation in order to inform the reader about the events that have occurred in this continent. Because of the political slant of his novels, he always blends together the cultural aspects and the historical phenomena. By this way, he clearly represents the destructive effect of the domination of colonial powers in the past and of imperialistic powers in the present, on the economy and culture of the continent. In reality, that caused people to get themselves alienated from their own culture, the continent to be divided into different countries, the political parties to be formed and engaged themselves in bloody civil wars, the violence to cover almost all parts of the country and eventually hundreds of thousands of people to be killed. As a result, the continent became one of the most violent areas in the world at the beginning of twentieth century. These are main themes that constitute his literary discourse. Hence, his literary discourse always conveys highly significant messages that subtly suggests a special reverence for his social conventions and cultural values.

The period in which Marquez began to write was an important phase in the Latin American Literature. He indeed got recognition as a prolific writer in the 1950s; that was a period in which literature of the continent had taken a realist-modernist approach for portraying the region in a multi-faceted image. The realist-modernist trend started from the year of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the continent, providing the Latin American writers with a new literary direction to depict the violent realities of the continent in their works. The perception and depiction of these realities were the main concerns of these writers during this period. Being part of this milieu, Marquez aimed at offering a wonderfully sharp and sardonic description of the social peculiarities and the tragic history of the region in his fictional works, which were quite dense in implication and exalting in their sadness.

Marquez is a story-teller of the first order in any idiom. His masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a remarkable breakthrough in the literary world of fiction which has been recently selected as one of the best books of the second half of the twentieth century. It is an outstanding work of fiction that sets in motion a complex chain of events which compels the reader to cross and recross the divide between the real and imaginary. Because of its style of narration, this novel has been compared with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Gerald Martin (Marquez's official biographer) would like to call Gabo (Marquez's nick name) the new Cervantes.

During the five decades of his writing career, Marquez has produced an astounding variety of works that has got him the status of an author who is convincingly one of the best to be found anywhere. He is the first Colombian and the fourth Latin American who has won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. Any lover of fiction reading his books is unlikely to forget them.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Bell-Villada, G. H. (1983). Building a compass. In G. H. Bell-Villada (Eds.), *Conversations with Gabriel Garcia Marquez* (pp.133-140). Jackson, US: University Press of Mississippi.
- Bell-Villada, G. H. (2009). *Garcia Marquez: The man and his work* (2nd ed.). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Dryfus, C. (1983). Playboy interview: Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *Playboy*, 3, February, 65-77.
- Gullon, R. (1971). 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.
- Hamill, P. (1988). Love and solitude: Interview with Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *Vanity Fair*, March, 124-131.
- Janes, R. (1981). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Revolutions in wonderland*. Missouri, Colombia: University of Missouri Press.
- Marquez, G. G. (1981). The art of fiction: The Paris review interviews II. In P. Gourevitch (Ed.), *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: The art of fiction* (pp.178-206). New York: Picador.
- Martin, G. (2008). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A life*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- McMurray, G. R. (1977). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.
- Minta, S. (1987). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Writer of Colombia*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Pelayo, R. (2001). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A critical companion*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Rodriguez-Vergara, I. (1998a). *Introduction: Critical essays on the work of Garcia Marquez* (No. 64, pp.2-6). A. Serra. (Trans.). Washington, DC: Organization of American States.
- Samper, M. E. (1989). An Interview with Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *Semana*, 14, 27-33.
- Simons, M. (1982, December 5). A talk with Gabriel Garcia Marquez. *New York Times* (Late City final Edition), Section 7, p.7, Column 1.