



The Pivotal Role of Melquiades in The Magical Realism of One Hundred Years of Solitude

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: April 18, 2023
Revised: June 21, 2023
Accepted: June 22, 2023
Available Online: June 24, 2023

Keywords:

Myth
Reality
Large Classes
Time
Memory
Symbolism

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Melquiades is a complex and enigmatic character in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. His suspension between fact and fantasy marks him as the signature contributor to the magical realism for which the novel is widely acclaimed. This study aims to examine the nature of his role in the interaction between reality and unreality which seems to portend the fortunes of the Buendia family and the fate of their town Macondo. Since his character is marked by a recurring ebb and flow between verity and illusion, it is expedient to deploy the lens of a theory or theories which deal with the symbiotic relationship between these two polar opposites which, in their various perspectives and permutations, coalesce to form the unique depiction of magical realism in this novel. To this purpose, two theoretical works are utilized in this study. The first is *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995) by Roh, F. et. al., and the second is *A Short History of Myth* by Armstrong (2008). The conclusion reached is that Melquiades is to be perceived, not as a human character, but as a metaphorical representation of various abstract values as are identified and discussed in this study.

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1. Introduction

Melquiades is first introduced as a gypsy who visits Macondo, the fictional town where the novel takes place. He is described as having a long beard, a turban, and an air of mystery. From the outset, it is clear that Melquiades possesses knowledge beyond what the other characters in the novel are capable of understanding. He is a man of science, philosophy, and magic, and his presence in Macondo sets off a chain of events that will change the town forever. One of the most significant aspects of Melquiades's character is his role as a writer. He is responsible for writing the mysterious manuscripts that are found by the Buendia family throughout the novel. These manuscripts contain prophecies, scientific theories, and mystical revelations that are often beyond the comprehension of the characters who read them. Melquiades's writing serves as a bridge between the mundane world of Macondo and the supernatural realm that exists beyond it. Through his writing, Melquiades is able to convey important messages to the characters in the novel and to guide them on their journey.

In addition to his role as a writer and a time traveler, Melquiades is also a source of wisdom and guidance for the characters in the novel. He serves as a mentor to Jose Arcadio Buendia, the patriarch of the Buendia family, and helps him to understand the mysteries of the universe. He also acts as a confidant to Aureliano Buendia, one of the central characters in the novel, and helps him to navigate the complex web of relationships that exist in Macondo. Melquiades's character is also closely tied to the theme of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As a gypsy who travels through time and space, Melquiades is able to see beyond the boundaries of linear time. He is able to predict the future and understand the cyclical nature of history. Through his interactions with the Buendia family, Melquiades teaches them about the importance of memory and the dangers of forgetting. He encourages them to remember their past and to

learn from it, even as they move forward into the future. He is also the author of the mysterious manuscript that details the Buendia family's history.

Melquiades is often described as being both alive and dead, and the writer keeps it unclear whether he is a real person or a ghost. In fact, he can be seen as two sides of a moral coin. On one hand, he is portrayed as a wise and mystical figure who possesses knowledge about the past, present, and future. However, on the other hand, Melquiades can also be seen as a great tempter who uses his knowledge to disrupt the idyllic existence of the people of Macondo. Therefore, it can be stated that his character embodies the contradictions that exist in Macondo, a town that is both magical and mundane; ancient and modern; alive and dead. Through his character, Marquez explores the nature of reality and the boundaries between life and death. Furthermore, Melquiades' motives and intentions are never fully revealed, leaving the reader to question his true nature. Some critics argue that he represents the concept of eternal recurrence and the cyclical nature of time in the novel, while others interpret him as a symbol of colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous cultures. Melquiades also serves as a symbol of knowledge, mysticism, and the supernatural. Through his interactions with the Buendia family, he becomes a catalyst for their transformation and the progression of their story which, in literary terms, becomes a case study in Magical Realism. The term "Magical Realism" is now used with quite the opposite connotations which its originator intended. Here, it is essential to mention an opinion more germane to the objective of this study. This view holds that Magical Realism emerged as a literary form when a group of Caribbean and Central American writers...reformulated the concept into an aesthetic form derived from the hybrid nature of Latin American culture and society (Perez & Chevalier, 2020). They further maintain that texts and their types have a status in world literature because they address global desires and promote transcultural goals. They also perform the vital role of resisting the immediacy of meaning as a function of national or regional expression. This would account for the global appeal of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Perhaps the most prominent characteristic of this novel is its compelling adaptation of indigenous myths towards the making of a wide-ranging narrative which has received almost universal acclaim in, not only literary circles but also among the general public. This universality of acceptance lies in the fact that the author has crafted a chronicle that straddles the domains of dream and reality—a paradox that every human being is forced to experience. To study this perspective, the terms *logos* and *mythos* must be clarified from the point of view of Karen Armstrong as she elaborates in her book *A Short History of Myth* (Armstrong, 2008). According to her, *logos* is the rational approach of the human mind as it strives to understand and utilize its surroundings to its best advantage. But, it has some serious shortcomings. The ultimate value of human life lies in abstract and intangible entities which may be called emotional or mystical components of the human psyche. They belie hard fact and cold reason not because they are escapist but because they address realities that fact and reason cannot comprehend, let alone manage. These comprise *mythos* and are expressed in all the mythologies in human history. They are necessary to lift humans above the mundane harshness of *logos* into a realm of ecstasy however fleeting and fragile.

1.1. Research Objective

To examine what link or links the character of Melquiades forms between the concepts of *mythos* and *logos* in imparting Magical Realism to the narration of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What elements of the narrative justify the label of 'Magical Realism' for the literary style of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*?
2. What images and implications in the novel indicate the role of Melquiades in the creation and development of Magical Realism?

2. Literature Review

Regardless of the dismal conclusion of the novel itself, the writer's own dream of Utopia after such devastation is remarkable. Therefore, this literature review begins with an opinion voiced by him in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in which he believes that destruction and catastrophe should not prevent the human race from dreaming of a world where love will be proven true and happiness will be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of isolation will have a second chance on earth, finally and forever (Márquez, 1995). This has relevance to this study insofar as Magical Realism is purported to be a healing potion for the

wounded human psyche. There is a view that Magical Realism is the result of an urge to create a world in fiction that can compete with the inexorable flow of creativity which emanates from Latin America's actual history (Conniff, 1990). It is an aspiration to create an illusory domain that can accommodate and express the almost limitless wellspring of imagination which exists in the minds of Latin American writers. The same critic goes on to say that Magical Realism restores fiction in the face of an increasingly anarchic reality (Conniff, 1990).

A more reductionist view holds that it has sometimes served as a sociopolitical tactic to pack many different kinds of writing, and many different political perspectives, into one single, usually escapist, concept (Conniff, 1990). A further observation from the same critic presents the dystopian idea that Magical Realism has the expressive power to "make apocalypse appear not only credible but inevitable" (Conniff, 1990). These two diametrically opposed points of view emanating from the same critic make the character of Melquiades all the more relevant to the discussion as Marquez has invested a baffling dichotomy of concepts into the character of this enigmatic gypsy. These dichotomous concepts are also taken note of by other critics. For example, (Ciplijauskaite, 1973) maintains that cyclical reiteration, paradox, and parallelism, are tightly interwoven with the main themes of the book.

Major portions of the novel evince a pattern of equivocality and vagueness, which is the hallmark of Magical Realism in Latin American literature in general and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in particular. The novel's ambiguity is heightened by the transposition and confusion of senses and sensations (Ciplijauskaite, 1973). So, ambiguity, presentiment, and foreboding are the fundamental structural elements of the novel and, obviously, Melquiades is the major contributor in this regard. However, there is an unequivocally positive view that Melquiades is like a memory of those who have experienced tribulation—a selective memory for the good of the people (Isip, 2011). The same critic suggests that Melquiades is an alter-ego for the writer. As the mythical gypsy, he is, in contrast to the Buendias, an objective outsider and a dispassionate witness to the rise and fall of the idiosyncratic family. And this is why we have the observation that Melquiades provides accurate and unbiased memory, but perhaps because he is unbiased, he lacks the desire to try to change history (Isip, 2011). Consequently, we see Melquiades as having clairvoyant knowledge, but no inclination to prevent the disasters which befell Macondo and the Buendias.

3. Theoretical Framework

Although Franz Roh was the first to use the term Magical Realism, this study applies theoretical concepts from a critical work in which he is just one of the contributors. —Roh, F., Guenther, I. et al., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995). An additional theoretical work delineating the concepts of *logos* and *mythos* is also adopted—Armstrong, K. *A Short History of Myth* (2000). In an article in the first-mentioned book, Wendy B. Faris opines that the hermeticism and dystopian trend in the post-modern epoch puts the writers of this era in the death-charged condition in which the fabled queen Scheherazade was constrained to relate her stories. It has now become a recurrent theme among critics that postmodern fiction writers use Magical Realism not only as an expression of artistic freedom but also as a survival mechanism for both their art and their sensibility.

The second theoretical work mentioned above provides a footing for the mythical perspective of this study. The basic premise is that humans have always created myths... Thus, it appears that human beings were distinguished from an early date by their ability to have ideas that went beyond their routine experience (Armstrong, 2008). Another unique feature of the human mind is the ability to have ideas and experiences that cannot be rationally explained. Humans have imagination, an ability that allows them to think of something that is not immediately present and has no objective existence when first conceived. On the basis of this ability, human beings have performed feats that were previously only possible in the domain of stories (Armstrong, 2008). Therefore, mythology, like science and technology, enables humans to live more intensely within this world rather than opting out of it. Since the dawn of time, myths have given explicit shape and form to a reality that people sensed intuitively but could not express concretely.

Karen Armstrong opines that mythology was born out of the need to help us cope with the difficult human condition (Armstrong, 2008). This observation is a faithful echo of Brian

Conniff's opinion that Magical Realism is a literary technique that helps to redeem fiction in the face of a reality that is becoming more and more chaotic (Conniff, 1990). In modern times, the term "myth" came to refer to something totally untrue. However, in the pre-modern world, people perceived myth as something which was always present—though not always within the ambit of logical perception. Consequently, Armstrong concludes mythology is a form of art that looks beyond history to what is ageless in human existence, allowing us to see beyond the chaotic mutability of random events to the core of reality (Armstrong, 2008). Mythology was essential in the pre-modern world. It not only helped people comprehend their lives, but it also uncovered areas of the human mind that were mystifying to logical thought processes. Karen Armstrong maintains that it was a primitive form of psychology. She further states that mythology mostly arises from deep anxiety about pragmatic issues that cannot be alleviated by purely logical arguments. This, in essence, is Karen Armstrong's exposition of the concept of *Mythos*. On the other hand, *Logos* is quite different from mythical thinking. Unlike myth, *logos* must correspond accurately to objective facts. It is the mental activity humans use when they want to make things happen in the external world. Myth looks back to the fantasy world of the consecrated epitome or to a lost paradise, whereas *logos* advances forward, always trying to discover something new and gain greater control over the surroundings.

4. Methodology & Method

Considering that the ontology of this study is interpretive, the epistemological approach is one of identifying and analyzing the relationships between the character of Melquiades and the various manifestations of Magical Realism encountered in the narrative. Consequently, the methodology opted for is a qualitative one. The method of study is a perusal of the text of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* under the spotlight of theories of Magical Realism and Myth. This is done with special emphasis on the character of Melquiades and all things, events, and implications related to it.

5. Discussion

While discussing the pivotal role of Melquiades in the Magical Realism of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the following salient points about the character of this character are worth noting:

- He is the inventor of the alchemist process that enables the Buendía family to turn lead into gold.
- He writes a set of prophecies that are passed down through the generations of the Buendía family.
- He is a friend and advisor to José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of Macondo.
- He dies, but his ghost continues to visit the Buendía family and provide guidance.
- His bones are discovered by Aureliano Buendía, who uses them to decipher Melquiades' prophecies.

These facts and incidents contribute to the magical realism of the novel and demonstrate the cyclical nature of time in Macondo. They also point towards a larger metaphorical reality which colors the human condition especially when confronted with the polar opposites of *logos* and *mythos*. It is significant to note that the gifts which Melquiades and the other gypsies bring to Macondo symbolize the *logos* which inevitably comes to the questing human mind. At the same time, these are double-edged swords which can and do hurt the wielders unless wisely informed by *mythos* which is the essence of life itself. The following is an assessment of *logos* and *mythos* as symbolized by the gifts of Melquiades:

5.1. The Magnet

The magnet is a symbol of the technological progress and modernization that is encroaching upon the traditional way of life in the town of Macondo. The magnet attracts all sorts of metal objects, including the old and rusted ones, representing the allure and power of modernity. At the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Melquiades tries to explain to the Buendia patriarch, Jose Arcadio Buendia, that the magnets which the gypsy has showed him will not work to find "gold" in the earth; the scene is a hauntingly accurate picture of the later generations of Buendias continually "looking for gold" with the wrong tools, including Melquiades' own manuscripts, which only provide a prophecy of their extinction. To his great disappointment, and the later loss of his clan, "Jose Arcadio Buendia...thought that it would be possible to make use of that useless invention to extract gold from the bowels of the earth" (Márquez, 1995). The

magnet is also a metaphor for the attraction and influence of foreign powers, such as the United States, on Latin American countries.

5.2. The Telescope

The telescope is a symbol of the Buendia family's desire for knowledge and their search for truth and meaning in life. The telescope is first adopted by Jose Arcadio Buendia, who becomes obsessed with it and spends hours looking through it, hoping to discover something new and profound about the universe. Later, the telescope is passed down to other members of the Buendia family, who also use it to explore the mysteries of the world around them. The telescope represents the human quest for knowledge and understanding, as well as the Buendia family's legacy of curiosity and exploration.

5.3. The Magnifying Glass

The magnifying glass is a symbol of the Buendia family's search for truth and clarity in a world that is often shrouded in mystery and confusion. However, it is significant that, in the beginning, the magnifying glass did not appeal to Jose Arcadio Buendia because of any intellectual or peaceful use. He "had still not been consoled for the failure of big magnets, conceived the idea of using that invention as a weapon of war" (Márquez, 1995). The magnifying glass is later used by characters such as Aureliano Buendia and his son Jose Aureliano to examine documents and artifacts, searching for hidden meanings and insights into the past. The magnifying glass also represents the power of observation and attention to detail, which are essential qualities for uncovering the truth and understanding the world around us. Overall, the magnifying glass serves as a metaphor for the human desire for knowledge and understanding, as well as the importance of careful observation and analysis.

5.4. The Astrolabe, the Compass, and the Sextant

The astrolabe is a symbol of the Buendia family's fascination with the stars and their search for knowledge and understanding of the universe. The astrolabe is introduced by Melquiades, who brings it to Macondo and gives it to Jose Arcadio Buendia. Jose Arcadio Buendia becomes obsessed with the astrolabe and uses it to study the movements of the stars and planets. Later, the astrolabe is passed down to other members of the Buendia family, who also use it to explore the mysteries of the cosmos. The astrolabe represents the human desire for knowledge and understanding of the universe, as well as the Buendia family's propensity for exploration. In general, the astrolabe serves as a metaphor signifying the human quest for cosmic understanding and the search for meaning in life. The compass is a symbol of the Buendia family's search for direction and purpose in life. It is first used by Jose Arcadio Buendia, who becomes obsessed with finding true north and spends years exploring the whole area in search of it. The compass represents the human desire for guidance and direction, as well as the importance of having a sense of purpose and meaning in life. In this story, the compass serves as a metaphor for the human quest for self-discovery and fulfillment.

The sextant is a symbol of the Buendia family's desire to navigate their own paths in life. It is later used by Aureliano Buendia, who becomes fascinated with it and uses it to navigate the seas on his journeys. The sextant represents the human desire for self-determination and the importance of charting one's own course in life. It also symbolizes the Buendia family's tradition of independence and self-reliance, as well as their willingness to explore new horizons and take risks. Overall, the sextant serves as a metaphor for the human quest for self-discovery and the importance of forging one's own path in life. However, it must be kept in mind that when these instruments were introduced to Jose Arcadio Buendia, he was completely ignorant of their proper use and did not know that it may take generations to learn the fruitful use of tools and knowledge. In the beginning, "Having completely abandoned his domestic obligations, he spent entire nights in the courtyard watching the course of the stars and he almost contracted sunstroke from trying to establish an exact method to ascertain noon" (Márquez, 1995). This is a potent depiction of *logos* gaining ascendancy over *mythos*.

5.5. The Daguerreotype

The daguerreotype, being a type of camera, is a symbol of memory and the preservation of history. The daguerreotype is introduced by Melquiades, who brings it to Macondo and gives it to Aureliano Buendia. The conditions under which the gypsy brings this instrument to Macondo are well worth noting: "He really had been through death, but he had returned because he could

not bear the solitude...he decided to take refuge in that corner of the world... dedicated to the operation of a daguerreotype laboratory" (Márquez, 1995). Aureliano Buendia becomes fascinated with the daguerreotype and uses it to capture images of his family and the town of Macondo. Later, the daguerreotype is passed down to other members of the Buendia family, who also use it to document their lives and preserve their memories. The daguerreotype represents the human desire to hold on to the past and keep memories alive, as well as the importance of remembering where we come from and the people who came before us. By and large, the daguerreotype serves as a metaphor for the human need for connection to our history and our ancestors.

5.6. The Scriptures

The scriptures of Melquiades in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are significant as they contain the history of the Buendía family and the town of Macondo. Melquiades, a gypsy, writes down the family's past and future on parchments that are passed down through generations. The scriptures are seen as a symbol of the cyclical nature of time in the novel and represent the idea that history repeats itself. They also act as a source of knowledge and wisdom for the characters in the novel. Melquiades carries the novel's central theme within himself through them. He returns from the kingdom of the dead, abandoning immortality because he cannot stand solitude. The reading of his scriptures concludes the book. As a result, the figure of Melquiades suggests that everything in this novel is a language of signs and patterns that generate intricate metaphorical relationships.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Melquiades is a central figure in "One Hundred Years of Solitude" and serves as a symbol of knowledge, mysticism, and the supernatural. Through his interactions with the Buendia family, he becomes a catalyst for their transformation and the progression of their story. His character embodies the contradictions that exist in Macondo and serves as a bridge between the mundane world of the town and the supernatural realm that exists beyond it. Ultimately, Melquiades's character represents the power of knowledge and the importance of memory in shaping our understanding of the world. However, it would be an injustice to the scope of this literary canvas if it is kept limited to the Buendia family and the town of Macondo. In fact, doing so would belittle the power of its fantastical narration and reduce it to the level of a childish fable. The real power of the character of Melquiades lies in the pivotal role it plays in the intricate balance of *logos* and *mythos* which is both the triumph and the tragedy of the human condition. This is what comprises the Magical Realism of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

6.1. Suggestions and Recommendations for Further Studies

In view of the relativism and materialism prevalent in post-modern society, there is a need for a heightened awareness of the transcendent aspect of human thought and existence. It is therefore suggested that modern and post-modern fiction be read from the point of discovering the symbiosis between *mythos* and *logos* as indicated in the present study.

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