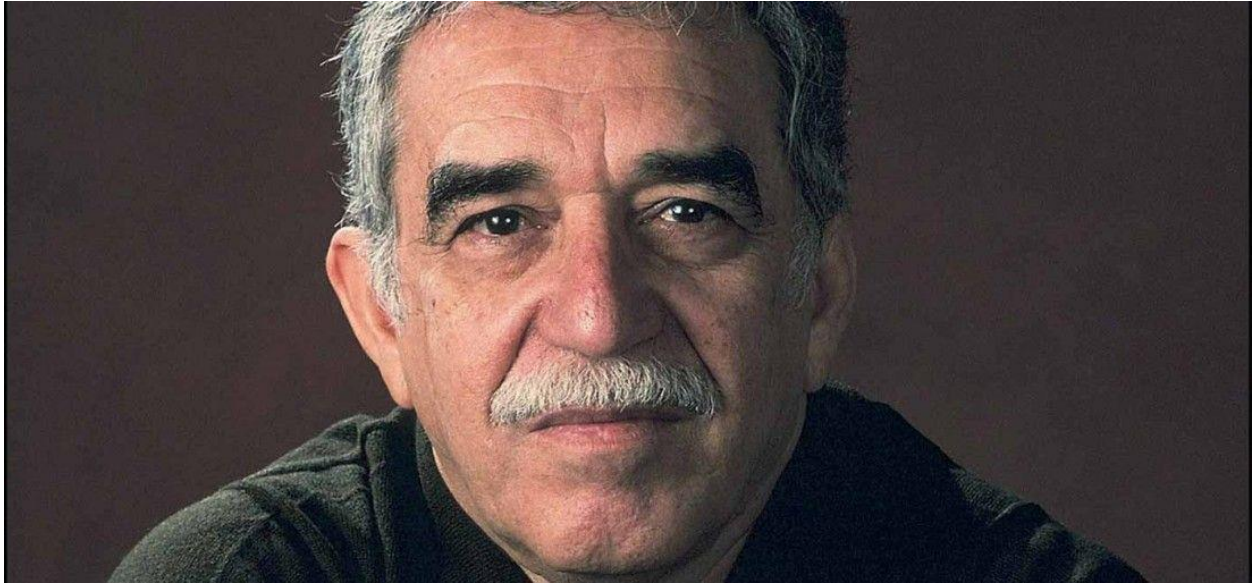


## Magical Realism as a Political Tool in Select Novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Dr. B. C. Anish Krishnan

---



**Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

Courtesy: <https://www.mensxp.com/social-hits/news/43076-twitter-is-celebrating-gabriel-garcia-marquez-s-birthday-with-their-favourite-quotes-by-him.html>

### **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) is one of the unique writers in the sense that his works are relished by the members of academia and general readers. He is one of the writers who re-defined the practice of literary craft. This paper will focus on Marquez's use of magical realism as not only a literary tool but also a political tool in his novels. This paper will first briefly dwell on magical realism and then trace its use as a political device in two novels of Marquez, namely *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975).

## **Magical Realism**

Magical realism can be crisply defined through the words of Salman Rushdie as: “commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (quoted in Bowers 3). It is a literary technique that presents magical, marvelous elements in a matter of fact tone to the readers. It is a fusion of magic and reality .Bowers points out:

‘Magical realism’, which of all the terms has had the most critical consideration, relies most of all upon the matter-of-fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings. For this reason it is often considered to be related to, or even a version of literary realism. Its distinguishing feature from literary realism is that it fuses the two opposing aspects of the oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form one new perspective. Because it breaks down the distinction between the usually opposing terms of the magical and the realist, magical realism is often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode (3).

The term had its roots in the German word “Magischer Realismus “that was used in art criticism. By 1950s ,a Spanish translation of this term “realismo mágico “ was used to describe a novel mode of narration by certain writers. Now magical realism as become a domain by itself. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie and Gunter Grass are some of the renowned writers who have used this narrative mode time and again in their fictions.

## **Used by Many Writers**

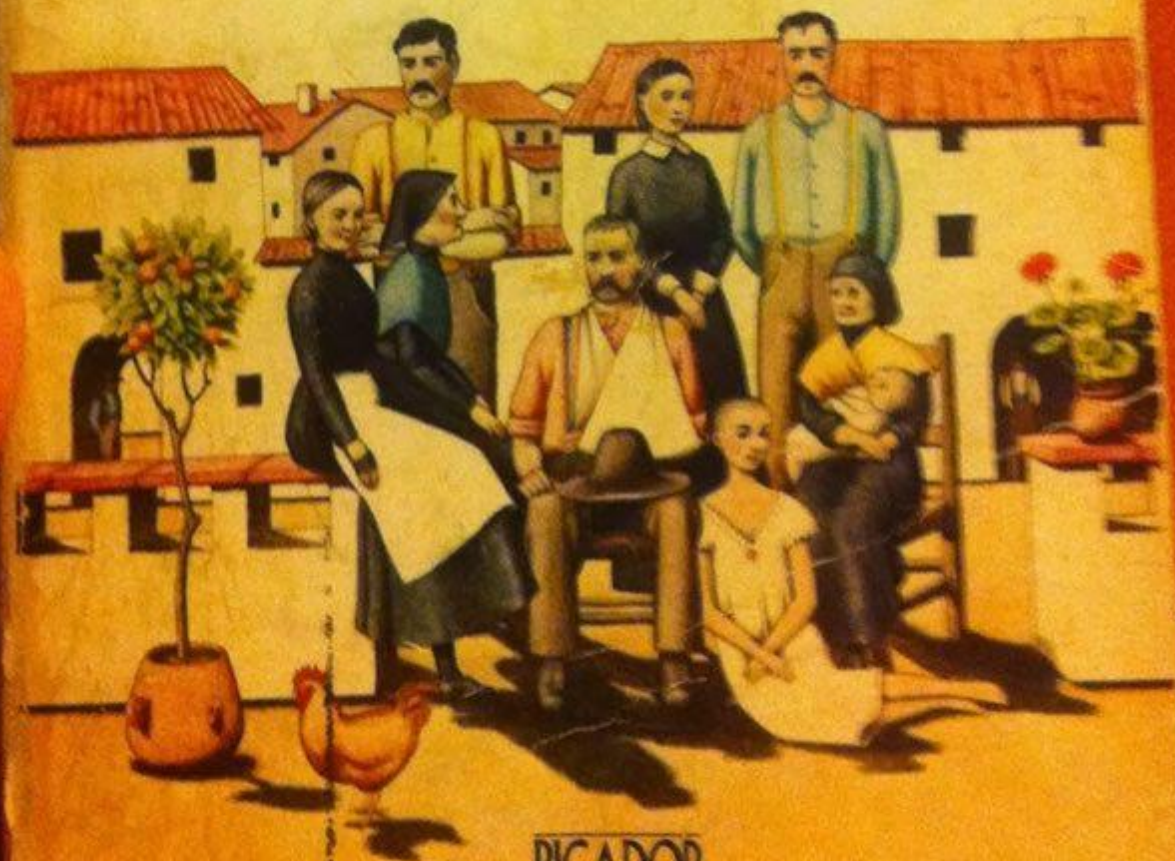
Magical realism is used by a number of writers around the world as a political device too. When writers find it difficult to express their views and ideologies during oppressive regimes, they often choose magical realism. Bowers highlights this aspect when she says: “Magical realism has become a popular narrative mode because it offers to the writer wishing to write against totalitarian regimes a means to attack the definitions and assumptions which support such systems (e.g. colonialism) by attacking the stability of the definitions upon which these systems rely”( 4). This observation by Anne Bowers is very relevant to the central idea discussed in this paper. Columbia, Marquez’s homeland and the Latin American region, with which Marquez identified him, was plagued with civil wars and political uncertainties. Dictatorship was a very

common phenomenon in the Latin American region. Consequently, it can be argued that Marquez's choice of magical realism as a narrative mode a very conscious political decision. This can be explained with illustrations from two of his master pieces, namely, *One Hundred Years Of Solitude* and *Autumn of the Patriarch*.

'A major contemporary work of literature...  
the Latin American Don Quixoté...a classic'

NEW YORKER

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS  
OF SOLITUDE**  
**GABRIEL GARCÍA  
MÁRQUEZ**



PICADOR

## ***One Hundred Years of Solitude***

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* has a special place in the literary history of Twentieth century. Christopher Warnes has crisply captured the uniqueness of this novel. He says:

Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*) is probably the most successful magical realist text ever written. Estimated to have sold more than 30 million copies in 37 languages, the novel continues to attract a startlingly diverse range of readers from around the world.<sup>1</sup> It appeals to Marxist critics, to literary aristocrats and Aquarian baby-boomers, to theorists of the postcolonial condition and to the Californian "stay-at-home moms" book group selected by Oprah Winfrey in 2004, who discuss it over margaritas while their kids play in McDonalds. The many reasons for the novel's popularity can best be seen in its capacity to resolve antimonies and to integrate into apparent harmony a great number of diverse concepts and ideas: most obviously – and seductively – reality and fantasy, but also serious and humorous, myth and history, epic and quotidian, psychological and transcendental, continental, national and familial. (75)

## **Critique of Political Conditions**

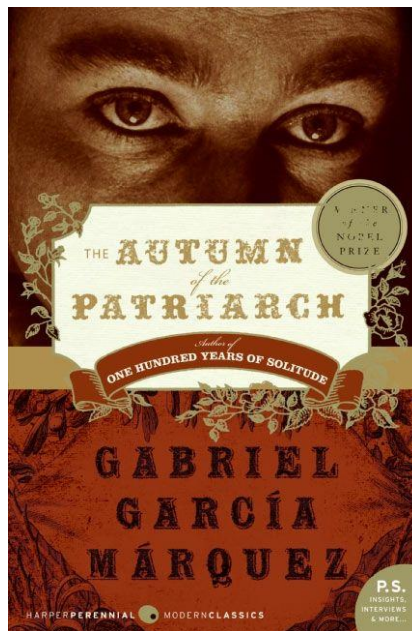
This novel is certainly a critique on the political conditions of Latin American countries. Marquez is chagrined by the neo-colonial forces in the Latin American region. He is worried by how the entire region is not only politically colonized, but also biologically colonized. He expresses his angst with the help of magical realism. In the novel, there is an incident named banana plague. A corporate company owned by "Gringos", decide to cultivate banana commercially in the fictional town of Macondo. They meddle with the ecological and geographical aspects of the town to establish banana groves in industrial scale. This results in a disaster, in terms of nature and culture. The ambience of the town is grotesquely changed. Marquez narrates this disaster in his own way. He says:

It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days. There were periods of drizzle during which everyone put on his full dress and a convalescent look to celebrate the clearing, but the people soon grew accustomed to interpret the pauses as a sign of redoubled rain. The sky crumbled into a set of destructive storms and out of the north

came hurricanes that scattered roofs about and knocked down walls and uprooted every last plant of the banana groves. (249)

Rains that last for four years can be found in only in works of fiction. Marquez uses such a narration to document his angst against the environmental exploitation. The casual tone indicates the cavalier attitude with which human beings confront the disasters that are caused due to their greed.

### *Autumn of the Patriarch*



There is another example in Marquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch*. This novel is centered on the life of a dictator who had ruled a country for some three centuries. Once again, such a long regime is possible only in magical realist fictions. The dictator, with the help of a few neo-colonialist powers, ruthlessly exploits the natural resources of the country. At one point, he half-heartedly sells the sea. The buyers take away the sea. (Such things are possible in works of magical realism). When the dictator complains that he misses sea breeze, the neo-colonizers present him with a table fan as a consolation

### **Can be a Political Tool as well**

The above-mentioned narration is an also a fierce but veiled criticism against the rulers who allow the natural resources to be exploited for trivia. If Marquez had expressed these views in the form of an essay or as a realistic fiction, they would not have survived the onslaught of censorship in many Latin American countries. However, his chosen literary device magical realism helps him to deliver his message across nation without such hindrances. Hence it can be said that in the hands of writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, magical realism is not only a literary device, but also a political device.

---

### Works Cited

Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. Routledge,2004.

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa, Vintage,1970.

Marquez,Gabriel Garcia. *Autumn of the Patriarch*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa , Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

Warnes, Christopher. **Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence**. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

---

Dr. B. C. Anish Krishnan Nayar  
Teaching Fellow  
Department of English  
University College of Engineering  
Nagercoil-629004  
Tamilnadu  
India  
[anishkrishnannayar@gmail.com](mailto:anishkrishnannayar@gmail.com)