
The World of Magic Realism in Grabiel Gracia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Paper Received on 10-01-2025, Accepted on 03-02-2025
Published on 04-02-25; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.1.224

Abstract:

This paper examines the use of magic realism as a narrative strategy in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). While the two authors belong to different continents, their works reflect shared historical experiences and struggles shaped by colonial legacies. Through their distinctive narrative approaches, they establish a profound connection between individuals and their socio-political realities, presenting a portrayal of the world that feels more authentic than traditional realist texts. Both novels employ magic realism to revisit and reinterpret the past, highlighting how the colonial experience distorts reality in their respective societies. By merging fiction with historical reality, García Márquez and Rushdie critique dominant narratives and reimagine the socio-political contexts of their nations. Additionally, the paper explores how magic realism enables the expression of unspoken truths in a world defined by unequal power structures. Through elements such as hybridity, metafiction, authorial presence, and the infusion of mystery into realistic settings, the authors effectively address untold stories and challenge conventional modes of representation, using magic realism as a powerful tool to navigate complex cultural and historical realities.

Keywords: Magic Realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Midnight's Children*, Colonial Legacy, Historical Reality, Postcolonial Literature

Introduction

The global rise of magical realist fiction in English, particularly within postcolonial contexts, has sparked considerable debate over its role as a strategic

mode of postcolonial writing. Stephen Slemon emphasizes the dualities and inherent binaries present in such texts. He argues that magic realism serves to explore the "gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter" (410). According to Slemon, the strength of magical realism lies in its ability to encode "a concept of resistance to the massive imperial center and its totalizing systems" (410). He further explains that "Magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions" (408). For Slemon, magic realism operates as a discourse where both magical and realist elements are equally present yet remain in constant tension and opposition.

Similarly, Angel Flores offers a comparable definition, describing magical realism as the "amalgamation of realism and fantasy" with a narrative imbued with "logical precision" (112-15). He asserts, "The practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent literature from getting in their way as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms" (115-16).

Moreover, Aldea highlights the role of magic realism as "... a tool in the search for a distinctive and positive Latin American identity in the face of external ideas of what this identity should be, in particular through a return to the myths and stories of Latin America" (41). This approach underscores the way magical realism reclaims cultural identity, resisting external impositions while drawing from the region's rich traditions and myths.

Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* share a strikingly biblical structure, addressing themes of cultural creation and destruction. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez portrays a Colombia untouched by modernization, where nature ultimately reclaims and destroys Macondo at the end of the narrative. Similarly, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* begins in the endemic setting of Kashmir, which becomes too confining for Dr. Aziz after he travels to Europe to study medicine.

Both authors skilfully intertwine the every day with the miraculous, the historical with the fabulous, and the psychological with the surreal. Through this blending, they utilize magic realism as a powerful tool to navigate postcolonial contexts. Additionally, their narratives sound revolutionary as they give a distinctive voice to Latin America and India, respectively, showcasing the richness of their cultural landscapes and histories.

Gabriel García Márquez employs magic realism as a means to reconstruct and reinterpret Colombia's historical narrative. By blending realistic, everyday details with elements of fantasy, folk legends, fairy tales, and magical stories, Márquez creates a vivid and dynamic depiction of Latin American culture in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Drawing heavily from ancient folkloric traditions, he uses these cultural elements as a powerful tool to rewrite Colombia's history, bringing the past

to life through imaginative storytelling.

When Márquez asserts that everything in his novel is "based on reality," he implies two distinct ideas. First, the most fantastical elements in his work have either been believed or claimed to be true by real people, often within the context of Latin America. As Wood notes, "This doesn't mean these things are true, but it may make them real" (56).

Through magical elements such as the yellow butterflies that follow one character and the scene where Remedios the Beauty ascends into the sky and vanishes, Márquez transforms extraordinary occurrences into fictional realities. These dizzying yet symbolic moments, presented with a literal truth, transcend idle speculation and bring the surreal into the realm of the everyday. In doing so, Márquez masterfully turns the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Secondly, by saying his novel is "based on reality," Gabriel García Márquez conveys genuine emotions through the use of hyperbole and metaphor. A striking example of this is the scene in which José Arcadio Buendía dies, prompting a rain of tiny yellow flowers to fall over Macondo—a "silent storm" that blankets the roofs, carpets the streets, and even suffocates the animals. This miraculous event, even in a place like Macondo, is described as "the bits and pieces of legend for the end of a legendary character" (144).

Although the phenomenon is extraordinary and defies common sense, it captures the deeper truth of a poetic image. The miracle reflects the imagination's capacity to elevate the moment, offering a sense of grandeur that feels appropriate for such an occasion, even if nature itself rarely rises to such heights. The thousands of tiny flowers that nearly bury the entire village serve as a powerful symbol, demonstrating how magical realism transcends the boundaries of ordinary experience to evoke profound emotional and metaphorical truths.

Such extremes are a defining characteristic of Márquez's narrative style:

They fell on the town all through the night in a silent storm, and they covered the roofs, blocked the doors, and smothered the animals who slept outdoors. So many flowers fell from the sky that in the mourning, the streets were carpeted with a compact cushion, and they had to clear them away with shovels and rakes so that the funeral procession could pass by. (144)

The familiar phenomenon of snowfall is reimaged through the substitution of snow with yellow flowers, subtly distorting reality to evoke a sense of the magical and the supernatural. This slight alteration transforms an ordinary event into an extraordinary experience, characteristic of Márquez's magical realist style. Similarly, the yellow butterflies that signal Mauricio Babilonia's presence serve as another instance of an everyday element exaggerated to an extreme. Both the butterflies and the yellow flowers appear in such an overwhelming abundance that their sheer quantity defies belief, reinforcing the novel's seamless blend of the real and the

fantastical.

Gabriel García Márquez's use of magic realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is deeply rooted in the socio-political history of Colombia. His narrative does not merely reflect historical events but actively reinterprets them through a fantastical lens, allowing for a more profound engagement with the past. The novel draws direct parallels to Colombia's turbulent history, particularly the long-standing civil conflict between the Liberals and the Conservatives, which is mirrored in the fictional struggles of Macondo.

Michael Wood highlights this connection, emphasizing how Márquez transforms historical reality into an imaginative yet recognizable account. By weaving factual events with elements of the extraordinary, Márquez exposes the cyclical nature of violence, political instability, and social upheaval in Latin America. His approach not only critiques history but also reclaims it, presenting an alternative version of reality that captures both the factual and the mythical dimensions of Colombia's past:

Colombia has a long tradition of democracy. The Liberals and the Conservatives, who dominated nineteenth and most of twentieth-century politics, stood for quite different things - reform or reaction, free trade or protection, separation or conjunction of church and state, and slowly turned into a rather narrow band of class interests. (8)

Drawing from this tragic historical event, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* crafts a powerful passage of magic realism, blending historical reality with the extraordinary. It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps because their panting rattle could be heard, and their incandescent spitting could be seen; the panic became a dragon's tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, toward the other dragon's tail in the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease. (311)

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colombia is transformed into a symbolic representation of Latin America—an enigmatic land of magic, isolation, and innocence, defined by towering mountains, tropical rains, and an ashen-colored sea. However, this seemingly mythical landscape is not untouched by history; it is also shaped by internal conflicts, bureaucratic rule, economic booms, labor strikes, foreign interventions, and military regimes. The novel carefully balances myth and historical reality, demonstrating how extensively Gabriel García Márquez blends real-life experiences with fiction to achieve the effects of magic realism.

The opening passage vividly illustrates this interplay between the real and the fantastical: "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 lacked names, and in order to indicate them, it was necessary to point" (1). This idyllic yet surreal setting soon

reveals its paradoxes. For instance, it is later discovered that Úrsula's great-great-grandmother was alive when Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha—an actual historical event that took place in 1568. Such a perception of time defies conventional reality, as Drake lived long after the world had become old enough for everything to be named. This deliberate distortion of time and history underscores Márquez's signature use of magic realism, where the boundaries between past and present, myth and reality, seamlessly blur.

The arrival of Melquíades and his band of gypsies, bringing navigational instruments, magnifying glasses, and other marvels, serves as a metaphor for the dawn of scientific and technological awareness in the town of Macondo. In this context, Márquez states:

In March, the gypsies returned. This time, they brought a telescope and magnifying glass the size of a drum, which they exhibited as the latest discovery of the Jews of Amsterdam . . . man will be able to see what is happening in any place in the world without leaving his own house. (3)

As Macondo thrives, American investors arrive to establish banana plantations, and the official government narrative of the events is readily accepted.

During the global economic depression that began in 1929 and lasted until the onset of World War II, Macondo undergoes a rapid transformation. Once a rustic and undeveloped settlement, it evolves into a modern town, driven by technological advancements, economic exploitation, and foreign intervention. However, rather than bringing prosperity and stability, these changes only deepen the town's struggles. Despite the introduction of new machinery and farming techniques, life in Macondo deteriorates. Discontent grows among the workers, leading Segundo to resign from his position as a foreman on the banana plantation in solidarity with their cause. He seeks to expose the harsh working conditions, drawing public attention to their exploitation. In response, the workers organize a strike, prompting the imposition of martial law. With the army siding with the plantation owners, violence escalates, and the town is plunged into turmoil. Notably, the war had already begun three months prior, and by the time martial law was enforced, its effects had spread across the entire country.

Don Apolinar Moscote was the only one who immediately recognized what was about to unfold, yet he remained silent—even withholding the news from his wife—as a military platoon secretly advanced toward the town. Their mission was to launch a surprise occupation.

Márquez describes the chilling moment: “They entered noiselessly before dawn, with two pieces of light artillery drawn by mules, and they set up their headquarters in the school, dragged out Dr. Noguera, tied him to a tree in the square, and shot him without any due process of law” (102).

This episode, central to the theme of the banana plantation massacre, highlights

the brutal suppression of resistance. Through his portrayal of state violence and military intervention, Márquez exposes the devastating impact of economic imperialism and political oppression in Macondo. As Paquet states:

The omniscient narrator's tacit support for the unofficial versions of the massacre represented in the stories told by Jose Arcadio Segundo and the unnamed child makes the question of oral history unproblematic in outline, though often unreliable in specific detail, for example, in the discrepancy about the number of dead carried by the hallucinatory train. Curiously, Garcia Marquez's fictional account has historically served as a reinserted into the official history of Colombia. (619)

There is a certain amount of irony in Garcia Marquez's proposal that modern technology and the pace of modern change confuse the villager's sense of reality. There is also a real political and historical message behind this reversal of expectations. Garcia Marquez is attempting to convey the extent of confusion that Western industrial technology created in the lives of Latin Americans, whose minds were comfortable with the mythic and the supernatural but for whom an adjustment to modern culture was extremely difficult that "the ultimate ability to perceive the schema of the cultural system in action" (Mossman 6).

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez employs magical elements to offer profound insights into the political and social realities of Latin America. By constructing an alternative reality, he seamlessly intertwines the fantastical with the real, often inverting their roles—where truth takes on the guise of fantasy, and fantasy becomes an undeniable truth.

This narrative is further enriched with the language and symbols of progress, such as the automobile and the arrival of the Banana Company. However, a striking paradox emerges: the very forces of modernization and supposed advancement that reach Macondo also usher in destruction and death. In this way, what is portrayed as progress ultimately reveals itself to be a form of regression.

Midnight's Children explores India's transition from British colonial rule to independence and partition. Through magic realism, Rushdie challenges colonial narratives, reconstructing history with Indian myth and magic. He employs the mode as an alternative lens to uncover deeper truths, weaving surreal and supernatural elements throughout the novel. By strategically using magic realism, he captures India's postcolonial complexities and its rich, multicultural identity.

In *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, born at midnight on 15 August 1947, shares a deep connection between his miraculous birth and India's independence. He reflects, ". . . I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country" (3). As a telepathic conduit, Saleem connects with other children across vast distances while exploring the significance of their gifts. The character Tai, claiming to be of great antiquity, asserts, "I have watched the mountains being born" and "seen emperors die" (13),

symbolizing pre-colonial traditions. His use of "now" contrasts the past he reveres with the present he despises, representing the impact of colonialism on Indian culture. Rushdie's use of magic realism seamlessly merges myth and fantasy with reality, granting equal significance to both the ordinary and the extraordinary. His narrative technique blurs the line between fantasy and reality, blending lyrical, sometimes fantastic storytelling with a critique of human existence and societal elites. Drawing from Indian folk tales and epics, he employs this technique to challenge established narratives. A striking example is "The Hummingbird" in Mian Abdullah's assassination, where magic realism heightens the impact of historical events.

Rushdie deliberately subverts the moral and didactic purposes typically found in folk tales and epics. Unlike these traditional narratives, which seek to entertain and present a complete, often chaotic vision of reality, Rushdie's approach is amoral. In such stories, the distinction between reality and fantasy is less important than the "underlying truth" that emerges. However, in Rushdie's work, what is real or unreal is often uncertain, even to the narrator. In a vast, diverse country like India, where traditions blend, facts become fictionalized, and truth can seem unbelievable.

Another fantastical element in Rushdie's novel is the explicit defiance of what is considered possible, probable, or true. For instance, like the Puranic characters, Tai, the eternal boatman, remains ageless:

"Nobody could remember when Tai had been young. He had been plying this same boat, standing in the same hunched position across the Dal and Nageen Lakes" (10). In his poetic language, Rushdie describes the agelessness of and something of the eternal in Tai: "His lace was a sculpture of wind on water . . ." (10). At the same time, incredulity is neutralized by exaggerating what could have been partially true or factual.

A notable feature of fantasy is the inversion of the elements of the real world, and Rushdie frequently employs this technique in his novel. The *Midnight's Children*, for example, possess mysterious magical powers. Throughout the novel, there is a deliberate effort to subvert the conventions of realistic representation. Rushdie further states:

It seems that in the late summer of that year, my grandfather, Doctor Aadam Aziz, contracted a highly dangerous form of optimism. He was by no means alone because, despite strenuous efforts by the authorities to stamp it out, this virulent disease had been breaking out all over India that year. (45)

This refers to the real historical event, the Quit India movement of 1942. In the novel, an attempt is made to reconstruct reality, creating strange and unfamiliar effects. For example, Mian Abdullah's hum "could fall low enough to give you a toothache, and when it rose to the highest, more feverish pitch, it had the ability to induce erections in anyone within its vicinity" (46). When assassins attempted to kill him, "his humming became higher and higher out of the range of our human ears, and

was heard by the dogs of the town" (58). Through these events, the novel foregrounds the unreality and confusion of our times. In a place like India, fantasy becomes not just a literary tool but a natural response to grappling with an elusive truth and reality. Rushdie's use of magic realism serves a deeper political purpose, challenging the notion of a singular, absolute reality. He suggests that each individual has their own version of truth, with no universal reality. Through Saleem, the struggle for identity in the postcolonial world is explored. The children symbolize hope for national freedom, but by the novel's end, this hope is "now forever extinguished," as most of *Midnight's children* are killed or sterilized. Yet, Rushdie highlights that such hope persists in every generation of *Midnight's children*, representing the children of each successive era, giving the novel an open-ended conclusion.

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing to specks of voiceless dust, just as, all in good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who is not his until the thousand and first-generation until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of *Midnight's children* to be the masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace. (647)

Each generation of *Midnight's Children* symbolizes a new hope for the nation to break free from its constraints and forge a distinct identity, achievable only by granting freedom to its emerging sources of hope.

Midnight's Children intertwines the magic realist narrative of a newly born nation, reflecting its hopes, failures, and ultimate downfall, much like the Emergency period in India. The story functions on multiple levels, serving as a fantasy, a political commentary, and an allegory of real historical events. It blends history with fantasy, where actual events and people are seamlessly integrated into the narrative. The protagonist, Saleem, endowed with several supernatural abilities, is unable to use them for the benefit of his nation. The story unfolds like an avalanche, where small incidents trigger larger events, each cascading into greater consequences.

The novel explores how history acquires meaning through personal experience. Presented through the subjective lens of Saleem Sinai, the retelling of history is fragmented and, at times, inaccurate. Saleem's life parallels the trajectory of postcolonial India, piecing together his fragmented identity as India attempts to rebuild its own in the aftermath of colonialism. His journey represents the plural identities of India and the nation's fragmented search for self through memory.

Elements of fantasy, such as the character of Durga, a washerwoman with enormous, inexhaustible breasts, contribute to the dreamlike quality of the novel. These surreal details blend with real life, creating a constant investigation into the relationship between order, reality, and fantasy. Throughout, Saleem draws

connections between his own life and that of India. His birth, growth, and eventual destruction mirror the fate of the nation. Other characters, too, seem to encounter pivotal moments in India's history, often by chance.

Midnight's Children weaves history, myth, legend, fable, comedy, political satire, and magic within a rich linguistic framework. Magic and miracles are deeply connected to the people and folklore of the region. Ghosts, superstitions, and supernatural abilities are common in magic realism, bridging the realms of life and death and often serving as representations of guilt or hidden secrets. In this world, mythology and legend often take precedence over logic, with people strongly believing in the supernatural. The mingling of the ordinary and the fantastical in the novel reflects Indian culture, where contemporary political and social realities are imbued with the power of mythic heroes. An early passage in the novel exemplifies this blending of the real and the fantastic, showcasing the unique integration of fantasy and history in the narrative.

Conclusion

Both Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie present worlds where fiction and history are intricately intertwined, using magic realism to highlight the contrasts between these realms and the attitudes of their protagonists. In both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children*, magical events are seamlessly integrated into the fabric of everyday life, presented matter-of-factly as part of the mythology and tradition of the respective regions. This study examines how the main characters and their communities evolve in response to external forces and how the authors use magical elements to provide broader commentaries on the political and social dynamics in Latin America and India. Both India and Latin America have long been shaped by various forms of colonization, and in their works, García Márquez and Rushdie blend the mundane with the miraculous, the historical with the fantastical, and the psychological with the surreal. Through their narrative techniques, they give literary voice to the complexities of Latin American and Indian societies, offering a profound exploration of identity, history, and culture.

In both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children*, magic is carefully juxtaposed with political and historical realities, serving not as an escape for the characters but as a lens through which the social and political climates of their societies are examined. Magic realism does not offer a retreat from the real world; instead, it challenges the reader to confront the complexities of reality in ways that traditional narratives may not be able to express. By blurring the lines between the fantastical and the real, it questions the nature of reality itself, prompting readers to reconsider what is believable and what is not, as the strategic use of magic realism in these novels reflects the authors' deliberate choice to address the traumatic consequences of colonization in India and Latin America. Through this technique, García Márquez and Rushdie compel their readers to engage with the harsh truths of

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF),Vol-10,Issue-1(Jan-Mar),2025
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

their respective histories, offering a new perspective on the struggles for identity, freedom, and justice in postcolonial societies.

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How to cite this article?

Vikash Kumar & Dr U.K. Sharma. " The World of Magic Realism in Grabiel Gracia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*." *Research Journal of English (RJOE)*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2025, pp. 225-234. DOI: 10.36993/RJOE.2025.10.1.234.