

Elements of postmodernism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by G.G.Marquez

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ABSTRACT: *Gabriel Garcia Marquez is considered as one of the greatest postmodern writers who has inspired innumerable authors throughout the world. His peculiar utilization of postmodern elements has been subject of investigation in the study with critical emphasis on: fragmentation, lack of identity and juxtaposition of two disparate cultures. Theories for the present study is a combination of Nunberg (1990) and Briscoe (1995). Employing descriptive analytical method, three aforementioned elements dabbled in previous are discussed and arrayed by explanation and instances from the text. The results reveals that particular use of such elements in the text with its extraordinary intercommunication with other postmodern elements play a significant role on worldwide éclat of One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

KEYWORDS: One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, fragmentation, Lack of Identity, juxtaposition of two disparate cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Works by Gabriel Garcia Marquez akin to any other authors winning Nobel Prize undergoes excessive explorations and studies and it is due to inspiring resonance and novelties of such authors. Although postmodern elements in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is overworked so far, there has been no proper investigation regarding fragmentation, lack of identity and juxtaposition of two disparate cultures. Using English translated version by Gregory Rabassa, these three elements are going to be investigated in particular to insinuate its impact on the entire work and to point out how these elements interact with other postmodern elements to create a unique piece of literature.

The method is descriptive and analytical; nonetheless, the cast of mind for the present study is combination and commonplace of major literary figures of postmodernism and Nunberg and Briscoe in particular.

Fragmentation

Since modernism, most writers desired to make their own particular voices in their literature and writing style to mesmerize their readers. Postmodern writers, in this regard are more interested in fragmentation. Such authors abolished the traditional, easy to follow, direct and continuous story lines and fragmented narratives in a puzzle form so the readers enjoy extra challenge on reordering the sequence and figuring out the story line. Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has utilized diversity of techniques such as; mixture of linearity and non-linearity, flash backs and flash forwards, in media res and many more to create even more complex and complicated narrative to follow(Alduey).

Curiosity and attention of readers is drawn to the story immediately when the story begins in form of in media res signaling: “MANY YEARS LATER as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.” (Marquez 8) In the following lines, the story continues as if it is the start of everything: “At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point” (Marquez 8); while it is not. The readers figure it out later when chapter two begins from an exaggerated long time in the past “WHEN THE PIRATE Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century, Úrsula Iguarán’s great-great-grandmother became so frightened with the ringing of alarm bells and the firing of cannons that she lost control of her nerves and sat down on a lighted stove.” (16)

Unlike what it seems to be the beginning of the story, the chronological opening above, is just another decoy used by Marquez for another mind game and it has the meanest connection with the progress of the plot. Actually, the story begins when José Arcadio Buendía explains his past with Úrsula and how they get married and were afraid of having a child. Couple of incidents come about and José Arcadio Buendía kills a man named Prudencio Aguilar in defending his honor. The problems arises afterwards when the couple see the dead man’s soul drifting around. Slowly, the couple could not bear its presence and decide to leave their town for a new place (Macondo): ““It’s all right, Prudencio,” he told him. “We’re going to leave this town, just as far away as we can go, and we’ll never come back. Go in peace now.” (18)

There are also numerous flash backs and flash forwards in the story. Marquez even has invented a mixture of them through flashback to the future when characters remember the future. Beside the

opening line of the story which is a fragment from middle of the story, following examples are among many other foreshadowing future events:

In the family daguerreotype, the only one that ever existed, Aureliano appeared dressed in black velvet between Amaranta and Rebeca. He had the same languor and the same clairvoyant look that he would have years later as he faced the firing squad. But he still had not sensed the premonition of his fate. He was an expert silversmith, praised all over the swampland for the delicacy of his work. (Marquez 30-31)

Or in another occasion when narrator is delivering the events of the present, it talks about Arcadio who is going to remember Remedios as the last person: “So deep was the affection that he and his wife had succeeded in arousing in both their families that when Remedios announced that she was going to have a child. Even Rebeca and Amaranta declared a truce in order to knit items in blue wool if it was to be a boy and in pink wool in case it was a girl. She was the last person Arcadio thought about a few years later when he faced the firing squad.” (48-49)

Such examples of fragmentation rule the narrative all along, as if Marquez has used it as a technique or writing style; moreover, it appears that Marquez has added another quality for flash backs and flash forwards. Whenever he uses flash backs, it is not just reciting the past events, and it acts as a reason or explanation for the present incidents; like the time when suddenly narrator explain the history of the family mentioned earlier, in which Ursula and Jose Arcadia Buendía leave their town because of a ghost haunting them. Ultimately it results in founding Macondo.

On the other hand, flash forwards acts as a unique form of foreshadowing for future events. While the story is at its beginning, flash forwards the firing squad and death of Colonel Aureliano Buendía. It happens for seven times during the narrative leaving repetitive fragments of future with readers who have no idea what to do with such piece of information, except waiting for the future and progress of the plot. Mostly such foreshadowing start with an adverb indicating the future:

1. “MANY YEARS LATER as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.” (Marquez 8)
2. “Those hallucinating sessions remained printed on the memories of the boys in such a way that many years later, a second before the regular army officer gave the firing squad the command to fire, Colonel Aureliano Buendía saw once more that warm March afternoon on which his father had interrupted the lesson in physics and stood fascinated, with his hand in the air and his eyes motionless [...]” (14)
3. “He had the same languor and the same clairvoyant look that he would have years later as he faced the firing squad.” (31)

4. “Years later, facing the firing squad, Arcadio would remember the trembling with which Melquíades made him listen to several pages of his impenetrable writing, which of course he did not understand, but which when read aloud were like encyclicals being chanted.” (40)
5. “Aureliano, dressed in black, wearing the same patent leather boots with metal fasteners that he would have on a few years later as he faced the firing squad, had an intense paleness and a hard lump in his throat [...]” (45)
6. “She was the last person Arcadio thought about a few years later when he faced the firing squad.” (45)
7. “A few months later, facing the firing squad, Arcadio would relive the wandering steps in the classroom, the stumbling against benches, and finally the bulk of a body in the shadows of the room and the breathing of air that was pumped by a heart that was not his.” (60)

Lack of Identity

G.G. Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represents the lack of identity in two ways more apparent than others! Firstly, he uses lack of identity by simply ignoring the identity of places or characters, and secondly through naming his characters. In fact, in the second technique, instead of giving new identities to the characters, he prefers to use familiar identities of former characters.

Forgotten Identities at the Core

One Hundred Years of Solitude is the story of lost identities. The story is about Macondo, a village where it supposed to be of mirrors, and later ice; however, nonstop rainfalls and finally a storm destroys it. The final lines of the narrative tells the readers how none will remember the city and its identity and identities of its inhabitants will be forgotten:

he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatabe since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.(201)

Beside city whose existence is under questions, or is supposed to be under question; certain incidents also lose their identity. For instance, in the story when workers try to have a demonstration, government officials and banana company’s managers orchestrate a massacre, but they change the course of the history and tell the outside world that the workers have packed their staffs and they have gone home. Readers of the story know better that in reality something horrible occurred and they just want to change its identity:

He inculcated him with such a personal interpretation of what the banana company had meant to Macondo that many years later, when Aureliano became part of the world, one would have thought that he was telling a hallucinated version, because it was radically opposed to the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks. (170)

Loss of identity in the story is not specific to the city or incidents. Sometimes in the story the most influential character like Colonel Aureliano Buendía lose his identity and although it is not a long time after his death, the majority either believe his existence as myth or folk stories, or question its existence even as a story and have never heard about him. Even though there was a street named after him, the course of history was shifted and his identity was lost:

Tormented by the certainty that he was his wife's brother, Aureliano ran out to the parish house to search through the moldy and moth-eaten archives for some clue to his parentage. The oldest baptismal certificate that he found was that of Amaranta Buendía, baptized in adolescence by Father Nicanor Reyna during the time when he was trying to prove the existence of God by means of tricks with chocolate. He began to have that feeling that he was one of the seventeen Aurelianos, whose birth certificates he tracked down as he went through four volumes, but the baptism dates were too far back for his age. Seeing him lost in the labyrinths of kinship, trembling with uncertainty, the arthritic priest, who was watching him from his hammock, asked him compassionately what his name was.

“Aureliano Buendía,” he said.

“Then don't wear yourself out searching,” the priest exclaimed with final conviction. “Many years ago there used to be a street here with that name and in those days people had the custom of naming their children after streets.”

Aureliano trembled with rage.

“So!” he said. “You don't believe it either.”

“Believe what?”

“That Colonel Aureliano Buendía fought thirty-two civil wars and lost them all,” Aureliano answered. “That the army hemmed in and machine-gunned three thousand workers and that their bodies were carried off to be thrown into the sea on a train with two hundred cars.” (197)

Naming as a Medium of Identity

Naming in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is important and story starts with things having no name, which implicitly represents the lack of identity. “The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.” (8) They have not named

most of the things since the objects were new to them. Humans name objects and concepts based on their use or application on humans, and since their identity and application were unknown to Buendías, they had no identity for them.

One of the first things that they name is the city itself. According to Bella-Villada “the name Macondo may have come from Africa. In Kituba language, the Bantu language is spoken in the western parts of the two Congos, the word for banana is *mankondo*”. The city named banana at the beginning of the story is in fact far from mirror or ice they intended to be and in the return in the history books (if actually there is a name of it in the books,) it is known as a city whose banana workers suddenly leave their staffs and return their homes. Finally, the city is destroyed based on the storm resulted from manipulation of clouds by banana company. There is another possibility that in fact Macondo once meant ice or mirror which are close-knit concept and now they have lost their identity among many thing else.

Naming of the characters in the narrative is also essential for their fate and identification. According to *www.sheknows.com*, meaning of the names is not the case, although it can be argued that for instance in Spanish José means “may gold give increase”, Arcadia means “pastoral simplicity and happiness”, and “Buendía” means “good day”. And as long as the names are followed by Buendía they had better days, and as the time passes Arcadia is replaced by Aureliano meaning “gold or golden” that in the story the pastoral is replaced by gold or money. What is critical here is the identity that naming gives the characters and alters their fate.

(Colonel) Aureliano Buendía at the beginning of the story is calm and peaceful person who enjoys the solitude and does not like to be in a crowded places. He even does not care about political attitudes; if he does not hate it. Suddenly, he feels that something should be done and gets the name colonel, then his life and fate changes forever and he leads a civil war. He is still Aureliano Buendía and is not separated from his power of foretelling recent future and survives “fourteen attempts on his life, seventy-three ambushes, and a firing squad. He lived through a dose of strychnine in his coffee that was enough to kill a horse.” (56) He also had seventeen male son, all of them named Aureliano (note the fact that without Buendía).

In the narrative, the readers realize that: “He had seventeen male children by seventeen different women and they were exterminated one after the other on a single night before the oldest one had reached the age of thirty-five.” (56) Naming all of them as Aureliano, and since the minute they are baptized; their shared fate starts with the cross mark on their forehead. And finally:

During the course of that week, at different places along the coast, his seventeen sons were hunted down like rabbits by invisible criminals who aimed at the center of their crosses of ash. Aureliano Triste was leaving the house with his mother at seven in the evening when a rifle shot came out of the darkness and perforated his forehead. Aureliano Centeno was found in the hammock that he

was accustomed to hang up in the factory with an icepick between his eyebrows driven in up to the handle. Aureliano Serrador had left his girlfriend at her parents' house after having taken her to the movies and was returning through the well-lighted Street of the Turks when someone in the crowd who was never identified fired a revolver shot which knocked him over into a caldron of boiling lard. A few minutes later someone knocked at the door of the room where Aureliano Arcaya was shut up with a woman and shouted to him: "Hurry up, they're killing your brothers." The woman who was with him said later that Aureliano Arcaya jumped out of bed and opened the door and was greeted with the discharge of a Mauser that split his head open. (119)

Characters in the story, especially Úrsula knows the best that naming them changes their fate and behavior, and tries to stop the naming process; although when she finds out that she is unable to change the family cycle of names, tries to change their identities or the identity-tie that comes with names:

When Úrsula realized that José Arcadio Segundo was a cockfight man and that Aureliano Segundo played the accordion at his concubine's noisy parties, she thought she would go mad with the combination. It was as if the defects of the family and none of the virtues had been concentrated in both. Then she decided that no one again would be called Aureliano or José Arcadio. Yet when Aureliano Segundo had his first son she did not dare go against his will.

"All right," Úrsula said, "but on one condition: I will bring him up." (96)

Also on page 146, facts above are repeated once more under different circumstances:

The atmosphere of the following months was so tense that even Úrsula perceived it in her dark corner, and she had the impression that once more she was living through the dangerous times when her son Aureliano carried the homeopathic pills of subversion in his pocket. She tried to speak to José Arcadio Segundo, to let him know about that precedent, but Aureliano Segundo told her that since the night of the attempt on his life no one knew his whereabouts.

"Just like Aureliano," Úrsula exclaimed. "It's as if the world were repeating itself."

In another moment in the story, character of Ursula is able to identify the real Aureliano twin based on his behavior. It seems that not only for the readers, but also for the characters in the narrative:

Úrsula reproached herself for the habit of forgetting about him when she spoke about the family, but when she sensed him in the house again and noticed that the colonel let him into the workshop during working hours, she reexamined her old memories and confirmed the belief that at some moment in childhood he had changed places with his twin brother, because it was he and not the other one who should have been called Aureliano. (129)

Albeit there are more instances and even better examples considering the correlation between names and identities or lack of identity in the book, in order to show lack of identity and individuality.

Juxtaposition of Two Disparate Cultures

Story starts with juxtaposition of two disparate cultures, continues with new disparate cultures and it ends with paradox and disparate cultures. These two cultures or attitudes or classes are always present and felt by the readers and never cease to exist. The story starts with the very basic and rural description of new found Macondo. Starting from middle of the second line:

At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point. Every year during the month of March a family of ragged gypsies would set up their tents near the village, and with a great uproar of pipes and kettledrums they would display new inventions. (8)

In a village like Macondo which has been unknown to the outside world, gypsies arrive and introduce the latest modern technologies and modernity side by side by magic. “First they brought the magnet.” (8) It raises a lot of questions: why a village like Macondo should need a magnet? Then they introduce ice. Later they introduce camera! These two does not fit with a village who have not name its surrounding.

The story continues and gypsies come and introduces other scientific tools. One of the gypsies named Melquíades even builds a chemistry lab for Jose Arcadia where other generations of Buendías use it for scientific and personal uses. The question that everybody should be asking himself is that why Macondo as a rural newly found village needs such scientific life style and how the rural culture is going to cope with such a change?

When gypsies come to Macondo, the do not just introduce scientific developments and they bring with themselves some magical objects as well. “This time, along with many other artifices, they brought a flying carpet.” (21) A village like Macondo with scientific and magical objects how is going to develop? Which one do they prioritize above the other? Although later in the narrative scientific breakthroughs increases but magic never cease to exist. Such as the time when “Father Nicanor tried to impress the military authorities with the miracle of levitation and had his head split open by the butt of a soldier’s rifle” (54); or when Remedios suddenly flies to heaven right before the eyes of her family members. “No sooner had Remedios the Beauty ascended to heaven in body and soul” (124).

The story reaches its middle and though it seems that scientific developments are in front, other rural culture, magical and even religious developments are growing likewise. Scientific grows is represented through many symbols such as: ship, army and guns, trains, doctors and medicine, bicycle and it is going to have airplane that storm destroys it. Rural development is illustrated through: establishing ways and connections with villages outside, establishing city hall and churches, having malls and neighborhoods, building factories and plantation sites and exporting business, expanding household etc. however, these social and scientific development does not replace other and opposite forms of cultures, on the contrary it flourishes them as well. For instance, although there was a father who had divine power of levitation and show some miracles, people grow ignoring and neglecting them: “If you don’t fear God, fear him through the metals.” (23) or in another occasion: “Fernanda rose up inside against that trick of fate, but she had sufficient strength to hide it in front of the nun. ‘We’ll tell them that we found him floating in the basket,’ she said smiling. “No one will believe it,” the nun said. “If they believe it in the Bible,” Fernanda replied, “I don’t see why they shouldn’t believe it from me.”

In the paragraphs below, in the best way, represent a village with a modern train and use of cosmetics, superstition and enchanted magical plain altogether and artistically illustrated:

He kept abreast of every kind of new beauty aid that arrived in the commissary of the banana company. Meme’s room became filled with pumice-stone cushions to polish her nails with, hair curlers, toothbrushes, drops to make her eyes languid, and so many and such new cosmetics and artifacts of beauty that every time Fernanda went into the room she was scandalized by the idea that her daughter’s dressing table must have been the same as those of the French matrons. (134)

When her mother ordered her out of the bedroom she did not comb her hair or wash her face and she got into the train as if she were walking in her sleep, not even noticing the yellow butterflies that were still accompanying her. Fernanda never found out nor did she take the trouble to, whether that stony silence was a determination of her will or whether she had become mute because of the impact of the tragedy. Meme barely took notice of the journey through the formerly enchanted region. (144)

Maybe the most brilliant example of juxtaposition of two disparate cultures is best represented in the scene where Bruno Crespi brings with himself a TV without setting a culture:

They became indignant over the living images that the prosperous merchant Bruno Crespi projected in the theater with the lion-head ticket windows, for the character who had died and was buried in one film and for whose misfortune tears of affliction had been shed would reappear alive and transformed into an Arab in the next one. The audience, who paid two cents apiece to share the difficulties of the actors, would not tolerate that outlandish fraud and they broke up the seats. The mayor, at the urging of Bruno Crespi, explained in a proclamation that the cinema was a

machine of illusions that did not merit the emotional outbursts of the audience. With that discouraging explanation many felt that they had been the victims of some new and showy gypsy business and they decided not to return to the movies, considering that they already had too many troubles of their own to weep over the acted-out misfortunes of imaginary beings. (112)

The gypsies themselves are so astonishing group. Throughout the history, the gypsies are a group of friendly people living out in the wilderness, travelling from place to place to be employed simply as a laborer. They also believed to have power of fortunetelling. (Advanced English dictionary and thesaurus) but even this is not the description of gypsies for the Marquez. They come from no land. When the village have not even named its surroundings, they suddenly find them. How? It is not mentioned. They are expected to be the farthest nation from technology and yet they bring both technology and magical objects with themselves and they foresee the future. Just considering Melquíades who sets up a chemistry lab for Jose Arcadia and teaches him science, there is another culture or class alive and flashing. According to Shmoop:

Melquíades is definitely the novel's most magical person. That's saying something in a novel where most people experience some kind of magic. Let's count the ways reality doesn't seem to apply to this gypsy:

One of the inventions he brings to town is a flying carpet. He cures the town's insomnia/amenia plague with some kind of magic potion. He comes back from the dead. He comes back from the dead several times. Last, but certainly not least, he writes manuscripts in a multiply coded cipher (encoded Spanish translated into Sanskrit!). It turns out to be a kind of Nostradamus-like prophecy about the whole history of the Buendía family.

Fernando's character is also full of duality of opposite cultures. She is brought up in a poor family who despite of their poorness, have raised her with highest social standards. Her family raised her to be queen and have had strict rules for her, for instance: "Fernanda carried a delicate calendar with small golden keys on which her spiritual adviser had marked in purple ink the dates of venereal abstinence. Not counting Holy week, Sundays, holy days of obligation, first Fridays, retreats, sacrifices, and cyclical impediments, her effective year was reduced to forty-two days that were spread out through a web of purple crosses." (105) when she marries and comes to live with Buendías, the disparate culture is parent. She was mocked by Colonel Aureliano Buendía because of peeing into a pure gold dish with her family's symbol on it. Such a person at the end, changes and becomes the head of the family. She is so realist and intellectual and yet she is corresponding with invisible doctors and undergo a telepathic surgery.

The duality of two disparate culture finally end the Macondo. For sure what is added to the peaceful, rural, calm village of Macondo is two cultures that violate its basic cultures: magic brought by gypsies and technology from the modernism. Apparently it was the rural climate and

natural storm that destroys the Macondo. On the surface it is true; however, let's not forget that it was the banana company and their manipulation of clouds that changes the natural and original trends in rainfall. On the other hand, it is Melquíades and his cyphered handwriting about the future of the Macondo that destroys the Macondo. Therefore, from the beginning where dead and alive can talk and influence each other, that makes the establishment of the Macondo, its one hundred years of history and destruction, existence of two disparate cultures are negligible.

CONCLUSION

According to the discussions above and characteristics of post-modernism, it is rational to conclude that there are indeed elements of fragmentation, lack of identity and juxtaposition of two disparate cultures in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and its use is unique and specific of G.G. Marquez that none has used it with such a perfection and artistry. The existence of these three elements per se are sufficient to claim that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is solid work of postmodernism.

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