

Quixotic Images in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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The penguin edition of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has a quote by Pablo Neruda that calls it “perhaps the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since *Don Quixote* of Cervantes”. The purpose of this paper is to look at some of the images that appear in both novels, written in the same language, 360 years apart, and which are today being spoken of in the same breath.

After the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula by the Moors in 711 A.D. till their defeat in the year 1492, medieval Spanish society needed warriors and horses. In order to accommodate this need, the land was divided into vast territories where large numbers of horses could be raised and trained. These territories were controlled by the marquises who owed their allegiance to the king. Knights were trained for war from childhood which taught them to be loyal in the extreme to their superiors and sometimes without compassion for those below them. Boys from aristocratic families became knights after lengthy preparations. As Renaissance unfolded in Spain and feudalism lost its power to a centralized government, “working knights” became obsolete. It is these knights we see in the chivalry novels and later satirized by Cervantes.

Cervantes published the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605, in the middle of the Golden Age of literature in Spain. In the novel he makes reference to and incorporates elements of four different types of novels that still enjoyed at least some popularity during this time: Books of Chivalry, Pastoral Novels, Morisco Novels and the Picaresque Novels. It is a common perception that Cervantes was satirizing these types of literature. He makes a reference to *Amadis de Gaula* (1508), which is one of the novels of chivalry responsible for Don Quixote losing his sanity. This book has all the elements that are parodied or satirized in *Don Quixote*: sorcerers, magic potions, damsels in distress, knights-errant, etc. Like the picaresque novel, *Don Quixote* is episodic, it portrays real geography and its characters are deeply human and show us a view of society from the bottom up.

A typical theme in Spanish baroque literature is the question of what constitutes reality. We see this in various forms in the novel: enchantment as against disenchantment, dreams versus reality, pessimism against optimism.... If Sancho Panza embodies the common man who is motivated by basic needs and desires complete with a practical attitude towards life, then Don Quixote is the uncommon man, the irrational dreamer who has not an iota of common sense despite his position in society. Where Sancho sees windmills, Don Quixote sees giants. Where Sancho sees sheep, Don Quixote sees armies, where Sancho sees inns, Don Quixote sees castles. Sancho is the antithesis of Don Quixote, but at the same time he also represents common sense and folk wisdom. Seemingly opposites, they grow to understand one another and to take one another's characteristics. As the novel unfolds, Sancho, the practical and dull-minded squire begins to understand Quixote's game and develops the capacity to change what he sees into something else, at least in his own mind. The two complement one another perfectly. While Don Quixote may be overly passionate in his attempts to administer justice and right wrongs,

and while he seems to have lost the capacity to reason, the irony is that often it takes a madman to see the world as it really is.

Gabriel García Márquez's epic novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1966, is the story of Macondo, a fictitious town and its first family - the Buendías. Just as the history of the Buendía family is the history of Macondo, Macondo is a reflection of the history of Latin America and the history of western civilization. In the hundred years of Macondo's existence we can trace history from the Garden of Eden to the apocalypse.

When Márquez wrote his first works, Colombia suffered one of the greatest American fratricidal wars of the 20th century as a result of the assassination of the popular liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. His novels examine in his own words "... motives for that violence..."¹ The importance of politics is reflected in the choice of the title, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which corresponds to the hundred years between the formation of Colombia in 1830 to 1930, when the conservative hegemony ended.

A major preoccupation in the writings of contemporary South American novelists, as is evident in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the traditional conflict between the liberals and the conservatives; although the manner in which this is represented vary from one author to another and Márquez has used satire in all its forms to express his views on the subject.

The Oxford English dictionary defines satire as a piece "...in which prevalent follies or vices are assailed with ridicule or

¹ Collazos, Oscar. (1976), "García Marquez habla de *Cien años de soledad*", en Recopilación de textos sobre Gabriel García Marquez, La Habana: Casa de las Américas.

serious denunciation.” This is what Don Quixote does, satirizes the novels of chivalry and “knighthood” and Márquez satirizes the political events of his times. Márquez uses hyperbole in the form of magic realism. Márquez believes that “magic realism provides a magnifying glass so readers can understand reality better.”² We first see this in the opening pages of the novel where Márquez describes the world as “...so recent that many things lacked names and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point...”³ This parallels the political naivety of the newly formed Colombian Republic. Macondo’s innocence ends with the arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote, the first magistrate sent by the Government. He orders them “...to paint the houses blue and not white as they had wanted.”⁴ The absurdity of this demand demonstrates the use of satire by Márquez to comment on the use of colours to represent political parties in Colombia and South America. This idea is further satirized when Macondo is alternating politically between two forces. “The houses painted blue then painted red had ended up with an indefinable coloration”. One can interpret it to show the meaninglessness of the colours and how in conflict the parties become indistinguishable in their barbarity.

Meanwhile José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of Macondo refuses to paint his house blue as he had wished it to be white, a symbol of both purity and neutrality. This commences the never-ending cycle of violence typical of South America as Moscote

² Gabriel García Márquez (serie Valoración Múltiple, Textos recopilados por Pedro Simón Martínez), Centro de Investigaciones Literarias, Casa de las Américas, Cuba.

³ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Penguin Books, 1981, pg. 1.

⁴ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Penguin Books, 1981, pg. 57.

returns within eighty days with a handful of soldiers. Just like Quixote, José Arcadio Buendía is the uncommon man, the irrational dreamer who despite his position in society is not ruled by his common sense. In his quest to leave the unhappiness of his present of having killed Prudencio Aguilar he seeks out a new life by founding the town of Macondo. He sets up the placements of the houses in such a way that from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort and he had lined up the streets with such good sense that no house got more sun than the other during the hot time of the day. He banned cockfights and tries to establish a utopian land. It is a fight against time. Later in the novel his utopia is lost completely. José Arcadio Buendía trades his mule and a pair of goats for two magnetized ingots. All because after watching the gypsy Melquiades demonstrate the properties of these ingots he was convinced he could with these find “enough gold to pave the floors of his house”⁵ He explored every inch of the region, even the riverbed, dragging the two ingots along... the only thing he succeeded in doing was to unearth a 15th century suit of armor. The mule and the goats on which his wife had relied to increase their poor domestic holdings were lost for this suit of armor. Later when the dying Melquiades comes back and leaves for him the seven metals that correspond to the seven planets and the formulae of Moses and Zoesus for doubling the quantity of gold and the process to manufacture the philosopher’s stone, José Arcadio Buendía is totally taken in and in his rudimentary laboratory he reduces Ursula, his wife’s precious inheritance to a large piece of hog stuck firmly to the bottom of the pan. The fascinating world of daguerreotypes has him trying to take one of god and in the process breaking the Pianola. It is also

⁵ Marquez, Gabriel García. (1983), *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, U. K., Penguin Books. p. 2.

José Arcadio Buendía who becomes “delirious”⁶ and loses sense of time and place completely.

If José Arcadio Buendía is the quixotic character then his wife Ursula Iguarran is his antithesis much like Sancho was to Quixote. Where José Arcadio Buendía looks for gold and works in his laboratory trying to make gold, Ursula grows “banana and caladium, cassava and yams, ahuyama roots and eggplants”, in the backyard to feed the family. Where José Arcadio Buendía thinks of Pietro Crespi the Pianola mechanic as a “fairy” Ursula sits tight on a vigil for her daughters not trusting him with them. Where José Arcadio Buendía declares Macondo to be surrounded by water from all sides, Ursula finds a way to the outside world rather effortlessly.

The dreamer Don Quixote sees what he wishes to see: a world of enchantment and beauty where knightly, idealized codes of behavior rule. José Arcadio Buendía also leaves his village and traverses lands and mountains for two years to set up a town where everyone would be equal; there were no bird fights and no deaths....

In the end Ursula tries to keep the family going and tries to atone for the sins of the family by sending a son of the family to the seminary whereas José Arcadio Buendía gives up the fight and dies. Just like Sancho in the end had been enriched by Quixote’s idealism whereas Don Quixote depressed by the reality he sees dies of a broken heart. At the end of his life Don Quixote confesses to being a madman and asks forgiveness for his follies. However, it seems rather clear that Cervantes is actually extolling the virtues of

⁶ García Marquez, (1983) *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, U. K., Penguin Books. p. 69.

this supposed “madness”. His point seems to be that while the world sees dreamers as madmen, they are the only ones who are same.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the “mad” José Arcadio Buendía is tied to a tree under a shelter of palm branches to protect him from the sun and the rain. But when the priest father Nicobar goes about town collecting money for a new church and levitating on hot chocolate to provide undeniable proof of the infinite power of God, it is only José Arcadio Buendía who challenges the priest. His devilish jargon was actually Latin and the “madman” questioning blind faith turned out to be saner than the rest.

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes makes a constant reference to magic. Don Quixote is convinced that sorcerers magically transform his world before his very eyes. Magic can explain the unexplainable. In chapter 10, Don Quixote tells Sancho,

By now you should understand the powers enchanterers have to alter things, not only to change their substance, but also to change their natural appearance into something else.

The interplay of illusion and reality are extended. Don Quixote makes magic out of what is real and says what appears to be real is not. To him truth is often masked by appearances. In an apparent contradiction, at one point he comments that what is ‘real’ is merely a disguise for what is ‘magical’! In order to force Don Quixote home, the barber and the priest must enter Don Quixote’s magical world and convince him that Dulcinea needs him, or that the Knight of Moon has demanded his return home. Seemingly Don Quixote is the victim of the tricks of his well-meaning friends, but it is really they who are drawn in by him and his view of reality.

Don Quixote cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality. His 'magical' world is so enchanting that he has difficulty leaving it and others are drawn into it unaware.

At first Don Quixote and Sancho are firm in their convictions of what is real and what is not. During the course of the novel, however, each is less certain of just what he is seeing, having been influenced by the other. The line between magic and reality, between illusion and truth, between appearances and deception begins to blur.

The novel is replete with examples of things not being what they appear to be: the nobles pretending to be shepherds, Rocinante appearing to be an old hack incapable of carrying his master and yet managing to complete their journeys. The introduction of the Knight of the Mirrors and his squire plays with 'magic' and 'reality'. Sancho is presented with a character who is not what he appears to be but who is his peer rather than Don Quixote's. His neighbour Thomas Cecial is wearing a paper mache nose, which gives him the appearance of being a bird of prey. Sancho is frightened by this. Don Quixote encounters the knight, who is none other than Samson Carrasco in reality, but this fact is of course unknown to Don Quixote. He sees himself as a knight, and perhaps as a ridiculous figure dressed up as a knight, because the knight's armor is covered with bits of mirror in which Don Quixote can see his own reflection. The constant interplay of what seems to be and what may or may not be is also seen in *One Hundred years of Solitude*. Prudencio Aguilar had been dead many years but "after many years of death the yearning for the living was so intense, the need for company so pressing, so terrifying the nearness of that other death which exists within death that Prudencio Aguilar had ended up loving his worst enemy. He had spent a great deal of time looking for him...José Arcadio Buendía

conversed with Prudencio Aguilar until dawn.... And he then declares the time machine broken because “the air, the buzzing of the sun” was the same as yesterday and the day before. The sky, the walls, the sun, the begonias, nothing had changed convincing him that time had stood still and was no longer moving.

Just before his death José Arcadio Buendía lived with the dream of infinite rooms. He dreamed that he was getting out of bed and entering an identical room. From there he would go into another room and then another identical one and so on to infinity. He liked to go from room to room, as in a gallery of parallel mirrors, until Prudencio Aguilar would touch him on the shoulder. Then he would go back from room to room, walking in reverse, going back over his trail and he would find Prudencio Aguilar in the room of reality.....”

José Arcadio Buendía's death in the novel brings the narrative a full circle. Macondo was established because José Arcadio Buendía was faced with the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar and he dies when he meets the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar. The cyclical nature of time and history is visibly marked in the book. The names are repeated generation after generation and at one time Ursula remarks “I know all of this by heart! It's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning.”(pg.303). A similar circular movement of the narration is also seen in *Don Quixote*. The theme of the novel is the Sally of Don Quixote from his house, his search for adventure and his return. The same circular movement is repeated in the second sally. The novel moves in this manner: Exit from the house; Inn and an adventure; Return and two adventures; In the second sally it is Exit, adventure and incidents; Inn; Adventures and incidents; Inn; Return, an adventure and an incident.

Even though Cervantes' purpose was to ridicule the books of chivalry which were very popular in his time, his satirical style of writing made fun of the social and literary norms of his time. The novel exhibits over 600 minor characters in its plot and uses them to give an image of idealism perpetually at odds with the evil, meanness and logic of the real world. Don Quixote is not a contemptible man, nor do readers at any point challenge what he does. Throughout the novel, Don Quixote is a sympathetic character. Even though he tries to push time back to the Golden Age of Chivalry, his efforts are seen as noble, and the reader empathizes with him. This empathy or sympathy is the sympathy for the underdog who defies all odds to win and yet fails in his attempts. His idealism seems to be madness in a world that sometimes views heroism and love as forms of insanity.

In *One Hundred years of Solitude*, Col. Aureliano Buendía seems to be another quixotic figure. He decides to fight the conservatives and sides with the liberals with his twenty one men tools shaped out of kitchen implements and knives. But later, he rejects them too. He fights and loses thirty one wars and yet remains a hero. His efforts to establish a just and fair regime are doomed and although he tries to commit suicide, he fails but his popularity and heroic stature only grows further. He too is the underdog and like Don Quixote his character too has the empathy of the reader. He is perhaps the most attractive character not only for the reader but Márquez too admitted to breaking down after "killing the Colonel"....." Yes I know that a point had to come when I would kill him off but didn't dare do it. The Colonel was already an old man, making his little gold fishes, then one afternoon I thought now 'he's had it'. I had to kill him off. When I finished the chapter, I went up to Mercedes on the second floor of our house, trembling.....I lay down on my bed and cried for two

hours.”⁷ Col. Aureliano Buendía who much likes Don Quixote, defies all odds to win and yet fails, whose idealism too seems to be madness certainly has the empathy of the reader.

In his book, *Utopia y Contrautopia en el Quixote* (Santiago de compostela Editorial Pico Sacro, 1976), José Antonio Maravell demonstrates how Don Quixote’s quest involves a criticism of modern society, which he describes as characterized by the development of a centralized state administration, the monetarization of the economy, and the creation of large standing armies. Don Quixote seeks to revive the deeds of chivalry in order to induce the modern world to adopt a more moral and heroic model of human behaviour. Cervantes dramatizes the tension between past and present by making use of such technologies as windmills, water powered grain mills, falling hammers and firearms. He associates these technologies with modernity and uses the anachronistic Don Quixote as a vehicle for illustrating the impact of technology on human sensibility.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, one sees Macondo transform from a sleepy backwater to a frighteningly modern town via the influences of technology, economic exploitation and foreign invasion in the span of only a few years. But the arrival of new machines and farming techniques do not make Macando a better place to live in, in fact things only get worse. The Banana plantation brings agricultural modernity but also brings the senseless massacre of the workers. Bringing to mind Don Quixote’s speech about pre-technological “Golden Age”.

⁷ Mendoza, Plinio Apuleyo. (1981), *The Fragrance of Guava*, Barcelona: Editorial Bruguera S. A. pgs 33-34.

....In that blessed era, all things were held in common.... All then was peace, all was concord and friendship; the crooked plowshare had not yet grievously laid open and pried into the merciful bowels of our first mother, who without any forcing, on man's part yielded her spacious fertile bosom on every hand for the satisfaction, sustenance and delight of her first sons. (Chapter 11 / pg 81-82).

One Hundred Years of Solitude points out that technology is not necessarily a sign of progress. For example the town's inhabitants forget their historical memory (no one remembers José Arcadio Buendía's attempts to locate the ocean). Soon they lose their spirit of exuberance and rebellion as well.

The carnival, the ice factory, the telegram, and the train all lead to the inevitable chronological expansion to colonialism and capitalism represented by the arrival of the Banana Company. The novel markedly points out that technological progress does not bring physical progress and material prosperity. It brings the downfall of the entire town, with it being completely wiped out. With the influx of foreigners and the advent of Capitalism, the reminders of a better, purer past, Col. Aureliano Buendía, Ursula and the otherworldly Remedios the beauty are either killed off or silenced or prepare for a confused and a morally ambiguous future of technological progress. For example the ascension of Remedios the Beauty, a miracle is treated as a natural event while the audience's reaction to the cinema is treated almost as legitimate rebellion.

Two books, written three hundred and sixty years apart, share most importantly, as García Márquez put it in an interview, “the author’s immense compassion for all his poor creatures”. Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote* does not bring Spain to the reader. He takes the reader to Spain, and more so to La Mancha. Gabriel García Márquez, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* takes his readers to Columbia and more so to Arcataca which becomes Macondo in his novel. And therein lays the quixotic reflection in *One Hundred years of Solitude*.