

The Potential Influence of *The Book of Genesis* Overshadowing in the Novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez

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Abstract

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a great novel and masterpiece of Gabriel Garcia Marquez which was originally written in Spanish with the title *Cien años de soledad* in 1967 and later translated into English by Gregory Rabassa in 1970. The author has a scholarly understanding of *The Book of Genesis*- which is the first book of the Jewish Scriptures and he brings out a lot of analogies, comparisons and contrasts from the book which he employs in his novel with a literary technique known as Magical Realism. Through this paper, the author has critically analyzed *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, with an intention to bring out the impact and potential influence of *The Book of Genesis* which is overshadowed. This paper is limited to the characters and concepts from *The Book of Genesis* which Márquez compares and contrasts in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This paper also highlights the magnitude and quality of the research done by Márquez on the Biblical text in the making of his outstanding novel. The literary devices known as Realism and Magical Realism are also briefly touched.

Key words: Solitude, *Genesis*, Realism, Magical Realism, Redemption, Buendia, Patriarch.

Introduction:

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) whose complete name is Gabriel José de la Concordia García Márquez was a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter and journalist famous throughout Latin America for his works. He is best known for his outstanding novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) along with his two other novels- *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985).

One Hundred Years of Solitude is originally written in Spanish with the title *Cien años de soledad* in 1967 and later translated into English by Gregory Rabassa in 1970. This novel tells the story of the fictional Colombian town Macondo and the rise and

fall of its founders, the Buendía family. It is evident through the novel and many critiques affirm that Gabriel García Márquez is greatly influenced by the themes from *The Bible*¹ and the same provides the foundation for his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Many stories in the novel correspond to what is taught in *The Bible* and anyone who has read *The Bible* finds much affinity with the same. Lois Parkinson Zamora commented on this novel and said- "Like Revelation, *Cien años de soledad* sums

¹*The Bible* is the Holy Book for the followers of Jesus Christ (Christians) which consists of Jewish Scripture Tanakh and a section known as New Testament, consisting sixty six books in total.

up *The Bible...*²Therefore, numerous comparisons and contrasts are possible between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Bible*. One of the notable literary critics from America, Harold Bloom has called this novel as “*The Bible of Macondo*” because of its close similarities with the first book of *The Bible*. The outstanding comparisons and contrasts are between the two patriarchs- Jose Arcadio in the novel and Abraham of *The Bible*, Melquiades the priest and Melchizedek the king of Salem, the contrast between the concepts of Solitude versus redemption etcetera. The examples clearly indicate that the author Gabriel García Márquez has spent a lot of time reading the first books of *The Bible* and profound research and quantity of time put into the making of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by making a detailed analysis.

Jose Arcadio versus Abraham: The comparisons and contrasts between the two patriarchs- Jose Arcadio and Abraham are interesting to observe as both were founding fathers. Jose Arcadio is the beginner for Buendia family as Abraham is the founding father of Children of Israel³. Jose Arcadio has settled down in an area “eternally sad” with relentless vegetation and barbarous landscapes- a land that is not promising in

any way while Abraham is in pursuit of his promised land in accordance with God’s directions. God promised Abraham that “I am the LORD, who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”⁴Abraham is favored by God to enjoy the further blessings in his life, unlike Jose Arcadio. One can note God’s assurance of His blessings to Abraham as He promises “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”⁵Abraham is blessed to become ‘a great nation’ and the ‘seed of Abraham’ who is Jesus Christ is assured an eternal kingship in the eternal kingdom along with an eternal priesthood identifying Jesus Christ as “High priest forever in the order of Melchizedek”,⁶ whereas the Kingdom of Jose Arcadio is not in any way promising anything good and not eternal which would require only two hundred years altogether to be completely destroyed and vanished. The contrast even extends to the children of these patriarchs- the eldest son of Abraham is named as Ismael who is prophesied to be a “wild donkey of a man”⁷, while Jose Arcadio recons his sons as those who run “wild just like donkeys”.⁸Even the twin grandsons of Jose Arcadio- Pilar Ternera and José Arcadio II also coincide with the twin grandsons of Abraham- Esau and Jacob.

²Corwin, Jay. “One Hundred Years of Solitude, Indigenous Myth, and Meaning.”p.62.

³‘Children of Israel’ is the title given to the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac and his son Jacob. Jacob is the grandson of Abraham whose name was changed to ‘Israel’ by their God and henceforth his descendants were called as the children of Israel.

⁴*Holy Bible: New King James Version, Genesis 15:7.*

⁵*Ibid, Genesis 12:2*

⁶*Ibid, Hebrews 7:17*

⁷*Ibid, Genesis 16:12*

⁸Márquez Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 15.

Melquiades versus Melchizedek: Melquiades is another character who replicates Melchizedek of the *The Book of Genesis*⁹ who is the king of Salem.¹⁰ Both of the names resemble similarities; however, Melchizedek is not given as much space in *The Book of Genesis* as compared to the space given to Gypsy king Melquiades. Melchizedek the king of Salem comes only once in the *The Book of Genesis*. Melquiades is seen throughout the novel persistently subverting men of the Buendia family with his alchemy lab and his prophecies scribbled in Sanskrit,¹¹ whereas, Melchizedek is not given much space in the *The Book of Genesis*. Another similarity between both of them is the fact that they both blessed the patriarch- Melquiades blesses Patriarch Jose Arcadio with verbal praise and science¹² and Melchizedek blesses Patriarch Abraham with food and spiritual blessings.¹³ The main function of Melquiades in the novel is to write down the history of the Buendia family, concentrating a “century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in a single moment.”¹⁴ But the purpose of the mentioning of Melchizedek in the *The Book of Genesis* is to provide a link to an order of priesthood which Jesus Christ is taken known as the ‘Order of Melchizedek’¹⁵ and

this will be evident and very visible as you continue to read the rest of the books of *The Bible*.

Solitude versus Redemption: As these terms refer, the Buendian family is provided with only solitude which is a state or situation of being alone- utter loneliness. They are never promised with redemption- an escape from the terrible and troublesome situation. *The Bible* declares its redemptive ideas the children of Israel with the intention of encouraging them and giving them the best hope. In fact, all the prophets of *The Bible* were proclaiming the future blessings to Israel during the time of their calamity with an intention to give a better hope. On the other hand, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* destroys its perceptions of redemption by establishing its perception of realism with mystery and enchantment. Therefore, for the Buendian family, there is no hope; hence there will be no possibility of redemption. It is extremely sad to see that the Buendian family has to live their entire life without any hope for any good that will happen in their life, but, survives through all the troubles and trials of each day. *The Book of Genesis* promises hope, highlights the benevolent God who is taking special care in His creations, whereas, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is atheistic in its approach and its ideologies are against the conventional ideologies of common religions.

Macondo versus Garden of Eden: In the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran begin the family in Macondo. Similarly, Adam and Eve were the first parents on the earth according to *The Book of Genesis* and they

⁹*The Book of Genesis* which is known as B'reshith in Hebrew language is the first book of the Jewish Scriptures which is known as Tanakh.

¹⁰*Holy Bible, op. cit.*, Hebrews 7.

¹¹Márquez Gabriel García. *op. cit.*, p. 384.

¹²*Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

¹³*Holy Bible, op. cit.*, Genesis 14:17-20.

¹⁴Márquez Gabriel García. *op. cit.*, p. 446.

¹⁵*Holy Bible, op. cit.*, Hebrews 7:17.

were kept in the Garden of Eden. The entire human family originated with them. Just as Adam and Eve committed a crime by eating the forbidden fruit, Jose Arcadio committed a crime of murdering a villager and joining the war. In *The Book of Genesis* God later punished the people by sending a devastating flood that destroyed the inhabitants on the earth, similarly, in the novel, plagues and hurricane destroy Macondo. There were plagues such as insomnia and rain that remained to fall in the village for almost five years that resulted in the destruction of the entire Macondo. The five years rain in Macondo happens immediately after the banana company massacre that talks about the wickedness of the city similar to the purpose of destruction caused by the flood in *The Book of Genesis*. *The Book of Genesis* says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"¹⁶. Thus the extreme wickedness was a common issue in both places that eventually led to the destruction of the people. In *The Book of Genesis*, it is a willful action taken by the Just God, however, in the novel, there is no place for god and this horrendous act comes as the result of human intervention.

¹⁶*Holy Bible, op. cit., Genesis 6:5-7*

Realism and Magical Realism: Realism is an endeavor to generate a depiction of actual life; a novel does not merely depend on what it presents but how it presents the same. In this mode, a realist narrative acts as an outline by which the reader paradigms a world using the raw materials of life. Comprehending both realism and magical realism within the jurisdiction of a narrative mode is vital in understanding both terms. Magical realism "relies upon the presentation of real, imagined or magical elements as if they were real. It relies upon realism, but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits".¹⁷ In the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* one can observe that the Buendian people are so concerned about themselves that not even Pilar Ternera herself recognizes that living well over 140 years is extraordinary. The fact that after the age of 145 she stopped keeping track of her age which shows that she is so involved in her solitude and her detachment from a life that she stops bothering to keep track of time in connection to her own life. Another incident that is magical yet an extravagant example of life is the lengthy period of rain that afflicted the town. "It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days".¹⁸ This indicates the disconnection from a life that the town's people suffer from. This is an impossible event, yet this does not distress the inhabitants of the town; they simply rearrange their lives to suit the new climate. They do not fight or raise voice against the rain because they are indulged in their solitude, and they cannot and will not

¹⁷ Bowers, Maggie A. *Magic(al) Realism*, p. 22.

¹⁸ Márquez Gabriel García. *op. cit.* 339.

question that which is not part of their own obsessions. Even the most impressive demonstrations of magic do not stir the villagers.

Similar to the magical realism in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, there are a lot of supernatural elements in *The Book of Genesis* which is considered as the volitional acts of God with an intention to fulfill his special purposes. Because, the God of the Bible is a person with Intellect, emotion, will and self-awareness who is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful) and omnipresent (present everywhere at the same time as He is not limited by time and space), He plans the entire events and nothing happens as a surprise for Him. But in the novel, there is no place for God and supernatural events just happens without any control or purpose. As a result even the inhabitant of Macondo cannot plan or expect anything for their better future which ultimately add the intensity of their solitude.

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Conclusion: A comparative reading of both the books- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Book of Genesis* will help the reader to recognize the immense amount of parallelisms- comparisons and contrasts in the main concepts. There is a hope for a better world in *The Book of Genesis* and people can live a very promising life in this context, whereas, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there is no hope for a better world and people have already adjusted living in bitter loneliness and they can do nothing about it to make it better for them. Gabriel García Márquez has an in-depth study of *The Book of Genesis* and a great understanding of its ideology and concepts which he could develop into a great novel based on magical realism. Thus, his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is indeed a masterpiece among all his literary works combined.