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GABRIEL GARCÍA-MÁRQUEZ: LECTURAS TEXTUALES Y  
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## Magical Realism in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*

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**MAGICAL REALISM IN GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S  
*CIEN AÑOS DE SOLEDAD***

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Ce qu'il y a d'admirable dans le fantastique, c'est qu'il n'y a plus de fantastique: il n'y a que le réel. - André Breton<sup>1</sup>

It was in an article by Ángel Flores published in 1955 that the term magical realism - originally used by a German critic to characterise a type of Expressionist art - was first employed as a yard-stick to measure, compare and evaluate modern Latin American fiction. In this article, Flores pointed out that one of the distinguishing features of magical realism is its ability to transform 'the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal'.<sup>2</sup> Flores' article also stressed the connections between magical realism and examples of European art such as Kafka's novels and Chirico's paintings. Flores' article, however, soon came under attack from various sources. In an article published in 1967, Luis Leal attempted to show that Flores' various statements about magical realism were ill-founded. The main aim of Leal's article is to see magical-realist artists - the examples he gives are Arturo Uslar Pietri, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, Lino Novás Calvo, Juan Rulfo, Félix Pita Rodríguez, and Nicolás Guillén - as part of a movement which is exclusively Spanish American in orientation and flavour. He thereby cuts the movement of magical realism- and the various artists that represent it - from any European antecedents, one of which is surrealism. At one stage in his article, Leal makes the following statement about the difference that separates magical realism from surrealism and realism:

El mágico realista no trata de copiar (como lo hacen los

realistas) o de vulnerar (como lo hacen los surrealistas) la realidad circundante, sino de captar el misterio que palpita en las cosas.<sup>3</sup>

While Leal's comment on the basic difference between realism and magical realism is true enough, he has forced the idea a little in his strict separation of surrealism and magical realism. Gerald J. Langowski, for example, has pointed out that Leal's demarcation of boundaries with regard to surrealism and magical realism is too rigorous, since it ignores the very real impact surrealism had on the writers mentioned by Leal, especially Asturias and Carpentier.<sup>4</sup> The main problem arising from Leal's thesis derives from his use of the verb 'vulnerar' (damage) in reference to what the surrealists did with reality. It is surely a misquotation to argue that the surrealists were intent purely on damaging reality. In their search for 'le fonctionnement réel de la pensée', as Breton called it,<sup>5</sup> the surrealists may have transformed the empirical laws of the universe we take for granted, but they certainly did not merely damage reality. Leal raises an interesting point about the similarity/dissimilarity of surrealism and magical realism which, if analysed in greater detail, will bring us to a greater awareness of the distinctiveness of magical realism.

It is clear firstly, that surrealism and magical realism join hands in their appreciation of the value of fantasy, and its paradoxical ability to unlock the secrets of the real world. Carpentier and Asturias, for example, two writers often placed in the mainstream of magical realism, have each expressed their interest in surrealism. Surrealism led Carpentier to see 'aspectos de la vida americana que no había advertido', as he confessed.<sup>6</sup> Asturias once explained the attraction surrealism had for him in a conversation with Luis López Alvarez:

Para nosotros el surrealismo representó (y ésta es la primera vez que lo diga, pero creo que tengo que decirlo) el encontrar en nosotros mismos no lo europeo, sino lo indígena y lo americano, por ser una escuela freudiana en la que lo que actuaba no era la conciencia, sino el inconsciente. Nosotros el inconsciente lo teníamos bien guardadito bajo toda la conciencia occidental.<sup>7</sup>

The attraction felt between magical-realists and surrealists was immediate and mutual. Antonin Artaud and André Breton were both fascinated by Mexico which they visited at different times.<sup>8</sup> Robert Desnos visited Cuba in 1927 and, by lending his passport to Alejo Carpentier enabled the latter

to escape from the island where he had recently served a prison sentence for political agitation.<sup>9</sup>

If the interests and subject-matter of these two literary movements were often similar, the presentation of that subject-matter was rarely so. The surrealist formula, as it stood, was unable to adapt itself to expression in the form of a realist novel. Thus, whereas many of the surrealists in France at the inception of the movement in 1924 turned their hand without a great deal of effort to poetry (among whom the most outstanding were Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard, Pierre Reverdy and Saint-Jean Perse), none were able to write a single good novel. The two main novels written in France in the 20s which can be truly called surrealist-namely, Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) and Breton's *Nadja* (1928) - can hardly be considered great works of art. Nor indeed can Agustín Espinosa's *Crimen* (1934), which was the only contemporary example of a Spanish surrealist novel. The reason for the signal failure of surrealism to produce one outstanding novel lay with its founder's self-avowed contempt for realism (without which, even if in subverted form, the novel cannot survive). In his *Manifeste du surréalisme* published in 1924, Breton ridiculed none other than Dostoyevsky, arguably one of the greatest of all the realist novelists. Quoting a descriptive passage from *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Breton writes:

Et les descriptions! Rien n'est comparable au néant de celles-ci; ce n'est que superpositions d'images de catalogue, l'auteur en prend de plus en plus à son aise, il saisit l'occasion de me glisser ses cartes postales, il cherche à me faire tomber d'accord avec lui sur des lieux communs.<sup>10</sup>

Breton's contempt for the commonplace, clichés, and postcards, as he puts it, of the realist novel is not shared to the same degree by the magical-realist novelists. For, as the word itself implies, magical realism does not turn its back on reality as Breton and his followers were compelled to do. The difference between magical realism and surrealism is, thus, not to be understood in terms of the cultural gap separating Spanish America from Europe. The difference between the two movements is rather one of degree of familiarity with the realist mode - which is non-existent in surrealism but very alive in magical realism.

The crucial concern with the real as well as the magical which is the hallmark of magical realism, as opposed to surrealism- has been successful in Spanish America above all because the mixture proved, paradoxi-

cally, more able to express the social reality of the Sub-Continent than any one of the constituents working in isolation. A. Valbuena Briones has pointed out that 'para dar sentido a la realidad americana se necesita una dimensión ilusoria, una fantasía o un mito',<sup>11</sup> and Professor Jean Franco has made the following perceptive comment:

Realism and naturalism have produced few good novels in Spanish America. Reality is too complex and bizarre, society too dispersed, for the Balzacian style to be successful. On the other hand, certain writers who had used fantasy and allowed the imagination free play came nearer to a true picture of society.<sup>12</sup>

While both these comments are substantially true, it is well to bear in mind that they are true in the sense that the successful Spanish American novelist enables us to see the fantastic within the real and not apart from it. Leaf's ultimate definition of magical realism hits the nail on the head. As he writes:

Tengamos presente que en estas obras de realismo mágico el autor no tiene necesidad de justificar lo misterioso de los acontecimientos, como le es necesario al escritor de cuentos fantásticos. En la literatura fantástica lo sobrenatural irrumpe en un mundo sujeto a la razón. En el realismo mágico «el misterio no descende al mundo representado, sino que se esconde y palpita tras él». Para captar los misterios de la realidad el escritor magicorrealista exalta sus sentidos hasta un estado límite que le permite adivinar los inadvertidos matices del mundo externo, ese multiforme mundo en que vivimos.<sup>13</sup>

In the magical-realist novel, mystery palpitates with the real rather than descending sporadically upon it

We have seen, thus, the main ways in which, as a point of definition, the magical-realist novel differs from the exercise of pure fantasy. The distinctive quality of the magical-realist novel will become clearer if we look at the question from the vantage-point offered by realist fiction. This proves an illuminating focus upon the realist novel, especially since the offshoot known as the 'terror' or 'Gothic' novel, was not without its fantastic events. Yet, in novels of this type, the supernatural tends to burst into a world which is otherwise subject to empirical and logical laws. This

is precisely what happens in a short story *La Vénus d'Ille* (1837), written by the French novelist Prosper Mérimée. The basic intrigue of this short story centres around the possibility that the protagonist M. Alphonse is murdered on his wedding night by a statue of Venus seeking revenge since, in jest, M. Alphonse had placed his wedding ring on the statue's finger rather than his bride's. The French novelist is careful never to describe this supernatural event. Through the mind of the narrator, we hear heavy footsteps on the stairs leading to and from the husband's bedroom on the night of the murder. We are also presented with the garbled account of the bride who claims that she saw the statue murdering her husband. All of these details and events are recorded in the detached and quasi-ironic style of the narrator. *La Vénus d'Ille*, thus, works quite consciously on two different levels. One of these levels is the world of the narrator who casts a sceptical veil over the accounts recorded, and whose world is empirical and real. The second of these levels is the supernatural world which erupts just once into the natural world with catastrophic consequences. It is precisely this disjunction between the normal and the praeternatural world which is absent from the magical-realist novel. In the universe of magical realism, the supernatural plane does not irrupt at certain crucial junctures into the empirical world. Rather, the supernatural is never absent from the magical-realist universe and, indeed, it is always visible to all. In this particular world, nothing is supernatural or paranormal without being at the same time real, and vice-versa.

Having established that the world of magical realism is at once natural and supernatural, I intend to discuss García Márquez's masterpiece *Cien años de soledad* (1967) in the light of this idea. In stating this, I am hardly saying anything new about magical realism, merely elucidating the inter-relation of its constituent parts. This disarmingly simple idea, however, has slowly been lost to view under the weight of new critical studies on the role of magical realism in modern Spanish American fiction. One of the reasons for the growing confusion and imprecision surrounding the use of this term derives from the arrival of a competitive term 'lo real maravilloso'. In discussing the merits and demerits of each term, critics have often lost sight of the simplicity of the original definition. Before discussing García Márquez's fiction, therefore, we must look afresh at the problems involved.

The expression 'lo real maravilloso' was first coined by Carpentier in the prologue he wrote for his novel *El reino de este mundo* published in 1949:

Lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un 'estado límite'. Para empezar, la sensación de lo maravilloso presupone una fe.<sup>14</sup>

This passage which is at once revealing and categorical has been used in a recent study by José Antonio Bravo as a key to unlock the secrets of the fiction of García Márquez, Carpentier and Juan Rulfo. The real problem with Bravo's study is that he adopts the term 'lo real maravilloso' quite uncritically. He says quite simply in the introduction to his study:

Preferimos la nominación que da el autor cubano, a otras que se manejan más o menos con la misma intención: lo mágico maravilloso, el realismo mágico, lo mágico milagroso, el realismo maravilloso.<sup>15</sup>

Bravo's choice of the three authors under discussion is likewise made uncritically:

Las novelas sometidas al análisis han sido elegidas, preferentemente, por razones de consenso: han alcanzado grandes tirajes, han sido premiadas y traducidas, corresponden a autores de conocido prestigio y, por sobre todo, muestran una atmósfera que llama la atención.<sup>16</sup>

The various reasons Bravo adduces for selecting *Cien años de soledad*, *El reino de este mundo* and *Pedro Páramo* are really no more than a statement of the popularity of the works, which is in itself hardly a convincing reason. Secondly, his contention that these novels have an atmosphere 'que llama la atención' (!) is not conclusive evidence that they will necessarily be suitable for discussion under the rubric of 'lo real maravilloso'. Bravo's study suffers considerably as a result of the lack of critical focus which mars the introduction. The choice of the term 'lo real maravilloso' as a guide line for Bravo's thesis is also unfortunate in that it is a singularly inappropriate term to use with regard to García Márquez's

fiction. As we shall see, 'lo real maravilloso' has quite different connotations from magical realism.

Juan Barroso VIII, in his study of *El reino de este mundo* and *El siglo de las luces*, traces thoroughly the use of the two terms 'el realismo mágico' and 'lo real maravilloso' in modern critical thought, and then makes the following distinction between them:

El realismo mágico es la combinación de temas que reflejan la realidad dentro de una exactitud y hondura detallística con técnicas que aunque rompen con las leyes de causalidad, acoplan apropiadamente los temas dentro de la unidad total de la obra. Cuando los temas tratados son americanos, se ofrece la variante de 'lo real maravilloso'.<sup>17</sup>

Barroso VIII's conclusion is, thus, that there is no substantial difference between magical realism and 'lo real maravilloso'. However, if the subject matter is specifically American, then the latter term is to be preferred. The distinction Barroso VIII draws between the two terms is, however, specious. All of the writers, mainly novelists, who are associated with the current of magical realism are Spanish Americans who deal above all with American reality. Barroso VIII's definition is also unfortunate in that he refers to themes, exactness, details, causality and unity without once mentioning the idea of the marvellous, or the magical. It is clear that, if a distinction between the two terms is to be made, it must be performed by looking again at the evidence available.

If we return to Carpentier's definition of 'lo real maravilloso' quoted above, a few salient features emerge. Firstly, it is clear that the experience Carpentier is referring to, since it is couched in the language of divine revelation (Carpentier refers to 'miracle', 'spiritual exaltation', and 'faith'), has much in common with the religious experience. This emphasis, I might point out immediately, is itself totally absent from magical realism. Yet, perhaps the single greatest difference between 'lo real maravilloso' and magical realism concerns the role that the supernatural plays in each. According to Carpentier's definition of 'lo real maravilloso', the experience of the marvellous is unexpected and unusual. It involves 'una inesperada alteración de la realidad', or, as Carpentier rephrases the idea, 'una iluminación inhabitual'. Nothing could in fact be further from magical realism. In the magical-realist world, as I have argued above, the marvellous or magical is never presented as something unexpected or unusual. While Carpentier's fiction operates on a dynamic

interplay of the marvellous and the real, with the miracle - imaged variously as nature, revolution, or the sexual act<sup>18</sup> - bursting into the real, García Márquez's fictional universe erodes any distinction between the marvellous and the real. It is in this sense that we can say that, in *Cien años de soledad*, reality is not real if it is not simultaneously magical. In assessing the role of magical realism in modern Spanish American fiction, critics have often shown how writers such as Carpentier, Asturias and García Márquez are able to integrate Amerindian myths within a picture of everyday life.<sup>19</sup> I intend to survey the mixture of realism and the magical in *Cien años de soledad*, however, by a close analysis of certain key passages of the novel, paying special attention to how realistic details are integrated into a magical universe. In a thoughtful article, 'Novedad y anacronismo de *Cien años de soledad*', Emir Rodríguez Monegal quotes a long passage from the novel - which centres around the murder of José Arcadio - and then analyses its uniqueness. As it would be impractical to quote the passage in full, I shall quote an extract which conveys, I believe, the essential characteristics of the whole episode. It runs as follows:

Un hilo de sangre salió por debajo de la puerta, atravesó la sala, salió a la calle, siguió en un curso directo por los andenes disperejados, descendió escalinatas y subió pretilos, pasó de largo por la Calle de los Turcos, dobló una esquina a la derecha y otra a la izquierda, volteó en ángulo recto frente a la casa de los Buendía, pasó por debajo de la puerta cerrada, atravesó la sala de visita pegado a las paredes para no manchar los tapices, siguió por la otra sala, eludió en una curva amplia la mesa del comedor, avanzó por el corredor de las begonias y pasó sin ser visto por debajo de la silla de Amaranta que daba una lección de aritmética a Aureliano José, y se metió por el granero y apareció en la cocina donde Úrsula se disponía a partir treinta y seis huevos para el pan. (p. 118)<sup>20</sup>

Of the passage from which this extract is taken, Monegal makes the following comment:

Los elementos sobre o extranaturales se apoderan de la narración: lo descriptivo, lo dramático, lo psicológico, pasan a segundo plano o importan poco.<sup>21</sup>

While it is clear from even a brief perusal of García Márquez's fiction that

'lo psicológico' is not of paramount importance, one cannot help questioning Monegal's suggestion that 'lo descriptivo' and 'lo dramático' also pass into the background behind the supernatural elements. Surely, García Márquez's fiction - and the passage quoted testifies to this - is not only dramatic, but also highly sensitive to the value and importance of description. If we look carefully at the extract quoted above, we shall see that García Márquez's text is not only fantastic but also highly detailed in a naturalistic sense. It tells us, for example, that the paving stones which the trail of blood crossed were 'uneven', that the name of the road it followed was 'Calle de los Turcos', that it hugged the walls in the parlour 'para no manchar los tapices'. The passage also informs us that when the trail of blood came right into the Buendía house, Amaranta was giving Aureliano José a maths lesson. We are even told how many eggs Ursula was getting ready to break in the kitchen (thirty-six). All of these details are not merely padding. They serve as a means of investing the fantastic event of the self-propelled trail of blood with a sheen of verisimilitude. It is in the first chapter of *Cien años de soledad* that we meet with perhaps the most impressive example of this novelistic technique in which the supernatural is presented in a natural, matter-of-fact manner. The relevant passage, which describes José Arcadio searching desperately for Melquíades, and also how a taciturn Armenian is able to make himself invisible by drinking a magic potion, runs as follows:

Se había tomado [ie the taciturn Armenian] de un golpe una copa de la sustancia ambarina, cuando José Arcadio Buendía se abrió paso a empujones por entre el grupo absorto que presenciaba el espectáculo, y alcanzó a hacer la pregunta. El gitano lo envolvió en el clima atónito de su mirada, antes de convertirse en un charco de alquitrán pestilente y humeante sobre el cual quedó flotando la resonancia de su respuesta «Melquíades murió». Aturdido por la noticia, José Arcadio Buendía permaneció inmóvil, tratando de sobreponerse a la aflicción, hasta que el grupo se dispersó reclamando por otros artificios y el charco del armenio taciturno se evaporó por completo, (p. 22)

What is most striking about this passage is not the fact that the taciturn Armenian is able to vanish as will into a puff of smoke like a genie in *The Arabian Nights* (although this is incredible enough), but rather José Arcadio's blasé attitude while witnessing this event. He is deeply moved

and transfixed, but this is because of the news of Melquíades' death. José Arcadio is not alone in failing to ascribe any importance to the taciturn Armenian's disappearing act. The group who had gathered to see his trick are, if anything, disappointed, since they disperse 'reclamando por otros artificios'. These naturalistic details tend to displace the focus of the narrative away from the fantastic as valuable or noteworthy in itself. This device tends to make the most magical happenings seem believable.

García Márquez gradually draws his reader into his magical-realist universe by presenting him with a fantastic event which is subsequently elaborated upon according to purely rational criteria. Such is the case with the episode in which Meme arrives home from school and greets her parents with the news that she has invited four nuns and seventy-eight school friends to stay at home for a week. The event is, in itself, unbelievable, but García Márquez gradually draws more and more events from this matrix event, which render the original event more believable. The unexpected number of guests leads the family, for example, to make vast accommodation arrangements:

Fue preciso pedir camas y hamacas a los vecinos, establecer turnos en la mesa, fijar horarios para el baño y conseguir cuarenta taburetes prestados para que las niñas de uniformes azules y botines de hombre no anduvieran todo el día revolteando de un lado a otro. La invitación fue un fracaso, porque las ruidosas colegiales apenas acababan de desayunar cuando ya tenían que empezar los turnos para el almuerzo, y luego para la cena, y en toda la semana sólo pudieron hacer un paseo a las plantaciones, (p. 223)

García Márquez infers logical conclusions from this illogical event. The setting up of rotas and timetables is a logical consequence of the congregation of large numbers of people who all want to use the same facilities. New situations produce new problems which in turn give rise to new ideas:

La noche de su llegada, las estudiantes se embrollaron de tal modo tratando de ir al excusado antes de acostarse, que a la una de la madrugada todavía estaban entrando las últimas. Fernando compró entonces setenta y dos bacinillas, pero sólo consiguió convertir en un problema matinal el problema nocturno, porque desde el amanecer había frente al excusado una larga fila de

muchachas, cada una con su bacinilla en la mano, esperando turno  
para lavarla, (pp. 223-224)

Fantastic, or supernatural events, such as self-propelled trail of blood, a disappearing Armenian, or seventy-two school children coming to stay for a week, are elaborated in *Cien años de soledad* according to the rational causality of events we normally associate with the realist novel. It is precisely in this original device that this novel derives its charm and universal appeal.

García Márquez's fictional world is a water-tight universe where everything obeys its own logic. The consistency of the world that the Columbian novelist presents us with is suggested by the fact that, not only is the supernatural depicted as if it were natural, but the natural is presented as if it were supernatural. Márquez's fictional world, therefore, neither follows the laws of the supernatural exclusively nor the laws of the natural exclusively, but bodies forth a dynamic fusion of both. The growth of the scientific spirit of enquiry in the West, which has dominated all fields of knowledge for the past three centuries, has tended to make us think of the world as an objective phenomenon which can be tested and understood according to rational and empirical criteria. *Cien años de soledad*, however, deliberately subverts this trend towards rational objectivity. For it presents the laws of the universe, and particularly the laws of science and history, not as if they were objective and self-evident facts, but instead as if they were unnatural and strange productions of man's mind. Márquez's device by which he reveals what is assumed to be natural as praeternatural is not an intrinsically new idea. It has, indeed, an illustrious precedent in Dante's *Inferno*. In Dante's divine poem, an act like breathing which is by definition natural is depicted as if it were something strange and marvellous, for we see it through the eyes of the inhabitants of Hell who look with amazement at Dante's moving rib-cage.<sup>22</sup> In *Cien años de soledad*, García Márquez does a very similar thing, but he makes us wonder not at rib-cages but at the scientific laws of matter and history.

The first chapter of the novel brings the arrival of the gypsies who introduce the community to natural or man-made objects such as the magnet, the telescope, the magnifying glass, and even false teeth. Márquez's presentation of the magnet is typical. The properties of the magnet, though known to man since time immemorial, were seen in the popular imagination as essentially magical until they were explained rationally and coherently by physicists such as Faraday (1791-1867) and

Tyndall (1820-1893). García Márquez forces the reader to experience the magnet as something strange and unfamiliar by describing it through the startled gaze of the naive observer:

Fue [ie Melquíades] de casa en casa arrastrando dos lingotes metálicos, y todo el mundo se espantó al ver que los calderos, las pailas, las tenazas, y los anafes se caían de su sitio, y las maderas crujían por la desesperación de los clavos y los tornillos tratando de desenclavarse, y aun los objetos perdidos desde hacía mucho tiempo aparecían por donde más se les había buscado, y se arrastraban en desbandada turbulenta detrás de los fierros mágicos de Melquíades. (p. 9)

To the innocent eye, the magnet might well seem to possess these awesome properties. Melquíades' explanation of the magnet's properties has all the spurious but convincing logic of the primitive who saw everything animistically:

«Las cosas tienen vida propia- pregonaba el gitano con áspero acento -, todo es cuestión de despertarles el ánima.» (p. 9)

This animistic explanation is also, we might note, implicit in García Márquez's description of the power of the magnets. Especially worthy of note are the details that the wood was creaking 'por la desesperación de los clavos', and that the screws are described as 'tratando de desenclavarse'. The telescope, invented by Galileo in 1609, is also presented in García Márquez's text as if it were a creation of the imagination. Likewise, José Arcadio's idea to use the magnifying glass as a weapon is based on a scientific invention. Archimedes (287-212 B.C.) is said to have postponed the fall of Syracuse by reflecting the sun's rays at, and thereby destroying, Marcellus' fleet which was attacking the city. Once again, a story based on truth is made to sound like a ludicrous idea. One of the most arresting examples of García Márquez's ability to depict scientific fact as if it were unbridled fantasy occurs when José Arcadio emerges from his study having made the significant through pre-Ptolemaic discovery that the world is round. The conversion of the natural into the supernatural is, in fact contrived by the skillful interpellation of Ursula's down-to-earth scepticism:

- La tierra es redonda como una naranja.

Ursula perdió la paciencia. «Si has de volverte loco, vuélvete tú solo», gritó. «Pero no trates de inculcar a los niños tus ideas de gitano.» (p. 12)

One of the most significant stages of scientific discovery - in which man advanced from his animistic world-view to an understanding of the movement of the stars - is presented as if it were a fairytale.

Later on in the novel, when the commodities of technological advancement associated with the modern era, such as electricity, the cinema, the record player and the telephone, arrive in Macondo, they are greeted with gasps of amazement by the inhabitants. These technological commodities are not only 'magical', but they call into question the boundaries between the real and the fantastic:

Era como si Dios hubiera resuelto poner a prueba toda capacidad de asombro, y mantuviera a los habitantes de Macondo en un permanente vaivén entre el alborozo y el desencanto, la duda y la revelación, hasta el extremo de que ya nadie podía saber a ciencia cierta dónde estaban los límites de la realidad. (p. 195)

In García Márquez's world, scientific discoveries are as believable as a magician's ability to disappear at will, neither more nor less so.

As a backdrop against which the personal fate of each member of the Buendía family is silhouetted lies the historical antagonism of Conservatives and Liberals which often erupts into civil war. In Columbia, in which *Cien años de soledad* is set, the struggle between the Conservative and Liberal parties, though buried in the very bedrock of historical experience, rose to a head mainly in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>23</sup> This period of history is largely covered by the middle sections of the novel. Yet García Márquez chooses to avoid describing the ideals which the Liberals were struggling to promote and those the Conservatives were just as intent on defending. The ideals with which Liberalism is associated, in Latin America and elsewhere - namely, universal education, land reform, social and political equality, freedom of the press, etc. - were of no interest to García Márquez as he composed his novel. The basic differences between the Conservatives and the Liberals become, in García Márquez's hands, huge and fantastic. Aureliano has the matter explained to him by his father-in-law:

Los liberales, le decía, eran masones; gente de mala índole, partidaria de ahorcar a los curas, de implantar el matrimonio civil y el divorcio, de reconocer iguales derechos a los hijos naturales que a los legítimos; y de despedazar al país en un sistema federal que despojara de poderes a la autoridad suprema. Los conservadores, en cambio, que habían recibido el poder directamente de Dios, propugnaban por la estabilidad del orden público y la moral familiar; eran los defensores de la fe de Cristo, del principio de autoridad, y no estaban dispuestos a permitir que el país fuera descuartizado en entidades autónomas. (p. 88)

While Aureliano's father-in-law rightly points to how the Liberals and Conservatives are divided on the issue of religion and state control, he ultimately explains the difference between them in an exaggerated manner. Since the views of each party are merely stated and not explained, they thereby seem arbitrary and fantastic. After this discussion with his father-in-law, Aureliano is filled with wonder, since 'no entendía cómo se llegaba al extremo de hacer una guerra por cosas que no podían tocarse con las manos' (p. 88). This down-to-earth approach tends to make the ideas dreamlike and almost unreal, which is precisely the effect García Márquez wishes to achieve.

It might be argued that the Columbian's deflation of the ideological context behind the controversy between Liberals and Conservatives is nothing new. When Aureliano, for example, admits to Coronel Gerineldo Márquez (a character who is the namesake of his creator) that he is fighting the war not for the Liberals but for his own pride (p. 121), he is, in fact, making the sort of comment that *mutatis mutandis* might have occurred to any one of the numerous disillusioned and ruthless characters who fill the documentary novels written about social conflict in Latin America. Indeed, Mariano Azuela in his classic about the Mexican Revolution *Los de abajo* (1915) tended, by excluding any sympathetic view of the ideological issues at stake and by concentrating on the brute facts of warfare, to give a dim view of the reasons for social upheaval. Although García Márquez, like Azuela, diverts the reader's attention away from the ideological battle, his intention for doing so is very different from the Mexican's. García Márquez is not trying to pull the carpet from beneath the buttress of positive values the reader might project into the war; rather he is presenting us with a universe that is at once real but also fantastic. The reason why one conscript whom Aureliano questions is

fighting the war against the Conservatives is unlikely ever to be found in a history book:

- ¿Es que se puede casar con una tía? - preguntó él, asombrado.
- No sólo se puede- le contestó un soldado-, sino que estamos haciendo esta guerra contra los curas para que uno pueda casar con su propia madre. (p. 132)

As we see, in a variety of ways, García Márquez unveils a world that is simultaneously magical and real. By treating the supernatural as if it were a natural occurrence, and by describing natural phenomena such as scientific inventions and political conflicts as if they were supernatural, the Colombian novelist manages to create a world in which the boundaries between the marvellous and the quotidian, the mythical and the real, are dissolved. Yet, we should beware of seeing *Cien años de soledad* as merely a work of fiction. Its imaginative powers often bring it uncomfortably close to the empiric laws of our own universe. Thus, the episode in which three thousand banana plantation workers on strike are collected in the station at Macondo and gunned down by the army, though seeming at first glance fantastic, follows closely a similar massacre of workers at Ciénaga, Colombia in 1928 on the orders of General Carlos Cortés Vargas.<sup>24</sup> In real life, as García Márquez found out to his great amazement, ten years after the event, nobody could remember exactly what happened. In the novel, the general reaction is: 'no hubo muertos' (p. 261). The comment made by the authorities to the accusation of mass murder of political undesirables has more than a superficial similarity with the government reports which, even nowadays, are released by Spanish American régimes:

«Seguro que fue un sueño - insistían los oficiales -. En Macondo no ha pasado nada, ni está pasando ni pasará nunca. Éste es un pueblo feliz.» (p. 263)

## NOTES

1 *Mainfestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 24.

2 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', *Hispania*, vol. XXXVIII, no. 2 (May 1955), pp. 187-192 (p. 190).

3 'El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana', *Cuadernos Americanos*, vol. CLIII, no. 4 (July-August 1967), pp. 230-235 (p. 234).

4 *El surrealismo en la ficción hispanoamericana* (Madrid: Gredos, 1982), pp. 35-36.

- 5 *Manifestes du surréalisme*, p. 37.
- 6 Quoted by Gerald J. Langowski, *El surrealismo en la ficción hispanoamericana*, p. 89.
- 7 Luis López Alvarez, *Conversaciones con Miguel Ángel Asturias* (Madrid: Editorial Magisterio Español, 1974), p. 80.
- 8 Luis Mario Schneider, *México y el surrealismo (1925-1950)* (Mexico City: Artes y Libros, 1978), passim.
- 9 Gerald J. Langowski, *El surrealismo en la ficción hispanoamericana*, pp. 88-89.
- 10 *Mainfestes du surréalisme*, pp. 15-16.
- 11 'Una cala en el realismo mágico', *Cuadernos Americanos*, vol. CLXVI, no. 5 (September-October 1969), pp. 233-241 (p. 233).
- 12 *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 300.
- 13 'El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana', pp. 234-235.
- 14 *Tientos y diferencias* (Montevideo: Arca, 1967), p. 108.
- 15 *Lo real maravilloso en la narrativa latinoamericana actual*. «Cien años de soledad», «El reino de este mundo», «Pedro Páramo» (Lima: Editoriales Unidas, 1978), p.6.
- 16 *Lo real maravilloso en la narrativa latinoamericana actual*, p. 6.
- 17 «Realismo mágico» y «Lo real maravilloso» en «El reino de este mundo» y «El siglo de las luces» (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1977), p. 65.
- 18 J. Labanyi, 'Nature and the Historical Process in Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, vol. LVII (1980), pp. 55-66.
- 19 See Suzanne Jill Levine, 'Lo real maravilloso de Carpentier a García Márquez', *Eco*, no. XX (April 1970), pp. 563-576; see also her article '*Pedro Paramo*. Cien años de soledad: un paralelo', in *Homenaje a G. Garcia Márquez. Variaciones interpretivas an torno a su obra*, edited by Helmy F. Giacomani (New York: Las Américas, 1972), pp. 279-293.
- 20 All page references embedded in the text are to *Cien años de soledad*, 5th edition (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1968).
- 21 *Homenaje a G. Garcia Márquez*, pp. 13-42 (p. 31).
- 22 Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher. Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 44-47.
- 23 J. León Helguera, 'The Problem of Liberalism Versus Conservatism in Colombia: 1849-85', in *Latin American History: Select Problems*, edited by Frederick B. Pike (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), pp. 223-258.
- 24 Mario Vargas Llosa, *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1971), pp. 16-20. See also the well-documented study by Lucila Inés Mena, *La función de la historia en «Cien años de soledad»* (Esplugas de Llobregat, Barcelona: Plaza y Janes, 1979), pp. 66-85.