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Magical Realism

In a previous discussion, we defined magical realism as fiction with realistic world-building that includes magical undertones or elements that are perceived as normal, not at all wondrous. This style is also often connected to social commentary. The examples we have seen so far are Borges' short stories, Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, and excerpts from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. These authors and their writings all had an impact on Latin American literature as a whole. Márquez even more so in Latin American culture, becoming greatly revered even today, especially in Colombia. Márquez has become the biggest author tied with magical realism and its beginnings in Latin American literature.

Reading *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* greatly expanded my understanding of magical realism within storytelling. After reading Borges and learning about some of the contents of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Márquez I was under the impression that all magical realism contained what we would consider truly magical. Such as Borges' "Library of Babel" where people wander an endless library all their lives or in Márquez's *One Hundred Years* when someone just floats away or an entire town is infected with insomnia by one person. There are no overtly magical events in *Chronicle*, but there are events where you can see the exaggerated or seemingly impossible events. The biggest example of magical realism in the story is the idea that no one ever warns

Santiago that the Vicario brothers were going to kill him. Almost every single person learns this within a few hours of his death and he is never warned until it is too late for him to save himself. Although this is not magical it is highly unlikely that no one would have said anything to a man that they knew was about to be killed. At one point he stood in a crowd of people that knew of his impending death, besides those who he directly spoke to, waiting for the bishop, and no one said a word.

Another example of magical realism in the text is after Santiago has been killed that the whole town smells of him. “ Not just I. Everything continued smelling of Santiago Nasar that day. The Vicario brothers could smell him in the jail cell where the mayor had locked them up” (Márquez 50). This is an example of exaggeration, where it's not really possible that everything would smell of a person after they died. The use of this hyperbole could show the manifestation of the town's guilt, no one did anything to stop the murder so the guilt became an overwhelming sense or in this case smell for the town. Magical realism adds to the story by creating an extra layer of interest to the story and takes the story to a more fantastical setting, but with a veil of reality as well.

Márquez's writing in *Chronicle* helped to expand my understanding of magical realism and how it can be more subtle than I initially knew. Márquez's writing also expresses one of the biggest reasons that magical realism is important in Latin America and its history. Magical realism allows for the fictionalization of events that enable authors to make social commentary on real structures, people, and events with the buffer of unrealistic events and exaggerations. A quote that connects well with this is:

These magical instabilities depend upon an array of narrative strategies that multiply/blur/superimpose/unify or otherwise transgress the solidity and

singularity of realistic fictional events, characters, settings. In magical realist fiction, individuals, times, places, have a tendency to transform magically into other (or all) individuals, times, places (Parkinson Zamora 501).

This quote expands this idea of magical realism and its ability to form social commentary but also creates a story all itself without only being about the comments it wishes to make. This is exemplified in *Chronicle* with underlying tones that criticize the Catholic Church, priests, and people in powerful positions, but these are not the main tones in the text. There is the overarching storyline of the murder of Santiago and the events that build to that climax.

The ability to criticize while storytelling could be important in Latin American history as these nations have become independent from imperial Spain and other countries, like the U.S. trying to control them and intervene as they are gaining their sovereignty. There have also been many struggles with dictatorships, military takeovers, and general struggles of power. These nations' struggles did not create an environment where open criticism was welcome or protected by any power structure. Therefore stepping into the world with powerful writing and criticizing power structures created an identity for Latin America and its unique history unlike many other established parts of the world. This idea could be discerned from Márquez's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech when he states:

A reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty... all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to

ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable (Márquez Nobel Lecture)

Márquez talks of the unique history of Latin America and how that inspires creativity, an outlet for some of the harsh realities in existence in Latin America, but also to celebrate its beauty. The recognition of Latin America and the art that originates from this part of the world made magical realism a staple for Latin American writing and continues to be an influence for current writers. Different waves of this style come and go from new writers (Rave 5).

Magical realism continues to be an influential and important form of writing in Latin America, popularized by Borges and Márquez amongst others that defined the genre. After reading Márquez's writing, particularly in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* I was able to understand a greater definition of magical realism and the cultural and historical significance that this genre has in Latin America.

Works Cited

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