



ECCLESIASTICAL CORRUPTION IN GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S *OF LOVE AND OTHER DEMONS*: A MAGICAL REALIST STUDY

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Article Received:31/12/2020

Article Accepted: 22/01/2021

Published online:28/01/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.1.40](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.1.40)

Abstract

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994) is a story based on a superstitious cultural belief of Caribbean Columbia. The novel deals with the story of a twelve year old girl, Sierva Maria who is bitten by a rabid dog on her twelfth birthday. The events that follow depict the power of Church and the unspoken fear that prevailed among the Church authorities at their dwindling power. The actions that are carried out by the Church associates delineate a horrifying picture of the state of citizens, both the Blacks and the Whites. As the title goes, the narrator tries to ratify the presence of psychological demons that contribute to the woes of man. As it is a magical realist text, the two worlds of existence are inharmoniously merged giving rise to the restoring of African cultural beliefs as the story is set during the colonial period of North America. The events of the story revolve around the role of Church and ghastly impact it has on the characters. Aided by hybridity and cultural alienation, the identity of the characters takes a deep plunge into the emergence of unconventionality that was suppressed with full force by the church authorities. The paper aims at establishing the traces of ecclesiastical corruption that prevailed in the eighteenth century Cartagena. The totalitarian regime headed by the Church as depicted in the novel shall be explicitly dealt with the analysis done through the lens of magical realism and the focus on the mystery hidden behind such corruption generally overlooked by a common man.

Keywords: power, ecclesiastical, church, demons, corruption

Gabriel Garcia Marquez does not need an introduction as his greatness has mesmerized globally covering the entire nooks and corners of the world. *Hundred Years of Solitude* being his magnum opus has popularized the tradition of magical realism, a postmodern style of narrative technique and all his works that follow, use this novel technique. The select work *Of Love and Other Demons* is a magical realist text in every aspect that deals with and criticizes the existing social problems. The fantastic elements in the novel depict the identity of the characters and are a reflection of the contemporary society of Latin America in which the

novel is set. The work does not include as heavy elements of fantastic as in *Hundred Years of Solitude*, but considering the social issues that the text has dealt with, Marquez unveils the deeply knitted ecclesiastical corruption in a fantastic way that creates a sense of real. The paper will focus on the aspect of ecclesiastical corruption and shall hypothesize that the technique of magical realism aids to the realistic presentation of this aspect and that power relations shape the corrupted scenario presented in this work of fiction.

One of the most important motives of European colonialism was the successful spread of

Christianity, a form of faith that never acknowledges reason. It is the power of faith that has historically driven the colonized communities to cultural alienation. There are many instances in the novel that showcase the corruption in the ecclesiastical power. The successful spread of Christianity had its trick declaring the natives as pagan and uncivilized; moreover, in countries like India, conversion to Christianity occurred on the caste-based discrimination. Preaching equality by the religion of Christianity, the discriminated groups of people were easily manipulated for the conversion. But, as the scenario depicted in the novel, the converted Black Christians in the convent of Santa Clara lead a life of filth and squalor. As depicted in the novel, "At the rear [of the convent] was a courtyard, always flooded with dirty wash-water, where several families of slaves lived together..." (*Demons* 66). The inferiority imposed by the Church authorities on the Black slaves aided to a similar behaviour by the White community in Latin America. This attitude of the people has been rightly put in the words of Loomba that expose the colonial motives, "the Bible held that all human beings are brothers descended from the same parents, the presence of 'savages' and 'monsters' was not easy to explain. One response was to locate them as creatures who had incurred God's wrath- hence the Biblical association of blackness with the descendants of Ham, Noah's bad son, and with forces of evil" (Loomba 92). The discrimination created on the basis of an absurd argument maneuvered and corrupted the minds of the slaves and they accepted this inferior stature without any voice of protest. The cultural alienation that followed due to the propagation of religion and culture of the colonizers, was alleviated by the actions of the Church authority. A vivid description of how Christianity was imposed on the Black Africans. It is evident in the words of the Bishop,

... We have crossed the ocean sea to impose the law of Christ, and have done so with the Masses and processions and festival for patron saints, but not in the souls of men... He spoke of Yucatan, where they had constructed sumptuous cathedrals to hide the pagan pyramids, not realizing that the natives came to Mass because their sanctuaries still lived beneath the silver altars. (109-111)

This heinous act of demolishing the established structures of culture and tradition in African countries aided by the self-acclaimed power on the basis of skin colour reveals the true guiltless nature of the colonizers along with the messengers of God. When the Bishop utters such ruthless words of merciless victory, the history of colonization and the ecclesiastical corruption is revealed in a fantastic way. Using the technique of magical realism, Garcia Marquez follows the avowed aim of authorial reticence and portrays the reality through his characters that vouch the authenticity of the facts. It was the "masculine order [that] governed the world" (*Demons* 25) and *Of Love and Other Demons* portrayed all the structures of colonialism driven by the masculine power. The Bishop who considered himself the "highest authority" (88) accepts the brutal history of ruthless power exercised on the powerless.

The love and purity that the ecclesiastical dome displayed during colonization was dismantled by the demonic affair that went on discreetly within the authority. Silencing the voice of medical science, the people like Bishop facilitated the superstitious beliefs of the mass by providing unreasonable instances only to sustain their own power. In the novel, ineligibility of Doctor Abrenuncio is proven by the Church authority by stating that "his last family name meant "dog" in the language of Portuguese" (*Demons* 58), which ultimately would prove his inefficiency to treat a disease that can only be cured by the Church authorities, performing the crime of exorcism, in the process killing the innocents. The Bishop disapproving of everything that science had to offer to the dog bite of Sierva Maria, said, "No matter what the physicians may claim... rabies in humans is often one of the many snares of the Enemy" (ibid. 59). Later, it was evident that the merciless and multiple exorcisms carried out on Maria took her life and this pitiable fate of the little girl was already decided by the Bishop, the highest authority. The tactic used by the people like the Bishops colonized the minds of the masses of the superstitions and irrelevant faith. Discarding all the reasons science had to offer, the Bishop said to the father of Sierva Maria, before admonishing her to the convent of Santa Clara, "...although your

daughter's body might be lost forever, God has provided us with the means to save her soul" (59). Even when Delaura justified the wild behaviour of Sierva Maria saying that "what seems demonic to us are the customs of the blacks, learned by the girl as a consequence of the neglected condition in which her parents kept her." (97) To this unconventional reasoning of Delaura, the Bishop warned him to take care of himself as he displayed illness by his thoughts and added, "The Enemy makes better use of our intelligence than of our errors" (97). Delaura is an example of the emerging religious frustration evident among the non-believers and he depicts the magical realist technique of a "deliberately rebellious mood against all forms of authority" (Durix 132) as an attempt to form an "alternative tradition free from colonial taint" (ibid. 132).

Depicting the contemporary political and social scenario of Cartagena, the murder of Sierva Maria went unnoticed and the perpetrators like the Bishop and the others associated went unpunished because of the liberty granted to them by the existing social and political structures. It is true that "disbelief is more resistant than faith because it is sustained by the senses" (*Demons* 61) yet the structure of colonial power that sustained partly because of the spread of Christianity drove the rank and file to a state of helplessness. Sierva Maria was not allowed with the hat inside the convent; rather than returning it to the father, the nun kept it. The fight between the nuns and the local Bishopric evident in the work is reflective of the corrupted minds of the so called peace-preachers of the established religious institution. And also, "They gambled in the most unexpected cells, either with Spanish decks of cards or weighted dice and drank furtive liquors and smoked the tobacco rolled in secret ever..." (*Demons* 74). The behavior and the temperament stood in stark contrast to the ones usually associated with the messengers of God. Thus corruption did not include only the affairs of the church but also in the minds of the ones associated. The elements of love and compassion are hardly found in the novel rather they are used only to disillusion the common people and to exert power.

Magical realism, as a technique deals with the exact presentation of reality, which the preceding

genre of realism excluded. The inclusion of magical elements not only includes the supernatural events that realism defied but also the cultural and traditional belief system of particular ethnic group that constitute their reality, which also was defied by realism. Without this inclusion, the reality of such ethnic groups shall cause an ultimate injustice and also create a sense of cultural alienation. Likewise, the basis of the story of Sierva Maria is folk belief that is concretised by the narrator's modern profession of journalism. A journalist, supposed to portray facts, gives in to the supernatural events and the traditional belief systems that create a sense of belief among the readers. The explicit portrayal of ecclesiastical corruption would not have been possible without the inclusion of these elements. Colonial power that prevailed during the time, in which the novel has been set, shapes the corrupted scenario. The successful establishment of the colonies instilled a sense of power in the whites, of which the propagators and the preachers of Christianity played an important role. The power associated with Christianity later, came to be a stigma during the period of its wane when its colonial motives came to the fore. This waning power of colonialism equally affected the ecclesiastical mien as a result of which, the desperate and urgent need to sustain the power inveigled corruption which happened not discreetly but unabashedly like the way it happens in the *Demons*. The corruption of the church authority, as depicted in the novel, is about all the scandals the period witnessed in the form of squander of power. It is power that administered the catachresis of the privilege bestowed upon the church because of their active association with colonial incumbency. Thus, *Of Love and Other Demons* significantly portrays the ecclesiastical corruption in a fantastic way keeping intact the realistic portrayal of the events and the truth behind the history of colonization.

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