

Magical Realism as Political Discourse: Power, Memory, and Resistance in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits*

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Abstract

Magical realism is a narrative form that emerges from the rich soil of Latin American literature. This research paper explores the complex connection between political narratives and acts of resistance, as shown in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*. Both novels transcend time as literary masterpieces and serve through time as macro analysis through the canvas of historical turmoil concerning the struggles of Latin American societies. This research will, therefore, compare aspects of these novels, from the dynamic interplay of power in action to the intertextual dialogue between them, revealing in more detail how each text responds to concerns with memory, identity and legacy.

Both novels are cultural touchstones tracing those struggles against authoritarian regimes and social injustices, documenting how the personal and collective narratives converge on a frame of magical realism. By comparing magical realism as a literary tool enabling the deconstruction of power dynamics and a means of resistance between the two authors, this study sheds light on how magical realism functions as a genre of political discourse. Auditory care in life and the mind, unique selves in love, loss, trauma, and transcendence are generously supported by what the authors offer the reader. Utilising a blend of narrative styles—intertextuality and metafiction—this combination acts as connective tissue in both writers' work, allowing readers access to more significant themes of society, struggle, and the resilient human spirit. This research will, therefore, explore aspects of the novels, from the dynamic interplay of power in action to intertextual dialogue between them, revealing in greater detail how each text engages with concerns with memory, identity and legacy.

Introduction

For decades, Latin American literature has been a means for expressing political dissent and the unsettling complexities of power structures. (Beverley, 1991) The socio-political ramifications are steeped in the history of the region. From the early chronicles of colonisation to Boom generation novels, writers resisted the straw man of scarcity, soul deprivation, and ultimately the fantastic through issues of social injustice, corruption, and revolution. This was compounded during the 20th century with increased authoritarian regimes, prompting an upsurge in writing opposed to the status quo and writing citations for the underrepresented. (Kristal, 2002)

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: an iconic work in magical realism, following the rise and fall of the Buendía family and the town of Macondo. It explores themes of love, war, memory and the cyclical nature of history through generations of Buendías. (Herrera, 2024) The novel is a deeply politicised work rooted in the Colombian history of civil wars, state-sponsored violence, political corruption, and foreign intervention. The novel's characters and events frequently reflect real-life figures and historical events, offering a fictionalised representation of Colombia's turbulent history. (Martin, 1977)

Acts of resistance appear throughout the novel against the forces of oppression. We learn about the endless rebellions led by Colonel Aureliano Buendía against the central government and, eventually, the devastating massacre of the workers' strike, which protected the fight for social justice and political change. (Hart, 2003) However, these acts of rebellion are often framed as ineffective or self-destructive, reflecting the difficulty in pushing back against the status quo. There is memory and narrative in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The oral and written records of the Buendía family story are a way to sustain cultural identity and resist the erasure of the past. Stories become a resistance against the forces of forgetting. (Hart, 2005)

The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende follows the Trueba family over several generations as Chile transforms politically around them. The themes of love, loss, family and the battle for social justice are explored with a particular emphasis on the female experience in a patriarchal world. (Rachel A. Wall, 2020) At its heart, *The House of the Spirits* also addresses issues of gender and power. The novel explores the patterns of marginalisation and oppression that women endure in a patriarchal system, as well as the ways they assert their agency and resilience. The Trueba women, such as Clara and Alba, defy conventional gender norms and demand social transformation. (Pons, 1997)

The novel chronicles the rise of socialism in Chile and its military coup, which brought Augusto Pinochet to power. Characters are drawn into political movements, marching in demonstrations, forming labour unions, and fighting for sweeping reforms. (Hart, 2006) The novel depicts both the hope and idealism of the socialist movement and the brutal repression that followed the coup. The supernatural very much informs the narrative of *The House of the Spirits*, especially in the character of Clara, who is psychic and communicates with spirits. These otherworldly features undermine the ruling rational outlook and introduce wonder and enchantment. Additionally, they offer a way to delve into the hidden elements of reality and the interrelatedness of everything. (Martin, 1986)

Literature Review

The literature review explores political narratives, resistance acts, magical realism, power dynamics, and social changes, linking to two works of literature: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez and *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende. Both novels, sublime cornerstones of Latin American literature, employ the technique of magical realism to craft intricate structures that mirror the violent personalities of murderous political landscapes and social upheavals in the region.

Both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (1963) and *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende (1982) use the literary device of magical realism to create political narratives that deconstruct authoritarianism, social inequality, and historical cycles of oppression in Latin America. (Ileana, 1990) Scholars have extensively explored how these novels blend the fantastical and the real to highlight the brutal consequences of colonialism, military rule and capitalist extraction. Márquez's representation of Macondo is often seen as an allegory of Latin American history, where resistance comes through fragmented acts of defiance and collective memory. (Martin, 1977) At the same time, Allende's Chilean context emphasises the gendered assumptions of political struggle, with female protagonists who resist patriarchal and dictatorial forces. (Martin, 1986) Both texts show how magical realism is not merely an aesthetic device but a mode of narrative resistance, and history becomes a site of struggle and hope. A series of comparative readings of these texts show how the authors accordingly reflect on such techniques to illustrate the energies from below that can oppose oppressive forces and the potential for broader social transformation.

Characterisation of Power Structures in Both Novels

Patriarchal Authority:

Whether within the pages of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, we find patriarchal authority to be a foundational concept that serves to structure the totality of how both the Buendía and Trueba families come to identify and create meaning for themselves and one another. (Hart, 2002) The phenomenon accommodates a continuum of violent manhood around the world and highlights the deeply entrenched nature of gender hierarchies. (García-Johnson, 1994) Yet within these narratives, a countercurrent is manifested by the agency of major female characters like Úrsula Iguarán and Clara del Valle, whose resistance and premonition challenge patriarchal domination. Like Ursula Buendía's household and her refusal to bow to José Arcadio Buendía's caprice, so too does Blanca Trueba's secret rebellion against Esteban's despotic regime — in her illicit romance with Pedro Tercero — echo Úrsula inspiration. Through analysis of these dynamics, the study investigates how the tension between patriarchal structures and female agency in both novels reflects broader political narratives and modes of resistance within Latin American literature.

Gendered Dynamics of Power and Resistance

In Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, the dynamic of the patriarchal power structures creates a silence for female voices. Still, the subversive potential of their female characters, in turn, is revealed through these narratives. (Beverley, 1991) As writers of the texts these women inhabit, through acts of defiance and resilience, they find ways to navigate the complexities of the gendered oppression they experience and challenge long-standing traditions to create a new state of female agency. (García-Johnson, 1994) Fernanda del Carpio's efforts to impose stifling social norms emphasise Amaranta's quiet rebellion (García Márquez, 2017) as Nívea del Valle's fights for women's liberation quietly complicate the social order. (Allende, 2015) Their assertion of this new agency is at once a subversive act against the regressive nature of the system(s) they find themselves subjected to, constructing the argument that the re-contextualising of gender identities is intertwined with socio-political redefinitions endemic to much (as in, all) Latin American political enclaves. (Swanson, 1998) Hence, a close analysis of these gendered dynamics shows how individual defiance can reverberate through social movements for change.

Economic Exploitation and Class Struggle Reflected in Characters

This is especially clear in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, where the impoverished character types depict, in moving terms, the entities of suffering facing the class system based on poverty stemming from, in addition to or primary, a profit-oriented economic system in the context of the patriarchy. (Hart, 2003) Through characters such as Aureliano Segundo and Esteban García, the narrative complexities unveil a cyclical dimension of class struggle, wherein personal ambitions become persistently suffocated by deeply rooted systemic inequalities. This dynamic informs their identities and drives acts of resistance against the norms of power that define their world, exemplified by Aureliano Segundo's rebellion against economic limitations and Esteban García's violent struggle for power in response to his status as an outsider. Thus, exploring their trajectories begs a deeper investigation of how foregrounded personal narratives interface with overarching narratives of collective struggles for agency and justice in Latin American literature. (Williams, 2003)

Psychological Dimensions of Power: Fear, Control, and Rebellion

In delving into the psychological underpinnings of power in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, it can be determined that fear acts as a vehicle of repression that drives the characters to submission and complicity in the face of oppressive forces. That manipulation creates an omnipresent cloud of anxiety in which people are sometimes crippled by the mental burden of their situation. (Beverley, 1991) For all the adorable fantasy, however, there's also a kind of desperation in it; for example, Meme Buendía's forced silence under the conservative yoke of her family recalls the scene, in captivity, of Alba Trueba's psychological torture, as both characters reflect how fear can be wielded as a weapon to maintain control. These narratives also reveal the emergence of rebellion as a valuable psychological counterforce, exposing how characters move beyond wrestling with their fears into harnessing collective action to restore their agency and claim personal empowerment in a world of systemic oppression. From this perspective, both authors deliver a powerful critique of the interactions between subjective psychologies and politics, encouraging us to further explore the role of these themes in their respective writings. (De Valdés, 1992)

Cyclic Time as a Narrative Strategy for Social Change

Cyclic time is an essential narrative strategy in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*, synthesising history's repetition and the omnipresent challenges of the societies. This temporal framework highlights how historical injustice echoes throughout generations and offers a critical lens that the characters use to engage with their present-day realities. (Al-Haidari et al., 2024) The show's cyclical fates for José Arcadio Buendía's descendants, particularly Aureliano Buendía, mirror Esteban García's tireless return for revenge, depicting how the inherited traumas of injustice continue. Using the causal mechanisms linking past and present to the future as a platform to consider the reflections of past empires in their evolution or dissolution, both authors, in some way, build a case for recognising cyclical history as a prerequisite for instigating social change and escaping oppressive cycles. However, this exploration of the role that magical realism plays as a means of resistance opens a larger lens through which we can examine the implications of it within the ideas of resistance in and through Latin American Literature. (Hart, 2003)

Acts of Resistance within the Framework of Magical Realism

Subversion Through Folklore: The Role of Oral Traditions

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez and *The House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende, oral traditions act as crucial tools of subversion, empowering characters to push back against the oppressive weight of political authority. (Sommer, 1986) The fabric of these tales is interlaced with the folklore of the narrative, a reminder that storytelling is not just a vessel for depictions of cultural identity but can be a fierce counter-narrative to dominant power structures. (Hart, 1999) Melquíades' prophetic parchments function akin to the whispered memories that old Pedro García hands down, histories that official documents wish to erase. Through the lens of magic realism, both writers reveal how oral traditions can provide a means for silenced voices to surface, reclaiming agency and facilitating social change in an oppressive environment. (Hart, 1999) This dynamic between folklore and resistance illustrates the immense power of the oral tradition in developing the political consciousness of entire nations in works of Latin American literature. (Beverley, 1991)

Reclaiming Agency: Female Characters as Catalysts for Change

The Central Figures that Reclaim Agency in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*: Fernanda del Carpio and Alba Trueba. Female characters demonstrate that female agency is still able to transcend and challenge patriarchal ideologies even in societies where machismo is rampant. (García-Johnson, 1994) Their strength is inextricably tied to their magic — Fernanda's stubborn spirituality and Alba's inherited clairvoyance — as these tools of personal empowerment also double as rallying flags against systemic repression. In charting the terrain of gender and power that surrounds them, these women become agents of broader resistance and, in so doing, provide insight into the critical relationship between individual acts of rebellion and social change in Latin America. (Hart, 2002)

Collective Memory as a Form of Resistance Against Erasure

As a key narrative strategy, collective memory challenges the historical amnesia of repressive regimes in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits*. These books show how communities rely on collective memories of trauma and resilience to create and cement their identities to assert their existence against erasure. The slaughter of the banana plantation workers, which the people of Macondo have such trouble remembering, resonates with the hidden atrocities of Chile's dictatorship that Alba Trueba will document in her notebooks. (Hart, 2003) Magical realism makes collective memory so powerful, turning the stories you tell about yourself and your community into acts of resistance against narratives that dominate. Not only does this dynamic underscore the importance of remembering within these literary frameworks, but it also positions collective memory as a form of resistance against systemic power structures. (Sommer, 1986)

Symbolic Acts of Defiance: Nature, Ritual, and the Supernatural

Nature in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of Spirits* serves as a potent site of shoring up that resistance when so much else is denied the characters—even at a metaphysical level—their confrontation with their environment is emblematic of their struggle against oppressive socio-political structures, not to mention the symbolic resurrection dimensional the narrative towards an embodiment of resilience and power. (Pratt, 2000) In the novels, ritualistic practices and supernatural elements are so interwoven that they become channels through which ethnic culture and collective memory can be voiced by marginalised groups. José Arcadio Segundo's escape into the jungle after the massacre, like Tres Marías's peasants' deep connection to the land in the region, suggests how nature becomes not only a refuge from political violence but a strength. These rituals undermine dominant narratives and create an identity and solidarity among characters, mirroring the complex interplay between power relations and social change across Latin America. By acting against oppressive practices, each author shows the transformative power of the relationship between the individual, sense of country and culture. (Pratt, 2000)

Comparative Analysis: One Hundred Years of Solitude and The House of the Spirits

However, while *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits* both engage with similar topics of political narrative and resistance through the lens of magical realism, their methods differ substantially. The two novels have a lot in common thematically and technically. Both wrestle with the cyclical nature of history, the effects of political violence on individuals' lives, and the role of memory and storytelling. (Rowe, 2000) Both also use magical realism to establish wonder and upend conventional ideas about reality.

However, the novels differ in scope and point of view. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is more about history's long arc and a community's fate, while *The House of the Spirits* is more about the experiences of individuals, especially women. Their grievous fates, such as that of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the

forever warrior whose conflicts never lead to genuine victory, jibe with the sturdiness of Blanca Trueba, who wills a better future for her descendants. (Franco, 1997) *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is more nihilistic in its perspective on social change, while *The House of the Spirits* presents a more optimistic view of the future. The representations of resistance are also quite different in the two novels. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, resistance is mainly shown as doomed to failure or suicidal, only for descending into new cycles of violence and oppression, as noted in the ongoing shortcomings of the Liberal uprisings. (Beverley, 1996) In *The House of the Spirits*, resistance proves more efficacious, resulting in real social and political change, if at the cost of much, such as Miguel's revolutionary activism and its long-term impact. (Beverley, 1991)

The Significance of Political Narratives and Acts of Resistance in Latin American Literature

The focus on more expansive political narratives and acts of resistance in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits* is part of a literary tradition in Latin America that celebrates storytelling as an act of rebellion. (Pratt, 2000) The novels testify to the life-changing potential of literature as a tool for responding to repressive regimes and as a means for communicating the experiences of the oppressed and motivating social change. Through their vivid depictions of political corruption and state violence — the massacre of banana plantation workers and the persecution of political dissidents — both works join a more extensive discourse on resistance. The authors challenge status quo assumptions and expose historical injustices, opening conditions for readers to reimagine the future and think with each other about different potentials for justice and liberation. (Herrera, 2024)

Both novels provide a voice to characters long marginalised in mainstream historical dramas, including women, indigenous people and the poor. The world, according to folk wisdom, is summarised in the figure of Pilar Ternera, from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, whose sybilline wisdom guides people through the trials of their lives; or Nana, the indigenous servant girl from *The House of the Spirits*, who encapsulates the persistence of cultural memory despite state-sponsored efforts to deny the past. (Pons, 1994) By placing the experiences of these characters at the centre, the novels challenge dominant power structures: They fundamentally imagine a more inclusive society. Literature alone cannot change society, but it can be essential to awareness, empathy and action. Both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits* have made a lasting impression on readers everywhere, inspiring them to reflect on and tackle the political and social challenges confronting Latin America and strive towards a more fair and equal tomorrow. (Kristal, 2002)

Conclusion

Both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of the Spirits* are testaments to the ability of magical realism to explore the political landscape and acts of resistance within Latin American literature. In their superbly woven plots, unforgettable characters, and poetic prose, these novels deeply reflect on the challenges of power, the value of memory, and the struggle for social change. They stress the importance of retaining historical and human material in narrative works. These works remain relevant by urging readers to engage critically with their world and fantasise about one that might be more just and equitable. Their use of fantasy, humour, and satire contributes significantly to their popularity and effectiveness. As global phenomena, these novels also articulate the local experience of Latin America.

Despite all this, the history of Latin America and the course of magical realism have a larger role, as the literature serves as a vehicle of social comment and transformation. Through careful historical contextualisation of each text, we have illuminated a dialogue between both texts on how narrative can be wielded as a powerful tool in shaping public consciousness within a repressive socio-political environment, as both authors employ aspects of magical realism to question the status quo and press for social change.

A close analysis of power dynamics reveals that the narrative strategies used by Márquez and Allende—intertextuality and metafiction—give rise to multiple layers of meaning, providing resonances that can engage readers across generations. The way the acts of resistance are rendered in their works can be viewed as acts of defiance in trying their best against the oppressive regime can be seen as a way of protest, but can also be regarded as a way of protest for a cause that cannot be emotionally placed with itself. In summary, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of Spirits* represent the power of literature to change lives, showing us how to live through stories and that they can become reality and drive movements toward justice and equity.

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