

ESPACIO CREACION/CREATION SPACE

Magical Realism: When Allowing the Extraordinary Is Women's Ordinary Work. A Poetic-Narrative Essay on Úrsula Buendía as the Foundation that Makes Magical Interventions Surprise Everyone (Except Her)

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In this poem, I wanted to shed light on the figure of Úrsula Buendía from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a character who immediately comes to mind when one evokes the current of magical realism.

When this novel is discussed or studied, attention is often drawn to its male figures such as the obstinate José Arcadio or the charismatic and at the same time monstrous Aureliano. Magical realism allows the various characters to experience a succession of events, both external and internal to their family, that seem entirely incongruous yet are accepted as part of a shared reality.

What is rarely highlighted, and what I sought to convey through this poem, is that Úrsula, as a mother, a pillar, and a tutelary figure for better or for worse, is the one without whom nothing would happen, nothing *could* happen. The other characters enjoy a certain autonomy and partake in the pleasures or curses of magical realism only because she stands at the center, in her home, the beating heart of both the family and of Macondo, sustaining the stability that makes all their stories possible.

Drawing both from sentences directly inspired by the book and from original creations, this poem is a sincere and feverish meditation on Úrsula and her complexity. At once nurturing and almost destructive, unwavering yet sometimes resigned, she is the character who makes the book exist, and without her lucidity, the reader could not perceive the true reality at the heart of the others.

Keywords: literature, poetry, Gabriel García Márquez

En este poema, he querido arrojar luz sobre la figura de Úrsula Buendía de *Cien años de soledad*, un personaje que viene inmediatamente a la mente cuando se evoca la corriente del realismo mágico.

Cuando se comenta o estudia esta novela, a menudo se centra la atención en sus figuras masculinas como el obstinado José Arcadio o el carismático y al mismo tiempo monstruoso Aureliano. El realismo mágico permite que los distintos personajes experimenten una sucesión de eventos, tanto externos como internos a su familia, que parecen totalmente incongruentes, pero que se aceptan como parte de una realidad compartida.

Lo que rara vez se destaca, y lo que quise transmitir con este poema, es que Úrsula, como madre, pilar y figura tutelar, para bien o para mal, es aquella sin la cual nada pasaría, nada *podría* pasar. Los demás personajes disfrutan de cierta autonomía y participan en los placeres o maldiciones del realismo mágico solo porque ella está en el centro, en su hogar, el corazón palpitante tanto de la familia como de Macondo, sosteniendo la estabilidad que hace posibles todas sus historias.

Compuesto de frases directamente inspiradas en el libro como también de creaciones originales, este poema es una meditación sincera y febril sobre Úrsula y su complejidad. A la vez protectora y casi destructiva, inquebrantable, pero a veces resignada, es el personaje que hace que el libro exista, y sin su lucidez, el lector no podría percibir la verdadera realidad en el corazón de los demás.

Palabras clave: literatura, poesía, Gabriel García Márquez



Aurélia Gervasoni

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Introduction

Methodological note: Just as Gabriel García Márquez uses the repetition of characters' names to express continuity and to emphasize the transmission of "gifts and curses," this poetic-narrative essay likewise mobilizes repetition to highlight the idea of accumulation.

In this poetic-narrative essay, I sought to bring to light the "work of allowing the magic" performed by women, and particularly by Úrsula Buendía, in García Márquez's novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). As creator and pillar of the household, a role still assumed by many women today, she enables everyone, and especially her husband and her sons, to live in a reality freed from domestic responsibilities. In doing so, they have

the time to let themselves be surprised by the visions, troubling events, and inexplicable phenomena that define magical realism.

Úrsula Buendía, however, is not truly surprised by this magic-filled reality: she is focused on “everything else,” out of necessity. This essay seeks to illuminate this dynamic and to place at the heart of this analysis the character of Úrsula and her many contemporary “sisters” who continue to resemble her.

Additionally, let’s note that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would never have seen the light of day without Mercedes Barcha, García Márquez’s wife, who gave him the money he did not have to mail his manuscript to a publisher by selling items from their household. Without that, the manuscript would likely never have become the magnum opus of the future Nobel Prize in Literature. While he was writing it, before sending it off, she ensured the household’s subsistence so that he could devote himself entirely to writing (Manzanilla 2024).

I. AS THE HEROES ACCOMPLISH...

The two major male figures in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are José Arcadio Buendía Father, the pioneer who founded Macondo, and his son Aureliano Buendía, who became a colonel in war.

What José Arcadio Was Able to Accomplish

- Devote himself to searching for alchemical formulas on how to transform gold
- Father as many children as he wished
- Show no interest in his children’s education until Úrsula pointed it out to him years after their birth
- Forge lasting and sincere friendships, particularly with Melquíades
- Never cook a meal and lock himself in a room where meals were brought to him
- Not concern himself with the household finances

What Aureliano Was Able to Accomplish

- Devote himself to searching for alchemical formulas on how to transform gold and later to crafting small gold fish that he would melt down after finishing them
- Show no interest in the education of his children, scattered by the course of his military actions
- Forge lasting and sincere friendships, particularly with Melquíades
- Wage an endless war and bring it back to Macondo, entangling his brother Arcadio and some of his childhood friends in it
- Never cook a meal and lock himself in a room where meals were brought to him
- Not concern himself with the household finances

For them, reality is magical: a succession of visions, enchanted formulas, journeys to the edges of the country, incredible discoveries. All of this takes place primarily in the house in Macondo where the Buendía family lives, managed by the matriarch Úrsula Buendía, wife of José Arcadio Buendía Father, the pioneering founders of the village.

II. ... THE WOMEN VANISH

Reverse Chronology of Úrsula Buendía, Matriarch

Úrsula dies curled up like a newborn, blind yet perceptive until the end. “Like a newborn”—because she was never able to free herself from the condition assigned to her at birth, that of being a woman and future mother not only of a family but of an entire village? Like a life that was never able to begin.

Úrsula announces that she will die when the rain stops.

She gradually becomes blind despite her refusal to grow old. By refusing to age, we understand her anxiety at leaving her house, her children, and her descendants at the mercy of a reality that overwhelms them in its most basic, material necessities. Who will notice the water damage and the groceries that need buying? They would all let themselves die; they all did let themselves die. Her mind—her only room of her own in her vast house in Macondo—is inhabited by a single preoccupation: anticipating the moods of some, the reactions of others, even while blind. She knows each inhabitant’s habits by heart, to the point that she can locate lost objects with precision: “Úrsula, haven’t you seen my...?”

Epiphany of her existence: when she realizes that she has “given birth to monsters,” whom she must nonetheless accept within her home? Is that the worst part? Not being able to detach herself from the horde she herself raised, cherished, disowned, searched for, pursued, expelled, and then welcomed back again?

Úrsula saves several of her children from death, including Colonel Aureliano Buendía.

She cares for her husband, who has become demented and now speaks only Latin, living tied to the tree in the garden until the end of his days.

She raises the illegitimate children of her sons, and then their children in turn.

She tries to catch up with José Arcadio, Jr., who has left with the “gitanos.”

She tells José Arcadio that he should take responsibility for the education of his children.

She creates a business selling sugar animals to compensate for the losses caused by José Arcadio's unemployment and his theft of their savings; gold coins inherited from her parents.

She raises her own children.

She gives birth in the jungle.

She becomes pregnant, and her first concern at the birth of her son is to check whether he has a pig's tail, or an iguana's.

She agrees to follow José Arcadio on a long journey to found Macondo.

She refuses sexual relations out of fear of a curse that might fall upon her descendants, giving them an animal's tail at birth.

She meets José Arcadio and decides to live with him.

Birth of Úrsula, newborn from beginning to end.

.....

Úrsula is mental succession: anticipation / creation / conception / anxiety / realization / cruelty / assistance / persistence.

Úrsula is physical succession: opening the door / placing bowls / preparing / cooking / selling / bending down / stubbing her toe against the door / changing the sheets / managing the house / grasping an object / not breaking it.

She has no time to let herself be surprised by visions or to marvel at the spirits of her house, whose every corner she knows by heart. If a magical intervention disturbs her, she opts for pragmatic solutions to remedy it. Perhaps she would have been very gifted at crafting gold fish, but she had to devote herself to her business of selling sugar animals instead.

III. A POEM ABOUT URSULA'S SISTERS

Listen to the poem in English and Spanish:
[https://www.aureliagervasoni.com/poetry](https://www.aureliagervasoni.com/poetry/marlaspoemmagicalrealism)
[/marlaspoemmagicalrealism](https://www.aureliagervasoni.com/poetry/marlaspoemmagicalrealism)

Another Time, Another Place

A bit of sugar on your tongue—you leave the kitchen
Your lips wiped with that attentive yet hurried gesture
Gesture of Mother

A vision of a bird crossing the window, she recounts
The pane should be cleaned, he explains

A few years earlier, your cradle had been tucked beneath the almond tree
Someone brought it inside when the rain began to fall

Still getting up in the morning

On the domestic front, do not disturb those waging civil war
Do not enter the office when he is working
Gesture for Father

The gold seems finally to have found your forehead

Grain by grain, your reality is invisibly adjusted
So that your tongue finds sugar, day after day
The sounds of the kitchen snap in your ears
You wonder why it cannot be quieter — after all, only one pair of hands is at work

Time to come to the table
Each name arrives at its own rhythm
Some insist on eating while it's warm

Something has just crashed to the floor

Becoming more than she wanted to be
So that you might at least become who you are
Sacrifice creates a debt

Waiting for you to leave and live
Then return without depending

The dust of the path before the house on your cheeks to protect you from the sun

The house expands so that each room may hold another womb
Birthing creatures
So that the ordinary might matter
So that the extraordinary may appear
Apparently—
For other hands to reach
Someone must first have carried life—
There are old women who still weep—
The white ribbons of their weddings turned yellow
And the letters no longer speak their words—
The realists who allow the magic that surprises
Who ensure that the deeds of others are not the undoing of their homes
There are Úrsula's sisters who still cry—

Otro Tiempo, Otro Lugar

Un poco de azúcar sobre tu lengua — sales de la cocina
Tus labios se limpian con ese gesto atento y apresurado
Gesto *de* Madre

*Una visión de un pájaro cruzando la ventana, dice ella
El vidrio habría que limpiarlo, responde él*

Años antes, tu cuna había sido colocada bajo el almendro
Alguien la entró cuando empezó a llover

Seguir levantándose cada mañana

En el frente doméstico, no molestes a quienes libran la guerra civil
No entres en la oficina cuando él está trabajando
Gesto *para* Padre

El oro parece haber encontrado por fin tu frente

Grano a grano, tu realidad se ajusta sin que lo veas,
para que tu lengua encuentre azúcar, día tras día

Los sonidos de la cocina estallan en tus oídos
Te preguntas por qué no puede haber más silencio —
al fin y al cabo, solo hay un par de manos trabajando

Es hora de venir a la mesa
Cada nombre llega a su propio ritmo
Algunos insisten en comer mientras aún está caliente.

Algo acaba de caer al suelo.

Volverse más de lo que ella quiso ser
para que tú al menos puedas ser quien eres.
El sacrificio crea una deuda,
esperando que te vayas a vivir
y luego regreses sin depender.

*El polvo del camino frente a la casa sobre tus mejillas,
para protegerte del sol.*

La casa se expande para que cada habitación
pueda albergar otro vientre,
pariendo criaturas
para que lo ordinario tenga peso,
para que lo extraordinario pueda aparecer.
Porque, al parecer —
para que otras manos alcancen,
alguien tuvo primero que cargar la vida.
Hay ancianas que aún lloran —
las cintas blancas de sus bodas se volvieron amarillas
y las cartas ya no dicen lo que decían.
Las realistas que permiten la magia que sorprende,
las que se aseguran de que las hazañas de otros
no deshagan sus casas.
Hay hermanas de Úrsula
que todavía lloran.

CONCLUSION: Magical Realism - A Misconception

Reality pierced by magical appearances is a large bowl of beans in woven palm leaves placed at the center of a table, covered with a neatly laid white cloth. Each extraordinary

intervention makes a small bean appear in the bowl. Some of the inhabitants of the house grab handfuls directly with their hands. Others use a spoon or small containers. Periods of rain slow the appearance of beans; summers, on the contrary, are prolific in visions and improbable distortions of situations.

The explanation for all of this becomes rational, since it is rationed and measured by the beans on the table: nature works this way; so does the ordinary. Why look further when one benefits from it? Even old José Arcadio under his oak tree can now devote himself entirely to contemplating his own mind, his long-desired seclusion now excused by his madness.

Who placed the bowl on the table?

Aurélia Gervasoni (2003) is a Belgian poet and multidisciplinary artist. In her work, she addresses questions of gender and intimate relationships. Unaltered yet always poetic, she exposes these subjects that concern us all but that we do not always dare to look at directly. Her art is intrinsically political and feminist. Her work also explores communication between individuals and the theme of autism, which affects her personally. In parallel, she is a researcher in law and literature at the University of Zurich. Her first academic publications were all inspired by Gabriel García Márquez and Colombia, where she found her true spiritual and geographical home. She also contributes regularly to the research group in comparative constitutional law at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

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