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CULTURE, MYTH AND MEMORY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'XENO' IN GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract

The paper at hand is an attempt to lend perspective to the rhetorical construction of the 'xeno' in Gabriel García Márquez's short stories. In this relation, the notion of the 'xeno' is discursively perused based on the application of diverse precepts by renowned theorists in logical progression: William Empson's categories of 'ambiguity', Claude Levi Strauss's concept of 'bricolage', Bakhtin's premise of the 'carnavalesque-grotesque' contextualised by the principle of binary opposition, Viktor Shklovsky's technique of 'defamiliarization', and Vladimir Propp's impression of 'archetypes'. In continuum, the trope of 'ambiguity' is identified as pivotal to the analysis.

Keywords

Memory Studies, Cultural Theory, Literature, Gabriel García Márquez, Rhetoric, Ambiguity, Xeno

1. Introduction

Nobel Prize laureate, Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), fondly recognized as *gabo* in Latin America, is widely acknowledged as a novelist, short-story writer and journalist. Whilst his novels – *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Love in the Time of*

Cholera (1985) – have received critical acclaim in the light of magic realism, his short stories in particular pay a subtle tribute to his artistry in rhetoric: in that, Marquez is legendary for his signature choice of diction given his treatment of multifarious themes that border on the dilemma of binary oppositions, an aspect accentuated by what appears to be a conscious focus on distinctive features such as hybridity, irony and authorial reticence.

In hindsight, considering the polemical thrust of literature in the domain of ‘memory studies’, which is a thread of cultural studies, it is apparent, perceived notions of culture, myth and memory complexly combine to create a rich tapestry of rhetorical visuality in Marquez’s short stories in terms of imagery, whereupon the reader is ushered into quaint little towns peopled with seemingly uncanny characters: they are often portrayed as merely incidental to the plot, although they represent what may be aptly termed the ‘*xeno*’ in cultural theory. In Greek, the notion of the ‘*xeno*’ loosely translates to ‘foreigner’, ‘alien’ or ‘stranger’ by its generic definition. However, in the discipline of ‘memory studies’, the term specifically connotes the politics of inclusion and exclusion, pointing to ‘the other’ of culture – the animal, the outcast, the bizarre, the bodily grotesque – largely viewed as the very parody of societal norms and mores. Marquez’ fictional universe is replete with such fringe-line characters who occupy the world of ‘spectacle’: the reader encounters outlandish images of a woman who has morphed into a spider, or an old decrepit man with wings cast away on the shore who rants in a strange heretic tongue or a tawdry leper whose sores magically sprout sunflowers.

At a point, the term ‘spectacle’ must be invested with bilateral significance. It derives from the Latin root ‘*spectare*’ – to watch; it additionally presupposes an ‘object of curiosity’ (Hermanet al., 2001). Further on, an ancillary inference postulates the subject of ‘xenophobia’ – which is undeniably a unifying theme employed by Marquez in the schemata of his shorter fiction. The image of the ‘town’ becomes the bone of contention. The facet of ‘watching’ here relates to the narrator’s voice which incorporates the visual-repertoire of all the minor characters who take stake in interpreting the unknown cosmos outside the confines of *their* ‘town’. The first ring of spectacle telescopes the individual attitude of young romantics, mystic sham and wise elders who avidly dream myth into reality. The second ring of spectacle includes assemblies of xenophobic town-dwellers who measure outsiders by the yardstick of scepticism. The third ring of spectacle denotes the raucous maw of sundry crowds that holler in thirst for entertainment – those living in anticipation of occasions such as a fair, a circus, or a travelling troupe of performers to jolt their inquisitiveness. The fifth ring of spectacle signposts symbiotic clusters of naive familial folk unified by their

veneration in an ethnic belief or syncretic faith. As a result, in Marquez' short stories, one finds the robust exposition of atomic micro-narratives that deter the framing of a meta-narrative, a quality that deserves appreciation. Moreover, this micro-narrative so sensibly look fragmented on the exterior, but that is principally how and why they are designed. Meaning remarkably evolves through fissure. Through the multiplicity of narratives. Through difference of opinion. Through the act of wilful ambiguity'. To this, if one admits the streak of reading post-colonialism into Marquez' situation, the issue of xenophobia garners heightened attention: each character's sense of belonging in then arrativised town is constructed through the externalised notion of the xeno. Several questions arise. Who is the xeno? Male, female, an animal; a town-dweller, a sea-farer, a coloured individual, a foreigner. How is the xeno's appearance and demeanour visually described? Fair, dark; beautiful, ugly; normal, bizarre. Is he/her/it treated as an insider or an outsider? What is the plausible ratio of acceptance or rejection of the xeno? Is he/she/it greeted, ridiculed, stoned or caged. What is the xeno's level of assimilation in the town after a span of time? What bearing do the language, dialect and accent of the xeno have on the town-dweller? Fear, awe, repugnance. What articles define his/her/its entry or exit? At times, a colonial ghost ship's ominous presence is felt by the coastline. Or a cursed chair is attributed to Sir Francis Drake's exploits. Maybe, the vague scent of roses hints at a Spanish settlement. The answers are left ambiguous.

In the essay *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Empson suggests that one must isolate the linguistic properties of a text to comprehend it. According to him, words, images or references in any text of poetic value are often ambiguous, as they at times carry multiple simultaneous meanings that enrich the reader's emotive response of it. Empson's aim is clearly not to concoct a dull formulation and shoot at the one 'right meaning' of a word, image or reference that might emerge in a text, but to strive to identify a type of ambiguity which is jubilantly conscious, not an incongruous accident (Empson, 1973). It is no surprise then that the characters in Marquez's short stories are rhetorically constructed in the language of conscious 'ambiguity'. 'Ambiguity' is definitely creative, constructive and even indispensable as Marquez purports it to be. In his practice, ambiguity doesn't crassly suggest 'uncertainty', 'dubiousness', or worse 'obscurity'. Rather ambiguity is the one virtue of a text that challenges the reader's acuity of comprehension, demonstrating the rhetorical superiority of a text in housing cellars and attics of meaning, eliciting a parade of nuanced responses. One comes across several types of ambiguity in Marquez's writings: lexical ambiguity, scope ambiguity, referential ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is where a single word, idiom or phrase

corresponds to more than one thought. For instance, the word ‘*light*’ can have two meanings – ‘not heavy’ and ‘not dark’. Referential ambiguity concerns the relationship between objects and ideas by way of reference. In the sentence, ‘X killed *his* dog’, the word ‘his’ could point to X or some other man. Scope ambiguity prioritizes the area of coverage in meaning. Consider the sentence, ‘all that glitters is *not* gold’. Here the technical scope of the negation – ‘not’ – is ambiguous, whereby two interpretations are possible: ‘all that glitters is *non-gold*’ and ‘*not* all that glitters are gold’.

It can be duly inferred, Marquez’s contribution to the question of ambiguity relies in his combinatory rhetorical use of ‘word’ and ‘image’, where he meritoriously raises mundane language to the stature of ‘metaphor’, time and again persuading his readers to read between lines and beyond. Extraordinarily, images possess the natural ability to trigger the imagination in many a route. The precise application of rhetoric to enliven a ‘pattern of images’ via the medium of language is the attribute of great literature. Marquez is provisionally not short of it. For that matter, in an exclusive interview at Mexico City, an interviewer observes, Marquez appeared fascinated with the ‘visual arts’ (pp.131), a trait which seemed to permeate his work (Williams, 1989). On being questioned as to the same, Marquez responds: “I discover a detail that reveals an entire world to me... something I see in a painting... It is always, always an image, with no exceptions (pp.132)”. He then elaborates on the peculiar function of his ‘selective memory’ (pp.132), which tends to glean images from several sources, real and imagined: art, paintings, travels, folklore, culture, myth, history.

2. Art, Imagery, and Lexical Ambiguity

‘Art’ in its most elemental meaning necessitates the epistemic logic of thinking in images. In the novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the image of ‘dead cocks hanging from trees’ is inspired by drawings from nineteenth-century travel books (Williams, 1989). On a parallel scale, one finds the image of a ‘decaying palace’ (pp.134) surrounded by cows, described at length in the opening pages of the novel, and even at the beginning of every chapter. In numerous nineteenth-century paintings, Marquez notes, the scenes are ‘idealized’ and made to appear larger than life. One finds, for instance, ‘fantastic birds that don’t exist’ (pp.136), or women who are dreamed into reality and rendered beautiful, based on the hyperbolic vision of an individual European artist’s imagination, i.e. a xeno’s perspective. In speculation, Marquez adds, ‘the drawings are like notes for creating the scenes’ (pp.134), whereupon the author is interested in how the images singularly act on him, eliciting a poetic

response in recollection. In these instances, the sheer artistry of the images per se seem to possess the power to transcend their original intent as they gradually brew in recollection and later transform into poetic symbols. Extending the thought, one conjectures, the author's own ambivalent stance in assembling these striking images in a specific sequence contributes to the text's 'lexical ambiguity' in several of his short stories.

3. Memory, Visual Metaphor, and Scope Ambiguity

'Memories', like embers, are notoriously known to rake up emotions in poetic flickers, whereby their prolonged reminiscence comprises the domain of forgetting. In theoretical terms, one is fluent with the language of 'individual memory', 'collective memory' and 'social memory', where forgetting is stipulated to be the direct consequence of culturization: which is to propose, memories do not operate through the random flash of residual images in vacuum, rather they are constructed and re-constructed with rhetorical vigour at a subconscious level during the very moment of recollection. Arguably, the memory of a writer may be held to be far more refined and sensitive in its approach: when a writer contemplates, images are initially sparked by nostalgic references to individual memory, but in due course they subsume into ambivalent poetic adulations of cultural memory encapsulated in texts. As such, another compendium of vivid images which find emotional refuge in Marquez' novels and short stories correspond to his romantic commemoration of childhood memories, principally those of his vagrant travels. This view finds its anticipatory voice in an article which traces the history of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's art of memory (Roth, 1990).

Consider, the Magdalena River, a central symbol in Marquez's work. Marquez was but nine years old when he first traversed the river. He had left Aracataca on his grandfather's death, and had shifted to the town of Magangué, 1936. Then onwards, every boat trip up and down the river gave him a storehouse of images to dwell upon: familiar, strange, routine, and unforgettable. Marquez cites, a memorable boat ride between Barranquilla and Magangué gifted him a series of emotive images: one, the striking image of 'alligators at the edge of the river with their mouths open catch[ing] butterflies' (pp.135); two, the familiar image of noticing how 'manatees nursed their young' (Williams, 1989). Other sonorous images allude to accounts of the 'wood-fuelled boat', 'the cutting of trees', and idyllic scenes that are relevant to the geographical climate of the era. In the latter years, post five or six trips down the river from Bogota to the Caribbean coast while at high-school in Zipaquirá, 1943, Marquez exclaims, the river had radically changed. For, this time, the 'boats ran on oil', an image that

reverberates in the novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera* – where the river in its graphic sense is rhetorically constructed as a symbol of change, movement, flux. It is meant to be watched as a character in itself, exuding an influence akin to a reverie, and commanding a delirious presence of its own. The binary construction of the ‘real Magdalena’ versus the ‘imagined Magdalena’, in this case, when construed through sustained poetic treatment, gets elevated to the status of a potent metaphor, which ultimately connotes the underlying undulations of life itself. Such a concrete ‘visual metaphor’ amplifies the value of ‘ambiguity’, which must be perceived as a positive attribute, opening up to a rich exhibition of polyphonous meanings, and allowing for multiple interpretations. Besides, the continual ‘layering of images’ through the apt use of rhetoric augments a certain depth of focus, doing away with the problem of the writer or the reader stumbling into an anachronism: the old Magdalena, the new Magdalena, the ‘morphing’ Magdalena, breathe at once in poetic splendour. Placing the idea in perspective, the rhetorical presentation of this unique blend of images comes under the purview of ‘scope ambiguity’.

4. Time, Space, and Referential Ambiguity

In the book *Myth and Meaning*, the cultural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss laboriously elucidates the categories of ‘scientific thought’ and ‘mythical thought’. In this connection he opines, mythical thought is a kind of ‘intellectual bricolage’ (Levi-Strauss, 2010). Here, the term bricolage derives from the French verb ‘*bicolour*’ that refers to the type of odd patch-work done by a handy-man. More tritely, a ‘*bicolour*’ is one who completes his tasks by piecing together whatever is available at his disposal from unusual sources to achieve a certain effect. The ‘intellectual *bicolour*’ likewise achieves the self-same effect in dealing with linguistic signs, i.e. in the conscious patchwork arrangement of words and images that showcase the amalgam of ‘mythical thought’ and ‘subjective reality’.

Marquezin his literary forays harbours an acute disregard for the ‘historical reconstruction’ (pp.136) of ‘time’ and ‘space’ (Williams, 1989). On the contrary, he reinvents the ‘cultural frame’ of time and space in the language of ‘lore’, turning the clock forward and backward when desired. A string of images edify this reading: they point to a method termed ‘the poetization of time and space’, substantiated by Marquez in several interviews, i.e. when he mulls over the craft of Magic Realism. Conceivably, here is where the *bricoleur*’s talent is summoned into practice: Marquez dexterously tears and pieces together patches of real and imagined land, first sieving images through the lens of memory and experience, then scrambling together multifarious renditions of history and culture, thus breaking

chronological time, endowing 'scenes' with the muscle of 'myth' and 'lore'. Two examples may easily be mentioned in this regard. Consider his treatment of 'space'. Marquez states, the physical space in *Love in the Time of Cholera* might match up to one's impression of Cartagena, Columbia (pp.136). Although, in the fictional map of Cartagena, one might surprisingly find the essence of Cafe de la Parroquia of Veracruz, Mexico. On a comparable scale, images and details of Santo Domingo, Havana and other such cities of the Caribbean are also known to fuse into Cartagena. Quaintly enough, it can be assumed, when Marquez wishes something from a city, he simply relocates it in Cartagena. This is nothing but a poetization of space. Now, consider Marquez' treatment of 'time'. In a peculiar scene, time-zones are trickily switched to the effect of creating the illusion of synchronicity, where the action embedded in the mystified 'present Cartagena' magically sweeps over to 'the ruins of Cartagena' (pp.138), scaling thoughts into the mythos of lore. The self-same city is beautifully presented in two distinct periods and two different temporal spaces. One may categorize this quality of poetic licence as 'referential ambiguity', an ingenious facet of Marquez' narration.

5. History, Myth, and Cultural Theory

'History' in its political appropriation coalesces with the sensorial fabric of myth; 'myth' in turn verifies the monolithic claims of dogmatic history. In cultural theory, one admits, there are voluminous histories, there are countless myths; perhaps, as many as may be examined from the penumbral zone of mnemonic retrospection. Out of a philanthropic necessity, giving form to vague abstractions, images abound to the tune of the rhetorical shaping of 'myth' and 'history' in literature. In this connection, the critic Sims (pp.14) differentiates between the nature and purpose of 'myth' and 'history'. He opines, 'historical narration tends to be chronological'; the focus is on 'objectivity', on 'certifiable techniques' for gathering 'discoverable testimony' pertaining to events that have happened in the past, where all that is documented and written is 'designed to reveal a pre-existent order of actuality' (Sims, 1978). He quotes another scholar, Berth off: "Myths are told, histories are reassembled." If one were to assimilate such a sharp distinction, myths must be tacitly regarded as diametrically opposite to one's endemic understanding of history. It is no secret then, the 'orality' and 'personal experience' of the teller is sacrosanct to the identity of myth. The accent on 'told' brings to mind the eminence of the 'teller' given his provincial manner of 'telling'. How else, then, do myths differ from history? Firstly, as a prerogative, myths are independent subjective accounts, stemming from the empirical assumptions, ethnic beliefs

and the fantastic vision of the teller, staunchly evoked through the godly medium of imagination; they vacillate between felt notions of time and space in a multi linear fashion. Secondly, myths do not adhere to the aforementioned certifiable techniques of documentation, other than the rule that one insists the teller must sincerely believe in his version of myth, passed on to his peers by word-of-mouth, handed over from seeker to seeker by way of legacy. The receptacle of such purist wisdom is required to register the impression of the myth in his repertoire, forever acting as a living document for posterity. In this trajectory, if history invests value in the so called ‘urbane sensibility’ of the man-of-science, myth exists solely in relation to the iridescent prophecy of the shamanic man-of-knowledge, and his loyal tribe of earnest believers. Thirdly, myths are not ordained to reveal any pre-existing order, rather their efficacy lies in the creation of new realities. In other words, myths are tenaciously moulded with the intent of dramatizing the past, validating the present, and predicting the future –all achieved through the glorious act of story-telling. Ultimately, coming to the crux of this matter, myths shift meanings as per the rhetorical gait and outlook of the teller, which again alters with retellings. Bearing in mind Marquez’ penchant for weaving short-stories, the ‘teller’ could be projected as the frame-narrator or point to the diverse characters that reside in the lush story-scape. Almost every minor character in Marquez’ collection is a unique ‘teller’ of stories, inexorably involved in the daunting process of the ‘creation of myth’ as infinitum: each restyles the other’s micro-story by interpreting dunes in history from an idiosyncratic point of view. These micro-stories clearly defy chronology, are skewed in structure, and thrive on the mnemonic function of visual rhetoric; they posit an integrated perspective of otherwise disturbing binaries: the ‘natural and ‘the supernatural’, the ‘insider and the ‘outsider’, the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’, the ‘normal’ and the ‘bizarre’. It is obvious, Marquez exerts immense authorial reticence in modelling his characters; they are permitted to voice their beliefs in their own indigenous style – in the visual language of fable, tale and lore – as their mythical-view remains pristinely untainted by the dominant thrust of mainstream philosophies in culture and history.

While a number of critics have mined Marquez’s novels, little effort has been put into studying the short stories of Marquez which are habitually dismissed as ‘patchy’ and ‘fragmented’; or they have been side-lined except for being regarded as broken shards that are the residual fall off of his epical novels. However, with keener attention, the short stories of Marquez may be freshly discovered as gold mines in themselves. Each story may be seen as a nugget that strongly holds its ground – with a beginning, middle and an end – a view seconded by Dauster in his deliberation over the mythical world of Macondo in Marquez’s

short stories. The critic would go as far as to state that it is through the short stories that the novels may finally gain fresh perspective

6. A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings (Marquez, 1996) is home to a galaxy of enchanting minor characters who express their views in a stream of micro narratives. Of the lot, the old man, Pelayo and Elisenda are alone recognized as major characters. In accomplishing this slant in storyline, Marquez eliminates the need for an insular protagonist who might have else erected a solitary standpoint that disregards the truce of myth. Curiously, very few of the characters are called by name – Pelayo, Elisenda and Father Gonzaga – while others are known by what they do, where they stay, or how bizarre they appear. Who are these ‘others’ then? How are they referred to? Why do they inhabit the mythical town? These are questions one might ask. To start with, the ‘others’ include a cantankerous child whose action outlines the passage of time, a wise neighbour woman who knows everything about angels, a doctor who revels over the anatomy of superhuman wings, a flying acrobat who resembles a bat, a frenzied woman who keeps count of her heartbeats, a crazed sailor perturbed by the noise of the stars, a guilt-ridden sleepwalker, a woman who has morphed into a spider by the laws of karma, a blind man, a paralytic and a leper. These fringe-line characters are referred to in many ways: ‘everyone’, ‘the whole neighbourhood’, ‘onlookers’, ‘the simplest among them’, ‘others of sterner mind’, ‘some visionaries’, ‘the curious’. They are built to inhabit a culture scape defined by ‘spectacle’, whereof their dreams, visions and beliefs resound the idea of the carnivals que-grotesque. In the theoretical text, *Rabelais and his World*, the term carnivals que-grotesque is discussed in the symbolic setting of the carnival which is seen as an occasion for spectacle where the ‘collective ancestral body of all the people’ unite in celebration of the commingling of the ‘material’ and the ‘cosmic’ (Bakhtin, 1984). Going by the thematic thrust of Marquez’s literary practise, it can be conjectured, the characters in the story *A Very Old man with Enormous Wings* are caricatures of such bodily celebration and disgust; they foreground the binary of the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the human and the superhuman, the normal and the strange, the insider and the outsider. The outcome is a brew of mythic bricolage.

Speaking of archetypes, it was Carl Jung and Vladimir Propp who examined the concept at length in their work. An archetype is simply a universal pattern found in stories and mythology regardless of a specified cultural or historical context. The term can be applied to an image, a theme, an idea or even a character. It would be apt to say, the universe

of the archetype is replete with images stemming from myth, dreams, folklore and fantasy. In this context, the 'others' in Marquez' story support the archetype of the 'super-heroic', where the superhero is demarcated as one who lives apart, does not quite belong, but is yet needed by society. The idea is further enhanced with the entry of the extraneous 'xeno with wings', who lands flat on the beach one rotten day. His very reception by Pelayo and Elisenda is marked with xenophobic abhorrence: the third day of rain; the stench of dead crabs; the sea and sky turning into an ash-grey thing; stew of mud; rotten shellfish; the child catching fever. All these images instil a sense of anxiety in the least. They make one perceive the xeno as the archetypal symbol of 'the other' – the denied hero, whose indispensable otherness makes heroism possible.

The notion of the xeno also morphs from time to time in Marquez's work, given the technique of 'defamiliarization' that he generously employs in character portrayal. Defamiliarization is a term popularized by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky to mean the essence of 'literariness' inherent in a text, which is the artistic capacity of a text to challenge the problem of 'habit' and 'convention' by investing the familiar with the air of strangeness, thereof deepening the 'length' and 'depth' of the reader's perception on a given subject (Shklovsky, 1988). For it is often through the rhetorical peculiarity of diction – constructed in word and image – that literature commands attention.

The familiar is made strange through a rapid shift in images, which dissuades the pinning down of an idea. In the loop, different folk interpretations of the xeno are made available. Initially, he is something which is 'moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard' (Marquez, 1996). Then he is discovered to be an 'old man' (p.186). Later he seems 'dressed like a rag-picker' (p.186). His pitiful condition reminds one of a 'drenched great-grandfather' with 'huge buzzard wings' that are 'dirty' and 'half-plucked' (p.186). Yet, he answers in an 'incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice' (p.186). So, perhaps he is a 'lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm' (p.187). Nothing but an 'angel' (p.187) knocked down by the rain, claims the wise woman, who prescribes that the 'fugitive survivor' of the 'celestial conspiracy' could be fed mothballs. The townsfolk treat him like a 'circus animal' (p.187). Others lend him fantabulous titles: 'mayor of the world'; 'five star general'; 'winged wise man' in charge of the universe (p.188). Soon after he is 'like a huge decrepit hen among fascinated chickens' (p.188), lying mute beside piles of fruit peel and breakfast leftovers. As he sees the world with his 'antiquarian eyes', knows no Latin, one lives by caution: 'the devil' uses 'carnival tricks' (p.188), of course. In time, he is a 'shipwreck disorder' that makes 'the earth tremble' (p.189), one who is surrounded by the

‘hellish heat of oil lamps and sacramental candles’, covered with ‘stellar parasites’, found ranting in a ‘hermetic language’ (p.189). Soon he is ‘a prisoner’ without a navel, that makes one wonder if his dialect has ‘any connection with Aramaic’, or ‘whether he wasn’t just a Norwegian with wings’ (p.190). Sometime ahead, post the doctor’s examination, when the child starts going to school, the xeno is ‘like a stray dying man’ (p.192). After surviving the worst winter of December, he has ‘feathers of a scarecrow’ (p.192). Finally, he grips the air, and flies away with ‘the risky flapping of a senile vulture’ (p.193); at last, ‘an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea’ (p.193). As discernible, all these mnemonic images are rhetorically constructed in the language of ambiguity. Such is the resplendent stance of diction.

7. The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World (Marquez, 1996) *exotica* the xeno. It enumerates the tale of a small coastal fishing village mesmerized by the entrance of a strange object washed up by the shore. While the frame narrator doles out the broad overview of the setting, it is the communal approach of the villagers – men, women and children – that prompts a defamiliarized view of the alien incidence.

In the beginning, a ‘dark and slinky bulge’ is belched by the sea, which is imagined as an ‘enemy ship’. But gathering that ‘it had no flags or masts’ *they* – the children – believe it to be a ‘whale’ (p.212). Here on the associative images linked with the xeno’s sighting adroitly multiply. Once the ‘clumps of sea’, ‘jellyfish tentacles’ and ‘the remains of fish and flotsam’ are dislodged, a ‘drowned man’ is discovered (p.212). From ‘enemy ship’ to ‘whale’ to the ‘drowned man’, the object of curiosity undergoes metamorphosis.

The drowned man is soon the subject of public spectacle, an archetypal hero. His identity remains ambiguous, veiled in mystery. The men who examine him are in awe of his superhuman physique, and indulge in a diagnostic study of the xeno: ‘he weighed more than any dead man they had ever known, almost as much as a horse’ and was ‘taller than all other men’ (p.212). But then, ‘maybe’ the body was swollen because ‘the water had got into his bones’ or ‘the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men’ (p.212). They notice, his skin is ‘covered with a crust of mud and scales’ (p.212), his hair is entangled with ‘underwater stones’, ‘the vegetation on him came from faraway oceans and deep water’, and ‘his clothes were in tatters as if he had sailed through labyrinths of coral’ (p.213). Was he a merman washed ashore? Memory teases them. Only when they finish cleaning him, they realize, he was ‘the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen’ (p.213). At this juncture, the xeno’s assimilation into the village is absolute.

He is regarded as a mythic hero. Bemusedly, 'the tallest men's holiday pants would not fit him, or the fattest one's Sunday shirts, or the shoes of the one with the biggest feet' (p.213). Fittingly, the Lilliputians dress their beloved Gulliver in pants made from 'a piece of sail' and an elegant shirt from some 'bridal Brabant linen' (p.213). The more they gaze at the corpse the grander he emerges in their imagination. If such a man should live in *their* village, 'his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor' (p.214). It doesn't stop here: 'his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame... and his wife would have been the happiest woman' (p.214). The process of mystification continues with renewed zeal. The unfathomable hero 'would have drawn fish out of the sea simply by calling their names' and the land would have burst forth with springs to the effect that 'he would have been able to plant flowers on the cliffs' (p.214).

The story swivels to the views of the women of the village. The oldest woman among them exclaims: 'he has the face of someone called Esteban' (p.214). The youngest of the lot meanders into the thoughts of Lautaro. They ponder over his countenance and immutable form: the type of shoes he might have worn, how 'the hidden strength of his heart popped the buttons on his shirt', fantasizing over his 'soft, pink, sea lion hands' (p.214). He surely must be the 'most destitute, most peaceful, and most obliging man on earth, poor Esteban', they decide (p.215). 'Ours!' With time the resolve grows stronger. 'He was Esteban... If they had been told sir Walter Raleigh, even they might have been impressed with his gringo accent, the macaw on the shoulder, his cannibal-killing blunderbuss, but there could be only one Esteban in the world... stretched out like a sperm whale' (p.216). 'So handsome'. Images from 'ancient fables' abound: 'sirens' in the least. Esteban's memory is finally consecrated in the idea of 'Esteban's village' – now a hallowed ground that might attract would be sailors and passers-by. The village gets cloistered in the fog of mythic memory, consumed by 'the smell of gardens on the sea' – 'where the sun's so bright, that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn' (p.218). The story thus ends on a high note of rhetorical visuality, cloaked in the language of metaphor. Lexical ambiguity is at the core.

8. The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship

The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship (Marquez, 1996) is penned in the stream-of-consciousness technique and is centred around the image of an enigmatic ship. The title recommends a 'ghost ship', alluding to a boy's experience of confronting a spectre in the past. The stance is that of a somnambulist leading the reader through a state of trance. Interestingly, the ship is gradually given a mythic status, rhetorically reconstructed purely

through the aid of memory. It is projected as a character in itself that grows with attention, shaped by mixed feelings of awe and fear. The boy, his mother, and the villagers, have their own quixotic idea about the imaginary ship, either real or unreal. Here is where the description of the ship gets to be intriguing. Initially, the 'ocean liner' passes the village one night like 'a great uninhabited palace' (p.228), 'without lights' and 'without sound'. Its somatic structure is massive, and is sketched in the language of relativity: 'longer than the whole village' and 'taller than the steeple of the church' (p.228). It sails in darkness towards the 'colonial city' (p.228) which remains unspecified. The city is pictured through an array of surrogate images that simulate a meditative mood: the other side of the bay is 'fortified against buccaneers', and is characterized by its 'old slave port' (p.228). Added to this are the 'gloomy beams' of the ship that transfigure the village into a 'lunar encampment of glowing houses' alongside 'streets of volcanic deserts' (p.228). The sensation of the 'wind's night harps' have such an effect that the liner disappears and appears from time to time, moulding it into an 'intermittent ship' that gropes its way like a 'sleepwalker' (p.228). Then it sinks with a note of mystery, so soundlessly that one thinks it must be a dream. Although, if it were real, its collision against the reefs should have 'frozen with fright the soundest sleeping dragons in the prehistoric jungle' (p.288).

In the course of the narrative arc, some jarring phantasmagorias coincide with the image of the ship, which by now is a symbol of the xeno's impeaching impression on the village. It is in the disguised sense of association. For the ship mutates with the beliefs of its beholder. It is like 'the huge asbestos whale' or 'the behemoth beast' (p.230), 'bigger than any other big thing in the world', 'darker than any other dark thing on land and sea'; it reeks of 'three hundred thousand tons of shark smell' (p.231). Such is the scale of xenophobia. Several images advocate this interpretation. For instance, the 'radiant fishbowl of the bay' is juxtaposed with 'the disorder of colours of the Negro shacks on the hills above the harbour' (p.229). To this is added, 'the schooners of the smugglers from the Guian as loading their cargoes of innocent parrots whose craws [are] full of diamonds' (p.229). The next exotic image is 'the lovemaking of manta rays in a spring time of sponges', with other colourful references such as the mention of 'blue corvinas' and 'pink snappers' (p.229). Again, the visual that succeeds brings about a contrast of life and death, of wonder and despair, all at once: 'the wandering hairs of victims of drowning in some colonial shipwreck' augments the introduction of 'Sir Francis Drake' who is linked with a cursed 'easy chair' that was 'bought at an auction in a Turk's store' (p.229). Its 'velvet lining' and 'brocade from the casket of a queen' fetch to memory the mother's 'dead husband', a thought which makes the 'blood in

her heart' bubble and turn into 'chocolate' (p.229). The 'murderous chair' which eventually 'rotted away as after a snakebite' is then 'thrown into the sea' where 'it wouldn't bring evil to anyone' (p.230).

The story subsequently turns to face the dreaded name of William Dampier, streaked in metaphor. A note of ambiguity can be felt in the mention of – 'the human brine of the Caribbean', typified by a cumbersome sequence of images: 'Hindu shops' display 'ivory mandarins carved from the whole tusk of an elephant'; 'Dutch negroes' are connected with their 'orthopaedic velocipedes'; 'copper skinned Malayans' are imagined as those who would sell 'roast filets of Brazilian women' (p.231). At that juncture a succession of cryptic images emerge: 'the night overcame him with all the weight of the stars', 'the jungle exhaled a sweet fragrance of gardenias and rotten salamanders' (p.231). The 'breathing of the water' becomes sad, and it is as if the 'stars had suddenly died'. In this 'halted time' a whole 'world of drowned animals floated' (p.231). In due course, after much commotion, the story ends with the name of the ghost ship engraved in iron letters – *Hallsillag* – with 'the ancient and languid water of the seas of death dripping down its sides' (p.233). Commensurably, it can be deduced, the notion of the xeno's yeti-like presence dominates the text from start to finish. Else, there is no story possible without the poetic arrangement of mind-altering images, nurtured by the rigour of metaphor. Myth blends with allusions to history; experiential reality is archived in collective memory.

9. Conclusion

Summing up the gist of theory, if 'culture' 'myth' and 'memory' are viewed as ideological constructs, Marquez' stories subvert and even challenge the way we think of the rudimentary, the marginalized, the 'xeno' – an effect which is achieved through the technique of 'defamiliarization'. In the language of binary opposition, the peripheral is deemed central. The partial is rendered complete. Beginnings and endings are consciously blurred. Scenes are constructed by way of bricolage. Fractures in narrative are verified as deliberate attempts to shift perspective. The characters illustrated are 'archetypal' and verge on the 'carnavalesque-grotesque'. Narrative cohesion is attained through the thematic emphasis on rhetorical visuality, whereby the trope of 'ambiguity' is key to a nuanced reading. As stated afore, dealing with a writer like Marquez the discerning reader needs to judiciously read between the lines, and even beyond them. Readings and re-readings are welcome in this direction.

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