

## Poetization of Space in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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### Abstract

This article is a parallel and comparative reading of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Gaston Bachelard's theoretical work, *The Poetics of Space*. It starts with this presumption that there is an affinity between what Marquez terms as the "poeticized space" and Bachelard's notion of "intimate spaces". The philosophical context of his study, i.e. phenomenology, clarifies the manner in which Bachelard chooses to perceive human spaces. The spaces discussed are phenomena rather than objects and gain their identity when they become intermingled with human consciousness. Three fundamental spaces (as examples of intimate spaces), city, house and objects are studied in order to illustrate the poetic depth of the novel. Furthermore, it will be discussed the way these spaces establish a "human geography" in which characters' lives interact and interrelate emotionally with the spaces they live in.

**Key Words:** Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gaston Bachelard, human geography, intimate spaces, poeticized space, Latin American novel, modern literature.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the story of human love, intimacy and solitude. This may not seem a new theme in literature. However, what makes it unique is that all these qualities are seen and felt in space as well as in human consciousness.

“Poetization of space” is a term by which Gabriel Garcia Marquez explains his technique to portray the unreal, imaginary spaces (Williams, 1989: 137). This research will endeavour to discuss the ‘poeticized space’ in a wider context mainly with cross references between the classic work of Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, and Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It suggests that there is an affinity between Marquez’s term and that of Bachelard’s, i.e. ‘the intimate space.’ Bachelard, by adopting this view, seeks “to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (Bachelard, 1992: xxxi).

In order to put Bachelard’s philosophy in a perspective and context, one has to define his idiosyncratic brand of phenomenology. Bachelard’s study and analysis of the poetic quality of ‘intimate spaces’ has its roots in western phenomenology. Phenomenology as an important philosophical school expounded by Edmund Husserl rejects the Cartesian duality of subject and object. René Descartes by proposing an ontological distinction between the observer (subject) and the observed (object) paves the way for the advent of scientific methodology in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. According to this philosophy, objects in the universe become wholly and ontologically separate and distinct from the human observer. The industrial revolution in the nineteenth century is the outcome of this view that considers the manipulation of nature as legitimate.

On the contrary, phenomenological view, sees an internal relationship between the subject and the object. The objects in universe gain identity and even existence when they are observed or experienced. In other words, we are not facing ‘objects’ but ‘phenomena’ around us. It is as if the phenomena around us are the synthesis of human consciousness that experiences them. Bachelard, in his *Poetics of Space*, ‘reads’ objects and human spaces not as detached objects and spaces but as the spaces experienced and inhabited by human beings. For him, these spaces are human spaces reflecting the ‘human soul’. This intermingling, or better to say ‘inter-subjectivity’ (as Bachelard himself puts it) (Ibid: xxiv) of imagination, human soul and consciousness leads to his portrayal of “intimate spaces” or “human spaces” in general and the “poetry of space” in particular.

City, House, and Object are three fundamental spaces that are poeticized in this novel. Various examples of each will be introduced in order to show the poetic depth of each one in the novel. This poetic depth mainly applies to two basic concepts of ‘intimate space,’ and ‘solitude of space.’ The intimacy and solitude of human being is reflected in the space man gets in touch with. This mirror-like relationship between man and space results in a text full of poetic intensity that gives the reader the impression of reading a long poem.

Man, by inhabiting and caring the space he lives in, rebuilds and humanizes the space. Having felt lonely, by taking refuge in a “corner” (Ibid: 136), he shares his solitude with space. Moreover, by sharing memories and dreams with objects, he feels they “transcend geometrical space,” (Ibid: 47) and attain “human value.”

## City

The story of the Buendias parallels that of Macondo, the city as the setting of the novel. The founding father, Jose Arcadio Buendia, founded the city, and the last line of the family is destroyed with it. Therefore, the course of events and the fate of the city and the family are interwoven together. Macondo, by its founders, is imagined as a Utopia, a “truly happy village” (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 9). The village (later town) is built in a way that all people could have equal access to the river and the sun (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 9). They live in such intimacy that they do not even need to name objects. It is a haven that will keep them away from the nightmares of death, the nightmares which Jose Arcadio Buendia could no longer tolerate in his hometown when the ghost of a murdered man always haunts in the house (Ibid: 23). It is cherished because it is “a town unknown to the dead,” (Ibid: 77) where all its inhabitants are under thirty.

Macondo is the city of ‘mirrors’ or ‘mirages.’ Jose Arcadio Buendia, on his way to find a new town, dreams that “right there a noisy city with houses having mirror walls rose up” (Ibid: 24). Again, at the time of the destruction of the city, it is called “the city of mirrors (or mirages)” (Ibid: 406). These two images suggest a twofold metaphor. First, because of its fictional, imaginary essence and its doomed life, Macondo is a city of mirages. On the other hand, it is also a city of mirrors since it reflects the deep feelings and emotions of its inhabitants and is affected by them. It is a “space of human soul.”

City, in this novel, is considered a place of refuge. Colonel Aureliano Buendia after many years of war, “Alone, abandoned by his premonitions, fleeing the chill that was to accompany him until death, . . . sought a last refuge in Macondo in the warmth of his oldest memories” (Ibid: 165). This intimate shelter-like space for solitary figures creates a state of isolation (or solitude) for the city. Macondo is found to be a city which is surrounded by water (Ibid: 12). It suffers from isolation in the beginning and in the end. The story ends when the city has become unknown and “forgotten even by the birds, where the dust and the heat had become so strong that it was difficult to breathe. . . .” (Ibid: 394).

The image that reinforces the solitude of the city is the recurrent motif of rain. “Sad” rain brings intimacy and solitude: “. . . the feeling of deep intimacy that the sprinkling of the rain produced . . . .” (Ibid: 309). A soft rain of yellow flowers falls on Macondo on the death of Jose Arcadio Buendia. The rain is so heavy that it covers the roofs, streets, and doors of the houses with flowers so that nobody can go out of his house the day after (Ibid: 139). When it rains for nearly five years, all the intrusions fade away. The Great Rain is the turning point of the novel, the time when people return to their primitive way of life, in solitude.

This solitude is always the target for intrusions. For instance, when train comes to Macondo, “. . . the town was shaken by a whistle with a fearful echo and a loud, panting respiration” (Ibid: 219). This shattered solitude strongly echoes in the whole city: “The innocent yellow train that was to bring so many ambiguities and certainties, so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, so many changes, calamities, and feelings of nostalgia to Macondo” (Ibid). The intrusions (or invasions) reach their peak in the process of urbanization and leads to alienation: “. . . the old inhabitants had a hard time recognizing their own town” (Ibid:

225).

Likewise, forgotten space is a space which is not cared or shared by feelings. The whole atmosphere of such a space has the scent of solitude. There are many instances that the idea of solitude is juxtaposed with forgetfulness and oblivion in the novel: “. . . a town that was sinking irrevocably into the quicksand of forget-fulness” (Ibid: 48).

### House

According to Bachelard, the house-image is a “topography of intimate being” (Bachelard, 1992: xxxii). He extends this idea and considers the “house as a tool for analysis of the human soul” (Ibid: xxxiii). Thus, this part of the essay will trace this idea and explains how the house of Buendia becomes a metaphor of the family and of the town.

The house of Buendia is the space of intimacy. Women try to preserve this centre of the world for the family. Anybody who leaves the house will always return in an urge to live there and die. One of the characters who feels this centrality is Jose Arcadio, the son of the great Buendia. He leaves the house to join the gypsies. Many years later he walks through the house: “He did not linger with anyone. He went directly to the kitchen and there he stopped for the first time at the end of a trip that had begun on the other side of the world. ‘Hello,’ he said” (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 89). When he shoots himself, in a place far from the house, his blood does not calm down until it reaches the centre of the Buendia house, the kitchen:

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces,..., made a right angle at the Buendia house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs,..., and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread. (Ibid: 131)

Ursula is the most influential preserver of this intimacy. She sacrifices everything to keep the house a place to live in. When her husband, disappointed by the isolation of the city, decides to leave, she replies: “If I have to die for the rest of you to stay here, I will die” (Ibid: 13). Anytime that the house is going to be ruined she reconstructs the house. During her blindness, that lasts many years before her death, none of the inhabitants of the house recognizes she is blind because she is so intimate with the house that she acts as if she sees all the walls and objects (Ibid: 241). This is reminiscent of Bachelard’s description of the house-image: “They are in us as much as we are in them” (Bachelard, 1992: xxxiii). According to him, the role of women in this intimacy is incomparable to men:

A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is rebuilt by women, since men only know how to build a house from inside.... (Ibid: 68)

Henri Lefebvre, in his philosophical work, *The Production of Space*, confirms Bachelard’s genuine study and states that: “The House is as much cosmic as it is human” (Lefebvre, 1992: 121). It is a ‘human space’ that is meant to be lived in and once it is left empty, it suffers from solitude. Colonel Aureliano Buendia “dreamed that he was going into

an empty house with white walls and that he was upset by the burden of being the first human being to enter it” (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 260). When only one couple remains in the house, their solitude becomes the solitude of the house: “As the pregnancy advanced they were becoming more integrated in the solitude of a house that needed only one last breath to be knocked down” (Ibid: 399).

The identity of the house is a symbol of human identity that man longs for. The first condition that the people of Macondo set for the government agent is that they would be allowed to paint their houses the colour they feel like, as if by doing this they preserve their identity as well as that of their intimate space (Ibid: 57). The two political parties which are the cause of many calamities, by forcing people to paint their houses red or blue, try to dehumanize this emblem of human identity: “The houses, painted blue, then painted red, had ended up with an indefinable coloration” (Ibid: 123).

House is the *heart* of human. This poetic metaphor, which may seem cliché, is brilliantly adopted in a new context and defamiliarizes the whole idea: “She had become tired of waiting for the man who would stay, of the men who left, of the countless men who missed the *road* to her *house*, . . . . During the wait . . . the *coals* of her *heart* had gone out” (Ibid: 67).

The house of Buendia is not kept at bay against the intrusions of the outsiders, either. It is exploited in a cruel manner and the hospitality of the family marks many incidents in which Latin American countries unawaringly became the victim of American exploitative capitalism:

The house was suddenly filled with unknown guests, with invincible and worldly carousers, and it became necessary to add bedrooms off the courtyard, widen the dining room . . . . ‘We have to prepare everything,’ she [Ursula] insisted, ‘because we never know what these strangers like to eat.’... At lunchtime the house shook with the bustle of a marketplace, and the perspiring guests - who did not even know who their hosts were - trooped in to occupy the best places at the table . . . . (Ibid: 226)

The Buendia House mirrors its inhabitants’ solitude. It embodies them in its ‘corners’, where they can take refuge against the outside world. It can even make them invisible to outsiders (Ibid: 304). Bachelard portrays this “psychic state” (Bachelard, 1992: 72) as “. . . every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house” (Ibid: 136). He sums up the idea by, “our house is our corner of the world” (Ibid: 5). The house contains some places of solitude, indeed. Melquiades’ room, for instance, is a place where many characters from different generations shut themselves inside and try to read the parchments he has written. This room is so isolated from the outside world that even it has its own time tempo. Generally, each time a character wants to be alone and solitary, he finds a room in the house and shuts himself up in there. ‘Shot’ or ‘locked doors’ is a recurrent motif to show the solitude of the house.

## Objects

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the value of objects is measured with the degree of

their association with memories and dreams. Moreover, Objects express human values when they are cared. Bachelard believes that housework is a creative activity because:

Objects that are cherished in this way are born of an intimate light, and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality. For they produce a new reality of being, and they take their place not only in an order but in a community of order. From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep. (Ibid: 68)

And this reminds us of Melquiades' words: "Things have a life of their own.... It's simply a matter of waking up their souls" (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 1-2).

Marquez makes certain objects associated with certain characters. For instance, 'yellow butterflies' with Mauricio Babilonia, 'gold fishes' with Colonel Aureliano Buendia. In the room of prostitutes, faded flowers and false candlesticks lay stress on the false notion of love. Ursula enjoys deep sense of belonging to the furniture of the house. Having been blind, "she did not need to see to realize that the flower beds, cultivated with such care since the first rebuilding, had been destroyed . . . the walls and the cement of the floors were cracked, the furniture mushy and discolored, the doors off their hinges...." (Ibid: 326-7). At the time of her death, a kind of confusion occurs in nature (Ibid: 335) and things in the house change location on their own (Ibid: 352).

In his brilliant essay, "Lamplight," Bachelard deals with the already-mentioned association of objects with memories and dreams:

Whenever we live close to familiar, everyday things, we begin once again to live slowly, thanks to their fellowship, and so yield to dreams which have a past, yet in which there is always something fresh and new. The objects we store away in our treasure chest of things, in our small personal museum of beloved things, are all of them talismans for our dreams. We have only to evoke a much-loved object and its very name will set us dreaming of some ancient story. (qtd in McAllester Jones, 1991: 15)

"A copper locket containing a woman's hair" (Garcia Marquez, 1991: 2) in a buried suit of fifteenth-century armor is one of the fascinating examples of this. The light, tiny hair provides a great burden of memory for the whole huge armor. Another example is a telephone which is ringing continuously for many years to ask about the massacre (Ibid: 375). The ringing telephone seems to be a beating worried heart. Both these examples are objects which evoke deep feelings and dreams in the reader. Accordingly, the objects which bear no memory seems uninteresting. Aureliano, an illegitimate child, has to stay inside the house all his life. When he leaves the house for the first time, his curiosity is not aroused because the things in the street lack any memories for him (Ibid: 357). However sometimes objects with deep memories are also intolerable. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia wants to take his own life, he buries all the objects which bear any memory: "He busied himself destroying all trace of his passage through the world ... until all that were left were impersonal objects...." and he continues until "no single object that would let him be remembered was left in the house ..." (Ibid: 171-2). And Aureliano, who becomes aware of the whole story of the family by

Melquiades' parchments, can not tolerate this great burden of memory which is associated in a rocking chair:

He sank into the rocking chair, the same one in which Rebeca had sat during the early days of the house to give embroidery lessons, and in which Amaranta had played Chinese checkers with Colonel Gerineldo Marquez, and in which Amaranta Ursula had sewn the tiny clothing for the child, and in that flash of lucidity he became aware that he was unable to bear in his soul the crushing weight of so much past. (Ibid: 404)

## Conclusion

Having studied the novel through Bachelard's theory, one can come up with the following conclusions. Firstly, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an example of modern literature in which space is an outstanding element. Space possesses human values and functions as a metaphor of human intimacy, memories, dreams and solitude. Presumably, Modern literature proved that memories are more fixed in space rather than time. Secondly, the present 'reading' of Marquez's novel proves the fact that 'human geography' can be identified as an important notion in literary study. In other words, literature can be read as the most interesting study of human geography. Finally, one might think of considering literature itself as a phenomenological reading of human life. Bachelard, in the introduction to his book, quotes J. H. Van den Berg saying: "Poets and painters are born phenomenologists" (Bachelard 1992: xxviii). The portrayal of poetic images as 'experienced images' intermingled with human consciousness is what, in effect, the poet embarks on.

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