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## **The Magic of Liminality: Shifting Realities and Ambiguity in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Works**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper explores the concept of liminality and its manifestation in the works of the renowned Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez. It probes into how Márquez masterfully employs liminal spaces and instances as part of his narrative artistry, effectively merging the borders between reality and fantasy - an essential feature of his famed magical realism approach. Through careful examination of his novels, particularly 'One Hundred Years of Solitude', 'Love in the Time of Cholera' and 'The Autumn of the Patriarch', we'll explore how the concept of liminality unfurls itself in myriad ways. This paper unravels the effective use of liminality in his narrative structure, theme development, and character progression. More overtly, the focus will be on those aspects where the liminal contributes significantly to Márquez's unique style and enhances the richness of his literary endeavours.

**Keywords:** Gabriel García Márquez, magical realism, liminality, shifting realities, ambiguity.

"Things have a life of their own. It's simply a matter of waking up their souls."

- Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Originating from the rich cultural conflation of Latin America, Gabriel Garcia Márquez allured readers worldwide by crafting narratives suffused with metaphors, surrealism, and sublime beauty as evident in this quote from his masterpiece, 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'. He masterfully created a fusion of the ordinary with the fantastical—an insignia of magical realism—

to create remarkable worlds and narratives (Bell-Villada). Born in Colombia and raised in a culture rich with oral traditions, Márquez transmuted his memories and background into his stories, skillfully merging elements from both the natural and supernatural worlds. We can assume these memories as a place situated on the doorway between the imaginary and the reality. Needless to say his artful narrative style gives rise to liminal spaces and events—moments or zones in which distinctions between reality and fantasy become indiscernible. The concept of liminality, which has its foundation in the idea of the ‘threshold’ or ‘in-between’ state (Turner, 2017), became a narrative device utilized by Márquez in numerous instances.

This research paper endeavours to examine the ways in which liminality manifests itself in Márquez's writings, paying particular attention to three of his most famous novels, ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’, ‘Love in the Time of Cholera’ and ‘The Autumn of the Patriarch’. By teasing out the manifestations of liminality in these novels and delving deeper into the implications of this narrative technique, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of liminality in shaping the themes and storytelling of Márquez's works. The paper is organized into several sections. First, we establish a theoretical framework defining the liminality concept and its relation to Márquez's magical realism. Subsequently, we discuss liminal spaces and characters in the three novels, analyzing how these representations blur the lines between reality and the fantastic. We then delve into the intersection of everyday life and the fantastic and explore how liminal moments function in his novels to challenge conventional notions of reality. Following that, we examine the implications of liminality on the various themes that run throughout his novels, specifically focusing on love, history, and identity. Finally, we offer a conclusion that underlines the importance of liminality in Márquez's works and its lasting impact on readers.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Concept of Liminality**

The concept of liminality, which is intrinsic to understanding Gabriel García Márquez's narrative techniques, emerged from the fields of anthropology and folklore studies. Etymologically rooted in the Latin word ‘limen’, meaning ‘threshold’, liminality refers to an in-between, transitional state or space that exists outside the realm of everyday reality. Originally developed by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his analysis of Rites of passage, this concept was further popularized by another anthropologist, Victor Turner as a distinctly processual approach contrary to the foremost structuralism of his era. Van Gennep classified the Rites of passage as having three

stages: separation, transition (liminality), and reintegration. Turner focused on the transitional stage—the stage of liminality—that he deemed essential in transforming and redefining a person's identity and social status. Turner expanded upon this concept and emphasized that liminality represents the realm of pure possibility, where familiar distinctions, categories, and norms are suspended, allowing for new ideas, beliefs, and behaviours to emerge.

In the context of literature, liminality functions as a narrative tool that opens up possibilities and meanings, transcending the constraints of a fixed reality. It enables the coexistence of the ordinary and the extraordinary, of the plausible and the implausible. Magical realism, the literary genre often associated with Márquez's works, builds on the liminality concept. It offers an expressive framework for representing reality through a unique blend of the mundane and the magical or supernatural. In effect, liminality functions as a catalyst for transcending the borders of what is considered 'real' and enables readers to experience an alternative, fantastical narrative realm.

With this theoretical framework in mind, we can analyze the ways in which liminality permeates Márquez's works, shaping the form and the content of his narratives. Through liminality, Márquez dismantles traditional boundaries between reality and fantasy, creating a multidimensional narrative space that fosters ambiguity, enigma, and multivalence in interpretation. As a result, readers are compelled to reevaluate their own understanding of reality and to recognize the underlying complexities of the human experience.

### **Liminal Spaces and Characters in Márquez's Novels**

Liminal spaces and characters in Gabriel García Márquez's novels refer to entities that lie at the boundaries of what is traditionally considered normal or acceptable. These are characters and settings that transcend common binaries such as life/death, real/imaginary, and past/present. They operate in a twilight zone where standard rules don't apply, paving the way for magical and grotesque occurrences. The constant oscillation between reality and unreality, solidity and fluidity creates a captivating narrative ambiguity, typical of Márquez's storytelling. Interestingly, this concept of liminality does not just pertain to individual characters or settings, but also to the societies Márquez depicts. These societies often stand on the threshold of political, social, and historical transformations. But instead of focusing on the transformations themselves, Márquez explores the ambiguous in-between state, emphasizing the uncertainty, chaos, and conflict

associated with such periods. This approach offers an unconventional perspective on human experiences and historical events, adding to the magic realism of his novels.

The presence of liminal spaces in Márquez's novels can be traced in those locations where boundaries become blurred and distinctions between reality and fantasy, past and present, and life and death are questioned. One such space is the fictional town of Macondo in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'. Macondo is a paradoxical space, both geographically isolated yet connected to the world's significant historical events. It is a time-warped place, where linear time loses its meaning, and incidents happen in a cyclical pattern. This town is stuck in a constant in-between of 'is' and 'isn't', reflecting an air of disorder and mystery. The extraordinary occurrences, like the rain of yellow flowers or the insomnia plague, contribute in building Macondo as a liminal space that challenges the typical notions of reality, history, and time.

Similarly in his 'Love in the Time of Cholera', the liminal space is the river. The river is a constant flow between two places, quite similar to liminal space—the transitional state between two conditions. When Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza embark on a river journey in the novel, the river becomes a literal and figurative departure from their past lives and towards an uncertain future. It takes on the role of purifying their past, carrying them into a state of reinvention. Simultaneously, the river is also a space where life and death coalesce, reflecting in Florentino's repeated references to the river as a place to dispose of the dead. Thus, the river exemplifies life's transient and cyclical nature, a theme that is recurrent throughout Márquez's work. The same is observed in 'The Autumn of the Patriarch' where the ocean symbolizes a liminal space. On one level, it physically separates the oppressed inhabitants from the outside world, creating an isolated, controlled environment for the story. The characters live under the constant shadow of dictatorship and fear, perpetuating a seemingly never-ending cycle of suffering. However, the ocean also symbolizes hope and freedom for the oppressed. It is the great, untamed vastness that holds the promise of escape, suggesting there is a transformative potential beyond their reach. The ocean is a place where boundaries dissolve, a transitional zone that embodies potentiality and an open-ended future.

Research that revolves around liminality particularly stresses on the concept of time and space. Márquez expertly manipulates the reader's perception of time and space. He brings in surreal elements to represent his characters' disjointed existence within these spaces, heightening the novel's sense of magical realism. The use of liminal spaces yet again asserts Márquez's genius

in blending the ordinary with the extraordinary, reminding us of the magic woven into the very fabric of existence.

In the context of characters the reflection of transitional liminality can be found in many places in his novels and must be considered in the wider thematic setting of memory and time mostly. Márquez's liminal characters exist on the margins of society and challenge conventional understandings of human nature, identity, and agency. These individuals possess traits that are both real and magical, and they often live in two worlds—that of ordinary life and that of the extraordinary. The singularity of these liminal characters is that they live dually—they are embedded in their mundane existence while simultaneously challenging and transcending the 'mundane' through their unusual experiences. For instance, in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude', Remedios the Beauty is a liminal character who straddles the boundaries between the natural and supernatural realms. She possesses a transcendent beauty and innocence that ultimately lead to her otherworldly ascension, leaving the confines of Macondo. Likewise, in 'Love in the Time of Cholera,' Florentino Ariza can be seen as a liminal figure because of his unyielding love for Fermina Daza, which lasts for over fifty years. Florentino's love exists in an in-between state, never fully realized, yet never abandoned. His character challenges traditional notions of time, devotion, and the nature of love itself. As Turner marked that 'liminality' "served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (14).

The multi-layered theme in a text coincides with dual consciousness and represents a sense of ambiguity in general. Márquez's liminal characters' dichotomous existence both inside and outside ordinariness contributes significantly to undermining traditional human identity conclusions. Their surreal experiences and traits challenge the perceived limitations of human nature, force, and the essence of reality itself. They ask us to think beyond the binaries, thus broadening the horizon of our understanding of existence and reality. In 'The Autumn of the Patriarch,' the unnamed dictator represents liminality as he occupies a position of illegitimate power that exists between the realms of governance and anarchy. He is simultaneously revered and feared by the people he governs, yet his actions blur the lines between life and death, love and

hatred, and loyalty and betrayal. As the dictator grapples with a lack of clear identity and purpose, his control over the nation becomes precarious.

### **Shifting Realities: Intersection of Everyday Life and the Fantastic**

As it is clear that one of the most distinctive characteristics of Gabriel García Márquez's storytelling is the effortless fusion of everyday life with the fantastic, resulting in a unique narrative landscape that challenges readers' understanding of reality. Liminality plays a critical role in facilitating this intersection, allowing Márquez to craft stories that hover indefinably between the mundane and the supernatural. In his novels, the line separating reality and fantasy is often deliberately blurred, as ordinary events are imbued with magical elements and vice versa. For instance, in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude', the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar appears to haunt José Arcadio Buendía. This encounter with a ghost is treated as a casual, everyday occurrence by both the characters and the narrative itself. Through such liminal instances, the world of Macondo becomes an amalgamation of magical and mundane events, one where it becomes impossible to distinguish between the two. Similarly, in 'Love in the Time of Cholera', supernatural elements are interwoven into the narrative with great subtlety, creating layers of ambiguity and uncertainty. The protagonist, Florentino Ariza, experiences miraculous recovery from cholera, an occurrence that seems to defy logic and reason. However, it is presented in such a matter-of-fact manner that readers are compelled to consider the plausibility of this extraordinary event in an otherwise ordinary, earthbound world.

At the heart of this melding of realities lies the liminal space where characters and events shift fluidly between the realms of the real and the fantastical. Márquez's masterful use of liminality transforms the seemingly implausible into the realm of the possible, thus enriching the narrative experience and prompting readers to question and reevaluate their own perceptual boundaries. Márquez acknowledges the inherent ambiguity and complexity of human existence by incorporating the fantastic into everyday life. His characters navigate these liminal spaces with grace and acceptance, emphasizing the idea that reality itself is malleable, multi-dimensional, and open to interpretation. For instance, in 'The Autumn of the Patriarch', the character of the dictator himself is an embodiment of fantastical elements, as he is portrayed as living beyond the human lifespan across several centuries. This aspect blurs the notion of time, creating a transcendental atmosphere that challenges temporal boundaries and human mortality. The dictator's regime, often

described as oppressive and brutal, is cast in an eternal light, creating an illusion of timelessness. The society under his rule experiences a repetitious, cyclical existence where changes seem inconsequential, and time appears to stand still. This conflation of time projects a dreamlike, surreal quality to the political landscape. Moreover, by creating an enduring image of his eponymous protagonist that truly encapsulates, Marquez masterfully integrates the fantastic into his reality. By doing so, he immerses readers into a world where everyday political struggle is magnified profoundly through the prism of the fantastic. Through this, he not only challenges traditional concepts of reality but also invites readers to embrace and celebrate the ambiguity and plurality inherent in everyday life. Ultimately, the intersection of everyday life and the fantastic in Márquez's works serves to illuminate the richness and complexity of the human experience, while also offering a profound commentary on the adaptability and resilience of the human spirit in the face of shifting, uncertain realities.

### **Dissecting Ambiguities: Liminality's Implications on Love, History, and Identity**

By employing the narrative technique of 'liminality' in his literary pieces, Gabriel García Márquez invites readers on a journey to delve into the intricate layers and profound themes that saturate his novels. His exploration of love, history, and identity becomes even more compelling as readers navigate through the nuanced spaces that exist between boundaries and find themselves immersed in his thought-provoking narratives. In this context, liminality functions as a catalyst for deeper understanding of and engagement with these themes, ultimately enriching the overall narrative experience. Márquez compels his readers to rethink their understanding of the aforementioned themes and their significance within the human experience by juxtaposing the ordinary with the fantastic and dwelling in the realm of uncertainty and ambiguity. Ultimately allowing for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of the themes that transcends conventional definitions and representations, leaving an indelible impact on both the reader and the literary tradition.

In Márquez's narrative universe, love isn't limited to simple romantic infatuations. Rather, it transcends boundaries and inhabits a liminal space, a state of 'in-betweenness' that allows for a wider exploration of love in its various forms and complexities. It includes elements of passion, unrequited feelings, longevity, and transcendence of time, thereby engendering a journey through the complexities involved in understanding and portraying the all-encompassing theme of love. As

in 'Love in the Time of Cholera', the protagonist, Florentino Ariza navigates the liminal spaces between romantic love, platonic love, and erotic love through his relationships with various women over the years. The depiction of love in the novel defies conventional categorization, as boundaries between these types of love become fluid and permeable. Through questioning traditional ideas surrounding love and dedication, Márquez encourages readers to contemplate the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in human emotions and connections.

While discussing the implications of liminality on history, his 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' illustrates the cyclical and unpredictable nature throughout the text depicting a town oscillating between isolation and contact with the outside world. The overlapping timelines and the experience of *deja vu* within the novel create a sense of temporal liminality, where the past, present, and future converge in unique ways. This strategic ambiguity offers a multifaceted interpretation of historical events and societal changes, forging a deeper connection between the readers and the socio-political controversies of the past. The Buendía family's multi-generational story demonstrates the inevitability of historical repetition and the influence of the past on the present, connecting their individual narratives to overarching social and political contexts. Through liminality, Márquez enables readers not only to interrogate traditional linear representations of history but also to consider the patterns, ruptures, and transformative processes underlying the unfolding of historical events.

The theme of identity receives special attention in Márquez's works, as characters often find themselves on a quest for self-discovery, grappling with the fluidity and dynamism of their own identities. Liminality enables the exploration of the intricacies of personal and collective identity, as characters navigate the murky spaces between who they are, who they were, and who they might become. In 'The Autumn of the Patriarch', the protagonist's identity remains in liminal flux throughout, emphasizing a dogmatic leader's cyclical nature. This powerful dictator, who seemingly flits between a state of living and an eternal existence, becomes a paradigm of garbled identities. His shifting identity, compounded by the timelessness and surreal quality of his rule, plants him firmly in an ambiguous and perpetual 'in-between' state, a key aspect of liminality. As the ruler's identity is intertwined with his political reign, his fall from political grace would naturally imply an identity decline. However, his character continues to straddle the world of the living and the world of the immortal, further manifesting the concept of liminality. This narrative strategy forces the reader to dissect the ambiguities of a dictator's identity against the backdrop of

a fluctuating political regime and blurs the distinctions between a monolithic identity and a myriad of shifting perceptions. In 'Love in the Time of Cholera', Florentino Ariza's shifting identity is reflected in his relationships with various lovers and in his artistic pursuits, which span writing, music, and poetry. Similarly, in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude', the identities of the Buendía family members are in a constant state of flux. Through an exploration of liminality, Márquez adds depth to the portrayal of human identity, highlighting the innate intricacies and the potential for transformation within the constructs of self-perception and societal roles.

## Conclusion

The magic of liminality in Gabriel García Márquez's works lies in its ability to ingeniously challenge and expand the reader's understanding of reality, emotion, and experience. Márquez's style of magical realism fosters a profound connection between the reader and the characters in his tales, forging unforgettable narratives that provoke thought and inspire introspection. Through the exploration of liminal spaces, events, and characters, Márquez weaves intricate tales that push the boundaries of imagination and leave a lasting impact on the reader. Furthermore, the liminality inherent in Márquez's works facilitates a deeper connection between the reader and the narrative. Márquez's portrayal of the fluidity between reality and fantasy invites readers to immerse themselves in a captivating world brimming with mysteries and marvels. He highlights the porous nature of the boundaries that separate these two realms, making his work a fascinating exploration of the unknown. As a result, readers become active participants in the stories, immersing themselves in the rich, multidimensional narrative spaces created by Márquez's magical realist vision.

Márquez's writing style not only challenges traditional thinking by blurring the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined but prompts readers to reconsider their established beliefs and ideas, and to appreciate the intricacies, contradictions, and paradoxes that make up the human experience. This dissection of human experiences through the prism of liminality allows Márquez's novels to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, thereby cementing their place in the international literary canon. In addition, liminality not only enables him to challenge perceptions of reality but also helps to craft deeply emotive and evocative stories that resonate with readers across generations and cultures. The lasting appeal of Márquez's works, therefore,

lies in their ability to both enchant and provoke, to reveal the limitless potential of human imagination along with the inescapable intricacies and complexities of the human experience.

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