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Imposing Worlds: On the Magic-Inflected Forms
of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Kiran Desai

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ABSTRACT

Despite the ostensible lack of magic present in the work of Kiran Desai, this thesis traces a line of formal influence between her novel and the magical realist short stories of Gabriel García Márquez. It compares the literary forms of Kiran Desai's novel *Inheritance of Loss* (2006), to Gabriel García Márquez' short stories "Sea of Lost Time" (1962), "Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo" (1955), and "Death Constant Beyond Love" (1972). García Márquez' stories can most directly be described as magical realist, depicting elements of magic which work in both real and metaphorical capacities to develop worlds and influence character narratives. While Desai's novel contains no magic, it does use images of nature (especially watery spaces) to similarly work in both real and metaphorical capacities. Further, the thesis explores how both authors use these metaphorical-real images to guide character narratives. Furthermore, the thesis explores how the authors are purposeful with their forms, desiring more perfect modes of representation, through forms which can depict the social histories that inform and underlie the narratives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In a 2008 interview, Indian author Kiran Desai is asked about her author influences. She answers:

Including V.S. Naipaul, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, Naguib Mahfouz, Gabriel García Márquez, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Kenzaburo Oe, Kazuo Ichiguro, and Gabriel García Márquez, [but] it is her mother who has had the most profound influence on her writing.¹

Here, a typo emphasizes a connection to an author from another culture and era of literature—Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez’s name is listed twice. This engagement with what happens in the text at the moment of its *formation*, and how we connect these two authors is what this project will focus.

Thus, I will be comparing select short stories of Gabriel García Márquez—“Sea of Lost Time” (1962), “Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo” (1955), and “Death Constant Beyond Love” (1972)—with the novel *Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai.² Despite the ostensible lack of magic in Kiran Desai’s novel, in contrast to its defining presence in the stories of García Márquez, there is a line of influence between the authors. Desai’s form, while not, by definition, magical realism, sketches elements of narrative and character formation

¹ Sidhwa, Shiraz, “Kiran Desai: A Life between East and West,” *The UNESCO Courier* 2 (2008): 14, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000158593>.

² Original Spanish publication dates for García Márquez’ stories; “Sea of Lost Time” is alternatively quoted as 1961.

that are comparable to García Márquez' form. The writing forms are similar because both approach description through metaphor in conjunction with literalness to describe a world (natural and social) that responds to the narrative. Both authors also develop characters whose emotional and social states (identities) are reflected in the image and metaphor of the world. In noting the echoes of García Márquez's techniques in the writing of Kiran Desai, I argue that their forms are purposeful: both authors seek to represent, through devices that depict fluctuating worlds which are based in and influenced by specific social realities.

Here, I often use the term "form," to describe the stylistic and technical choices the authors make in developing the narrative and choices on language used to describe the world and narrative. In this way, the concept defined as "magical realism" gives a semi-neat outline for what goes into the form used here by García Márquez, and is a moniker often given to writing that clashes literalness and metaphor in literature of the Global South, and Latin America especially. However, Desai makes different choices in her novel which are not magical realist, but something else influenced by similar techniques and choices. *Inheritance of Loss* contains no magic. Instead, certain textual devices are marked by intentionality and suggestive of a link in form and purpose to García Márquez. This reflects a shift in the tradition of South Asian magical realism, away from literal narrative magic while still showing an influence of the magical realist tradition in certain techniques of description.

The Stories and the Novel

And so, we arrive at the texts in focus. This thesis will compare Gabriel Garcia Marquez' short stories "Sea of Lost Time" (1962), "Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo" (1955), and "Death Constant Beyond Love" (1972) with Kiran Desai's novel, *Inheritance of Loss* (2006). The comparison is significant because both sets of texts differ in subject matter but contain similar details and can mirror each other in certain elements. The stories vary in subject matter: "Sea of Lost Time" explores a seascape that holds time past and sends the smell of roses; "Watching it Rain" focuses on a rain that lasts a few days and makes time and memory fall apart; "Death Constant" is the story of a senator running for re-election despite being foretold to die; and "Enormous Wings" is about an unexplainable winged man who washes ashore in the rain. Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* is a novel that explores various people in states of loss and displacement: people who immigrate and people affected by the landscape and by inherited loss. It most prominently (as a narrative center) focuses on the story of the judge, a cantankerous man who has suffered a trauma of immigration and "lost" all ability to love.

Little previous scholarship has been done on the short stories of García Márquez. Frank Dauster, writing "The Short Stories of García Márquez," not long after the English publication of *Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude)* (1967, trans. 1970), remarks that the "explosive success" of the novel has resulted in all scholarship being reduced to analyzing Garcia Marquez' short stories only in what they offer to readings of *Cien años*.³ Indeed, he

³ Frank Dauster, "The Short Stories of García Márquez," *Books Abroad* 47, no. 3 (1973): 466, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40127319>.

writes, this does injustice to the independent (and often pre-existing) worlds of his short stories. Dauster goes on to analyze themes of select short stories and the way Garcia Marquez' form guides these themes, often differently (with different "intrusions of the fantastic") from how the form works in *Cien años*.

I focus on García Márquez' short stories (as opposed to his more analyzed novel) because: they, for one, are taken from various points in his writing career. And second, they examine different aspects of the way García Márquez conveys the world in his writing. Dauster suggests that each story contains its own mastery of certain techniques that is worth remarking, separately from the novels. Taking "Monologue of Isabela Watching it Rain in Macondo" as an example, a short story which was later developed into his novel *Leaf Storm*, Dauster suggests studying the short story on its own: "The story possesses its own aesthetic integrity and viability." He notes its phenomena as uniquely remarkable: the depiction of a woman whose depression is reflected in and exacerbated by rain.⁴ Each story is an experimentation in form; García Márquez uses each to introduce dichotomies of fantasy and the literal in different ways; unique uses of metaphor and symbol. Dauster further notes the experimentation of the writing form: "The intrusion of the fantastic takes many forms. In 'The Sea of Lost Time' it is the relatively innocuous phenomenon of the sea's smelling of roses."⁵ In "Death Constant Beyond Love" it is the political presentation of a fake cardboard-built city. In my work, I examine how, and to what effect, these experiments work. Following this, I trace how Desai's novel its own experiment in form.

⁴ Dauster, "Short Stories," 467.

⁵ Dauster, "Short Stories," 470.

In his genealogy of magical realism's travels, "The Global Life of Genres and the Material Travels of Magical Realism," Mariano Siskind also pauses on the short stories of Garcia Marquez: "Many critics have read these pre-*Cien años* narratives as proto-magical realist laboratories where Garcia Marquez played with forms of conveying the marvelous, which he would perfect and incorporate into his novel. This is clearly an exaggeration." He suggests that reading the short stories only as they develop the *Cien años* magical realism would be reductive, as the pre-*Cien años* stories do not lend to a "clear articulation of the rhetoric of magical realism." For example, Siskind describes that some texts "experiment with time, stretching the narrative duration of an instant in a clearly European modernist [Joycean] way."⁶ These texts have their own forms, with purposes and influences sometimes differing from *Cien años*. Also worth drawing from this is that even García Márquez did not stick to a definable "magical realist" mold. Therefore, instead of assuming his texts are consistent examples of magical realism, we examine their textual choices and techniques of description.

Previous Scholarship

To examine previous scholarship on García Márquez' short stories, in the 30 years since Dauster's article, little has changed. There is still little criticism on Garcia Marquez' short stories aside from how they influence and reference his novels. Previous scholarship on these stories includes Katherine J. Hampares' essay "Gabriel García Márquez: A Synthesis of Inter-American

⁶ Mariano Siskind, "The Global Life of Genres and the Material Travels of Magical Realism," In *The Palgrave Handbook of Magical Realism in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Richard Perez and Victoria A. Chevalier (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020), 86.

Reality,” which references “Sea of Lost Time” to analyze Garcia Marquez’ post-imperial critique of the inter-American reality.⁷ Also, Vera M. Kutzinski’s “The Logic of Wings,” which analyses the influence of Afro-American culture and literature (in folktales/myths and Spanish-language literature) on his stories. Interestingly, this essay also traces the transcultural influences of Garcia Marquez’ writing to English Afro-American literature, referencing a poem by Robert Hayden which is inspired by “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.”⁸

Prior scholarship on Desai’s award-winning novel is abundant, with scholars analyzing the diversity of nationalist, cosmopolitan, immigrant, postcolonial, and ecological themes in *Inheritance*. Natacha Lasorak, in her essay “Inhabiting the British Country House in India,” examines the displacement felt by the characters, especially as it relates to the setting and, particularly, images of British culture and colonialist norms.⁹ Dina Yerima and Damian Opata encounter the psychology of the characters facing cultural hybridity in “Psychosis in Hybridity.”¹⁰ Jill Didur and Carmen Escobedo de Tapia write essays, “Cultivating Community: Counterlandscaping” and “Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature,” analyzing the book from ecocritical lenses.¹¹ And Arun Kumar Pokhrel borrows from the eco-critical to examine the

⁷ Katherine J Hampares, “GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ: A SYNTHESIS OF INTER-AMERICAN REALITY,” *INTI*, no. 16/17 (1982): 111-123, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23285322>.

⁸ Vera M Kutzinski, “The Logic of Wings: Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Afro-American Literature,” *Latin American Literary Review* 13, no. 25 (1985): 133-146, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20119392>.

⁹ Natacha Lasorak, “Inhabiting the British Country House in India: The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai,” *Folia Linguistica et Litteraria* 31 (2020): 39–54.

¹⁰ Dina Yerima, and Damian U Opata, "Psychosis in Hybridity: Locating the Identity of the Postcolonial Subject in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*," in *Forum for World Literature*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2018): 449-463.

¹¹ Jill Didur, "Cultivating Community: Counterlandscaping in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*," *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011): 43-61.

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia, "Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature," *Narratives of Environmental Challenges in Brazil and India: Losing Nature* (2018): 97-108.

romantic colonial and images of the natural setting in connection with the socio-historical plot revolving around political conflicts in the essay “Eco-Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Identity.”¹²

For all the dearth of scholarship on García Márquez’ short stories, they have inspired an abundance of descendant literature and artwork. For example, a short story (2007) by Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos-Febres inspired by minor characters from “Rain in Macondo.” Illustrations based on “Sea of Lost Time” by Colombian artist Andrea Sazu. And, linking our interested cultures, a film titled *Sea of Lost Time* by Indian director Gurvinder Singh, intended to evoke the magical realism of García Márquez. This suggests that if not analyzed, García Márquez’ stories are more often “felt.” The fact that his stories have inspired much creative thought suggests that there is a wider social/political consciousness that his writing calls attention to. A potential consciousness whose transnational ripples were surely felt by Desai.

By engaging *Inheritance* with the mechanical understanding of Garcia Marquez’ form and its purposing, this thesis adds to the tradition of reading and understanding the themes Desai unravels. Further, Roanne Kantor’s book, *South Asian Writers, Latin American Literature, and the Rise of Global English* (2022), traces the lines of influence between Latin America and South Asia, but she leaves off at Anita Desai, not examining the work of her daughter.¹³ By continuing her path, I further trace transcultural connections and create a better understanding of these two literary canons of the cultures. Also, by analyzing Garcia Marquez short stories where there has previously been little scholarship on the subject, I pick up on the gap in scholarship, and further,

¹² Arun Kumar Pokhrel, "Eco-Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Identity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*," *The Global South* 15, no. 1 (2021): 168-194.

¹³ Roanne L Kantor, *South Asian Writers, Latin American Literature, and the Rise of Global English*. Cambridge Studies in World Literature, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

hope to renew interest in Garcia Marquez' approaches to thematic development and representation through the particular writing forms of his short stories.

Outline

To make my argument, I begin by summarizing the nature of magical realism, how it has travelled, and in what form it has arrived in and influenced the literature of South Asia, and how South Asian authors expressed the form. Further, I distinguish “form” as a concept and examine how elements of magical realism can be drawn on to create form. In the third chapter, I explore García Márquez' use of form. Beginning with the pre-*Cien años* stories, I examine how he represents thematic symbols and collective histories through magical images of the natural world, especially spaces of water. Then, how he writes the world to affect characters and reflect their emotional and social states; by representing social history through world. Next, I describe how his characters are defined by narrative repetition and unavoidable memory, and how these devices lend to a new way of seeing. In the fourth chapter, I examine what Desai's form does, separated from magical realism. I begin by analyzing how she uses metaphorical images of the natural world to influence realities of character and narrative. And how she invokes real societal existences to inform the characters. Further, I examine how her characters position themselves in relation to their painful memories and then how time reaches stillness in repetition, suggesting shared memories. Finally, I conclude by linking both authors in a desire to represent specific realities, informing their form. And I suggest that both authors are pressured by specific understandings of society, through forms which recall possibilities of social change.

Chapter 2

Background

What is Magical Realism?

The scholar-defined form commonly attributed to García Márquez is magical realism. Alternatively described as a genre, a mode, or a form, I call it a form here to define it in terms of its formal qualities, and the ways some of these formal qualities show up in these specific texts (i.e., how is it formed?). The origin of this form could be traced back to 1798, when German philosopher Novalis first “envisioned in his notebooks the figure of a prophetic individual[...] the prophet poet who lives outside the boundaries of enlightened discourse without losing touch with the real, grounding his poetic idealism in reality.”¹⁴ Or it could begin by tracing the effects the Cuban Revolution and the transnational economic boom of the 1960s to examine economic and institutional forces that shaped literature from specific cultures.¹⁵ Instead, we begin with a simple definition, and trace how this categorized authors from García Márquez onwards, and how other authors may differ from these bounds.

In defining magical realism for her essay, “South Asian Magical Realism,” Roanne Kantor pulls from Wendy Faris’s “well-known taxonomy,” saying, “Magical realism is primarily defined as a text that ‘contains an irreducible element of magic,’ in which, nevertheless, ‘realistic

¹⁴ Mariano Siskind. "The Global Life of Genres and the Material Travels of Magical Realism." in *The Palgrave Handbook of Magical Realism in the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), ed. Richard Perez and Victoria A. Chevalier, 64.

¹⁵ Siskind, “Global Life of Genres,” 93.

descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the world we live in.”¹⁶ Faris also references other formal attributes of magical realism, such as metamorphoses and narrative repetition, but neither Kantor nor I hold these as vital to magical realism as a form. However, as we will later see, aesthetic details such as these do influence the performance of magical realism and how they are used as elements of formal expression in different places.

Travels in South Asia

To trace the movement of the form, in “The Global Life of Genres and the Material Travels of Magical Realism,” Mariano Siskind calls up Irlemar Chiampi’s “working definition of magical realism as ‘the naturalization of the marvelous and the denaturalization of the real.’” Siskind and most critics agree that the magical realism can be defined as worlds “where the ordinary and extraordinary coexist without conflict without even calling attention to each other’s Otherness.” For example, García Márquez, in whose stories magical images exist in a form unsurprising to the characters. However, the agreement on definitions “ends with this dialectic of estrangement and normalization.”¹⁷ Siskind explains that scholars are divided on whether magical realism is a global phenomenon, wherein authors have the particular ability to unveil the unreal within the real. Or if it is local: a code of representation for specific cultural formations where history and unreal coexist. Therefore, Siskind chooses to historicize the form to allow for a more complete definition, finding a definition of form in the history of its movement rather than

¹⁶ Wendy Faris. “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction.” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris (Duke University Press, 1995): 163-190. Qtd. in Roanne L. Kantor, “South Asian Magical Realism,” in *Palgrave Handbook*, 84.

¹⁷ Siskind, “Global Life of Genres,” 62.

its formal attributes. According to Siskind, magical realism should be sought in its global trajectories, because global genres are significant in how different cultures are drawn to them and how they appropriate and translate the genre to their goals. Thus, we follow the global trajectory of forms.

Returning to “South Asian Magical Realism,” Kantor traces the rise of magical realism in South Asia through Salman Rushdie, who is often seen as the foundational postcolonial author and one of the icons of magical realism.¹⁸ She starts by tracing a history of the form’s indigenous development in India pre-1981. To begin, there are early texts such as Sanskrit religious epics and oral Islamic folktales which lend source material for later magical realist novels. Then, early 20th century fantasy fiction follows European “desire to see India as a stereotyped location of Eastern magic.”¹⁹ Later authors, Saadat Hasan Manto and G.V. Desani, whom Rushdie named as influences, approached magical realist elements. However, Kantor suggests, “a search for the roots of magical realism in South Asia before 1981 come up with precious little.”²⁰ Although there are early non-realist texts, a critical leap to the magical realism of Rushdie is incomplete. Further, Kantor pushes back against *Midnight’s Children* (1981) as a “purely indigenous product,” suggesting that this would marginalize the Latin American writers who contributed to the development of the mode and ignore its transnational movement and adaption in different contexts.²¹ Here, Kantor references Siskind in describing Rushdie’s decision to write a more experimental literary fiction using the magical realist form and his subsequent world-recognition through the Booker prize. Rather than a spontaneous development across the Anglophone

¹⁸ Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism," 83.

¹⁹ Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism," 86.

²⁰ Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism," 89.

²¹ Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism," 91.

postcolonial canon, magical realism spread due to the widespread global translation and distribution of Garcia Marquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967) over the 1970s. Thus, Siskind quotes the moment in 1975 when Rushdie encounters Garcia Marquez for the first time: "It was a colossal event."²² From this moment, Salman Rushdie, so taken by the magical realist form and how it can represent struggles of colonial history and identity, writes *Midnight's Children*.

From that point, magical realism takes immediate root in South Asian literature. Kantor suggests that it marks some of the most "iconic novels of the past thirty years," referencing Rushdie's later well-regarded novels and the novels of fellow Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy. Kantor defines Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) as solidly magical realist due to its "irreducible elements of magic:" "a tufted moth who freezes hearts, a cartwheeling corpse, a magical birthmark." However, she states, "the central magickness of magical realism is somewhat attenuated[...] those elements[...] are tied to the perspectives of children, children who turn into adults, permanently warped by trauma. What might be explained as magical is, just as often, merely uncanny." Here, Kantor describes Roy's magical elements: details which might be magical in their unreal, supernatural, and metaphorical intensity, which however, can just as easily be described as uncanny and not magical: "epistemological uncertainty" in Kantor's words.²³ Thus, although Kantor traces the magical realist form to Roy, Roy does not fully commit magic to her writing. This signals a shift in the tradition of South Asian magical realism,

²² Mariano Siskind, "Magical Realism," in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), ed. Ato Quayson, 860. Qtd. in Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism, 92, and reproduced in Siskind, "Global Life of Genres," 94.

²³ Kantor, "South Asian Magical Realism," 92.

away from literal narrative magic but still signalling an influence of the magical realist tradition in certain formal details.

What Changed

To look for to what changed in Latin American magical realism, Siskind examines the effects of García Márquez's 1982 Nobel prize. The prize made him "the most visible global literary celebrity, and magical realism became the preeminent protocol for the representation of the underdeveloped world, an aesthetic form easily translatable to a wide range protocol for the representation of the underdeveloped world, an aesthetic form easily translatable to a wide range of cultural locations." And indeed, it was translated; Siskind describes that it became a commodity whose form was shaped to the market niche expectations of different locations.²⁴ Thus it was that many authors turned away from this commodification and fetishization of the form in and outside of Latin America.

Similarly, in "A Case of Exploding Markets," Kantor suggests a "failure of a dream of global literary circulation that isn't coopted by global capital and other regimes of domination. Magical realism at first embodied that dream and then became its opposite."²⁵ There was a dream of an aesthetic that directed to political freedom, which failed. Further, she suggests a

²⁴ Siskind, "Global Life of Genres," 95. Here as examples of forms shaped according to market expectations, he includes Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) and Laura Esquivel's *Como agua por chocolate* (1989). Kantor (93; south Asian magical realism) discounts that this form of argument which links an ostensible fall in the form to a feminization of the form, i.e., moving from Alejo Carpentier and García Márquez to Allende and Esquivel.

²⁵ Roanne L. Kantor, "A Case of Exploding Markets: Latin American and South Asian Literary "Booms,"" *Comparative Literature* 70 no. 4 (2018), 473, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-7215506>.

contemporary “loss of faith in the progressive potential of style *tout court* and a belief that, instead of serving a variety of purposes ranging from personal expression to political argument, literary style has a single goal: to capture the market.”²⁶ The ideals of originality in form are lost in the current moment. Once, the experimental style of magical realism was seen as an original form which could aptly represent unique perspectives. Now, as suggested by Siskind, the form was seen as commodified for its capitalistic market value. Indeed, Desai seconds this point in an interview, where she describes that at the time of writing her first book, magical realism was “a very dirty way to work and to write about the third world” because of how it exoticized India “for the Western market.”²⁷ Thus, authors aspiring to “personal expression” and “political environment” could only succeed by forgoing this kind of form.²⁸

Thereafter, Kantor indicates a shift in how magical realism is expressed in the South Asian literary canon. She describes that, in addition to its narrative juxtaposition of real and magical, magical realism also works in the affective dimension. It does this by “playing up the tension between the lightness and pleasure of fantasy and the deeper, darker truths such magic is meant to reveal.” She explains the work of balancing with the “darker truths” in the examples of Mohsin Hamid and Mohammad Hanif, whose “recent writings evince moments of pleasure and fun, but they also show their teeth. In the echo of that iconic postcolonial gesture, the empire *bites* back.”²⁹ The affective dimension balances the magic and the political dimension of the text. Here, this is often seen in the characters, whose magic-touched worlds influence their personal

²⁶ Kantor, “Exploding Markets,” 474.

²⁷ Kiran Desai, “A Proud Inheritance,” interview by Suzanne Snider, *Columbia Magazine*, Winter 2006. <https://magazine.columbia.edu/article/proud-inheritance>.

²⁸ Kantor, “Exploding Markets,” 474.

²⁹ Kantor, “South Asian Magical Realism,” 96.

and political lives. Again, this analysis shifts the focus of magical realism from pure fantasy to formal details in the text.

What is the Form

Having so far traced a history and understanding of “magical realism” it is important to note [recall] that what we are exploring in the writings of Desai and García Márquez is not the magical realist form. Indeed, Desai makes it clear that she is uninterested in writing magical realism and, rather, is focusing on “a desire for realism.”³⁰ Thus, there is no conscious writing into the structure of magical realism. And what is the structure? Kumkum Sangari suggests, “There is nothing purely formal in Márquez’s choice of mode.”³¹ Instead, we link the authors in their use of techniques and details which are often categorized as magical realist but can just as easily be categorized as ways of knowing which García Márquez writes into his literature; and something that Desai does in a similar fashion.

To further explain these techniques and details and the specific reflections and discourses of magical realism I see influencing García Márquez and Desai in similar forms (and to explain García Márquez’s magical realist form which produces the weight of magic/event as metaphor and conveys the shared social basis of the extraordinary or singular effect), I reference Kumkum Sangari’s article, “The Politics of the Possible,” a comparative study of García Márquez and Rushdie. The article focuses on García Márquez’ novels (perhaps due to their recognizability),

³⁰ Desai, “A Proud Inheritance,” interview.

³¹ Kumkum Sangari, “The Politics of the Possible,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 7 (1987), 164, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354154>.

but the elements of his form which Sangari discusses are consistent across his less analyzed short stories. In the article, Sangari examines the non-western “nonmimetic narrative [mode] of Gabriel Garcia Marquez by focusing on knowledge as “inseparable from its performance in language, image and metaphor[...] [through which] Marquez legitimizes the status of the possible as valid knowledge.”³² Like previous scholars, she roots his writing form (calling it “marvelous realism” after Alejo Carpentier) in the “political and historical formation of Latin America,” with its history of “various kinds of domination, colonial and neocolonial.”³³ She defines the form as “a new way of seeing,” which “tackles the problem of truth at a level that reinvents a more acute and comprehensive mode of referentiality.”³⁴ Thus, she reads García Márquez’s texts as attempts at new approaches to knowledge-formation. Also, she emphasizes the aspect of collectivity to his approach: “Márquez’s narratives direct attention to the *social, collective, performative, and manifold processes* by which *meaning is generated, to parole* instead of *langue*.”³⁵ In her essay she uses the terms “performance” and “parole” to describe what language does (politically and for the narrative) rather than its semantic processes. Thus, for her, a defining aspect of what language does in García Márquez’ form is generate collective knowledge.

Further, the power of the even possibly real also helps us understand the application of the form to authors of different backgrounds (including postcolonial), as it allows them to express their cultural/historical specificities. Kiran Desai’s novel vitally has no magic, yet one may trace a line of influence in the writing form: both authors approach description with similar

³² Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 157, 163.

³³ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 158.

³⁴ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 162.

³⁵ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 165. (Emphasis original).

uses of metaphor—the possibly real—in conjunction with literal realness to describe a world/nature that responds to the narrative. So, what we trace in both author's texts is an application of form.

Chapter 3

Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel García Márquez opens his 1982 Nobel Prize Speech by recounting the fantastic reality of Latin American history. He tells of colonizers who find a magical land and dictators who arrest insanity. He describes corruption, war, death, and the emigration of millions. Faced with this “outsized reality,” García Márquez says that writers must have original ways of knowing: “Our crucial problem has been the lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.”³⁶ That is, European modes of writing and ways of analyzing the writing of Latin American literature are insufficient to represent and understand the reality of Latin America, and the individual’s struggle. There is a different social reality, a whole different world, for the people of Latin America, one whose representation calls for originality in form. In his stories, García Márquez represents these social conditions, the specific histories of experience in Latin America. In his short stories “Sea of Lost Time,” “Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo,” and “Death Constant Beyond Love,” we see the way in which he encounters the “outsized reality.” He represents aspects of world and character through metaphorical magical images (especially images of water) which often embody collectivity. Further, he emphasizes the nearness of the magical world to the characters’ affect. And characters are defined in social histories through narratives which repeat themselves and unavoidable memory which afflicts them.

³⁶ Gabriel García Márquez, “The Solitude of Latin America Nobel Lecture, 8 December 1982,” *The Georgia Review* 49, no. 1 (1995), 135, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41401618>.

Watery Spaces and Collective Memory

In the vivid symbols present in his stories, one can see how García Márquez uses certain techniques of figuration. In the same way Sangari suggests he uses metaphor in *Cien años*, his short stories present techniques of event as significant metaphor. As Sangari explains, “Marvelous realism discovers a figurative discourse that produces a knowledge inseparable from its performance in language, image and metaphor.”³⁷ In other words, figuration (representation) in García Márquez’ short stories is directed by performances of language to develop metaphor. Rather than having events with metaphorical meaning read as supernatural or interrupting the natural world, events are naturalized, and the metaphor is turned into the (natural) event. In his stories, suggestions of past and future, made physical in watery spaces, are indicative of García Márquez’ form because of their simultaneous physical and signifying existence.

In both Garcia Marquez’s “Sea of Lost Time” and “Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo,” the rain and the sea become spaces where marvelous figurations of time past and future can be presented as natural image. In “Sea of Lost Time,” a town is suddenly changed by the smell of roses coming off the sea. The smell of roses represents different things to different characters: old Jacob’s wife thinks it means she is going to die, while it inspires nostalgia in others. Mr. Herbert comes to town and gives money and cons people out of their property. Further, people, businesses, and other hopeful aspects come from out of town following the smell. Later, the smell departs, and the setting takes on a hungry countenance; Tobias and Mr.

³⁷ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 163.

Herbert dive into the sea in search of food and find a sunken flowery village and many of the old dead.

What is notable about the magic in García Márquez's stories is that it arrives. It washes often literally washes ashore in many of his stories. In "Sea of Lost Time," the arrival of the rose-smell results in changes in the lives of the characters and their village, comparable to the arrival of hope in one's mind, and the possibilities that hope inspires. Its "arriving" nature demonstrates that in the text, the magical element is an addition to the existing natural world. However, what makes the writing form unique is the nonmimetic attributes of the written world are naturalized into reality. Furthermore, it is a smell described as leaving "no chink for any odor of the past,"³⁸ signaling time forward from the present. At the beginning, the town is affected by the "harsh" sea, "dumping it's heavy garbage on the town[...] everything was contaminated with its unbearable mood."³⁹ But then comes the smell "so pure" that people are drawn to it.⁴⁰ To the point that it revitalizes the town, bringing back people who left in earlier times and creating immense changes in its people's living. In these expressions of positive change, the town now takes on a contrasting hopeful aura, and the smell begins embodying the possibility of change, hope.

Certain characters doubt the existence of roses because they perceive that the object of hope is to be doubted; an idea which denaturalizes (makes marvelous) hope as a perception. The old veteran says, "I don't believe much of this[...] During the war[...] we'd wanted a general so

³⁸ Gabriel García Márquez, "Sea of Lost Time" in *Collected Stories*, First Perennial Classics Edition, (Harper & Row, 1984), 232.

³⁹ García Márquez, "Sea of Lost Time," 226.

⁴⁰ García Márquez, "Sea of Lost Time," 232.

bad we saw the Duke of Marlborough appear in flesh and blood.”⁴¹ Here, the image of a lost battle precipitating the apparition of a hoped-for general lends further credulity to the idea of rose-smell embodying hope. The veteran describes wanting something so much that it’s possible they imagined even the smell; a hope (for change) so strong that it alters perception. Thus, in the smell of roses, the emotion of hope is given marvelous form. It becomes part of the marvelous landscape of memory and time (with hope indicating the possibilities of time forward), which is embodied by the magical-natural landscape of water and its rose-smell.

Also, the sea is represented as storing a collective past, through the depiction of an entire town’s “Sunday” sunken within it. In the beginning, a past, with all its emotional and storied weight, is foreshadowed to be held in the sea: “Dynamite only brought the remains of old shipwrecks to the surface.”⁴² But more visibly, after the smell of roses leaves, Tobias and Mr. Herbert dive into the ocean in search of turtle meat. There they discover:

A submerged village with men and women on horseback turning about a musical kiosk. It was a splendid day and there were brightly coloured flowers on the terraces.

“A Sunday sank at about eleven o’clock in the morning[...] it must have been some cataclysm[...]”

They were leaving the sea of catastrophe and entering the sea of the dead.

⁴¹ García Márquez, “Sea of Lost Time,” 233-234.

⁴² García Márquez, “Sea of Lost Time,” 227.

There were so many of them that Tobias thought that he'd never seen as many people on earth[...] floating motionless[...] they all had the look of forgotten souls.⁴³

Deep in the sea, the characters find first an entire town, living and decorated with roses. This image is significant because a "Sunday," a holy and temporal space is made physical. It is frozen in an aspect of the past, in the location of the physical space of the sea. The lush imagery presents a beautiful passage where Garcia Marquez experiments with a higher level of the marvelous. Further, the old dead also embody the past through diction that alludes to memory. Death is the place of memory; what is inalterably past. These images are indicative of collective memories, the memory of a whole people together, notions of collectivity which Sangari suggests are indicative of García Márquez' form. Water, and to a larger extent, the world, is a space which creates images which extend beyond the present moment of time. Thus, water creates images which represent reality in novel ways, signifying a shared structure of thought, a social matrix that exists outside, and prior to the story itself.

"Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo" describes the perspective and melancholia of Isabela as a harsh rain falls for days, making time and senses fall apart. The story depicts a similar representation of the dead, who bear metaphorical weight in their relationship with time. As her senses fall apart and her psyche disintegrates with the world-melding rain, Isabela says, "The smell. It must be the dead people floating along the streets."⁴⁴ In this narrative, like "Sea of Lost Time," the watery space of the rain and its sea-like accumulation on the ground is perceived to be reclaiming the dead. Here too, the past (made physical by the

⁴³ García Márquez, "Sea of Lost Time," 243-244.

⁴⁴ García Márquez, "Monologue of Isabel Watching it Rain in Macondo," in *Collected Stories*, 100.

aromatically perceptible object of the dead body) is being reclaimed by watery space (a natural space with the unnatural quality of unfolding time).

Like the sea with the sunken village in “Sea of Lost Time,” a similar extension of realist space occurs in “Rain,” with an image of death elaborating beyond literal and physical manifestations of space. In the story, a magical body arrives in the home-scape out of the rain unexpectedly. A cow is found in the garden one morning, and it stays there, while it rains, refusing to move. After a while (the day is unclear, time is confused), it is described that the characters have become

Paralyzed, drugged by the rain, given over to the collapse of nature [peacefully]. Only the cow was moving in the afternoon. Suddenly a deep noise shook her insides and her hooves sank into the mud with greater force. Then she stood motionless for half an hour, as if she were already dead but could not fall down because the habit of being alive prevented her.⁴⁵

Then (a half-hour after apparent death), it collapses slowly and ceremonially. The “habit,” which could be read as memory (habit defined as a tendency of behavior, remembered), “of being alive” is what stops the cow from dying altogether. Is what stops it from moving from one point in time into the next. In this way, the rain-space creates an abrasion in time, where even while dead, extended into time forward, the body is still stuck in the memory of the past. Thus, the space that these characters (the cow and later-discussed Senator Onesimo) inhabit extends both forward and backwards in time. In defining the form García Márquez uses here, one can

⁴⁵ García Márquez, “Isabel Watching it Rain,” 97-98.

understand that he creates spaces that extend beyond the real, into the magical, where thematic aspects such as time can bend into unreality.

Figurative Worlds and Character Affect

Recall Kantor's discussion of the affective work of magical realism: the form encourages a tension between magic and deeper, darker truths. In "Rain," it does this by introducing literal-metaphorical (magical) images affecting the character, causing her to be defined by melancholia (a truth of character). Isabel describes "In the uniform and peaceful intensity you could hear the water fall[...] but without our noticing, the rain was penetrating too deeply into our senses."⁴⁶ Slowly, the world becomes muddy, affected by the rain. Then it extends into affecting the minds of the characters (especially Isabel); they lose track of time, even becoming paralyzed for hours on end with the banal chaos of the world. The characters are heavily affected by fantastic events beyond their reality. Further, the nearness of the natural/metaphorical world to the characters' emotions is described from the very exposition: "the sky was a gray, jellyfish substance that flapped its wings a hand away from our heads."⁴⁷

To understand the connection of the marvelous world to the characters' histories (and further, the social histories involved in the development of the world), we look to Kumkum Sangari, who suggests that "There is nothing purely formal in Márquez's choice of mode[...] The intent of the style is neither to surprise nor to draw attention to its own uniqueness (as in Euro-

⁴⁶ García Márquez, "Isabel Watching it Rain," 95.

⁴⁷ García Márquez, "Isabel Watching it Rain," 94.

American modernist fiction) but to convey the shared social basis of the extraordinary or singular effect.” Sangari suggests that there is a “social basis” to García Márquez’s form, which informs the marvelous effect. Furthermore, she suggests that “The performative aspect of the style lies outside the text in already existing ways of seeing and relies not on the shock of novelty but on shared structures of knowledge and belief.”⁴⁸ These shared structures of knowledge and belief, originating in a specific sociohistorical context, are what lead to a development and definition of the characters. Similarly, Kantor suggests that magical realism can work in the affective dimension through this tension between shared histories (depicted through magic) and the play of the magic itself.⁴⁹

In addition to organizing the stories themselves, certain social histories often define García Márquez’ characters. Often, they are characterized by loneliness, a kind of “solitude” García Márquez uses to describe Latin America. As an example of a process of figuration, Sangari discusses the processes of collectivity of subject-voice and repetition as it creates the causal-ideological space of García Márquez’ texts and is affected by time past

Narratives gesture toward the *autonomy* of the *story* in its *semantic* aspect: stories exist above and beyond the storytellers who relate them, the language in which they are told, and the narrative structures in which they are held[...]

Márquez’ marvelous realism, then, is an interactive mode based on a notion of collectivity (a social relation) which the narratives *figure* forth in several ways.

⁴⁸ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 164.

⁴⁹ Kantor, “South Asian Magical Realism,” 96.

Here, Sangari emphasizes that García Márquez' stories are based in a "social matrix that is always prior to their telling."⁵⁰ The stories, through techniques of figuration, display the social reality of the author, the collective social from which he writes, in their narrative. And these social histories are figured/represented by the narrative in the various processes of the form. The social histories are seen in how the characters are constantly described as "different," defining their lives in the language of solitude. "They say you're worse than the others because you are *different*," (emphasis mine) Laura tells Senator Onesimo in "Death Constant Beyond Love."⁵¹ The falling rain (an aspect of the world) in "Rain" changes, affecting the character of Isabel: "now it seemed to be raining in *another way*, because something *different* and bitter was going on in my heart."⁵² The difference originates in the author's desire (in form) for characters uniquely defined by their setting, a specific reality. Thus, they are protagonists afflicted with solitude.

"Death Constant Beyond Love" describes the story of Senator Onesimo Sanchez, who, despite being months from death, continues to run his electoral campaign. During the story, the senator arrives in the "illusory village" of Rosal del Virrey, where he gives a speech promising hope. During the speech, his aides build a cardboard façade of a town behind the listeners, to be pointed out by the senator. The senator later meets with the important people of the town and treats them with dismal contempt for their corrupt politics. Later, the beautiful daughter of a man who needs his help comes, sent by her father. The senator muses on their solitude and chooses to fall asleep with her.

⁵⁰ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 166.

⁵¹ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," in *Collected Stories*, 264.

⁵² García Márquez, "Isabel Watching it Rain," 96.

The senator's character, in choosing to continue in the aforementioned "habit of being alive," represents the marvelous world through melancholia of character. García Márquez describes that despite being in the process of slowly but concurrently dying, he continues to go about and run his re-election campaign, living life "with no change in his life, not because of pride but out of shame."⁵³ Shame indicates a psychological and political state for the character where he is reproachful against his own identity. Furthermore, in continuing life only as habit, "with no change," time is bent into repetition. For both the cow of "Watching it Rain" and the senator of "Death Constant," despite time moving forward, the characters' time (the time of their character-world) is repeating the actions ("habit") of the past. In this way, the space that these characters inhabit (especially as represented by time-melding rain in "Rain"), extends both forwards and backwards in time. The spaces of world and character in García Márquez's stories extend beyond the real, into magical spaces, where aspects such as time can bend into unreality. Thus, the melancholic characters are absented of the real processes of active identity and time. Caused by the social histories of the character, their affliction represents the marvelous aspect of the form.

To better understand the social histories of the characters, we look to the senator's lying speech and the simultaneous building of a false city, where García Márquez gives the image of inauthentic hope in the world-adjusting language of his literary mode. The senator is constantly aware of death, to the point that he has to make an effort to avoid the thought while sleeping. This is his difference; so, when Laura Farina, the girl sent to him by her father, calls him "worse

⁵³ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," 256.

than the rest because he's different,"⁵⁴ it means his memory of death separates him, making him worse than even the corrupt politicians. In his pain, he recalls death instead of life. Therefore, it's important to note his actions while keeping in mind his constant mindfulness of death. The contrast of the language of the speech the senator gives is significant because it stands "opposite of a fatalistic pronouncement," instead of in the "nature of telling the truth."⁵⁵ Despite his constant memory of death, he speaks in a façade of hope:

"We are here for the purpose of defeating nature," he began, against all his convictions.

"We will no longer be foundlings in our own country, orphans of God in a realm of thirst and bad climate, exiles in our own land. We will be different people, ladies and gentlemen, we will be a great and happy people[...]"

[His aides] finished by setting up a card-board façade with make-believe houses of red brick that had glass windows, and with it they covered the miserable real-life shacks[...]

When he saw that his fictional world was all set up, he pointed to it[...] "Look! That's the way it will be for us."⁵⁶

The speech seems to suggest the hope for rootedness and fulfilment in one's own country. Notice the focus on world and nature in his speech: "foundlings in our own country[...] a realm of thirst and bad climate." His words link the nature of the world to the affect of the characters; "thirst and bad climate" specifically use "watery" language to imply alienation from the world they call their own.

⁵⁴ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," 264.

⁵⁵ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," 257.

⁵⁶ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," 257-258.

The faux town built behind everyone, seemingly in support of the words, further suggests a physicality to the characters' potential fulfilment. However, he gives this speech "without gestures, his eyes fixed on the sea, which was sighing with heat."⁵⁷ Again, the sea, a place of memory, is the only thing in his perception. In the story, the sea is only significant insofar as it is the location of smuggler's ships, cardboard cruise ships, and the islands Laura and her once-murderous, now old and melancholic father came from. By focusing his eyes on the sea, the senator can only perceive loss, even as he speaks of hope.

García Márquez paints the image of false hope through two devices. That of the character's melancholic inhibition presented in his language. And that of the world the senator builds: a faux city and the aimless life that he folds magically into being. Contrasts of hope and loss are built into the dialogue as well as the worldbuilding. The fake town, like the senator's words, "stand against his own convictions." His language, which distorts his convictions, presents a constant memory of death that resists hope. He doesn't believe in the town or the speech, and doesn't even believe in living, it is only a habit. Thus, the emptiness of his character is figured forth in the image of the town. It is not magical outright but is so direct in its meaningful nature (empty town equating empty words/beliefs) combined with impossible being, as to enfold metaphorical significance into the literal building of a faux town. Presenting contrasts of hope and emptiness thereof, the dialogue and world become examples of García Márquez's aesthetics of nature, which reflect the psyche of the characters.

⁵⁷ García Márquez, "Death Constant Beyond Love," 257.

Repetition and Unavoidable Memories

Returning to Sangari's concept of collectivity and the way it is performed in García Márquez' form, Sangari suggests an important device is repetition. One of various techniques used to present a collective subject-voice, Sangari suggests that his use of repetition holds his stories together. She suggests that it is important that his narratives can return to the same place, which binds them, and "depart in a *different* direction." She describes it as an improvisation that lends to new, multiple, and different performances, forming "the grounds of both the new and the same."⁵⁸ Stories can redevelop themselves and reveal more about the characters narratives by returning and retelling. And in depicting these repetitions the narrative may reveal more about the realities of the characters.

Sangari further looks to the stillness of repetition: in memory, where it can provide a closure to repetition, or an opening. Memory, in its invariable form, can be seen as a closure to repetition, shackling characters to certain tautological narratives, certain predetermined events which will continue to repeat. But it can also prove "to be the agent of historical sense and of political understanding, that is, it provides the openings."⁵⁹ Thus memory, in working in the social context of the story can be the material practice that provides the openings to improvisation and narrative. Memory is a collective action, that performs socio-political role of holding stories, often through repetition.

⁵⁸ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 168-169.

⁵⁹ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 169.

Unavoidable, persistent memory, such as that of Tobias, performs its significance in defining the characters through its unavoidability. After returning from the sea, Tobias' thoughts are distracted. During lovemaking, his thoughts are interrupted by the memory of "a village at the bottom of the sea[...] with little white houses with millions of flowers on the terraces." The act of intercourse, which could signify creation and time forward is interrupted by his memory of what he had seen frozen in the past. These images, of spaces extending beyond time, push the characters in certain ways. Here, Tobias too is pushed into the past; his repetition freezes him in time. Repetition can lend to the new, or the same, with reconfigurations—*re-memberings*—furthering thematic understanding of the worlds the authors represent.⁶⁰ The cow, frozen in place; Tobias, forced to remember the image of time past; and Senator Onesimo, constantly remembering death, all deliver repetition through world; an element which defines the characters.

New Ways of Seeing

To conclude, García Márquez approaches a new way of seeing as developed in the original form of his stories. By "way of seeing," I mean the particular approach to world and identity the author hopes to convey. This construction of a new epistemology originates in the desire for a different approach to history. In his Nobel speech, García Márquez emphasizes a desire for alternative "[interpretations] of reality" through native-born "patterns."⁶¹ In this way

⁶⁰ Term "re-membering" borrowed from Homi K. Bhabha, introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon (Pluto Press, 1986).

⁶¹ García Márquez, "Solitude of Latin America," 135.

he suggests a literature and an identity which can be achieved through form. Similarly, Sangari looks to “dialogic and dialectical history” as the base for the “formation of different selves and construction of different epistemologies.”⁶² Here, Sangari emphasizes history as a basis for identity and new ways of seeing. So, García Márquez’ writing constructs a new way of seeing that emphasizes knowledge as originating in the social history. His writing draws from history and figures forth the particularity of specific identities. Further, this hope for literature to structure specific history and identity is seen in the writing of another author, whose writing likewise discusses the repetition of imperialist hegemonies and the legacies of colonialism.

⁶² Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 186.

Chapter 4

Kiran Desai

In 2006, Indian author Kiran Desai published her ground-breaking novel *Inheritance of Loss* to much acclaim, winning the Booker Prize “for the strength of the book’s humanity.”⁶³ The book mainly follows characters living in a crumbling house near Kalimpong, in the foothills of the Himalayas. It follows Sai, her grandfather the judge, the cook, and the cook’s son, Biju. In Sai, it explores the displacement of an anglicized orphan, who does not know her parents’ or her grandparents’ history; in the judge, the lasting colonial hierarchies and effects of colonialist thought on the educated colonized; and in Biju and the cook, poverty and immigration in the contemporary post-imperial world. The novel is a realist account of the social lives and histories of various characters existing in a specific time and place(s). Despite this, real elements and actions of nature and the world pattern with character’s actions and emotions, producing metaphors, or diegetic images with metaphoric depth. For example, as Desai explains the border-politics of the moment, she describes the existence of conflicts “despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders.”⁶⁴ At each moment where reality of world or character is introduced, nature influences and changes it as a device of narrative. The high peaks of the Himalayas are always present in the lives of the characters, from the very start of the novel: “Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice[...] Every now and then she looked up[...] observed its wizard

⁶³ John Ezard, “First-Timer Beats the Odds to Take Booker Prize That Eluded Her Mother,” *The Guardian*, October 11, 2006, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/oct/11/books.bookerprize2006>.

⁶⁴ Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 9.

phosphorescence with a shiver.”⁶⁵ Thus, in *Inheritance of Loss*, Desai uses a language of describing reality that plays and surprises and makes metaphor of event, indicating an influence of García Márquez’ magical realist forms. Elements of the form are seen in the watery nature of the world which influences realities of character and narrative, memory which painfully breaks in on characters, and repetition of individual memory to suggest social memory. The form is purposeful in representing specific realities, which provide social bases for the characters’ narratives and transformations.

The book opens on a scene at Cho Oyu, the crumbling country house bought by the judge in the far north of India to escape from his past. Sai, the judge, and the cook are idling on a misty day. A group of boys who are part of a local popular liberation movement then arrive and threaten the family and take the judge’s old guns and anything else of value. The novel concurrently traces the journey of the cook’s son, Biju, who has illegally immigrated to America. He has low-paying jobs at a variety of restaurants and lives with other undocumented immigrants in poor conditions. There, he writes letters to his father and grows sad and alienated from society. Eventually his knee is injured during work.

Sai is a young woman who arrived at her grandfather’s house nine years before the start of the novel when her parents died. She had grown up in a convent, with her parents having moved to Russia to work in the space program. At Cho Oyu, Sai falls in love with her tutor Gyan, a local Nepali. The judge treats her with the same cold blankness as everything else. He is a cantankerous, jaded old man, who has made every effort to separate himself from the world and forget his past, and demonstrates love only for his dog. Still, the judge finds a degree of

⁶⁵ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 1.

familiarity in Sai's foreignness; her having grown up in an English convent in India. Her presence triggers his own memory, recalling his travel from India to England. He was from a poor family, who prized his education. Eventually, he studied intensely enough to travel to England to continue his studies. His father had high dreams for him, and he was on a path to a high courtly position in the Indian Civil Service. So, he was married to the daughter of a wealthy, high-class Indian and given a large dowry to help pay for his travels.

In England, the judge further buried himself in his studies, growing estranged from the world around him. As an Indian, he was looked down upon and eventually turned the colonizer's gaze inward, finding his own skin appalling. Successfully completing his studies, he returned to India, where he likewise turned a hateful eye on his family and his wife. In anger, he assaulted, abused, and beat his wife. He continued to abuse her, while spending years working and travelling in the Indian Civil Service. After a particular moment of being embarrassed by her, he sent her away and took no notice when she gave birth to a daughter, or to her death.

In current day, the popular liberation group are growing in power, causing political instability and conflict in the region. The tutor Gyan, influenced and made insecure by them, yells at Sai over her luxury and westernized culture. He then tells the group about the guns at the judge's house, prompting the burglary. Sai is angry and heartbroken by Gyan's words. Later, the judge's dog is stolen and he beats the cook, who feels guilty and requests it. At the same time, Biju returns home to India and all his belongings and savings are stolen by the liberation group. The novel ends with him embracing his father, the cook, as the sun comes out over the mountains.

Metaphorical Nature and Character Narratives

Through language wrought with figuration, Desai's writing is preoccupied with the role of place in narrative. Especially Cho Oyu, the country home that defines many of the main characters' narratives. Early in the novel, she describes Sai's arrival there:

In her bed later that evening[...] She could sense the swollen presence of the forest, hear the hollow-knuckled knocking of the bamboo, the sound of the *jhora* that ran deep in the décolleté of the mountain[...] The structure of the house seemed fragile in the balance of the night—just a husk[...] When Sai moved her foot, her toes went silently through the rotted fabric. She had a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big it reached both backward and forward.⁶⁶

Here, the natural world seems to impinge on the narrative world of the character: she easily hears the sounds of the mountain and feels the presence of the forest. Even her foot passes through the old fabric, entering the space of the world. The natural world is so unavoidably close. But, vitally different from our other author, it is not magical in nature. Desai writes a tension between the nearness of this fantastic landscape and its inescapable reality. In the fantastic dimension, the world stretches out of place (seen in its sensation) and out of time (seen in its "reach"). In this dimension, it affects the character: it discomforts her, it frightens her. Here metaphor becomes the event. As Sangari says, "Metaphor is turned into *event* precisely so that it will *not* be read as event, but folded back into metaphor as disturbing, resonant image."⁶⁷ Thus, the sounds and

⁶⁶ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 34.

⁶⁷ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 164.

spaces almost symbolic in meaning are real events, folded back into metaphor as images. Desai's precisely described images of the natural world tend to interlope on the space of the character, despite their physical impassiveness.

At another point, in that same house racked by rainstorms, Desai uses metaphoric language to describe an event that parallels the characters' narrative. During Gyan and Sai's shy childlike courtship, Sai leaves abruptly, and the narrator describes, "She didn't return. But the mice did. It was quite extraordinary how tenacious they were—you'd think their fragile hearts would shatter, but their timidity was misleading; their fear was without memory."⁶⁸ In this passage, the language foremost describes the mixed fear and tenacity of the mice, but also, more earnestly, the characters burgeoning romance. This scene folds metaphor into the event of the mice returning, but in such a way that the event itself becomes the metaphoric image. Thus, nature becomes metaphor to represent the transformation of the characters.

On the topic of rain, an image that has come up a few times and which will continue to arise is that of water. It is an image that finds common ground in both Desai and García Márquez, with both authors using real spaces of water as metaphorical spaces of memory. Water brings forth collective past in the stories of García Márquez, and in Desai, it likewise conveys a social dimension. The house soaks water, is bashed by water, and water is made a metaphor for the moment of falling into memory. At other points, water influences the narrative through imagery which evokes thematic significance, such as the "Mist[...] making ridiculous the drawing of borders."⁶⁹ And the judge, whose spirit is weakened by the immensity of the ocean.

⁶⁸ Desai, *The inheritance of Loss*, 116.

⁶⁹ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 9.

Which indicates, through metaphor, to his relative place in the world. Various emotional scenes in the book are marked with water; during another storm the cook opens letters from his son, but finds that “Blue ink waves lapped the paper and every word had vanished, as so often happened in the monsoon season.”⁷⁰ The words of his son, his hope for the future, is attacked by water. Water reaches into the place of memory, into the narrative life of the character. For Desai, this parallel with García Márquez’ images is neither formally inspired (it is not allusion) nor coincidental. Rather, the intentionality of the images signals a connection between elements of the linked forms that García Márquez and Kiran Desai use.

In example of a character influenced by the natural world (and watery spaces in particular), the judge is heavily affected by the compounding rainy season. He is a colonial character so traumatized by his time in Britain that he desires to forget his whole past. The narrator describes,

How he hated this dingy season[...] When he looked about he saw that he was not in charge[...] Cho Oyu also soaking up water, crumbling like a mealy loaf. With each storm’s bashing, less of it was habitable.

The judge felt old, very old, and as the house crumbled about him, his mind, too, seemed to be giving way, doors he kept firmly shut between one thought and the next, dissolving.

It was now forty years since he had been a student of poetry.⁷¹

Again, the natural world impinges on the lives of the characters. In this case, the storm-battered house is literally falling apart, and the authoritarian character of the judge is realizing he’s not in

⁷⁰ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 120.

⁷¹ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 34.

control of his home. Then, Desai connects two simultaneous moments in the character and the setting. The house crumbles, and the judge's mental blocks likewise fall. Here it is specifically his political life, his past as a colonial subject in England, which is brought up by the stormy weather. Contrast his arrival to Cho Oyu: "The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language. He never went back to court."⁷² In the present moment, the judge has come to a place where he does not need to engage with the politics of the place. Through his own actions of movement and transformation, he has become a character not defined by politics. However, the diegetic event of the house crumbling is paralleled with the moment of his mind falling back into a political place. Again, the natural world is a metaphor presented as an image. And what the image figures forth, specifically, is the memory of the judge when he was a colonized person being hated and alienated in the colonizer's country. At that moment, he was someone defined by the society around him. The image figures forth a more particular (conflicted) political state. Thus, these narrative techniques are often used by Desai to convey a social dimension of the characters, where real forms of societal existence inform the characters' lives.

Further, the judge's failing walls in his memory indicate a wider history underlying his narrative. The narrator describes, "His memory seemed triggered by the tiniest thing[...] the barrier between life and eternity would in the end, no doubt, be just another failing construct."⁷³ In putting up walls in his memory, the judge attempts to escape his memory by separating his life from eternity. Thus, the narrative creates a separation of the moment of the judge and history

⁷² Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 29.

⁷³ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 113.

itself. The severed moment of “eternity” figures forth a historical basis for the character, one which is only encountered during the intrusion of the natural world.

In her ecocritical analysis of Desai’s novel, “Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature,” Carmen Escobedo De Tapia further traces the influence of nature on the characters’ narratives, and the political place of humans in relation to nature. She describes how the character arc of the judge is guided by nature. From the start of his journey, his character is broken down by the immensity of the ocean and his solitude in the new world is defined by his fear of the sunlight. The book further describes his life in the country home he buys in the mountains of Kalimpong, in an attempt to distance himself from his troubled past and “redefine himself through his relationship with Nature.” However, in that house where rain, mist, and bugs constantly impede on the security of the space he has built, “he realizes his vulnerability as a human being and his incapability to control Nature.”⁷⁴ In this way, he realizes his place in relation to nature. De Tapia’s article takes as a thesis the connection of man to nature.⁷⁵ That the themes of the narrative are “felt through the action of Nature on the human and the reaction of the human on Nature.”⁷⁶ Therefore, by examining his place in relation to nature, the novel ascribes a political role to the character of the judge: he is a human character who is changed and influenced by nature, even as he attempts to control it. This is a different dimension to earlier: this is his political role in relation to nature, rather than society, although this dimension also informs his

⁷⁴ Escobedo de Tapia, "Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature," 100.

⁷⁵ Escobedo de Tapia, "Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature," 98: “Interpreting the narrative of Nature and its effects on the human environment in the novel will help us understand the connection of all living things.”

⁷⁶ Escobedo de Tapia, "Re-reading Nature, Restoring Nature," 99.

societal political role. Again, the natural world influences a social dimension of the characters, through its metaphorical influence over their narratives.

Memory and Identity

Another comparable element in Desai is the brash, magic-inflected arrival of memory. It's described that "When [the judge] thought of his past, he began, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with a burning sensation. It roiled within until he could barely stand it."⁷⁷ Memory breaks in painfully, with an almost magical burning sensation, in much the same way the metaphoric world of nature breaks in on the characters' narratives.

In her essay "Psychic Unease and Unconscious Critical Agency: For an Anatomy of Postcolonial Melancholy," Rossella Ciocca uses a psychoanalytic lens to describe the judge's identity as damaged by displacement in the location of memory. She describes that he becomes "A lost soul infected at the heart with an ineradicable sense of inadequacy[...] a damaged identity."⁷⁸ Ciocca further reads into what Sigmund Freud describes of the melancholic as a tendency to displace the emotion they feel towards a lost love-object (what he desires).⁷⁹ When the judge returns to India, he has internalized all the hate for his own identity and made a sincere attempt to rid himself of this ego (as embodied by Indian identity). His abandoned love-object is the colonizer's identity, i.e., he wished to become of the colonizers. Then, "His wife, with her

⁷⁷ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 56.

⁷⁸ Rossella Ciocca, "Psychic Unease and Unconscious Critical Agency: For an Anatomy of Postcolonial Melancholy," In *Ex-centric Writing: Essays on Madness in Postcolonial Fiction* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 183-185.

⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," tr. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XIV (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1963).

cumbersome sticky solid Indianness, is the perfect target of his enraged revenge [against his hated identity]. He sees reflected and multiplied in her what he had learnt to feel ashamed of in himself.”⁸⁰ In this way, the hate for the colonizer’s gaze, is displaced and internalized, violently turned towards his own people. Where there was once love, the trauma and subsequent melancholia is so intense it turns to hate. In the judge’s violent cruelty against his wife, the narrator describes, “He would teach her the same lessons of loneliness and shame he learned himself.”⁸¹ He identifies his own actions with the hate of the colonizer; his presumed identity becomes the abandoned object, the thing he could never be.

Furthermore, Ciocca uses Frantz Fanon’s theories to describe memory as a painful act, which has notable effects on the characters who attempt to remember. She quotes Homi K. Bhabha’s foreword to the 1986 edition of Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), which states that “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful *re-membering*, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present”⁸² (emphasis mine). The act of memory requires a painful assemblage of a “dismembered past” to make sense of characters’ present moments. This is reflected in the lengths the judge goes to in order to forget. And the painfully reluctant and yet unavoidable form in which the memories return to him (through narrative form). For other characters too, re-membering, or past memory is no less painful. Past memory is often marked by absences in the text, suggesting loss. In a novel that covers entire backstories of most significant characters, most of Sai’s mother’s story is noticeably mostly absent. So, various aspects of memory are lost in *how* the story is told.

⁸⁰ Ciocca, “Anatomy of Postcolonial Melancholy,” 187.

⁸¹ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 170.

⁸² Bhabha, introduction, xxiii. Qtd. in Ciocca, “Anatomy of Postcolonial Melancholy,” 182.

Therefore, the act of memory is significant, because it uses indirect, formal means to figure forth characters' traumas and characters' position (in time, in affect) in relation to their traumas.

Repetition of Memory and a Social Basis

Furthermore, there are various points where time seems to stand still in repetition. Sangari writes about García Márquez, that: "Memory functions as flexible, collective, material practice open to improvisation and personal reminiscence."⁸³ She understands repetition to be the basis of his narratives, which allows stories to return to the same place and redevelop in different ways ("improvisation"). Desai uses similar devices to depict the characters of her novel, wherein characters' lives will noticeably stagnate. Biju's letters "traced a string of jobs, [but] said more or less the same thing each time except for the name of the establishment he was working for. His repetition provided a cosiness."⁸⁴ The judge seeks a life that stands still by moving to an isolated land. The ending describes a circular time that will continue to repeat itself. At other times, their narratives will repeat themselves in other characters. In much the same way the judge leaves his homeland to find displacement, his daughter does the same, and his granddaughter Sai hopes to do the very same. Sai's mentor recommends her to leave; recommends time that does not stagnate: "Time should move[...] don't go in for a life where time doesn't pass, the way I did."⁸⁵ However, by repeating the desire to leave, Sai goes in for the life where time remains. The story shows that memory always returns to the same place, solid as the peaks of Kanchenjunga.

⁸³ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 169.

⁸⁴ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 17.

⁸⁵ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 93.

Furthermore, Sai's realizes that her own journey to Cho Oyu was a repeat of a narrative, a recurrence that pre-existed her. At the library,

There were endless accounts of travel in India[...] and Sai realized that her own delivery to Kalimpong in such a manner was merely part of the monotony, not the original. The repetition had willed her, anticipated her, cursed her, and certain moves made long ago had produced all of them: Sai, judge, mutt, cook.”⁸⁶

Sai realizes her place in a repetition of stories. The book's narrative returns to the same place: a defined set of tropes, events, and details which have already been told. The monotony is the canon of literature in which Sai recognizes her own story, which suggests a social basis that guides her narrative.

Repetition, which draws narratives and individual memories again in new characters indicates a collective memory. I.e., the fact that three generations all have the same story unites them in a certain identity, as defined by shared experiences. And the literature which predetermine Sai's narrative suggests pre-existing collectivity. Further, one can compare the “unmoving” time of Desai's characters to Tobias and the senator from the stories of García Márquez, for whom memory is unavoidable and impeding. In Desai, repetition, through retelling and improvisation, serves to form shared memory for the characters.

⁸⁶ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 199.

A Purposeful Form

At the end of *Inheritance of Loss*, Desai again turns to repetition and stagnation to describe what will happen following the violent climax: “The cook would hobble back to his quarter—The judge would return to his room—All night it would rain[...] men would make their paths and civilization and their wars once again, only to have it wash away again.”⁸⁷ Here too, stagnant repetition “proves to be the agent of historical sense and of political understanding.”⁸⁸ In Desai, this (repetition of war and civilization) is the moment of history. Sangari suggests that this technique of García Márquez, repetition to the point of stagnation, provides political understanding which undergirds the narrative. In this scene Desai provides the ideological undertones of her novel in much the same way that García Márquez does. The characters will go on repeating these actions and the social reality of wars and oppression will continue. In repeating this narrative point, the book draws attention to it, to make visible the social base that creates the characters.

Conversely, in the final lines, despite stagnation, Desai provides a message of hope as a distant freedom which is still ever-present in the form. Despite the judge, who spends the novel attempting to stagnate time, time goes on. Sai’s arrival, though a recurrent narrative, is also a break in the judge’s monotony. Though he does not admit the fact to himself, he sees her as a redemption for all he went through (hurting others and himself) to achieve the stagnation of time. Thus, there is a distant (but ever-visible) horizon, a freedom from the stagnation. The various moments of narrative, presented through form, wear down the cyclical repetition of time. The

⁸⁷ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 323.

⁸⁸ Sangari, “Politics of the Possible,” 169.

book's final lines turn away from repetition and describe the same mountains which provide much of the water and imposition of nature throughout the novel: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was reach out and pluck it."⁸⁹ With this image, Desai emphasizes again the nearness of the natural world and its equivalence with a social reality, "the truth." In this way, the final words remind the reader of an important aspect of the form: the narrative may convey stagnation and hopelessness, but it also reflects freedom from them (i.e., social change) through its metaphoric devices. The form is a medium of representation that includes both social history and potential for social change in its image.

Similarly, Sangari suggests that the power of García "Márquez" narratives lies in the insistent pressure of *freedom* as the *absent horizon*—which is neither predictable nor inevitable."⁹⁰ She suggests that despite repetition, there is a precise freedom which his narratives gesture towards, one thematically aspirational. This possible freedom is pressured on the narrative by an "excess of meaning," which is produced by his formal elements. An excess which bursts out of the story's historical moment. Similarly, in his Nobel speech, García Márquez describes this aspect of hope: "We, the inventors of tales[...] feel that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia."⁹¹ In his stories, the characters are often afflicted with solitude and other maladies which originate in the world. However, his characters' narratives indicate a pattern of hope; the repetitions outlive the characters' struggles, and the world continues. For example, in the story of Isabel, the rain clears, and her thoughts turn to

⁸⁹ Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 324.

⁹⁰ Sangari, "Politics of the Possible," 176. (Emphasis original)

⁹¹ García Márquez, "Solitude of Latin America," 136.

returning to church. In “Sea of Lost Time,” the colonizer leaves and the characters return to their lovemaking. There is an always-present potential for freedom from difficult times. Again, García Márquez’ ideology is one of hope for societal change, and he presents that through the form he writes his stories in.

Recall Kantor’s description of the moment in literary history when a “loss of faith in the progressive potential of style” occurred. She writes of “a belief that, instead of serving a variety of purposes ranging from personal expression to political argument, literary style has a single goal: to capture the market.”⁹² A belief that authors desiring purposeful literature, which works as “political expression” or “political argument,” must use a less market-oriented style. However, she pushes back against scholars who judge South Asian boom literature as gimmick which serves only to excite the market.⁹³ She says,

The risk of reducing boom aesthetics to “exotica” whose main purpose is to titillate consumers is not simply, as Deepika Bahri argues, that we might miss the redemptive political projects within South Asian Anglophone novels. It is also that we might ignore the political projects behind their emergence on the world stage.⁹⁴

Thus, she emphasizes the possibility of authors to use style and experimental aesthetic for political project. That such authors do desire political expression and can effectively do so through forms which have ostensibly been used to achieve “perverse” market success.

⁹² Kantor, “Exploding Markets,” 474.

⁹³ That is, South Asian literature developed at the moment (post-1981) when forms were influenced by Latin American magical realism

⁹⁴ Kantor, “Exploding Markets,” 482.

This is all to say that what really links Desai to García Márquez is their desire to figure forth ideological formations of society, emphasizing the form of the text. Theirs is literature whose writing is directed by structured belief toward social change. Desai effectively works in this dimension by working various elements of stylistic form into her literature. She does so in the same way as García Márquez, whose writing posits itself as a way of seeing unique to a certain society. Further, she effectively balances two forces he employs: the lightness of metaphor and the depth of truth. This indicates a level of indirect influence which links the authors, even as they express the tension differently. And it shows a similar approach to representations of social reality, as subjects with colonial and post-imperial histories. Further, Desai similarly attempts to work in a form which can authentically commit itself to the world, and pressure societal change on the narrative. A form which solidifies itself through its almost-metaphorical elements, and a world which affects the characters' moments and their narratives and conveys societal themes. So, she chooses a form with many of the same elements García Márquez uses to convey his own desire to represent.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Having traced the writing forms of Gabriel García Márquez and Kiran Desai, we have opened up their writing to the formal mechanisms that drive their texts. Both authors draw on devices which are said to be “magical realist,” yet both do so in different ways, connecting their forms in dimensions besides structural. In García Márquez’ stories, he notably depicts collectivity through techniques of literal images which embody metaphor. These metaphors are informed by a shared social basis, existing structures of knowledge and seeing. Often, these are watery images, which unfold time and make social memory physical. The natural world also figures forth affective aspects of characters, which are defined by collective history. Further, collective history is represented through repetition of narrative, in which memory is redeveloped.

Desai similarly uses images of nature as metaphor, to represent character transformations and social histories which underlie the characters. Elements of nature impinge on characters’ narratives, reflecting and influencing their transformations. The metaphoric images of nature also represent aspects of the characters, such as their social place, social histories, and political roles in society. Thus, nature and world embody metaphor in much the same way as in García Márquez’ stories. Further, remembered, repeated, and stagnated narratives also suggest shared memory and social histories. Social histories which form bases for the characters and their narratives. And, in suggestions of ends to stagnating repetitions, there is a distant truth, a possibility for societal change represented by the narrative.

Gabriel García Márquez and Kiran Desai both use these forms out of desire to achieve more perfect modes of representation. Both writing forms are purposeful attempts to make

visible the unique specificities of characters' place and social histories. In this way we can link both authors, considering that despite the structural difference in form, their writing is connected in certain formal aspects. Thus indicating indirect influences and transculturally shared concerns. Further, the argument shows that the dimension of form can be used for purposeful personal and political argument. The form can be thought of both as a way of knowing and as an approach to representing specific realities.

There is much potential for research into literary form and what the structural analysis of form can lend to problems of purposeful representation in literature. I hope that my theses linking Kiran Desai and Gabriel García Márquez encourages further research on the influence of Latin American forms on seemingly dissimilar and disconnected South Asian literatures. Further, I hope my analyses of García Márquez' form as presented in his short stories encourages further scholarship on his short stories and what they can lend to an understanding of his writing form.