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**Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*  
and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A grain of Wheat and Petals  
of Blood*: A Postmodernist Reading**

A Master Thesis in English Literature

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## Summary

This Thesis applies a postmodernist perspective to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Petals of Blood* (1977). Postmodernism is a literary and cultural philosophy that emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which rejected modernism through its own techniques, elements, and characteristics. Postmodernism maintained economic, social and political aspects in connection with literature and art. Mainly, the three novels under study are being analyzed using two essential fictional styles; magical realism and historiographic metafiction. Additionally, there are techniques such as intertextuality, parody, and pastiche that represent postmodern ideas.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, postmodernism is studied as a philosophy or a broad movement, which has passed through many phases including post-colonialism, modernism, and surrealism. Moreover, the characteristics that identify postmodernism and represent the movement are tackled, as well as the movement's relation with other movements and approaches as marxism, feminism and post-fordism. Also, postmodernist techniques are generally illustrated under the shadow of identifying them as postmodernist techniques which are magical realism, historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, and other techniques. In the second chapter, the novels are analyzed through examining the use of magical realism, after a detailed explanation of the technique and its characteristics, along with the tools adopted by the two writers, to emphasize the political, social, and economical aspects of postmodernism. Chapter

three highlights the use of historiographic metafiction in the novels to express postmodernist ideas and ideals, along with a detailed explanation of historiographic metafiction and its characteristics as a technique. Finally, the conclusion sheds light on the thought process of the postmodernist writers, their outlook on life, and their consequential outlook on literature. The matter which gives this thesis its value, as it includes a topic can add to literature in general a focus on the relation between writers and readers from a postmodernist perspective.

## Abstract

This Thesis studies postmodernism as a crucial literary movement, highlighting its most important techniques; especially historiographic metafiction and magical realism, which are applied on three novels: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Petals of Blood* (1977). In order to achieve this application of postmodern techniques in such novels, postmodernism better be illustrated and understood based on more than one phase. The environment which led to postmodernism to emerge is traced as well as the various aspects of postmodernism and its characteristics. Hence, These postmodernist techniques can be applied on the three novels under this study; in other words, they are previewed from a postmodern prospective, underscoring the importance of postmodern literature in representing people's ideas during that time, which is between 1970s and 1980s, and give them a better direction to follow.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Magical realism, Historiographic metafiction, Intertextuality, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, Petals of Blood, A Grain of wheat.

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## Introduction

We are living in a time when sensitivities are at the surface, often vented with cutting words. Philosophically, you can believe anything so as you do not claim it a better way. Religiously, you can hold to anything, so long as you do not bring Jesus Christ into it. If a spiritual idea is eastern, it is granted critical immunity; if western, it is thoroughly criticized. Thus, a journalist can walk into a church and mock its carryings on, but he or she dare not do the same if the ceremony is from eastern fold. Such is the mood at the end of the twentieth century. A mood can be a dangerous state of mind, because it can crush reason under the weight of feeling. But that is precisely what I believe postmodernism best represents - a mood. (7)

Ravi Zacharias here defines postmodernism in his book, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, as a philosophical mood that refuses to believe in one thing only, as there is nothing that follows an established pattern of thought as in modernist movements. Postmodernism rejected modernism and conflicted with its ideals. Thus, philosophers and theorists started to use elements and techniques which opposed those of modernism. Consequently, writers took the same direction, which was to find a solution to what they experienced negatively in the period of modernism. As a result of the destruction, people lost faith in many things. For instance, we can see Lyotard discussing in his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, the demise of the grand narratives as one of the main indicators of people losing faith. Here is where the importance of this thesis lies.

The objective of the thesis as a whole is to examine postmodernist elements and techniques along with their reflection of the ideology of society post WWII and the Cold War. Having lost faith in religion, government, and the hope for better lives in general, this led people to start rejecting the tidy ideals of modernism. It is only natural when faced with repeated tragedy, that people started to change the rules that were imposed upon them; the rules in which they had previously believed. The novels chosen for this thesis reflect the change of societal ideals, and give readers an insightful look into the collective mindset western society adopted in the late twentieth century. People started a revolution against modernism termed as postmodernism. Writers represented those ideas, and gave them the solution for the problem of the terrible experiences they went through. These solutions include postmodernist techniques or features such as magical realism, historiographic metafiction, and intertextuality.

Through postmodernism, people wanted to escape their whole reality; they wanted to change it, or even ignore it in order to not directly confront the tragedies they have been through, and the pain they have suffered. Actually, this trend of people was vividly depicted in the writings of postmodernist philosophers. Philosophers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson who defined the characteristics of postmodernism as it mainly reflects the absence of the absolute truth, losing faith, subjectivism, and rejecting old Western values.

In addition to its literary aspects, postmodernism also is connected to other philosophies, such as skepticism and

deconstructionism, which are related essentially to structuralism and relativism. These philosophies were mostly introduced by Jacques Derrida, who followed Ferdinand de Saussure. Mainly, these trends together allied to attack modernism and its reliance on modern science and objectivity. The majority of these concepts came before and through the postmodern period to pave the way for it and played a great role in helping postmodernism to evolve and emerge as a major movement which impacted literature greatly. (See *Engaging with Postmodernism: An Examination of Literature and the Canon*)

Individuals on different levels, regardless of their religious, political, scientific, or social trends, were associated with postmodernist components. To the extent religion is concerned, postmodernism predicates no essential fact of the matter, the idea which was adopted by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Postmodernists likewise rejected the scriptural truth as a refusal to have reality from one source, i.e. God. In terms of religion, there are different thoughts, for example, creativity which was added to postmodern religion so as to give its own character and shape. Based on that people started to think differently. People became more capable of criticizing religions symbols with no fear. (See *Postmodernism and Religious Institutions*)

Besides the religious aspect of postmodernism, it is also related to political factors. Postmodernism was influenced by different events, theories, philosophies and movements other than World War II and the Cold War. Marxism is one theory that has influenced postmodernism as it was a belief that helped in emerging the Cold War. Post-Colonialism is also one of the state of affairs that influenced

postmodernism. As postmodernism also emerged to move people's mood from a dark passage. Many authors from different nations like Asia, Africa, and Latin America were expounding the impacts of Colonialism. They wanted to resist not only European Colonialism but also to resist the corruption of their own leaders which they called "internal colonialism". Another important movement is Feminism which was one of the factors that contributed to postmodernism. It began in the 1960s as a movement to establish economic and social equality between genders not only on the political level, but on the social and financial levels as well. (See Literature for the 21st Century Summer 2013)

As for science, it has assumed a significant job in the emergence of postmodernism. In the first place, it has demonstrated transition from modernism to postmodernism. This condition came about because of nonscientific convictions as a result of the dangerous innovation that affected everything including literature during that time. Meaning, the science that prompted killing people like the nuclear bomb and its impact on murdering a huge number of individuals has been one of the primary explanations behind the people's disposition represented in postmodernism. Second, people tended to concentrate more on naturalistic science due to their feeling of uncertainty which led them to direct their attention towards scientific explanation more than religious or spiritual thinking. Also, postmodern science relied upon the way which states that any standard given in a day can be refused by another standard in the following day. In other words nothing is believed to be

constant in science. (See *A Poetics of Postmodernism* by Linda Hutcheon)

As referenced previously, postmodernism has adopted techniques or components to mirror the various conditions experienced by individuals. Magical realism, historiographic metafiction, parody, and pastiche have been utilized to change reality, since the truth has been brimming with brutality and negativity. Postmodernism likewise has meant to think about the entire community rather than the individual, and through the study, it will be clear how these techniques have been utilized by authors to reflect contemporary thoughts and states of mind. Historiographic metafiction has been coined by Linda Hutcheon as a term alluding to bringing an occasion or an activity that has occurred in the past to be rehashed in the present in an alternate method to fix it. This thought has come about because of people's general sentiment of the terrible occasions or activities of the past and the sentiment of the (reword) likelihood to change that using any and all means to stay away from the missteps that occurred in those days.

Magical realism, a term coined by Franz Roh in the 1920s, has been utilized in its best form in Latin America during the postmodern period between the 1970s and 1980s. Essentially, magical realism is about mixing real life with supernatural, myth, and a fantasy world parallel to the genuine one. Despite the fact that it has been coined, raised and utilized in Europe before, the Latin American journalists have spearheaded this field led by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Alejo Carpentier. Magical realism has been primarily utilized for a reason close to that of historiographic metafiction in an endeavor to change the

genuine life condition. However, the component is distinctive since it examines the present, not the past. Likewise, it is utilized as a progressive strategy in postcolonialism which is additionally one of the motivations behind magical realism. In fact, those are not by any means the only techniques utilized in postmodernism, but rather there are different techniques, such as intertextuality, satire, and pastiche. Despite the difference in the methods and styles, these three components are fundamentally similar for they all rely upon relating or alluding to a more seasoned book, with the aim of satire to show its significance. They have been characterized and identified by Fredric Jameson, as will be additionally reviewed in the thesis.

When it comes to apply postmodernism on the three texts, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 1981 and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* 1967 and *Petals of Blood* 1977, we have to understand that we are applying postmodernism on texts written by authors in a period in when around sixty million individuals passed away in World War II, and the Cold War erupted between the Eastern and the Western worlds. Thus, the entire world, including artistic scholars and explicitly the authors of the novels under investigation have been influenced by these conditions and occasions, and they have required a solution to escape from this hurting reality. Because of that, these authors under this study would, in general, include these referenced elements in their works. This is why these texts are chosen to be under this study.

The author of the first novel under study, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, is a Colombian author who has been granted a Nobel Prize

for one of the most outstanding novels ever, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Marquez was born in Colombia in 1927, as the oldest of twelve kids. He became a journalist and writer starting from the college in Colombia till he went to Europe in the wake of composing an article assaulting and condemning the military ruling of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla during the 1950s. He has been viewed as one of the significant pillars of magical realism. Marquez's novel under study, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is, for the most part, a journalistic story about somebody in a Colombian town Marquez personally knew. It narrates the murder of the novel's protagonist Santiago Nasar, in view of a reason for honor since a bride claims that he takes her virginity when her groom discovers and discloses to her family. The majority of the novel's events revolve around how the murder takes place from more than one point of view, as the author witnesses the novel's events. Moreover, there are interviews with numerous characters getting some information about what they have witnessed, and what they have felt back during that time and what they are feeling during the meeting which takes place twenty-seven years after the murder was committed. Marquez's job as an author and as a character in the novel is to investigate the murder and to know its chronicle.

Among the most significant African postmodernist authors is Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, two of whose novels are the focus of this study: *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o or James Ngugi was born in Kenya in 1938. Thiong'o's birth and life witnessed numerous phases and movements in his country and continent starting from the British Colonization that began in his