

1 Marquez's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World": A 2 Man of Multifaceted Significance

3 Nurun Nahar¹ and Md. Abdul Momen Sarker²

4 ¹ University of Bangladesh

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7 **Abstract**

8 ?The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World? is a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
9 that features a drowned, dead man?s arrival at a remote island. The story demands attention
10 as a dead man makes the islanders? existence meaningful, he magically alters a solid reality
11 and contributes to social integration and disintegration. To reflect on these particular aspects,
12 this paper has relied on Jean Paul Sartre?s existentialism to some extent, use of magic realism
13 and Talcott Parsons? theory regarding social unification. Selecting the short story as the
14 primary source, the paper here has attempted to unveil how a dead man can bring a change to
15 a living community.

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17 **Index terms**— existence, magic realism, integration, disintegration, life, death.

18 **1 Introduction**

19 he way Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells stories of man, woman and the world around, retains a mesmerizing beauty
20 that, at the same time, throws the reader profoundly into the confusion while glues them to it. "The Handsomest
21 Drowned Man in the World", a short story, for instance, equally has an attraction due to an inherent ease,
22 fluidity and impeccable composition. This particular trait of Marquez's writing where "a special sense of wonder
23 through describing a world where ice is no more or less remarkable than a ghost who keeps bothering you in your
24 bathroom, a world where the risk of children being born with pig's tails is accepted as a fact of life" (Jordison,
25 "Gabriel García Márquez") distinguishes him considerably from his contemporaries. However, the story creates
26 an irresolvable mystery that reenergizes the tension between fiction and reality. Since the story revolves around
27 a dead man's arrival at a small island, the distinction of Marquez's writing is reflected through the approach the
28 islanders show towards the dead man regarding which there is a generalized belief that in Marquez's writings
29 "the narrative's emphasis is placed, not on the story, but rather on how the story is told" (Pelayo 20). It is not
30 like any suspense or detective story where everyone gets busy with identifying the dead man; instead it is a
31 story where everyone on the island gets immersed in the dead man's existence diversely. In spite of being a dead
32 man, the corpse magically surprises, shocks, excites, unifies and even disintegratesthe islanders. What Marquez
33 imbues the dead man with or who is he becomes the most researchable question in the story. To find out a
34 satisfactory answer to this question this paper has explored several possibilities. What does the dead man stand
35 for -in answer, this paper has analyzed the polarizations between existence and non-existence, magicand reality,
36 and finally social integration and disintegration. It is to be mentioned that in the course of the story the dead
37 man gets the name Esteban that comes intuitively to the islanders' mind. However, Esteban gets entangled with
38 an existential as well as non-existential presence -his death turns him into a non-existing being while his passive
39 influence over the islanders marks him as an existing entity. This particular duality of Esteban has been analyzed
40 in light of Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism. Secondly, how the magical appearance of Esteban changes the reality
41 of a small island community -this question has been discussed focusing on the instrumenting purpose of magic
42 realism. Finally, the paper has shed light on the integration and disintegration of a small island community
43 under the theory of social integration and disintegration of Talcott Parsons. It would be a matter of better

6 A) A MAGIC REALISTIC HANDSOMEST DROWNED MAN

44 understanding if researched into the fact how a dead man can unsettle a communal existence. In this respect,
45 this paper aims to find out which possible significances Esteban can stand for.

46 2 II.

47 3 Methodology

48 The primary source of this paper has been decided to be Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story "The Handsomest
49 Drowned Man in the World." To get a desirable answer to the question what this dead man represents, this paper
50 has taken help of Sartre's existentialism, reflected on the nature of magic realism as well as Talcott Parsons'
51 social theory of integration and disintegration. The paper has not attempted to bring a worldly identity of the
52 dead man to the light, instead it has argued to divulge an abstraction this dead man stands for.

53 4 a) The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World

54 "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is short story written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in 1968. The
55 story is based on a dead man, a drowned one who reaches the island as a corpse. The children on the beach first
56 notice him and inform the elder ones who T Author : Senior Lecturer Department of English World University
57 of Bangladesh. e-mail: naharnrekha@gmail.com Author Assistant Professor and Head Department of English
58 World University of Bangladesh. e-mail: sarker10march@gmail.com ultimately bring the dead man to their island.
59 Therefore, the man residents all go out as they are very small in number, but the women stay beside the dead
60 man. They wash his body and face, admire him, compare him with their husbands, find out his vulnerabilities,
61 sympathize with him, sacrifice their precious materials for him, give a name to his soulless body, revere him
62 profoundly and at last let him wither with grandeur. The entire story is told as if a dead man is spiritually
63 enriching an entire community. The question, however, hangs on what significance this dead man bears.

64 5 b) A wanderer between existence and non-existence

65 The dead man who the islanders name as Esteban does not have any worldly capacity to be a part of the island,
66 but unknowingly he starts belonging to the psychological as well as physical space of it. Before identifying the
67 space of Esteban specifically, it would be more understandable if the nature of existence and nonexistence gets
68 little connectedly briefed. According to Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser's study on philosophy "some
69 philosophers of the eighteenth century? retained the notion that people possess a "human nature" -a nature that
70 is found in every person. Each person ? is a particular example of the universal conception of Humanity (434)."
71 Esteban represents human shape and characteristics as he encroaches on gradually everyday life of common
72 islanders. He does have a uniformity with the people on the island in terms of physique, but he cannot express
73 his human nature. However, the women on the island imagine what would be his movement and behavior if he
74 would be alive. This is, therefore, the starting process where Esteban bodily declares his belongingness to the
75 community. And Esteban retains something extra that enlarges his existence beyond death. Esteban cannot
76 breathe, but he makes the islanders sigh for him; he cannot move, but he makes all the islanders come after him
77 at his last moments; he cannot take active part in worldly matters, but he provokes all the islanders to think
78 differently of their worldly activity. Therefore, what does it signify -can it be declared that Esteban exists? In
79 the language of Samuel Enoch Stumpf, James Fieser and Sartre's existentialism believes: "we are what we make
80 of ourselves, we have no one to blame for what we are except ourselves (434)." As Esteban cannot choose what
81 he wants or likes, according to Sartre's existentialism, he does not exist. Therefore, who Esteban is -what is he
82 who exists and not-exists at the same time. Esteban exists as an ideal of beauty, spirit, and strength. Even his
83 dead body stirs an entire community to think beyond their known boundary; but at the same time, he does not
84 exist as he does not actively want to change these islanders. And it is all even greater surprise when a dead man
85 retains the capacity to change an entire village what gets expressed in the language of the narrator of the story:
86 They did not need to look at one another to realize that they were no longer all present, that they would never
87 be. But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider
88 doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into
89 beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome
90 fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory
91 eternal? (Marquez, "The Handsomest Drowned in the World") This is where probably Marquez employs the
92 miracles of life. A non-existing being brings a forever change to the existence of a community. And this is where
93 the debate arises -who exists and who does not. In spite of being a dead man, Esteban opens a range of choices
94 in front of the islanders who now would live differently from each other. On the other hand, the islanders who
95 physically exist come out to decorate their life in the memory of Esteban. This is how in the spirit and memory
96 of a community, a non-existing one can even live forever while the living ones seem dead in spite of being alive.

97 6 a) A Magic Realistic Handsomest Drowned Man

98 In delineating magic realism Lois Parkinson Zamora suggests in an article titled "Swords and Silver Rings:
99 Magical Objects in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez": "Whether the magic is thought
100 to inhere in the real, or whether it pre-exists the real according to cultural or philosophical systems of belief,

101 objects in magical-realist texts operate with symbolic energies that are distinct from those in realistic texts
102 ??Zamora 31)." The object having magic realism inhered in it functions symbolically, but it brings change to
103 the real. Therefore, it becomes really difficult to realize the difference between magic and reality. In the story,
104 Marquez lets one dead man come into an island's everyday life, but the dead man is not decomposed or odorous;
105 instead, it is full of good-look and masculinity regarding which it has been remarked in the story: "Fascinated
106 by his huge size and his beauty, the women then decided to make him some pants from a large piece of sail
107 and a shirt from some bridal linen so that he could continue through his death with dignity" (Marquez "The
108 Handsomest Drowned Man in the World") Why does Marquez write about such a magical appearance of a dead
109 man? Why should a calm, quiet life of an island need to face a sudden change? To answer this question, it would
110 be appropriate to quote from Wen-chin Ouyang, remarked in introduction chapter of "Empire, Nation, Magic":
111 Magical realism, in its combination of the fantastic and the real, has been producing political discourses that
112 partake in imagining communities as wishes. Marquez also refers that from then on, the women of the island are
113 not going to dwell on the thought of their husbands; instead, they are going to dive deep in this young man who
114 represents the imaginary perfection everyone dreams of. "But they also knew that everything would be different
115 from then on?" (Marquez, "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World") This assertion, therefore, brings the
116 end to light how a society falls apart. This paper has depended on Parsons' theorization regarding this fact that
117 says:

118 Parsons recognized that no actual social system was ever likely to attain perfect integration. Some "slippage"
119 was always to be expected. For example, some individuals may want to comply with particular role expectations,
120 but be unable to do so. At the opposite extreme, however, Parsons considered and rejected the possibility of
121 complete disintegration ??Abrahamson 48).

122 Reflection of what Parsons believes regarding integration and disintegration of a society finds a discernable
123 description in the short story. All the islanders get integrated at one point that the dead man, Esteban, is not
124 like them and he deserves a grand departure, but at the same time they get disintegrated as the women on the
125 island are going to dream of a dead man from then on instead of their husbands and their houses as well as
126 memories are going to be reshaped from then on. Therefore, the dead man becomes a symbol of both integration
127 and disintegration. The question, however, persists what this dead man symbolizes. According to Parsons, as
128 a society cannot wholly be integrated of disintegrated, there exists a point which functions as the catalyst of
129 integration and disintegration. Esteban is a representation of difference, beauty, inspiration that the women of
130 the island cherish on their minds. Finding him, they have got the way to finally touch their dream. To them,
131 the dead man becomes a past filled with pleasure, love, and satisfaction. The men of the island, on the other
132 hand, have come to discover a new face of their wives through the arrival of Esteban. Here comes a revelation
133 of disintegration, while the islanders come to realize that their houses need bigger doors and their infrastructure
134 of everything needs to be enlarged so that Esteban's memory can wander around freely. This is, therefore, the
135 point to be integrated. Through this process, therefore, Esteban appears to be a past who reenergizes and brings
136 a fresh wave of change side by side. To the islanders, he is a memory to be enthralled again and again and a
137 reminder to the foundational social requirement, that is, integration and disintegration.

138 7 III.

139 8 Conclusion

140 Gabriel Garcia Marquez has a remarkable storytelling Capacity, and this particular quality of his ??Ouyang 225).
141 In light of the stated-above-definition of magic realism, Esteban turns into an object that the whole island
142 community gets engaged in. Absorbing the essence of the land and the inhabitants there, the drowned man
143 magically changes into a larger-than-life figure who retains the power to encroach on everyone's life around.
144 From a material figure Esteban's transformation into an immemorial one is going to intervene in every aspect of
145 the islanders' life. Marquez, therefore, tries to establish the dead man as an enriched past through the inclusion of
146 magic realist ingredients in the story. The islanders who never have come to meet him, who never even know the
147 life beyond the small island, they suddenly name him as Esteban, adore him, plan to design their future keeping
148 him on the mind -all these certainly refer to the radical transformation of society keeping faith in any particular
149 idea. In literary texts, therefore, no other device can better explain such huge collective transformation except
150 magic realism. Instrumentation of magic realism as political, religious, local ideology is one of the significant
151 techniques in contemporary fictions. In this particular story of Marquez, Esteban's magical appearance is the
152 originating point of a myth that this community is going to preserve for a long time.

153 9 b) A symbol of integration and disintegration

154 The moment Esteban reaches the island, there happen lots of revelations regarding the place as well as the
155 inhabitants. While the men go out to find out the dead one's real identity, the women stay behind. The women
156 think of the dead man, they get enchanted with him, they find a way to give expression to their untold desires.
157 At this particular point, therefore, the society gets divided. In the text, it has been remarked:

158 The men thought the fuss was only womanish frivolity. Fatigued because of the difficult nighttime inquiries,
159 all they wanted was to get rid of the bother of the newcomer once and for all before the sun grew strong on
160 that arid, windless day?But the more they hurried, the more the women thought of ways to waste time. They

9 B) A SYMBOL OF INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION

161 walked about like startled hens, pecking with the sea charms on their breasts, some interfering on one side to
162 put a scapular of the good wind on the drowned man? (Marquez, "The Handsomest Drowned in the World")

163 For the first time, the society gets divided into man's world and woman's world. What the man considers
164 as "womanish frivolity" becomes a womanly instrument to articulate their cherished dreams and gets another
165 dimension when he incorporates unreal into reality. In this short story, Marquez enters collective psychology
166 through an individual named Esteban. However, Esteban becomes an entity that goes beyond a mere person;
167 instead, he appears to be a dead person raising multiple debates regarding existence, reality, and society. This
168 paper has tried to discover possible significances of Esteban's appearance on the island. What Marquez articulates
169 in the course of the story is not an enchanting tale only to savor; rather, he tries to make connection to the essence
170 of the land and human beings. In doing so Marquez often takes help of different techniques that make his way
171 easy to say whatever he strives to say. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is such an example that
172 seems a story of far-away and unrecognizable land, but it is a story of life, living, and beyond-life.

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