

Magical Realism in *The God Who Begat a Jackal*

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Abstract: Neka Mezlekia's *The God Who Begat a Jackal* tells us the familiar story of a love affair between an Aristocrat's daughter and a lowly commoner in feudal Ethiopia. It is also about religious wars and rebellions against feudal exploitation. The striking parallels between his novel and Haddis Alemayehu's *Fiqir Eske Meqabir* suggest a significant influence by the latter on the former's author. While characterizing his novel as part fable and part history, the author also acknowledges the influence of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, one of Latin America's best known masters of magical realism and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. One finds some interesting parallels between the marvellous elements of this novel and those in Marquez's classic novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Indeed, Neka creates an exotic fictional world in which the magical and the ordinary are intermingled, often for a melodramatic effect. Neka's novel is the first major work by an Ethiopian writer to try to use magical realism. The aim of this article¹ is to examine the narrative strategies employed in the depiction of the magical. In so doing, the article attempts to identify the significant attributes of some of the major magical elements and their functions, including their thematic implications.

Introduction

Ethiopian classical literature is rich in narratives that abound with supernatural characters and events. Miracles, extraordinary acts of holy men and women, interactions with supernatural beings, movements between the universes are quite common in Ge'ez hagiographic works. Although modern works of Amharic prose fiction also occasionally tap into the local folklore, it is mainly in the moralistic or explicitly didactic works that one finds a heavy dosage of the supernatural and extraordinary events, often manifested in the form of dreams, visions, and superstitions. Typical examples of works of prose fiction with such a mingling of the supernatural and the ordinary are the works of Mekonnen Endalkachew, where dreams abound, ghosts interact with the living, or Nature unleashes its destructive

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 17th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in November 2009 in Addis Ababa.

elements to punish the sinful (see for example “*Alem Woreteгна*” and “*Yedihoch Ketema*” in the anthology titled “*Arremugn*”). Here the elements of “fantasy” serve to convey a metaphysical reality. Another variety of “fantasy” without the transcendental element is found in Sebhat Gebre Egziabher’s “*Motinna Agafari Endeshaw*”, a humorous story about mankind’s futile quest for immortality as symbolically depicted through a middle-aged man’s ceaseless efforts to outmanoeuvre and defeat death – a story in which the ‘fantasy’ finally turns out to be a dream triggered by Agafari Endeshaw’s chocking on the local beer he was drinking. Yet another variety of “fantasy” in secular prose fiction is the satirical allegory in which non-humans are given some human attributes. A typical example in this context is Abbe Gubegna’s novelette *Gobland Atcheberbariw Totta*, wherein the major character, a wily monkey called Gobland, learns to speak and compose poetry like humans, interacts with humans and even succeeds in manipulating his human antagonists into subordination to protect its interests. None of these works, however, fall into the literary category known as “Magical Realism”. As far as I can tell, therefore, Nega Mezlekia is the first modern Ethiopian novelist who has tried to apply Magical Realism in his novel, *The God Who Begat a Jackal*. Even in literary debates and essays on Ethiopian literature, there is hardly any mention of Magical Realism as a literary fashion in anyway related to the practice of Ethiopian writers. Before I delve into a discussion of its application in Nega’s novel, therefore, it would be helpful to set the conceptual framework of the paper by briefly outlining the historical evolution of the term “Magical Realism” and introducing the main defining characteristics of the literary category it designates.

In the critical literature on “Magical Realism”, the first application of the term as an aesthetic descriptive has generally been attributed to Franz Roh, a German art critic. In his 1925 essay, “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism”, Roh used the term to describe the works of a group of German painters in which familiar objects were presented from an unfamiliar angle, “a juxtaposition of reality and appearance” made possible by “the recuperation of the objective world, which was largely lacking in Expressionism” (Zamora and Faris 1995, 20).

According to Irene Guenther (1995), this pictorial term has been adopted and then appropriated by the literary community since 1925. The term was also popularised by the Italian critic Massimo Bontempelli, who launched the journal *900*, an influential work that helped the dissemination of the term to other European countries (p. 60). Guenther suggests that the term made its way to Latin America through the Spanish translation and publication of Roh's book by the *Revista de Occidente* in 1927, a year after which "Magic Realism was being applied to the prose of European authors in the literary circles of Buenos Aires" (p. 61). He also suggests that "the unprecedented cultural migration from Europe to the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s, as the muses fled the horrors of the Third Reich, might also have played a role in disseminating the term" (p. 61).

In Latin America, however, the concept of Magical Realism was not only appropriated in literary criticism, it was also transformed. One of the prominent Latin American writers, the Venezuelan writer and diplomat Arturo Uslar Pietri, who first tried to provide a literary definition for the term says: "What became prominent in the short story and left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism" (quoted by Leal 1995, 120).

One of the most influential Latin American writers who is reputed to have provided a theoretical elucidation of the concept and given it a distinctly Latin American character is the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier. In the *Prologue* of his novel, *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), Carpentier coined his own term, *lo real maravilloso americano* (the American marvellous real), to describe the kind of Latin American literature that expresses the continent's turbulent history through an uncanny amalgamation of Native American, African and European cultures and world-views. Rejecting Surrealism, a European movement in which he was a participant for a while in Paris, as "never anything more than a literary ruse", Carpentier declares that the marvellous presupposes *faith* (1995a, 86).

In his 1975 lecture titled “The Baroque and the Marvellous Real” (1995b), Carpentier equates the *marvellous* with the *extraordinary*, which he distinguishes from its ordinary dictionary meaning by underlining that “the extraordinary is not necessarily lovely, or beautiful; rather, it is amazing because it is strange. Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvellous” (p. 101). Carpentier also underlines the difference between *the American marvellous real* and the marvellous in European Surrealism: “if Surrealism pursued the marvellous, it very rarely looked for it in reality”; rather, “the fabrication” of the marvellous by the Surrealists was “*premeditated* and calculated to produce a *sensation* of strangeness” (emphasis added, p.103). For Carpentier, the marvellous is not a product of the writer’s imagination; it is an integral part of everyday and historical reality: “the marvellous real that I defend and that is our own marvellous real is encountered in its raw state latent, omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always commonplace” (p. 104). He illustrates this by citing the extraordinary acts of two historical personalities, Christophe and Mackandal, around whose life his 1949 novel revolves:

King Henri Christophe, from Haiti, a cook who becomes the emperor of an island and who, believing one fine day that Napoleon is going to reconquer the island, constructs a fabulous fortress where he and all of his dignitaries, ministers, soldiers, troops could resist a siege of ten years’ duration. Inside, he stored enough merchandise and provisions to last ten years as an independent country (I refer to the Citadele of La Ferrière). In order that this fortress is capable of resisting attacks by the Europeans, he orders that the cement be mixed with the blood of hundreds of bulls. This is marvellous. Mackandal’s revolt, which makes thousands and thousands of slaves in Haiti believe that he has lycanthropic powers, that he can change into a bird or a horse, a butterfly, an insect, what his heart desires. So he foments one of the first authentic revolutions of the New World (p. 105).

So Carpentier’s ‘marvellous real’ is rooted in the actual world, and what the magic realist needs to do to depict this world is to “uncover and interpret it”. Elaborating this notion of magical realism, Luis Leal says that magical realism “does not distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; nor does it emphasise psychological analysis of characters, since it doesn’t try to find reasons for their actions or their inability to express themselves” (1995, 121).

According to him, “in magical realism, key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as the realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things” (p.123). Among the examples he gives to illustrate his point is Carpentier’s short story, “Journey to the Seed”, where time mysteriously flows backward when the old black gardener twirls his staff. In such magical realist works, “the author does not need to justify the mystery of events, as the fantastic writer has to. In fantastic literature, the supernatural invades a world ruled by reason. In magical realism ‘the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it’” (p.123).

Amaryll Chanady, too, makes a distinction between magical realism and the fantastic and, within this framework, identifies three inter-related defining elements that distinguish magical realism from other associated genres:

...the magical realist text must display coherently developed codes of the natural and supernatural, the antinomy between these codes must be resolved, and a measure of authorial reticence must be in place in order to ensure that the co-existence and legitimacy of both codes is not threatened (1985, cited by Warnes 2005, 6).

According to Chanady, it is the privileging or under-privileging of these codes that distinguishes magical realism from its neighbouring genres. Thus she says:

... fantasy, fairy tales and science fiction underprivilege codes of the real by taking as settings realms removed from our recognizable, empirical world. Or one might show how the Gothic novel, the uncanny and some examples of horror make coherent use of codes of the natural and of the supernatural, yet present them in such a way that their co-existence is rendered as a source of unease or anxiety – thus leaving the antinomy unresolved.

... if the supernatural is in any way explicable – such as when Lewis Carroll’s Alice awakes to find that her adventures were all a dream, or when the fantastic bats swooping down on one of Hunter S. Thompson’s characters are revealed to be the result of drug-induced hallucination – then the code of the real is effectively privileged over that of the fantastic, and magical realism is therefore not the best category within which to consider the text (cited by Warnes 2005, 6-7).

While conceding the non-explicability of the supernatural according to the laws of the human universe, Wendy Faris disagrees with the notion of magical realism that tends to equally privilege the real and the magical. According to her, “magical realism is a combination of realism and [the] fantastic in which the former predominates” (2002, 102). She also does not accept Chanady’s distinction between magical realism and the fantastic, arguing that the reader’s hesitation over the antinomy between the magical and the real remains unresolved even if a narrator accepts it. In fact she argues that such definitions as those offered by Leal and Chanady are not *inclusive* enough to accommodate prominent twentieth century works from around the globe that apply magical realism.

Arguing that magical realism is “a central component” of contemporary international narrative (for which she cites several examples from not only Latin America, but also North America, Europe and even Africa), Wendy Faris (1995, 167-174) offers a broader definition of magic realism by identifying the following five “primary characteristics” of magical realist fiction:

- i. Existence of “an irreducible element” of magic in the text – an element that “we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them”. This “irreducible” magic is defined as a “disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect”;
- ii. Realistic descriptions recreating the material world in all its variety, often by extensive use of details or reference to historical events or a materiality extending to word-objects through repetition;
- iii. The reader’s hesitation between two contradictory understandings of events (i.e., “unsettling doubts” felt about an event primarily as a character’s hallucination or as a miracle);
- iv. Readers’ experiencing the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds. ... (like smuggling oneself in between the world of ordinary people and that of the witches);
- v. Disruption of our conventional notions of time, space and identity.

An important point worth noting in all these definitions is that not only the mingling of the mundane and the marvellous, but also the manner of their depiction is equally important for the creation of both a magical and reality effect. How is this effect generated? According to Hegerfeldt (2002): "... entertaining a completely matter-of-fact attitude towards fantastically implausible or impossible incidents on the one hand, magic realism on the other presents perfectly 'ordinary' reality in such a way that it appears incredible, marvellous, fantastic." As an illustration, Hegerfeldt refers to the description of ice and other natural and technological "miracles" in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Thus, when Jose Arcadio Buendia sees for the first time the block of ice the wandering gypsies put on display in Macondo, he thinks it is the world's "largest diamond" while his little son Aureliano touches and feels it is "boiling". The magic here lies not in the nature of the ordinary object, but in the way it is perceived by the characters.

Commenting on the significance of vision in magic realism, Zamora (2002) observes:

... *vision* is often a theme, as well as a narrative strategy: magical realist texts conflate sight and insight and thus collapse the literal and figurative meanings of "vision"... magical realism is characterized by its visualizing capacity, that is, by its capacity to create (magical) meaning by seeing ordinary things in extraordinary ways (p.22).

According to Suzan Baker, despite the presence of the fantastic events, magical realism succeeds in creating the impression of realism because it is "grounded in recognisable reality through social, historical and political references". But she also adds one other distinguishing feature of magical realism:

The presence of an objective and dispassionate narrator who maintains a tone of complete equilibrium throughout the story is another intrinsic feature of magic realism. While the reader need not believe in the possibility of the extraordinary events narrated, the characters and, above all, the narrator must believe that all the events recounted are equally real. The narrator cannot raise questions or treat the events as puzzling.

Some critics such as Warnes (2005), however, caution against the attempt to apply a global definition of magical realism on the ground that it will not enable us to account fully for the historical and theoretical differences between the vast array of magical realist texts and also between the contexts from which they emerge. He thus argues: “As techniques vary, so will each text have its own reasons for wanting to naturalize the supernatural. These reasons will only become clear when background factors such as literary influence, cultural context and political agenda are taken into account” (p. 9). So, he suggests a nuanced interpretation of specific magical texts, an approach which I will try to adopt in my analysis of the magical in Nega’s novel.

Narrative Strategies of *The God Who Begat a Jackal*

Nega Mezlekia’s novel is set in the fictional Kingdom of Hararghe, which, according to the author’s historical postscript, is meant to represent Ethiopia as it used to be “during a period that would have been between 1750 and the late 1800s, when the country was beset with feuding emperors, feudal masters and vassals, slaves and slave runners, religious tensions and class hatred” (p. 239). In the same postscript the author also talks about 17th century Ethiopia, thereby creating confusion as to the exact time setting of his novel. The novel’s story revolves around the family of Count Ashenafi, especially the forbidden love affair between his daughter Aster and her unacknowledged half-brother, Gudu, in the midst of a civil strife spurred on by a revolt of the tenants of Harar and Kersa against the Count’s ruthless exploitation and an anarchistic crusade waged at the instigation of a diabolic monk. While the portrayal presents a realistic picture of the ruthless exploitation of the serfs, the boundless greed and gross injustice of the feudal lords, the moral depravity of the ruling elite including the clergy, and the incessant tensions between the rulers and the ruled in a manner that repeatedly evokes the world of Haddis Alemayehu’s *Fiqir Iske Meqabir*, this portrayal is also infused with extraordinary events, characters with superhuman powers, and often malicious spirits that constantly intrude into the human universe, thus creating the impression of a dreamlike world.

The narrative strategies deployed for the depiction of the magical in this novel can be classified under two broad categories: *naturalization of the marvellous* and *defamiliarization of the ordinary*.

Naturalization of the Marvellous

I will discuss the techniques used for making the marvellous appear to be normal, conventional and plausible, while also identifying some of the manifestations and attributes of the marvellous elements.

Religious Mythology as the Marvellous

The novel deploys two religious myths which are accepted by the fictional characters and the narrator as part of the spiritual norms regulating their lives. These are the myths of Mawu-Lisa and Amma, which are borrowings from the West African Coastline communities, namely, the Fon people of Dahomey and the Dogon people in current-day Mali, respectively.² The story starts by introducing the mythology of Mawu-Lisa, which is presented as the official religion of the kingdom of Hararghe. Mawu-Lisa is an omniscient, androgynous god with two faces on one head, who has nine children, the last one of which, Legba, is delegated to oversee the realms ruled by his siblings and report to Mawu-Lisa. The ruling class, including the likes of Count Ashenafi, who constitute just 10% of the population, claim to be descendants of Legba and ordained to own and use to their benefit all the arable land in the kingdom, engaging the landless masses to toil for them.

This myth serves to legitimise the class divisions within the society, the excessive privileges of Count Ashenafi, the subjugation of the serfs and slaves, the crusade and the Inquisition as well as the raids by the Count against the serfs of Harar and Kersa. Both the clergy and the aristocrats justify their hegemony and privileges as divinely

² Contrary to what the author says in his postscript, Mawu-Lisa and Amma are deities still worshipped by these people. See: World Mythology Dictionary: Mawu-Lisa. <http://www.answers.com/topic/mawu-lisa>; see also: Wayne Kreger. 2005. *The Mythology of the Dogon People*. <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mythology/118502/2>

ordained while the commoners and the slaves are duped into believing that this is the law of nature.

According to the young narrator's father, Amma is a "lowly" god of the nomads in the lowlands around Kersa and Deder. The nomads are said to believe that Amma has the shape of an egg with four compartments: fire, air, earth and water. His first offspring from the earth was a jackal, who proved to be disobedient and rebellious. In his second reunion with earth, he fathered twins, both half-human and half-snake, who in turn populated the earth with humans and other animals. Thus the mythology of the Dogon people of Mali has been re-moulded to serve a thematic purpose.³ In its fictionalised version, the Amma religion is said to be far more egalitarian and does not require a hierarchical class division of the society, thus attracting the destitute and over-exploited serfs towards Amma and inducing them to join forces with the nomads in the revolt against Count Ashenafi and the monarchy. The thematic significance of the title of the novel, "The God Who Begat a Jackal", hence lies in the egalitarian values of the Amma faith and the struggle of the serfs, slaves and nomads against an establishment that sustains itself through naked injustice. It is this threat that motivates Reverend Yimam and the Supreme Pontiff of the Mawu-Lisa to launch their crusade and Inquisition against the serfs: to quash the subversive threat of Amma, reaffirm the hegemony of Mawu-Lisa followers and maintain the socio-political status quo. It is this political marriage of common interest between the secular and religious elite that is at the core of the crusade and Inquisition.

Although there is no visible interaction or direct contact between Amma, Mawu-Lisa or his immediate offspring, on one hand, and the human characters, on the other, and although all the actions of the novel take place in the normal world of

³ The jackal in the novel's title is an appropriation from the mythology of the Dogon people, according to which the rebellious Yurugu forced his way out of the egg in desperate search of a mate, used the pieces of placenta he was gestating in to create the earth with which he then proceeded to mate. "His transgression in this act was two fold: he had arrogantly tried to imitate the act of creation that Amma had done, and he mated with the placenta from which he was born, essentially committing incest. Yurugu was punished by Amma for his mistakes – he was transformed into the Pale Fox". (see <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/mythology/118502/2>). The jackal hence seems to be an allegorical representation of Gudu, the young slave who falls in love with his half-sister and leads a fierce rebellion against his master (or denying father).

humans, these faiths provide the ideological systems which the characters adhere to according to their inclinations, and are in this sense not removed from the realm of the real. The two myths therefore set the spiritual, social and political norms which govern the everyday actions, decisions and aspirations of the fictional characters while also creating a link between the human and transcendental world. At the thematic level, the ruling elite's claim of descent from divinity becomes naturalised through its intertextual association with the claims of the Solomonic dynasty in Imperial Ethiopia. Despite the borrowings from West African mythology, Mawu-Lisa's allegorical representation of the Christian religion is also evident from the analogies of the Christian nomenclature used: the crusade, Inquisition, Knights Templars, pilgrims, monasteries, hermits, priests, monks, nuns, reverends, the Good Book, Holy Scriptures and book of hymns, evening mass, sermons, holy pulpit, etc. Through the portrayal of the malpractices of the crusaders and the Inquisition, the myth of Mawu-Lisa is also used to satirise the spiritual decay and material corruption among leading proponents of the official religion of the time. From another angle, the borrowings from the living myths of West African communities may be an attempt to make the fictional setting Africa-wide, although it is the Ethiopian local colour that predominates in the portrayal.

Superstition as the Marvellous

The superstitions used in the novel come in the form of: foxes or dogs crossing travellers' paths; offerings and sacrifices to appease or solicit the aid of spirits; vulnerability of new-born babies to attacks by spirits or evil eyes; the attack of travellers by dust-devils; the use of *markesha* or anti-dote to break an evil spell; or the burial of a fetish in the compound of an adversary to cast a spell on him; or the use of an amulet to protect oneself against an evil spirit. Unlike the Mawu-Lisa and Amma myths borrowed from West Africa, these superstitions are indigenous and form part of the Ethiopian local colour of the novel.

The novel portrays an inter-mingling of invisible spirits and humans in which the former constantly intrude into the lives of the latter as agents of good or bad fortunes. The spirits (occasionally identified as the devil) seem to move easily between their own universe and that of humans, either to satisfy their own needs or

intervene on behalf of humans when their aid is sought through the intermediary of some special character such as a hermit, a diviner, or an *ergum* charmer. They manifest themselves through fetishes buried in the proximity of targeted humans, for instance, a gecko head thought to be buried under the Count's seat, or by taking a human form like a pilgrim, or through their deeds, as when they come in the form of a dust-devil and snatch away the horse and supplies of Teferi and his father, or in the form of widow spirits that snatch away new-born babies and make them their own.

These supernatural beings are naturalised by the actions and reactions of the characters likely to be affected by the spirits or their agents, for instance, the rare anti-dote (*markesha*) sprayed by Teferi's father at the cross-eyed monk whom he took for an *ergum* (wandering spirit or soul moving between the dead and the living), or the Count's order that his new-born baby's crib be completely covered with *gabi* (large cotton shawl) and that no one look at her bare skin or eye for the first three days. The naturalisation is effected through the characters' acceptance of the existence and activities of the spirits as a fact of life, and their attempts to supplicate them through offerings or prevent them from doing harms. In the narration of such interactions, even the omniscient narrator makes no effort to question their reality, and describes their interventions as he would a natural phenomenon or incident. He thus leaves the reader to assume the duality of the real world: the universe of the humans and those of the spirits. Ironically, however, there is no attempt to link the spirits with either the Mawu-Lisa or Amma faith.

Characters with Extraordinary Attributes

Characters with extraordinary attributes are the most dominant form in which the marvellous manifests itself in this novel. Both major and minor characters are endowed with such attributes. Their main attributes are of four kinds: 1) *metamorphosis* (physical transformation); 2) *performative* (telekinesis, levitation/teleportation, communicative, gluttony); 3) *endurance* (superhuman endurance of physical suffering or immortality); and 4) *omniscience* (telepathy, fortune-telling). Aster, Areru, Beza, Duke Ashenafi, Aster's first suitor, the family diviner, the hermits, Rev. Yimam, the *ergum* charmer, and the abettors are endowed with one or a combination of these attributes. I will use the examples of Aster and Areru to illustrate many of these features.

Aster's marvellous feats: These include: *metamorphosis* (of skin), performance (communication with animals, telekinesis, walking through a solid wall, and levitation), and *omniscience* (telepathy and prophesy). At the age of five, her father prevents her from mixing with her playmates because of the injury she received from the push by one of them. Then she becomes confined to her home, isolated from the people around her. That is when she begins displaying her unusual attributes. Two devices are used to naturalise these unusual developments: the reaction of the people watching her and how they explain them. When she begins talking to birds, other animals and invisible friends in a strange language, and when she comments that her fat mother may grow two more legs from behind and join the family of hippos, her mother Countess Fikre thinks Aster has finally lost her mind. Count Ashenafi dismisses her talking to the animals as an "oddity", believing that she was merely "experiencing the tribulation of growth", and thus relegates her conduct to the level of the possible. However, when he saw Aster walking through the solid wall, "his eyes melted into a pool of incomprehension" and he had her shackled to the bedpost while sending for the family diviner. Countess Fikre, on the other hand, "gasped", and the maids "shrieked" at the encounter. So admission of the extraordinary nature of Aster's behaviour is one means of naturalizing it.

Taken in light of the explanation provided by the family diviner, this conduct of Aster also sets both a precedent and the code for naturalizing other extraordinary behaviours or attributes of the characters. Dismissing other people's suspicion that Aster was afflicted by widow spirits, the learned diviner declares, after only a cursory examination, that her conduct was "a mere hangover from the world beyond" and that the cause of Aster's odd behaviour was her not being "immersed in the proper social conduct" (p.17). He then proceeds to provide a more naturalistic explanation:

...babies come down to earth burdened by many languages, hopes, and dreams. In their cribs, they laugh at the jokes of spirits, and cry at the waft of the Devil's noxious fart. Left to their own devices, the innocent would think nothing of debating with a pack of hyenas or singing in the tongue of a thrush. Child rearing is, for the most part, stamping out the budding languages from the baby's essence, giving room for only one to grow. It is a series of methodical and coordinated attack on the baby's ability to perform a forbidden act -- such as walking through a solid wall (p. 17-18).

The diviner offers his tutorial services to groom her in acceptable social conduct, and Aster begins to ‘atrophy’ her extraordinary abilities under his tutelage. But then another learned man, the Sage of Sages, comes along as another tutor and he begins to open her ‘Third Eye’, i.e., her mental power, the ability not only to compose beautiful poetry and unravel complex riddles, but also to read people’s minds and reveal their secrets, to foretell future happenings, and to diagnose people’s hidden afflictions. Thus, the process of remoulding Aster’s personality under the aegis of the two learned diviners, a process which selectively cultivates certain natural traits while suppressing others, is at the same time a demonstration of society’s act of codifying a preferred reality and regulating human conduct to fit this reality.

The first diviner’s rationalization naturalizes Aster’s extraordinary powers by arguing that every child is born with certain innate abilities whose manifestation may be uncommon among adults and are hence suppressed through socialization. At the same time, his characterization of these extraordinary attributes as undesirable “hangovers from the world beyond” also suggests that the extraordinary is actually *natural*, while the conventional is *artificial*, selective, a product of social control. Human nature therefore seems to be a bundle of tensions between suppressed elements of nature and the censorial convention. Under certain conditions, the natural element could burst through the shell of convention, in the event of which others may perceive it as an “oddity”, “madness” or a “miracle”. The characters don’t always seem to exercise full command over their suppressed powers, nor are they able to explain them, and this further aggravates the fear and hesitation the extraordinary causes in others who are subdued by convention.

One may ask why the reader has to give credence to the diviner’s explanation. As Teferi the narrator tells us, the old diviner is reputed to have superhuman powers like Aster. He could tell the contents of a securely packed sack without opening it; identify a murderer by whispering to the horse of the deceased; make himself invisible or change into a tiny bird; levitate or turn his hair green in rage. So, unlike other ordinary people, he knows from personal experience what he is talking about. Still, contrary to what he preaches to Count Ashenafi about child rearing, his own involuntary levitation seems to suggest that it needs more than qualified hands to help one ‘unlearn the lessons of the world beyond’. Despite his immense learning, what his rage-triggered levitation, the smoke bellowing from his nose and ears, and

his hair's turning 'moss green' demonstrate is that the boundary separating the realms of the natural and the marvellous is fuzzy, marked as it is by social sanction. An ordinary mortal could easily and even involuntarily become a marvellous creature.

By explaining the natural source of the marvellous and the censorial function of convention, or rather socialization, the diviner provides a code which naturalizes Aster's other extraordinary abilities, such as the telekinetic power she develops when her freedom is again circumscribed by the isolation her father imposes on her, and the power of levitation when she suffers an intense emotional trauma as a result of the murder of her lover right before her eyes.

A few days after her rape by the emperor, when the maid enters Aster's bedroom at her father's house, she is awestruck by the "apparition" on the bed:

Aster's skin had been washed of its earthly colours, becoming transparent, revealing *what no living soul had ever seen before in a breathing person*: internal organs, the structural skeleton, blood rushing through veins, teeth visible through clenched mouth, eyes rolling in space. Overnight, Aster had turned into a living glass with unsightly content (emphasis mine, p. 16).

The transformation is admitted to be extraordinary, both in the narrator's commentary and through the frightened maid's shock, but its cause is not explained. It is admission of the uncanniness of the transformation that naturalises it. Later in the story, during their much anticipated encounter after Gudu's return from his long self-exile, Aster kisses him suddenly, and goes to sleep with rosy thoughts of feeling "reborn". The next morning, she is elated to discover her dreams had come true and that her skin had regained its natural colour. It is the characterization of the transformation as a *miracle*, her jubilant reaction and the shared joy of her neighbours that naturalize the change: she darts out of her room screaming, and dancing half-naked (p.88). The reader is left undecided about the reality of the transformations, especially since the narrator offers no explanation as to what really caused the change.

These extraordinary powers and metamorphoses of Aster set such precedence that subsequent manifestations of marvellous attributes simply become repetitions of the same essence, i.e., natural people's innate capacity for extraordinary feats and transformations, with the difference being only a matter of form. Therefore, the early manifestations of Aster's unusual powers have a function of norm-setting, or code-making, by which yardstick other subsequent manifestations of extraordinary attributes become normalised. Thus the exceptional linguistic and military skills of Aster's first suitor, the extraordinary power of endurance of Beza and the two hermits, the metamorphoses of Count Ashenafi, the family diviner, the abettors and the albino *ergum* charmer, and the telekinetic powers of the Rev. Yimam can be normalized under this code.

Incidentally, the glassy skin and its transformation seem to carry a symbolic meaning: the transparency of her skin seems to be an exposure of the loss of her purity and honour at the hands of the adulterous emperor. One needs to note how she keeps washing her body again and again as if she were trying to remove the stigma or shame of being a deflowered girl. That fateful kiss of innocent love creates in her a feeling of being reborn. The moral seems to be: life without love is like a vacuum. Ironically, theirs remains a forbidden love, though unknown to them, as they are half-brother and sister. It is this blood relation that was symbolized by the endless sliver chain tying Aster, Gudu, Enquan, and Count Ashenafi, a chain which the *ergum* charmer visualizes but is unable to unravel. What the two lovers were entertaining all the while was an illusion, an unrealisable dream which they were condemned to suffer because of the hypocrisy and decadence of their society. That is why the dream motif is repeatedly associated with the two lovers.

Areru the Taller's Affliction: Areru the Taller, one of Beza's twin sons, is struck by a bullet that enters the back of his skull and dislodges his eye during the first raid on Harar. It is only after his recovery, however, that the effect of the strike becomes most glaring, i.e., his turning into the most gluttonous creature on earth. He could wipe out 23 breakfasts in one sitting and he would still hanker for more food. He would spare no edible item, cooked or raw, small or otherwise, be it roosters, pigs, or cats (p. 71), and at one point he even bites his mother's arm while asleep. So they decide to tie him up during the day to a eucalyptus tree and put a gag in his mouth during the night. When the crusade starts and his mother begins to serve its cause, he

joins her, but even Reverend Yimam, who could send terror into cats and even inanimate objects with a mere stare, could not put in check Areru's voracious appetite. So he quietly mixes poison with his food and shuts him up for ever. Areru's case is an example of an extraordinary attribute which is naturalized by ascribing it to a physical cause – the bullet that struck his brain and turned him into the glutton par excellence. The solution too is a natural one, ordinary food mixed with poison. The symbolism of Areru's gluttony seems to be the depth of dehumanisation of the slaves and serfs who are condemned to a depraved life of servitude merely to fill their stomachs so as to survive from day to day. Ironically, this struggle for survival also forces them into a cannibalistic relationship, metaphorically speaking. Just as he literally bites his mother's arm, so his mother, too, tries to do away with Gudu and Enquan, just to secure a favoured position in the service of her master, just as Teferi's father betrays Gudu. Hence, the downtrodden are no less innocent in the perpetuation of their slavery and dehumanization.

A related symbolism seems to be embedded in Beza's extraordinary endurance of the flogging she receives trying to poison Gudu. A burly man would spend a bundle of bamboo canes and more tree branches whipping Beza's bare back and end up collapsing from exhaustion. Yet Beza not only suffers it all without flinching a bit, but also resumes her chores of domestic labour without any rest. It is a stark reminder of the eternal toil and torment her lot are condemned to bear for life.

Extraordinary Events

The downpour of rain that never touches the soil: Upon seeing Aster shoot up into the sky and disappear for ever, the town people begin to pray for redemption. It has been five years and four months since they had seen the last drop of rain, and suddenly "the heavens opened and water gushed out with unprecedented vengeance. Drenched, the town's people abandoned their prayers, half finished. Enquan stood still. Duke Ashenafi sought shelter" (p. 233). And the narrator says, "No one had ever seen such a downpour, and no one knew what to make of it." The rain stops as abruptly as it had started, the people surprised by the sudden downpour are bewildered to discover that "not a single drop of rain had reached the ground!" (p. 233). This is an extraordinary event that neither the narrator nor the townpeople try

to explain, but taking its presentation in juxtaposition with the sudden levitation of Aster and the townpeople's hope that Aster would help them gain redemption, the normalization seems to be based on the logic that if an ordinary person's levitation is an act of miracle, the sudden downpower after the long spell of drought is another act of miracle sent, perhaps on her behalf, to cleanse their sins. That may be why it drenches their body, but doesn't touch the ground.

The giant vine plant: Another magical event that is narrated without an explanation is the transformation of the *ergum* charmer's small pouch that is buried outside Teferi's window and which grows overnight into a giant vine plant that climbs up and down huts and roads, wraps itself around a jackal that it kills, dips into wells and reappears in a cemetery at the far end of the town. This tree seems to parallel the blood of Jose Arcadio in Marquez's *Solitude* where it flows all the way across the town's street to Ursula's house, thereby heralding to her the bad news of her son's death. The vine tree that Deder's residents make a futile attempt to cut down or uproot finally disappears as suddenly as it came once news of Gudu's return home hits the town.

Defamiliarization of the Ordinary

In Nega's novel, ordinary events and situations are also depicted in a manner that presents them in an extraordinary light. Among the devices used to this effect are coincidences, hyperboles, and magical discourse.

Coincidences

When Countess Fikre delays delivering her baby for up to ten months, this causes a great alarm in Deder. Women are concerned by the precedent she was setting. Diviners are consulted, and offerings made. Count Ashenafi, however, explains that his child is waiting for escorts to evade being snatched away by widow spirits. Then Aster is born and so are many others. The ordinary event of child bearing is transformed into a marvellous incident by the simple coincidence of other births on the same day: nine vassals' homes had new babies, as did a horse, two cows, a donkey, two goats, a stray devil. Furthermore, a slave gives birth to twins (possibly the Arerus) and another one to a boy (Gudu) (p.15). The narrator does not comment

on these births, but elevates the mundane event to a higher level by simply accentuating the identity of the species giving births: humans, livestock, and a stray devil, all escorting Aster to help her evade the widow spirits.

Hyperboles

In this novel, hyperbole is another dominant device used for transforming ordinary events into extraordinary ones, often through deployment of a superfluity of descriptive details. A few notable examples include the following:

- The extraordinary reaction that news of the 10-month old pregnancy of Countess Fikre causes in the valley of Deder: farmers' protests at the precedent she was setting for their women and fear of shift of farming schedules; women's fear of giving birth to all sorts of wild animals with the extension of the delay in the delivery of the baby; the consultation of soothsayers; the dispatch of elders to check the sanity of Count Ashenafi's mind; the sacrificial offerings and libations;
- The insatiable sexual appetite of the young emperor who is said to have changed his partner with his bed linen and whose secret agents prowled market stalls, social functions and even shrine halls looking for a captivating woman; the emperor's promiscuous conduct becomes so pernicious that even the Supreme Pontiff threatens to excommunicate him unless he puts his sexual excesses in check (p.31);
- The 228 suitors asking for Aster's hand in marriage, the Count's fanatical pride that makes him throw into his private dungeon the elders of a suitor who failed to reveal his ethnic origin and his releasing them only upon receiving a compensation of cattle, grain, jars of butter, and blocks of salt (p.51); his setting up a court of four handpicked judges, and a panel of experts that includes astrologers, genealogists, neurologists, nephrologists, and even six *extraterrestrialists*, to scrutinise the best suitors, and then his demand that the finalists fight a duel to decide on the most eligible suitor (p.122), which all serve to satirise the absurdity of the count's class prejudices;

- The extraordinary significance attached to the Count's siege of Harar, as exemplified by the fact that poets, chroniclers, admirals, and the likes crossed mountains and valleys to witness its outcome, and bookmakers took bets on the size of casualties (p.108);
- Count Ashenafi's oblivion of how his own absurd demand drives away his daughter's suitors, his seeking the aid of soothsayers to find out the cause of his daughter's remaining unwed, the Hermit of Hermits who is so emaciated that he buckles under the weight of the thin air and prays "for half a generation" when his aid is sought by the Count (p. 55);
- When he discovers Gudu and Aster in the old barn, Duke Ashenafi's rage takes such an apocalyptic intensity that even celestial bodies take cover. The narrator describes the scene with such vividness that the visualization becomes a means of creating the marvellous:

The moon fell out of the sky. The stars burrowed behind the thin crest of the night. Beasts prowling alleys took cover. Duke Ashenafi went through a visible change: he gained height, ascending higher and higher, like an ominous vine. His distending shoulders brushed up against rafters, his stretching arms stuck out of the paneless windows, his ballooning belly squeezed the condemned pair into a small corner. Then as if in a nightmare, he threw his head back and roared, before deflating himself to his original self. As the quiet was settling, he set the sights of his rifle on Gudu and shattered the stillness with rapid gunfire (p.132).

- Hyperbolic depiction of the absurdity of the Inquisition and the Crusade as demonstrated by the vivid description of the drunkenness, excessive greed, and profanity of the crusaders and Inquisitors; their indiscriminate and bestial cruelty to others and the wanton destruction of property and innocent lives; the looting and desecration of even their own temples and holy objects (p. 157-58) – all these images combine to create a hellish world in which the crusaders emerge as demons in human guise who are let loose in Kersa and Deder to wipe out human civilization and values.

Discourse as Magic

Fables and Riddles:

Gudu makes his career as a poet and entertainer in his father's court. He was born to a slave girl that had been raped by Count Ashenafi, who has since forgotten his deed and never suspects Gudu is his son. Nor does Enquan divulge the secret to her son, although she keeps warning him against being too intimate with the Count's daughter. He refines his skills by collecting riddles, fables, anecdotes, legends, poetry and historical accounts from learned men in far away lands and remote monasteries and reciting these to his peers and to the eminent guests of the Count. But most importantly, these fables serve to draw Aster and Gudu together, and to help them vicariously escape from their harsh realities of bondage – Aster from her imprisonment in her parent's home and Gudu from his servitude. When they plan their elopement, for instance, they draw inspiration from acts of extraordinary bravery and endurance recounted in the anecdotes and legends they have been recording in several volumes. Even when Gudu has been wounded and held in captivity to force him to reveal the spell he is alleged to have cast over Aster, it is these fables that make them temporarily forget the impending catastrophe and keep them going in hope. They serve them like an invisible wall that separates their world of innocence from that of Ashenafi, whose hypocrisy and tyranny they reject. The repetition of these acts of self-delusion, just as their love affair, is hence a means of creating the marvellous.

Descriptive Metaphors

There are several instances in which descriptive metaphors are made to convey a sense of the marvellous. For instance, immaterial or abstract phenomena are described as if they had metamorphosed into a physical bulk. The heading of the chapter about the birth of Aster is titled "a strange *bundle* of joy". Countess Fikre is described as "a *bundle* of innocence". Sometimes metonymy is used to create an association between unrelated things: In explaining why her husband failed to detect her pregnancy, the narrator says, "Her ample bosoms and generous girth were a testament to the wealth of her husband" (p.13). On other occasions, the diminished

social status of the Countess is reflected in a metaphor that seems to efface even her physical bulk. For instance, at the time the first suitor's emissaries arrive at their home, Countess Fikre is said to be "huddled in the *shadows* of her husband" (p. 47). Similarly, among the mute audience observing Aster's bi-weekly practice in unraveling the riddles the Sage of Sages throws at her are said to be "Count Ashenafi, the family diviner, and the *cowed silhouette* of Countess Fikre" (p. 20). This shadow motif is also used for describing other characters. When describing Count Ashenafi's impoverished serfs whose bodies have been withered by abject poverty, the narrator refers to their "emaciated shadows". In the next reference to them, the shadow is substituted for them when the narrator says, "Dad greeted each passing shadow" (p.10). In another context, when describing the haste and speed with which the emissaries of the rejected suitor left the angry Count's mansion, the narrator says, "they vacated the premises so fast that *they left their shadows behind*" (p.51). At the time the abettors shifted their allegiance to the crusaders, when someone asked them how the rebels had managed to stay out of sight without hiding underground, the Abettor's answer was that "the villagers were actually in full view of the crusaders, even as they spoke, only they had learned the technique of *walking without shadows*" (emphases added, p.200). Neither the narrator nor the characters offer any explanation as to how a shadow can be separated from the physical body that is not completely enveloped by either darkness or light.

Personification is another device used for creating the marvelous out of the ordinary. On the day Aster is introduced to the Sage of Sages, the Count throws a feast to mark the occasion. Among the visitors who put an appearance were "two thousand guests ... not counting a family of jackals and two packs of warring hyenas that dropped in quite unexpectedly" (p. 19). When the Count invited the Sage of Sages to deliver a fitting address, "the audience quieted down at once; a mob of flies froze in mid air *in anticipation*" (emphasis added, p. 19). Likewise, when the whip-cracker's cane comes into contact with Beza's back, it is received "with a resounding protest" that spurs the birds to take to the air while "an army of cranes broke formation, swooping down *to investigate*" (p.57).

Intertextuality and the Reality Effect

As can be seen from the following outline, there are several striking parallelisms with *Fiqir Iske Meqabir* in Nega's novel. Some of the main ones are enumerated as follows.

No.	Common feature	Manifestations in the two novels
1.	Relationship between protagonists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heroines in both novels are the daughters of prominent aristocrats; they also happen to be the only child for their parents (since Gudu is not acknowledged by his father); • Both fathers dot on their daughters, and hire for them the best tutors; both daughters love their fathers while also being very critical of their unjust treatment of their serfs; • The heroines fall in love with a young man of a very low social status – Seble with the son of poor peasants, and Aster with the son of a slave woman (though neither she nor her lover is aware that they are siblings from different mothers); • Both Gudu and Bezabeh join the service of their aristocratic masters because they were able to impress them with their poetic skills;
2.	Social isolation of heroines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social isolation of the heroines starts early in their childhood, in both cases imposed on them by their fathers: an accidental push from their playmates and a retributive response from their fathers leads to their peers shying away from them; • In their adulthood, too, they become virtual prisoners in their parents' homes, on occasions each guarded day and night by a hired diviner;
3.	Character traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the Fitawrary and the Duke (fathers of the heroines) had distinguished themselves with bravery in fighting in their younger days; • Both fathers are domineering and temperamental; • Both are acquisitive and ruthless exploiters, extremely insensitive to the destitution of their tenants; • Both are fanatically proud of their aristocratic lineage and reject their daughters' many suitors based on this single

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • criterion; • Both men have no fidelity to their wives; • Gudu of the <i>Jackal</i> has an egalitarian outlook like his namesake character in <i>Fiqir Iske Meqabir</i>;
4. Heroines' forbidden love affairs exposed by their fathers' envious maids;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heroines' secret love affair is frustrated by the schemes of envious maids: Yeserash against Seble, and Beza against Aster;
5. Heroines' forbidden love attributed to a magical spell cast by their young lovers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both fathers reject outright their daughters' genuine love for the young men; they think the latter cast a spell upon them; so, they seek remedies through the intervention of diviners; • Both fathers seek to punish the young men for their alleged spells, thereby forcing them to flee;
6. Diviners' role as instruments of heroines' subjugation; freedom sought through elopement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both heroines plan to escape from their bondage, out of the reach of their domineering fathers, by elopement; • In both novels, the diviner-guards get drunk and try to seduce the heroines;
7. Clashes between tenants and feudal lords triggered by latter's demands of excessive tributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants in both aristocrats' fiefs refuse to pay excessive tributes; • Both aristocrats launch punitive raids against their tenants, and ransack their homes; • In both cases, the tenants succeed in eluding capture by deserting their homes; • Raids end in empty victory for the fathers;
8. Tragic end of elopement, parents' wedding plans, and the young lovers' dreams of getting married	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly suitors in their fifties ask for heroines' hands; • Suitors to engage in duels; • Despite the extravagant feast being prepared, wedding plan is foiled at the last moment by elopement of heroines; • Though the heroes escape first, the elopement plan still fails to attain its objective; • Both heroes are mortally wounded, nursed by their lovers, vow never to desert their lovers; Gudu declares: "Until death do us part", an allusion to the title of <i>Fiqir Iske Meqabir</i> (Love Unto the Grave). • Death prevents the heroes and heroines from consummating their love; • The stories end with the demise of the aristocratic families;

What purpose do these parallelisms serve? A possible function is to heighten the sense of verisimilitude of the portrayal by creating a mirror image through intertextual association with a popular pioneering work. The similarities suggest that despite the proliferation of the marvellous in *The God Who Begat a Jackal*, the core political, religious, and social issues dealt with in the novel are the same ones that *Fiqir Iske Meqabir* graphically portrays with its sober realism: love, greed, vanity, hypocrisy, tyranny in feudal Ethiopia. In other words, the originality of Nega's novel does not lie in the conception of the plot of the central story or the essence of the major themes, but in the magical embellishments with which these are conveyed. Its magical realism, hence, does not provide us a new or better insight than does the realism of *Fiqir Iske Meqabir* as far as the feudal/vassal or clergy/vassal or state/clergy relations is concerned.

Nega Mezlekia acknowledges that he was influenced by Gabriel Garcia Marquez's style of magical realism.⁴ Indeed, this influence can be detected in the similarity of some easily recognizable images, incidents and character attributes with those we encounter in *Solitude*. As can be seen from the following examples, while the situation and identity of the actors are different, the likeness of the incidents can be discerned by comparing the following:

<u>No.</u>	<u>Event in:</u> <i>The God Who Begat a Jackal</i>	<u>Parallels in:</u> <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>
1.	Aster's temporary loss of memory (she forgets the names of ordinary things and fails to recognise even her mother);	The memory loss of the people of Macondo and their resorting to writing down the names of ordinary things;
2.	Areru's being tied to a tree to restrain his gluttony;	Jose Arcadio Buendia's being tied to a chestnut tree to restrain his destructive impulse;
3.	The mysterious vine tree's winding up and down to the other side of	Jose Arcadio's blood racing up and down the road of Macondo to Ursula's

⁴ Nega is reported to have made this comment in February 2002 at the Prairie Lights Bookstore in Iowa. See: http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_oigg.159817/Nega-Mezlekia-The-God-Who-.html/

	Deder;	kitchen;
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aster's ascendance to the sky; • the levitations of the family diviner and the Count; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meredios the Beauty's ascendance to the sky; • the levitations of Father Nicanor;
5.	The clanking bones of the Hermit of Hermits;	The clicking bones of Rebeca's parents;
6.	The three-foot tall albino charmer's shrinking by one foot;	The shrivelling of Ursula's body to the size of a fetus;
7.	The <i>ergum</i> charmer's fortune-telling by reading palms;	Pilar Ternera's prediction of the future by reading cards;
8.	The butterflies that spring out of Aster's dream and hover over her bed (in her dream);	The yellow butterflies that constantly pursue Babilonia and even Meme temporarily;
9.	Incidentally, the butterflies in Aster's dream change into a baby with a blank face, no eyes, ears, mouth or any other human feature. As the dream comes in the context of a love letter to Gudu, it is used as a forewarning of the danger of her begetting a deformed child if her incestuous relationship with her half-brother is consummated; later, she confesses to him that she wants to have his babies (p.222).	This deformity has a parallel in <i>Solitude</i> , where, despite Ursula Iguaran's repeated admonitions against incest in her family, Amaranta Úrsula's incestuous relation with her nephew Aureliano Babilonia results in the birth of a child with a pig's tail. In both cases, the partners in the incestuous relationship (not committed in Aster's case) are unaware of their actual family relationship.
10.	Reverend Yimam's futile and destructive crusade and Inquisition, which also turns against his own followers and even their shrines;	Colonel Aureliano Buendía's no less senseless and destructive 32 civil wars against the conservatives, which also destroys his own followers before it ends;
11.	Beza's jealous schemes against	Amaranta's persistent jealousy against Rebeca Buendia which ends with the

Enquan and her poisoning Gudu;	accidental poisoning of Remedios Moscote;
<p>12.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In both novels, numbers are repeatedly used to heighten a reality effect, even though it makes little difference for the plot if the figures are higher or lower than those enumerated. For example, before the birth of his daughter, Count Ashenafi laments over the high price he had to pay to his Creator to bless him with a child: “Aster had cost him eleven cows, six oxen, nine goats, a cape buffalo (wounded, and therefore, counting only as half) and five sheep” (p.16). • True to the Count’s belief that his daughter was waiting for escorts, two of his maids and nine of his vassals had new babies, while in his barn, too, “a horse, two cows, a donkey, two goats, and a stray devil brought forth their young” on the same day that Aster was born (p.15); • Duke Ashenafi had “to ride to death six horses, four mules, a donkey, and a three-legged zebra” to mobilise support to save his daughter before the crusaders decide to burn her at the stake (p.154). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Jose Arcadio Buendia starts smashing the objects in his alchemy laboratory and turns to his house, “ten men were needed to get him down, fourteen to tie up, twenty to drag him to the chestnut tree in the courtyard, where they left him tied up” (p. 78). • Colonel Aureliano Buendía has 17 sons by 17 different women, each of whom he stays with for only one night; • The plague of long rains that lasts four years, eleven months, and two days.

Conclusion

As pointed out earlier, Nega's novel is replete with marvellous events, characters, and situations. However, for the most part, the magical elements in the novel do not appear to be seamlessly blended into the fictional reality in such a way as to give us the impression of being a natural part of the everyday life of the characters; rather they appear to be imagined artefacts inserted into the fictional world to create a sense of wonderment. Apart from the divorce from the reality of the local culture (save for some of the superstitions), this impression of artifice is heightened by the magical elements' minimal role in determining the course of development of the plot. This is evident from the fact that some characters' extraordinary attributes (teletransportation, levitation, telekinesis, telepathy, metamorphosis, and immortality) appear to have little effect on the ultimate fate of these same characters or those closely associated with them, or the major events shaping their destiny: despite their extraordinary powers, the abettors are not able to determine the ultimate outcome of the rebellion; Count Ashenafi's capacity for levitation or riding a three-legged zebra has little influence on the fate of his daughter or his own; the albino's transformations or oracular powers have little bearing on Gudu's eventual discovery after his disappearance; the widow spirits or *ergums* have little influence on the fortunes of Aster and Gudu.

None of the main characters are able to summon their extraordinary powers at the critical moment they need them most, either to save themselves or those closest to them, from the impending danger. Thus despite her telepathic and prophetic powers, Aster is unable to foresee any of the dangers to herself and to Gudu, either before her rape or before Beza's scheme against Gudu, or even to discover her true relation to Gudu. Her levitation itself may have dramatized her final demise, but it did not determine it since her fate was sealed by her father's brutal murder of her lover/half-brother. The family diviner guarding Aster is unable to use his marvellous power to discover what Aster and Gudu are up to; it is only by sheer logic that he unravels the scheme to drug him. Neither does his power to make himself invisible or change into something else help him avoid the mysterious death awaiting him during the Harar campaign. The underlying implication of this limitation of influence hence seems to be that one must face one's destiny without divine intervention, as do the rebellious nomads and serfs, who eventually gain victory using their own ingenuity and

resolve; the real miracle seems to emanate from the power of genuine love and liberty.

Despite the decorative function or wonderment effect of many of the magical elements, some of the marvellous elements also serve to satirise the weaknesses of the society. Such is the function of the hyperboles on the Count's vanity and greed, or the moral depravity of the clergy of the Mawu-Lisa or even the ignorance and gullibility of ordinary folks. The crusade and Inquisition which, on the surface, appear to be motivated by religious zeal, are depicted in such a way as to graphically expose the boundless greed, cruelty, and destructive impulse of their proponents. Rev. Yimam's blackmail of the Duke over his daughter's liberty, his plan to receive the bounty for the capture of Gudu, his tolerance of the looting of the shrines of Mawu-Lisa and the wanton destruction of property by his followers, all suggest the secondary role of religion in this campaign. What the irreligious and contradictory acts of the cross-eyed monk and his anarchist followers demonstrate is the absurdity and ultimately self-serving nature of ideological extremism, whatever its label, secular or religious. In this regard, despite the author's postscript claims about the time setting of the novel, one is tempted to draw parallels between the Crusade/Inquisition, on one hand, and the Derg regime's Red Terror campaign, on the other.

Sometimes the satire is tinged with irony. Just as the plague of collective amnesia that infects the people of Macondo forces them into futile acts of labelling ordinary things, so the Duke suffers from a suppression of memory, which makes him forget his rape of Enquan when she was barely 14, never bothers to check who fathered her son when she delivered the same day that his daughter was born. Yet he blames his creator for not blessing him with a son. Even the Areru twins could be his sons since there is a hint that their mother had been his favourite maid when he went on a campaign and it is fear of being replaced by Enquan that drives her on a mad course of revenge. The Duke's amnesia is nothing but a metaphor for his inability to accept reality, as demonstrated not only by his failure to recognise his own son, but also by the rejection of hundreds of his daughter's suitors. The Duke's irrational hankering after a suitor with an aristocratic blood, while really rejecting his own offspring from a slave, leaves his daughter entangled in an incestuous relationship with her sibling

from another mother, thus giving him an enduring lesson for the rest of his life that all humans are born equal.

In as far as the historical details are concerned, save for easily identifiable references to names of places and characters, as well as the Inquisition, and the cultural setting, as well as the superstitious beliefs (omens and sacrifices to spirits), there are hardly any fictional events or characters that can be directly linked with actual events or personalities from Ethiopia's rich history. Despite the suggestions in the Postscript, no recognisable historical event or personality has been recreated as in the case of Marquez's *Solitude*, where the civil war between the conservatives and the liberals or the massacre of the plantation workers or General Rafael Uribe Uribe's military pursuits have been vividly reconstructed from Columbia's turbulent history. Of course, one can look for possible historical counterparts of the fictional events to associate with, as is implied in the *Jackal's* Postscript, by a stretch of the imagination, but then such conjectures shed little light on the author's success in reconstructing historical events or providing us with a new insight into the country's past (or present!), its people, its history and its culture.

Unfortunately, the numerous anachronisms too have not been helpful in recreating that 17th or 18th century Ethiopia. One finds it difficult to readily associate the following elements with the socio-cultural context of that period's society: body paint, mosquito bednets, chandeliers, saltshaker, a bowl of sugar, picture frames hanging from the wall, spinning fans, horse-drawn carriages, drawing rooms, shower, tiled floors, laced curtains, bookmakers, and cigarettes. The proliferation of these objects tends to diminish the reality effect by accentuating the incongruous imagery of the social canvas being painted, especially since the local colour of the novel appears to be rather hazy.

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