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## Metafiction as a Rhetorical Device in Hegel's History of Absolute Spirit and Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

"Metafiction" has been defined as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."<sup>1</sup> Of course, many literary works include some element of self-awareness or self-reference. However, the term "metafiction" is usually applied only to those cases in which the self-relation is used to undermine our traditional understanding of the distinction between fiction and reality. Metafiction shows the rhetorical power to do so by relating a fictional work to *itself*, by including discussions of a fictional work as *part* of it. Thus, the distinction between the actual fictional work we are reading and holding in our hands as part of reality and the fictional world which the work describes is blurred or collapses. But this also gives metafiction the rhetorical power to create a feeling of absurdity, subverting temporal, logical, and literary distinctions of before and after the work's completion, of historical narrative and fiction, of true and false. Further, by relating the fictional work to itself, metafiction can also create an impression of recursive chains. Indeed, it is for such "anarchistic" uses that metafiction is most frequently employed, and it is on them that research on it concentrates. However, research has neglected to see that the blurring of fiction and reality can be used not only to confound these categories, but (retaining these categories) to convince the reader that the apparent fictional narrative being read is real, that the events described have actually been happening. Further, it

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1. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 2.

frequently has been overlooked that metafiction has been used as a rhetorical persuasive device not only in literature but also in philosophy. In this paper I shall compare and contrast two uses of metafiction as a rhetorical device, one philosophical, the other literary. The first is the metafiction at the end of Hegel's history of Absolute Spirit. The second, which illuminates dimensions of the first by both similarities and differences, is the use of metafiction at the end of Garcia Marquez' history of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

In his various writings, Hegel shows how the history of Spirit progressively manifests itself in time as political history, history of legal systems, of art, of religion, and of philosophy. Even the non-temporal, logical categories by which Spirit returns to itself in the *Logic* are present as the essential, guiding concepts of the philosophical systems which progressively appeared in the history of philosophy. All events in these fields are moments in the process by which Spirit strives, through its different manifestations, to achieve self-realization.

The various moments and categories are interrelated by means of the dialectical movement which synthesizes them into ever more inclusive categories. Near the close of the system the Absolute Spirit itself is discussed. The system first describes the manifestation of Absolute Spirit in art, then in religion, and finally in philosophy, the development of which, as of other fields, is outlined from the earliest and most primitive forms. Thus the discussion progresses gradually through the generations up to the modern era. After dealing with Kant, the system discusses German Idealism and shows how Absolute Spirit expresses itself yet more fully with each successive philosopher. But at the end we realize that the final stage of the complete development of Absolute Spirit and of philosophy is the very system we have just been reading.<sup>2</sup> The end of the system (story, narration), then, is the system (story, narration) itself (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 3:14). The story is the story of itself. In it Absolute Spirit reaches self-consciousness and self-realization. Although we did not realize it at the time, from the very start we were already reading the system from the point of view of final truth.

Thus, the end of all historical (and logical) events discussed in the system is a fuller and richer understanding of the events them-

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2. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 20: 460 ff.; all references to Hegel's works are from the Suhrkamp edition, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: 1969). See also *Phenomenology of Spirit* 3:80, 582-83, 589, 591; *Science of Logic* 6:549-50, 567-69, 573; *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* section 577.

selves. In the end of the system there is a return to previous stages and categories understood in a richer, more complete way. The end of the events discussed in the system is the realization of each one's place in the context of all the other events and processes, of the necessity of their development through the dialectical method, and of their being manifestations of Absolute Spirit. In short, it is the recognition of their necessary development in the process which has led to this very recognition.

Hegel uses metafiction at the end of his system to achieve several philosophical purposes. However, I shall first discuss metafiction as a literary device to create in the reader the impression that what is read is true. The metafictional turn imparts this feeling in the following ways:

1. We are in the habit of seeing truth as the congruence between description and described. Thus we see the statement "snow is white" as true if and only if snow is indeed white. Now, at the end of Hegel's system we reach a special situation: what is described in the system is the very systematic description itself. The system includes assertions about something, but this something is these very assertions. Since the description describes the description itself, a discrepancy between them seems impossible. The metafiction creates the illusion that what we read is true. (Note, however, that this perception is not necessarily correct. A description or a sentence can be about itself and still be false as in, "This sentence is in French and has five words.")

2. The presumption of truth is created not merely by reading a narrative which portrays how a certain system describes itself, but also by the fact that the system *about* which we are reading is the very same system *which* we are reading; it is present right before us. Since the system we are reading about is actually held in our hands, we feel that at least part of what is discussed in the system is real. Put differently, when at the end of the system we understand that this end involves our very present understanding of it, we feel that the system is realized. Thus, we are led to feel by association that the rest of the things described are also realized and hence truly described.

3. The system's special relationship with the reader exists from yet another aspect. The different stages and processes described lie along the Absolute Spirit's way toward self-realization. But according to Hegel, Absolute Spirit cannot reach self-realization by itself; it can do so only through human beings. Thus, the full self-realization of Absolute Spirit (through the self-consciousness of human beings who realize the truth of what is said in the system) described in the

system is found to be identical with the reader's all too coincidentally similar self-conscious reading, understanding, and accepting of the system. We as readers, then, are led to believe that the system actually describes the act by which we read it and accept it as true. Put differently, metafictional description induces the supposition of an identity of reference between what is described in the system and the reader's experience which contributes to the impression that what is written in the system is true.

4. Because of the metafiction, there is a sense of synoptical recapitulation at the end of the system. When we discover that the end of the system is the whole coherent system we have been reading, this whole is recalled at once. But the cohering of theses and descriptions is taken as a mark of truth. Thus, again, a feeling that what we read is true is aroused.

5. Thanks to the metafiction, the system says of itself some things that indeed are true. For example, it says of itself that it discovers itself in the end and indeed it does. Similarly, it says that it reconciles all previous categories, and indeed it does. Thus, when it says or implies of itself that it is true, we may come to think by association that this too is the case.

6. The metafictional turn also creates the impression of a circular mutual affirmation between things said all through the system and things said at its end. Throughout the system we read that we are to reach the complete truth at the end. Then, at the end, we read that all we have been reading up to now is the complete truth. Thus, we feel that what we have read earlier is true, and hence that what is said at the end of the system is true.

Note that the mutual affirmation as constructed by Hegel creates a stronger feeling of truth than would have been aroused by a simple assertion such as "all you have been reading here is true." The affirmation as we are given it appears as a natural continuation of what has been happening in the system according to the dialectical method. In a way, it *relies* on the system. A simple assertion that "all you have been reading here is true" would not be a natural continuation of the system up to that point and would be based on nothing.

All these factors impart a feeling that what we have been reading is true. The feeling is enhanced by the fact that when the system relates to itself all these factors appear at once. Had they appeared one by one, at different stages, the effect would have been weaker. Moreover, the feeling of truth is further enhanced by the fact that these factors are not explicit, and we are less likely to examine critically and consciously whether they indeed are evidence for the

truthfulness of the system—an inspection which might lead to a diminution of the impression of truthfulness.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*<sup>3</sup> narrates in a semi-realistic and semi-fantastic way the history of the village Macondo and of a leading family in it—the Buendias. With a few exceptions, the events of this history are narrated chronologically. In the final chapter we learn that one of the last members of the family, Aureliano (lover of Amaranta-Ursula), finds and reads the writings of one Melquiades, composed many years earlier, at the time of José Arcadio Buendia, one of the founders of Macondo. While reading he realizes that these texts discuss the whole history of Macondo and the Buendias. He finds in Melquiades everything that has happened to his family, including the fact that he, Aureliano, has found the book and is reading it, and that this very understanding dawns on him.

Many similarities exist, then, between Garcia Marquez' description of the history of Macondo and Hegel's description of the history of Absolute Spirit. Both works narrate a historical process. In both a metafictional turn appears toward the end of the history, referring directly to itself and reflecting all the other events. In both the metafictional turn takes us back to earlier events, adding to them a dimension which up to that point we had not seen; in the final, metafictional stage we have a richer understanding of the earlier stages.

But most importantly, in both cases the metafictional turn imparts a feeling that what we have read is true. We feel that what we have been reading is not merely a description, but also part of reality. Like Hegel, Garcia Marquez achieves this effect in several ways:

1. As in Hegel, so in the world narrated by Garcia Marquez the description and the described are to some extent one. Aureliano finds a book which describes Macondo and his family, including his finding and reading the book at that very moment. Aureliano is used to the distinction between a description of reality and reality itself. But when he sees that the description of reality is about itself—about the very description he is reading—the description belongs for him to both worlds: the one described and the one he himself experiences. Thus, the events discussed in the book seem more persuasively true to him, and to the extent that we identify with him, to us as well.

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3. Trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

2. Again analogously to Hegel, apart from the metafiction that exists *inside* the narrative, there is also one between the narrative and our actual world. Since what is written in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is similar to what is written in the book Aureliano reads, we feel it might be the same book. In other words, we feel that the book we are reading is the book in Aureliano's hands. It is true, our book was written not by Melquiades but by Garcia Marquez, and not in Sanskrit but in Spanish. But there is sufficient similarity between the two to leave us with the feeling that they are nevertheless one and the same book. Hence, we feel that the book we are reading describes itself and thus both belongs to the world of fiction and that of reality. The distinctions between reality and fantasy are to a large extent obliterated.

3. Again, the metafiction at the end of the book creates a recapitulative synoptic feeling. When Aureliano finds and reads a book which narrates all the events we have been reading about (including his very finding and reading of the book), all we have been reading about at once comes together as a unity. And since we frequently take the coherence and unity of theses and events to be a mark of their truth, the unity we feel at the end of the book has the effect of truthfulness.

4. Again, thanks to metafiction Melquiades' book can say of itself some things which are indeed true. For example, it says that it discusses Macondo's history and indeed it does. It says that it was found by Aureliano and indeed it was; it is being read by Aureliano at that very moment and indeed it is. It even says that it *says* that it is being read by Aureliano and it does. Thus, when the book implies of itself that it is true, Aureliano, and to a certain extent we, come to think that this is so.

Note that since it is not completely certain that the book Aureliano is reading is the same as ours, some of the things the book says of itself are true only for his and not for ours. For example, we cannot be sure that the book's saying of itself that it was found by Aureliano is true of our book as well as of Aureliano's.

5. Again as before, the metafictional turn creates a feeling of mutual affirmation between the things said all through the system and those said at its end. At the end of the story a book is found that implies that everything that has happened in the story is true; but the book itself is also part of the story, and hence it also is again true. (And again, the affirmation can be taken to continue: since it says, or indicates, that the whole story is true, and since it is part of the story, it again seems true, and thus what it says is true.)

Note that here again this mutual affirmation creates a stronger feeling of truth than a simple assertion that "all you have been reading up to now is true" would have done, since the former seems a natural continuation of the story we have been reading, and the latter would have been foreign to it.

6. In Garcia Marquez, the book found by Aureliano toward the end of the narrative was already fully written out a few generations earlier, at the time of Macondo's founder, José Arcadio Buendia. Thus, both Aureliano and we feel that the events that took place after the writing of the book but which are narrated in it and in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, were necessary. If the book described events which happened after it was written, then it seems that these events *had* to happen as they did. Thus, there seems to be not only a simple congruence between what was written in Melquiades' book and what happened outside it, but also a necessary, magical congruence. And this enhances our feeling that what was described in the book (which is by and large what is described in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) was true.

All these factors impart a feeling that what we have been reading is true, a feeling enhanced by the fact that when the book refers to itself all the factors appear at once. Had they appeared separately, their effect would have been weaker. Moreover, none of these factors are explicit. Thus, we are less likely to investigate whether they are indeed evidence for the truth of what the book says—an examination which might weaken the impression of truthfulness.

The similarity between Hegel's history of Absolute Spirit and Garcia Marquez' history of Macondo is clear. It lies, for example, in the appearance of metafiction toward the end of the histories and in the use to which it is put, viz., enhancing the feeling that what is written in them is true. Moreover, even the ways in which metafiction is used to enhance the feeling of truth in these two works are almost similar.

But there are also differences between metafiction in Hegel and in Garcia Marquez. In almost every way, Hegel uses metafiction more fully. Whereas Garcia Marquez uses metafiction only for a literary purpose—to create an aesthetic effect—in Hegel it also advances philosophical purposes. For instance, it allows him to avoid unfounded axioms. The starting point of the system is grounded when the end relates back to it, certifying its necessity in the complete system. Likewise, Hegel uses metafiction to avoid infinite regress. The dialectical method does not go on infinitely, continuously pushing the end forward, but, by relating to itself, overcomes the notion of the end altogether. Similarly, through metafiction Hegel keeps the

system continuously dynamic. The movement does not stop once self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit has been reached, but, through the self-relation, continues circularly. Hegel also uses metafiction to help synthesize all the notions contained in the system, yet, since he is an anti-reductionist, without endangering their individual uniqueness. Thus, whereas in the previous phases of the dialectic each inclusive category does not represent the unique natures of the categories included in it, the final category in the system—i.e., the system itself—does.

But even rhetorically, i.e., only in imparting a feeling of truth, Hegel employs this self-relation more fully than Garcia Marquez. First, whereas at the end of Hegel's system we feel that its reading is both experienced by us and implied in the system, we do not feel at the end of Garcia Marquez' novel that *our* reading of it is mentioned or implied in any way. The literary "hero" of Hegel's system—the Absolute Spirit—is taken to exist not only in the system but also in the real world and to achieve self-realization through human beings. Hence we feel that there is a congruence between the acceptance of the system by human beings as described or implied in the system, and our actual acceptance of the system in the real world. The literary "hero" of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—the Buendia family and Aureliano himself—is not taken to exist in the real world, nor to be connected to our reading of the book in any other way. Thus we are not tempted to feel that our reading the book is described or implied in it.

Second, at the end of Hegel's system we feel that the system we are reading about is similar to the system we actually hold in our hands, whereas at the end of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* we are less certain that the book we are reading about is similar to the one we actually hold. Although the book we are reading about is similar in some respects to the one in our hands (both discuss the same events, including Aureliano's finding and reading it), they are different in others (composed by different authors in different languages). Thus, whereas readers of Hegel's system feel that there is a complete similarity between the system they are reading and the system they are reading about, readers of Garcia Marquez feel that there is only a partial similarity between the book they are reading and the book they are reading about. Hence, the feeling of truthfulness in Garcia Marquez' novel, although still aroused, is weaker.

Third, Hegel's system says of itself a greater number of true things than Aureliano's find does of itself. Hence, the propensity to feel that other things said in these works are also true is shakier in Garcia Marquez than in Hegel.

Fourth, although mutual metafictional affirmation exists in both works, it is stronger in Hegel's, where the final, metafictional stage is clearly anticipated. Moreover, this stage is taken to be a logical continuation of the previous ones. In Garcia Marquez, on the other hand, Aureliano's finding and reading the book is not anticipated. Moreover, it is not seen as a logical, necessary conclusion of the previous stages, but as merely one event among many. Thus, in Garcia Marquez the end of the book and the events which precede it still mutually affirm each other, but less powerfully than in Hegel.

All in all, then, Hegel uses metafiction more fully and to achieve stronger effects of truthfulness. There is one way, however, in which Garcia Marquez' use of metafiction creates a stronger feeling of truth than Hegel's: the fact that Melquiades' book describes events that happen after it was written creates a feeling that the congruence between it and the events it (as well as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) describes is a necessary one. In Hegel's system, on the other hand, the historical realization of the system is taken to be completed only at the end of the narration. It is true that at the end of the system we see that in a sense its end is present also in the beginning; but not in its full form, as is Melquiades' book.

How can the differences between Hegel's and Garcia Marquez' uses of metafiction be explained? Why does the latter not follow Hegel's model of the use of metafiction in all respects, but only in some and less emphatically? The differences have to do with the different natures of their works. Hegel aims at presenting a philosophical, scientific account of the history of Absolute Spirit. The reality or truthfulness of his account is very important to him. Garcia Marquez, on the other hand, is consciously presenting a literary work, and thus he does not aim at convincing his readers that what he is writing is true. His book balances on the fine line between reality and fantasy and he wants to avoid "crossing the border" to reality, as Hegel did. In other words, he does not wish to convey a sense of complete reality, but to leave an impression that the border between fantasy and reality is blurred. Hence, unlike Hegel, he does not use metafiction in all the ways he could.

But if Hegel is interested in using metafiction to achieve the strongest possible effect of truthfulness, why does he not also use Garcia Marquez' method and take his system to exist in its full form already at the beginning of his narrative? This is not possible; Hegel's system is directional. It starts with categories which in themselves are wrong insofar as they are partial, but through an ordered process (the dialectical movement) become incorporated into larger and larger contexts which add to their understanding. Completeness and truth

are achieved only at the end of the system, when the development of Absolute Spirit reaches its final stage. Hence, for Hegel the final point could not fully exist at the beginning. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, on the other hand, there is no feeling for a gradual philosophical progress. The plot does not seem to go in any specific direction, and at the end of the saga there is a marked feeling of decadence. Hence, there is no difficulty in taking Melquiades' book to exist not only at the end of the story, but also at the beginning.

To sum up, Hegel uses metafiction both as a philosophical device, a structure which fulfills genuine philosophical functions, and as a literary device, a rhetorical tool used to impart to the reader a *feeling* that what is read is true. Does the unmasking of Hegel's use of metafiction as a rhetorical device undermine the philosophical cogency of his system? The answer is no. The existence of a literary device in a philosophical system is in itself irrelevant to the philosophical cogency of the system, which should be measured only by philosophical standards (e.g., the consistency of its theses, the tenability of its assumptions, or the soundness of its arguments). However, identifying the rhetorical devices present in a system is helpful in assessing its philosophical cogency; it enables us to distinguish between philosophical elements in the system (including the philosophical use of metafiction) and rhetorical ones, and thus not to be affected by the latter when only the former should be taken into account.

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