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Alessandro Rocco. *Gabriel García Márquez and the Cinema*. Tamesis, 2014.

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Abstract

Review of Alessandro Rocco. *Gabriel García Márquez and the Cinema*. Tamesis, 2014

Keywords

Gabriel Garcia Márquez, cinema

Alessandro Rocco. *Gabriel García Márquez and the Cinema*. Tamesis, 2014. xiii + 212 pp.

In *Gabriel García Márquez and the Cinema*, Alessandro Rocco, a researcher in Latin American Literature and Culture at the University of Bari, provides a thorough discussion of Gabriel García Márquez's lifelong relationship with film. Writing for film complemented his fiction writing, even though the two were very different processes that produced very different results. García Márquez's stories and novels might become film scripts, which in turn might become movies, or ideas from his scripts might be recycled and then made into new stories. Collaboration was central to García Márquez's way of working; he collaborated not only with directors but with other writers, often evolving ideas in group discussions. The result is uncertainty regarding the degree of his involvement in some of the projects on which he worked. This is most evident in his early film work, where Rocco has no choice but to engage in speculation, at times able to conclude little more than that García Márquez simply must have had some input into a particular script. García Márquez's contributions to later collaborations, however, are more fully documented. For example, a six-part television series made in Cuba in collaboration with Cuban film professionals and Cuban film students is the most fully documented work of his cinematic career. For this feature, discussions were written down and published, showing the development of the series from the initial concept to the completed final script, as well as the specific contributions of various participants.

García Márquez had to grapple with the tensions among the various possible "incarnations" of any given narrative: story, script, and film (not necessarily in this order). Some of his narratives are told with a cinematic inflection. Rocco discusses one of the most famous among them, *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada* (*The Incredible Sad Tale of Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother*), which was first written as a screenplay. Because of delays in the start of production, García Márquez became impatient and rewrote it as a novella, but one with points of view and sequences that clearly suggest camera positions and editing. Ironically, when the film was finally made, the story was used, not the script. Script becomes story and story becomes film, a departure from the "normal" order of adaptation from story to film. At other times García Márquez tried to write pure narratives, eschewing all cinematic suggestions, and he came to regard writing as essentially freer and superior to film. García Márquez has said that *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), his most famous literary work, if not his greatest, was written to demonstrate literature's "vaster scope" and "greater possibilities for reaching people" than film (16).

At the very outset, Rocco makes it clear that his approach will be different from the *auteur* approach, which regards the director as the artist who is (or should

be) the primary creative force in making a film. Rocco emphasizes the role of the scriptwriter and, consequently, the story itself, rather than specific cinematic techniques used in a film. Thus, Rocco writes numerous detailed summaries of action and characters in García Márquez's scripts, paying little attention to cinematic aspects. This is appropriate, given Rocco's stated emphasis on story and García Márquez's role as writer, not director.

Over the course of his career, the themes and styles of García Márquez's narratives and films varied immensely. Influenced early on by the Italian neorealists, he was himself associated with a kind of realism. But fantastic aspects were included in a deadpan way, as if they were normal, unremarkable aspects of a story's world. They were treated with the same "realism" that was applied to "normal" characters and events, thus erasing the line between the real and the fantastic and producing what came to be called the "magic realism" for which García Márquez is most known.

He often dealt with political themes, dictators or autocrats, and cruelty (often imposed on the weak by the strong), as if determined or "written" beforehand. Always reflected in his work is his fascination for his own Colombia, in all its violence, contradictions, and magical sensibility. Rocco identifies *fatum* 'fate' as the major theme in García Márquez's work overall, beginning when, as a young reporter, he became fascinated by *Oedipus Rex*, reading it over and over until he had it memorized. The Colombian author came to view an individual's life as being determined, that is, as having a trajectory that the individual cannot avoid, a perspective that complemented his belief that nations themselves, and Colombia in particular, also have destinies. Rocco quotes the author in this regard: "What most moved me about *Oedipus Rex* in 1949 was its tremendous resemblance to the Colombian situation . . . For many years I thought that political violence in Colombia had the same metaphysics as a plague" (154). Decades later, *Edipo Alcalde* (*Oedipus Rex*) would itself become one of García Márquez's works. His screenplay parallels a story of guerilla warfare in Colombia with a story of Colombian characters with names drawn from Sophocles's play: Laius, Creon, Jocasta, and Tiresias. The "Oedipus" character is not given the name explicitly, but identified as *Alcalde* (literally, 'mayor'). Both nation and character must live the destinies that have been foretold, and nothing can change that.

García Márquez worked in many countries, mainly but not exclusively Latin American. He was friends with major film artists, politicians, and national leaders. He supported revolutionary groups and leaders, including the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Fidel Castro in Cuba. With Castro he created the *Fundación Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* 'The Foundation for New Latin American Cinema.'

Overall, García Márquez tends to be remembered primarily for his literary contributions, which, by any standards, earn him a place not only among the great Latin American writers, but also among the greatest modern writers generally.

However his literary work has understandably eclipsed his work in film which, though acknowledged, tends to be neglected. Rocco's book goes a long way toward creating a more appropriate balance between García Márquez's contributions to literature and to cinema, as well as exploring the similarities and differences between those two ways of telling a story.

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