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Magical Realism in the Age of its Archival Canonization:  
García Márquez's and Rushdie's Political Filiation

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### *I. Problems with the canon as way of introduction*

My first approach to García Márquez (GM) was as a required reading of his short stories to be evaluated in the traditional, male, private catholic school from Bogotá, the Gimnasio Campestre. The resistance and the difficulty to understand ‘Gabo’ —as he is called often with an excess of familiarity— is imprinted in the repelence of enforced duty his author function produced in us, I recall it crystalized in the first email address of a fellow student: [gaboisafool@hotmail.com](mailto:gaboisafool@hotmail.com)<sup>1</sup>. Many years later, as a BA student, I would happen upon him and his work in the most unexpected of places: At the poshest Grill House and Club around Bogotá, Andrés Carne de Res —temple of Bacchus of the privileged classes of Colombia, celebrities and tourists, and according to tourist guides “the best party in the world”. I was handed with the entrance ticket a sticker of a yellow butterfly —Mauricio Babilonia’s butterflies— with a slogan<sup>2</sup> he formulated for the grill house and his signature. Something similar happened in 2013, when ProColombia, the entity of the government in charge of promoting Colombian tourism in foreign countries launched the campaign “Colombia, magical realism”<sup>3</sup>. The main objective of the campaign was, in the words of the María Claudia Lacouture president of Proexport, to create “a worktool for the entrepreneurs to sell the country” (0:38-0:42, my translation), a project for airlines, hotels, “looking forward to tell the foreigners why in this country one can live unique and magical experiences.” (0:29-0:33, my translation)

On the other hand, my experience with Rushdie was quite different. The first time I heard from him was because of his visit to Colombia during the Hay Festival in 2009. He

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<sup>1</sup> “[gaboisafool@hotmail.com](mailto:gaboisafool@hotmail.com)”

<sup>2</sup> “‘Andrés Carne de Res donde se acuestan dos y amanecen tres [A. C. d R. where two go bed and three awake.]”

<sup>3</sup> “Colombia, realismo mágico” from Procolombia, published April 12th 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cSFkHb37vg>

represented the existential consequences of literature I had never heard of — in the naiveté of my provincialism — and thought to be relegated to the past: a ‘fiction’ that wanted to be destroyed with explosives, a *political* book in the most realistic manner, as one that had configured the enmity to death from a nation, Iran, voiced by a militant leader institutionalized Islamic fundamentalism, Ayatollah Khomeini. Moreover, a world-renowned writer that was banned from his own land instead of being a commercialized nationalist icon<sup>4</sup>. In Rushdie, I believed to have found all that the institutional status of García Márquez — whom I was dodging with effort in my BA in Latin American literature — wasn’t.

Since 2016, Gabriel García Márquez’s face has been printed in the bill of 50.000 pesos, the second highest value in Colombia. Since he won in 1982 the Nobel Prize for Literature, he has become an alternative in the global system of value to symbolize coin Colombian identity besides other figures and symbols such as the drug lord Pablo Escobar, Shakira, football players, or the two most coveted psychoactive Colombian commodities consumed massively in Europe and the US, cocaine and coffee. I look forward to analyzing critically the intellectual correspondence between these two cosmopolitan authors and focusing on the role that their ‘fiction’ has played in the ‘real’ world, especially in the ground in which they have become global archetypes: the disputed chimeric genre of magical realism, which filiates both and is the backbone of Rushdie’s reception, discourse and the heritage of GM. I will proceed to discuss many marvelous yet real parallels in the lives of these two writers as well as in the reception of their works. Then I will conclude with a critical discussion of the acquisition of sources of archival and empirical practice for studying

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed narration from Rushdie’s perspective on Indira Gandhi’s ban of *Midnight’s Children* refer to Rusdhi’s 2005 “Introduction” to the novel; on the difficulty of shooting an adaptation of the same novel read the essay “Adapting Midnight’s Children” in *Step Across This Line*; and in more general and mediatic terms of the banning of *The Satanic Verses* worldwide see Malik’s book in the bibliography.

GM's works by the Harry Ransom Center in Texas and Rushdie's participation in its celebration.

## II. García Márquez and Rushdie as intellectuals

The fluid position of both writers as cosmopolitans is well known. The way Rüdiger Kunow described Rusdhie's subjectivity corresponds historically to García Márquez as an intellectual: "a subject position [that] is multiply determined, when somebody does not write from *one* place but *many*, from a sequence or series of locations, when somebody is not merely 'positioned' but multiply positioned. [...] In James Clifford's terms, 'roots' have given ways to 'routes.'" (2006, p. 369) García Márquez lived and wrote in different countries, moving and writing simultaneously at local, national and continental levels: in his native land Colombia, in some of its varied regions, in Europe (in Paris during 1956 and in Barcelona 1967-75), later in Mexico City, where he took as his most permanent location until his death. With Rushdie it has not been any easier, as reported synthetically by Kunow he lived "like some of his characters— from Bombay/Mumbai to England and back, again to England, then to a series of undisclosed locations during the *fatwa*, and most recently to the United States [since 2000]." (p. 369-370) Both shared a life of routes, rather than roots, and a sustained spatial dislocation that converged with a disjunction of time: while García Márquez became a public figure on a global scale during the end of the sixties until the first part of the 2000s, Rushdie came later, at the beginning of the eighties up to the present.

The mastery of a practice and its social reception were essential to understand the conditions and intersections that allowed both writers to be recognized as public intellectuals. First and foremost, their craftsmanship as writers, and second, derived from the first, the institutional value production, which by becoming best-sellers and/or earning some of the most notable literary prizes of their language, gave them a name and position in the global

economy of prestige. These decisive facts enabled them to attract widespread visibility in an international stage and in this way be considered renowned intellectuals. In GM's case the moment of inflection was the publishing of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which was an immediate best-seller<sup>5</sup>, later earning the Rómulo Gallegos Prize (1972) and a decade later the Nobel Prize (1982). The latter he had studied thoroughly as evidenced in two texts of the 80s<sup>6</sup>. In Rushdie's case the Man Booker Prize (1981) and the Booker of Bookers (1993). Both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children* gave their authors, as Rushdie would put it himself in an interview, the public's recognition, their legitimization as writers as and economic autonomy<sup>7</sup>. These prizes also gave them the traditionally contested power to (mis)represent their nations abroad. Their work in different fields is another noteworthy intersection: in literature, journalism, cinema, advertising, with varying intensities in each case.

Moreover, another decisive fact was —once having the best-seller/prize as a solid launchpad to visibility and worldwide recognition— the performance of stunt acts with power in the limelight, even putting their well-being in danger. García Márquez like Rushdie was also threatened to death, while working in 1959 for the Cuban revolution *Prensa Latina*, the official Cuban press agency in Manhattan. Similar to this was his (self-)exile from Colombia to Mexico in 1981: an article signed with the pseudonym Ayatolá —to add another resonance with Rushdie's threat— accused him falsely of having connections with the armed group M-19 and supporting the occupation of southern lands by guerrillas in Colombia. As put by a journalist: “such a statement during the Julio César Turbay Ayala's government was an

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am following Gerald Martin's account of the publishing process of GM's best know novel in his authorized biography, my statement is also based in the wave of English translations of his works published in English until 1972. In brief, as put by an analysis of the reception his English translations: “García Márquez's reputation and financial security were sealed.” (Munday 1998, p. 138)

<sup>6</sup> See his essay in two parts “The Ghost of the Nobel Prize” [El fantasma del Premio Nobel] published in October 1980.

<sup>7</sup> “It created people's sense of me as a writer. It made me financially independent.” (Rushdie 2015b)

equivalent to torture and jail.”<sup>8</sup> (Torres 2014) His close relationship with powerful figures of world politics, earned him the disdainful remark from his fellow, best well-known Latin American writer of the following generation —who emphasizing his own empowering act turning up his nose, performing his hierarchizing distinction, called him: “a man terribly pleased to have hobnobbed with so many Presidents and Archbishops” (Bolaño qtd. by Rushdie 2014b). Looking at the collection of pictures of hobnobs, one must remind, the paradoxical political orientation of “the spokesman for left-wing causes” (Bell-Villada 2016, 313). He had a long lasting close friendship with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro —which he used diplomatically, in more than one occasion to facilitate the release and emigration of writers and their families, while being willfully blind to torture and execution— which cost him becoming *persona non-grata* of the US; he got to meet Indira Gandhi —Rushdie’s first censoring compatriot—, and even the US ex-president Bill Clinton who granted him again a visa to visit the US. García Márquez’s as a political activist denounced with telegrams US-backed dictators, for example when Pinochet took power in Chile in 1973. Furthermore, he donated the Rómulo Gallego’s to the Venezuelan party Movement Towards Socialism, as well as being vice-president on the Second Bertrand Russell Tribunal from 1975 to 1980. He renounced ambassadorships and counselships in Europe during the governments of López Michelsen and Betáncur in Colombia, as well as “he summarily rejected any suggestions from his fellow left-wingers that he run for chief of state.” (313). A chance that other contemporary Latin American writers with a similar profile —such as Mario Vargas Llosa and Miguel Ángel Asturias— would not miss. He invested his money in independent, left-wing magazines as *Alternativa* during the second part of the seventies, not to mention establishing the Foundation for New Latin American Journalism in 1994. He also bought the

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<sup>8</sup> “en pleno gobierno del Estatuto de Seguridad divulgado por el gobierno de Julio César Turbay Ayala, una acusación de esas equivalía a tortura y cárcel.”

Colombian magazine *Cambio* during the end of the 90s to diversify the one-dimensional political journalism of Colombia. All these acts of altruism are mixed with politically unpleasant facts which evidence an asymmetry between his discourse and his habits. For example, having been “a wealthy man, with seven homes in glamorous locations in five different countries” and being “able to demand (or, more usually, refuse) \$50,000 for a half-hour interview.” (Martin 2009) Or bathing under the Cuban sun for family vacations on the dictator’s yacht *Acuaramas*.<sup>9</sup>

In Rushdie’s case, the clearest example is the *fatwa* triggered in February 1989, which forced him to be a star in seclusion and the embodiment of the tensions between Western liberal democracies and radical Islamic state terrorism<sup>10</sup>. Albeit, this had other benefits, as his memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012) reveals, which enabled his Jet-Set encounters, from (ex-)heads of states like Margaret Thatcher, to the thrill “to swap sunglasses with Bono on stage at Wembley” (Shakespeare 2012), to doing cameos in Hollywood chick-flicks like in *Bridget Jones Diary*, or to visit parties at the Playboy mansion. Even becoming a “knight” in 2007 for his literary services to Queen Elizabeth II and further collecting a repertoire of at least 21 prizes (as tabulated by the British Council) (see English 2005, 345). He has since then, a clear political position as a defender of “the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based” (Rushdie 2001). His first book as a journalist, *The Jaguar’s Smile* (1987), brings him closer to GM, showing his closest adherence to left-wing ideas. The secularist-humanist principles were —he argued after 9/11— the only way that terrorism could be defeated. This position is most clearly evidenced in his support of Western armed interventions, as US

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<sup>9</sup> The information of this paragraph is based on Martin’s official biography, the chronology of the Instituto Cervantes, and Martyris’ and Bell-Villada’s articles. I would like to thank Prof. Bell-Villada for generously sharing a copy of the quoted chapter.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed genealogical reception of *The Satanic Verses* that triggered both the *fatwa* from Ayatollah Khomeini and the censorship in different countries, read the “Introduction” and chapter 1 of Malik’s *From Fatwa to Jihad*.



invasion of Afghanistan, or his fluctuating and timely support to the war in Iraq<sup>11</sup>. He, just like García Márquez followed his ideological lines, has been part of altruistic projects such as advising non-profit organisations for daily meals in South Africa, the Secular Coalition of America, being patron of the association of Humanists UK or as president of PEN American Center defending freedom of speech.

García Márquez has been called “a classic example of the free-standing public intellectual” and a “spokesman for left-wing causes” (Bell-Villada 2016, p. 313). Rushdie’s sympathizers consider him, “a promoter of cosmopolitan ideals – of transnational allegiances – and as a practitioner of what Walkowitz calls ‘cosmopolitan style’, or mixture of styles, that ‘contaminates’ his prose.” (Zimring 2010, p. 6). Both authors share secular principles but there is a political difference between them, as none of García Márquez political dilemmas were focalized in a religious subject, as is the case with Rushdie, and none was as flammable or made him subject to such imminent danger. What is more, both writers’ liberal position would be drawn closer, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the 80s.

Timothy Brennan was probably the first one to point out the first filiation between Rushdie and GM as intellectuals at the end of the 80s. He fashioned them as “literary celebrities”, “Third World cosmopolitans” (1991, p. viii), “Third World author-entertainers”, “literary agents” (p. 79), or even more mockingly they were called members of “the Cosmopolitan Club” (Mangolly 1991, p. 103) of their nationality or cultural continent. In Brennan’s postcolonial approach<sup>12</sup>, it is worth noting how he related formally the work of both writers with the success of their reception, as well as calling into question their

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<sup>11</sup> For Rushdie’s differentiated position along time read “No fondness for the Pentagon’s politics” in *The Guardian*, 09.07.2007.

<sup>12</sup> As Marangoly put it acutely in her review of Brennan’s book, although it never clearly takes a clear ideological position: “Brennan’s major argument can be located in two citations from Frantz Fanon [...] first, Fanon’s assertion that ‘it is at the heart of the national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows’. Second, his claim that any culture that is not national is meaningless.” (1991, p. 103)

legitimizing discourses on their work<sup>13</sup>. He would also —during the second part of the nineties— revise and typify more clearly this category, based again —implicitly— on this filiation, by means of a discourse of liberation, imperialism, neocolonialism and nationalism. This characterization of the “public face of the ‘Third-World’ writer” portrays them bitterly and ironically in the book’s title, as if they were *At Home in the World* (see Brennan 1997, p. 38-41). At his best Brennan managed to capture the dialectic, paradoxical tension embodied in these two writers, as he illustrated their amphibious condition, moving between the Gramscian “imperial universal” and the “national popular” (1991, p. 61). Most of Brennan’s critique of Rushdie is of someone who comfortably makes a living from what he criticizes, localized in the imperial centre, engaging in an extractive business, trafficking and monopolizing the political representation of the periphery. He characterized the third world intellectual, as someone that both appeals for the pathos of his national identity, but focuses, and benefits of the liberal subjectivity and its individualism (see p. 140-141). Brennan argued that this is the model of the Latin American boom, which Rushdie successfully imitated and translated in the Anglophone world. Moreover, he makes a long list of parallels of Rushdie’s novels —*Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*— in the same lineage of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (see p. 66), as of their “successful intervention into the metropolitan bookmarkets” (p. 36). This interpretation would make a large career in the 90s and 2000s with the rise of postcolonial studies, and it frames my narrative.

García Márquez and his heritage of magical realism would be subject to a similar critique from part of the Latin American literary and sociological world of the 90s. The

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<sup>13</sup> Brennan explains with three reasons the attraction produced by Rushdie’s literature: first, visualizing the condition of the subject and the relationship between centre and periphery; second, by this means, not only representing his national identity, but helping to bring into public view other groups —as he illustrates it with the black communities in the case of *The Satanic Verses* in Britain; third, he brought, and translated magical realism into the anglophone canon.

literary anthology of *McOndo* (1996) aimed to introduce the short stories of various male Latin American writers that described another face of the mythical continent. In the words of the editors:

Our McOndo is so Latin American and magic (exotic) like the real Macondo (that, with all this, it isn't real but virtual). Our country McOndo is bigger, overpopulated and extremely polluted, with highways, metro, TV-Cable and slums. In McOndo there are McDonald's, Mac computers and condos, amen, five star hotels built with money laundering and gigantic malls. (Fuguet and Gómez 1996, p. 17, my translation)

The anthology opens with the story of two Latin American writers<sup>14</sup> that are attending a creative writing course at an US-American university, and who are invited to publish in a famous magazine, yet at the end semester their work is rejected because it does not mimic magical realism. In Mexico, the reaction came from a literary group, the "Crack", in the words of Ignacio Padilla, one of their representatives in his "Crack Manifesto" (1996): "There is... a reaction against exhaustion; weariness of having the Latin American literature and the dubious magic realism converted, for our writing, into tragic magicians." (qtd. by de Castro 2014). The diagnostic was not only in the literary field, but also the Chilean sociologist José Joaquín Brunner coined in the term *macondismo* at the beginning of the 90s: "the one [view] that tends to read Latin America through its cultural products, removed from their context. The same pretension of trying to make literature a historical text, to make it reality's testimony, depriving it from its temporal frame. It turns itself, in its own way, into the great narrative of the 'Latin American', and enables to uproot the location and disjoint its temporalities."<sup>15</sup> (von der Walde 1988, my translation) The whole history of the term of

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<sup>14</sup> Both writers, as Fuguet recalls 20 years later, were C. E. Feiling and himself. See his revision "McOndo" of 2016.

<sup>15</sup> "Esta es la mirada que José Joaquín Brunner llama macondista: la que tiende a leer a América Latina desde sus productos culturales, desprovistos de contexto. La misma pretensión de convertir la literatura en el texto de la historia, en el testimonio de la realidad, permite el desanclaje. Se convierte a su manera en la gran narrativa de 'lo latinoamericano' y permite desactivar el lugar y sus temporalidades." For a differentiated history of the

magical realism goes back to the beginnings of the twentieth century. It has a long and disputed career in the anglophone literary and cultural studies, emphasizing one or the other face of the slippery, polysemic, paradoxical term, sometimes as a flag of the postcolonial studies or as a denounced postmodern vice.<sup>16</sup>

In India during the nineties, Rushdie received not only the state censorship, but also in the academy he had a similar reception to that of GM's. As put by Singh, there was a response to magical realism, specifically in the case of Rushdie's *Shame*, "it is as if they [the anglophone Indian writers] wished to assure their Western audiences that a 'journey' to the West is essential to attaining an Indian identity." (1992, p. 151) Later, other cosmopolitan Indo academic critics would take Brennan's approach further. For example, Leela Gandhi pointed out the condition of the postcolonial Indian English novelist, Rushdie being the paradigm, as he who is in a "deliciously 'win-win' situation", "an enviable position of privilege and disempowerment" (Gandhi 1997-98). Later, in the late 2000s, he would be interpreted as exercising "strategic exoticism" (Brouillette 2007, p. 5), and developing "self-conscious gestures", that "are highly saleable to the audiences that arise within this same milieu." (ibid)

Rushdie has pointed at the way his writing, in his cosmopolitan condition, produces "frictions" that "make sparks" (Rushdie qtd. by Brennan 1991, p. 64). Under the light of his liberal<sup>17</sup> convictions and notions of freedom, he has asserted: "Free people strike sparks, and those sparks are the best evidence of freedom's existence." (Rushdie 2002) I have tried to make a brief parallel of the paradoxical results of the literary magical realism of these two

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terms, adaptations and criticisms, read the entrance of the word in the *Diccionario de pensamiento alternativo* (2008) from Biagini and Roig.

<sup>16</sup> For a deeply theoretical and historical approach on the academic debates of the term until the first decade of the 2000s refer to chapter 1 of Eva Aldea's *Magical Realism and Deleuze* (2011).

<sup>17</sup> When I speak of liberalism, I refer to, following the intellectual historian Faisal Devji: "the elaboration of a social order based upon the freedom of ownership and contract. It is this kind of freedom that alone makes a liberal regime of contending interests possible. For it is the freedom of ownership that determines the actions of men by the status, property or labor they might possess, exchange or acquire, all within a framework of contractual relations that makes interests what they are." (68-69)

authors up to the 2000s. The following section of this text aims to answer the question, following Rushdie's reception of García Márquez: Can Rushdie's magical realism, reflecting on itself, thematizing the literary field *still* produce enough friction to make sparks?

### III. In the Name of the Father: Rushdie's tribute to GM

Rushdie's admiration for GM is clear from the original title of his first review, which consistently would resemble the name of one of the main characters of *The Satanic Verses*—with a slight orthographic diacritic—“Angel Gabriel”. Rushdie first published reviews of GM's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *Clandestine in Chile*<sup>18</sup> in the 80s. As Rushdie would later as a master of ceremonies perform—as we will see—in its most dramatic fashion, he stated in his first text on García Márquez, that one of the extraordinary aspects of the most well-known messenger magical realism was “to make the real world behave in precisely the improbably hyperbolic fashion of Márquez story.” (Rushdie 1991, 300) The Colombian writer reciprocated this admiration, as he put it in a personal letter rejecting an invitation to the PEN America in New York in August 9 2003<sup>19</sup>.

After GM's death the 17th of April 2014 Rushdie wrote two obituaries, one after the other, at his two homes in the West: in the *New York Times* and London's *The Telegraph*. The title of the obituaries establishes the acknowledgement of the Colombian writer's literary legacy, one as literary figure and intellectual, “His world was mine”, as the notion and

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<sup>18</sup> Both of them were published independently under the titles “Angel Gabriel” and “A Donkey's Tail for Pinochet”, both collected later in the essay anthology *Imaginary Homelands*.

<sup>19</sup> I did not have access to Rushdie's letter, but following the evidence in the coming paragraphs besides these words of GM, it is safe to derive the judgement from the implicit text: “Querido Salman Rushdie: Gracias por tu carta, cuyas dos líneas iniciales debía haberlas escrito yo en una primera carta para tí. Más aun [sic]: una vez escritas por tí no encuentro cómo empezar esta carta, pues en realidad la tuya debía habértela enviado yo hace muchos años cuando eras un fantasma errante y perseguido.” [Dear Salman Rushdie, thank you for your letter, whose two initial lines I should've written in a letter for you. Moreover, now, once they have been already written by you, I don't find how to start this letter, because the truth is that I should've sent it to you many years ago when you were a wandering and persecuted ghost.] (Letter to Salman Rushdie. Typed letter and photocopy of letter from Rushdie to GGM, 2003 Container 75.5 Harry Ransom Center, my translation)

definition of magical realism preferred by both: “Magic in the Service of Truth”. A quick review of GM’s conceptualization of what Rushdie in his reception calls magical realism will be handy before proceeding. GM never assumed the coinage, but he often spoke in interviews, the most quoted is perhaps the “frank but carefully calculated conversation—expertly staged” (Martin 2009), book length interview *The Fragrance of the Guava* (1982). The other key texts are the Nobel lecture, “The Solitude of Latin America” (1982) and the two rarely mentioned newspaper articles—not yet translated into English—that are the proto-texts which he rewrote and fused into the Nobel speech: “Fantasy and artistic creation” and “Something else on literature and reality”<sup>20</sup> (published in June and July 1981). The guiding thread that is implicit in all these texts is summed up in the statement: “All our [Latin American] history, since the Discovery [of America], has been distinguished for the difficulty of making it believable.”<sup>21</sup> (García Márquez 1995, p. 148) He constantly repeated this same line, always emphasizing the Latin American identity, and himself entitled as a witness to represent it, “I was born and grew up in the Caribbean. I know it country by country, island by island”<sup>22</sup> (p. 156). Worth noting too, is the medial, neutral role he asserted for himself, as put by Martin, he only regarded himself as “just a ‘poor notary’ who copies down what is placed on his desk” (Martin 2009) or in his words: “The farthest that I’ve been able to go, is to transpose reality with poetical resources”<sup>23</sup> (García Márquez 1995, p. 156). Or, as he would render it one year later, clearly directed to an European audience and captured in a self-staged image of helplessness fashioned in the central theme of his most famous novel: “we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been

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<sup>20</sup> “Fantasía y creación artística” and “Algo más sobre literatura y realidad” . All the translations of these texts are mine.

<sup>21</sup> “Toda nuestra historia, desde el Descubrimiento, se ha distinguido por la dificultad de hacerla creer.”

<sup>22</sup> “Yo nací y crecí en el Caribe. Lo conozco país por país, isla por isla” (156)

<sup>23</sup> “Lo más lejos que he podido llegar a es a trasponerla con recursos poéticos, pero no hay una sola línea en ninguno de mis libros que no tenga su origen en un hecho real.”

a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.” (1982b)<sup>24</sup>

Another line that he insistently repeated was: “There’s not a line in any of my books which is not originated in a real fact.” (García Márquez 1995, p. 157; Martin 2009 quotes almost the same line of an interview in an US-American newspaper and *The Fragrance of the Guava*). After making this statement, he proceeds to illustrate what he means with the correlation between facts and his fiction. He gave different examples from his novels, clarifying specific moments that were rendered ‘magically’, and here he puts it in ‘real’ terms: the baby with the tail of a pig (1995, p. 156, this same comment will be repeated in *The Fragrance of the Guava*), the yellow butterflies of Mauricio Babilonia and the ascension to heaven of Remedios the beauty (1982). Rushdie adopted a similar move with *Midnight’s Children*, in an article on the 40th anniversary of Indian independence “The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987”, he revisited it—in their logic—the “real” midnight’s children. To make the real world behave precisely in the improbably hyperbolic fashion of a Rushdie novel.

Rushdie’s definition of magical realism is in the same line, always in reference to GM. Both obituaries repeat it, as his statements in the BBC radio programme *Open Book* after the death of the Colombian writer and the key lecture to “Gabriel García Márquez: His Life and Legacy” at the Harry Ransom Center to celebrate the arrival of his archive to the Texan institution. All of them repeat the following lines:

This is the trouble with the term magical realism: that when people say or hear it, they’re really only hearing or saying half of it, magic without paying attention to the other half, realism. But if magic realism were just magic it wouldn’t matter, it would be near whimsy, writing in which because

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<sup>24</sup> “The main problem with adopting an attitude towards the outside world based on resentment is that it is founded on extremes: either foreign influence is completely shunned, or it is wholly embraced. Intellectuals, who for several decades had been.” (Miller 1999, p. 208)

anything can happen, nothing has affect. It's because the magic in magic realism has deep roots in the real, because it grows out of the real and illuminates it beautiful and unexpected ways that it works.

(41:10-49)<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, according to Rushdie, the central point of magical realism is that “[t]he real, by the addition of the magical, actually gains in dramatic and emotional force. It becomes more real, not less.” (42:35-43:23 | 2014c). He, furthermore, has remarked the similar parallel Macondian reception of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and his *Midnight's Children*: the latter “whose first Western readers saw it as a straightforward fiction, fantasy, while its Indian readers read it almost as a history book.” (38:20-38). This same point, he has repeated insistently on his essay anthology<sup>26</sup>.

When he has aimed to distinguish magical realism as a genre<sup>27</sup>, he has attempted to differentiate it from other two “in vogue” by means of broad generalizations and an intent disregard to any close reading. The first one, “a kind of writing that is almost the antithesis of García Márquez. The vogue term [... of] auto fiction, the literature that shies away from everything invented, that trusts only the deeply autobiographical, the nakedly personal.” (48:16-51:26) His examples were the pseudonymous Italian Elena Ferrante and the Norwegian Karl Knausgaard. The other point of comparison and distinction is what he called “the vogue for fantasy fiction”, specifically “alternate worlds”, he exemplified them with “Tolkien’s Middle-earth, Rowling’s Hogwarts, the dystopic universe of *The Hunger Games*,

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<sup>25</sup> I quote the key note to the congress at the Harry Ransom Center, because it is the last version and it incorporates and refines all the previous.

<sup>26</sup> For instance: “On the novel’s first publication, Western critics tended to focus on its more fantastic elements, while Indian reviewers treated it like a history book.” (2002), “His story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes. Ironically, the book's success—its Booker Prize, etc—initially distorted the way in which it was read. Many readers wanted it to be the history, even the guide book, which it was never meant to be” (1991, p. 23).

<sup>27</sup> In my opinion, the most interesting and exhaustive intent to define magical realism as literary genre from an academic perspective is from Amaryll Chanady in her book *Magical Realism and the Fantastic* (1985). She approaches the problem from Todorov’s symmetrical analysis of genres, through a narratological vantage point, where none can be defined by the laws of reality but rather by the narrative approach and treatment of natural/supernatural events. Following Todorov, she makes a distinction between: the marvelous, the fantastic and the uncanny, to derive her definition.



the places where vampires and zombies prowl” (2014b). What he appears to point at, is two different genres that one appears as strictly “real”, while the other as an autonomous fictional alternate world. Magical realism appears to be a kind of literature that manages to keep the tension between the autobiographical realistic writing and fantasy fiction, as coexisting and articulated realities, not as exclusive ones.

#### IV. Chronicle of a Theft Foretold: The Texan Acquisition of the Caribbean

GM’s 1982 novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* tells the story of a murder announced publically, of which a whole town is aware, but no one prevents. Like a murder, socially consented and legitimized, a theft in a globalized world took place, where Frantz Fanon’s dictum appears to rule: “it is at the heart of the national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (Fanon 2004). I aim to show to which extent the culture industry is an accomplice that subverts literature’s power to imagine different worlds from our own and to make it’s critical heritage mimic mockingly the laws of the market.

The Harry Ransom Center (HRC) at the University of Texas bought García Márquez archive in 2014. Sometime later, in October 2015 Rushdie was invited to celebrate the acquisition as the main lecturer. Just before presenting, in a Macondian fashion, a letter by the ex-president Juan Manuel Santos was read impersonating the “decorative authority” (García Márquez 1995, p. 199, my translation<sup>28</sup>) of Macondo’s mayor, Don Apolinar Moscote congratulating everyone. Afterwards Rushdie was introduced to the stage, where he remolded and expanded his GM’s obituaries. Close to the end of his lecture, after complimenting the Harry Ransom Center for its acquisition, he quoted and corrected biographically a well-known fragment of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*:

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<sup>28</sup> This powerful coinage is translated by G. Rabbasa as: “Don Apolinar Moscote was once more a figurehead” (102)

The occasion of the arrival of his archive here in Austin is perhaps comparable to that fictional American acquisition of the Caribbean... [the audience laughs] You too have carried it off in numbered pieces, to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of, in this case Texas, not Arizona, with everything it had inside, with the reflection of our cities, with our timid drowned people, with our demented dragons, as that great sea of literature is transported to Austin. (59:03-1:00:40)

Rushdie's biographical correction of the previous passage restages how the Colombian Nobel Prize winner interpreted his dictator novel personally back in the 70s. As he put it in an interview on *The Autumn of the Patriarch*: "It's almost a personal confession, a totally autobiographical book, almost a book of memoirs. What's happened, of course, is that they are encoded memoirs; but if instead of seeing a dictator you see a very famous writer who is terribly uncomfortable with his fame, well, with that clue you can read the book and make it work." (GM qtd. by Martin 2009)

Rushdie's approach to the meaning of the acquisition of the García Márquez archive by an US-American academic institution broadens, when contextualized with the brief public discussion which took place in Colombia after the writer's death. Some years earlier, in 2013 a delegate of the Colombian Ministry of Culture was sent to communicate to the family the interest to buy it (see Badawi 2014). However, there was no public offer. One year later, the discussion took place some days after his death, the economic battle lines were drawn: on the one hand, nationalism, that argued for the need to acquire and preserve national cultural, the "material legacy" and the "material debt of Colombia with its beloved Nobel Prize laureate"<sup>29</sup> (ibid, my translation). On the other hand, some months later, the 25th of November of 2014, the family ruled out the discussion with a communiqué, informing of a deal that was long ago closed. They stated that they had sold it under criteria of the skills of conservation and preservation of the literary archive. That was "the Harry Ransom Center" (HRC), which

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<sup>29</sup> "deuda histórica con su Nobel amado".

could do it “better than anyone else”<sup>30</sup> (García Barcha 2014). Moreover, that “in any moment was it auctioned or offered to the highest bidder”<sup>31</sup> (ibid). However, the sum for which it was sold was kept secret as long as possible, it was only revealed in February 2015. The Harry Ransom Center was required by the state attorney general’s office in Texas to reveal the number they would have otherwise preferred to keep in secrecy. They paid 2.2 million US-dollars for the archive. In December 2017 a representative part of the archive was digitized and made public to the general audience with around 27,000 images open for anyone with internet access in English and Spanish. Most of the archive, with some few exceptions —as his unfinished novel— were made public, like for instance the manuscripts of the author’s most well-known novels.

An article in the *The New York Times* appeared flag bearing, in US-American manner, bragging about liberal liberty, with the humble title: “Gabriel García Márquez’s Archive Freely Available Online” (Schuessler 2017). Most of the archive, with some few exceptions —as his unfinished novel— were made public, even some of the most longed for academic work, like the manuscripts of the author’s most well-known novels. The article affirmed, “to make so much material from a writer whose work is still under copyright freely available online is unusual” (Ibid). One must dutifully say, it is not surprising going against the national interest in a world ruled by this form of identities and after receiving such a significant sum. Why would they pay 2.2 million dollars then?

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<sup>30</sup> “Con ese fin, nosotros decidimos que el archivo de los documentos literarios y del correo fuera al Centro Harry Ransom, por ser uno de los lugares que hace éste tipo de archivo y preservación de documentos mejor que nadie.”

<sup>31</sup> “En ningún momento se ofreció este archivo a otros Centros y en ningún momento ni se subastó, ni se buscó al mejor postor.”

A Colombian grantee who performed research at the Harry Ransom Center in the GGM archive last year explained to a certain extent the interest of the institution in the archive, in terms of digital economy:

The number of unique monthly visitors to the webpage, that in average it was of 2600, shot up to 54,5000 with the digital publication, from which 8,000 were Colombians. Today the Ransom Center uses the case of their negotiation with the family García Barcha to convince other writers to permit to show openly their work, still under the surveillance of copyright. This way, they managed to make public some digital archives of the writer David Foster Wallace<sup>32</sup> (Pernett 2018)

To complement this view, I decided to dive into the archive testing the HRC project librarian's statement in the press release: "Anyone with access to the internet can have an in-depth look at García Márquez's archive" (*Harry Ransom Center* 2017). The archive is without a doubt well organized, designed for research and easy to navigate; one can use the Mirador image viewer that facilitates the comparison between different images of the same archive. I also tried to access the objects that were not part of the digitalized public collection. At the beginning, this was not very clear, as they appeared digitalized and when pressing a given image, one suddenly had access to a different image from the archive. Then I decided to write to the HRC describing my problems and requesting a copy of a letter from García Márquez to Rushdie from 2003, in the frame of this academic project and emphasizing that I did not have the financial support to travel to Texas. As this text itself has already evidenced (see note 19), I received it via email in less than 24 hours, the only requirements were creating an online Research Account and writing to the HRC's staff.

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<sup>32</sup> "el número mensual de visitantes únicos a la página web, que en promedio era de 2600, se disparó tras la apertura de la versión digital del archivo garciamarquiano a 54.500, 8000 de los cuales fueron colombianos. Hoy el Ransom Center usa el caso de su negociación con la familia García Barcha para convencer a otros escritores de permitir mostrar libremente en internet sus trabajos, todavía bajo la vigilancia del copyright. De esta manera, también se logró la presentación de algunos archivos digitales del escritor David Foster Wallace, que también reposan en el centro."

Under the light of academic research —as is the case of the cosmopolitan writer of this paper— being able to speak in English being a Colombian native, write emails, and get a copy of an unpublished letter from García Márquez to Rushdie transcontinentally from Texas to New Delhi, it's hard to deny the legitimacy of the HRC's acquisition of the material literary heritage of a totem of the Caribbean. That is, recognizing how it was bought justly —as we could argue along with the definition of justice of GM's Colombian reactionary, literary and intellectual counter figure: “As Justice is the observance of the legal rule, the act according to the rule is just, and the act that breaks it is unjust” (Gómez Dávila 2017, p. 37). Counterfactually stated, it would have been highly improbable, that I had access under these circumstances to such a letter in this condition if the archive had been acquired by the Colombian Ministry of Culture, and if the letter would have been residing in the Biblioteca Nacional or in the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango in Bogotá. The size, the specialization and skills of the HRC's staff is hard to compare —almost 100 persons, from public affairs, marketing, curators, digital librarians, to technicians—, the efficiency and sophisticated system of conservation, cataloging and digitalization is hard to match.

The asymmetry between the technical speed, the economic power of the US-American research institution, with already a decade archival digital experience with its Colombian fellows can be expressed, mockingly, in brief with a sport competition simile —which fits so well our liberal regime: like a race between an US hypersonic rocket-powered aircraft against a Colombian animal-powered mule cart. The correlation between technical proficiency and economic power is not arbitrary. A materialist approach on some national hard facts might yet be meaningful to understand to which extent the consented law ruling the cultural material is —making a subtle change in the law given by the pig-bureaucrats of a fable— that *all nations and institutions are equal, but some nations and institutions are more*

*equal than others*. The digital humanities are no exception. The 2.2 million dollars for the archive recall more than one McOndian scene, the gesture of such an offering is like one performed by the Yankee figure of Mr. Herbert, the embodiment of US imperialism, founder of the banana company in Macondo. The gesture resembles the one of the short story “The Sea of Lost Time”, in which Mr. Herbert makes one of his spectacular interventions in the economy of the town: “He appeared suddenly, he put a table in the middle of the street, and on top of the table two big trunks bursted at the seams of money”<sup>33</sup> (García Márquez 1962, my translation).

Now, I will move away from the “magical”, to move back to the “real”, the material, to see if it actually might gain more “dramatic and emotional force”. *From an economic perspective the Colombian government or any institution could not have easily afforded the GGM archive*. To compare the sum of 2.2 million US-dollars with Colombia’s economy of culture, makes clear to which extent we are still very close to the abyss separating Macondo’s profit from the surplus of Mr. Herbert’s banana company. This is evident in contrast to the only similar historical cultural purchase comparable in terms of literary heritage as part of the Colombian national archives: the philosopher Nicolás Gómez Davilá’s (NGD) legendary 30,000 volume personal library acquired by the Bank of the Republic in 2009<sup>34</sup> —probably the only national contemporary writer in such a polar political opposition, whom GM gave the recognition of an equal<sup>35</sup>. A fact easily explained because of the library’s owner’s

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<sup>33</sup> “Apareció de pronto, puso una mesa en la mitad de la calle, y encima de la mesa dos grandes baúles llenos de billetes hasta los bordes. Había tanto dinero, que al principio nadie lo advirtió, porque no podían creer que fuera cierto.”

<sup>34</sup> I follow the dates in which it was made public that it was bought in the media, the first article that mentions it is, to my knowledge, from the 22nd of March 2009, see Pizano’s article. The archive opened for researchers on April 2011, see Rabier’s article.

<sup>35</sup> As reported by the philosopher Franco Volpi, the editor of Gómez Dávila works, who does not reveal his source: “García Márquez, his gentlemanly adversary, admitted in private: ‘If I wasn’t communist I would think of everything and for everything like him’ [“García Márquez, su caballeroso adversario, en forma privada admitió: ‘Si yo no fuera comunista pensaría en todo y para todo como él’”]. (Volpi 2001, p. 498)

infamous —for the secular and liberal sensitivity— self-fashioning as an anti-democratic “authentic reactionary”, as well as his systematic elusion of the limelight. For these same reasons, he is still on the margins of the Anglophone bookmarket<sup>36</sup>, while being translated long ago to every other major Western language. This special condition gave enough time —the generous sum of 15 years— to the Colombian Bank of the Republic to purchase the library even against other bidders<sup>37</sup>.

The information of the exact economic value is not public, but a testimony during the years which it was bargained left some evidence to strike the magic and the real sparks out of our cosmopolitan debate: “during the mid nineties, the Department of National Planning reserved 400 million pesos for the acquisition of this collection [NGD’s library], however, the family found the offer too low, refusing to sell it for less than 1,200 million pesos”<sup>38</sup> (Jorge Orlando Melo qtd. by Badui-Quesada 182, my translation). Melo’s testimony is from the year 2000. The Colombian government’s trunk of money is comparable on the base of an economic analysis<sup>39</sup> with Mr. Ransom’s trunks: the money paid for the GD’s library would represent approximately 670 thousand dollars, which is evidently only approximately the 30% of the money that ransomed the archive from its national identity. The same evidence

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<sup>36</sup> His work has been published in more strange and surprising ways, resisting the economic regime of the market: in a blog *Don Colacho’s Aphorisms* (2010-2011) by an anonymous ‘Stephen’, later in 2012 by a small selection of his scholia by a Professor of Mathematics, Architectural Theory and Urbanism at the UTSA. The former effort would probably later censored by the copyrighted translation of the same selection in English but published in the Spanish speaking world in 2013, in Bogotá, which has conserved its location systematically, in his fashion, in the periphery of the anglophone bookmarket.

<sup>37</sup> An article in 1997 said before its condition was defined: “many universities of the world have been interested in its acquisition” [“varias universidades del planeta se han interesado en su adquisición”]. (*Semana* 1998)

<sup>38</sup> “a mediados de los años noventa, Planeación Nacional reservó 400 millones de pesos para la adquisición de esta colección [la biblioteca de NGD], sin embargo, a la familia le pareció muy baja la oferta negándose a venderla por menos de 1200 millones de pesos, prefiriendo conservar la biblioteca un tiempo más.”

<sup>39</sup> I thank my friend Diego Ramos-Toro, Ph.D. candidate in economics at the Brown University for helping analyse and making the time-value conversions of the given sources. He gave me two possible interpretative cases based on the given evidence: 1. “The transaction was made for a value equivalent to 1200 million pesos during the mid nineties (i.e. 1200 million pesos taken to the present value of 2009)”. 2. “1200 millions were paid in year 2009 for NGD’s library (i.e. 1200 millions of the year 2009)”. My interpretation opts for the second speculation, considering that it would have been unlikely that the family would have bargained for less than what they marked as its minimum price during the mid-nineties. A more detailed account can be read in the appendix.

can be drawn shifting the countries interests from another point view, from the perspective of the General Budget of the Nation (GBN), in which the effort of the state would represent 0.0008% of it to acquire NGD's library and in relation to it, the acquisition of García Márquez archive would have represented an effort of the 0.00238% to acquire GM's archive. But these numbers pale in comparison to the money invested in the auto-immune civil war and the self-destructive business of self-defense, which for the year 2014 represented 17,9% of the GBN, i.e. 13 billion dollars for killing ourselves (see *Semana* 2014).

Rushdie's critical approach is thought provoking to discuss the acquisition of sources of archival and empirical practice of GM's works in the frame of a cosmopolitan debate, where genre branding, the marketing of authorial identities, and the commodification of the their inheritance plays an important role. Interesting to point at is that Rushdie, in this case, moved away from his traditional defense of cosmopolitanism and through literary strategies showed solidarity towards Colombian nationalism. A position understandable from the following point of view: first, of a world far from the subjection of national identities and with no clear alternative in the horizon. Second, Colombia and its institutions being in an evidently weaker and more vulnerable and economic condition than the US-American. Third, because of the symbolic, cultural and social capital that such an acquisition represents having such an archive inland; i.e. the researchers that will come to visit it and the technical and archival challenges that such an archive would have implied to a Colombian institution, as well as its visibility enabled by clicks. All these were exchanged and bought by the alliance of economic capital and technical skills of the HRC in the system of production of self-validation of schemes of justification, as shown previously.



After Rushdie recited the rewritten and dissenting fragment of *The Autumn*, he proceeded to quote with no biographical corrections Aureliano Babilonia's re-reading of the annihilating cataclysm that finalizes *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This fragment is often interpreted politically as a "a cyclical view of history — a denial of any accumulation of collective experience and a return to the fables with which the history of the Americas began in the late fifteenth century"<sup>40</sup> (Miller 1999, p. 242). However, García Márquez rewrote and read out loud the ending of his deep meditation on Latin American loneliness, not as political literature which he did in his novel, but later as he said, as "a political speech presented as literature" (GM qtd. by Parkinson Zamora 2007, p. 209). That was the political progressive speech he read when he earned the Nobel Prize. Then he stated how he longed Latin America to be seen with eyes that would enable social equality with different methods in dissimilar contexts, as he had managed to do and be valued with literature. He asked Europeans to let us be measured by our own yardstick, he asked for a reconsideration of how Latin Americans were defined by the hierarchizing fixed gaze of more powerful neocolonial nations. GM changed his narrative discourse from an apocalyptic narrator of his novels<sup>41</sup> to an utopist one

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<sup>40</sup> Parkinson Zamora has made a good summary of the many approaches to this interpretation, from which, she, as I following her take distance: "Several critics have commented on the cyclical movement inherent in Macondo's structure. Ricardo Gullón and G. D. Carillo emphasize the repetition of the Buendías' names and personalities, the recurring events and activities from one generation to another; the seemingly endless series of futile civil wars that involve one character after another; Carmen Arnau describes Macondo as cyclical in the Spenglerian sense that the town participates in birth, growth, maturity, decline, death, and rebirth. This is certainly so during the course of Macondo's 100-year history, but those 100 years do come to an end, and a rebirth ultimately fails to occur." (2007, p. 185)

<sup>41</sup> Here I am following Parkinson Zamora's article (2007), which I consider is much more consistent interpretation than the cyclical one. She traces and parallels García Márquez narrators with Judeo-Christian apocalyptic writings. She describes the narrator, Melquíades, as who "recounts the past, present, and future of Macondo from a point beyond the future." (p. 184) "For Melquíades, the future is past." (p. 184); the characters "are inextricably bound to their pasts and, at the same time, long for the future." (p. 187); and politically it means: "the paradigms of apocalypse impose an ending that confers historical significance." (p. 204) "Apocalypse is inextricably tied to political realities; it both responds to and imaginatively embodies social and political upheaval. The biblical apocalyptic visionary mode developed in response to political and moral crises, as I have said, and its forms have flourished when the established understanding of the history of a community is challenged. Apocalypse proposes radical changes in the organization of future world governance, in reaction to existing inadequacies and abuses." (p. 204)

<sup>42</sup> in his political speech. Let's remember why García Márquez made such a narrative turn in the stage of society. He was there because of his literature, which like a biblical apocalyptic visionary mode developed in response to political and moral crises, its forms flourished when the established understanding of the history of a community was challenged. Apocalypse proposes radical changes in the organization of future world governance, in reaction to existing inadequacies and abuses, it is, to use Spivak understanding of literature, "the experience of the impossible, ethical discontinuity shaken up in a simulacrum." (Spivak 2002, p. 23). Let's remember why his face is in a bill, why he socially served a community to become an alternative value to the simple stereotypes of banana republics and still competes with the commodities most leisurely and compulsively consumed in the global market and associated with the Colombian identity, the psychoactive substances of coffee and cocaine. Instead of using him indifferently as a token of exchange, let us understand why the bill gained the picture and not simply why it should matter only as the virtual representation of the weight of gold as a form of exchange. Let's remember how he performed an excess to the symbolic political economy that triggered a new configuration of the field and the conventions that set the demands of readers of what to expect from a writer of a postcolonial country.

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<sup>42</sup> "A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth." (GM "The Loneliness...")

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## Appendix

### Supuesto 1:

**La transacción se hizo por un valor equivalente a los 1200 millones de pesos de mediados de los noventa (i.e., 1200 millones de mediados de los noventa llevado a valor presente del año 2009).** En ese caso el cálculo del primer ejercicio no cambia en nada, y llevado a dólares del 2014 la transacción de Gómez Dávila seguiría siendo aprox. 58% del valor de los archivos GGM

Bajo este supuesto, el segundo ejercicio cambia ligeramente porque ahora el denominador ya no es el presupuesto general de la nación del 98 sino el PGN de 2009, mientras que el denominador es el valor presente de la transacción en el año 2009. El segundo ejercicio arrojaría que el estado hizo un esfuerzo correspondiente al 0.00191% del PGN de 2009 para comprar la biblioteca de GD, lo cual es significativamente menor que el esfuerzo fiscal que habría tenido que hacer para conseguir los archivos GGM (como digo en la nota, un esfuerzo equivalente al 0.00238%). En este caso, la no compra del archivo GGM podría ser entonces la consecuencia de un estado que le faltan capacidades fiscales para efectuar la compra.

### Supuesto 2:

**Se pagaron 1200 millones en el año 2009 por la biblioteca GD (i.e., 1200 millones del año 2009).** En este caso, llevando esa plata al año 2014 tendríamos que el estado gastó aproximadamente 670 mil dólares por la biblioteca GD, lo cual es significativamente menor que el archivo GGM (2.2 millones de dólares) al representar solamente el 30% de tal gasto.

El segundo ejercicio arrojaría una conclusión similar y de hecho aún más fuerte en términos numéricos que arriba, pues eso implicaría que el estado hizo un esfuerzo equivalente al 0.0008% del PGN del 2009 para conseguir la biblioteca GM, lo cual languidece frente al esfuerzo del 0.00238% que habría tenido que hacer en el 2014 para conseguir los archivos GGM.