
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Writing based on the Bible: Rereading García Márquez's *Eréndira*

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ABSTRACT

La increíble y triste historia de la Cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada (1972) is an important middle grade novel by Marquez, and the biblical metaphors contained in the text have been neglected by critics. By employing Frye's biblical archetypal criticism, a comparative analysis of the novel and the Bible reveals that Márquez's text is imbued with central imagery from the metaphorical paradise of the Garden of Eden and the demonic imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah that adheres to the biblical framework of sin-punishment-redemption, which is fundamental to its structure. From the perspectives of imagery, characterization, narrative structure, and theme, the Bible emerges as the primary symbolic source and foundation of the text. Thus, *Eréndira* can be viewed as an allegory that employs the Bible as a metaphorical model. This analysis reveals the deeper thematic concerns and narrative artistry in Márquez's work, highlighting the complex interplay between sin and redemption.

KEYWORDS

Marquez; *Eréndira*; biblical metaphor; narrative structure

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1. Introduction

In 1972, five years after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez published a collection of short stories under the title of the tale "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother" (*La increíble y triste historia de la Cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada*, 1972)¹. *Eréndira* is a tragic story about a young girl, Eréndira, who is forced into prostitution by her ruthless grandmother after accidentally causing a fire that destroys their home. Eréndira endures a vagrant life of exploitation until she meets Ulises, a boy who falls in love with her and attempts to rescue her. Eréndira implores Ulises to kill her grandmother, but he fails multiple times. Eventually, Ulises succeeds in killing the grandmother, but Eréndira escapes without looking back. This narrative explores themes of sin, punishment, and redemption.

Joel Hancock (1978) speaks highly of *Eréndira*: "It is a long narrative which has enjoyed more critical attention than its companion pieces a work so complex that the question of influences could be discussed indefinitely" (p.44). This evaluation objectively demonstrates the significance and depth of *Eréndira's* explicability. Traditional interpretative perspectives on the text over the past few decades have included literary genres, mythological allegory, hegemony, postcolonialism, and historicist criticism. Some critics have analyzed the text on a cultural and anthropological level. As César López (2006) has pointed out, "the *Eréndira* tale also connects the indigenous and Creole worlds of Latin America with the myths and folklore of the Old World, specifically those of Spain and Latin America." (p.79) This type of cultural analysis enriches the symbolic sources of the work. Today, the sources of the basic symbols in the story are typically considered to comprise Western literature, including ancient Greek mythology, Homeric

¹ Later titles are abbreviated to *Eréndira*.

epics, Spanish Golden Age works, Grimm's fairy tales, and Melville's *Moby-Dick*, as well as native Latin American myths and folklore².

Now, we will provide a new interpretation of the symbolic origins of *Eréndira*. Penuel (1988) argues that "The allusions that abound throughout his works entice the reader to seek deeper patterns of meaning, but rarely yield their meanings in an exclusively straight forward manner" (p.67). Indeed, the surface of the text does not seem to be connected to the Bible, and the multitude of ambiguous imagery constitutes an obstacle to analysis. Consequently, critics have apparently overlooked the richness of the biblical elements in the story. We attempt to decipher this ambiguous discourse. Utilizing Frye's biblical archetypal criticism and the method of para-reading, we will demonstrate that the Bible is the fundamental source of the literary symbols in *Eréndira*. We will first scrutinise the numerous biblical metaphors in *Eréndira* and then show the similar "sin-punishment-redemption" structural pattern present in both narratives.

2. Biblical Imagery Metaphors: Heaven or Devil's Land?

2.1 The Garden of Eden and the Orange Orchard

Eréndira is replete with imagery, and a comparison of this imagery with biblical texts reveals that it is, in fact, a biblical metaphor. Northrop Frye, in *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982), categorizes biblical imagery into revelatory imagery and, conversely, demonic imagery. Biblical revelatory imagery encompasses paradise imagery, pastoral imagery, agricultural imagery, urban imagery, and life imagery. This type of imagery expresses "the ideal world (looking at it from one point of view) which the human creative imagination envisages, which human energy tries to bring into being"(p. 139). The story of the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament's Genesis narrates the origin of human history, and the oasis imagery suggests a higher mode of life, an important type of imagery in the Bible that focuses on trees and water. In *Eréndira*, the orange orchard of Ulises' house is a recreation of the Garden of Eden.

The Garden of Eden in the East is oasis imagery, most notably the trees in the garden: "And out of the ground made the LORD God grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9). God additionally commanded Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Genesis 2:17). However, Adam and Eve, the progenitors of humankind, were tempted by the serpent to partake of the forbidden fruit and were subsequently expelled by God from the Garden of Eden..

In *Eréndira*, Ulises' father owned a large orange orchard surrounded by exotic flowers. This orchard, located not far from the Badlands, possessed an Edenic quality in contrast to the barren desert. Additionally, an even stronger proof lies in the special feature of the oranges: each orange contains a diamond at its center. In the Garden of Eden, the forbidden fruit embodied the power of knowledge; similarly, the oranges, as smuggled goods, are 'forbidden' and symbolize wealth, creating a connection between the two. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is clearly linked to the discovery of sexuality, and the first mention of the diamond-containing orange, when Ulises first enters the tent where *Eréndira* is prostituting herself, is closely related to sexuality.

In terms of plot, *Eréndira* is also a clear metaphor for the Garden of Eden. To help *Eréndira* escape and survive, Ulises steals three oranges from the orchard. However, breaking the taboo results in displacement. Ulises, who has not yet sinned, takes the forbidden fruit and drives into the barren desert, effectively guided by an unseen thread of destiny from the Garden of Eden to the land of sin. In this journey, Ulises becomes a phantom of Adam, and like Adam, he can never return to innocence after stealing the forbidden fruit.

2.2 Sodom, Gomorrah and House, Tent

Frye(1982) points out that there are two forms of demonic imagery in the Bible, one of which is "the manifest, or you-just-wait demonic, the ruins and wasteland haunted by hyenas and screech owls that all this glory will eventually and inevitably become"(p. 140). Typical demonic imagery in the Bible includes Sodom and Gomorrah. In *Eréndira*, this demonic imagery transforms into the grandfather's house and the tent of prostitution.

The first point to be made is that in *Eréndira*, the dwellings and tents are implicitly designed to contain elements of the Garden of Eden. The Bible explicitly states that "before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt"(Genesis 13:10), implying that Sodom and Gomorrah itself are two-sided. The dwellings in *Eréndira* can be seen as either demonic imagery, similar to the nature of Sodom and Gomorrah's crimes, or as revelatory imagery, depending on the

² For a more detailed analysis of the relevance of *Eréndira* to ancient Greek mythology, see Beesley (1991)'s *The Battle for Eréndira*. It is also described in Cuéllar (2014)'s article *La realidad como fundamento de la imaginación en La cándida Eréndira* (Reality as the foundation of the imagination in *La cándida Eréndira*).

perspective. Before the calamitous winds plunged the ancestral home into flames, the dwelling is depicted as a magnificent, spacious, fortified house with a beautiful garden attached, resembling a small oasis in the middle of a barren desert, akin to the Garden of Eden in the midst of chaos. A similar context occurs in the case of the tent, where the Tree of Wisdom can only grow in the Garden of Eden, but the forbidden fruit is, after all, being plotted for use in the tent.

In Genesis, when the LORD heard that "the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous" (Genesis 18:19), he sent two angels to see if there was only one righteous man, Lot, in the city. After Lot left the city, "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground"(Genesis 19:24-25). Similarly, in *Eréndira*, "The house was far away from everything, in the heart of the desert."(p.3), situated in extremely harsh natural conditions, aligning with the nature of demonic imagery. The destruction of the house parallels the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "the wind of her misfortune came into the bedroom like a pack of hounds and knocked the candle over against the curtain."(p.7)After the fire, the large, beautiful, and luxurious house lay in ruins. Despite the punishment of eternal fire in Sodom and Gomorrah, the people continued their acts of fornication, "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 1:7) In the same vein, in the aftermath of the disaster, instead of showing more tolerance toward her granddaughter, the grandmother intensified her behavior and imposed upon young *Eréndira* the lustful sins of her past as a prostitute.

The place that housed the sin of lewdness was a tent. Initially constructed with thin iron sheets and remnants of Asian carpets, the tent was used by *Eréndira* for prostitution during the day and served as a residence for her grandmother and herself at night. As *Eréndira* gradually "became a phenomenon" (Oldwin, 2018), the interior of the tent became luxurious, resembling their previous residences. This "destroy-build" transition from dwelling to tent is akin to the destruction and rebuilding of Jerusalem in the Bible. The Book of Nehemiah records that Jerusalem was afflicted and "Jerusalem lieth waste and the gates thereof are burned with fire"(Nehemiah 2:17), but was eventually rebuilt. In a sense, this tent of prostitution is comparable to the Jerusalem that descends from heaven in the Book of Revelation. In the Bible, Jerusalem is described as a tabernacle: "the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down" (Isaiah 33:20). Even this tent possessed its own believers: "all the soldiers of the local garrison were awaiting their turn" (p. 16). Not only the soldiers but also the local inhabitants came in droves when they heard about it. Even the women formed a procession to see *Eréndira*, an act that clearly resembled a pilgrimage. *Eréndira*'s tent was a demonized "holy city" with a carnal congregation. The location of the tent is also related to Jerusalem: "the tent in another seaside town which the glass buildings gave the look of an illuminated city"(p. 50). The New Jerusalem is described as: "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass" (Revelation 21:18). Through the imagery of glass, this tent is a metaphor for Jerusalem.

The reconstruction of a space that simultaneously embodies the opposite natures of heaven and the city of the devil remains firmly linked to the history of sin; moreover, it re-enters a new cycle of sin. The desert, which is so desolate that it contains the house and the tent, can be seen as a metaphor for sinful Sodom and Gomorrah. God has sworn to make Sodom and Gomorrah " the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation" (Zephaniah 2:9), where the land and its people who have committed sin will receive punishment. Clearly, the author is implicitly reflecting on the plight of Latin American reality: "The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them, a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them." (Joel 2:3). Will the influence of European civilization on Latin America lead to its advancement or to its desolation?

3. Biblical Narrative Structure and Character: The Sin-Punishment-Redemption of Ulises

3.1 Narrative Structure

According to Frye (1982), "The entire Bible, viewed as a 'divine comedy,' is contained within a U-shaped story of this sort"(p.169). The U-shaped narrative structure is similar to that in the Book of Judges, "the apostasy being followed by a descent into disaster and bondage, which in turn is followed by repentance, then by a rise through deliverance to a point more or less on the level from which the descent began."(p.169) We can encapsulate this as sin-punishment-salvation mode. The textual structure of *Eréndira* aligns with this narrative pattern. The three main characters and the evolution of the storyline clearly reflect this theme. Each character carries sin in varying degrees, suffers punishment, and ultimately finds redemption.

In the Bible, the patriarchs of mankind were exiled by God for their sins, displaced from their homes on earth, and ultimately returned to heaven through the crucifixion of Jesus, who served as the "scapegoat" for all of mankind, thus realizing the ultimate salvation. In *Eréndira*, the grandfather Amadeus commits murder and starts wandering. After the house burns down, the grandmother takes *Eréndira* and continues wandering in the desert. Eventually, Ulises kills the grandmother and saves *Eréndira*.

Eréndira Sinfulness pervades the text; it begins with the murder committed by the grandfather Amadis in order to take away the grandmother, who was a prostitute at the time. This is followed by the sin of lewdness involving both the grandmother and

Eréndira, in addition to the crime of theft committed by Ulises. Like the Israelites who were dispersed throughout the land, the characters in the story suffer the punishment of wandering. This wandering in the barren desert includes the grandmother's journey of prostitution with Eréndira, Ulises' escape with Eréndira, and Eréndira's final run alone.

The plot and theme of salvation are also evident in the text, with the threefold salvation including Amadeus' salvation of the grandmother, the grandmother's salvation of Eréndira (the grandmother raising her granddaughter, Eréndira, on her own can be seen as an act of salvation), and Ulises' salvation of Eréndira.

3.2 The Sin-Punishment-Redemption of Ulises

Since the name Ulises is derived from ancient Greek mythology, many critics have taken this as a starting point, claiming that "In this story, Greco-Roman mythology overlaps, mingles with, and conflicts with Judeo-Christian myth; but the allegory associated with the primary characters is strongly founded in the Greco-Roman" (Beesley, 1991). In fact, this complex character is rooted in the Bible, with Ulises embodying a fusion of multiple biblical figures and archetypes, including Adam, Cain, and Jesus. His behavior is a crucial narrative impetus, clearly presenting the biblical narrative structure of "sin-punishment-redemption". This paper will take this character as an example and analyze him in detail according to the three stages of crime, punishment, and salvation.

Ulises, the criminal. In the Book of Exodus (20:13-15), Moses made a covenant with God on Mount Sinai, which is known as the Ten Commandments. Among these, "Thou shalt not kill", "Thou shalt not commit adultery", and "Thou shalt not steal" are the first three. Lanier (2018) argues that the order of the commandments related to murder, adultery, and stealing is potentially complex. Part of the complexity of this sequence lies in the underlying religious attitude toward determining the severity of the offenses. The sequence of Ulises' crimes follows precisely this order, from least to most serious. First, Ulises, as a metaphor for Adam, most closely resembles Adam's behavior in that he, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, steals the oranges, which his father regards as forbidden fruit, thereby violating the commandment "Thou shalt not steal". In fact, "Ulises' most frequent activity in the novella is stealing" (Marting, 2001). He steals money from his father's wallet to pay for his first trip to Eréndira's tent and follows this by stealing his father's truck, revolver, and oranges to take her on the run. These thefts mirror the theft of Adam, the patriarch of mankind. Second, Ulises commits adultery. From an objective point of view, Ulises and Eréndira were a whoremonger and a prostitute, which is an "abomination" in the eyes of Scripture (Jeremiah 7:10). Ulises, by "separated with whores" (Hosea 4:14), was bound to move farther and farther from God, thus committing the most serious of sins. Finally, Ulises took on the role of Cain and rose up to kill grandmother. Cain's murder of his brother is the first murder recorded in the Bible. Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve, killed his brother Abel in the field because God valued Abel's offering over his own. This murder is not the first in Eréndira; the grandfather Amadeus also kills a man to save a prostitute, but his killing is not exactly considered murder. In contrast, Ulises' actions fit the definition of murder perfectly, retelling the story of Cain.

Ulises the Punished. Breaking taboos must be punished, and being punished is a way of atoning for sins. However, unlike Grandmother and Eréndira, who were forced to wander as a form of punishment, Ulises' primary punishment was abandonment. After committing all his sins and killing grandmother with all his strength, Ulises sits in a stupor while Eréndira runs away with the gold vest. Ulises, "calling her with painful shouts that were no longer those of a lover but of a son" (p.59), experiences a shift in status from an equal lover or accomplice to that of a mother's son, completely and callously abandoned by her. The imagery of the "child abandoned by his mother" parallels the human experience of being abandoned by God. God, as Creator, assumes the quintessentially maternal function of "procreation" (Trible, 1973). So, the relationship between Adam and God can be seen as that of a child and a mother, and the primal act of abandonment, in which God casts Adam out of the Garden of Eden, reappears in *Eréndira*. The end faced by the abandoned child is wandering. When Ulises steps out of his home in the Orangery, his father declares, 'Wherever you go, your father's curse will follow you' (p. 49), and his mother tells his father, 'He will never come back' (p. 50). These two lines once again evoke the story of the Garden of Eden; the father's curse corresponds to Jehovah's curse, while the mother's words prophesize Ulises' fate: once fallen, purity will never return, and the Son of Man will surely wander forever.

Ulises the Deliverer. Salvation is an important theme in the Bible and the central theme of *Eréndira*. The biblical figures closely associated with the act of salvation are angels and Jesus. In fact, Ulises is not only a metaphor for Adam, the patriarch of mankind but also for angels and Jesus. Ulises is often likened to an angel in the depiction of his appearance. Wings are a typical part of an angel, and the first time grandmother sees Ulises, she asks him, 'What happened to your wings?' (p. 19) and tells him to come back the next day with his wings, thus implying Ulises' identity as an angel. Additionally, the author directly uses the word 'angel' to describe Ulises: 'with the appearance of a furtive angel' (p. 16), 'Ulises hid behind his angel face' (p. 52), and 'He had an unreal aura about him, and he seemed to be visible in the shadows because of the very glow of his beauty' (p. 19). On the other hand, relevant proof of this is the imagery of the eye and the gold writing; Ulises symbolizes Jesus. The eye is associated in the Bible with the teachings of Jesus, who said to his disciples, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." (Matthew 6:22) Bright eyes equate to a bright mind. A description of Ulises' eyes appears several times in the text: "who was riding in the other seat, was a gilded adolescent with lonely maritime eyes" (p.16). Ulises' body is also described by

Eréndira as "made of gold all over" and "smell of flowers"(p.22). The gold and the aroma point to Jesus, who received gold, myrrh, and frankincense as gifts from wise men from the East at his birth. Like Jesus, he could only save others, but not himself. Ulises took on the responsibility of saving Eréndira, which ultimately led to his own destruction.

4. Results and Discussion

Of course, as a representative writer of Latin America, Márquez's work is not an exact equivalent of the Bible, the center of European civilization, and the biblical elements of *Eréndira* are often distorted. Like the Bible, there is a historical cycle of sin in the story of *Eréndira*: Ramatis kills a man to redeem the grandmother, and Ulises kills the grandmother to redeem Eréndira. However, Eréndira breaks this cycle and transcends it. This transcendence of fate's wheel is based on Eréndira's sense of autonomy; she initiates Ulises' request to kill her grandmother in exchange for her freedom. However, after Ulises kills her grandmother, Eréndira immediately takes her belongings and abandons him, fleeing on her own. This 'broken' flight allows Eréndira's redemption to be truly accomplished, achieving complete freedom, a state of liberty from all restraints.

The wandering journey of Eréndira and her grandmother follows the smuggling route and eventually reaches the sea. At their first meeting, Ulises tells Eréndira that those "who die in the desert don't go to heaven but to the sea"(p.20). The sea symbolizes the water of life, the antithesis of the desert, and a link to heaven. In the Bible, man "loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation"(Frye,1982,p,169), and the story follows this pattern. At the end of the story, they finally reach the coast, and Ulises and grandmother fight their final battle there. However, it is the grandmother, not Eréndira, who dies on the beach, completing her individual atonement through a brutal death, while Eréndira eventually returns to the desolate region.

Obviously, Eréndira's destination is not heaven, and "García Márquez does not consider Ulises to be her saviour"(Marting, 2001). Through this thought-provoking ending, the author shows that even with the help of Ulises, who symbolizes the Son, Eréndira is ultimately unable to escape the desolate land of sin. The sacred biblical text is parodied, and by applying and subverting it, Márquez dissolves the solemn sanctity of religion. This complex attitude toward religion reveals Márquez's ambivalence as an ethnically Latin American writer. It also declares that the people of Latin America cannot be truly saved through European civilization. Only by exploiting and breaking free, as Eréndira does, can they find a new path.

This study employs Frye's biblical archetypal criticism to conduct a detailed analysis of the symbolic origins in Márquez's *Eréndira*. However, there are several limitations to this approach. Firstly, the reliance on a single critical perspective may constrain a multidimensional understanding of the text, and it does not deeply explore the underlying meanings of the biblical metaphors or their impact on the story's themes. Additionally, while some cultural and historical contexts are mentioned, the analysis does not thoroughly examine how these contexts influence Márquez's writing. Future research should delve deeper into the historical and cultural backgrounds of Latin America, especially focusing on how colonial history, political environments, and social issues are reflected in *Eréndira*. Examining how these historical factors intertwine with biblical elements can offer a more profound understanding of the work's social critique. Furthermore, integrating the rich indigenous cultural and mythological elements present in Márquez's works and comparing them with biblical narratives can elucidate their functions within the text. A more thorough analysis of biblical metaphors should be conducted to uncover their deeper meanings and their influence on the story's themes, thereby revealing the text's critical perspective on contemporary realities. Through these approaches, future research can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of *Eréndira*, highlighting its complex symbolic system and significant social commentary.

5. Conclusion

In past studies of *Eréndira*, interpretations derived from other European literature have received much attention, while interpretations of biblical origins have not been thoroughly explored. According to Frye's definition, a metaphor is 'this is that' (p. 25). He states, "Metaphorical meaning has for me a primary and a derived sense, the primary one being so broad that it is really a tautology"(p.61). In fact, the entire *Eréndira* can be seen as a biblical metaphor, as the components of the text are distinctly biblical in nature. Through a careful reading of the text, it becomes evident that the various kinds of imagery, characters, narrative structure, and themes are all closely related to the Bible. This proves that *Eréndira* is deeply rooted in biblical tradition. By recognizing these biblical elements, we gain a richer appreciation of Márquez's narrative artistry and the profound moral and spiritual questions he explores. The integration of biblical metaphors provides a lens through which the reader can discern the complex interplay between sin and redemption, thereby illuminating the novel's enduring literary significance.

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