

Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

Bi-monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 1-202

1. Since One Hundred Years of Solitude chronicles seven generations of the Buendía family, whose members share the same or similar names, readers may have trouble at first keeping the characters straight. (For a clearer genealogical chart than the one in our edition, see https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/One_Hundred_Years_Of_Solitude_Buendia%27s_Family_Tree.svg.)

If you are having trouble remembering the details of the complex lives of so many characters, you can find chapter-by-chapter summaries on the Mission Impossible: Márquez web site:

- <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/o/100-years-of-solitude/about-100-hundred-years-of-solitude>
 - <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/solitude/>
2. Márquez said that he agonized over the first paragraph of every novel because it must contain the key threads that he will weave into the fabric of the entire novel. What do the following threads from the first paragraph of One Hundred Years of Solitude suggest about the historical, political, and/or mythic scope of this novel?
 - Aureliano Buendía as a military man
 - The founding of Macondo as a new world
 - The marvels brought by Melquíades from the outside world
 - José Arcadio Buendía's search for gold
 - The discovery of a fifteenth-century suit of armor
 - The family names (Arcadio, Buendía, Aureliano)
 3. How are knowledge and technology represented in the novel? For example,
 - The wonders brought by Melquíades (magnet, spyglass, magnifying glass, compass, astrolabe, sextant, daguerreotype photography)
 - José Arcadio Buendía's schemes (using magnifying glasses as weapons of war, using daguerreotypes to prove the existence of God, building an alchemical laboratory to find the philosopher's stone) and his quest to open a path to the world of inventionsIs knowledge/technology the serpent in the garden of this new world? Or does it represent social and historical progress? Or something else entirely?
 4. How are we to understand the "solitude" of the novel's title?
 - Which characters experience solitude?
 - What causes their solitude?
 - By its origin and geography is Macondo a realm of solitude? For good or for ill?
 - Is solitude, as seen in this novel, primarily a spatial, social, psychological, historical, and/or metaphysical condition?
 5. Perhaps love is what can break through solitude.
 - Does the novel provide examples of love breaking through solitude?

- Does the novel provide examples of sexual passion breaking through solitude?
 - Does passion sometimes exacerbate solitude in the novel?
6. Incest, committed or narrowly avoided, reappears throughout the generations of the Buendía family.
 - What significance do you find in this family's fear of and attraction to incestuous relationships?
 - Does Márquez's depiction of incest simply tell the truth about a common occurrence in isolated villages, or does the recurrence of incest in the family carry symbolic import?
 - How might the novel's treatment of incest relate to its treatment of solitude?
 7. Do the female characters in the novel simply replicate common sexist stereotypes (woman as guarantor of domestic/social order, as sexual object, as Earth Mother) or is Márquez consciously employing character types? If so, to what end—comedy, satire, social/political commentary, etc.?
 8. The town of Macondo and the Buendía house are at the center of this novel, even as the plot divides into the stories of the country's civil wars and the stories of the family's daily life.
 - Do you have experiences of a small town and/or of a family impacted by a country's large political and/or societal changes? If so, do your own real experiences relate to the fantastical place and history that Márquez describes?
 - How have Macondo and the Buendía house changed from the founding?
 - What external forces have precipitated changes?
 9. Despite the proliferation of incident and detail in this novel, can you identify patterns that reappear in these characters' lives?
 - Do characters with similar names have similar character traits? Or do traits repeat, but skip generations?
 - Do certain types of events keep reoccurring through the generations?
 - Is the family plagued by other forms of repetition?
 - How are we to understand these repetitions—as Fate, as the cyclic patterns of history, as unchanging human nature, as the failure of human progress, as something else entirely?
 10. How has the government of Macondo developed over the years?
 - What role has the founder José Arcadio Buendía played in its governance?
 - When and why does the government begin to change?
 - What leads to Aureliano Buendía's radicalization?
 11. How do the revolution and the civil wars change Arcadio and Aureliano Buendía?
 - How does Márquez describe the ultimate results of the revolution and civil wars?
 - How are we to reconcile Márquez's representation of revolution in this novel with his long-time support of the Cuban revolution?
 - Does this novel take any political position?

12. The back story of the novella No One Writes to the Colonel (1961) is embedded in the later novel One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967).
- How is our understanding of the novella enriched by the details added in the novel?
 - Did your view of the Colonel of the novella change when you read that Colonel Aureliano Buendía rejected his own pension?
13. Ever since José Arcadio Buendía tried to pull gold from the ground with Melquíades's magnets, gold and the pursuit of riches have become part of the history of Macondo.
- What do gold and riches signify to each of the following characters?
 - José Arcadio Buendía
 - Úrsula
 - Colonel Aureliano Buendía
 - Aureliano Segundo
 - Abundant natural resources, especially minerals, have influenced and continue to influence the history of Latin America. Is this history an important context for understanding this novel?
14. What do you make of the novel's fantastical elements? For example,
- Prudencio Aguilar's ghost
 - The cousin with the tail of a pig
 - The plague of insomnia
 - Rebecca's sack of click-clacking bones
 - The discovery of a Spanish galleon in the middle of ferns and orchids
 - The mysterious death of José Arcadio and the trail of blood that leads to Úrsula
 - Petra Cortes's ability to cause prodigious fertility in animals
 - Remedios the beauty, whose mere presence drives men mad
 - The return of Melquíades's from the dead and the appearance of his ghost