

Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

Monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 203-313

1. In “the lucidity of her old age,” Ursula reevaluates everything she ever thought about her son Colonel Aureliano Buendía: “He had fought so many wars not out of idealism . . . he had won and lost for the same reason: pure and sinful pride. She reached the conclusion that the son for whom she would have given her life was simply a man incapable of love.” Moreover, Ursula reevaluates the character of the daughter she had thought hard-hearted and bitter, coming to see Amaranta as torn between “measureless love and an invincible cowardice,” tormented by “irrational fear” (248-49).
  - What do you think of Úrsula’s reevaluation of her children?
  - What do the extended narratives of the deaths of Colonel Aureliano Buendía and Amaranta reveal about their characters?
2. Do the character traits of the twins, Aureliano Segundo and José Arcadio Segundo, match the traits of their respective namesakes, their grandfather José Arcadio and their great uncle, Colonel Aureliano Buendía? Or are their names a result of a final game of identity switching?
  - Regardless of name, do these twins repeat aspects of the Buendía family destiny?
  - José Arcadio Segundo tries to engineer a navigable river passage to the ocean and Aureliano Segundo becomes a fabulously wealthy and profligate landowner. How might their stories mirror aspects of Latin American history: the coming of modernity to the continent, the exploitation of its abundant natural resources?
3. One Hundred Years of Solitude chronicles the coming of technological change—from Melquíades’s magnets, telescopes, and cameras to the side-show of ice in the circus and the arrival of the telegraph, telephone, automobile, and cinema.
  - What happens in this novel when people with a largely mythic world view suddenly find themselves in a world in which technology has accelerated time, diminished space, and substituted the virtual for the actual?
  - Does the novel seem to make a judgement about technological change?
4. Although exaggerated, the story of the banana workers’ massacre, as witnessed by José Arcadio Segundo, is true; as is the story of its coverup.
  - How does this episode interpret the historical relation between Latin American governments and corporate interests of the U.S.A.?
  - How does the subsequent coverup of the massacre relate to the novel’s earlier episode of the plague of insomnia and the resulting plague of amnesia? What, suggests Márquez, are the costs of historical and familial amnesia?
5. During its one hundred years, the Buendía family drama has not infrequently been motivated by class aspirations and prejudices.
  - What does the story of the renovation of the family house and the arrival of Pietro Crespi with the pianola suggest about Úrsula’s class aspirations?

- How does the story of Fernanda del Carpio—her childhood, her crowning as queen of carnival, and her marriage to Aureliano Segundo—satirize class prejudices?
  - How is Meme the product of both Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda? Should we attribute the tragedy of her life to the Buendía family determinism or to the rigidity of class structures or to something else entirely?
6. We have read the stories of five generations of women connected to the Buendía family. Can we identify the kinds of agency available to the following women, as well as the limiting conditions of their lives?
- Úrsula and Pilar Ternera
  - Amaranta and Rebecca
  - Santa Sofia de Piedad and Petra Cortes
  - Fernanda del Carpio
  - Remedios the Beauty and Meme
  - What might the stories of Remedios the Beauty and Meme suggest about the possibilities of women’s liberation in Macondo?
7. Despite the proliferation of back stories and elaborate explanations, One Hundred Years of Solitude includes tantalizing mysteries.
- Who shot José Arcadio and why does the rivulet of blood from his head wind its way to Úrsula in her kitchen?
  - Who persuaded Fernanda’s father to send her and her expensive entourage to Aureliano Segundo’s carnival? Who started the riot by shouting, “Long live the Liberal party! Long live Colonel Aureliano Buendía!”?
  - Who owns the gold left in the statue of Saint Joseph that Úrsula has hidden?
  - What might Melquíades’s manuscripts reveal?
  - Who killed Colonel Aureliano’s sons?
  - Which members of the Buendía family do not know the identity of, at least, one of their parents? And which members of the family are hidden away in forgotten rooms in the house, or elsewhere?
  - Why has Márquez included these loose ends in his sprawling, but otherwise straight forward narrative?
8. Márquez is the master of hilarious exaggeration: e.g. the stories of Aureliano Segundo’s eating contest with the Elephant, of the seventy two chamber pots for Meme’s visiting friends, of Remedios the Beauty’s unconscious potential to drive men mad, of the perpetrators’ machinations to conceal the banana massacre; and of Fernanda’s communications with invisible doctors.
- What effects does Márquez achieve, in addition to humor, by using this technique of extreme exaggeration?
9. Márquez said that the novella No One Writes to the Colonel was his best book, and that he had to write the novel One Hundred Years of Solitude to get people to read the novella.
- How does the novel, with its epic sweep, expand our understanding of the novella, with its tight focus on the plight of one impoverished old veteran and his wife?