

Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

Monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 315-417

1. When Márquez was almost 23, a law school dropout and a struggling writer, he accompanied his mother on a visit to Aracataca, where he had been raised by his grandparents. She needed him to help her sell the family home. Instead of what he remembered, Márquez found a run-down house in a desolate hamlet. Overwhelmed by waves of reminiscence, he was inspired to write a novel, which he originally entitled “La Casa” and later changed to One Hundred Years of Solitude. (See the following web site for a virtual tour of the house: <https://centrogabo.org/gabo/contemos-gabo/la-casa-de-gabriel-garcia-marquez-en-aracataca>.)
  - How do the fortunes of the Buendía house embody the fortunes of the entire clan?
  - What threats to the house does each generation have to confront?
  - Which rooms of the house are significant in the family history? Which rooms of the house are open to society, which are sealed off from the outside world, when and why? How does the house participate in the family plague of solitude?
  - What role do the women of the Buendía family (either by birth or marriage) play in the fate of the house?
2. Of course, “house” can mean family lineage, as well as a living space. Greek tragedy often focuses on a cursed lineage, e.g. the fall of the House of Atreus dramatized in Aeschylus’s trilogy The Oresteia.
  - Does One Hundred Years of Solitude resemble a Greek tragedy that could be titled the fall of the house of Buendía? Or is it more Biblical? Or do both literary traditions inform Márquez’s monumental novel?
  - For Mission Impossible Faulkner participants: Do you see any relation between Márquez’s novel and Faulkner’s two, family tragedies: the story of the decline of the Compsons told in The Sound and the Fury and the story of the rise and fall of the Sutpens told in Absalom, Absalom? We might think of comparing the endings of these novels.
3. Or would you classify One Hundred Years of Solitude as a dark comedy, instead of a tragedy?
  - What are the funniest parts of the novel to you?
  - How would you characterize Márquez’s humor?
  - What makes Fernanda’s four-page (pp. 322-327) tirade so funny?
  - Úrsula fights a constant losing battle against the red ants. Do you find it comical or horrifying when, in the end, the ants drag Aureliano Babilonia’s pig-tailed son off to their nests? Do you find Fernanda’s prudery, which leads to miscommunications with the invisible doctors and eventually to her death, comical or horrific?
4. At the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude, time seems to collapse. As Aureliano Babilonia reads and understands Melquíades’s manuscript, “he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it. Prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror” (416).

- How has the novel represented differing modes of understanding time: linear progress, cycles of repetition, and/or entropic decay? Which mode seems to triumph in the novel's ending?
  - Does fiction by its very nature collapse time, creating a space in which everything has always already happened, as in Melquíades's manuscript? (e.g. We use the convention of the historical present tense to describe events in a novel: "Ursula wears [not "wore"] a chastity belt because she fears [not "feared"] having a child with the tail of a pig.")
  - For Mission Impossible Woolf participants: Do you see any relation between the representation of time at the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude and at the end of Orlando?
5. How do you interpret the final sentence of the novel: Aureliano Babilonia comes to understand that he and Macondo "would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men . . . and that everything written on [the parchments] was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth"?
- Why is the house of Buendía condemned "to one hundred years of solitude"?
  - How is the incest curse, which eventuates in a baby with the tail of a pig, related to the curse of solitude?
  - Why will no memory of the family and the town remain? How does this ending relate to the novel's earlier treatment of memory and forgetting? But this novel arose from Márquez's detailed memories of his childhood home, so is Macondo really "exiled from the memory of men"?
  - How does the novel's ending raise questions for humanity now? Will we get a second chance—to save the planet, to save our democracy, to . . . ?
6. Below is a simplistic schema of human interactions represented in the novel:
- Settled domestic family life
  - Nomadic wandering
  - Sexual passion
  - Politics and war
  - Commerce
- As an exercise in bringing the sprawling plot of this novel into focus, can you identify characters who dominate in each mode of interaction?
  - In every generation, where do each of these modes of interaction seem to lead?
  - Does the novel represent any modes of commerce that are not exploitative?
  - Might friendship (e.g. between Aureliano Segundo and Petra Cotes in old age and between Aureliano Babilonia and his friends who meet at the bookstore of the wise Catalán) offer an alternative to the excess, waste, futility, violence, and solitude that dominate human interaction in the novel?