

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Columbian; 1928- ), One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967)

SUMMARY: The Buendía family founds the village of Macondo (presumably in Columbia) and flourishes more or less, then declines to the death of both family and town a century later. The family includes numerous extremes of temperament. All members, despite their closeness, are imprisoned in some type of solitude.

AMPLIFICATION: JOSÉ ARCADIO BUENDÍA, to escape the ghost of a man he has killed in his own village, leaves with his wife URSULA and others to found the village of Macondo in the middle of nowhere. Faustian by temperament, he grabs at new discoveries from the outside world as they are brought in by the wizard-like gypsy MELQUIÁDES, but finally goes mad, to finish his days tied to the courtyard chestnut tree. URSULA, a small, indefatigable matriarch, manages to hold the family together until she fades out in extreme old age. Gradually moving forward in time, the novel focuses on the main family members in turns:

(2nd and 3rd generations)

COLONEL AURELIANO, the younger son and a major figure, is born "with his eyes open." After a youth of artcraft (little gold fishes), he becomes a liberal and a leading rebel general in civil war against the Conservatives. The increasing compromises made by the Liberals in order to survive finally persuade him that there is no moral difference between sides. He negotiates a gray peace, goes into deep retirement, making gold fishes not to sell but merely to do something. His illegitimate son ~~ARCADIO~~ (by PILAR TERNERA) was ~~executed~~. The <sup>shot</sup> 17 sons, all named Aureliano, whom he fathered here and there during the wars, are all slaughtered by Conservative forces. In short, for the Colonel, having one's "eyes open" has led to the wisdom of nihilism. (His wife, the childlike REMEDIOS, died in pregnancy.)

AURELIANO  
JOSE )

JOSE ARCADIO, the older son, vanishes to go to sea, returns a giant of a man with enormous sexual prowess. He marries REBECA, who unaccountably shoots him dead and spends the rest of her life in utter seclusion. His illegitimate son ARCADIO (also by Pilar Ternera) married the nebulous, only part-existent SANTA SOFIA DE LA PIEDAD, and on his execution by the Conservatives left three children. SOFIA lives long but nebulously, finally departs, finding that the house is too much for her, and is never seen again.

AMARANTA, the daughter, cannot give herself to love. She feels enormous guilt over the death of Remedios (which somehow answered her prayers that something awful would happen so that she would not have to poison Rebeca, her rival for PIETRO CRISPI). She rejects Crispi (who commits suicide). She also rejects a soldier friend of her brother, GERINALDO MARQUEZ. She indulges in incestuous sex with her nephew Aureliano Jose and much later with a great great grand nephew, the child JOSE ARCADIO. In her final years she concentrates on weaving her own shroud.

PILAR TERNERA, the village whore, actually belongs to the family since she has mothered two of its illegitimate males. She lives to 145 (at least), pretty much all in the same way.

(Later generations)

REMEDIOS THE BEAUTY, daughter of Arcadio, is so enigmatically distant that one day she ascends to heaven, never to be seen again.

JOSE ARCADIO SEGUNDO, son of Arcadio, has been almost hopelessly alienated when as a child he witnessed an execution. He is active as a union leader against the banana company which has come in, ends his day with the illusion (?) that the strike was broken by a hideous mass murder. Other townspeople think nothing occurred.

AURELIANO SEGUNDO, the other son of Arcadio, is a prodigy of macho vigo: a sexual wonder so much so that when he lives with his mistress, PETRA COTES, all their livestock multiplies miraculously. He marries an extreme opposite, FERNANDA DEL CARPIO, who had been brought up in ultramontane seclusion in the belief that she was to be a queen. Excessively proper (she uses a golden chamber pot), she tries to block all life out of the house). In old age, Aureliano Segundo makes special sacrifice to see that his daughter AMARANTA URSULA goes abroad for her education. He, like his brother Jose, spends much time trying to decipher the prophetic MS left by Melquiades.

RENATA REMEDIOS (MEME), his daughter, becomes the lover of the workman MAURICIO BABILONIA, whom her mother Fernanda has ambushed. Meme goes into perpetual silence for life. She leaves an illegitimate son AURELIANO.

JOSE ARCADIO, son of Aureliano Segundo, is sent to seminary with his mother's idea that he will be Pope. He cuts off his seminary studies to return, finds Ursula's old hidden wealth, has orgies with children who finally murder him and take the money.

AMARANTA URSULA, daughter of Aureliano Segundo, <sup>laughing</sup> returns from abroad married to a wealthy man, GASTON, but free, open, a prodigious lover whom her husband leaves after she begins a violent affair with her nephew AURELIANO (Meme's son). They have a monstrous child (with the dreaded "tail of a pig"). Both mother and child die. Aureliano finally deciphers ancient prophetic MS, which predicts the ruin and disappearance of this family "condemned to one hundred years of solitude." His world vanishes in a catastrophic wind as he reads.

The town of Macondo itself grows, becomes center of thriving banana business which deserts it after labor trouble, acquires telegraph, railroad, electric light, cinema, telephone, but gradually fades out after the four-year deluge which closed the labor troubles.

IDEA: Well, "solitude" is the idea. Despite much sex, intimacy, family ties, individual gusto, every character finds an eventual solitude--the nihilistic silence of Colonel Aureliano, the regal aloofness of Fernanda, the perpetual silence of Meme, etc. Even Ursula the matriarch, who does live through her family, ends like an old doll. Genuine love seems rare--perhaps it's in Meme's passion for Mauricio, or Aureliano Segundo's lifelong liaison with Petra Cotes--but it fades. Religion, as seen in the two ineffective priests, does nothing to create human solidarity. Yet despite this

solitude, the characters live with energy and passion. They are anything but depressed or listless. The novel seems to say: "Yes, we are all imprisoned in a solitude which will sooner or later show its real nature to us; but it is a rich solitude, filled with the exciting shapes of others in their own solitude, enough to give us an illusion of living together which we should treasure."

TECHNIQUE. On first study the novel is seamless, simply flowing through the years, first along the channel of one personality, then another. Rarely are we given a scene, and then only a short vivid one. The manner is panoramic, summarizing traits and trends with many illustrative details and some eloquent thematic metaphors.

Time order does jump, though. We are often given gleams of the future (e.g. the glimpses of the coming firing squad for Colonel Aureliano, or Meme's mute death as an old woman in a convent).

The basically realistic mode is penetrated with the miraculous--the appearances of Prudencio's ghost and that of Melquiades; the ascension of Remedios the Beauty; the rain of yellow flowers at the death of Jose Segundo; the Colonel's premonitions; the fantastic deluge. Other passages, if not magical, are hyperbolic: the constant invasions of the house by decay and red ants; the fecundity of Aureliano Segundo's livestock; the horrible conditions of the banana workers.

The total effect is that of a vivid dream--tangible, gorgeous, terrible. One is tempted to say that this whole dream whirls like the cyclone which finally carries everything away.

JUDGMENT: A masterpiece or close to it. A careless or relaxed reader might complain that the peaks of the narrative are flattened, that the story flows on and on without "growth." I would counter that the novelist has to write like this if he is concerned with repetitive cycles and traits as he is. These very recurrences in the new forms (e.g., the prodigiously sexual male, the retreats into arcane studies) are exciting.

RME

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