

Female stereotypes in one hundred years of solitude

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Throughout history, women have been portrayed in a certain light. Women's rights activists and feminists have succeeded in gaining some respect for women and their struggle continues. Unflattering views of the female race still exist in literature.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ursula was stereotypically portrayed as passive, unimportant, and inferior to men. Many of the female characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exude weakness and appear passive. Ursula repeatedly allowed her husband to destroy her property and family. He used Ursula's money to buy a simple magnifying glass that had no possible benefit to himself or his family. "That money was from a chest of gold coins that her father had put together over an entire life of privation.

.."(3). Ursula's husband carelessly wasted her coins that she planned to save. She merely stood by without trying to stop him.

Ursula does not stand up for herself or for her belongings. She could not protect herself, as displayed in the story, ".. at one point he was ready to set the house on fire," (3). Jose Arcadio becomes out of control and dangerous because Ursula cannot control him. Her passivity and submissiveness is blatantly stated in the quotation, "Ursula gave in, as always, to her husband's unyielding obstinacy," (6).

She is always portrayed without a spine and as if she has no power in the relationship or her life. Her role in her relationship with Jose Arcadio mirrors the role of countless women of the 18th and 19th centuries. Husbands are portrayed as all-knowing while women are portrayed as obedient and

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compliant. The female characters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are continuously considered less important than the male characters. Jose Arcadio was extremely excited about the visit of his gypsy friend, Melquiades. However, "Ursula, on the other hand, held a bad memory of that visit, for she had entered the room just as Melquiades had carelessly broken a flask of bichloride of mercury," (6).

Ursula and Jose Arcadio held different opinions about the trustworthiness of Melquiades but Jose's opinion was considered more important. Ursula's judgment was not considered because her husband did not share her feelings about the guest. The following quotation further illustrates the unimportance of the female characters in the novel. "So he handed out clearing tools and hunting weapons to the same men who had been with him during the founding of Macondo," (10). The expedition that Jose Arcadio so passionately planned was very important to him and to the success of Macondo. However, despite the importance, women were not invited or involved in the trip.

Minor details of the novel also portray Ursula as unimportant. As her husband continued dreaming and scheming, "Ursula continued sweeping the house," (14). She is never shown with great ambitions and is repeatedly shown doing tedious tasks. Although he fails sometimes, Jose Arcadio is constantly shown coming up with ideas and going on adventures. Ursula is shown in his shadow doing menial work.

The stereotypical image of a woman doing housework while her husband works hard to change the world is not new. The stereotype that anything a

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woman has to say is unimportant is sadly also not new. Not only are women considered unimportant but they are also frequently portrayed as inferior to men. When Ursula attempts to scold or control her husband, her attempts are not taken seriously. After yet another ridiculous claim by Jose Arcadio, Ursula lost her patience and severely scolded her husband.

His response was unthreatened. " Jose Arcadio Buendia, impassive, did not let himself be frightened by the desperation of his wife, who, in a seizure of rage, smashed the astrolabe against the floor," (5). She is not taken seriously and her husband refuses to be intimidated by her. The descriptive words used by the author also indicate a sense of inferiority in women. In speaking of other cultures, the author uses the phrase, "..

. there were men so intelligent and peaceful that their only pastime was to sit and think," (15). The author makes no mention of intelligent or peaceful women but does talk about women in another light. He mentions Ursula's great-grandmother, who became frightened and accidentally sat on a stove. " The burns changed her into a useless wife for days," (19).

The previous quotation illustrates two stereotypical qualities. The great-grandmother is portrayed as out of control and so flighty that she would sit on a stove at the sound of alarm bells. Secondly, her physical disability turned her into a useless wife. She was not appreciated for her intellectual contributions but solely what she could do with her hands. Throughout history, women have not been considered equal to men. They have consistently been shown in the shadow of their husbands, always following and never leading.

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Multiple factors may contribute to the stereotypical portrayal of women in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The book was written by a man who may not have considered the point of view of a woman. The novel was also published in 1967, a time in which women had already received equality in many political aspects but were struggling to receive respect and power in society. The story may have been drastically changed if one of the most important characters, Ursula, had been shown as powerful. Her opinion, if considered and taken seriously, could have seriously affected the opinions and actions of the multiple impulsive male characters.