

The significance of the time structure in the novel



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Cyclical Time Structure in One Hundred Years of Solitude

Narrative structures vary from novel to novel as a technique that aides in the advancement of the plot and enhances the clarification of the literary devices employed throughout the story. In the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, both traditional, or linear, narrative time and cyclical narrative time structures work simultaneously to emphasize the recurrent destructive behaviors of the Buendía family. A linear narrative structure “ follows a straight line — starting at the beginning, moving to the middle, and proceeding to the end of the story”; follows a line of movement including an ongoing plot, with a somewhat typical exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement. However, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not a novel that primarily depends on a linear narrative structure. In fact, this novel’s structure is also inclusive of a cyclical narrative. The cyclical time “ cycles through the story one event at a time to end back where the story originated”, and reiteratively brings the reader back to key plot occurrences as a means of highlighting the impact on the characters. In his novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez implements the technique of cyclical time to heighten the intensity of recurring destructive behaviors across the generations of a small, metaphoric village.

Garcia Marquez employs the device of repetition, through names and personalities of specific characters, in order to display an uncommon series of coincidental events within a cyclical structure. These events are perceived as distinctive and inflammatory in the destruction of a normal society. In the novel, there are a total of five characters that share the name Jose Arcadio, and, as described by Ursula -one of the novel’s main characters- carry “

impulsive and enterprising” characteristics associated with mischievous behavior, capable of inciting trouble and often leading to a negative effect on the surrounding environment (Márquez 181). Marquez’s establishment of recurrent names and similar personalities throughout characters provoke the negative outcomes that occur within plot cycles. Marquez presents repetition within the novel once again with inclusion of twenty-two characters named Aureliano. These men are defined as possessing “ withdrawn but with lucid minds”, a characteristics that starkly contrast those of Jose Arcadio (Márquez 181). Marquez’s reintroduction of the Aureliano characters ironically advances the plot as Aureliano attempts to reestablish Macondo to the village’s previous state, however, this instead creates a crisis and sets up a further subplot that sparks a new cycle. Both of these characters’ reappearances and their polar actions trigger the destructive behaviors that occur historically and repeatedly within the novel. These cyclical generations produce negative outcomes for the people of Macondo, forcing them to repeat disastrous events that eventually move them toward their own demise.

The destructive recurring event of incest, also known in the novel as “ the original sin,” introduces and concludes each narrative cycle. It embodies the unnatural actions that the majority of the characters in the novel must endure. Incest further becomes the primary cause of disastrous abnormal characteristics in the Buendía family. Due to the tragedy of a past incestuous event in the Buendía family when “[a]n aunt of Úrsula’s married to an uncle of José Arcadio Buendía, [and had] a son ... grow up with a cartilaginous tail in the shape of a corkscrew and with a small tuft of hair on the tip,” U’rsula

and Jose Arcadio Buendía are exiled from their original village (Márquez 36). This action in the plot cycle was driven by the fear of Úrsula's mother, who believed pigtailed children were an inevitable outcome of incest. This incestuous event marks the beginnings of the "original sin", thus initiating its recurrence in the novel's plot. As incest takes place within the Buendía family, it serves as the catalyst for the rebirth of each new cycle, namely foreshadowing the impending destruction of the characters and the village. While the event of incest marks the beginning of each cycle, the aftermath of incest -the pigtail- serves as a symbol for the annihilation of a cycle that only lasts one hundred years. Throughout the incestuous events that occur within six instances among the five generations of characters in the novel, not one of the characters deals with the outcome of a pig-tailed child. Thus, the cycle continues and regenerates throughout the plot, until the end of the novel when Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula's child is born. With the birth of their child, they "turned him on his stomach [and saw] that he had something more than other men, and they leaned over to examine him... [i]t was the tail of a pig." Úrsula mentioned in the novel that "the tail could be cut off when the child got his second teeth"; however, the couple were not aware of the family's history, so the resulting action leads to the child permanently keeping his tail. The consequence of incest acts as a conclusion to the circular plot cycle and the torment of the Buendía family. Incest is an action that defies social norms; thus, it is the reason that the characters seem destructive and act as facilitators toward their own demise in the novel.

As the Buendía family's history duplicates itself, the characters in the novel become familiarized with the absurdity of their present situations. However,

such characters do not raise awareness for these irrational cyclical events. In the novel, “ U´rsula confirmed her impression that time was going in a circle”(Márquez 220). She feels “ as if time had turned around and [they] were back at the beginning”(Márquez 335). U´rsula is one of the few characters that notices the reoccurrence of odd events in her village, yet she does not take any direct initiative to stop the cycle; just like other characters throughout the village’s commotive history. Likewise, Jose Arcadio Buendía becomes aware of the absurd, seemingly recurring span of time as he begins to realize the repetition of the days. He even states, “ that it’s still Monday, like yesterday... look at the sky, look at the walls, look at the begonias ... [t]oday is Monday too” (Márquez 77). He notices the relationship between the past and present days that have not gone through change. He, like U´rsula, does not attempt to cease the recurrent events or speak more about the similar occurrences; thus, Jose Arcadio Buendía permits these happenings to cycle through the plot and recreate misfortune upon misfortune. The characters that recognize catastrophic events, but do not make any conscious effort to end them; resemble the destructive naturalistic history of the metaphoric village.

One Hundred Years of Solitude’s plot advancement relies on the regeneration of cycles within a linear narrative structure. By the end of the novel, when the Buendía’s are blown off the face of the earth by a hurricane, the last character, Aureliano, “ wandered aimlessly through the town”(Márquez 413). Since the Buendía’s revolve around restating their family’s history, Aureliano is stranded and left with no connection to the past. Due to his dependence on his family’s history, he begins “ searching for

an entrance that [goes] back to the past”(Márquez 413). Aureliano desperately searches for a tie to his old way of life in order to salvage himself and his family’s legacy. When he fails to revive his family’s past historical events, he and his family are condemned to obliteration due to their independence and abandonment of their history. At the end of the novel, when there is no connection to their past or recreational source of tragedy, the ability to form another cycle is gone. Thus, the cyclical nature of plot regeneration is extinguished.

Garcia Marquez’s simultaneous linear and cyclical structure in his work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* follows an axle and wheel metaphor for time, that further defines the Buendía family’s nature. In the novel, Pietro Crespi describes the Buendia family nature as “ a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spilling into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle” (Márquez 396). The wheel is the novel’s temporal mechanism, the axle represents linear time, and the turning of the wheel represents cyclical time. This metaphor provides an imaginative representation of the technique and also demonstrates the concept Marquez has developed through his intentional repetitive writing. The idea of this everlasting circular time exhibits the deformity the village of Macondo experiences. The events Marquez incorporates into this cyclical structure, like incest, are destructive to the social time period; thus, allowing the plot device to act as an instrument for disease. The Buendía family’s reliance on the past, in order to advance into the future, is one that demonstrates the unnatural destructive mentality the characters have. Through emphasis of cyclical repetitive

events within a broad linear hundred year time frame, Garcia Marquez augments the role of these recurring events and portrays their destructive capabilities within a metaphorical town intended to mirror that of Colombia.