

# A distorted reality



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One Hundred Years of Solitude is a book about history and culture; the imaginary town of Macondo is based on the author's hometown of Aracataca, and the many events described in the novel - the civil unrest, the labor/commercial struggles, the technological changes - are historically accurate. Furthermore, Garcia Marquez's narrative voice is borrowed: "The tone I eventually used in One Hundred Years of Solitude was based on the way my grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness" (Fields). It may seem safe to say that Garcia Marquez's novel is a work of reality, but this is not the case. Garcia Marquez's unique style - his inclusion of fantastic events, nonlinear development, free-flowing sentences - blurs the thin line between realism and fantasy by infusing the fictional with an aura of believability and the commonplace with an aura of magic. The resulting confusion leads to the creation of a distorted reality, which ironically reveals and contains some surprising truths. The "blur" that marks the boundary between reality and unreality is dominated by Garcia Marquez's tone. Aside from the unperturbed attitude with which he treats unusual events - his surprising calmness - the author's use of sensual language and hyperbole dare to counteract the novel's believability to create an ironically more cogent reality. As one critic commented on Garcia Marquez's technique: "If you say you have seen a pink elephant, you will not be believed, but say that you saw seventeen elephants flying about that afternoon, and your story gains in verisimilitude" (Bell-Villada 96). Garcia Marquez's masterful use of exaggeration accomplishes exactly that: his exaggerations offer a ring of truth. In fact, several of the extraordinary events described actually occurred in real life. One critic recounts Joseph

Conrad's attempted suicide in response to the possibility that a bullet can go through Colone Aureliano Buendia's body without damaging a single organ (Pelayo 50). The distorted view of reality that appears in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is deeply influenced by South American superstitions and folklore. In essence, Garcia Marquez redefines the urbane world of reality to fit with the jungle, Macondo version of reality. The assumption of Remedios the Beauty's ascendance is treated like another everyday event, while the arrival of the first railway train brings women screaming down the street proclaiming the entry of "something frightful, like a kitchen dragging a village behind it" (Garcia Marquez 182). This reversal of "appropriate" reactions leads the reader to believe that reality has literally ceased to exist, and the book becomes a story dominated by fantasy. Furthermore, this distorted reality is as much related to politics as it is to culture. During Garcia Marquez's lifetime and due to his political experiences, "truth has been controlled to the point at which it has ceased to be possible to find out what it is. The only truth is that you are being lied to all the time" (Bell-Villada 45). Thus these exaggerations, or semi-lies, actually embody a confused world in which they are reality, in which they are the truth. The town of Macondo does not only represent a microcosm of the country of Colombia, but also the continent of South America, and by Garcia Marquez's intentions, the world and its history, from the time of Eden to the eventual Apocalypse. Garcia Marquez's style, which seeks to achieve a confusion of truth or a truth of confusion, is highly unique. He approach to this novel was strongly influenced by his career as a journalist: "On a number of occasions, in fact, Marquez has said that for him there is no real difference between the writing of journalism and the writing of fiction—both are committed to the

rigors of realistic representation—and his own ideal of the novel involves as much reportage as imagination” (Irvine). Taken from this point of view, the truth in the distorted reality is literal: Marquez is just another reporter, and his writings about friendly ghosts and reappearing magicians constitute just another daily column. Though the themes that appear in Marquez’s book are not new – the domination of the rich over the poor, the corrupt over the pure, and the “ civilized” over the indigenous – the difference appears in the way Marquez makes the reader see these events in a completely new light. In other words, it is not necessarily what he says, it is how he says it. Enter Marquez’s magical realism with a dab of “ political realism,” which end up revealing important secrets to a once blind and foolish reader, who should have discovered them on his or her own. Garcia Marquez’s style begins with the structure of the novel. The structure of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* may seem ordinary, but upon closer inspection one notices that, first of all, the chapters are all unnumbered. By doing so, Garcia Marquez presents the various events in the novel as a single entity, implying a link in time and the progression of the decline of Macondo. The long, fluid, and eventful paragraph construction, combined with the long, flowing sentences, also conveys the unity of the plot and the rapid and unceasing course of time. The confusion is heightened by the literal repetition of names: one critic counts four Jose Arcadios, one Arcadio, one Aureliano Jose, three Aurelianos, seventeen Aurelianos from conquests during the Colonel’s warfare days, and three Remedios (Irvine). This absurd exaggeration by Garcia Marquez is a technique to point out an equally absurd consistency in the personality type of each name: the different names actually constitute a system of personalities that prevails through generations. The dichotomy between a

complex structure packed with events and the names that remain unchanged over a century is essentially the truth Garcia Marquez is trying to bring to the surface: “repetition versus change of course is what human history is about” (Irvine). A seemingly confusing aspect of the book actually reveals an important meaning in the novel. The time aspect brings further confusion to the story. The novel’s timeline is basically linear, presenting an account of a town’s rise and eventual decline. Yet *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is packed with flashbacks and zigzag/circular time patterns. In fact, the first sentence of the book already contains the past, present, and future: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember the distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (Garcia Marquez 1). In addition, the time that appears in the novel fluctuates between periods of activity and periods of stagnancy. The growth of the town and the children takes place overnight, yet the slow physical decay of the village and the aging of the adults leave a bitter aftertaste that lasts for years on end. Consider the progenitor of the family, Jose Arcadio Buendia. He spends the end of his days tied to a tree, dwelling in his own bitterness and refusing to die. To add to the disarray, time moves circularly, as children take on the same identity as their ancestors, and when the town withers to the roots from which it grew, the book comes full circle. The capricious force of time plays an important role in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. First of all, the decay of Macondo exposes the truth of “the horrors of lineal history” (Pelayo 45), which include the decline and eventual failure of man’s social, political, and religious institutions. However, Garcia Marquez’s inclusion of repetitive patterns provoked by mythical time creates “a mytho-poetic atmosphere that blurs sordid reality and thrusts the reader

into a kind of temporal void where the laws of cause and effect end to become meaningless" (45), which is another truth in which a world of reality and fantasy turns meaningless. It is precisely because of Garcia Marquez's juxtaposition of reality and fantasy that the essence of human nature can be seen and evaluated. From a reading of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the reader may assume that the author's point is to say that the world is doomed to first fall into stagnation and decay and then be completely destroyed due to man's lack of love, and spurred by his greed for power and money. The male characters in the novel do yield to this destiny; even Ursula states that she has finally discovered that the men are "incapable of love" (Garcia Marquez 282). The critic McMurray, however, argues that "ample evidence of eternal virtues is provided by Ursula, the archetype of feminine wisdom and stability; her husband Jose Arcadio Buendia, who embodies man's heroic quest for progress and truth; their great-grandson Aureliano Segundo and Petra Cotes, whose sincere love makes them charitable toward others" (McMurray 148). Because of the novel's stark irony of solitude in a prospering and expanding family, other readers might grasp the meaning to be the oppressive reality of everyone living alone in his or her own bubble in a world inhabited by billions of people, and of the ultimate meaninglessness of life. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can also be viewed as an expression of moral indignation against exploitation, brutality, and degradation. But there is not doubt that the effect of the warped world of Macondo, which, as the reader discovers at the novel's end, is a fiction within the fiction of Melquiades' manuscripts, is the revelation of the warped world of humanity. It is best said by the critic Fields: "It would be a mistake to think of Marquez's literary universe as an invented, self-referential, closed system.

He is not writing about Middle Earth, but about the one we all inhabit.

Macondo exists. That is its magic" (Fields 200). Works Cited Bell-Villada, Gene H. García Márquez: The Man and His Work. Chapel Hill, NC: Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Fields, Wayne. " One Hundred Years of Solitude and New World Storytelling". Latin American Literary Review 14 (1986): 73-88. Literature Resource Center. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2001. GCPS, Lawrenceville, GA 21 April 2004. García Márquez, Gabriel. One Hundred Years of Solitude. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1970. Irvine, Dean J. " Fables of the Plague Years: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, and Magical Realism in Cien Anos de Soledad ". Ariel 29 (1998): 53-80. Literature Resource Center. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2001. GCPS, Lawrenceville, GA 21 April 2004. McMurray, George R. Gabriel García Márquez. London: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc., 1977. Pelayo, Rubén. Gabriel García Márquez : A Critical Companion. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001.