

The theme of incest and its development



In the epic novel “ One Hundred Years of Solitude,” Gabriel Garcia Marquez writes about the Buendia family of mythical Macondo. Throughout the generations, the Buendias are plagued with incestuous relationships; by the end, they only succeed in isolating themselves from society and weaving unnatural bonds created by incest. The incestuous relationships in the novel allow the characters to “ recreate” themselves, sinking the family deeper into isolation. Thus, “ One Hundred Years of Solitude” is not a book about incest. Rather, incest is used both as a catalyst for, and as a way to explore, the novel’s themes of memory and forgetfulness, circular time, and violence.

Incest is a major theme of the novel from its beginning, when Macondo is founded. When Ursula marries her relative Jose Arcadio, she refuses to consummate the marriage, afraid of giving birth to an infant with a pig tail. When Prudencio Aguilar says that Jose Arcadio is unable to make his wife pregnant, Jose Arcadio murders him, only to be chased by his ghost; the fleeing couple form the town of Macondo. Although Jose Arcadio and Ursula are spared the fate of giving birth to a baby with a pig tail, Ursula continues to remember the threats caused by incest, often reminding her family not commit this sin. She remains the moral compass for her family until her death, and is the only one who remembers the past as more than a series of nostalgic recollections. Yet her power and influence are limited. She cannot stop her son José Arcadio from becoming a gypsy or a male prostitute; neither can she dissuade her grandson Arcadio from becoming Macondo’s most despotic ruler or the Colonel from executing a man who deserved clemency. Powerless to stem the losses and tragedies that beset the family,

she cannot help them avoid the fate set for them at the time of Macondo's founding.

The incestuous relationships in the novel particularly highlight character traits and emphasize the repetitiveness of character actions. Incest forges important links between the characters of present and past generations, further alienating them from society. For example, Aureliano and his aunt Amaranta enjoy a sexual relationship, halted only by Amaranta's conscience. Two generations later, Aureliano and Amaranta Ursula-different individuals, but sharing the same names and many character traits-have a child together. Locked in a fierce passion, they forget about the outside world as the town of Macondo withers away.

The theme of memory loss, and its being rooted in incest, is also tied to the notion of circular time. By forgetting their past, the Buendias repeat their ancestors' mistakes and are unable to move forward in time. For example, when Arcadio returns after becoming a gypsy, he neglects the fact that he is related to Rebecca and marries her. Because no one connects the present to the past, the family allows this to happen. One significant metaphor for this inability is the "turning wheel." As Marquez writes,

There was no mystery in the heart of a Buendia that was impenetrable for [Pilar Ternera] because a century of cards and experience had taught her that the history of the family was 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 (Marquez 402).

The wheel, representing circular time and repetition, spins throughout the novel. Yet, as Marquez writes, “ the first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants...” (Marquez 445). Thus, the fiber the wheel is weaving to tie the Buendia family together is delicate. The reader is aware that it is only a matter of time before it will be snapped.

Not only does the family's incest lead to the repetition of characters and their actions, however, but to violence, the culmination of the Buendias' ignorance and passion. Their ignorance allows them to commit incest because they have forgotten how closely related they are, and now, this leaves them open to instability and violence. For example, Aureliano isolates himself, deciphering the ancient text of Melquiades, at the same time that his son, the last of the Buendia line, suffers the violent fate written for him since the founding of Macondo. Aureliano (III) must suffer this fate because of the actions of his predecessors. They forget their origins and do not realize how closely they are related. Their fate is written in Melquiades's book, and they follow it easily. Thus, incest proves to be the crucial mistake of the novel and is ultimately the downfall of the Buendia family.

By charting the path of the Buendia family, Marquez writes about the journey of humans. He does not give a moral commentary on incest, but rather a warning to remember the past to prepare for the future. The town and the family are fated to die because they do not have what is required to continue. Their commitment to solitude, fantasy, and desire doomed them; their lineage is unfit to continue because they do not know who they are or where they came from. Thus, the novel represents more than the Buendia family. It is a metaphor for the human race.