

Disillusionment



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In Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colonel Aureliano Buendía experiences several metamorphoses that grant him his multidimensional character. However, these metamorphoses become regressive, and he finds himself in despair as he struggles with the never-ending cycle of his transformations. He constantly fluctuates between his polar identities as scientist and as soldier, and he eventually loses any true commitment to either. Each shift from one persona to the other causes Aureliano to become more disillusioned with his nature and further entangled in his nostalgia, leading eventually to his demise. Aureliano is Márquez's greatest harbinger of the eventual demise of the Buendía family, a foreshadowing of the disaster to come. After the Liberals lose their fruitless war and the Colonel recognizes his growing hubris, he falls back into his hermetic cocoon, where he begins to manufacture gold fishes in his workshop. His obsession with science leads to a greater withdrawal from society, but his nostalgia for waging war brings him back to his pride. Considered the original and the most serious of sins, pride further handicaps Aureliano from humility and from love, a trait of which he seems to be incapable. Though he relapses back to his gold fishes, he is already hardened by his many battles and experiences a complete detachment from people as well as from himself. Colonel Aureliano's entrance into adulthood serves as his greatest and most significant transformation. His jump from the laboratory into the war is a complete shock to the reader and one of the most powerful character modifications in the novel. As Aureliano spends "interminable hours in the abandoned laboratory, learning the art of the silver work," he begins to craft his cocoon (Márquez 39). He becomes "concentrated so much on his experiments... that he scarcely [leaves] the

laboratory to eat” and assumes an impervious lifestyle, completely devoted to alchemy (Márquez 40). Aureliano’s ignorance, due to his hermetism, becomes obvious when he throws extra coins into a prostitute’s hopper not out of desire or need, but out of pity and guilt. He devotes himself to a mad proposal of marrying this prostitute and freeing her from the “ despotism of her grandmother,” but is aggravated when he discovers she has left town and resigns himself “ to being a womanless man for all his life — in order to hide the shame of his uselessness” (Márquez 53). Aureliano’s shell experiences its first crack upon the arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote’s family. The magistrate brings his wife and seven daughters to settle in the Hotel Jacob, where they are met by José Arcadio and Aureliano. Despite Aureliano’s lackadaisical attitude towards women, he is mesmerized by the image of Don Moscote’s youngest daughter, Remedios. The nine-year-old’s “ lily-colored skin and green eyes” become a physical sensation that “ bothers [Aureliano] when he walks, like a pebble in his shoe” (Márquez 58). Aureliano is troubled by the thought of Remedios and tormented by his loneliness. His detachment from science becomes most evident when he welcomes Remedios into his laboratory. His focus shifts from dedication to his work to a newfound obsession with Remedios. Aureliano grants her entrance into his realm of alchemy and offers her his little fish with a level of eagerness that startles Remedios and causes her to flee. As Aureliano falls deeper in love, everything in his life starts to remind him of Remedios, and he begins to neglect his work. “ The house [becomes] full of love” and Aureliano expresses it in poetry that has no beginning or end: “ on the harsh pieces of parchment... on the bathroom walls, on the skin of his arms,” in all of which Remedios appears (Márquez 65). As their marriage is arranged, Aureliano’s

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priorities experience an earthquake: he becomes closer to his bride and he moves farther from his alchemy. However, before his transformation can fully sink in, “[Remedios] wakes up in the middle of the night soaked in a hot broth which exploded in her insides... and dies three days later, poisoned by her own blood” (Márquez 68). The miscarriage causes Aureliano to once again become disoriented, trapped in a state of withdrawal, and fervent for another outlet from his solitude. He begins to bury his affection for Remedios and his love for the world, leaving only his poetry as a souvenir. The soon-to-be Colonel completes his first cycle, a transformation from silversmith to lover and a regression from man of sentiment to medieval science devotee. The conflict between the Liberal and Conservative party erupts at an opportune moment for Aureliano. He sees the war as an outlet to his emotional turmoil and takes an identity different from anything in his past. Though he is initially impartial to any politics, Aureliano observes the magistrate unlawfully break open the ballot box and cheat for the Conservative side, “leaving only ten red [votes] and making up the difference with the blue [votes]” (Márquez 96). Sympathizing with the Liberals and understanding the disadvantages of being the opposition, Aureliano states that “If [he] has to be something [he will] be a Liberal... because the conservatives are tricky” (Márquez 96). After witnessing Don Apolinar Moscote’s subterfuge, Aureliano reaches out to the young people in Macondo and embarks on a stealthy campaign against the Conservative travesty. He announces that “the only effective [approach] is violence,” and despite his ties with the magistrate, crafts a plan of intervention with the Conservative establishment (Márquez 98). Obsessed with the imminence of war, Aureliano breaks free from his solitude and begins another

metamorphosis of character. As he begins to lead the rebellion, Aureliano grants himself the title of "Colonel" and eventually conquers Macondo for the Liberals. Aureliano's new identity as a soldier-figure paves the way for him to grow into the legendary but erratic leader of the Liberal armies. When the Liberals lose the war, Colonel Aureliano falls prisoner to his enemies and is condemned to death. His execution is scheduled to be carried out in Macondo "as a lesson to the population," and he begins to understand the emptiness of the war, stating that "A person fucks himself up so much... just so that six weak fairies can kill him and he can't do anything about it" (Márquez 128). However, when he is miraculously rescued by Jose Arcadio, Aureliano begins another war on the spot. He "contact[s] the dormant Liberals" and organizes another uprising, the first of thirty-two that fail and underline the worthlessness of the war (Márquez 129). Even with his realization that "[the war] doesn't have any meaning for anyone," Aureliano is blinded by his own pride and determined to continue the Liberal regime (Márquez 136). A war mentality takes over the Colonel and keeps him from understanding why he continues to fight for the party, fundamentally detaching him from his true feelings. The root cause of many other sins, pride initiates a desire within Aureliano to be more important than others, but this need is quickly extinguished when he discovers the lack of light at the end of the war's tunnel. The small success that the Liberals experience arouses an "illusion of victory" that Aureliano understands is false, leaving him with the "feeling of being hemmed in against the sea" and in a desperate search for a "loophole through which he [can] escape" (Márquez 134). In his quest to find this "loophole," Aureliano battles his pride and eventually prevails, but the end of his struggle only marks the beginning of

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another. Losing faith in the war, Aureliano loses faith in a life after the war as well. He decays into a shell of the man he used to be, enticed by the nostalgia of his former life but then relapsing into a soldier, this time fighting against his own Liberal party in an attempt to end the war. Aureliano thus completes another cycle, from warrior to hermit and back to fighter. As Aureliano collapses back into a solitary lifestyle, he cannot help but notice the flaws of the war and the need for an end. Whether he genuinely yearns for war or merely wants to see it over with, Colonel Aureliano “scratch[es] for many hours, trying to break the hard shell of his solitude” (Márquez 169). Eventually, he returns to the war but now fights for “his own liberation and not for abstract ideals” (Márquez 170). But this second attempt at war only weakens Aureliano when he realizes he has betrayed the same party that he so enthusiastically fought for. His attempt and failure at suicide leaves him in a state of emotional hardness, where “he makes one last effort to search in his heart for the place where his affection had rotted away” and realizes he cannot find it (Márquez 173). His memories have been buried so deep that even the thought of Remedios appears a hazy image of someone who may have been his daughter, rather than his wife. He acknowledges that all of his travels and conquests have left no trace in his feelings and that ultimately, “all had been wiped out by the war” (Márquez 173). Instead of attempting to revive any emotion, Aureliano decides to bury it once and for all; he reduces his old poetry to ashes. He tries to put the past farther and farther behind him by getting rid of his memories, but the emptiness only leaves him with “the nostalgia of glory” (Márquez 176). Realizing he cannot get rid of his longing for war, Aureliano takes refuge in his workshop and “loses all contact with the reality of the nation” (Márquez 198). Once again, Aureliano

abandons one identity for another. However, this time he does not approach his work in gold with the same enthusiasm. Aureliano has been hardened and exhausted by his wars and seeks the making of gold fishes as a sanctuary rather than a true hobby. His only relationship with the rest of the world becomes his business in these little gold fish; he even shudders at the thought of war and tells others “ don’t talk to me about politics” (Márquez 198). Márquez throws Aureliano into a vicious cycle of exchanging gold fishes for gold coins only to convert these coins into more fishes, only to underline the cycle that Aureliano is experiencing on the inside. Because of his restless nature, Aureliano’s dedication to his workshop cannot rid him of his nostalgia for rebellion. Though he commits his eyes and his hands to his work, he cannot close his ears to the world outside his shop. When Aureliano finds out about Mr. Brown and the banana plantations, he states, “ Look at the mess we’ve got ourselves into, just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas” (Márquez 228). Aureliano loses his calm over this foreign invasion and falls back into the cycle: “ I’m going to arm my boys so we can get rid of these shitty gringos!” (Márquez 238). He immediately abandons his manufacture of little fishes and directs his efforts toward finding means to wage another war. Aureliano visits Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, who at the time was “ really the only one who could have pulled... the musty strings of rebellion,” and pleads for help to start a “ mortal conflagration” against the foreign invader (Márquez 242). Colonel Gerineldo, however, only feels pity for Aureliano and rebuffs his idea. Aureliano falls deeper into his emptiness, feeling abandoned by his comrade, his party, and, ultimately, Macondo. Unable to find help for the pressing issue, Aureliano is discouraged and relapses back to his workshop. The banana plantation ordeal would mark

Colonel Aureliano's last cry for war. After his last attempt, he recedes away from the idea and completes the last half of his final cycle by locking himself up in his world of gold fishes. However, Aureliano decides to stop selling his fish and begins to make dozens, only to melt them down and start all over again. As Aureliano's internal cycle actually manifests itself in the external cycle of making and remaking gold fish, he falls into a deeper trap of nostalgia. One day, while standing in the courtyard, he accepts this nostalgia for "the first time since his youth" and momentarily relives the "prodigious afternoon of the gypsies" (Márquez 264). When he hears Santa Sofía de la Piedad shout that the circus is coming, Aureliano begins to think about the circus, searching for the circus from his past but realizes that "he can no longer find the memory" (Márquez 267). In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez uses Colonel Aureliano's vicious cycle to warn how the Buendía family may also spiral towards its eventual destruction. Aureliano's metaphor is especially symbolic because of its incessant nature, even after his death. His vice continues to plague future generations, as José Arcadio Segundo aligns himself with the strikers with the same sense of disillusionment that gripped Colonel Aureliano in his fight for the Liberals. The seventeen Aurelianos are targeted and most are executed, marked by the permanent cross of ashes on their foreheads that symbolizes the permanent stain the Colonel has left on the Buendía family. Colonel Aureliano's polar interests cause him to run back and forth from one addiction to another, each time becoming less tolerant of the withdrawals and giving in to the nostalgias more often. Nostalgia, whether for war or for work, begins to come sooner with each cycle; each period of soldier and scientist becomes shorter and shorter. The Colonel lives for these two aspects and is unable to find

excitement in anything else. Once he is confronted by the possibility of losing skill in both, he sees no point in life. Early in his metamorphoses, Aureliano acknowledges his imminent death and embraces the idea, stating that he is merely “ waiting for [his] funeral procession to pass” (Márquez 199). Aureliano stretches himself so thin over both personas that, with old age, he has less and less of himself to devote to either. After taking his last refuge in the workshop, Aureliano is overcome by a loss of memory and a lack of sentiment. He becomes completely detached, not only from society, but from himself. As he fails to connect with any past emotion, he becomes blind to his interests and, in the end, blind to life. Even his family is unable to distinguish the “[person] who had spent his adolescence making little gold fishes with that of the mythical warrior who had placed a distance of ten feet between himself and the rest of humanity” (Márquez 171). Aureliano’s fluctuations between his two characters make him disoriented in the world and increasingly nostalgic for his past. In the end, Aureliano can no longer recognize the most effortless aspects of life; he buries his memories, stows away his feelings, and eventually loses himself. *Bibliography* Márquez, Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* . 1st Perennial Classics ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006. 417. Print.