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by

Isabel C Henao

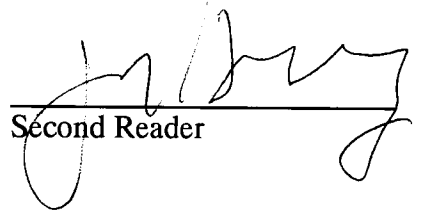
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Saal", written over a horizontal line.

Thesis Mentor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. King", written over a horizontal line.

Second Reader

## Abstract

Gabriel García Márquez establishes the importance of identity, names, and narrative in order to highlight the importance of recognizing the past for a country that has allowed history to be rewritten and, as a result, forgotten. Márquez writes about what happens to a character with no history, for whom it then becomes imperative that the other characters orchestrate a narrative, thereby allowing Márquez to critique the neocolonialism and imperialism that occurred in Colombia. This strategy can be seen in several of his most well-known works—the short stories “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” and “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,” as well as his best-known novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The main characters of the stories come to an already established narrative as unnamed characters. The remaining plot is then dependent on the named characters and their existing communities attempting to establish a narrative for the unnamed characters. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez more explicitly focuses on what happens when memory is erased and history is forgotten. The result is narratives that critique passiveness and demonstrate that people should actually take active roles when an unknown entity or foreign government tries to invade and change the status quo and history. Ultimately, his determination to write about the corruption in Colombia and Latin America led to his use of magical realism.

## Magical Politicism: History and Identity in Gabriel García Márquez's Fiction

Gabriel García Márquez's works have often been linked to the political relationship he has with Latin America and his home country of Colombia. Studies focus on analyzing the geographical influences in his writing due to his migrations from the liberal side of the country to the conservative side. The political events in Colombia caused Márquez to write in many politically charged newspapers. In 1954, he moved to Bogotá to write for *El Espectador*, the more liberal of the two large national dailies (Bell-Villada 49). The editors of *El Espectador* received direct threats and harassment from then dictator/president Rojas Pinilla and in 1956 was shut down (50). Márquez, recommended by his editors, spent some time in Europe to stay out of trouble. He began writing for the new newspaper *El Independiente* only for it to be shut down two months after its first publishing. Some time after, Márquez began writing for *El Memento*. However, the *El Memento* office was raided by military police who, as Gene Bell-Villada reports, "arrested everybody in sight, García Márquez being spared only because he chanced to be out at the time of the lightning sweep" (52). The government's move to silence liberals was a running theme in Latin America, which resulted in many people being considered communists for openly critiquing whoever was in power. Amy Sickels affirms, "Like many Latin American intellectuals and writers, García Márquez favored the socialist revolution and was an early ally of Castro. During this exciting period of political and cultural changes, a great amount of Latin American literature appeared, helping to create the Boom" (22). The Latin American Boom was a time in which many Latin American authors were publishing and experimenting with narrative while, like Márquez, focusing on Latin American dictators and their rise to and fall from power. Some authors associated with the Latin American Boom are Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, and Carlos Fuentes, to name a few.

Márquez experiments with reality in order to illustrate and provide commentary on the concerns he has when the past is forgotten or inaccurately conveyed. Through a variety of strategies, he establishes the importance of identity, names, and narrative in order to showcase the importance of recognizing the past for a country that has allowed history to be rewritten and, as a result, forgotten. Márquez writes about what happens to a character with no history, for whom it then becomes imperative that the other characters orchestrate a narrative, thereby allowing Márquez to critique the neocolonialism and imperialism that occurred in Colombia. This strategy can be seen in several of his most well-known works—the short stories “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” and “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,” as well as his best-known novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The main characters of the stories come to an already established narrative as unnamed characters. The remaining plot is then dependent on the named characters and their existing communities attempting to establish a narrative for the unnamed characters. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez more explicitly focuses on what happens when memory is erased and history is forgotten. The result is narratives that critique passiveness and demonstrate that people should actually take active roles when an unknown entity or foreign government tries to invade and change the status quo and history. Ultimately, his determination to write about the corruption in Colombia and Latin America (such as “the dirty war” in Argentina and the ‘disappearances’), along with wanting to tell a story and tell it with confidence, led to his use of magical realism.

The criticism of Gabriel García Márquez’s work centers on his re-writing the story of Colombia, in particular through the fictional town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As Jeffrey Gray writes in “History, Erasure, and Magical Realism: Exploration, Colonization, and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,” “Indeed, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* at

times seems a parable of and for Latin America. The novel represented a stylistic and conceptual revolution, but also an engagement –if not always direct –with the history of Latin America, notably its history of neocolonialism at the hands of the United States” (123). Stephen Minta observes in *García Márquez: Writer of Colombia*, “[Márquez] has constantly laid stress on the importance of developing alternative sources of history as a challenge to the status of conventional ones” (30). The goal for Márquez is then to tell the correct story of Colombia and make sure that the people do not forget it.

There were several influences, besides Colombian politics and his journalism career, that influenced Márquez’s writing. His grandfather’s stories, along with his grandmother’s attitude towards a “story”—explaining that a story should be told with so much confidence that the content can go unquestioned—were also important. Additionally, Bell-Villada writes, “The daily life of northern Colombia, in particular is a world richly textured with folk legend and superstition, and it became one of the objectives of a mature García Márquez to recapture this folk quality in his art” (12). Márquez was accustomed to stories that seemed false but were nonetheless either myths, legends, or superstitions, many of which his grandmother told him growing up. She told the stories with so much confidence it left no room for doubt, a technique Márquez credits when he explains why he introduced magical elements into his stories. Thus, magical realism became the primary vehicle for Márquez’s political commentary due to its grounding in the fluidity of time and history. Unlike journalism, fiction allowed Márquez to safely express his ideas about imperialism, neocolonialism, identity, and discourse in a way that would not be censored. As a literary style that accepts the fantastic and absurd, magical realism enabled him to critique the Colombian people and their acceptance of foreign political forces



infringing on their government much like the characters he wrote about, who fully accept the fantastic in their reality.

“Magical Realism,” defined as introducing the fantastic into the realistic, was first termed “Post-Expressionism” by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 (Roh 15). Roh was concerned with the artistic movement following Realism, Expressionism, which focused on depicting the concrete world rather than an abstract one. Roh states, “[T]o depict realistically is not to portray or copy but rather to build rigorously, to construct objects that exist in the world in their particular primordial shape” (24). The Expressionists tried to “leap out of the existing world and jump into the free spaces of pure spirit” (24). In order to reconcile the two modes of representation, Roh defines “Post-Expressionism” as “holding to existing exteriority...we have to shape the world we find in front of us” (24). Therefore, at the foundation of “post-expressionism” lies the idea that a new magical world cannot be created out of thin air; the magic elements must be integrated into what is already worldly and common. Wendy Faris, in her introduction to Alejo Carpentier’s “On the Marvelous Real in America,” confirms Carpentier’s argument:

The fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images. Rather, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s varied history, geography, demography, and politics – not by manifesto. (75)

In 1943 Carpentier visited Henri Christophe’s kingdom in Haiti and saw the former colony “where a house with great long balconies leads to the palace of hewn stone inhabited years ago by Pauline Bonaparte. My encounter with Pauline Bonaparte there, so far from Corsica, was a

revelation to me” (84). Carpentier described the marvelous in European literature, such as the Knights of the Round Table, Merlin the sorcerer and the Arthurian legend, as tiresome, with the marvelous only being evoked by deformities in festival characters. Carpentier believes the marvelous real to be a transaction between reader and author, where there is an understanding of the events happening because the reader wants, as much as the author, for the events to happen. Carpentier provides the example that “those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracles of saints” (86). Different from Surrealism, the marvelous real must use the mundane world as its background. Carpentier continues, “The marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribe dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry: from those who searched for the fountain of eternal youth and the golden city of Manoa to certain early rebels or modern heroes of mythological frame from our wars of independence” (87). Carpentier is interested in the idea that “sane” Spaniards from Angostura willingly put themselves through the search for El Dorado (87). To Carpentier, that is the marvelous real; real events and people going above and beyond to the fantastic. Literature is thus able to take the real and introduce magical elements to, ironically, make something that much more real and believable.

When discussing magical realism, Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is almost always mentioned, a work that Márquez has credited with influencing his writing. Angel Flores, in “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” draws our attention to the first sentence of *The Metamorphosis*: “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from a troubled dream, he found himself changed in his bed to some monstrous kind of vermin” (qtd. in Flores 115). Flores writes, “from then on the narrative moves smoothly, translucently, bound for an infinite, time less perspective....Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality”

(115). Other characters do not question Gregor Samsa transforming into an insect. Rather, it happens, and the other characters accept this transformation as normal. Flores continues, “Once the reader accepts the *fait accompli*, the rest follows with logical precision” (115). This is a result of the power of the narrator and the order of time. Julio Ortega writes,

When the novel reaches the exceptional and radical possibility in which writing imposes its own fabulative order, it is free of mimesis –writing even breaks the laws of natural order...Its freedom surpasses the natural logic of language and, thus, the derepresented allows the novel to expand in every direction. It is a language which has no common border with our natural language, for it itself has no borders. The other world is not even ‘fantastic’; it is a written freedom in which representations are invalidated, and the interchangeable nature of the written prevails. (5)

Verisimilitude becomes an important strategy when relaying events in a story that may seem magical. Márquez successfully does this by manipulating time, narration, and setting. Laurence Porter explains, “For García Márquez, the *ultimate* referent of both fantasy and political militancy is real: it is the Colombian and Latin American history of factional strife and of exploitation, both by dictators within and by imperialists without” (198). Porter defines fiction as “a signifying system of words whose referents are ostensibly not real” (201). He makes the distinction that fantasy is, therefore, a subclass of fiction in which the fantasy becomes familiar with a “conventional literary genre or belief system” (201). The difference is the flow of the narrative chain and that it is not disrupted. Similarly, once time is established, the setting becomes important. Ruben Pelayo, regarding the setting in magical realism, writes, “these short stories may be distinguished from works labeled *regionalist*, which emphasizes the description of a local area and suggests that the problems of the characters are only peculiar to the people of

that area” (71). Pelayo observes that the stories are identifiably set in Latin America and Colombia with the universal themes of violence, economic disparity, and the absence of social justice (72).

In order for Márquez to both write his fiction and comment on politics, he had to make the past and present one entity, which is itself a further critique of how people are able to erase the past. Porter writes,

The living dead restore a sense of history to the fictional world. By extension, they defend the integrity of the national past, a past which the invading imperialists and their corrupt indigenous allies seek to obliterate so that they will be able to treat Latin American and its people as a passive raw material. Specifically, García Márquez transmutes the fantastic into fantasy as to make it available to furnish a symbolic commentary on events. (200-1)

Regarding Márquez’s literary influences, Amy Sickels writes, “He was also inspired by the modernists, particularly by Virginia Woolf’s use of interior monologue and, even more important, William Faulkner’s narrative techniques, themes, and small-town settings. García Márquez’s first novel, *Leaf Storm*, is his most Faulknerian in terms of plot pattern and style, echoing the narrative structures” (20). Bell-Villada comments, “For this purpose García Márquez builds his narrative around the larger blocks of Colombian (and by extension Latin American) history: the early process of Spanish colonization and inland settlement, the bloody wars of the nineteenth century, the repeated instances of illusory prosperity based on a single product, and the hegemonic power of the U.S. economy in our time” (103). Márquez, therefore, critiques how, after Spain, Colombia and other countries were recolonized by the United States.

In order to understand Márquez's fiction, one must understand his reality and the reason for his concerns about history and the past. The way in which history is relayed in accordance with memory is a recurring theme in many of his stories and novels. He is concerned with history being revised, erased, and with events being omitted, such as what was happening in Latin America. Due to his start in journalism, Márquez was aware of the ways in which stories can be distorted and the memories of events forgotten. It is significant that Márquez began writing at a time in Colombian history termed "La Violencia" [The Violence], which was an informal civil war that occurred from 1946 to 1965. In 1946, the presidency went to the Conservative candidate Mariano Ospina Pérez. On April 9, 1948, Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was shot dead by a conservative fanatic (Bell-Villada 25). In downtown Bogotá, a riot, now known as "El Bogotazo," ensued between conservatives and liberals which ended with as many as two thousand five hundred people dead. Regarding the violence, Bell-Villada writes, "the conservative and the U.S ambassador both blamed Communists" (25). Bell-Villada explains how in 1949, "President Ospina had Liberal departmental governors ousted; Conservatives in Congress took to blowing whistles to drown out opposition party speakers; and in September, Conservative House members actually drew revolvers and shot at Liberals, murdering the man who currently had the floor" (26). Liberals considered impeaching Ospina. However, liberal newspapers continued to be shut down during the time of "La Violencia." The concern to silence a group of people and delegitimize their stories and voices at this time is one reason Márquez focused on narrative and its role in creating a historical identity.

In the process of critiquing Latin America, it was also important for Márquez to note the United States' influence on Latin American countries. He simultaneously wrote about United States involvement in Latin America and its role in commercialism and imperialism. Márquez

notes the power the United States had in his novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, when he has an entire sea bought, divided up, and carried off by Americans, an event that relates to the United States' role in forming what is now the Republic of Panama but was formerly Colombia's northernmost province. Márquez's experience with the United States was not a positive one, which led him to favor socialism. Due to his open support of socialist ideals and his friendship with Fidel Castro, Márquez became one of many writers denied a visa to the United States. He also became "one of several journalists invited by the revolutionary government to witness Castro's 'Operation Truth,' a media campaign aimed at countering the anti-leftist bias of the U.S. news agencies (Bell-Villada 53). He continued to support Castro and the Cuban Revolution for its early demonstrations of class equality. However, Márquez later became aware of the repressive events that occurred in Cuba and the darker side of the Soviet Union (Sickels 68). Despite witnessing the negative effects of Castro in Cuba, Márquez was much more critical of the United States and what he noticed was the hegemonic power the United States had over other countries under the pretense of spreading democracy. Márquez's fiction centers on his concern with postcolonial histories and cultures that are a result of corrupt governments. Laurence Porter writes, "His major interest has been to foster Colombian and Latin American unity while advocating those regions' economic independence from the United States" (196). These concerns find their way into his fictional works.

Forgetting history and, as a result, its various figures is something that interested Márquez. Evidence of his developing theme can be seen in "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," published in 1955, which focuses on a small community and the extent to which the people will go to make sure an unknown character is provided a narrative. Márquez then fully develops this theme in 1967 with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and it then returns as a focus

in “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” in 1971. All three texts show the concern Márquez has with the power of narrative and history.

“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” begins, “On the third day of rain they killed so many crabs inside the house” (105). The story beginning as it does, with the indication that it is now the third day and there is something taking place, demonstrates the necessity for the narrator and the reader to be caught up with events. This is not a story that starts at the beginning of time, but rather one in which characters and events are already established with a life of their own. Similar to Kafka’s beginning, this manipulation of an established timeline and narrative allows the reader to take in the events as they are presented. The time at the beginning of the story establishes verisimilitude that will later be necessary when the old man arrives. The lack of a setting also allows for fluidity, which gives the impression that the events about to unravel are in fact true.

The very old man is described as a rag picker representing the farming and working class of Colombia. The lack of a name for the very old man implies that the working class consists of disposable and dismissible entities. The first thing the family tries to do is categorize the old man within their knowledge base since an unknown creature has landed in their yard. The narrator explains, “They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar” (106). Since they cannot, of course, find him familiar in the realm of their reality, they have to adjust their relationship to him as a figure who is plausible in their world by relating him to things they find familiar. Porter Abbot writes, “García Márquez portrayed a whole cast of adult interpreters who seek through explication to domesticate the real” (135). For example, since the old man is evidently in their presence, he must be real. As Pelayo also suggests, “the reader of this short story must accept

that it indeed depicts an imaginary world where angels can be old, unattractive, sickly, and yet have wings and fly” (76). Because the characters struggle to domesticate him, it furthers the idea that the old man needs a history and story to be real.

The next thing the family tries to do is communicate with the old man. The narrator states, “Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor’s voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm” (106). Not only does the couple now find him “familiar” but in trying to communicate, they conclude on their own that he has a sailor’s voice, which leads to their first attempt at identifying him and closing the gap of unfamiliarity. The first narrative they prescribe for him is that of a castaway. To the couple, this may be the more possible story for this creature in their attempts to relate him to something they already know. Living so close to the sea allows them to relate this experience to one they may have experienced before. Márquez himself grew up in the coastal part of Colombia, and so he was familiar with ships docking and stories of castaways. The old man’s unfamiliarity also represents foreign entities approaching a community, much like the leading powers in colonialism. However, this is less likely since the family later commodified the old man, further suggesting his status as a representative of the exploited Colombian citizen.

However, the castaway narrative does not last very long. The very old man is then deemed an angel. Again, it becomes important for the characters in the story to be able to identify him and give him a story with a past in order to find him familiar. An old neighbor woman claims, “he must have been coming for the child, but the poor fellow is so old that the rain knocked him down” (106). The old man is given an age in respect to those around him, as are his abilities in the rain. The old woman asserts, “Angels in those times were the fugitive



survivors of a celestial conspiracy” which, luckily for the old man, is a narrative that leads the people not to kill him (106). Although the angel does not cause any harm, despite the initial fear that he may have come for the couple’s child, Pelayo decides to lock the old man in a wire chicken coop because of the old woman’s words. The old woman is respected because of her longer connection to the past; therefore, her judgment is trusted. By placing the old man in the chicken coop, Pelayo associates wings with chicken feathers and no longer assumes the creature to be a human species, but rather to be an animal. Despite a later failed attempt by Father Gonzaga to prove the old man’s evangelic relationship, the narrator continues to call the old man an angel when referring to him.

The attempt to provide a narrative for the old man continues when the narrator recalls the townspeople’s suggestions for his place in the community: “The simplest among them thought he should be named mayor of the world. Others of sterner mind felt that he should be promoted to the rank of five-star general in order to win all wars. Some visionaries hope that he could be put to stud in order to implant on earth a race of winged wise men who could take charge of the universe” (107). Although other characters in the story are not given names, they are still given descriptive adjectives that provide insight into the type of people they are: the simple minded, the sterner minded, and the visionaries. No definite adjectives are assigned to the old man besides those connected with age. Additionally, when the priest cannot establish a rapport when speaking Latin to the old man, he asserts that the old man may actually be a product of the devil, which is another attempt to try to provide him with a narrative and an identity.

The people of the town also try to feed him as a way to establish what he is. The narrator observes,

At first they tried to make him eat some mothballs, which, according to the wisdom of the wise neighbor woman, were the food prescribed for angels. But he turned them down, just as he turned down the papal lunches that the penitents brought him, and they never found out whether it was because he was an angel or because he was an old man that in the end he ate nothing but eggplant mush. (108)

Since eating is a communal experience, the townspeople's attempts to feed the old man suggests they are still trying to determine what they may have in common with him. When they try to get a real human reaction out of the man, they only succeed once when they have "burned his side with an iron for branding steers" (109). The old man reacts in what is expressed as "ranting in his hermetic language and with tears in his eyes, and he flapped his wings a couple of times" (109). Due to his reaction, the people assume he has acted out of pain and not rage. The days continue, and the people are still not sure if the man is indeed an angel. However, their determination to place him into a realm of familiarity and construct a narrative continues. The narrator observes that "They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connections with Aramaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings" (109). The multiple attempts to at least find a human quality in him is in order to identify him and finally stop speculating about his story. His unfamiliarity makes them uneasy. In this way, Márquez critiques and shows that people should not play passive roles when encountering the unknown. Instead, they should play active roles and question decisions and motives that will ultimately affect them.

The presence of the old man finally leads Elisenda and Pelayo to charge people to see him. A carnival attraction emphasizes the importance of narrative and identity in the story when a woman described as a "frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden"

comes to town, and she costs less to see than the old man (109). What drives more consumers to her is the story she tells. Although a fantastical creature for which the townspeople must again adjust their understanding, this woman provides a story. Her appeal comes from the fact that “people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever doubt the truth of her horror” (109). Not only does she tell the story of how she came to be half a spider but she is also obviously able to do so in a language they understand, unlike the very old man, who still cannot communicate with them. The woman comes with a lesson of obeying one’s parents and, unlike the very old man, it is revealed what she eats: “Her only nourishment came from the meatballs that charitable souls chose to toss into her mouth” (110). It is then concluded by the narrator at this point, who must share the thoughts of the people, “A spectacle like that, full of so much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look at mortals” (110). The ability to pinpoint her story and receive her narrative makes her a better attraction to the people, showing how much they value identity and a past.

Furthermore, the old man is concluded to have no heart by a doctor who tries to listen to it when the old man contracts chickenpox. For a time, the angel continues in his decrepit state, until one day his feathers start to grow again. Since no one understands him, the narrator figures, “[the very old man] must have known the reason for those changes, for he was quite careful that no one should notice them, that no one should hear the sea chanteys that he sometimes sang under the stars” (112). The angel attempts to leave discreetly but is noticed by Elisenda, who in the end is finally relieved to be rid of the burden of his presence and her inability to identify him. The last line reads, “he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the

horizon of the sea” (112). The old man recovers by himself once the townspeople have lost interest in him. Pelayo suggests, “the town as character is portrayed as indifferent, not firm in its beliefs, frivolous, superstitious, and superficial. This is a town that moves back and forth, lacking firm convictions” (82). The town itself is one that, as Pelayo claims, seems to have been forgotten by civilization, which is evident when Father Gonzaga writes to the Vatican about the supposed angel and receives no response. For Márquez, this neglected town shows people partially complicit in change while also valuing a past and a narrative. The people needed a narrative from the old man when he failed to fit the social structure of the town. The use of magical realism in the story is a satiric technique to comment on what happens when a nation, or in this case a town, welcomes the absurd. The story also suggests that a past is ultimately necessary.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* takes the themes of narrative and past and introduces the additional element of memory. Márquez cautions readers about the effects when a nation and its people lose a sense of history. He also criticizes what happens when the government attempts to silence history, as evident in his climactic scene of the United Fruit Company Massacre. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has the most explicit reference to a setting in Colombia with the town of Macondo. Part of Márquez’ concern with narrative and history serves as a political commentary on post-colonial events. The novel covers the life of one family in order to demonstrate the events that occur from the moment they set up a town to the moment they are colonized and the future generation forgets the town’s past.

Once again, similar to Kafka, time must be introduced and manipulated in order to establish verisimilitude. Julio Ortega analyzes the first sentence: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his

father took him to discover ice” (1). Ortega writes, “The narrator knows future time (“years later”), past time (“distant afternoon”), and also precisely what the Colonel is thinking or remembering” (3). The beginning of the novel, with its combination of future, past, and present, means that “fable-time replaces calendar-time, it communicates a more resonant and more tangible temporality, a time of both duration and transition.... The entire past, therefore, already belongs to the future –to the ‘later’ where the Colonel, remembering, awaits us as he faces the firing squad” (2). Bell-Villada affirms that, for Márquez, “Straight linear narrative was replaced by a conception of time that, while developmental and evolutionary enough to be ‘Marxist’ in its general contours, was also structured and articulated as a myriad of subtle flashbacks and foreshadowing” (11). Throughout the story, time is not fixed and the syntax allows the reader to understand that the future is only as important as its past.

The narrator is important in the novel because of his ability relay all the events that happen in the town. Abbot explains, “the narrating voice is usually stabilized as an implicit first-person entity who makes use of the third-person construction for a self now distanced by time from the one who narrates” (136). This is evident in the first sentence, where the omniscient narrator is able to recall the Colonel’s thoughts at a distant future remembering the past. Regarding the very real banana strike massacre, for which Márquez does not provide a date or place, Gray writes, “[it] is presented in the same way as purely magical events...fictive events and historical fact are both presented as fantasy or hallucination (124). When every event is told with the same language and syntactical structure, it is up to the reader to decipher the “real” from the “magical.” However, because of the established relationship between reader and text in the first sentence of the novel, both “real” and “magical” become one thing allowing a logic fallacy.

With no clear distinction of time, Márquez is able to comment on events and history while at the same time showing his ability to rewrite history himself.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* begins with the introduction of colonization as the reason for upcoming events, which allows the novel to come full circle. The discovery of the town of Macondo is related to the day “when the pirate Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century” (21), an event for which “[Ursula] would leap back over three hundred years of fate and curse the day Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha” (22). Francis Drake attacked and occupied Cartagena around 1586 and in 1596 took over Riohacha (Bell-Villada 18). However, the reason for finding Macondo also connects the importance of life, death, past, and memory. When José Arcadio Buendía kills Prudencio Aguilar, his ghost haunts José Arcadio and his wife. In order to escape the ghost and forget their past crime, they flee in search of Macondo. Porter claims, “At first, death does not touch Macondo. It is as if the inhabitants had evaded it by fleeing from the ghost. But no death implies no past, and no past implies no identity. For the town to consummate its identity, it must become reunited with death as the bearer of the metaphorical meaning of history” (201-2). The town, and therefore history, is founded on forgetting a past in another town and the identity left there. José Arcadio from then on is not considered a murderer, but a founder. Once Macondo is established, the critique of United States colonization is introduced.

In connecting real events, Márquez establishes the reason for the Americans’ arrival as commercialism and resource exploitation. Mr. Brown and Mr. Hubert represent officials in the United Fruit Company. The Buendías initially greet Mr. Hubert as a guest and give him a banana, but Mr. Hubert begins to inspect the banana and later marks the arrival of “engineers, agronomists, hydrologists, topographers, and surveyors” along with Mr. Brown (244). The

changes happen quickly, as the narrator notes: “So many changes took place in such a short time that eight months after Mr. Hubert’s visit the old inhabitants had a hard time recognizing their own town” (246). The passivity of the people of Macondo, along with the assertiveness of the foreigners, is also a critique of the Colombian citizens’ complacency under neocolonialism. Upon the arrival of the Americans, Márquez is concerned with the way history is revoked in order to accommodate the future. As the narrator explains, “It was at this time that they built a fortress of reinforced concrete over the faded tomb of José Arcadio, so that the corpse’s smell of powder would not contaminate the waters” (245). The life of José Arcadio is the foundation of the novel when demonstrating the importance of appreciating history. Having the Americans build on the tomb of the great Arcadio shows history neglected with the elimination of the man who was crucial to the development of Macondo. Porter writes, “the gringos’ treatment of the native dead reflects their treatment of the native past. Their engineers cover a murdered man’s tomb with concrete so that one can no longer smell the odor of gunpowder emanating from his corpse –a way of obliterating his memory” (203-4). The fact that the tomb always reeked of gunpowder is the magical realist element trying to preserve history and memory so that anyone who walks by smells the gunpowder and is reminded of the assassination. Covering the smell denies the memory of the body. Porter continues, “a second death more terrible than physical death itself is being forgotten –and to forget one’s ancestors and traditions, [Márquez] implies, is to lose part of oneself” (204). Therefore, history, past, and memory are important for national and individual identity.

The past continues to be forgotten when the narrator further asserts, “more than a year had gone by since Mr. Hubert’s visit and the only thing that was known was that the gringos were planning to plant banana trees in the enchanted region that José Arcadio Buendía and his

men had crossed in search of the route to the great invention” (248). Again, any important route that may have been established is forgotten and is only remembered by the narrator, who alone is able to differentiate what the past looked like in relationship to the present. Those living in the novel’s future will never know the area and its connection to the great invention. They will only know the area for having banana trees.

As time progresses, officials are replaced, and the Banana Factory makes a home in Macondo. The narrator explains, “When the banana company arrived . . . the local functionaries were replaced by dictatorial foreigners . . . the old policemen were replaced by hired assassins with machetes” (256). Colonel Aureliano Buendía reflects on the days he fought for the establishment of political parties and regrets what he assumes is a role he played in not centralizing the government; a connection he makes with the Americans colonizing his town and resources. Porter writes, “it is expedient for the gringos who overrun Macondo to deny the value of its past. It was nothing until they came along. They isolate themselves within a compound; most don’t try to learn Spanish. They respect no pre-existing identities; they dismiss traditional claims” (203). The tomb and the route are only small examples of history erased. Márquez provides his most significant commentary on memory and colonialism in the Banana Factory strike scene.

The Banana Factory Strike, an event which happened in Colombia in 1928, is recounted in the novel. Although the death toll Márquez gives is exaggerated, the event that occurred is, in fact, real and significant to his theme. In the novel, “the protests of the workers this time were based on the lack of sanitary facilities in their living quarters, the nonexistence of medical services, and terrible working conditions” (323). José Arcadio and other union leaders were responsible for voicing their concerns against the factory. However, as a response, some leaders



were jailed in an attempt to silence them. Mr. Brown ends up freeing himself of responsibility and leaves Macondo. His identity becomes crucial for the ease with which history can be eradicated and responsibility revoked. Regarding Mr. Brown, the narrator explains that “he appeared before the judges with his hair dyed black and speaking flawless Spanish. The lawyers showed that the man was not Mr. Jack Brown, the superintendent of the banana company, born in Prattville, Alabama, but a harmless vendor of medicinal plants born in Macondo and baptized there with the name of Dragoberto Fonseca” (324). Mr. Brown’s ability to abdicate responsibility and change his identity shows the power that narrative has and the importance of a past. This new character is able to provide documents that show he has a past and so the case is dismissed. Gray confirms,

One of the implicit lessons of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is that literacy and dissemination of knowledge will save history from those who would erase it. The problem is that those who would erase history use the same technique as those who would preserve it, but they have more power at their disposal –more money and more printing presses, but also more government officials and armed forces. (130)

The concerns of those seeking justice are then dismissed by higher courts, leading to the strike. The army is then sent to establish order. The day of the massacre the people are led to the town square under the pretense that an agreement will be reached between workers and company officials. Instead, the government opens fire on unarmed citizens under the orders of General Carlos Cortes Vargas, a name Márquez deliberately does not change from that of the real person. The presence of José Arcadio Segundo at the massacre makes him the only witness to the event. He wakes up in a train full of dead bodies that are set to land in the ocean in order to dispose of the evidence of the massacre. When José Arcadio Segundo escapes the ill-fated train, the first

news he receives is an account: “there weren’t any dead” (331). Returning to the scene of the crime, “he went through the small square by the station and he saw the fritter stands piled one on top of the other and he could find no traces of the massacre” (331). An event that is rejected in the novel as being solved peacefully haunts the character with the recollection that “there must have been three thousand of them [bodies]” (331). This erasure of history demonstrates the importance of narrative and of producing an accurate past that cannot be forgotten. In the novel, the retelling of the event from the narrator’s point of view shows the event was not forgotten, and there was at least one witness.

Those involved in the real United Fruit Company strike similarly tried to cover up the death toll in newspapers. Bell-Villada notes, “Hiring its field hands only through subcontractors (so as to avoid Colombian labor legislation), its consistent claim was that United Fruit had no employees on its payroll” (105-6). Márquez’s Jack Brown represents Thomas Bradshaw, who was absent when the negotiation with labor leaders was supposed to take place. As in the novel, workers and their families gathered in the central plaza at Ciénaga, and as Bell-Villada reports, “an army detachment was then sent there by General Carlos Cortés Vargas. The crowd was given five minutes to disperse and one extra minute. However, within that extra minute, militants, pressured by the United States, opened fire. Bell-Villada continues, “Witnesses would later report having seen the bodies thrown into trucks, which then headed toward the sea — the basis for the novelist’s two-hundred-car train piled high with workers’ corpses. Following the slaughter the authorities arrested hundreds of labor leaders (a railroad foreman recalled having been on a train filled to the brim with detained workers)” (106). General Cortés Vargas placed the figure at forty dead and one hundred people wounded. However, Alberto Castrillón, prominent union leader, placed the figure at four hundred dead at Ciénaga, but about one

thousand five hundred dead for the larger strike and about three thousand wounded (106). Bell-Villada writes, “The human damage was minimized by the Conservative press, the government, and the company’s supporters” (107). While no articles thereafter concluded that there were three thousand dead, Márquez’s hyperbolized body count nonetheless showcases the corrupting role the media played in producing alternative facts. Bell-Villada cites other instances of United States imperialism in South America. He writes, “beginning in the early 1990s, U.S. mining companies have moved in and set up open-pit, extraction operations in the Guajira area, where the coal is of unusually high quality and ‘clean.’ So massive an undertaking has resulted in disruption of the indigenous people’s lives, forced transfer of the populations of entire villages, and repression and assassination of numerous labor union activists” (21).

The concern for a forgotten history in the novel continues in Melquíades’ room, a gypsy co-creator of the inventions in Macondo. The room represents the history that has passed since the first José Arcadio Buendía. However, when Colonel Aureliano Buendía enters,

looking for the traces of a past from before the war . . . he found only rubble, trash, piles of waste accumulated over the years of abandonment. Between the covers of the books that no one had ever read again, in the old parchments damaged by dampness, a livid flower had prospered, and in the air that had been the purest and brightest in the house an unbearable smell of rotten memories floated. (260)

Since there was no priority to preserve memory and history, Márquez demonstrates the loss felt as a result. The fear of forgetting the past is also prevalent in the insomnia plague that occurs in the novel. Márquez makes the past fluid with the future in order to show how the past is forgotten. According to Porter, as “the insomnia plague reveals, rejection of the past causes a culture to lose it, and consequently to lose its ability to define and orient itself through memories

of the phases from which it emerged” (203). The narrator explains, “Many years later, when Macondo was a field of wooden houses with zinc roofs, the broken and dusty almond trees still stood on the oldest streets, although no one knew who had planted them” (43). The fact that “no one knew” shows how even the trees that carry significance in the setting cannot be traced back to the time they were planted. Porter writes, “Ghosts figure memories, and memory ensures the integrity of one’s self, family, race, or nation despite the oppression of a military ruler or economic exploitation” (203). Documents, photographs, and objects that are related to a period of time or people become important to preserving history and memory.

When the insomnia plague hits Macondo, the people are content without sleep because they feel they can get work done in the hours they would have been sleeping. However, the effect of not sleeping is explained by the Indian woman:

The most fearsome part of the sickness of insomnia was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation: a loss of memory. She meant that when the sick person became used to his state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past. (48)

Márquez uses this scene to caution against history being forgotten, concluding that to know the past is very important to identity. The family believes that the only way to resolve this issue is to label everything with what it is called and its function so that even the reason for it will not be forgotten. However, as the narrator explains, “the system demanded so much vigilance and moral strength that many succumbed to the spell of an imaginary reality, one invented by themselves, which was less practical for them but more comforting” (52). Naming things whatever one

pleases corrupts the nature and power of a name. However, to the people of Macondo, writing also provides momentary comfort in explicitly being able to identify an object and a person. Scott Simpkins considers this a strategy to “reveal the unseen fantastic element behind writing and its magical ability to create a reality” (149). However, this supports the idea that writing also has the ability to misinform, and the decision to write things down continues to prove ineffective. The narrator laments, “Thus they went on living in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irremediably when they forgot the values of the written letters” (52). The greatest fear is then also forgetting how to read. Pilar Ternera, the fortuneteller, reverses her role and begins to use her cards to conceive the past. The narrator notes, “the insomniacs began to live in a world built on the uncertain alternatives of the cards, where father was remembered faintly as the dark man...and a mother was remembered only as the dark woman...and where a birth certificate was reduced to the last Tuesday on which a lark sang in the laurel tree” (52). Márquez critiques the people of Colombia and cautions them about their uncertainty of the past and their forgetfulness.

The novel comes to an end when the last Aureliano and his aunt are unaware of the prophecy established at the beginning of the novel and family history in which incest will produce a child with a pig’s tail. Their lack of knowledge of the history of their family is enough to bring the novel to its end, showing how detrimental it is not to know their history. The novel from beginning to end focuses on the importance of the past and criticizes the effects of imperialism and its ability to change a town to the extent that people are so disconnected from the past that they contribute to their demise.

Although Márquez’s themes of memory, history, and identity are completely established in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, they continue to be a concern for him in his fiction. “The

Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” continues with the importance of having a narrative and its connection to having a past. Márquez also continues to use his technique of narration to establish verisimilitude. “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” begins, “The first children who saw the dark and slinky bulge approaching through the sea let themselves think it was an enemy ship” (98). The past tense asserts the already pre-established communities and settings for the story which begins with children noticing a foreign object approaching the beach. The ease with which they allow themselves to think it is an enemy ship approaching stresses the environment and the vulnerability people in the coastal part of Colombia faced. Even though the characters in the story are regarded as a collective whole, with “men, women, and children,” it is the fact that they have thoughts and actions that separate them from the drowned “man.” Even though all characters do not have names, the people of the village at least have voices and thoughts, giving them power over the drowned man. Considering he is the only one given a name, the irony of his being the only named character in the story proves the extent to which the other characters go to provide him with an identity, which they do not have, or at least, which the narrator does not find important. It is their lack of names and their need to name the drowned man that highlights how important a name and past actually are to them.

The story throughout consists of many speculations on the nature of the drowned man. At first, the villagers contemplate possible histories and narratives for him. The children initially want the object to be an enemy ship, until “then they saw it had no flags or masts and they thought it was a whale” (98). The children proceed to consider the next possibility in the ocean, which would be a whale, only for it to be determined it is actually a man. The next speculations involve his weight. When the men of the village carry him, they begin to establish a relationship with him in comparison to what they know. They conclude that “he weighed more than any dead

man they had every known, almost as much as a horse, and they said to each other that maybe he'd been floating too long and the water had got into his bones" (98). The men use their typical weight as the standard measurement to decide that the drowned man obviously weighs more than the standard and also as much as an animal. They then use scientific reasoning and decide he weighs so much because his bones have absorbed water. The issue of weight is the first instance in which the people of the village must provide an answer for something unknown.

Once he is brought inside a house, his height becomes a topic of concern. They decide "he'd been taller than all other men because there was barely enough room for him in the house" (98). The standard of measurement in deciding his height is established according to the size of the house, an issue they fix in the end by deciding to make all their houses much larger in size in the event they must ever host such a large man again. The larger houses in the future become the norm for this village because of the drowned man's visit. However, because at present he is so tall in the house, the villagers conclude, "the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men" (98). In order to integrate the drowned man's presence into their reality, his physical state becomes an exception to what is otherwise their norm. Rather than concluding that he must be an unknown creature, they fully accept him as an exception to their own human state; one where apparently men can continue to grow after death.

The men then set out to determine where this man comes from since he is not from their village. They take the time to get inside the boats and determine, since they are all present, that it could not be someone from their people. While the men go into neighboring villages, the women begin to clean the man, who is covered in mud, grass, and scales. The narrator explains, "they noticed that the vegetation on him came from faraway oceans and deep water and that his clothes were in tatters, as if he had sailed through labyrinths of coral" (99). This is the first indication of

the villagers trying to establish a source for the man. They decide he must have travelled a very long distance. Once clean, it is decided “not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination” (99). At this point, they cannot fully engrave him into their understanding besides being a man, so they seek to provide him with a narrative that will result in a past for him and therefore an identity.

The women begin to dress him, but due to his size, they must make his pants out of a sail and “a shirt from some bridal brabant linen so that he could continue through his death with dignity” (99). The villagers finally impose a funeral practice on the man in order to make him human to them. Now that he has become a human in their minds, someone who was capable of living and is now dead, they start to give him a narrative of his life when he was alive. The narrator observes, “they thought that if the magnificent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor, his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame held together by iron bolts, and his wife would have been the happiest woman” (100). The women assign a home and marriage to him, all in the attempt to provide him with a narrative to which they can relate.

The power of the oldest person in the community is next established, demonstrating the importance of history. The oldest person, in this case, a woman, is the one who has lived the longest and so, therefore, has a connection to the past, and her knowledge helps shift the rest of the story. This woman is believed to have all the answers due to her being a first-hand witness over the years. As the narrator explains, “They were wandering through that maze of fantasy when the oldest woman, who as the oldest had looked upon the drowned man with more compassion than passion, sighed: ‘he has the face of someone called Esteban’” (100). From that



moment forward, the drowned man is named Esteban. It is not clear why that is the chosen name, but it shows that providing him with a name goes hand in hand with providing him with a narrative and a past, the running theme Márquez focuses on.

Providing him with a name creates a narrative that proves the importance of the people of the village wanting to accommodate him in their lives. Everyone in the village agrees that his name is Esteban, despite the youngest, “[who] lived for a few hours with the illusion that when they put his clothes on and he lay among the flowers in patent leather shoes his name might be Lautaro. But it was a vain illusion” (100). Once his name is established, he becomes real to the women in the village. No longer a foreign entity, they accept him for his height and weight, despite never having met anyone else like him, and feel pity for how his life must have been. According to the narrator, “[the women] could see him in life, condemned to going through doors sideways, cracking his head on crossbeams, remaining on his feet during visits, not knowing what to do with his soft, pink, sea lion hands while the lady of the house looked for her most resistant chair and begged him, frightened to death, sit here, Esteban” (101). The further speculation about his life is in direct relation to the way the people live, assuming that wherever “Esteban” comes from, he was always a burden. Concocting a situation in which the drowned man visited a home when he was alive, the women also provide him with a shy and timid personality. When hypothetically offered a chair, according to the scenario the women make up, Esteban would have responded, “don’t bother, ma’am, I’m fine where I am” (101). The women then begin to pity him because of what a burden he must have been to have in the house, assuming the seemingly hospitable host would then turn around and “whisper the big boob finally left, how nice, the handsome fool has gone” (101). The women are very interested in providing the drowned man with a community and a personality.

The women then decide that even though he is far more beautiful, this now human man reminds them of their men, and so they begin to cry. The narrator notes, “the more they sobbed the more they felt like weeping, because the drowned man was becoming all the more like Esteban for them” (101). With the drowned man becoming more of a figure they find real, his identity is further established. The men then come back and confirm he does not belong to neighboring villages, which allows the people to consider him theirs. They cry out, “Praise the lord...he’s ours!” (101). However, since the men were away looking for a village while the women provided him with a background story, they did not understand why the women were suddenly so attached. When the women become offended by the men’s lack of sympathy, they reveal the drowned man’s face to them for the first time. The narrator notes, “the men were left breathless too. He was Esteban. It was not necessary to repeat it for them to recognize him” (102). The men’s frustrated attempts to place him in a village and not being able to do so are finally eased when they see his face and can agree to a narrative. Otherwise, the drowned man would continue to be an unknown entity with no attachment to a land, family, or past—a great concern for Márquez and the people of Latin America.

Finally, when it comes time to rid themselves of the drowned man, “it pained them to return him to the waters as an orphan and they chose a father and mother from among the best people, and aunts and uncles and cousins” (103). The village people are so concerned with providing him with a past and history that they create a lineage for him. The impact of the drowned man’s visit becomes evident in the architectural structuring of the town’s future homes. They decide if a man should ever come again their houses would have “wider doors, higher ceilings, and stringer floors so that Esteban’s memory could go everywhere...to make Esteban’s memory eternal” (104). The people of the village pay homage to the drowned man and change

their name to “Esteban’s village” (104). Abbot writes, “a community growing indifferent to the wonderful is replaced by a state of wonderment that only grows with time” (134). The story ends with future passengers being told to look in the direction of the village. This indicates that the village will become a tourist spot and the people who lived before will not be remembered; the only person remembered, in fact, will be the unknown man, which makes the story a commentary on a disappearing narrative of the community. The people who lived before represent the indigenous peoples. When the drowned man comes, they are complicit in allowing him to change the way they live and furnish their homes, so much so that the narrator, knowing past and future, comments on the fact that from then on, the homes would incorporate the changes they implemented as a result of his visit. In this case, the narrator again is the only one aware of the changes and the way life used to be.

Márquez demonstrates that just as stories can be created and fantastic elements introduced, suggesting an ability to make things appear, the reverse can also happen: making things disappear. The relationship Márquez has with Colombia, and his awareness of the imbalance of power in Latin America pushes him to become concerned with history and the way stories are told. Through his use of magical realism, Márquez criticizes what happens when people are indifferent to change while simultaneously expressing his thoughts about power and the need to remember history and identities. Márquez demonstrates this running theme in many of his works. The stories and novel show how at a time when history is being revised, and voices are being silenced, communities should play an active role in opposition to others infringing on them. Although the old man and the drowned man do not come as threats, they still threaten the established communities. The people in the communities are concerned with providing a past and a narrative for these unknown entities in order to understand them and domesticate their magical

presence, as well as to provide a commentary on the importance of having a past. Alternatively, Márquez's works also suggest that to know history and write about history and narrative is to be in power, adding authorship to authority.

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