

One Hundred Years of Solitude

review by Ramlal Agarwal

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude brought him overnight success. It is the story of a primitive family, the Buendias, in the wild swamps of Colombia.

The novel portrays the family's inbreeding and its disastrous consequences, along with violent swings in fortune, blind faith, political conflicts, and the overall fate. Marquez moulds all these elements into a single, effortless, and sweeping narrative that leaves the reader wondering whether they are reading a realistic novel, a fantasy, or an allegory, all the while suggesting something profound without providing a clear meaning.

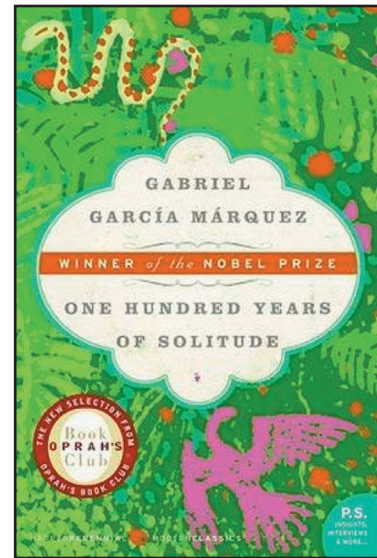
However, the novel does convey that there is no getting away from ghosts, however one tries to avoid them; that human lives are "cribbed, cabined, and confined"; and that humans are preordained and repetitive. Early on, José Arcadio Buendía says, "Today is a repetition of Monday, and it is Monday too."

Small wonder that the novel got ecstatic reviews from literary giants. In the words of Pablo Neruda, "It was perhaps the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since the Don Quixote of Cervantes."

Vargas Llosa wrote, "This was the best book that enlarged the Spanish-language reading public to include intellectuals and also ordinary readers because of its clear and transparent style. At the same time, a very representative book: Latin America's civil wars, Latin America's inequalities, Latin America's imagination, Latin America's love of music, its colour—all this was in a novel in which realism and fantasy were mixed in a perfect way.

José Arcadio Buendía and Ursula were cousins, but because they loved each other, they married, despite a popular belief that inbreeding within a family leads to children born with pig tails. Initially, Ursula avoided sex with her husband, and José Arcadio abided by her wishes, notwithstanding rumours going around that he was impotent. But an incident changed all that. José Arcadio won a cockfight from Prudencio Aguilar. Enraged, Aguilar shouted, "Congratulations! Maybe that rooster of yours can do the wife a favour." It was an insult José Arcadio could not stand, and he challenged him to a duel, killed him, and forced his wife to surrender. After the incident, they saw Aguilar's ghost visiting their house regularly. Both husband and wife could not bear it and decided to leave their town and move where the ghost could not pursue them. They, along with some friends and their families, crossed the mountains and arrived at a swamp.

They made a halt there. While asleep, José Arcadia saw a dream that the place glittered with glass-panelled buildings and was called Macondo, so he decided to settle there. Initially, Macondo had twenty adobe houses. While crossing the mountains, Ursula had given birth to a son, Colonel



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Aureliano Buendía, and later, in Macondo, to another son called José Arcadio and a daughter called Amaranta. Initially, José Aureliano showed pluck and social drive and busied himself in allotting plots and building houses in a line, but his interest in civil matters began to wither as gypsies began to arrive at Macondo with more and more discoveries by the sages of Memphis. José Aureliano began to spend his time with those discoveries and began making potions in the lab he had set up. He takes a special liking to a gypsy called Melquíades, who was gifted with extraordinary powers. Suddenly, Melquíades stopped visiting Macondo, and José Aureliano missed him.

After a lapse of time, he reappears with the discovery of the daguerreotype. José Aureliano becomes engrossed with it and wants to make a daguerreotype of God, and when he fails to do so, he starts believing that there is no God. He loses sense of time. He goes mad with his mental agitations and gets violent. Therefore, Arcadio, his grandson, ties him to a chestnut tree in the yard with the help of about fifty people.

Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the son, comes of age and starts sleeping with Pilar Ternera, a free woman who used to help Ursula in her daily chores, and leaves her pregnant. Subsequently, he is drawn to a beautiful Gypsy girl and leaves Macondo with her. When he returns, he crushes the conservatives and marries Remedios and starts behaving like a dictator. When General Gerineldo, a trusted friend, disagrees with him over a small matter, he orders that he be shot. Ursula pleads with him to spare his life, but he does not budge. When he meets Gerineldo before shooting him, Gerineldo says he would prefer being shot rather than seeing him become a dictator. That changes Colonel Aureliano, and he enters a peace treaty with the conservatives and withdraws from public life.

Meanwhile, an orphan girl comes to meet Ursula carrying a bag in her hand. She turns out to be her cousin's daughter. The Buendios receive her into the family and call her Rebeca. Both Rebeca and Amaranta grow together as sisters and fall in love with an Italian musician, Pietro Crespi. Pietro Crespi prefers Rebeca to Amaranta and decides to marry her. Stung by it, Amaranta says that she would not let the marriage go ahead, come what may.

Aureliano's brother José Arcadio, also has a fling with Pilar Ternera and begets a son by her called Arcadio. Later, he falls in love with Rebeca and marries her, though Ursula was opposed to the marriage because she thought Rebeca was his sister. When the matter is referred to Father Nicanor, the Father okays the marriage, and they get married at a newly built church. Arcadio, the son of José Arcadio by Pilar Ternera, gets desperate to have sex with Pilar Ternera, but Ternera dodges him, and he gets married to Santa Sofía de la Piedad. Three children are born to them: Remedios the Beauty, Aureliano Segundo and José Arcadio Segundo. Aureliano Segundo marries Fernanda del Carpio and fathers Renata Remedios (Meme), José Arcadio and Amaranta Ursula. Renata's son is called Aureliano.

The novel depicts the bewildering mess of the family's inbreeding and the strange and tragic effect it has on its members.

Remedios the Beauty carries a magic aura around her. She refuses to wear underclothes, and people who try to see her naked meet with sud-

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den death, and she ascends to heaven in body and soul. Amaranta Ursula is infatuated with Aureliano. One night, they daub themselves from head to toe with peach jam and lick each other like dogs and make love on the porch and are awakened by a torrent of carnivorous ants ready to eat them alive. Their story ends with Amaranta's death in childbirth and Aureliano's reading of Melquíades' parchments. Melquíades had foreseen the fate of Macondo and Buendía family. He had foreseen Macondo blown by a cyclone and turned into dust and rubble. He had foreseen "The first in the line tied to a tree and the last being eaten by ants." All this he had noted in his parchments,

One Hundred Years of Solitude makes for sad reading. It depicts humanity trapped in preordained tragedy that constitutes its solitude.