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The Fabulous Epic:
One Hundred Years of Solitude

A new world--conquered by adventurers whose names still stand as emblems of heroism, though whose shadows, in the bright light of retrospect, are black with blight--has great want of an epic foundation myth: a new *Aeneid* for a new world. Such an epic has not been written. Instead, North America offers a great white whale and a one legged captain; instead, South America offers Macondo, a town done over, annihilated, a myth with no second chance. Although *Moby Dick* has variously been credited as an American epic, clearly, the claim for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, though less vocal, is of such potency as to seem undeniable. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as epic, composed of the traditions of primary epics including those by Homer, *The Aeneid*, *Oedipus*, and *The Bible*[1] provides a

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[1]Inclusion of *The Bible* suggests the broadness of my definition. Indeed, I deliberately avoid any introductory definition for the simple reason that, like “magic realism,” it is a term more likely to confound than clarify. *The Encyclopaedia of Epic* contains more entries than a pocket

mode of reading which essentially makes sense of the kaleidoscopic, untangles the tangle, and realises the "magic." But just as *genre* inevitably provides a frame incapable of containing its subject, so too a mode of reading based upon *genre* will not provide a picture containing every piece of the puzzle.[2] The picture we shall see, however, is one where traditional epic conventions are arranged and rearranged, adopted and adjusted to produce, finally, a picture both vast in scope and rich in regional contrast.

The first indication of epic tendencies in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* occurs at the novel's opening:

> 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)

Here then are indications of epic allusion: we see the

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dictionary, ranging from the Roman *The Aeneid* to the Scandinavian *Edda,* from *The Illiad* to *Imdugud*, from *Oedipus* to *Óengus*. The analogue I apply, therefore, is essentially a definition by memory--an understanding of epic founded principally upon those primary epics--and a gradual elucidation by the paper itself.

[2]This is not so much a limitation as a virtue for it recognises the multifarious nature of literature. The real danger is forcing the pieces to fit.

convention of beginning *in medias res*--particularly at a climacteric point; a distinct barrage of military thunder echoes from *The Aeneid's* "My song is arms and a man"(3), itself resounding of The *Illiad*; we notice also the epic temporal scale with the discovery of ice and the successive description of a world so recent that "many things lacked names"(1). But, of course, there are twists in store. From this opening we eventually realise that climacteric point, the firing squad which Colonel Aureliano Buendía finally faces, fails to fire; and as the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that Márquez, rather than mock will modify epic, transforming an old world form into a new world story. Edna Aizenberg offers some common-sense insight into the question of historical narrative, suggesting that:

> The Latin American novel was "born" at the moment the Spanish colonies became independent, and many of the significant early novels were historical--an indication that imaginatively re-creating the past is a necessary part of the nation-building project.(1236)

And, furthermore, that this act of historical reclamation is an on-going process. Viewed from a distant perspective, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is indeed employed in the nation building business, but it does so by negation, showing a crumbling architecture and a planless plan bereft of social conscience, a tumbling town that finally must come tumbling down. Epic then, yes, but a twisted epic, modified and leaning

precariously towards the tragic epic of *Oedipus*.[3] The twists Márquez provides are numerous and elaborate.

The question of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* provides an early twist and one which deserves due consideration. From the very first sentence, it is clear that the reader's one hundred years captivity will be unusual, that we will be continually arrested, detained and arrested again. Besides beginning *in medias res*, the question, "Later than what?" springs to mind. For the present, the present is as vague and even as distant as the past and the future. The problematics of time, however, does not mean, as Raymond L. Williams suggests in *Gabriel García Márquez*, that it is "elusive of definition"(74). When he shortly concludes:

> Both here and throughout the novel time takes on a certain magical quality that is impossible for the reader to explain totally in rational terms,(74)

we see that he, like some other critics, has been mesmerised--the question of reading "magic" we will leave until its proper place--by that "magic." The ascendance into what seems like prehistory, juxtaposed with the very modern firing squad, seems indeed to further complicate the temporal question. But we need not accept time at face value: time in literature is not necessarily what the clock tells us. First of all we must realise that a kind of mythical notion of time is a work.

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[3]The character of Oedipus first appeared in *The Odyssey*.

Secondly, the unusual juxtaposition of prehistory and contemporary history leads us to the understanding that Colonel Aureliano Buendía, ostensibly an epic hero, incorporates generations of men stretching backwards into a time that seems timeless, providing a link in the chain of existence. This idea is soon extended to the entire Buendía family, which becomes a sigillarian embodiment of nationhood. Time then can function not merely chronologically but thematically.

The repetition of names is also another clue to the complex nature of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.[4] Firstly it subverts the notion of identity found in western texts--the epic hero as an example. These repeating names are not only specific to the emblem of the Buendía family, but provide the basis for a literature concerned with the character of community, a biographical account rooted in geography and producing a family tree which must be nurtured in local soil.[5]

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[4]As many have noted, same names are evocative of similar character traits: “The José Arcadios are physically active and spontaneous, as opposed to the Aurelianos, who tend to be more passive and intellectual in there approach to life”(Williams, 80).

[5]At the same time, as Gene H. Bell-Villada suggests, “In real life, of course, families, prominent ones in particular, do tend to repeat certain names”(96). From this perspective the strategy is suggestive of the family’s European patrimony.

Of course, this theme is often effected by negation. Time, therefore, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is epic, concerned more with community and generation than with the personal experience of its passage; and it is for this reason that we find in the similarity of names a certain similarity of action working often upon the principle of theme and variation.

What then are the implication? One episode in particular, the day Colonel Aureliano dies, seems to offer a general solution. The text is laced with temporal keys: “During those days”(266), “He was linear”(267), “hours”(267), “October”(268), “autumn”(267), “always”(268), “old fashioned”(268). It is the day of a circus, an old and fading echo of that day long ago when he touched ice. It is also October 11. Colonel Aureliano remembers another October 11, during the war, when “he had awakened with the brutal certainty that the woman with whom he had slept was dead”(268). It is an omen he can no longer recognise.

> . . . José Arcadio Buendía was still dozing under the shelter of palm fronds that had been rotted by the rain. He did not see him, as he had never seen him, nor did he hear the incomprehensible phrase that the ghost of his father addressed to him as he awakened, startled by the stream of urine that splattered his shoes.(269)

In the afternoon he dreams a recurrent dream that is never remembers. He returns to the courtyard and again urinates beneath the Chestnut tree, the daytime shelter of his father’s

ghost. He dies in the act of urination.

The repetition in this episode has reached particular intensity and we see that, in the simplest terms, time *is* repetition. The entire episode delineates the way individual life is replete with repetitive acts; that lives themselves are repetitions of other lives; that life does not end at death: the ghost of consequences live on just as the ghosts themselves live on; and that the only salvation is memory, a faculty so diminished in Colonel Aureliano Buendía that he urinates on his father, on his own history, and dies in the process. Rather than ancestral worship we witness metaphorical desecration of the dead. It is, again to wax simplistic, another indication of the thematic use of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

The idea of repeating time and lives, and its spiritual implications, is particularly evocative of the belief systems of America's indigenous peoples. In Ricardo Pozas' much acclaimed ethnological re-creation, *Juan the Chamula*, the repetition of history, perceived as a celestial phenomenon, is affiliated with the quotidian matter of fact: "When I die and my spirit comes back here, it will find the same paths I walked when I was alive"(7) Later, the correlation between the living, the dead, and myth is related in an interior narrative:

> "'Don't weep, mother. My father will return in three days. But if you keep mourning him, he'll never come back.'

> "Chulmetic wept and wept without listening to what her son told her, and the father of the sun never came back. [As a result of this] . . . today is the only day their souls can come out to visit us."(51)

The episode begins in myth, but concludes in the annual returning of the dead when the spirit, following the earthly path of life, comes upon mortal exigencies: "In every house there was a table set with food for the souls"(49). This blending of spirit and corpus, fabulous with familiar, though contextualised within an indigenous and oral society, is so cognate of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that we are forced to recognise similar characteristics of the two.

One Hundred Years of Solitude explores the notion of time not only by the use of repetition but by its close cousin, circularity; and again there is epic implication. When Aureliano Babilonia finally deciphers Melquíades' script, we discover not, as Aizenburg suggests, that we have been reading that same text, but a literary rendition. Sacred prophesy has become literary reflection. We also discover that the whole tale, beginning with incest and ending with incest, has finally eaten its own tail. The suggestion, of course, is that history is cyclical--a non-Western view of the past--and, its more profound corollary that in this context that circle must be broken: broken with a sense of self not defined in isolation but in integration; a sense of self which must finally abandon the burden of histories' original sin. The

fabrication of history is a game played by both Márquez and political ideologues. The same game, though played on vastly different fields.

Besides the over all circularity of the plot, the internal structure itself is based upon similar and much discussed circularity.[6] This repetition and circularity, interesting in the way it posits various alternate ontological views of time, is also central to matters stylistic.

To return briefly to the Chamula of southern Mexico's highlands. This deep rooted culture bears, above all else, the hallmark of tradition. A people energetically resistant to change, it is this very stasis, this immutability of ritual and behaviour, which authenticates its own legitimacy.[7] Although *One Hundred Years of Solitude* makes only amorphous reference to such indigenous people, the seeming innocence of early Macondo is clearly antithetical to the modern world which, by contrast, finds legitimacy in the vicissitudes of change.

Some of these changes offer the first indication of the oral tradition which both defines Macondo and shapes the narrative style.[8] When, for example, José Arcadio Buendía is shown the magnet, the "useless invention"--which, in fact, had allowed

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[6]See, for example, Raymond L. Williams.

[7]Redundancy deliberate.

[8]This idea, of course, is borrowed from class.

the "discovery" of the Americas and so his own existence--seems potentially able to "extract gold from the bowels of the earth (2). In this single passage José Arcadio Buendía both displays ignorance of his own history and reveals himself to have the same hunger for gold which characterised that history. Of course, the ignorance steadily reveals itself to be a naiveté born of solitude, and the narrative tone throughout the novel emulates that same naiveté. Although Macondo does not literally represent an oral culture, its initial state and its solitude are much to the same effect. The orality of the community is much like the orality of the narrative: an aspect of style and character more than a literal truth.

The oral narrative style also becomes clear in the sympathy between character and narrator:

> "Just a moment," he said. "Now we shall witness an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God."
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> The boy who had helped him with the mass brought him a cup of thick and steaming chocolate, which he drank without pausing for breath. Then he wiped his lips with a handkerchief that he drew from his sleeve, extended his arms, and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. It was a convincing measure. He went among the houses for several days repeating the demonstration of levitation by means of chocolate while the acolyte collected so much money in a bag

> that in less than a month he began the construction of the church. No one doubted the divine origin of the demonstration except José Arcadio Buendia . . .(86-87)

This somewhat lengthy quotation is an anomalous rarity, an incident where the fabulous does not meet unanimous credulity--though it does seem to have entirely convinced critics who perhaps again were too spell-bound to notice the real goings-on.[9] Though far from irrefutable, "It was a convincing measure," does seem to offer a hint of the narrator's shared suspicions. More certain: the preambular announcement, the flourish of the handkerchief and the physical exaggeration all smack of magical theatrics, showing that indeed José Arcadio Buendia has good reason to suspect. In addition, the successive commercial exploitation undermines authenticity, not just for the sceptical atheist but the sincerely pious. Importantly, it is not so much the levitation itself that is questioned, but the "undeniable proof of the infinite power of God" to which it lays claim.

The reader also has good reason to suspect, for we, like the narrator, recognise that the cup of thick and steaming chocolate appeared prior to the marriage and the levitation encore:

> In spite of the fact that her mother had taught her

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[9]Jane Robinett and Raymond L. Williams as two of many examples.

> about the changes of adolescence, one February afternoon she burst shouting into the living room, where her sisters were chatting with Aureliano, and showed them her panties, smeared with a chocolate covered paste.(82)

There is then a sense of some other form of magic at work, and we might wonder if there is, in Spanish, some similar word-play on Nicanor and Old Nic.

As we have seen, there is a sympathy between narrator and character which appears both in subtle single instances, as above, as well as in a more omnipresent mode, where the fantastic and the mundane are each told as simple matter of fact, with *belief* shared, and with no discrepancy between story and the story teller.[10] In addition to this, there is also the idiosyncratic quality of various traditional oral narratives which typify the text:

> Pilar Ternera's son was brought to his grandmothers house two weeks after he was born. Úrsula admitted him grudgingly . . . [José Arcadio Buendía] imposed the condition that the child should never know his true identity.(38)

As Guida M. Jackson informs us, the abandoned child--successively finding shelter and comfort--is an archetype

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[10]The irony of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* functions upon the differences between reader and character, not narrator and character.

discovered in the folk-story, fable, myth and epic. Here also we find Úrsula, whose grudging acceptance of the child comes only at her husband's command, temporarily playing the role of vindictive woman, another archetype adopted from the oral tradition. Although the simple narrative style generally associated with many oral based narratives is only cursory in the example, its presence in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is such a given that we need not give further proof.

Finally, and specifically, the orality of the novel is supported by the deliberate adoption of epic tradition. This orality is further enhanced by the notion of memory--reminiscent of the mnemonic phrases of Homer and the importance of such epic memories in a nation's self definition--which here plays both a thematic and stylistic role. There are, of course, numerous stock phrases which reappear, like memories of old friends, as the life of the novel is progressively lived. Compare, for example, the opening " . . . that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice"(1), with:

> . . . that distant dawn when Colonel Aureliano Buendía took him to the barracks, not so that he could see an execution, but so that for the rest of his life he would never forget the sad and somewhat mocking smile of the man being shot.(276)

Compare also the delight of the new gypsies' inventions when

> ". . . José Arcadio Buendia must have wanted to invent a memory machine so that he could remember

them all"(17)

with the dire need for the memory machine during the plague of forgetfulness. In both these examples, the opulence of familiarity is bankrupt by the contrariety of context. Finally, compare the opening of chapter one with that of chapter ten. As Franco Moretti suggests,

> . . . announcing a fact long before it takes place, and then recalling it long afterwards . . . endows it with a truly epic grandeur.(242)

This repetition of phrase is also part and parcel of another oral tradition: the fairy tale, particularly those collected by the Brothers Grimm from local Germanic folklore and myth. In "Cinderella," for example, "good and pious"(86) appears as an introductory catch phrase; later, "Shake and wobble, little tree!/Let the gold and silver fall all over me"(89) recurs on three (magical number) different occasions; finally, the epigrammatic,

> "Looky, look, look
> at the shoe that she took
> There's blood all over, and the shoe's too small.
> She's not the bride you met at the ball,"(91)

finally is modified to read,

> "Looky, look, look
> at the shoe that she took
> The shoe's just right, and there's no blood at all.
> She's truly the bride you met at the ball.(92)

Since fairy tales once were taken from the repositories of

memory and not the depository of books, such repetition serves, in addition to being a stylistic device, as a means of recall. For the child listening, style and service go hand in hand: the repetition is remembered as the nuggets of the tale, and that memory allows for the anticipation of future delights.

But memory serves a still deeper purpose in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, even excluding its thematic value. The peculiar structure of the elemental episodes is one which turns back upon itself, often forming a complete circle. This is an obvious feature of the first chapter, which begins with a memory of ice, turns about and gradually tells the tale, concluding in confrontation with the ice; but it is elsewhere everywhere felt. Such examples are offered in: "Aureliano Buendía and Remedios Moscote were married one Sunday in March"(82) which begins the subsequently told story; and in "Colonel Aureliano Buendía organised thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all"(106), announced before his military life has even begun. Franco Moretti, offers good insight into this particular opening:

> Nothing abstract here. No "objective" reasons for wars. Everything springs from a concrete, flesh and blood, subject, unalterably repeated at the beginning of nine consecutive long sentences. It is a mythical way of explaining events.(235)

But what is the point of all these narrative U-turns? Clearly, the point is Márquez's self-confessed attempt to tell

a story the same way his grandmother told stories, and so we must realise that the characteristics of plot--the land of Márquez infancy--sow the seeds of narrative style: where much is displaced, at least the mode of story telling is indigenous and springs from native soil. And so the point is also, of course, a point of memory. When we recollect story or anecdote, primarily we encounter that golden nugget, the main point, the theme, the reason we remembered the thing in the first place, something of a mental mile stone. With that marker discover, we dig down for the details which are steadily and progressively unearthed. Márquez announces that nugget and then goes on to explain the details with chronological linearity, the traditional structure of a story. When that golden nugget is the conclusion, a complete and closed circle is formed.

When we speak of memory and the "traditional story," we are, of course, in some uncertain terms, really speaking of the oral tradition. Compare these elements of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with Eric Knight's *Sam Small Flies Again*:

> The conviction that he could fly didn't come over Sam Small gradually. It just hit him all of a sudden.
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> That night, he and Mull had been down to Los Angeles to hear Sister Minnie Tekel Upharasin Smith at the temple. First off Sam hadn't wanted to go, but before it was over even he agreed that it was quite a bit of a do, and Mully had as rare a time as

> she's had in all her born days.
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> . . . .
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> .
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> "Mully," he said, "tha knaws, sometimes Ah hev a feeling that a chap could put out his arms and launch himself off of here and fly--if he nobbut hed Faith."
>
> "Aye. If! Mully retorted. "And if thy aunt hed hed you-know-whats she'd ha' been thy uncle."
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> . . . .
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> .
>
> So Sam tip-toed out of bed in his night-shirt and took off.(54-67)

Although the story is set in California, Sam Small is a Yorkshire man on holiday with his wife. From two such divergent cultures we have great similarity in technique: the story begins with an proclamation, turns back upon itself and then describes the events which lead up to its realisation. Besides this, there is the same matter-of-fact tone to, "Ah hev a feeling that a chap could put out his arms and launch himself off of here and fly." In addition, we find also a sympathy for character and playful humour. The connection, of course, which allows this comparison, is the oral tradition: similar goal, similar strategy. Indeed, Knight first created his stories by the act of telling them out loud. If all the vastness of the world makes Yorkshire seem almost a London suburb, traditionally--as well as presently, to some degree--

it is perceived from both without and within as decidedly marginal, separated from the southern centre by a great cultural divide. And it is in that distant cold and windy county, thanks in part to its relative isolation, that the oral tradition of story-telling still preserves some potency.

Circular structure, an extreme form of flashback and a device extensively employed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* does indeed also have precedence in *The Odyssey*, which systematically resorts to flashback; and here Márquez brings it to specific and cunning effect, providing the whole memory/oral based structure of the novel.[11] The reliance upon flashback and circularity then is a powerful means of re-establishing traditional and even pre-literate narrative style in a post-modern text.

Such emphasis upon the oral tradition also creates a diffuse critique upon modernity's economic empires and emphasis upon book learning.[12] As a "new" literature, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* attempts to delineate an old sense of disaster, insisting upon a radical change in the social and political disorder. Adoption and subversion of traditional epic then is the literary equivalent of a new world order localised--in

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[11]If this sounds something of a grandiose statement, notice at least that the text is writ in small case.

[12]A theme, ironically, which is at the heart of the 16th century *Love's Labour's Lost*--proving, again, that there is indeed nothing new under the sun.

every sense of the word.

Although oral epics have played an important part in preserving identity in colonised lands, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tells the story not of indigenous native, but of those transplanted and left with the legacy of conquest. In this respect, it depicts unavoidable realities and so is echoic of epic tales born in regions which share a similar history of despair:

> Not every epic celebrates a victory; sometimes it keeps old animosities smouldering. The ongoing political crisis involving Serbia, Croatia, and the Bosnian Muslims, seen against the backdrop of the burgastica of the area, seems merely a continuation of what has gone before. For example, the *Battle of Kosovo* commemorates a tragic defeat of the Sebs At the hands of the Muslims, marking an end to the great Serbian empire. (Jackson, xvi-xvii)

Colombia's long-lived two party system--almost unique in Latin America--outlined during the nation state war section of the novel, is much like the imported technologies which enchant José Arcadio Buendia: a political magnifying glass which vainly attempts to focus ideologies which inevitably defuse with the setting sun. Although Colonel Aureliano Buendía, as already mentioned, serves as a epic hero to some degree, he provides another instance of the epic mode translated to Latin American literature: a hero who fought

thirty-two battles and lost them all; a hero who leads men into battle not as a nation building enterprise, but through a sense of personal outrage after the execution of Dr. Noguera and “a woman bitten by a dog”(104). It is this personal sense of outrage at quotidian brutality which calls the Colonel to arms, rather than a goal to “defend his own rights and privileges or to exact revenge on an opponent”(Wood, 179).

Those numerous technological importations, as Aizenburg points out, also serve as historical and political symbols. The astrolabe and sextant smack of the Spanish voyages--an epic tale that serves both as an ironic shadow, as well as the antecedent of displacement and abandonment of the one hundred years epic. Although Aizenburg sees the suit of armour as the “medieval heritage”(1241), it seems, rather, the embodiment of the violent conquest of those same voyages, the rattling bones inside a reminder of mortality, and a silent intimation of the silenced voices of the absent indigenous peoples.

The integration of “real” Colombian history in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been much examined, and there is no real need here for further catalogue. The importance of this political history, however, is varied. Initially it provides a counterbalance to the fabulous elements of the story, disallowing any passing fairy-tale reading by the reading public. Besides this, more specific episodes attempt to rewrite rewritten history, to remember. In addition, various critics make clear that the legendary General Rafael Uribe Uribe--a man of epic stature marked by unalloyed failure--

provides the prototype for Colonel Aureliano Buendía.

Equally as important, the endless wars are experienced by the reader at a distance, namely, from the point of view of Macondo and the narrator, revealing, by implication, the potential of distant war to implicate all local arenas and so stressing that the solitude of Macondo is, in reality, regional solitude, in much the same way that the Buendía family is really the regional family. Since both colonisation and de-colonisation provide the process by which solitude comes about, all this seems inevitable.

The Buendía family, of course, is something of an oligarchy; sometimes despotic, sometimes benevolent. Nevertheless, their increased wealth and improved residence reproduces its elitist tendencies with incestuous inevitability. Incest then reveals another face: the countenance of European political structure most typical during the age of conquest, imported into that new world lacking names, though immediately possessing deeds of title. Finally, with the feudal system all but vanished across the Atlantic, in Macondo it continuous to reproduce itself, with liberal supporting land owners turning turn-coat, turning conservative in an effort to prevent any new allotment of land.

As we see then, the political agenda inherent in *The Aeneid*, which was indeed written at the emperor's request as an attempt to legitimise Rome's primacy, provides a mirror image that demonstrates the new world's foundation as one inherently illegitimate. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* cannot modify

external social and political realities; it does, however, underline differences of culture and provides vivid access to that world of differences; and perhaps this, in terms of politics at least, is the fundamental limit of literature, a border between imagination and reality that no passport, magical or otherwise, can deny. Although politics occurs, at least as a subtext, throughout the novel, its most interesting expression is saved for the conclusion, as suggested by Márquez in his 1982 Nobel lecture, when he looks forward to a time " . . . where no one will be able to decide for others how they die"(Ortega, 91). Here then we clearly see Melquíades' prophesy as fate born of the marriage between the patrimony of conquest and the consequence of solitude.

The fabulous elements,[13] the "magic realism"--a subject severely abused by many critics[14] is properly contextualised by

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[13]"Fabulous" is offered as a term less hazardous than "magic."

[14]The dazzle of magic has lead Michael Wood to dismiss magic as something which merely "represents a reality elaborated by the imagination"(12); Raymond L. Williams suggest that, "This is one of those novels constructed with some type of over all scheme in which details fit some kind of pattern"(75), concluding finally that pattern is really all there is; finally, Edwin Williamson misses the point completely, and dismisses the fabulous entirely, suggesting: "Even though the

Márquez :

> Antonio Pigafetta, a Florentine navigator who went with Magellan on the first voyage around the world, wrote, upon his passage through our southern lands of America, a strictly accurate account that nonetheless resembles a venture into fantasy. In it he recorded that he had seen hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like spoons . . . He described how the first native encountered in Patagonia was confronted with a mirror, whereupon that impassioned giant lost his senses to the terror of his own image.(Ortega, 87)

If the fauna of the new world is fabulous enough, it is matched by geographical prestidigitation:

> Eldorado, our so avidly sought and illusory land, appeared on numerous maps for many a long year, shifting its place and form to suit the fantasy of cartographers;(Ortega, 87)

and by the daydream of human activity:

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inhabitants of Macondo might accept this [Remedios the Beauty's 'assumption into heaven'] as a true event, as far as the reader is concerned, the fact of it being narrated in the text does not strengthen its claim to literal, historical truth"(47).

> In his search for the fountain of eternal youth, the mythical Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca explored the north of Mexico for eight years, in a deluded expedition whose members devoured each other and only five of whom returned, of the six hundred who had undertaken it.(Ortega, 87)

Márquez goes on to describe Latin American independence not as a break from such spells but as a new phase, including the bizarre account of General Antonio López de Santa Anna holding a funeral for his right leg[15] lost during the Pastry War.

Márquez address is riveting reading for the same reason that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is riveting reading: it features the fabulous in the ordinary, the fantasy of reality not for purely literary purposes but because, as Babe the talking pig has told us, this is "the way things are."[16]

And the story continues: When the Chamula squats in his remodelled Colonial Church, floor covered in pine needles, ceiling painted with sky and stars, sipping from his bottle of Pepsi or Coke--the soft drinks war here has reached heavenly proportions--burping the carbonated gas as a medium for the exorcism of evil spirits, we see also that what seems fabulous from the outside is normal and even sacred from within. If we find humour in some surreal passages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, then the humour is often double edged, for we gaze

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[15]Perhaps an episode excluded from *Moby-Dick*?

[16]This, by the way, is another Yorkshire tale.

outwards at this strange world as from the barred cells of a prison, built brick by brick upon the rock of our own cultural certainty. Breaking free of this prison, entering the world of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, requires us not to suspect the paradigm of its formulation but to accept its authenticity. It does not, however, mean that we should fail to examine the literary symbolic and allegorical meaning.

One particularly interesting application of the fabulous focuses upon the death of José Arcadio :

> As soon as José Arcadio closed the bedroom door, the sound of a pistol shot echoed through the house. A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlour, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Úrsula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.

"Holy Mother of God!" Úrsula shouted.(135)

The extended sentence trails along much like the anthropomorphic trail of blood, establishing not only the familial ties which transcend death, but the relationship between the textual body and the characters it portrays. The point that there is often[17] a literary meaning in the fabulous is also made clear in this passage, for, as Márquez himself informs us, this trail of blood is symbolic of the umbilical cord. Besides this, the physical nature of the blood trail and its fabulous abilities show the link between mother and son as transcendental, the duality that is in our very nature.

Occurring where we least expect it, a particularly interesting instance of the fabulous: The repetitive rebellions and civil wars finally come to an apogee with the arrival of the US owned banana company. When workers protest the cruel conditions of their employment, their voices are silence by the resounding racket of gunfire. As school text books subsequently make clear, clearly the disturbance was minor, clearly it was quickly settled. Those who died, by magnificent slight of hand, vanish into the fog of non-history. In the following chapter, this fog of non-history condenses as black cloud: rain inundates Macondo for four years, eleven months and two days. Much of the town is wiped away, cleansed by epic machinery.

Reading the banana strike massacre as a "magical" event--

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[17]Always?

reality turned to literature; reading the "magical" downpour as an epic--Biblical--allusion affecting material change--literature turned to reality; this is to treat the fabulous respectfully, to read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* upon its own terms, as Márquez insists we do:

> It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick they use for themselves. . . . The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary (Ortega, 89).

The rains which conclude this episode are, as Jane Robinett puts it, and example where " . . . the magic of the natural world has the last word over the impressive technologies of the gringos"(86). The fabulous, as this episode make clear, besides being a feature of traditional epics, is a feature of Latin American reality and should by no means be seen as a magical alternative to realism but an actual and integral component of that reality.

We have already seen the importance of memory in the novel's cyclical structure, but it is also an important feature of the fabulous, for memory has the ability to mutate, to transform what might have been ordinary into the fabulous.[18] Besides

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[18]A memory: As a lad, there was an old abandoned quarry that we often imagined but never visited. Two tall brick chimneys marked its place, rising from waves of rolling corn. There lived Chippy, the guardian of the quarry. Chippy and his gun.

Our mams and dads warned us never to go there or Chippy would shoot us. So we looked at the chimneys from a safe distance, beside the stream that separated our world, the streets and small woods, from the world of rolling corn, the quarry, Chippy, everything that was unknown, and only imagined ourselves adventurers. Sometimes we would decide that Chippy was not real, that he was an invention of our parents to keep us in our place. One day, sitting blowing dandelion clocks in the back garden. From next door, where Swaney the post man lived, came a sudden commotion. Kids, strange kids who, in my memory, were so entirely strange that they must have lived in a different street altogether, were crying and screaming. I looked over the privet hedge. Rex, the postman's dog, was on the ground. The kids surrounded him. There was blood spilling over the concrete path. Rex was crying his dog cries too.

"What happened?" I shouted over.

"He's been shot." Rex was shot.

"Chippy shot him." Chippy had shot him.

The kids from another street had taken Rex for a walk to the old quarry and Chippy had shot him. For years afterwards Rex hopped about on three legs.

When I was older and braver, I went to the old quarry. There was no sign of Chippy nor the house where he was supposed to live. There was a farm house nearby. Farmers were notoriously hostile to strange dogs on their land. Farmers always had

this, memory is, of course, the key element in the insomnia plague, an addition to the Biblical seven deadly plagues and perhaps the novel's single most interesting incident of the fabulous. José Antonios' first reaction is laced with scepticism: reading it as mere Indian myth, he wears European incredulity like a suit of armour. The insomnia plague, which finally results in loss of memory,

> and a resultant loss of both personal and community history, culture, dreams and language, is a fitting metaphor for the fate of the indigenous peoples of the New World.(Robinett, 46)

The plague finds no remedy in either Úrsula's herbal lore, nor in José Arcadio's scientific attempts at containment and his infamous "memory machine"(49). This machine

> . . . bears a distant family resemblance to the Great Work of . . . Catalan mystic Ramon Llull. Llull's Ars Magnus . . . was a machine built to answer philosophical questions.(Robinett, 47)

We notice also that the plague arrives after an unremitting influx of external technologies. This, and the recourse to labels and even a sign reading "GOD EXISTS"(49), points not only towards a metaphorical reading of indigenous peoples' fate, but also mankind's fate when oral tradition is displaced by the written, and when Western scientific rationality

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shotguns. I only realise these forgotten details now--and they make no difference. I know Chippy shot Rex.

entirely rules the roost.

> Words in their printed form have become more real for us than either the sounds on the lips of living men or the concepts the represent. Books as a mere physical object sometimes surpass wisdom in the worlds esteem.(Sims, 68)

José Arcadio's ineffectual labels, the "GOD EXISTS" sign, reveal such fatuous faith in the written word, whilst his memory machine offers proof positive that technology and rationality has inherent problem solving limits. Not surprisingly, it is Melquíades, returning from the realm of the dead in grand epic style, who provides the final solution.

Melquíades provides *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with an epicentre for magical reasoning. It is Melquíades who possess the keys of Nostradamus and so possesses the keys of prophesy. Robinett's provides a concise assessment of Melquíades' importance:

> . . . magic and science can be regarded as parallel methods for acquiring knowledge about the natural world.
>
> . . . .
>
> Along with science, Melquíades brings two kinds of technology (technique and apparatus) to Macondo in the form of an alchemist's laboratory. The importance of this laboratory, which he presents as a gift to José Arcadio, is underscored by the

> observation that it will have a "profound influence on the future of the village." This link to the time of the alchemists, when magic and science were scarcely differentiated from each other, underscore the connection between the two methods of gaining knowledge.(26)

Melquíades is philanthropic--to a certain point--with his knowledge and understanding of nature's secrets, and the paraphernalia he introduces to Macondo pose no threat in themselves. It is that same stuff in the hands of José Arcadio Buendía, however, which becomes a threat and immediately reveals the dangers of his European patrimony, for he cannot resist turning such wonders towards wealth and power. If the Buendía race have arrived in a land laced with the fabulous, its proper usage is by no means a given. But the fabulous is often an outside force that touches human life rather than being touched by it, as we saw in the Biblical flood.

One Hundred Years of Solitude, as suggested elsewhere, makes varied allusions to fate, a notion which remains almost as esoteric--and as important--here as in *The Aeneid*. If gods or magic often play an important part in the epic's mechanics of fate--and it is the free will of the human actors which poses the problem--here everything seems free will, everything the problem, and yet fate insists on being played out. Needless to say, fate in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* leads not to victory but to annihilation; and it is at the very close of the book, with the reading of Melquíades' script, that this

question becomes most prominent and most puzzling. I will therefore place stress not on a *document*, neither will I suggest that "it is revealed in reality that the narrator of the entire story was Melquíades"(Williams, 88)--unless we believe that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* concentrates "a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in on instant"(Márquez, 421), this notion carries no weight; but instead on a prophesy written down, a prophesy which, unlike *The Aeneid*, cannot be revealed until it is done, and containing, as it does, not only the act of foundation but the act of destruction. Told in the tone of hindsight, ironically it becomes a testament of foresight, a circularity which expresses the cyclical notion of history central, as already mentioned, to many ancient peoples.[19] Since the coded document is indeed a prophesy, the simple definition of fate must resemble somewhat the causes of solitude.

The absence of divine intervention means that the sin of hubris cannot be avoided and becomes an aspect of the novel's fatalism. But if there is no divine intervention is there really any divine and is there therefore any hubris? If this syllogism is true does Remedios the Beauty merely get caught up in a gust of wind? To answer these question, it seems, would be to embark upon a new paper. Suffice to say, a slight crack in the concreteness of unalterable fate appears when we note that Melquíades begins his prophetic text after returning

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[19]The Maya immediately spring to mind.

from the dead, when he has “lost all his supernatural faculties because of his faithfulness to life”(50). Is Melquíades’ string of literary washing then more prediction than prophesy? It this the second chance denied Macondo but offered to other Macondos? Is this then the epic machinery bequeathed to the hand of man?

When Márquez destroyed the volumous working notes for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, he did so with the knowledge that the vitality of the book depended to a good degree upon its continued mystery, just as the mundane self-explanatory is forgotten and the enigmatic might turn mythic and so be remembered. And it is the very mystery of the fabulous, working like enigmatic incantations, which capture our attention and breathe extra-ordinary vitality into each page. As we see then, the fabulous in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an aspect of external reality, of story-telling’s fabula and of stylistic fabulation.

The time has come to restate the stated. Instead, we might look at the big picture. The omnipresent violence of the epic occurs in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* not merely in the overt war section but as a steady trail of blood which streams between every line. The trail of blood which travels down streets and around corners, joining José Arcadio to his mother ties in national violence to family, once again reminding us of the emblematic nature of the Biendía family.

Incest, from this perspective, is not merely a family matter but a national one. Aisenburg's essay, so bound to violence that she cannot see the forest for the battlements, offers a peremptory glance at the incest issue, understanding it as a response to the "Hispano-Catholic society--the sanctioned ideals of the colony"(1242), where the sacredness of the family is here defiled. Although this is true to a certain point--especially within the framework of the epic Biblical allusions--it overlooks the larger context of solitude and the fundamental importance incest plays in the foundation and destruction of Macondo. The original Biendía family represent not Aizenburg's "stepchildren of Spain"(1241) but the abandoned children of Spain, *élever* without outside influence, turning inwards and entering an incestuous adulthood as a direct result of isolation: only the abandoned remain, and the abandoned are all keenly related. Incest then is a form of self abuse, violence turned inwards: the original of original sins; and it is this sin which is carried to Macondo. Macondo, as a "city of ice," slowly melts in the fateful heat of incest and annihilism. At the same time this sin serves as a double symbol: the original sin of the original conquest, something which, by the attachment of generations, cannot be left behind. Although the novel's opening is suggestive of Eden, it is an Eden where man is already spoiled.

Kerwin Lee Klein is quite correct in suggesting:

> Rather than elaborating ever more intricate principles of differentiating historical and non-

> historical cultures [those with and without written histories] . . . we need to consider what happens to historicity when we imagine all peoples, regardless of race, religion, or literacy, as historical, and think of their narratives as different forms of historical discourse rather than romantic alternatives to it.(298)

Klein's essay, dealing principally with "master narratives"--most particularly in respect of Hegel's musings, immediately brings the epic to mind.[20] Although the primary epics seem *prima facie* inclusive: *The Illiad* features Ionians and Aiolians on the side of Troy, pit against Achaians, Argives and Danaans; *The Odyssey* was spread by reciters throughout Asia Minor before its culmination in the written form and is composed of varied folk-tales from unrelated traditions; even Virgil's deliberately literary *The Aeneid* is linked to the oral tradition, which provides the Roman segments of the myth, such inclusions were appropriations destined to support national supremacy and national pride. It is for this reason that the epic in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* serves as both a criticism of that self-destructive land, but also is variously subverted in order that it might more faithfully portray the story being told. As Raymond L. Williams points out, the end of the book also features characters from other

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[20]Indeed, Franco Moretti opens his *Modern Epic* with Hagel's definition of the epic.

authors work, such as Carlos Fuentes and Juliao Cortázar. Although Williams sees this as merely "playful"(76) and self-conscious fiction, by drawing attention to literature, it plays an important role in addressing an issue which is central both in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and in its production. Márquez, in that same Nobel Lecture, tells us:

> our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude. (Ortega, 89)

Solitude then is not only the theme of the novel, but the practical problem of post-colonial writers. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a singular attempt to overcome that problem.

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An introduction to and summary of the novel One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel GarcÃa MÃ¡rquez.Â SUMMARY: This is the authorâ€™s epic tale of seven generations of the BuendÃa family that also spans a hundred years of turbulent Latin American history, from the postcolonial 1820s to the 1920s. Patriarch JosÃ© Arcadio BuendÃa builds the utopian city of Macondo in the middle of a swamp. At first prosperous, the town attracts Gypsies and huckstersâ€”among them the old writer MelquÃades, a stand-in for the author. A tropical storm lasting nearly five years almost destroys the town, and by the fifth BuendÃa generation its physical decrepitude is matched by the familyâ€™s depravity. A hurricane finally