

Chapter 1

Writing in Macondo: How Characters Create Nostalgic Texts.

In the preface to his collection of short stories, *Strange Pilgrims* (1992), Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells us that since he had described the European cities where the stories take place from memory, he decided to verify the accuracy of his memories by returning to Europe. After twenty years, he discovered his imagination had replaced the cities reality:

Not one of them had any connection to my memories. Through an astonishing inversion, all of them, like all of present day Europe had become strange. True memories seemed like phantoms while false memories were so convincing that they replaced reality. This meant I could not detect the dividing line between disillusionment and nostalgia. (xii)

The passing of time that erases the ultimate line between present day Europe and Garcia Marquez's nostalgic memory of it gave him a "perspective in time" that, because it does not distinguish between reality and the imagination, released his creative imagination (or imaging of the past). This allowed him to overcome persistent "uncertainties" he had about this collection of stories and freely rewrite them into the ones he had always wanted to write (xiii).

As Garcia Marquez explains:

Because of my helpful suspicion that perhaps nothing I had experienced in Europe was true, I did not have to ask myself where life ended and the imagination begin. Then the writing become so fluid that I sometimes felt as if I were writing for the sheer pleasure of telling a story which may be the human condition that most resembles levitation. (xii-xiii)

It seems however, Garcia Marquez had already reached his insight into nostalgia when he wrote his first novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Because they recognize nostalgia as a creative force that reshapes memories, many of the characters in his novel use nostalgia to

overcome their “uncertainties“ about living in a world where each successive moment in time brings them closer to disillusionment. When they place present time, as Garcia Marquez himself did, in relation to an emotionally remembered past, they too erase the “dividing line” between reality and imagination. They “levitate” above the constraints of their present condition by holding it in an imaginatively creative relation to the past in an attempt to revise the story of their own present reality. In this sense, there is an essential difference between simply remembering a past event and remembering that event nostalgically. Memory is the recollection of prior events, but nostalgia is the transformative process by which we remember those events emotionally. As Uruguayan writer Eduardo remind us, the Spanish verb recorder (to remember), derives from the Latin recordis: “to pass back through the heart” (10). Consequently, many characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* do not simply recall a past event; rather their emotionally charged memory leads them to remember it nostalgically. Their emotions reshape their memory of the past by reinterpreting and representing it, and in the process, they recreate meaning for their present reality by placing it in relation to the revised past. Imagination rather than historical fact shapes their remembrance of things past.

In his “*A La Recherche du Temps Perdu in One Hundred Years of Solitude*”, John P. McGowan distinguishes between Proust’s perception of how art and memory combine to overcome time and what he believes is Garcia Marquez’s own distrust of nostalgia as an imaginative force that can redeem time by applying art to reality(566). Unlike Proustian metaphor, which transcends sequential constraints and allows “art to overcome the solitude of individual events by joining them together in an act not of nostalgia but of memory” (359) Garcia Marquez’s notion of nostalgia, according to McGowan, unavoidably leads his characters into solitude because “nostalgia is the emotion of a man facing a past which is closed, which is entirely other than the present” (563). McGowan’s argument, however underestimates nostalgia as the creative force that reshapes memories. Because many

characters in the novel use nostalgia to revise present reality by placing it in relation to a revised past, they break down barriers between reality and the imagination, thus creating a meaningful perception of reality that like Proustian metaphor, leads them out of solitude of present time. In this sense, the past is never “closed”, but always open to reinterpretation, making a character’s nostalgic recollection of a particular event a creative act: the real historical event is replaced with a nostalgic memory that is more real than reality.

However, as a creative process that always allows characters to re-image the past, nostalgia has a positive and a negative side. By drawing from both real life and imaginary sources, Prudencio Aquilar, Fernanda del Carpio, Amaranta and Ursula Buendia, to name a few are, like the novelist, writers who try to make sense of the world by reshaping reality imaginatively to give it meaning; for them nostalgia is beneficial, because through its perspective, they create meaningful texts that lead them out of the solitude of present time. By contrast, because the Catalonian can not achieve a balance between his imagination and reality, his nostalgia produces negative results; instead of leading him out of solitude, it only reinforces his solitude in present time.

But perhaps nostalgia becomes most significance in the case of Colonel Aureliano Buendia. Unlike the others, Colonel Buendia exemplifies the failed writer: he does not shape reality imaginatively because he has no emotional interest in it. After his experience before the firing squad, Colonel Buendia loses his emotional capacity to create a nostalgic text. With no emotions to give his memory of the past the imaginative force it needs to reconstruct reality, Colonel Buendia cannot inscribe the world with personal or political meaning; he simply makes little gold fish in solitude.

Whether characters become casualties of nostalgia, like Colonel Buendia, or find in their heart’s memory a constant wealth of creativity, like Ursula, they all demonstrate how nostalgia offers them a way to re-image the past for meaning. The positive or negative aspects

of nostalgia depend on why each character invokes nostalgia; however, all of them show how passing emotions back through the heart affirms the human potential to inscribe the world with significance. See in this respect, nostalgia is less an attempt to recover in language what has been lost in time than it is a rhetorical strategy that allows individuals to endure the real world despite its harsh realities. In every case, Garcia Marquez underscores through Melquiades' parchments and the text of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* itself the narrative creativity that arises from the process of nostalgia. As Michael Bell puts it, Melquiades "adopts his solitude for a creative purpose" (68); that is, like the novelist, he writes a nostalgic text that recreates reality to give it meaning not only for himself but for people of Macondo as well.

For those characters whose nostalgia becomes a way out of solitude, their emotional connection to the past can often be strong enough to defy death. Prudencio Aguilar, for instance, cannot change the reality of his death; however, the intensity of his emotional memory and desire for life and human company emphasizes the power of nostalgia to break through the barriers that separate life from death. Prudencio's nostalgia for life is so strong; it even arouses immense pity from his enemy and killer, Jose Arcadio Buendia. When Prudencio returns to the Buendia house as a ghost attempting to wash the wound that killed him, and Jose Arcadio Buendia sees the depth of Prudencio's emotional suffering, he too recognizes how deep his human connection to Prudencio actually is and participates in Prudencio's pain:

He [Jose Arcadio Buendia] was tormented by the immense desolation with which the dead man had looked at him through the rain, his deep nostalgia as he yearned for living people..... "He must be suffering a great deal" [Jose Arcadio Buendia] said to Ursula. "You can see that he's so very lonely."(30)

Prudencio's nostalgia for life, however, is more than yearning for the unattainable. As the most extreme form of human solitude, death is the greatest challenge to a character's sense that life has meaning. Indeed, time does not distance Prudencio from his longing for a life that is no longer attainable; it intensifies it, giving him a different perspective of his past. Prudencio cannot change the historical fact that Jose Arcadio Buendia is the man who killed him, but even years after his death, Prudencio's desire to be with the living, and his fear of death's final solitude, are so strong that his emotions reshape his perception of Jose Arcadio as his enemy and cause him to seek Buendia's friendship: "After many years of death the yearning for the living was so intense, the need for company so pressing, so terrifying the nearness of that other death which exists within death, that Prudencio Aguilar ended up loving his worst enemy" (80). The creative force in the process of nostalgia gives Prudencio a "perspective in time" that erases any definitive line between the past and the present, allowing Prudencio to re-define Jose Arcadio Buendia and create a meaningful sense of reality despite historical facts. Of course, Prudencio cannot escape death, but in recognizing his emotional connection to the past and to humanity, he "levitates" above the barriers between reality and the imagination and overcomes not only the alienation imposed on him by death but the solitude produced from hate. Time and death give Prudencio a new perspective of life, allowing him to revise his remembrance of the past and write into the loneliness of his present condition the meaning it lacks in reality. Like the novelist, Prudencio writes a nostalgic text that leads him out of solitude and into the solidarity of Jose Arcadio Buendia.

However, not all characters must be trapped in the solitude of death before they can create a new perspective of life. Fernanda del Carpio, the "stuck-up highlander" (299) who marries Aureliano Segundo Buendia, is a rigid woman whose lack of human warmth prevents her from experiencing any meaningful contact with humanity. Raised to be a queen, she separates herself from Macondo's inhabitants, living in aloof isolation because, as a "noble

dame of fine blood” who has the “right to sign eleven peninsular names”, she believes she is “the only mortal creature in that town of bastards who did not feel all confused at the sight of sixteen pieces of silverware” (299). It is not surprising, then, that when Fernanda moves into the Buendia house; she denies herself the full experience of human emotion to maintain strict aristocratic order in the family. Her absurd values and inflexible lifestyle not only oppose the Buendia’s traditional carefree hospitality but make the house as tomb-like and cold as Fernanda’s sterile heart.

Yet, as she nears death, Fernanda, like Prudencio, seeks to overcome her self-imposed solitude by invoking her emotionally charged memories of the past. In fact, her emotions infuse her memory of the past with so much significance that when she stands in front of the mirror wearing the “motheaten queen’s dress” she wore when she was to be crowned queen of the “bloody carnival”, anyone seeing her “in ecstasy over her regal gesture, would have reason to think she was mad” (335). The old dress, however, is actually a symbol of a past remembrance Fernanda uses as a “device” to activate her nostalgia, so she, like Prudencio, can rise above the limitations of her present condition and by imaginatively re-creating her memory of the past, revise the disillusionment of her present reality to find comfort:

She could not help a knot from forming in her heart and her eyes filling with tears because at that moment she smelled once more the odor of shoe polish on the boots of the officer who came to get her at her house to make her a queen, and her soul brightened with the nostalgia of her lost dreams. (335)

Of course, as with Prudencio Aguilar, Fernanda cannot change historical fact: her dress is a symbol of the humiliating past event that brought her “shame” (197). Raised by parents who had promised her she was going to be a queen, Fernanda’s real or imagined royal future is shamefully shattered when a group of unknown political agitators, promising to proclaim her beauty queen of Macondo’s festival, actually use Fernanda to incite a massacre

that turns the festival into a “bloody carnival” (186-92). Like Prudencio, then, Fernanda reinterprets her bitterest past event to re-contextualize her present condition. So, despite the reality of her self-imposed solitude and cold heart, Fernanda’s nostalgia reverses her lack of human warmth and becomes an act of solidarity that allows her to achieve the humanity she had always denied herself in life:

She felt so old, so worn out, so far away from the best moments of her life that she even yearned for those that she remembered as the worst, and only then did she discover how much she missed the whiff of oregano on the porch and the smell of the roses at dusk, even the bestial nature of the parvenus. Her heart of compressed ash, which had resisted the most telling blows of daily reality without strain, fell apart with the first waves of nostalgia. The need to feel sad was becoming a vice as the years eroded her. She became human in her solitude. (336)

Recognizing her connection to the past and other people, Fernanda experiences the multiplicity of human emotions that resurrect the creativity of her “heart of compressed ash.” As with Prudencio, Fernanda can never really escape her solitude. At the same time, when she “becomes human”, she writes herself out of her own solitude, transcending its loneliness by creating a meaningful condition for herself in the present based on an imaginative reinterpretation of the past. Like Prudencio, Fernanda writes a nostalgic text that leads her into solidarity with other people.

Ironically, Fernanda’s “need to feel sad” is an act of purposeful and pleasurable self-hurt that stresses how, once she invokes her nostalgic memories, she has authority to revise, and therefore control, the emotional meaning of a past event over which she originally had no control. Perhaps to justify her otherwise restrictive lifestyle, which among other things closes the doors of the once hospitable Buendia house, Fernanda willfully intensifies a single human

emotion of her nostalgic memory: sadness. So although her nostalgia kindles in her heart's memory a variety of human feelings, Fernanda ironically uses this fundamental emotion to exacerbate the humiliation of her past.

Amaranta Buendia, the daughter of Jose Arcadio and Ursula, uses nostalgia similarly. She also willfully feels emotional pain in the present by deliberately infusing her nostalgic remembrances with painful emotions. However, unlike Fernanda, who shapes the recreation process with sadness so she can find comfort in controlling the meaning of her emotional pain, Amaranta uses her nostalgia as an act of self punishment: she keeps her memories of the past bitter so she can constantly punish herself in the present.

Just as the passage of time does not distance Prudencio Aguilar from his desire for life, the passing years do not distance the "old and isolated" (257) Amarta from her youthful "secret passion" (243) for her sister's fiancé:

Amaranta had reached old age with all her nostalgias intact.

When she listened to the waltzes of Pietro Crespi she felt the same desire to weep that she had in adolescence, as if time and harsh lessons had meant nothing. The rolls of music that she herself had thrown in the trash.....kept spinning and playing in her memory. She had tried to sink them into the swampy passion that she had allowed herself with her nephew Aureliano Jose, and she tried to take refuge in the calm and virile protection of Colonel Gerineldo Marquez, but she had not been able to overcome them. (25)

For Amaranta, the past is not as McGowan contends, "entirely other than the present" (563). Instead, Amaranta's past continuously enters into the present, transcending the boundaries of time and infusing present events with past emotions. Unlike Fernanda, who recognizes that the re-creative process of nostalgia leaves the past open to reinterpretation,

Amaranta believes the re-creative process itself is “closed” to her. She can only relive the past, not re-imagine it:

The hatred that Amaranta noticed one night in Meme’s words did not upset her ... but she felt the repetition of another adolescence that seemed as clean hers must have seemed and that, however, was already tainted with rancor. But by then Amaranta’s acceptance of her fate was so deep that she was not even upset by the certainty that all possibilities of rectification were closed to her. (260)

Because Amaranta believes she cannot revise her past, her original jealousy of Rebeca for being Crespi’s choice constantly infuses her present feelings for Rebeca with “rancor”:

She thought of Rebeca when she soaped her withered breasts and her lean stomach, and when she put on the white stiff-starched petticoats and corsets of old age. ...Always, at every moment, asleep and awake, during the most sublime and most abject moments, Amaranta thought about Rebeca, because solitude had made a selection in her memory and had burned the dimming piles of nostalgic waste that life had accumulated in her heart, and had purified, magnified, and eternalized the others, the bitterest ones. (207)

Although Amaranta simultaneously maintains the memory of her passion for Pietro Crespi and malice for Rebeca, she also maintains through time the guilt and sense of responsibility she felt when Remedios, her brother’s young wife, dies, “poisoned by her own blood” (89). After all, just before Remedios’ death, Amaranta had been “waiting for that hour” to poison Rebeca’s coffee and at the same time “begging God with such fervor for something fearful to happen so that she would not have to poison Rebeca” (89). Amaranta maintains her belief, then, that her love for Pietro Crespi and her “mad” wish for Rebeca’s death caused her to poison Remedios’s coffee “involuntarily” (91). Moreover, Pietro Crespi’s

suicide after Amaranta rejects his marriage offer reaffirms her sense of guilt-ridden responsibility and leads her in an act of self hurt and “terrible expiation” (207), to “put her hand into the coals of the stove until it hurt her so much that she felt no more pain” (110). Quite literally in her relations with Pietro Crespi and Rebeca and intensifies forever on her body only the bitterness of her heart.

In fact, because time cannot change Amaranta’s “rancor” for Rebeca nor her guilt for Remedios’ and Pietro’s death, Amaranta, when she recognizes the unearthly beauty of Remedios the beauty, feels “reborn in her heart the rancor that she had felt in other days for Rebeca, and begging God not to impel her into the extreme state of her dead, she banished Remedios from the sewing room” (157). Contrary feeling simultaneously wages a war in Amaranta’s heart because her past emotions always infuse her present, confusing any distinctions between love and hate. Thus, when she inadvertently tells Ursula that “sooner or later” the government is going to shoot her suitor, Colonel Gerineldo Marquez, Amaranta is “overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt similar to the one that had tormented her when Remedios died, as if once more her careless words had been responsible for a death” (135). Amaranta’s “tragedy”, then, is not that her nostalgic past is “distinct from the present” (McGowan 564); on the contrary, it is that she cannot discern love from hate because she cannot discern the past from the present. Indeed, years later, when Amaranta believes Rebeca is about to die, she plans her funeral “with such hatred that it made her tremble to think about the scheme, which she would have carried out in exactly the same way if it had done out of love, but she would not allow herself to become upset by the confusion” (259). Because time does not let Amaranta “overcome” her youthful passion for Pietro Crespi, she cannot distinguish love from hate, leaving her only with the memories that, in an act of self-punishment, she maintains by continuously infusing them with bitterness:

At times it pained her to have let that outpouring of misery follow its course, and at times it made her so angry that she would prick her fingers with the needles, but what pained her most and enraged her most and made her most bitter was the fragrant and wormy guava grove of love that was dragging her toward death. Just as Colonel Aureliano Buendia thought about his war, unable to avoid it, so Amaranta thought about Rebeca. But while her brother had managed to sterilize his memories, she had only managed to make hers more scalding. (258)

Thus, as with Fernanda, Amaranta imposes her own solitude, and just as Fernanda's "motheaten queen's dress" is a "device" that activates her remembrances, allowing Fernanda to "feel sad", the black bandage Amaranta wears over her burned hand and never takes off is also a "device" that allows her to keep her most bitter memories "intact". Indeed, both Amaranta and Fernanda, by intensifying their need to feel pain, deny themselves the fullness of human emotions and create their own solitude. But, unlike Amaranta, Fernanda writes herself out of solitude by re-writing the story of her sorrow. Fernanda creates her own solitude, but she also writes herself out of it because the reinterpreted meaning of her sadness is, for her, more real than life. Amaranta, by contrast, only "manages" to make her memories "more scalding" (258) and thus limits the meaning of her solitude to perpetual bitterness and self-punishment. Indeed, Amaranta cannot rise above her "life of meanness" (261) because she "eternalizes" her "most bitter" (207) memories, trapping herself in a self-created solitude where "all possibilities of rectification are closed to her".

But when Amaranta reaches the end of her life and realizes she cannot avoid dying before her sister, she learns the solitary act of creating her shroud holes the solution to overcoming her solitude:

She began to understand that only a miracle would allow her to prolong the work past Rebeca's death, but the very concentration gave her a calmness that she needed to accept the idea of frustration. It was then that she understood the vicious circle of Colonel Aureliano Buendia's little gold fishes. The world was reduced to the surface of her skin and her inner self was safe from all bitterness. It pained her not to have had that revelation many years before when it had been possible to purify memories and reconstruct the universe under a new light and evoke without trembling Pietro Crespi's smell of lavender at dusk and rescue Rebeca from her sloth of misery, not out of hatred or out of love but because of the measureless understanding of solitude. (260)

Amaranta ultimately learns that because solitude imposes no artistic limits on her nostalgic remembrances, memory, as a creative act, always leaves the past open to reinterpretation, and like Fernanda, Amaranta writes herself out of the solitude she originally creates. For Amaranta, the act of making her shroud becomes like the process of nostalgia itself – a creative act that kindles the creativity of her bitter heart and allows her to “reconstruct” the meaning of her emotional connection to the past and to humanity. Consequently, instead of slowing down its creation with “useless detail” to delay her death, Amaranta “speeds” (269) up the process of making her shroud; her work turns into an act of solidarity. Like the novelist, Amaranta creates a text that reconstructs reality to give it meaning not only for herself but for the entire “world”:

She took the last stitch in the most beautiful piece of work that any women had ever finished, and she announced without the least bit of dramatics that she was going to die at dusk. She not only told the family but the whole town. Because Amaranta had conceived of the idea that she could make up for a life of

meanness with one last favor to the world, and she thought that no one was in a better position to take letters to the dead. (261)

Amaranta's struggle to recognize nostalgia as a creative force that does not distinguish between reality and the imagination contrasts with the ease with which her mother, Ursula, breaks down the barriers separating her imagination from reality. Unlike Amaranta, who embitters the meaning of her life by using nostalgia to punish herself in the present, Ursula uses her memory to reshape present reality imaginatively to give it practical meaning. Like the novelist, Ursula is a story teller who, by breaking down the barriers between reality and the imagination, creates a text from nostalgia that makes sense of the world for herself and others as well.

Ursula's attempt to create a practical meaning from the condition of her family results from her perception of time as circular. As the one who must constantly maintain stability and order in her family while the obsessive behavior of the Buendia men recurs each generation, Ursula suspects that time is not linear but instead turns in a circle (210). For instance, when her grandson, Jose Arcadio Segunda, "sets about the awesome task of breaking stones, digging canals, clearing away rapids, and even harnessing waterfalls" so he can cross the same impassable region of land which her husband tried to cross on foot years earlier, Ursula shouts, "I know all this by heart ... it's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning" (185).

However, like the creative process of nostalgia itself, Ursula's circular perception of time allows the past always to comment on the present, a process, which, because it erases any definitive line between the past and the present, allows Ursula to create a meaningful sense of reality despite its historical facts. So when she must comfort her husband from the pains of hearing about his sons' obsessive behavior, she discovers she can also comfort

herself by recreating the reality of the Buendias. Ursula, in effect, finds the comfort of storytelling:

She would bathe him bit by bit as he sat on his stool while she gave him news of the family, “Aureliano went to war more than four months ago and we haven’t heard anything about him”, she would say, scrubbing his back with a soaped brush. “Jose Arcadio comes back a big man ... but he only brought shame to our house”. She thought she noticed, however, that her husband would grow sad with the bad news. Then she decided to lie to him. ... “God willed that Jose Arcadio and Rebeca should get married, and now they are very happy”. She got so sincere in the deception that she ended up by consoling herself with her own lies. “Arcadio is a serious man now”, she said, “and very brave, and a fine looking young man with his uniform and saber”. (106-07)

Because her perception of time breaks down the barriers between the past and the present, Ursula’s nostalgia for domestic stability becomes a comforting reality to her and her husband underneath the chestnut tree. She re-images the world and gives it the meaning it will never have if it is left un-interpreted by the emotions of her imagination. In this sense, Ursula is at the same creative point as Garcia Marquez when he returns to Europe after twenty years and discovers the solution he needs to revise his collection of short stories. Indeed, when Garcia Marquez finds that he cannot distinguish between his disillusionment of present day Europe and his nostalgia memory of it, he also finds that he does not have to ask himself where reality ends and the imagination begins. Ursula’s “perspective in time” likewise allows her to “levitate” above the disillusionment of her present reality, making her art more real than life; consequently, like Garcia Marquez, Ursula does not have to ask herself where life ends and the imagination begins: by rewriting the stories of her children, she and her husband find comfort in the stable and united Buendia family Ursula creates from nostalgia.

Supported by the strength of her “invincible heart” (308) Ursula bridges the distance between the imagination and the real world to construct a “marvelous sense of unreality” (370) that allows her to find comfort in present time. For this reason, the necessary counterpart to Ursula’s “unreality” is her acute perception of the real world. Faced with one disaster after another, Ursula’s “invincible heart” consistently finds a way to function in the real world: she keeps the family financially stable with her animal candy business, cares for her deranged husband under the chestnut tree, grooms Jose Arcadio Segundo hidden in Melquiades’ room, raises various offspring long after her own children have grown, and repairs and sweeps the Buendia house clean after each calamity. So despite the pressures of reality threatening the wholeness of her family, Ursula is able to re-image the Buendia history through a “perspective in time” that never loses meaning for her because her heart never loses emotion. In effect, her heart gives her a constant wealth of creativity to turn any disillusionment into a meaningful reality.

But not every character’s heart in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is invincible. For example, drawn by his heart’s memory to the Mediterranean village where he was born, the wise Catalanian (362) sells his store in Macondo and returns home; ironically, after he returns to his native village, he feels nostalgia for macondo.

One winter night while the soup was boiling in the fireplace, he missed the heat of the back of his store, the buzzing of the sun on the dusty almond trees, the whistle of the train during the lethargy of siesta time, just as in Macondo he had missed the winter soup in the fireplace, the cries of the coffee vendor and the fleeting larks of springtime. Upset by two nostalgias facing each others like two mirrors, he lost his marvelous sense of unreality and he ended up recommending to all of them that they leave Macondo, that they forget everything he had taught them about the world and the human heart, that they

shit on Horace, and that wherever they might be they always remember that the past is a lie, that memory has no return, that every spring gone by could never be recovered, and that the wildest and most tenacious love was an ephemeral truth in the end. (370)

Forced to comfort two nostalgic realities simultaneously, the Catalonian traps himself between two unrealities, so unlike Ursula, who maintains her “marvelous sense of unreality” by creating fiction from fact, the Catalonian loses his “marvelous sense of unreality” because his heart is creating fiction from fiction. Like two mirrors facing each other, his nostalgias only reflect each other in what would seem to be a never ending process of representation that always puts off any meaningful creative act. For this reason, the Catalonian cannot match his memories with his present reality: while he is in Macondo, he re-creates the Mediterranean village; while he is in the Mediterranean, he re-creates Macondo. In both cases, the Catalonian finds his present reality meaningless because instead of giving meaning to the real world, his nostalgias are simply reflecting each other. It is not surprising, then, that he renounces the entire creative process of nostalgia when he explains that “memory has no return” (370). Memories, of course, do return to the Catalonian, but his heart fails to use them to re-create the appropriate present reality.

If nostalgia is the imaginative force that applies art to reality (McGowan 566), then the Catalonian’s “disenchantment” (370) with nostalgia reflects his failure to apply nostalgia’s artistic “solutions” to the real world. The Catalonian loses his “marvelous sense of unreality” because, unlike Ursula, he fails to sustain an artistic balance between his imagination and reality. In other words, he gives himself completely to nostalgia – to imagination; instead to applying art to reality, he applies art to art itself, which inevitably leads to the nothingness of one “unreality” reflecting another “unreality”. In this same sense, Ursula’s son Colonel

Aureliano Buendia, is not much different from the Catalonian: he too invents a disillusioning reality that leads him to the nothingness of one unreality reflecting another unreality.

Chapter 2

The Failure of Writing in Macondo: Why Colonel Buendia Cannot Create a Nostalgic Text

Gabriel Garcia Marquez begins *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with a seemingly omniscient account of a memory: “many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (11). By alluding to the future moment of Colonel Buendia’s death, then abruptly shifting back to his childhood memory, the first sentence of the novel introduces a time sequence that moves the narrative from the future to the past but gives no clear indication of the present. Since distinct divisions between the past, present, and future do not exist in the narrated memory, Garcia Marquez suggests that memory, like time, is fluid. In this state of flux, past events are continuously being modified by the human intellect and emotions of the present and present reality can only gain its meaning in relation to the past. Colonel Buendia’s memory, as it breaks down the distinctions between present and past, creates a text that attempts to give meaning to his own history and, like myth, to the history of human existence. Consequently, the panoramic view of Colonel Buendia’s memory invokes a sense of epic past when Macondo and the world itself are at the end of mythical time and the beginning of historical time:

At the time Macondo was the village of twenty adobe house, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.

(11)

Indeed, critics frequently note the postlapsarian quality of Buendia’s memory. Robert Sims, for example, comments on the similarities between the “paradisiacal stage” of the

opening chapters of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Genesis* (104), and Jerry Root, examining the historical beginnings of language recounted in the first scene, argues the Buendias and their contemporaries “are in a newly fallen world where signified objects still outnumber the available signifiers. For the initial inhabitants of Macondo something still remains of a prehistoric unity of signifiers and their signified objects” (6). By commenting on the mythic quality of Colonel Buendia’s memory, these critics, as Isabel Alvarez Borland states, remind readers that “the mythical dimension in *One Hundred Years of solitude* is inseparable from the historical dimension” (91).

In this respect, the difference between history and myth corresponds to the difference between factual memory and nostalgia. As Alvarez Borland further suggests: “historical writing is a recording of the past and implies self-understanding through the remembering of the past. Myths, by contrast, allow self-understanding through the telling of tales that seek to explain who we are”. She concludes *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is simultaneously a “historical novel and mythical novel” (95). As an historical novel, it recounts the factual events of the people of Macondo; as a mythical novel, however, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reveals how some characters try to give those events meaning by re-telling them in a way that creates self-understanding. Like the novel itself, then history and myth shape Colonel Buendia’s nostalgic memory: the day Colonel Buendia saw ice is a historical event in the narrative, but the mythic qualities of the event imply the Colonel’s subjective attempt at “self-understanding”.

Central to this “self-understanding” is the condition of Colonel Buendia’s emotions. Not surprisingly, he feels rage when he is confronted with the reality that “six weak fairies” can determine how he is going to die and therefore negate the meaning on his life by erasing its significance:

He did not feel fear or nostalgia, but intestinal rage.... “A person fucks himself so much”, Colonel Aureliano Buendia said. “Fucks himself up so much just so that six weak fairies can kill him and he can’t do anything about it”. ... When the squad took aim, the rage had materialized into a viscous and bitter substance that put his tongue to sleep and made him close his eyes. ... He saw himself again in short pants, wearing a tie around his neck, and he saw his father leading him into the tent ... and he saw ice. (125-27)

However, when his rage turns into a “bitter substance” that puts his “tongue to sleep” and forces him to “close his eyes”, he places his perception of reality in relation to the past: at the moment Colonel Buendia closes his eyes, he succumbs to nostalgia, which does not seek to describe reality but recreate it. So, although the “prehistoric eggs” signify Macondo’s postlapsarian state, they are also Colonel Buendia’s own recreation of the “enormous stones”; that is, by comparing the stones to “prehistoric eggs”, Colonel Buendia’s memory relies on a metaphoric image to replace fact with fiction. When he recalls the day his father took him to discover ice, then he attempts to give his present condition and impending death meaning by putting them in relation to an emotionally charged memory that re-inscribes the significance of his childhood. He turns to the past at the point he is about to die a meaningless death, and by doing so, he invokes a sense of meaning in the present through a nostalgic recreation of the past.

As the scene indicates, emotions dictate the significance of memories, and the human heart is the medium through which memories pass, this process is nostalgia. A person’s capacity to pass through the heart life-affirming emotions, such as solidarity and love, determines that person’s capacity to create a meaningful reality through nostalgia. Life-affirming emotions keep memories of the past alive – that is, infused with emotional significance. Much like his sister, Amaranta, Colonel Buendia struggles with the tension

between his life-affirming and self-centered emotions. But unlike Amaranta, he never overcomes his emotional instability. In fact, his impending death by the firing squad marks the culminating point of the conflict between love and rage that plagues Colonel Buendia throughout the novel. Facing a meaningless death, Colonel Buendia shuts his eyes and searches his memories for something besides “bad luck” (125) that will give his life and death significance, and before his rage gives way to the solution of death, Colonel Buendia’s heart momentarily creates meaning through nostalgia by re-presenting his memory of the day he saw ice with his father. His ability to love and experience human solidarity overcomes his rage as Colonel Buendia nostalgically recalls the Edenic Qualities of his youth. As the opening scene of the novel, this nostalgic moment is important because it marks the last time the memories of Colonel Buendia’s heart give meaning to his reality. As he involves himself with his country’s civil wars, rage and pride defeat the Colonel’s life-affirming emotions: his heart turns cold, distancing him from the emotional importance of his past and eroding his ability to create a meaningful present reality through the process of nostalgia.

Much has been written on Colonel Buendia’s inability to feel love or human solidarity, and critics recognize his solitary nature as the reason why he cannot reach out and love other people. Gabriela Mora, for example, argues Colonel Buendia “has a barren heart, more prone to rage than to love, with pride fueling most of his actions” (83). Similarly, Nina M. Scott believes that because the entire Buendia family is “afflicted with congenital solitude”, each member is “condemned to solitude and an inability to love each other... or achieve intimacy” (270-1). Finally, even Ursula, his mother concludes her son “had not lost his love for the family because he had been hardened by the war... but that he had never loved anyone, not even his wife, Remedios” (233).

Yet, before Aureliano identifies himself as colonel Aureliano Buendia, and in spite of his solitary character, he does, in fact, feel the “irresistible need to love ... and protect” (58)

the adolescent mulatto girl forced into prostitution by her grandmother. Aureliano also discovers the significance of love when he meets Apoliar Moscote's daughter, Remedios and finds her the "justification that he needs to live" (90). If Aureliano cannot find a reason for his existence before Remedios, he finds that reason after he falls in love with her. The feelings he expresses for Remedios through poetry that has "no beginning or end" (69) are strong enough to fill the entire Buendia house with "love" (69), and although she is the daughter of an enemy, Remedios and Aureliano's marriage "arouses" deep feelings of "affection" (90) in both their families. Even Aureliano's sister, Rebeca and Amaranta, "declare a truce" (90) in their "mortal rivalry" (111) so they can knit clothing for Remedios's unborn baby. Because Aureliano and Remedios's love is not self-centered, it inspires the entire family with affection. In this regard, despite his often cited solitary nature, Aureliano's love for Remedios allows him to make a human connection and bring others together as well; in effect, his love-filled heart allows him to re-write his own solitary condition to create a sense of solidarity.

But even if Aureliano's heart feels love, it is also susceptible to feeling of rage, as Mora points out. He does not grieve after Remedios dies; rather, her death produces "a dull filing of rage" (97) similar to the "intestinal rage" (126) he later feels when he confronts his own death before the firing squad. Because Aureliano cannot find meaning in Remedios's death, he feels powerless to act against its certainty; his rage, then, becomes an ineffectual feeling that dissolves into a "solitary and passive frustration" (97). This same form of self-consuming, self-contained rage also distances him from an emotionally meaningful past after he joins the Liberal revolt against the Conservative government and realizes he is fighting a meaningless war.

In fact, the war begins into conflict Aureliano's feelings of love and rage, thus bringing into conflict his life-affirming tendency toward solidarity and his self-consuming tendency toward solitude. When the Conservative regime occupies Macondo and places the

town under martial law, Aureliano believes his love and human solidarity determine his decision to go to war. In actuality, however, the rage he feels when Remedios dies leads him to fight the Conservative regime. He disputes the martial law imposed on the people on Macondo by the Conservatives, but he does not respond actively to their presence until they brutally execute a woman bitten by a rabid dog. Ironically, her execution causes Aureliano not only to take up arms for humanitarian reasons but to avenge her death by executing the captain and four soldiers responsible for killing her (102-03). Confusing his love and solidarity with self-centered rage, Aureliano joins the war to give meaning to the woman's senseless murder by exacting revenge, and in the process, Aureliano also wages his own internal war to give his life meaning.

Instead of using his humanitarian feelings to hold present time in relation to an emotionally significant past to determine his role in the war, Aureliano determines this meaning by holding present time in direct relation to the condition of his present feeling – rage. This confusion leads him to invent an illusion of solidarity that lacks any relationship to an emotionally significant past. His solidarity is a self-centered creation not based on a nostalgic recreation of a communal past but on the condition of his present emotions only, so instead of rewriting his solitary condition, as he did when he loved Remedios, Aureliano re-affirms his solitude through his self-consuming “indignation” over the execution of the woman who had been beaten to death because she had been bitten by a rabid dog (224).

The war Aureliano joins, then, has no clear ideological distinction, but it does have an emotional one as it brings into conflict the love and rage within Aureliano himself. And just as his solidarity-inspiring love for Remedios turns into the solitude of rage after she dies, so too does his illusion of solidarity turn into the reality of self-centered rage after he joins the wars and asserts his new identity as Colonel Aureliano Buendia. If Remedios's senseless death marks the beginning of Colonel Buendia's “dull felling of rage” (97), and the execution

of the woman exacerbates that rage, then Colonel Buendia's own impending death by the firing squad indeed emphasizes a turning point in the conflict between love and rage that wage war in his heart.

Of course, Colonel Buendia is rescued from the firing squad by his brother and becomes a revolutionary leader for the liberal cause. Even with his many military successes, however, the colonel does not feel "enthusiastic over the looks" of their war against the Conservative regime: "the government troops abandoned their positions without resistance and that aroused an illusion of victory among the Liberal population that it was not right to destroy, but the revolutionaries knew the truth, Colonel Aureliano Buendia better than any of them" (131). In fact, colonel Buendia's "firm impression" that he is fighting meaningless battles that continue to advance "in the opposite direction from reality" torment him with "sleepless nights of uncertainty" (132). To resolve his doubt about fighting an apparently meaningless war, Colonel Buendia invokes his memory of Remedios, turning once again to the past to create meaning for his life:

Surrounded by Remedios' dusty dolls, Colonel Aureliano Buendia brought back all the decisive periods of his existence by reading his poetry. He started writing again. For many hours, balancing on the edge of the surprises of a war with no future, in rhymed verse he resolved his experience on the shores of death. (133)

Unlike the moment he succumbs to nostalgia while facing the firing squad, Colonel Buendia fails to transcend his "uncertainty" about the war because instead of placing present time in relation to a meaningful period of his life, he looks for meaning in language, but since his heart is emotionally bankrupt, his words are equally insolvent. Before Remedios dies, Colonel Buendia writes poetry that gives the entire Buendia family meaning. But rage now isolates his heart's memory, detaching him from his past love for Remedios and erasing its

emotional significance in the process, so when he goes back to his poetry – when his words and world are cold – the writing lacks the emotions to give it significance. For Colonel Buendia, words by themselves are not enough to give him meaning; like memories, they can only re-create a meaningful experience if they are charged with past emotions.

In this sense, Colonel Buendia's failure to give meaning to his present solely through words recalls the time when the people of Macondo succumb to the insomnia plague and find themselves detached from their past:

When the sick person became used to his start 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. (50)

Although the citizens of Macondo try to freeze reality by labeling everything in town with its proper name, they find that words written to help them “memorize objects and feelings” only have a temporary value: 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” (53). As the slippage between signifier and signified grows with the increasing loss of memory, the inhabitants of Macondo also forget the emotions connected to the past events that language tries to describe. Without this memory, language becomes arbitrary, and with no past events to give the present meaning, the people of Macondo construct an illusory reality:

Many succumbed to the spell of an imagery reality, one invented by them, which was less practical for them but more comforting. Pilar Ternera was the one who contributed most to popularize that mystification when she conceived the trick of reading the past in cards as she had read the future before. By means of that recourse the insomniacs began to live in a world built on the

uncertain alternatives of the cards, where a father was remembered faintly as the dark man who had arrived at the beginning of April. . . . Defeated by those practices of consolation, Jose Arcadio Buendia then decided to build the memory machine ... (53-4)

To comfort the solitude of living in a present that has no past, the inhabitants of Macondo invent emotionally meaningful memories based on an imagined past reinterpreted through the arbitrary codes of Pilar Ternera's cards and Jose Arcadio Buendia's memory machine. Indeed, they seek "consolation" from the solitude of their emotionally vacant lives by constructing an illusory reality based on the arbitrary interpretation of texts. But because their invented reality has no emotional relationship to the past, it only gives them an illusion of comfort, a type of "anti-nostalgia" that is "not the irremediable forgetfulness of the heart, but ... a different kind of forgetfulness, which was more cruel and irrevocable ... because it was the forgetfulness of death" (54).

As with the people of Macondo during the insomnia plague, Colonel Buendia is emotionally detached from the past. He therefore cannot rely on his memory of Remedios to give his role in the war significance; instead he tries to find that significance through the written word. Indeed, Colonel Buendia "starts writing again", but because he cannot linguistically create an emotionally meaningful memory to hold in relation to his emotionally empty present, he succumbs to fighting the war for nothing greater than individual pride:

"Tell me something, old friend: why are you fighting?"

"What other reason could there be?" Colonel Gerineldo Marquez answered.

"For the great Liberal Party"

"You're lucky because you know why", he answered. "As far as I'm concerned, I've come to realize only just now that I'm fighting because of pride."

“That’s bad”, colonel Gerineldo Marquez said.

Colonel Aureliano Buendia was amused at his alarm. “Naturally”, he said.

“But in any case, it’s better than not knowing why you’re fighting ...” or fighting, like you, for something that doesn’t have any meaning for anyone”.

(133)

Because pride is nothing more than a product of his rage, colonel Buendia creates an illusory reality that only disguise the real meaning of fighting a “war with no future”, and by hiding in his vainglorious solitude of illusion, he tries to make his life in the war meaningful. Moreover, if this “imaginary reality” is indeed the “forgetfulness of death” the people of Macondo temporarily suffered, then it is not surprising that Colonel Buendia actually begins to resemble a living corpse:

His face... had acquired a metallic hardness. He was preserved against imminent old age by a vitality that has something to do with the coldness of his insides. He was taller than when he had left, paler and bonier, and he showed the first symptoms of resistance to nostalgia. “Good Lord”, Ursula said to herself. “Now he looks like a man capable of anything”. (151)

Since the human heart is the medium through which memories pass to create nostalgia, Colonel Buendia’s “resistance to nostalgia” reflects not only his inability to modify the remembered past emotionally, but his inability even to recognize the significance of his memories. With no emotional investment in his past or present, colonel Buendia becomes an “intruder” (151) to Macondo. In fact, his inner coldness isolates his heart so far away from the people of Macondo that the “remembrances” he speaks of when he visits with his family touch no feelings; they are alien and empty recollections, “simple leftovers from his humor of a different time” (151-52).

An important relationship exists between the “coldness” in Colonel Buendia’s heart and his inability to sustain meaning through language. In effect, he is a failed writer. The weekly telegraphic conversations between Colonel Buendia and his friend, Colonel Gerineldo Marquez, for example, indicate that as Buendia becomes a stranger to his own words, he cannot revise his sense of the past because it and language itself no longer have emotional value for him:

As the war became more intense and widespread, Buendia’s image was fading away into a universe of unreality. The characteristics of his speech were more and more uncertain, and they came together and combined to form words that were gradually losing all meaning. ... General Marquez limited himself then to just listening, burdened by the impression that he was in ... contact with a stranger from another world. (156)

Words without any investment of emotional significance make Colonel Buendia’s Messages increasingly meaningless to him and others as well. After all, words do not inherently contain emotions; rather, they are static constructions that, as Derrida believes, always defer the real meaning of the object they seek to describe. Significantly, then, when the Colonel attempts to describe reality through words alone, he seems to Colonel Marquez as “a stranger from another world”. In fact, he is in “another world”, a world that lacks any relationship to an emotionally meaningful past, and from this world, Colonel Buendia fails as a writer because he is unable to create a nostalgic text.

If linguistic meaning breaks down in the slippage between the word and its object, the imaginative meaning of nostalgia flourishes in the space between the past and the present. However, because emotions determine the creation of meaning from the present’s relation to the past, as Colonel Buendia’s heart progressively becomes colder, and he loses his ability to derive meaning from nostalgia, the words he uses equally fail to construct a sense of reality.

When Colonel Marquez “sadly” types “it’s raining in Macondo” on the telegraph, for instance, Colonel Buendia responds with indifferent and “pitiless” letters “Don’t be a jackass, Gerineldo. . . . It’s natural for it to be raining in August” (158). Colonel Buendia’s inability to recall Macondo nostalgically points to his failure as a writer. Indeed many of the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* become writers simply by re-creating their present reality in the context of a past event, but Colonel Buendia’s cold and meaningless description of what should be emotionally charged, meaningful memories indicates a failure on his part to write himself out of his solitude and into the companionship of Colonel Gerineldo Marquez. In fact, as his cold heart uses cold words to describe reality coldly, he alienates himself even further from others by maintaining an illusory reality void of human emotions.

For example, his actions betray his cold heart when he refuses to commute the execution his friend, General Raquel Moncada:

A short while before dawn he [Colonel Buendia] visited the condemned man in the room used as a cell.

“Remember, old friend”, he told him. “I’m not shooting you. It’s the revolution that’s shooting you”. (153)

In this scene, Colonel Buendia suppresses his humanitarian feelings with cold indifference to preserve the illusion that the revolution is indeed killing his friend. Yet, when General Moncada tells him to “go to hell” (153), Colonel Buendia’s capacity to love momentarily overcomes the solitude of his cold heart, and the vainglorious certainty of his illusion falls apart:

Until that moment... Colonel Aureliano Buendia had not given himself the opportunity to see [Moncada] with his heart. He was startled to see how much he had aged, how with which he awaited death, and then he felt a great disgust with himself, which he mingled with the beginnings of pity. (154)

When he sees his friend with a warm-hearted emotion, the reality of General Moncada's physical condition overwhelms Colonel Buendia, tearing down his justification for General Moncada's death. Because there is no deception in death, General Moncada's presence undermines the illusion Colonel Buendia invents to warrant the execution of his friend. Consequently, the emotional tension between the objective reality he sees before him and his illusory reality brings into battle again the respective realities between the love and rage that wage within Colonel Buendia: he realizes "that his confused heart is condemned to uncertainty forever" (159). Indeed, when Colonel Buendia gives himself over to a life-affirming emotion, he does, in fact, begin to feel "pity". However, because he can not transcend the emotional conflict in his heart, he remains "impressive" (154) and has his friend executed.

Ironically, Colonel Buendia's withdrawal from his humanitarian feelings leads him to the height of power and cruelty as the leader of the Liberal Party's humanitarian cause. In one of the interview with Apuleyo Mendoza, Garcia Marquez himself says that those "who pursue and achieve power" in his books states, "power is a substitute for love ... the inability to love is what drives them to seek consolation in power" (108-109). Colonel Buendia's actions reflect this observation, when, for example, his "spirit" can only be "calm down" after he has the house of General Moncada's widow "reduced to ashes" because she refuses to let him enter her home (159). As Garcia Marquez states in another interview, Colonel Buendia's "progress to power is really a progress towards solitude" (Guibert 314). Indeed, because Colonel Buendia invents an illusion of solidarity that only disguises the real meaning of fighting an empty war, it not only creates an illusion of meaning but leads him back into solitude. After all he finds no consolation in his power:

The same night that his authority was recognized by all the rebel commands, he woke up in a fright, calling for a blanket. An inner coldness which shattered

his bones and tortured him even in the heat of the sun would not let him sleep. ... The intoxication of power began to break apart under waves of discomfort. ... His orders were being carried even before they were given, even before he thought of them, and they always went much beyond what he would have dared have them do. Lost in the solitude of his immense power, he began to lose direction. (160)

In fact, Colonel Buendia's disillusionment with power as a means to pacify the uncertainty in his heart causes him to feel "more solitary than ever" he becomes weary of a war that always leaves him feeling "older, wearier, even more in the position of not knowing why, or how, or even when" (161). More importantly, however, because he can not find a "cure" (160) for the inner coldness that makes it impossible for him to sleep at night, he attempts to return to a significant place from his past: "Alone ... fleeing the chill that was to accompany him until death, he sought a last refuge in Macondo in the warmth of his oldest memories" (161).

But like the Catalanian, "memory has no return" (370) for Colonel Buendia. Because his cold heart has made him a stranger to the people of Macondo, he fails to find a "cure" for his solitude by literally returning to the place of his "oldest" memories. Instead, he discovers his heart's memory is not capable of finding emotional significances in his past:

During the interminable night ... Colonel Aureliano Buendia scratched for many hours trying to break the hard shell of his solitude. His only happy moments, since that remote afternoon when his father had taken him to see ice, had taken place in his silver workshop where he passed the time putting little gold fishes together. He had to start thirty two wars ... and wallow like a hog in the dung heap of glory in order to discover the privileges of simplicity almost forty years late. (163)

Colonel Buendia's life long reliance on self centered emotions to invent vainglorious illusions of solidarity trap him in solitude, where only two things have meaning for him: his only nostalgic memory of his childhood and the task with which he endlessly passes present time after his heart is no longer capable of evoking nostalgia. The two events contrast as two very different forms of creation. His nostalgic memory of the day he saw ice indicates the Colonel's only successful recreation of the past to give his present life meaning; however, the continuous making of little gold fish – putting them together, melting them down, only to put them back together again – highlights the meaninglessness of his present condition: his reality repeats itself because the Colonel, without an emotional connection to the past, cannot write himself out of his solitude and into the solidarity of Macondo and his memories of it. Thus, he does not return to Macondo “changed back into the human being” his family expects to see. Instead, when he has difficulty recognizing his sister, Amaranta, she is the first to realize “they had lost him forever” (165):

“It's Amaranta”, she said good-humoredly ... showing him the hand with the black bandage. “Look”.

Colonel Aureliano Buendia smiled at her the same way as when he had first seen her with the bandage on that remote morning when he had come back to Macondo condemned to death.

“How Awful”, he said, “the way time passes!” (165)

Although Colonel Buendia recalls the first time he saw Amaranta wearing her black bandage, he no longer remembers the event's emotional significance, making it impossible for him to connect the gesture to the “remote morning” when he first saw his sister with her bandage. Time passes for Colonel Buendia, but because his heart has lost its ability to imbue the passing years with emotional significance, they hold no meaning other than to emphasize the extent of his own emotional separation from the past. Colonel Buendia, therefore, is not

“pained” by any of the “insidious traps that nostalgia offers him” when he returns to Macondo: “He did not notice the minute tearing destruction that time had wreaked on the house and that, after such a prolonged absence, would have looked like a disaster to any man who had kept his memories alive” (166).

It is not surprising, then, that Colonel Buendia fails to give meaning to his present when he compares Ursula to what should be his nostalgic memory of her:

Colonel Aureliano Buendia realized ... that Ursula was the only human being who had succeeded in penetrating his misery, and for the first time in many years he looked her in the face. Her skin was leathery, her teeth decayed, her hair faded and colorless. ... He compared her with the oldest memory that he had of her, the afternoon when he had the premonition that a pot of boiling soup was going to fall off the table, and he found her broken to pieces. In an instant he discovered ... the scars that had been left on her by more than half century of daily life, and he saw that those damages did not even arouse a feeling of pity in him. (166-67)

Colonel Buendia sees the same inevitability of death in Ursula’s face that he saw in General Moncada’s face, but he can no longer “arouse” from his heart even the vague “pity” he was able to feel for his friend. Colonel Buendia’s inability to see Ursula with his heart, moreover, also means he lacks the emotions he needs to reconstruct reality creatively; he recalls the afternoon with Ursula, but without the capacity to remember the events emotional significance, he cannot reshape its meaning and bring it into present time to give his own life meaning. In other words, he cannot reshape reality imaginatively because he has no emotional interest in it, so unlike Ursula, the story teller, Colonel Buendia cannot create a meaningful

view of the world: all he can do is make little gold fish, a self indulgent act of creation he himself deconstructs because he constructs them in an emotional vacuum.

Moreover, because Colonel Buendia also sees no significance in the war, he cannot create the emotions that originally got him involved in its conflict: “in the fury of his torment he tried futilely to rouse the omens that had guided his youth along dangerous paths into the desolate wasteland of glory. He was lost astray in a strange house where nothing and no one stirred in him the slightest vestige of affection” (227). His self centered emotions have, in effect, “done away” (167) with his life affirming emotions, trapping Colonel Buendia in an existence where he can find neither emotional meaning in the past nor a means to cure the “blind and directionless rage” that leads him into the solitude of disillusionment and “broad feelings of impotence” (226). And because he lacks the ability to write himself out of this, Colonel Buendia turns to the endless task of making little gold fish, where each fish he creates, then melts down to recreate, “sterilizes” (258) the memories he cannot avoid: “He needed so much concentration to link scales, fit minute rubies into the eyes, laminating gills, and put on fins that there was not the smallest empty moment left for him to fill with his disillusionment of the war” (190).

Yet, if human identity refers not only to man’s recognition of a variety of simultaneous emotions, but the ability to confront them in all their disorder, then Colonel Buendia turns to an artistic “solution” that does nothing more than teach him to “think coldly so that inescapable memories will not touch any feeling” (249). Indeed, all the golden fish Colonel Buendia melts down to recreate are made into one predictable event that does not rely on an emotional process of creation. Much like the Catalonian’s two nostalgias that can only repeat themselves, Colonel Buendia’s act of making and unmaking little gold fish is a never ending repetitive process that denies itself creative meaning: the past is as predictable as the

present which is as predictable as the future. With no means to cure his rage, this endless repetition of useless action keeps Colonel Buendia's reality void of human emotions. As Kenrick Mose notes, the Colonel escapes "into a world of creation that goes nowhere, doing to undo, alienated from all human feeling" (217).

Without the ability to keep his "memories alive", the past becomes a closed text for Colonel Buendia. And insofar as the present can only gain its meaning from the past, his present is as static as his past – such stasis is the solitude of the living dead:

He would sit in the street door as long as the mosquitoes would allow him to.
Someone dared to disturb his solitude once.

"How are you Colonel?" he asked in passing.

"Right here", he answered, "Waiting for my funeral procession to pass". (191)

Colonel Buendia cannot invoke nostalgia to affirm the meaning of his life nor to establish links to solidarity, and although he finds "refuge" (228) in his self imposed solitude of making little gold fish, it also finalizes the loss of his human identity: "He locked himself up inside himself and the family thought of as if he were dead. No other human reaction was seen in him until one October eleventh, when he went to the street door to watch the circus parade" (246). When immediately before his death Colonel Buendia hears the sounds of circus, he "knowingly falls into a trap of nostalgia" and "relives" the only event that still holds meaning for him: the afternoon the gypsies came to town and his father took him to discover ice.

By recalling the day he discovered ice with his father, Colonel Buendia relives a nostalgic memory he created at a time when he could create nostalgia. Invested with the emotions he had before his heart turned cold, the memory is set in time, and so Colonel

Buendia can go back to the one meaningful event in his life. That nostalgic memory, however, is not enough for Colonel Buendia it transcends his solitude. While he can relive a nostalgic memory he has already created, he cannot create a new nostalgia because he has no sense of the past anymore: “Then he went to the chestnut tree, thinking about the circus, and while he urinated he tried to keep on thinking about the circus, but he could no longer find the memory” (250). Colonel Buendia tries to force himself back into nostalgia by invoking an image of the parade after it passes, but with no emotional capacity to make even the most immediate past event meaningful, he cannot create another nostalgic memory to give his life meaning. In fact, Colonel Buendia dies urinating on his father’s ghost; something he has done over and over again because, as Michael Bell notes, “the dead remain visible presences as long as they persist in the emotional memories of the living” (51).

Like his sister, Amaranta, Colonel Buendia struggles with the tension between his life affirming and self centered emotions. Yet, unlike Amaranta, he never recovers the creativity from his “confused heart” (159) to write a meaningful perceptions of the world through nostalgia. Indeed, his description as a man with a “lucid mind” (174) can suggest he is the sole person to perceive nostalgia as an act of self deception – a lie. However, his inability to see his father’s ghost under the chestnut tree or Melquiades’ room as untouched by the decay of time underscores the significance of his emotional separation from the people of Macondo: as the only person who cannot write a nostalgic text, colonel Buendia can never write himself out of his solitude and into the solidarity of Macondo.

Chapter 3

The writing of Macondo: nostalgia and metafiction

The nostalgic memory of the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reflects the creative process of writing in general, turning Garcia Marquez' novel into a form of metafiction. That is, characters reconstruct their past creatively in what is already a creative narrative. Like two opposing mirrors, the two levels of fiction reflect each other, creating a rhetorical self-reflectivity that questions not only how the characters construct their fiction through nostalgia but how the novels narrative structure likewise reflects the creative process. As critics generally point out, fiction that in some capacity is about fiction forces readers to "contemplate simultaneously the frame and what is represented inside the frame" (Alvarez Borland 95).

Nowhere is the tension between these two levels of fiction more apparent than in the first scene of the novel. As previously mentioned, the opening scene provides two conflicting accounts of Macondo's past. On the one hand, an impersonal omniscient narrator uses Colonel Buendia's memory to recount Macondo's mythical beginnings; on the other hand, Colonel Aureliano Buendia's own memory of Macondo when he was just six years old also informs the narrative. So, if a third person omniscient narrator is reporting Buendia's memory, then indeed, the panoramic view of a world "so recent that many things lacked names" (11) invokes a sense of Macondo's epic past. However, if Colonel Buendia's memory informs this seemingly direct report of Macondo's history, then Colonel Buendia's consciousness and emotions undercut and stratify the narrative, constructing a dialogic relationship between a narrator reporting Colonel Buendia's memory and Colonel Buendia's own emotionally charged subjective memory of his past. In effect, the description of Macondo's river with "polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric

eggs”, is an example of what Mikhail Bakhtin terms “double voiced discourse”; indeed, it “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intension of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meaning and two expressions” (324).

The double-voiced discourse, then calls into question the nature of the narrative and the identity of its narrator. While critics generally agree that the gypsy Melquiades, to whom “everything is known” (344), chronicles the story of the Buendia family, prophetically, one hundred years before the events occur, not all critics agree the narrative itself is Melquiades’ text. For instance, George R. McMurray argues that although the reader is “led to believe” an impersonal omniscient narrator tells the Buendia story, “toward the end ... we discover that Melquiades, a major character, is the narrator, and that his parchments and the novel are one and the same” (61). Other critics, however such as McGowan, believe Gabriel Marquez, a character who plays a minor role at the end of the Buendia story, is the narrator of the text we read. In fact, McGowan argues, “the narrator of the novel is careful to make it clear that his narrative is distinct from Melquiades’ manuscripts” (562-63). Still again, Ricardo Gullon, who believes Melquiades’ manuscripts are “in fact the novel”, suggests the narrator might be “Melquiades’ double or in terms of this novel, his reincarnation” (28). Finally both Melquiades and Garcia Marquez together are often identified as the controlling narrative voice. Examining the role of memory in the novel, for example, Jack B. Jelinski, explains that “the narrator Melquiades’ perspective of the history he transcribes on his parchments parallels that of Garcia Marquez as he recreates a fictional reality from memory” (324). In any case, when the last Aureliano of the Buendia line breaks the code of Melquiades’ parchments in the final page of the novel, he not only learns about the “most trivial details” of the family’s history (382), but he also reads about his own apocalyptic fate at the moment it is happening to him. Along with this last Buendia, we too discover that Melquiades’ parchments narrate the

Buendia story, thereby suggesting the writer of one also wrote the other. Melquiades may be the actual narrator, or he may have constructed a pseudo-omniscient narrator to tell the Buendia story; whichever the case, we are, as Lois P. Zamora believes, “witness to the genesis and apocalypse of Macondo through the eyes of Melquiades” (29).

Melquiades, however does not actually begin writing the parchments until he returns to Macondo from the dead, so he reconstructs his Buendia narrative through his nostalgic memory for life. As with Prudencio Aguilar, Melquiades transcends the solitude of death to re-write history and give his own present condition meaning:

He really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude. Reduplicated by his tribe, having lost all his supernatural faculties because of his faithfulness to life, he decided to take refuge in that corner of the world which had still not been discovered by death... (55)

But when Melquiades writes about the past, he writes about it in a way that gives life epic meaning. He does on a grand narrative scale what Prudencio Aguilar, Fernanda, Amaranta, and Ursula do – create meaning where there is none by filtering past events through the heart in a process that continuously reconstructs present reality imaginatively. By doing so, he opens up the past to re-interpretation, re-evaluates the present, and keeps the future forever indeterminate. His nostalgia continuously offers him artistic solutions to problems, because its timelessness always allows him to reconstruct – write – another present reality.

This immortality through art makes Melquiades’ narrative position to Buendia story parallel to Garcia Marquez own position to his novel as it collapses the distinction between fictional character and real life novelist. Just as Garcia Marquez “suddenly envisioned the entire world of the novel” (Jelinski 324), so Melquiades envisions, in a single moment, the

entire story of the Buendia family: “Melquiades had not put events in the order of man’s conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant” (382). Indeed, the circularity of narrative time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* indicates the text is written from nostalgia. Nothing the novel’s circular structure around a series of key narrative episodes (325), Jelinski argues that the “transitions between the cycles of serial events are not always clearly defined because the novel, like memory, exhibits a quality of continuous fluidity; pronounced divisions between past, present and future do not exist” (329).

As a circular process that collapses linear time to revise reality, nostalgia also parallels the circularity characteristic of the revision process in composition. That is, the creative process of writing is a recursive act that breaks down the linear notion of creating a text. As composition theorists often notes, revision is never an “end-of-the-line repair process, but is a constant process of re-vision or re-seeing that goes on while they are composing” (Flower and Hayes 367). It seems, then, that Melquiades’ creation of Buendia narrative arises from his process of “re-vision”: it collapses the linear movement of events and thus makes the act of re-composing through memory synonymous with writing in general. Indeed, as with Ursula’s sense of circular time, Melquiades’ own re-vision breaks down the barriers between imagination and reality to create a narrative that ends where the parchments begin and, in the process, fuses the past with the present: “Then the wind began, warm, incipient, full of voices from the past, the murmurs of ancient geraniums, sighs of disenchantments that preceded the most tenacious nostalgia” (382).

With nothing left except the reality of the last Buendia’s impending death, it seems almost fitting for Aureliano Babilonia that the story concludes where the Buendia narrative begins: the disenchantment of Colonel Aureliano Buendia. For this reason, it is even more

fitting that as he remembers the past nostalgically; Melquiades creates a reality to give this disenchantment meaning by describing it in epic proportions. So, even if Melquiades writes the Buendia story to overcome the disenchantment of his own solitude, his role as the Buendia's story-teller also points out how nostalgia, as the creation of text, can create a sense of mythic meaning for the entire Buendia history. As with writing in general, then, nostalgia is a solitary act of creation that is always performed to construct a sense of solidarity.

Because Melquiades remembers his love for humanity, he performs an act of solidarity through the artistic perception of his heart's memory; he writes a nostalgic text that not only recounts the history of the Buendia family but recreates it into a meaningful reality that seems larger than life. Thus, Remedios the Beauty ascends to Heaven like the Virgin Mary, and when Jose Arcadio Buendia dies, a rain of tiny yellow flowers covers the streets of Macondo. By turning fact into fiction, Melquiades elevates their deaths to the level of myth and creates the same "marvelous sense of unreality" Ursula creates when she rewrites the stories about her sons to comfort her husband.

For Melquiades, then, history is also a story because his emotionally charged memory reshapes, revises, and reassigns meaning to past events through an artistic process that erases distinctions between reality and the imagination. His nostalgia bridges the distance between imagination and the real world to construct a narrative where, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, "the real and the imaginary, the past and the present merge for the reader" (84). By stressing how history and fiction are not only inseparable but indistinguishable, this artistic synthesis of the real and the imaginary transforms the historical account Melquiades' writes into an example of historic. Both history and story, Melquiades' parchments recount the events of the people of Macondo and reveal how he gives those events meaning by retelling them in the same way the novelist reshapes reality imaginatively to give it meaning. In this sense historia

corresponds to a nostalgic interpretation of the past because past events are never complete or fixed but continuously modified by the human imagination.

If Garcia Marquez' novel suggests that, like writing itself, nostalgia is a constant process of re-vision or re-seeing the past to give present reality meaning, it also points out that this process is contingent upon human emotions. Without them, the creation of meaning is impossible. This is why the people of Macondo lose their ability to write themselves out of the disillusionment of present time during the insomnia plague; and why Colonel Buendia cannot maintain meaning in his life after he faces the firing squad. But, perhaps the consequences of disrupting emotional connections to the past become most significant in the episode of the banana strike and its massacre. Jose Arcadio Segundo is one of the few survivors of the massacre, but when he repeats his eye witness account of the death of more than three thousand workers, he discovers the citizens of Macondo have no recollection of the massacre: "There haven't been any dead here... Since the time of your uncle, the Colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo" (285). In addition, the North American banana company announces an official version that covers up the massacre, "there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families" (287). Finally, the military tells the relatives of the victims that, "nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town" (287).

If nostalgia is a production of meaning that has emotional significance, this episode depicts the imposition of meaning that erases emotional significance. The people of Macondo do not replace their memory of the event with self-created nostalgia; instead, the banana company replaces it with a different memory altogether – one that has no emotional connection to the past for the people of Macondo. By erasing the community's emotional connection to the past, the banana company also erases their capacity to re-vision the

massacre, making it impossible for the citizens of Macondo to participate in the recreation of its meaning through nostalgia. With no means to create a meaningful perspective of reality, the people succumb to living in an illusory reality that has been invented for them. It is not surprising, that as the sole person whose nostalgia remains intact, Jose Arcadio Segundo lives out his life alone and isolated in Melquiades' ageless room. If nostalgia is a solitary act of creation that constructs a meaningful sense of solidarity, then, with no one to construct solidarity with, whatever meaning he creates in his writer's solitude, must stay in solitude.

Put in a larger socio-historical context, the deliberate erasure of the massacre from public memory by foreign political and economic forces is an example of capitalist hegemony constructing a social reality in which economic and class memory have been both individually and collectively erased. As Anna Marie Taylor points out, "the massacre, its subsequent suppression from historical memory, and the decline of Macondo... illustrate some fundamental problems – the connection between a sense of history and a society's survival, and the ways in which repressive mechanisms can operate to eradicate the past" (107-08). Jose David Saldivar also suggests that by showing how the massacre is "made into a fiction, or a lie", Garcia Marquez not only "deconstructs" the authority of "historical, governmental, and news media discourses", but shows how "all texts... are written to deceive their readers" (36-38).

However, if Garcia Marquez uses fiction to suggest that all fiction, even artistic fiction, is nothing but a pack of lies, he also uses it to affirm the creative force involved in nostalgia, and its ability to give meaning to a world that, in effect, is going to pieces. In other words, Garcia Marquez seems to be saying that the modern world may be a problem, but human emotions are not – to create meaningful texts that replace reality with nostalgia affirms an individual's ability to endure the real world. As Vargas Llosa explains, "fiction is

indispensable for mankind... everyone needs to incorporate into his real life, some kind of lie that by some mechanism or other he transforms into truth” (149). Ursula Buendia indeed “lies” when she tells her husband stories that recreate the lives of her family. However, her solution to her world that is falling apart is not merely to lie about past events to recover what has been lost in time, but to write about them in the same way a novelist reshapes reality imaginatively to give it meaning. In a somewhat different context, Genaro Padilla makes similar observation testimonies by Hispanic Californians:

The reconstitution of Pre-American society was less an escapist activity than what I consider a strategy, only vaguely conscious of its means, perhaps, for sustaining order, sanity and purpose in the face of economic and political dispossession, spiritual fragmentation, sadness and longing. This because an established way of life was disintegrating, being rubbed out, erased even at the moment the life was being narrated, transcribed, textualized (92-93).

What is significant about Padilla’s observation is that these people are not novelists. In many ways, they are like the people of Macondo – everyday people who must deal with reality. As with Vargas Llosa’s narrator, nineteenth century Hispanics and the people of Macondo devise “Strategies”, as Padilla puts it, to inscribe the world with personal, political, and social meaning. They write themselves back into reality and create their history in the process. In the context of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, then, each character’s nostalgic “strategy” – Ursula’s story telling, Amaranta’s black bandage, Fernanda’s “motheaten queen’s dress”, Prudencio’s unquenchable thirst, and Melquiades’ longing for life – are all rhetorical strategies to create meaning. In this sense, their “strategies” are little different than Garcia Marquez’s own writing process. As a novelist, he too is trying to inscribe reality with significance, but what his novel indicates is that novelists are not the only ones who create

meaning. Insofar as he ‘deconstructs’ texts, as Saldivar argues, Garcia Marquez also deconstructs the privileged position of the novelist. That is, by pointing to nostalgia as a creative act, a strategy to create meaning, Garcia Marquez also shows how the creative act is itself nostalgic; moreover, by collapsing the distinction between these two processes, Garcia Marquez ultimately undermines the novelist’s culturally privileged representation of reality. Instead, he demonstrates how those who allow their emotions to pass back through their heart can create meaning in solitude to find a meaningful solidarity. As he mentions in his Noble Prize acceptance speech about “The Solitude of Latin America”:

I dare to think that it is this outside reality, and not only its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, And that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty, of which this roving and nostalgic Colombian is but one cipher more, singled out by fortune. (89)

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