

A Method To His Madness:
Seven Major Themes In The Short Fiction of Gabriel García Márquez

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Spring 1990



Gabriel García Márquez has gained international recognition for novels such as One Hundred Years Of Solitude, No One Writes To The Colonel, Leaf Storm, and The Evil Hour. However, many of his short stories have remained relatively overlooked. When critics do invest the time to dissect Márquez' short fiction, they can become immersed in techniques and mechanics while losing sight of Márquez' larger picture; too often they fail to ask themselves what Márquez hoped to communicate by writing the story.

Understanding the themes of Márquez' short works should offer a strong reflection of his values. Márquez himself readily acknowledges the correlation between a story's content and the ideology of the author:

When I sit down to write a book it is because I am interested in telling a good story. One that will appeal. I also have an ideological position and if it is firm, if the writer is sincere at the moment of telling his story, be it Red Riding Hood or one of guerillas, to cite two extremes, if the writer, I repeat, has a firm ideological position, this position will nurture his tale and it is from this moment on that the story can have subversive force of which I speak. I do not think it is deliberate, but it is inevitable.

(Saldivar 32)

The "firm ideological position" of Márquez manifests itself through his treatment of themes that are important to him, but at the same time does not interfere with his ability to tell "a good story." Seven themes that appear repeatedly in Marquez' short fiction are death, greed, solitude, religion,

decadence, independence, and imagination. Each of these themes can serve as a basis for examining Márquez' short stories, and in turn, his ideological perspectives.

Perhaps the most common theme of García Márquez is death, a topic consistent in his works for four decades. During that span, Márquez' perspective on death seems to evolve from a considerably bleak one to one that contains at least a glimpse of the eternal. His first collection, published in 1968, focuses on the agony and fear associated with death, while the collections published in 1972 and 1978 concentrate on the tendency of time to glorify the memories of someone who has died.

Márquez' 1968 collection, Eyes of A Blue Dog, has been called his "morbid prehistory" because of its thematic emphasis on death. (Vargas Llosa 217) Among the stories in this collection are "The Third Resignation", "The Other Side of Death", "Dialogue with the Mirror", and "Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses". Each of these stories contains a depressing tone of pain, fear, or spiritual inquietude as the living and even the dead themselves attempt to cope with the challenge of death.

In "The Third Resignation", the usually clear distinction between life and death is blurred as Márquez' main character gets trapped in the mysterious world between life and death. (Williams 14) Márquez' confronts his readers with the strange reality of death as he creatively allows someone to experience death as if he were alive. Even the character's mother pretends that her son is alive, to such an extent that she measures his growth daily. (Byk 112) Operating on her own interpretation of reality, she makes his coffin comfortable, and uses the breezes through an open window to hide the smell of

his decaying body. (Márquez 6-8)* In an approach characteristic of magical realism, Márquez dismantles accepted patterns of behavior, in this case, the patterns of life and death. He seems to be posing the possibility to himself and his readers that all life represents different stages of dying, despite the human tendency to draw a precise line between life and death. By having the boy's body continue to grow in death, Márquez leaves the suggestion that our bodies are doing the same.

Awareness of death is also the centerpiece of "The Other Side of Death" as Márquez underscores the effects of death on the living. The living twin is haunted to the point of insanity by the smell of formaldehyde, the vivid pain and anguish of his brother's dying moments, and the accompanying promise of his own inevitable death. (17-20) A major focus of Márquez in this story is the fear which is associated with death, as the main character realizes that "only his own death came between him and his grave." (22)

Like "The Other Side of Death", "Dialogue with the Mirror" deals with the attempt of a surviving brother to cope with his brother's death, but a major difference is that "Dialogue With the Mirror" ends with a much more optimistic outlook. The story begins with a tone similar to "The Other Side of Death", as the brother awakens pondering "the thick preoccupation of death, about his full round fear, about the piece of earth - clay of himself - that his brother must have under his tongue." (40) As he looks in the mirror, he sees an image of

*All direct references to Marquez' short stories will be subsequently noted simply by page numbers and are from Collected Stories by Gabriel García Márquez, New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

his brother (a reflection reminding him of his own death) looking back at him.

Because the image in the mirror is his brother's rather than his own, making faces in the mirror while shaving are part of his struggle to mentally and emotionally come to terms with the death of his brother as well as his own death. The dialogue with the mirror is in effect a dialogue with death as he finds ways to keep on living - groping for the name of a store, getting to work on time, and shaving. The kidneys that await him on the breakfast table are significant as organs which are essential for breathing and life. Though the brother in "The Other Side of Death" is consumed by fear and hopelessness, his counterpart in "Dialogue with the Mirror" is able to claim hope with the realization that "a large dog had begun to wag its tail inside his soul." (46)

The tone conveyed in "Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses" continues Márquez' increasingly positive portrayal of death. The spirit of the dead boy in this story is not completely at rest, but neither is he tormented by the fear or pain which accompany death in the previous stories. Moreover, there is a dissociation of the body and spirit; the soul of the dead boy operates in the living world but does not belong to it. Again Márquez concentrates the focus of his story on the ways in which the living remember the dead, but his unique approach in this story is his simultaneous description of how the dead view the living. Márquez does allow for the possibility of an afterlife in "Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses", an element which is absent from his previous stories about death. Perhaps his movement towards this position can at least partially explain the increasing optimism in his approach to death until this point in his literary career.

Márquez continues to examine how the living remember the dead in his

second collection of stories, Big Mama's Funeral. These works deal less with internal monologues about mortality, focusing instead on the external reactions of individuals dealing with death.

Márquez' personal favorite of the collection, "Tuesday Siesta", provides a thought-provoking account of a trip by a dead thief's mother and sister to see his grave. (McMurray 47) Rather than being ashamed of their poverty or Carlos' death as a criminal, the Centenas are clearly proud of Carlos, and touched by his death. Memories and emotions connected with their loved one are real, not contrived. Their love for Carlos elevates his otherwise undignified death, and defies the stares of disrespect from the people gathered in the street.

Love and respect for the dead are important to Márquez, but he realizes that they must be genuine. "Big Mama's Funeral" points out that death often promotes greatness which is artificial and undeserved. Although Big Mama is undoubtedly a powerful figure in Macondo, her death elevates her to the status of a goddess. Big Mama is universally praised at her funeral, and no one seems to remember that when Big Mama died, she simply "emitted a loud belch and expired." (192) The distorted memories which death is capable of generating are embodied in the newspaper's decision to print a photograph of Big Mama as a beautiful young woman, rather than a less glamorous but more realistic photo of her appearance later in life. The citizens are also persuaded to replace their true memories of Big Mama and deny the biological reality of her death:

The vocation of Big Mama reached unheard-of proportions, while her body filled with bubbles in the harsh Macondo September. For the first time, people spoke of her and conceived of her without her

rattan rocker, her afternoon stupors, and her mustard plaster and they saw her ageless and pure, distilled by legend. (195)

The juxtaposition of gross human degeneration and glorified versions of reality serves as a reminder from Márquez that glamorization of death cannot erase the truth of its physical ugliness.

Death as both an intimidating and elevating factor is found on a slightly smaller scale of exaggeration in "The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World". Although the drowned man's death primarily contributes to the central theme of hope, a tangential theme of death is also present in the story. Márquez dramatizes the confusion created by having to deal with a useless body, and the human tendency to awkwardly subject the corpse to ceremonies in an attempt to dispose of it as tactfully and responsibly as possible. Just as Big Mama was notable for her immense size and was marketed as a goddess, the sailor is considerably taller than the villagers as Márquez again suggests the power of death to elevate the human to the level of the divine.

The children's reactions to the drowned man are markedly different from the response of the adults. While the children bury the dead man and dig him back up again, the adults are powerless to accomplish even the first half of the children's game. (232) The children are oblivious to the statement of mortality connected with the dead man, but perhaps the older villagers recognize that the sailor's fate is a reminder of what awaits each of them.

"Death Constant Beyond Love" differs from Márquez' earlier stories about death by dealing with the relationship between beauty and death. The frustrating aspect of death is suggested throughout the story as promises of

enjoying beauty are consistently denied, including Laura Farina and the hope of better living conditions. Senator Onésimo Sánchez learns of his impending death in the midst of a full, happy life and is deprived of watching his five children grow up or enjoying his golden years. As if repeating the lesson of temporality that he has learned from facing death, Senator Sánchez has his staff plant felt trees and build cardboard fantasy houses that will only be torn down at the end of each campaign stop. The senator is also adept at creating birds and butterflies made of paper, symbols of expendable beauty. In the framework of death, beauty seems reduced to insignificance for Marquez, as the lone rose in Rosal del Virrey does not grow in a garden, but is worn on the heart of a dying man. The senator cannot even enjoy the beauty of Laura Farina, because she, too, is among the beauty that has been barred from him.

The frustration and apathy created by the limitations of mortality pervade "Death Constant Beyond Love", and suggest that the Gabriel García Márquez who began his literary exploration of death with "The Third Resignation" in 1947 is still searching for hope by 1970 with "Death Constant Beyond Love". Throughout the years, Márquez is both descriptive and imaginative in capturing the powerful effect which death can have on the human mind. The quantity of stories concerning death gives evidence that Márquez is creatively challenged by the unrelenting promise of mortality.

Death has been called the "common denominator" of mankind because everyone is equal in the grave, regardless of previous wealth or social position. In the midst of everyday life, however, the equality presented by death is denied, as the rich usually command the most power. Money and the luxuries which it can buy are an especially powerful influence, often becoming a controlling force

which dominates decisions and relationships. Accumulating possessions can take control of our time on earth and limit our potential for living life to the fullest. Realizing the damaging effects which it can have upon people and relationships, Márquez treats greed as another major theme.

With a reputation as a Marxist and active socialist, Márquez clearly has a personal interest in the problems created by avarice, and his attacks on capitalism are not surprising. (Byk 115, Minta 54-6) However, his creativity is hardly predictable as he treats the theme of greed in such stories as "Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon", "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings", "Blacamán The Good, Vendor Of Miracles" and "The Incredible and Sad Tale Of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother".

A plausible but incomplete hero in the fight against materialism is unveiled by Márquez in "Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon". Although the character of Balthazar appears to compromise his convictions later in the story, he initially establishes a distrustful stance against wealth and its problems:

He never felt at ease among the rich. He used to think about them, about their ugly and argumentative wives, about their tremendous surgical operations, and he always experienced a feeling of pity. When he entered their houses, he couldn't move without dragging his feet. (142)

Balthazar's decision to give the cage to José Monteil's son in direct opposition to the commands of the boy's rich father is an especially effective

statement, consisting of his personal sacrifice of money as well as his indifference to the wealthy. Richard Cardwell has suggested that Balthazar's prioritizing of Chepe Monteil over the doctor indicates that he is actually deferential to the wealthy, but the doctor does offer more money than Monteil, and the prestige of his position also detracts from this theory. (Cardwell 22-4) Consequently, Balthazar is an admirable character until he decides to capitalize on the opportunity for praise and respect earned by doing effective business with "Mr." Chepe Monteil.

Balthazar initially donates his cage to Chepe's hysterical son in order to make the boy happy and avoid disappointing him, but when he reaches the pool hall and lies about the transaction price it is clear that even the good intentions of Balthazar are subject to the undermining effects of capitalism. His values system is altered as he realizes that recognition and praise are not attracted by hard work or benevolence, but by money:

Until that moment, he thought that he had made a better cage than ever before, that he'd had to give it to the son of Jose Monteil so that he wouldn't keep crying, and that none of these things was particularly important. But then he realized that all of this had a certain importance for many people, and he felt a little excited.

"So they gave you fifty pesos for the cage."

"Sixty," said Balthazar.

"Score one for you," someone said. "You're the only one who has managed to get such a pile of money out of Mr. Chepe Monteil.

We have to celebrate." (145)

After Balthazar convinces himself of the necessity of making lots of money, Márquez strips Balthazar of his dignity and benevolence. Márquez allows Balthazar to become drunk, sleep with women he doesn't know, and lie in the middle of the street without shoes, dreaming all the while of making more money and building bigger bird cages. The personal dignity represented by his stand against wealth and José Monteil escapes Balthazar, allowing him to become caught in the same evil that he believes he is fighting:

Since it was the first time he had ever been out drinking, by dusk he was completely drunk, and he was talking about a fabulous project of a thousand cages, at sixty pesos each, and then of a million cages, till he had sixty million pesos. "We have to make a lot of things to sell to the rich before they die," he was saying, blind drunk.

"All of them are sick, and they're going to die." (145)

The bird cages are symbolic of materialism on several levels, including the demand on Balthazar's time, their purpose of captivating life, and their attractiveness. Although Balthazar's celebratory reaction has been interpreted as an emphasis of his ability to keep dreaming and triumph over Chepe (McMurray 56-7), his dreams are of a material wealth similar to Chepe's, and his "triumph" appears to be little more than a compromise of formerly noble values.

Márquez uses "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings" to accomplish a similar but less central statement about the greed of exploitive capitalism. The elderly angel is treated harshly by Pelayo and his wife, Elisenda, who both behave in a manner that places financial rewards above compassion. Rather than

feeling sorry for the stranded angel, Pelayo and Elisenda soon realize the opportunity for entrepreneurship presented by their uninvited stranger:

Elisenda, her spine all twisted from sweeping up so much marketplace trash, then got the idea of fencing in the yard and charging five cents admission to see the angel. (206)

Márquez' choice of the word "marketplace" to describe their front yard is particularly indicative of the link between human (or angelic) exploitation and a capitalistic environment. The winged old man suffers from incessant prodding and a meager diet of eggplant mush, besides being bombarded with demands for healing trivial maladies, but "Pelayo and Elisenda were happy with fatigue, for in less than a week they had crammed their rooms with money and the line of pilgrims waiting their turn to enter still reached beyond the horizon." (206)

As a foil to the old man, the spider woman freely allows herself to be exploited for financial gain. A public eager to be entertained by the misfortunes of others perceives the spider woman as preferable to the old man because she gladly reveals the tragedy behind her appearance, while the old man retains his silent dignity. An additional advantage held by the spider woman is that she charges a lower admission price, which again presents individual worth in terms of monetary value. (Gerlach 124-5) By creating a fantasy which elevates money to a higher status than individual dignity, Márquez issues a warning of the actual potential of money to betray intrinsic human value.

"Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles" also focuses on the lack of human concern that can result from greed, but unlike the previous story, pays

particular attention to the attitudes of the entrepreneurs themselves rather than the exploitation experienced by their victims. Blacamán the Good learns both his trade and his greedy attitude from the appropriately named Blacamán the Bad. Neither of the two considers the welfare of his clients, and when a sailor dies after buying an impotent anti-venom potion from Blacamán the Bad, they react with fear for their own safety rather than remorse. (256-7)

Profit for the Blacamáns is made possible through the misfortunes of others, as Márquez again illustrates the translation of misery into cash. Blacamán the Good takes special pride that his prices are scaled according to the severity of his clients' problems:

I've gone through the world drawing the fever out of malaria victims for two pesos, visioning blind men for four-fifty, draining the water from dropsy victims for eighteen, putting cripples back together for twenty pesos if they were that way from birth, for twenty-two if they were that way from an accident or a brawl, for twenty-five if they were that way because of wars, earthquakes, infantry landings, or any other kind of public calamity, taking care of the common sick at wholesale according to a special arrangement, madmen according to their theme, children at half price, and idiots out of gratitude, and who dares say that I'm not a philanthropist . . . (258)

Blacamán's exaggerated perception of his generosity suggests that Márquez intends to mirror what he believes is the self-righteous involvement of

capitalist nations in Latin America. The challenging statement "who dares say that I'm not a philanthropist" communicates a threat of power similar to that held by the United States.

Márquez' portrayal of the relationship between cruelty and avarice is especially evident in Blacamán the Bad's treatment of Blacamán the Good when they are both starving. After offering several examples of their unprincipled behavior, Márquez clearly (though comically) attacks their nonexistent capacity for kindness or concern for their fellow man. Blacamán the Good relates how Blacamán the Bad "came down to the dungeon to give me something to eat...but then he made me pay for that charity by pulling out my nails with pliers and filing down my teeth with a grindstone." (258) Blacamán the Good treats Blacamán the Bad little better, reaching beyond death for revenge as he "revived him inside the armored tomb and left him there rolling about in horror". (261) The outstanding traits of both men are their capitalistic greed and their cruelty, and the correlation between the two characteristics appears to be intentional.

Márquez offers another portrait of runaway capitalism in "The Sea Of Lost Time". The character of Mr. Herbert embodies several distasteful aspects of capitalism, including an unfounded sense of goodness, artificial satisfaction, and morally reprehensible opportunism.

Mr. Herbert's effect on the town is not immediately recognizable, for he does provide money to some citizens who truly need it, but even in his initial role as a financial savior others are trapped in his web of promised wealth. One instance in which Mr. Herbert's supposed generosity sacrifices the dignity of his clients is the case of the woman who prostitutes herself in order to

"earn" five-hundred pesos. (222-223). Another of his voluntary victims is old Jacob, who tries to win money from Mr. Herbert by playing checkers, but after failing to win even one game must sell his house to pay off his debt. (223-4)

The selfishness of capitalism continues to be represented through Mr. Herbert as his calculating indifference to the welfare of the townspeople eventually becomes obvious. Although the self-proclaimed philanthropist "spoke of the fabulous destiny of the town" (224), he falls asleep shortly after that speech, suggesting Márquez' sentiments that once capitalists gain what they want, their promises are forgotten. Accordingly, when Mr. Herbert finally awakens, he reveals to Tobías and Clotilde that he plans to leave, and advises them to depart as well because "there are too many things to do in the world for you to be starving in this town." (229)

The combination of cruelty and capitalistic greed appears again in "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother." Eréndira's grandmother exploits her in a manner similar to the perceived capitalistic exploitation of many Latin American countries, or perhaps the exploitation which resulted from Spain's colonization of Latin America. (Penuel 67) The grandmother reaps for herself the financial benefits of Eréndira's suffering, without guilt or pity for her granddaughter.

Money is closely related to the suffering and abuse in the plot of "Innocent Eréndira". Early in the story, Eréndira is forced to work hard to maintain her grandmother's lavish lifestyle. The exhaustion resulting from her overwork causes her to accidentally burn the house down, and the grandmother's insistence on being repaid for the house leads to Eréndira's life of misery as a prostitute.

Prostitution is significant to the theme of "Innocent Eréndira" because it places a price on an act designed for love, thereby destroying its intrinsic value. Ulises has a redeeming effect on Eréndira, who "had loved him so much and so truthfully that she loved him again for half price while her grandmother was raving and kept on loving him for nothing until dawn." (180) When Eréndira begins to have true feelings for Ulises, the price of her love drops accordingly, suggesting Márquez' point that the most important aspects of life can neither be bought nor sold.

Eréndira's grandmother is not the only example of greed in the desert. Characters such as the spider woman and a number of smugglers are also in the area, operating on the same principle of selfishness as Eréndira's guardian. Their presence helps to complete a picture of a world where money has clearly displaced both law and ethics.

Money has even become imbedded within normally wholesome oranges, as Ulises and his father smuggle diamonds by hiding them inside the fruit. The smugglers are in a sense perverting the natural quality of the oranges to make a profit in the same way that Eréndira is perverted by her grandmother for the sake of becoming wealthy. Márquez notes the link between Eréndira and the oranges as Ulises tells her, "You're the color of an orange all over." (291)

The theme of capitalistic greed is supported in this story with the inclusion of characters from "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings". The previously mentioned spider woman, a symbol of warped opportunism in the earlier children's tale, reappears in this story for a similar effect. The winged man himself, a figure who stood above the selfishness in the earlier story, apparently has a grandson who inherited the capacity to care about life

rather than money:

"You," the grandmother asked him. "What happened to your wings?"

"The one who had wings was my grandfather," Ulises answered in his natural way, "But nobody believed it."

The grandmother examined him again with fascination.

"Well I do," she said. "Put them on and come back tomorrow." (277)

Because the grandmother recognized Ulises' heritage of wings even without them growing from him, Márquez indicates that the wings are more than a physical characteristic. The shared ability of both the boy and his grandfather to stand apart from the exploitation around them suggests that the wings represent the rarity and beauty of those who reject being enslaved by money, as the old man flies away from the materialistic village and Ulises leaves his smuggling father.

Judging from his symbolic treatment of exploitive capitalistic activities in Latin America, perhaps Márquez sees at least a part of himself in the race of winged men that, even while standing apart from greed, cannot help but be sorrowfully affected by it. Eréndira's strange decision to return to her grandmother as well as her refusal to "live happily ever after" with Ulises could be interpreted as connected events. Both reflect a feeling of helplessness on the part of Márquez as he watches many fellow Latin Americans allow themselves to be exploited by large multinational corporations, eventually losing sight of their own best interests.

Greed is frequently a problem which manifests itself in the manipulation

of others for the sake of personal gain. It is dependant upon people, whether for their money or their recognition of financial success. While greed represents an illness that feeds upon society, Márquez also addresses a theme that is based upon separation from society - the theme of solitude.

As suggested by the title of Márquez' prize-winning novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, solitude is a theme that pervades both his novels and short stories. For Márquez, solitude is more than simply a circumstance of being alone; it is a realm of emotion that goes beyond loneliness to include the question of self-reliance and a struggle against despair. Márquez frequently shapes the atmosphere of solitude by using alienation, the prospect of death, and a lost sense of purpose. Several stories which best exemplify Márquez' interpretation of solitude are "The Night Of The Curlews", "Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain In Macondo", "Montiel's Widow", "One Day After Saturday", "Death Constant Beyond Love", and "Artificial Roses"

"Night Of the Curlews" demonstrates Márquez' understanding that solitude can exist on a variety of levels, especially through alienation. The sense of alienation that exists throughout the story is created primarily by the inability of the three blind men to maintain visible contact with the world around them. Even while being in each others' company, they are experiencing solitude dealt to them from the outside world of darkness. Their formation as a group does not diminish the solitude that they represent, but instead emphasizes their need for human companionship and understanding. Because the men cannot see, they are not only regarded as different and helpless, but also as obstacles that had to be confronted:

We turned around. Right there, behind us, there was a harsh, cutting breeze of an invisible dawn, and a voice that said:

"Get out of the way, I'm coming through with this."

We moved back. and the voice spoke again:

"You're still against the door."

And only then, when we had moved to all sides and had found the voice everywhere, did we say:

"We can't get out of here. The curlews have pecked out our eyes." (84)

Lack of sight makes the men feel separated from a suddenly mysterious outside world. The description of the open door behind them as an "invisible dawn" emphasizes their frustration with being unable to visually experience the world of sight. Metaphorically, it signifies the constant bleakness of their solitude.

Alienation as an element of solitude is also emphasized by the omission of names assigned to the characters. With the exception of the boy's book entitled *Terry and the Pirates*, no names are mentioned throughout the entire story, as the characters are referred to only generically, such as "the woman" (85) or "the boy". (87) Even the incidentally named book character of Terry is not considered important to the boy, whose attitude is representative of the lack of community in the story.

"At least tell us what happened to Terry this week."

He's trying to gain his confidence, we thought. But the boy said:

"That doesn't interest me. The only thing I like are the colors."

"Terry's in a maze," we said.

And the boy said:

"That was Friday. Today's Sunday and what I like are the colors,"

and he said it with a cold, dispassionate, indifferent voice. (87)

The other characters share the boy's dehumanized approach towards life, ignoring the blind men by calling their misfortune "a fake item made up by the newspapers." (87) The humanity of individuals is brushed aside in the society created by Márquez as his characters refuse to interact compassionately with one another. By doing so, Márquez uses the element of alienation as a contribution to the larger theme of solitude.

In addition to alienation, the prospect of death as a second element of solitude establishes a pattern that Márquez continues to use in other short stories. Early in the story, the men are sitting calmly at the bar right up until the moment that the birds attack and they are suddenly enveloped by darkness. The event is similar to an unexpected death in its suddenness, blackness, and tremendous consequences for the future. Later, when the men bump into unknown objects, one of them guesses that "they might be coffins." (84) Although darkness and coffins are the only allusions to death in "Night of the Curlews", later Márquez stories more strongly emphasize the role of death in creating solitude.

The third and final aspect of solitude for Márquez in "Night of the Curlews" is a lack of purpose made evident by the wandering pattern of the men and their indifferent resignation to their fate. Rather than asking to be led home, they simply wander passively from place to place without becoming enraged

at either their tragedy or the treatment that they receive from the townspeople. Their lethargy of action and emotion is characteristic of Márquez' use of understated expression in his portrayal of solitude.

Solitude is the central theme of a story published two years after "The Night of the Curlews", entitled "Monologue Of Isabel Watching It Rain In Macondo". Again, Márquez uses alienation, the prospect of death, and a lack of purpose to shape his theme of solitude, but he accomplishes each of these elements differently than in "The Night of the Curlews".

Alienation is an important aspect of "Monologue Of Isabel", and in this work Márquez uses rain as his instrument of separation. As in "The Night of the Curlews", the characters in "Monologue of Isabel" are not physically separated from each other and even communicate with one another, but they still experience solitude through alienation. The rain forces a physical proximity to each other, which causes a psychological distancing to take place. A mechanical, uncompassionate treatment of one another is the result:

My father said to me: "Don't move away from here until you're told what to do," and his voice was distant and indirect and didn't seem to be perceived by ear but by touch, which was the only sense that remained active. (95)

Although this psychological distancing may be a natural tendency after spending several days confined with the same small group of people, Márquez builds the sense of alienation with other details as well. After her father leaves, Isabel mentions, with no trace of sadness or alarm, that he "didn't

return; he got lost in the weather." (95) Even the entire town is isolated as Márquez informs us that the train from the outside world cannot reach the town until the rain clears. (94)

The prospect of death is central to the solitude in "Monologue of Isabel". The linkage between death and solitude is first hinted when Isabel mentions that the jasmine bush is "faithful to the memory of her mother." (91) Later, Isabel watches the gradual collapse of a cow standing in the middle of the rain. (92-93) The dead animals and people floating through the street morbidly intensify the relationship between solitude and fear of death during this period of individual and community isolation. (94) Finally, the combination of solitude and fear of death in Isabel culminate with her drowsy nightmare of the house being her tomb as she cries out, "I'm dead,...My God, I'm dead." (96)

Perhaps Márquez places such a strong emphasis on the relationship between solitude and death because death is the ultimate form of solitude. Being faced with the prospect of dying necessarily focuses attention deeply on oneself in isolation from the rest of the world. Consequently, the fear of death which contributes to solitude has severe implications for characters such as Isabel. Because she fears death and has no one to alleviate her fears, her enjoyment of life suffers as a result. Isabel drifts along, fearing her solitude yet unable or unwilling to break free from its stifling effect.

The depression caused by alienation and fear of death seems to create the lack of purpose in "Monologue of Isabel". Lack of purpose as both a symptom and cause of solitude is evident in her dreamlike actions and

thought processes. Even as the water climbs to a dangerously high level, Isabel remains preoccupied with her own hazy sensations:

I moved without direction, without will. I felt changed into a desolate meadow sown with algae and lichens, with soft, sticky toadstools, fertilized by the repugnant plants of dampness and shadows. I was in the living room contemplating the desert spectacle of piled-up furniture when I heard my grandmother's voice warning me from the next room that I might catch pneumonia. Only then did I realize that the water was up to my ankles, that the house was flooded, the floor covered by a thick surface of vicious, dead water. (93)

Márquez' treatment of solitude in "Monologue of Isabel" is similar to that found in "Night Of The Curlews" as it contains the overwhelming feeling of solitude even in the midst of other people. Rather than providing companionship and being a group, the characters are merely a collection of individuals. In both of these stories, Márquez appears to be pointing out the human tendency to ultimately be concerned only for one's self, retreating into personal boundaries rather than reaching out to others.

In contrast to the group settings of the previous two stories, "Montiel's Widow" deals with the solitude of being completely alone in a physical sense. The condition of widowhood is a major aspect of the sense of alienation in "Monteil's Widow" because she is left alone and has allowed herself to become distanced from her children. All three children have moved

out of the country and are referred to as "his son" and "his two daughters". (148) Their awkward relationship with their mother is reflected in their correspondence. It appears that they had written letters "standing up, with the plentiful ink of the telegraph office, and that they had torn up many telegram forms before finding twenty dollars worth of words." (148)

Although the widow's physical isolation contrasts the alienation within a group experienced by the blind men and Isabel, the characters all share the fault of contributing to their own solitude by denying some basic aspect of their humanity. At least to this extent, they alienate themselves. The blind men are devoid of emotional vitality, as they show no sign of rage or distress after becoming blinded. Isabel has allowed her need for companionship to drift into the background, and in "Monteil's Widow" the main character allows her own interpretation of reality to stand between any honest communication with others.

The solitude suffered by Montiel's widow is perhaps even more painful because her alienation from people is a symptom of her deeper problem of being alienated from reality. Because she believes throughout her married life that Jose Monteil is a pillar of the community, she is unprepared for the lack of community support at his funeral:

But his wife also was hoping that the whole town would attend the funeral and that the house would be too small to hold all the flowers. Nevertheless only the members of his own party and of his religious brotherhood attended, and the only wreaths they received were those from the municipal government. (148)

For both Isabel and the widow, alienation produces a connection between frustration and death, but alienation affects the widow Monteil's attitude about death differently than Isabel's. While Isabel was terrified at the thought of being dead, the widow Monteil hopes to use death as a means of escape. Marquez writes, "That day, she made a concerted effort to summon death, but no one replied." (149) While Isabel is anguished because she is confronted with death, the widow despairs because she is unable to experience the relief of dying. Although she does not consider killing herself, the widow suffers from solitude to such an extent that she is almost desperate to die, even to the point that she expresses her desire in her dream:

Then she fell asleep with her head bent on her breast.

The hand with the rosary fell to her side, and then she saw Big Mama in the patio, with a white sheet and a comb in her lap, squashing lice with her thumbnails. She asked her:

"When am I going to die?"

Big Mama raised her head.

"When the tiredness begins in your arm." (153)

Since the widow Monteil wishes so badly to die, she experiences an even more pathetic apathy to life than that characterized by his other figures. Possibly because her state of loneliness is absolute while that of the other characters is solely psychological, the widow resigns herself to the depression of solitude in a more complete sense than Isabel or the three blind men:

That night, at the age of sixty-two, while crying on the pillow upon which the man who had made her happy had rested, the widow Monteil knew for the first time the taste of resentment. I'll lock myself up forever, she was thinking. For me it is as if they had put me in the same box as Jose Monteil. I don't wish to know anything more about this world. (148)

While Monteil's widow wants to escape her experience of solitude through death, the boy in "The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship" uses a different tactic to break the solitude of his world. The townspeople do not believe or respect his image of the ghost ship and after years of suffering from unwanted solitude, the boy finally "breaks the solitude through the communicative act" by guiding the ghost ship into the town. (McMurray 124-6) Although the boy's method of dealing with solitude is more direct and aggressive than that of the winged old man's, destroying the cause of his solitude - a sleeping village - commands considerably less respect and dignity than the old man's response of simply removing himself from the atmosphere of solitude.

One of the Márquez stories that best illustrates the terror and frustration that can accompany solitude is "Death Constant Beyond Love". The theme of solitude is developed throughout the story, especially focusing on the elements of alienation and the prospect of death.

The prospect of death occurs throughout "Death Constant Beyond Love" and contributes an intensity to the atmosphere of solitude, but at the same time it is not entirely negative. The prospect of death makes him aware that he is immersed in solitude, despite having a family and being surrounded by campaign

workers, but it also helps him realize the shallow, empty nature of his selfish pursuit of power through re-election. Senator Sánchez is both cynical and lonely as he is faced with death, and Márquez seems to establish a strong link between his impending death and his understanding of the importance of human companionship as preferable to wealth.

The change that results from the solitude associated with his "death sentence" is particularly evident in Senator Sánchez' relationship with Laura Farina. When Laura presents herself at his door, it is the knowledge that he is to die which initially gives the Senator the courage to brave the risk of a potentially scandalous relationship. (243)

His decision to submit to his desire for Laura is more than simply lust, because his desire to be with her involves companionship as well as physical gratification. Upon discovering that they share the same astrological sign of Ares, he smiles and tells her, "It's the sign of solitude." As he begins to caress her, he sighs and says, "No one loves us." (244) Finally, it becomes apparent that his need for companionship has taken precedence over his urge for physical gratification as Laura offers to go get the key to her chastity belt:

"If you want, I can go get the key myself," Laura Farina said.

The senator held her back.

"Forget about the key," he said, "and sleep awhile with me.

It's good to be with someone when you're so alone." (245)

Márquez makes an insightful comment about society by continuing the senator's feeling of loneliness even in the company of Laura Farina. As

presented earlier in "Night of the Curlews" and "Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo", the company of others is not enough to alleviate inner solitude. Even though Senator Sánchez spends his last hours in the arms of Laura Farina "weeping with rage at dying without her," (245) Márquez seems to be making the point that the terror and solitude associated with death is so great for the senator that even sexual union with Laura Farina would not be enough to overcome it.

"One Day After Saturday" also contains solitude as a major theme, but in this case alienation, death, and lack of purpose are eventually broken by hope. Each of the characters in this work are initially experiencing solitude, but by the end of the story are brought together physically. By joining the individuals in the same room for a single purpose, Márquez leaves the hint that greater unification is possible. (Dauster 469)

García Márquez employs several techniques to create the atmosphere of alienation. A subtle but powerful effect of solitude through alienation is achieved as each character enters the plot separately, isolated from each other. Furthermore, none of the characters are connected with a family during the story, serving to heighten the noticeable absence of community.

Building on the alienation presented, Márquez once again allows death to play a major role in establishing a theme of solitude. Numerous examples of death can be found in "One Day After Saturday", in addition to the obvious account of the dead birds. More peripheral mentions of death include the description of José Arcadio Buendía's death (162), the shooting of the banana workers (165), and the call for the priest to administer extreme unction to a dying woman (170). In one instance, Father Isabel falls to the floor, believing

that he is dying, but then collects himself and steps outside to continue living in the precense of death and solitude:

Then he looked around himself, as if to reconcile himself
to the solitude, and saw, in the peaceful shade of the dawn,
one, two, three dead birds on the veranda. (171)

Finally, the lack of purpose evident in previous stories reccurs, but the conclusion of "One Day After Saturday" converts the lack of purpose into at least some degree of hope. Throughout the story, Father Isabel wanders in and out of senility, Rebecca focuses her thoughts and energies on simply making herself comfortable, and the boy is merely passing the time until his train returns. However, Márquez realizes the potential in each of these characters, and his strange but inspiring conclusion recognizes that the lack of purpose linked with solitude can be overcome by community:

"Then take the money and give it to the boy that was alone
at the beginning, and you tell him that it's from the priest,
and that he should buy a new hat." (176)

The priest's advice expresses Márquez' remedy of community to combat solitude as he instructs the acolyte what to do with the church's money. (Dauster 469)

"Artificial Roses" was published in the same year as "One Day After Saturday", and not surprisingly, treats the same elements of solitude - alienation, death, and lack of purpose. In another similarity between the two

stories, "Artificial Roses" offers the interjection of hope, but in a much stronger sense than is portrayed in "One Day After Saturday." Mina is a character who allows herself the luxury of self-pity, while her grandmother presents an antidote to solitude. The juxtaposition of the two characters makes "Artificial Roses" a key story with regard to this theme.

Alienation is a factor for both Mina and her grandmother. In addition to the overt sense of alienation experienced by Mina's loss of a lover, the blindness of the grandmother isolates her from the world of vision. A major difference between the two characters is that the grandmother does not surrender to her isolation as Mina does, but instead allows herself to triumph by using it as a celebration of her individuality. She is not burdened by feelings of inadequacy, and tells Mina "God knows I have a clear conscience." (179) Conversely, Mina does not have enough self-confidence to accept responsibility for her own problems, and therefore tries to escape from her personal solitude by repeatedly placing blame on her grandmother. By using Mina as a foil to her grandmother, Márquez emphasizes the temptations of self-pity afforded by solitude as well as the potential to use solitude as a means of exploring individuality.

These two distinct reactions are also revealed in their sense of purpose. After the apparent dissolution of her romantic relationship, Mina not only abandons her plans to go to Mass, but even places any responsibility for her decision on her grandmother:

"You're to blame," she murmured, with a dull rancor, feeling
that she was drowning in tears. (178)

The most telling dialogue that Mina has about her lost sense of purpose occurs after Mina explains the situation to her friend Trinidad. Mina's answer to Trinidad's question about her boyfriend also describes her own lack of determination to continue living beyond solitude:

Trinidad looked at her without blinking. A vertical wrinkle divided her knit brows.

"And now?" she asked.

Mina replied in a steady voice.

"Now nothing." (180-1)

The grandmother, however, learns from her solitude both a definite sense of purpose and a willingness to shoulder responsibility. The grandmother is an active worker, evidenced by her rising from bed long before seven, washing Mina's sleeves, making coffee, and pruning the rosebush. Her willingness to accept more than her share of responsibility is illustrated when she explains to Mina's mother why Mina did not go to Mass, taking up for her granddaughter even after receiving such disrespectful treatment from Mina:

"I thought you were at church," her mother said when Mina came into the kitchen.

"She couldn't go," the blind woman interrupted. "I forgot that it was first Friday, and I washed the sleeves yesterday afternoon." (179)

The grandmother is a character whose blindness and old age present similar challenges of isolation and mortality as those faced by other characters, yet she emerges as a strong-willed, confident individual. Rather than focusing on herself, she conquers alienation by thinking of others, as in the above quote, and defeats a lack of purpose by putting her thoughtfulness to work. She is at peace with herself not in spite of her solitude, but through it.

In her sense of purpose that perseveres beyond solitude, the grandmother is similar to the old man with enormous wings in the story of the same title. Being the only winged man among a race of wingless humans has obvious implications for alienation, and the abuse suffered at the hands of the cruel and curious humans only reinforces the winged man's psychological solitude. As George R. McMurray states in Gabriel García Márquez, "the theme of solitude emerges from the angel's uncommunicative nature and isolation from all men." (McMurray 118) However, with dignity similar to that of Mina's grandmother in "Artificial Roses", the old man has a sense of purpose in his solitude that goes beyond simply gathering the strength to fly to include the larger purpose of setting an example of patience for mankind:

His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience.

Especially during the first days, when the hens pecked at him, searching for the stellar parasites that proliferated in his wings, and the cripples pulled out feathers to touch their defective parts with, and even the most merciful threw stones at him, trying to get him to rise so they could see him standing. (207)

Although the townspeople in "The Old Man With Enormous Wings" do not seem to learn anything from the old man, he presents an excellent model of the ability to retain a special dignity in the midst of solitude. Rather than becoming bitter or wallowing in self-pity, he attempts to solve the problems of strangers who only reward him with pokes and stares.

His lack of resentment is amazing, as he remains with Elisenda and Pelayo for a time even after his cage is removed. Solitude is forced upon the angel to a large extent, but he refuses to use it as an excuse to reject society. His experience with solitude brings the old man close to death, but his physical and emotional perseverance allows him "rise above" the potentially destructive force of solitude as he flies away at the end of the story.

Márquez' presentation of solitude does not encourage the avoidance of solitude, but rather portrays solitude as an avenue to self-understanding. While solitude is a destructive force for several of Márquez' characters, their negative experiences are largely a result of their own surrender to alienation, fear of death, or lack of purpose. Although Mina's grandmother is alienated through blindness and the winged man is alienated because of physical appearance, both are sacrificial in their solitude rather than frightened or bitter. Ironically, focusing on others' needs instead of their own enables Mina's grandmother and the old man to gain personal strength even in the midst of solitude.

Historically, the church has provided an alternative to the despair of living an alienated and purposeless life. However, the church described by Márquez further alienates the people, undermining its very purpose. The reader experiences an institution that has strayed from its own source, God, and

consequently is incapable of helping its members establish a relationship with God. With institutionalized religion as a major theme, a number of stories contain satirical or openly critical references to organized Catholicism, although not necessarily to faith in God.

"Tuesday Siesta" introduces a Márquez character type that begins to have tremendous significance in his later stories - the distant and impersonal priest. Although he does not appear until the middle of the story, the priest plays a central role in shaping the atmosphere of public apathy that is endured by the mother and daughter of the dead thief. When the mother informs the priest which grave she has come to see, he does not even recognize the thief's name, perhaps the most essential symbol of individuality.

"Which grave are you going to visit?" he asked.

"Carlos Centeno's," said the woman.

"Who?"

"Carlos Centeno," the woman repeated.

The priest still did not understand.

"He's the thief who was killed here last week," said the woman
in the same tone of voice. "I am his mother." (103)

The sad fact that a man could be buried without even the priest knowing his name suggests the mechanical nature of organized religion as seen through the eyes of Márquez. Compassion and human love are portrayed as somehow separated from structured religion, which seems to have become simply a job for the priest rather than an expression of his love for God and resultant love for

mankind.

The portrait of apathy in the priest is continued through his thoughtless responses to the story of the boy's love and dedication to his family.

"God's will is inscrutable," said the Father.

But he said it without much conviction, partly because experience had made him a little skeptical and partly because of the heat. He suggested they cover their heads to guard against sunstroke. Yawning, and now almost completely asleep, he gave them instructions about how to find Carlos Centeno's grave. (105)

His reactions reveal that the priest is not only incapable of understanding dignity, he cannot even recognize it. Rather than feeling pity for the dead boy's tragic circumstances or respect for Carlos' devotion to his family, the Father only goes through the motions of filling his position. Because of the priest's symbolic post as head of the local church and the absence of other church members to counter his apathy, the priest's attitude seems intended to represent a problem shared by the church as a whole - too much emphasis on order and too little encouragement of concern.

The priest in "One Day After Saturday" does have the compassion that is absent in "Tuesday Siesta", but his compassion is offset somewhat by his problems with understanding and communicating reality. Although Father Anthony Isabel does try to save a dying bird and decides to give the offering money to the boy, his inability to think on the level of his parishioners has negative

consequences for both his career and their personal spiritual growth:

It had been a long while since they had asked for him to be replaced by a younger priest, especially when he claimed to have seen the devil. From that time on they began not paying attention to him, something which he didn't notice in a very clear way in spite of still being able to decipher the tiny characters of his breviary without his glasses. (p. 158)

The priest's mental and emotional state reflects the problems of the institutional church as a whole. Not only is the priest himself unable to identify and meet the needs of the people, but the higher levels of the Catholic structure seem to be included in the indictment as the people's petition for a new priest falls on deaf ears.

Having a priest who has lost both his vitality and a portion of his sanity contributes to an environment of spiritual sterility. Rather than assisting their spiritual development, he has become an obstacle. The parishioners are reluctant to attend worship services, which apparently do not fulfill their most basic purpose - celebrating human existence as well as the existence of God. Instead of being spiritually vibrant, they must tolerate the wispy leadership of a feeble old man, who seems to embody the church's concept of religion.

In "Big Mama's Funeral", another priest and the Pope himself are included as characters and both contribute to Márquez' humorous criticisms of religion. In a story which attacks a number of institutions, religion is certainly among

Márquez' foremost targets. As in "One Day After Saturday", the priest is portrayed as very old and incompetent, and the introduction of the Pope in Big Mama's funeral only contributes to the negative characteristics of the Church present in earlier stories.

Márquez' depiction of the priest is humorous, but the comical portrayal contains a biting message. The priest, again Father Anthony Isabel, is first described as "talking to himself and on the verge of his hundredth birthday". (185) His ridiculous insistence on appearing powerful despite his feebleness is illustrated when he is summoned to attend to Big Mama and must be carried to her by his "ten best men". (187) The first image of foolishness and the last image of feebleness being acknowledged as power appear to be part of Márquez' personal feelings that the Church insists on being acknowledged and respected even while struggling for coherent thought.

His treatment of the Pope continues Márquez' emphasis on the humanity of revered church leaders. Márquez seems to take special delight in contrasting the public elevation of the Pope with his reality as a human. As the Pontiff waits for the beginning of Big Mama's funeral, he must endure insomnia and mosquito bites "for the first time in the history of the Church." (196) The description which glorifies the Pope's presence at the funeral is intentionally ridiculous:

The Supreme Pontiff himself, whom she in her delirium imagined floating above the gardens of the Vatican in a resplendent carriage, conquered the heat with a plaited palm fan, and honored with his Supreme Dignity the greatest funeral in the world. (199)

By contrasting the holy, superior image of the Pope with his human susceptibility to mosquito bites, sleeplessness, and heat, Márquez points out that the Pope's spiritual significance does not eliminate his humanity. The Colombian writer's satiric portrayal does not appear intended to deny the Pontiff's importance as head of the Church, but rather as a warning against substituting the Pope for God Himself.

Both lethargy and the Church's lack of focus are examined in other passages from "Big Mama's Funeral" separate from the mention of the pope or Father Anthony Isabel. The lifelessness the Church is mentioned rather bluntly, as the death of Big Mama caused "an hour of confusion, chagrin, and bustle in the limitless empire of Christendom" for only "the third time in twenty centuries." (196) The Church's tendency to cater to the powerful is illustrated with the mention of a younger Big Mama "at High Mass, fanned by some functionary of the Civil Authority, enjoying the privilege of not kneeling, even at the moment of extreme elevation, so as not to ruin her Dutch-flounced skirt and her starched cambric petticoats." (189) While the Pope and the priest represent incompetence and arrogance, these references concentrate on the dullness and class-consciousness that Márquez perceives as barriers to an effective Church.

A new target of Church weakness appears in "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings." The familiar Márquez attack on lack of compassion by ecclesiastical authorities is shown as well, but in this case the major focus of Márquez' short work is the unreasonable bureaucracy and theological nit-picking that can contribute to lost compassion.

Despite his background as a woodcutter which suggests a practical mind,

the priest, Father Gonzaga, is neither practical nor compassionate. Rather than taking the old angel out of the chicken coop, cleaning him up, and feeding him, the priest writes a letter to his bishop, who in turn sends a letter to Rome. In fact, of the variety of people who examine the angel, the priest is the only one who does not offer a personal interpretation, instead relying on his Church superiors to help him think. (Williams 95) Márquez clearly intends to demonstrate a mindless bureaucracy, which he perceives as a barrier to the effective application of such religious principles as love or pity. His point is supported by the Vatican's response:

The mail from Rome showed no sense of urgency. They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connection with Aremaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings. Those meager letters might have come and gone until the end of time if a providential event had not put an end to the priest's tribulations. (207)

The triviality exhibited by the Church hierarchy presents a twin prioritizing of dreamy theology and adherence to proper channels, rather than focusing on the alleviation of mankind's suffering. Father Gonzaga capsulizes Márquez' portrait of misplaced priorities in the Church as he rejects the miracle of the angel on the grounds that "close up he was much too human." (205) (Gerlach 124)

The hardworking lifestyle of the missionaries in "Innocent Eréndira" offers a positive alternative to the ecclesiastical idleness of Father Gonzaga

and his superiors, but even this arm of the Church fails to include love in applying their standards to everyday life. The aloof attitude of the Church presented in previous stories is reversed in "Innocent Eréndira" with such images as a nun wrestling with a pig in mud, but both love and practical considerations remain absent. Even the practice of arranging marriages to protect pregnant Indians has negative consequences which are ignored by the Church:

The most difficult part of that Indian hunt was to convince the women, who defended themselves against divine grace with the truthful argument that the men, sleeping in their hammocks with their legs spread, felt they had the right to demand much heavier work from legitimate wives than from concubines. (278)

Because the mission wants so strongly to accomplish its own goals, the needs of the people it is meant to serve are frequently brushed aside through bribes or the use of force. However, the goals of the mission and the needs of the desert people do coincide at times, and it is only at the mission that Eréndira can say "I'm happy." (286)

Márquez' interweaving of religion in his stories is depressing in its negative assessment of priorities and the failure of the Church to reflect God's love. For Márquez, attending Mass seems to have little bearing on the parishioners' behavior, as even the murdering Chepe Monteil "was present every Sunday at eight o'clock Mass." (147) Márquez' stories frequently manifest a strong cynicism about the validity of the Church's relationship to people and

to God. As an alternative to the Church, Márquez seems to suggest a more individualized approach to religion. In "Artificial Roses", Mina's grandmother does not go with Mina to Mass, but can confidently state "God knows I have a clear conscience." (179) She also indicates that direct confession to God is more effective than going to Him indirectly through a priest, as she tells Mina, "If you want to be happy, don't confess with strangers." (188) The character of Mina's grandmother merges the themes of solitude and religion, but resolving solitude through her religious life is not dependent on the Church.

The crumbling effectiveness of the organized church has its parallel in the decadence which Márquez describes in his fictional societies. While the Church suffers from incompetent leadership and uninvolved members, Márquez' societies share the similar problem of morally deficient officials and uncommitted citizens. In the same way that the church parishioners were unable or unwilling to reform their system, the citizens frequently contribute to their own corrupt society through their own immorality or even by simply remaining silent.

Márquez' approach to decadence in "Monteil's Widow" presents a warning to those who are content to remain blind and inactive when corruption gains a foothold. Although the widow is quite concerned about the murders openly committed by the mayor, she never takes the time to investigate the situation. Her compassion is useless because she ignores the sources of the moral crimes taking place around her, including the activities of her own husband, José Monteil:

Planning the massacre, José Monteil was closeted together with

the mayor in his stifling office for days on end, while his wife was sympathizing with the dead. When the mayor left the office, she would block her husband's way. "That man is a murderer," she would tell him. "Use your influence with the government to get them to take that beast away; he's not going to leave a single human being in this town alive." And José Monteil, so busy those days, put her aside without looking at her, saying, "Don't be such a fool." (151)

During six years of praying and sympathizing with the dead, the widow never bothers to investigate the source of the killing. She is actually convinced that her husband is working on behalf of the victims, "helping them so that they won't die of hunger someplace else." (151) Raymond Williams suggests that the widow can be read as "an ideologeme for that sector of society that supports its institutions, and even institutional violence, without realizing the true nature of either." (Williams 54)

As she prepares to die, the widow is left alone, in despair, and naively certain of her husband's integrity. (McMurray 53) Even though she spends "five years praying to God to end the shooting," (149) the widow is not dedicated enough to consider that God may choose to work through her. By telling the story of Mrs. José Monteil, Márquez makes an appeal for the importance of being informed and subsequently being willing to act for change, a theme which his active political involvement would strongly support. (Byk 115-6, Minta 54-6)

Like the mayor in "Montiel's Widow", his counterpart in "One of These Days" also murders to accomplish his objectives and is representative of a

decadent society. According to McMurray, this decadence is further suggested through the descriptive details in the story. The two "pensive buzzards" being watched by the dentist present an image of inevitable doom, and the "dusty spider web with spider eggs and dead insects" that the mayor spies on the "crumbling cieling" (108, 110) are "symbolic motifs suggestive of the decadence of a community caught in the grips of social strife." (McMurray 50)

George McMurray states that "the spectacle of decadence momentarily alleviated by the mirage of material progress appears to be one of García Márquez' major thematic obsessions" (McMurray 126), and this statement is certainly true in "Death Constant Beyond Love". The campaigning senator believes that a successful campaign should be based on guile and inconspicuously keeping the people needy. He realizes that the fate of his career is dependant on the perpetuation of decadence, a point that he makes quite plain to his campaign staff.

You and I know that the day there are trees and flowers
in this heap of goat dung, the day there are shad instead
of worms in the water holes, that day neither you nor I will
have anything to do here, do I make myself clear? (242)

Senator Sánchez' speech helps to clarify a major aspect of decadence - the lack of hope for the future, due in large part to the unwillingness of those in power to work for change. As was the case in "One of These Days" and "Monteil's Widow", a reformation to improve the lives of the general public only poses a threat to those who already hold power - another similarity to Márquez' Church.

The character of Nelson Farina represents an extreme case of the moral decadence in Rosal del Virrey. Farina's first wife was drawn and quartered with his own hands, with her body parts used as fertilizer for her own califlower patch. His treatment of his first wife serves to diminish some of the shock from his willingness to use the purity of his own daughter as a political bargaining chip. The ruthlessness of Nelson Farina towards his own family clearly adds to the aura of decadence surrounding "Death Constant Beyond Love".

Following the pattern from "One of These Days", Márquez reinforces his theme of decadence in "Death Constant Beyond Love" by using symbolic details. The bleak description of Rosal del Virrey establishes a framework of emptiness and apathy that provides a foundation for the entire story:

He met her in Rosal del Virrey, an illusory village which by night was the furtive wharf for smugglers' ships, and on the other hand, in broad daylight looked like the most useless inlet on the desert, facing a sea that was arid and without direction and so far from everything that no one would have suspected that someone capable of changing the destiny of anyone lived there. (237)

This opening paragraph immediately suggests a moral vacuum, and the mention of smuggling continues the image of lost morality. The lack of purpose suggested by the "directionless" sea accurately characterizes the townspeople's frame of mind, as they have little choice but to wait for the fruition of the senator's miracle promises. Even the sea is "arid", providing the image of a town thirsting for a wholeness that has no hope of being quenched.

The sea has a slightly different role in "The Sea of Lost Time", representing death as the only means of escape from a decadent society. The townspeople have the practice of throwing their dead into the sea, a body of water which seems to imitate the pattern of pain in death by dumping garbage onto the shore. The sea's similarity to death continues with the suggestion of an afterlife as the ugliness of the garbage is ultimately replaced by the sweet smell of roses. The flowery scent coincides with the demise of the town, as Jacob learns soon after his wife first smells the new odor of the sea:

"Last night," old Jacob explained, "she caught a smell of roses."

"Then half the town is going to die," Don Máximo Gómez said. "That's all they've been talking about all morning." (214)

The connection between the sea and the collapse of the town is continued as Mr. Herbert and Tobías swim past flowers and the dead toward the bottom of the sea. When the sea no longer carries the fragrance of roses, the hope of a better life through death has disappeared, as the priest indicates by saying, "The smell won't come back . . . You've got to face up to the fact that the town has fallen into mortal sin." (226) The word "mortal" is especially significant.

"The Sea of Lost Time" also links Márquez' earlier themes of materialism and religion to his exploration of decadence. Prostitution, various forms of gambling, and the loss of dignity all occur for the chance of monetary wealth, and no one has any interest in contributing to religion, as the priest of the village discovers:

The priest let himself be confused by desperation. He went all over with a copper plate asking for donations to build the church, but he didn't get very much. (226)

However, Márquez is effectively unclear whether the people do not contribute because they have no faith or whether they simply cannot afford to be generous. The link between religion, materialism, and decadence is further established as Mr. Herbert explains to Tobías as they are swimming that "A Sunday sank at about 11:00 in the morning." (227) Mr. Herbert, the wealthy self-proclaimed savior, is announcing the death of the morning worship, usually scheduled for that time on Sundays, and the reason for their swim is that they are both starving - spiritually as well as physically.

The desert location of "Innocent Eréndira" serves a similar purpose to Márquez' earlier use of the sea in establishing an atmosphere of decadence. The desert is a place far from civilization, where illegal acts such as smuggling and the child prostitution of Eréndira can flourish. As in T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland", the desert environment matches the emptiness and spiritual barrenness of its inhabitants. The characters' futile attempts to nourish themselves in the midst of their moral desolation are symbolized by the activities of the mayor, a military man who also represents the familiar aspect of governmental decay (Penuel 75):

She found him in the courtyard of his home, his chest bare, shooting with an army rifle at a dark and solitary cloud in the burning sky. He was trying to perforate it to bring on rain,

and his shots were furious and useless, but he did take the necessary time out to listen to the grandmother. (262)

Not surprisingly, the cloud moves out of range, and the desert inhabitants are left once again without hope of revitalization. This hopelessness is characterized by other inept leaders in the story, such as "a military commander who is illiterate" and "a senator who vouches for the high morality of a procuress." (Penuel 75)

Márquez does not, however, neglect to offer a remedy for decadence, which he provides in "The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World". The characters in this story gradually change their environment from one of hopelessness to one of hope, although both the setting and the despairing attitude of the inhabitants are initially reminiscent of the decadent communities in other Márquez stories:

The village was made up of only twenty-odd wooden houses that had stone courtyards with no flowers and which were spread about on the end of a desertlike cape. There was so little land that mothers always went about with the fear that the wind would carry off their children and the few dead that the years had caused among them had to be thrown off the cliffs. (231)

The aimless, barren framework of the villagers existence is changed with the arrival of the dead man on their shore. The villagers begin to imagine what the dead man's life was like, humanize him by naming him Esteban, and in doing so

develop a greater appreciation for the beauty of human life. Dreams alone are not enough to combat decadence, but by acting on their fresh understanding the villagers begin to work towards the common goal of honoring the dead man and life itself:

Men and women became aware for the first time of the desolation of their streets, the dryness of their courtyards, the narrowness of their dreams as they faced the splendor and beauty of their drowned man. . . . But they knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere. . . they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal and they were going to break their backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers on the cliffs so that in future years the passengers on great ocean liners would awaken, suffocated by the smell of gardens on the high seas. (235-6)

By envisioning a brighter future and having the dedication necessary to act on their dreams, the inhabitants of Esteban's village establish a community that flourishes rather than one mired in the apathy and aimlessness of decadence. Their willingness to risk idealism and then follow up on their hopes presents an optimistic alternative to decadence. (McMurray 120)

At times, however, members of society do not have the power or the freedom to change their circumstances, and have little choice but to shape their behavior accordingly. Even when the situation is not one of society

versus decadence, conformism poses a threat to a healthy society by stifling individualism. Codes of behavior are often enforced through violence or social intimidation, and only rarely do individuals proudly assert themselves against such an authoritarian environment. However, because Márquez values individualism as an essential theme, a number of his characters make unique personal statements against authority by refusing to acknowledge their own vulnerability.

Individuals confronting authority or society as a whole can create tremendous intensity of emotions. While this type of concentrated emotional energy may be necessary to be effective, it can also be destructive if misguided. Not surprisingly, Márquez provides several characters who channel their defense of individuality in negative ways.

Márquez' most negative example of individual assertion against authority occurs in "Blacamán the Good, Vendor of Miracles". Working under the supervision of Blacamán the Bad, Blacamán the Good is subjected to a number of abuses, including condesension and torture. Blacamán the Good takes revenge against Blacamán the Bad by repeatedly resurrecting him from death while leaving him inside his tomb. Despite the cruelty of the act, it declares the selfhood of Blacamán the Good as much as it punishes Blacamán the Bad. While his form of rebellion is deplorable rather than admirable, Blacamán the Good does outperform the bad Blacamán at his own harmful magic. He is consistent with the other characters who represent this theme in his refusal to be manipulated by someone who assumes power over him.

Eréndira has a much more difficult time establishing her independence than the other characters do, but she too eventually manages to free herself from

the tyranny of her grandmother. On an expanded scale, one critic sees Márquez' use of symbols in this story as representing the plight of Latin American countries trying to establish their independence from Spain. (Penuel 67-83) When Eréndira finally does escape from her grandmother's influence, she is especially protective of her new freedom, even to the point of leaving behind her liberator Ulises - presumably from the fear that he, too, presents a threat of controlling her.

Another negative example of individual assertiveness occurs in "The Last Voyage Of The Ghost Ship". Despite the destructive outcome of his actions, the boy does achieve a fresh maturity when he decides to take revenge after being beaten by the townspeople, who refuse to believe in his story of a ghost ship. He is "drooling with rage," (249) but rather than expressing his rage in the form of a childish tantrum as does José Monteil, the boy focuses his anger by telling himself, "Now they're going to see who I am" . . . "in his strong new man's voice." (146) Regardless of the damage done by his decision to guide the ship into a collision with the village, the boy does not conform to the village's ideas of reality. Instead, he establishes his own perspective and self-worth in a forceful way. (McMurray 124-6)

The wealthy Chepe Monteil is the authority figure in "Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon". Like Blacaman, Eréndira, and the village boy, Balthazar establishes his individuality by refusing to be manipulated. (Cardwell 6) He remains steadfast in his decision to give the cage as a gift even when the wealthy José Monteil addresses Balthazar "in a fury". (143) Monteil's condescending attitude toward Balthazar is evident as he tells him, "I'm very sorry Balthazar, but you should have consulted with me before going on. Only to

you would it occur to contract with a minor."

José Monteil, typical of Márquez authority figures, is unaccustomed to being challenged. In this case he expresses his shock through rage. When Balthazar disobeys Monteil's direst orders by leaving the cage, Monteil goes into a state of frenzied anger:

He was very pale and his eyes were beginning to get red.

"Idiot!" he was shouting. "Take your trinket out of here.

The last thing we need is for some nobody to give orders in my house. Son of a bitch!" (143)

Monteil's furious reaction to being ignored reveals more than surprise at Balthazar's assertiveness. His reference to Balthazar as "some nobody" indicates his opinion of those who do not share his degree of wealth.

The mother and daughter of the dead thief in "Tuesday Siesta" represent another positive example of pride and determination in an unkind world. The mother rides "with her spinal column braced firmly against the back of the seat," suggesting unyielding self-assurance. Her instructions to her daughter demonstrate that personal pride is valued highly, as she tells her daughter to comb her hair, be careful of soot, and "above all, no crying." (101) Descriptions of the mother's voice are also revealing, as she speaks calmly, briefly, and without hesitation. Their struggle to overcome the cruelty of their environment is characterized by Carlos Centeno's occupation as a boxer, as he voluntarily takes regular beatings for the sake of his family.

The attitude of assertiveness is not expected by their society, which

operates through subtle intimidation. The priest tries to send them away at first, but the mother calmly insists on seeing him. After understanding their situation, the priest is clearly surprised by the inner strength they display, realizing "with a kind of pious amazement that they were not about to cry."

(105) The rude stares of the crowd surrounding them constitutes another attempt to break the resolution of the mother and daughter, but their efforts again have little effect.

The dentist in "One Of These Days" also manifests a refusal to be subserviant, but at the same time indicates a community loyalty that was often missing in the theme of decadence. His defiant stance toward the mayor apparently stems from the mayor's role in the death of twenty citizens, an event that suggests the risk of rebellion. The confrontation between the two men represents a conflict between an abusive government and an angry citizen rather than simply a conflict between two individuals, as evidenced by the absence of names assigned to either the mayor or the dentist. The mayor's title is capitalized, emphasizing the power of government embodied in his person.

Márquez' use of terse dialogue and half-serious threats escalates tension associated with the conflict. When his son tells the dentist that the mayor wants his tooth pulled, the dentist replies, "Tell him I'm not here." (108) After the mayor counters with a threat to shoot the dentist, the dentist responds by pulling open a drawer with his own revolver in it, saying, "O.K., tell him to go ahead and shoot me." (108)

When the dentist does reluctantly agree to pull the mayor's tooth, he makes the most of the opportunity. After informing the mayor that the extraction must be made without anesthesia, he coldly executes his own form of

revenge against the government:

The dentist spread his feet and grasped the tooth with the hot forceps. The Mayor seized the arms of the chair, braced his feet with all his strength, and felt an icy void in his kidneys, but didn't make a sound. The dentist moved only his wrist. Without rancor, rather with a bitter tenderness, he said:

"Now you'll pay for our twenty dead men."

The Mayor felt the crunch of bones in his jaw, and his eyes filled with tears. But he didn't breathe until he saw his tooth come out. Then he saw it through his tears. (109)

The operation is effective not only in removing the tooth, but in communicating the intended message. When the dentist asks whether he should send the bill to the mayor or the town, the mayor knowingly replies, "It's the same damn thing." (110)

The gold tooth used by the dentist has considerable symbolic weight in the confrontation between an unjust government and a justice-hungry individual, as pointed out in an insightful paragraph by Richard Cardwell:

The gold tooth becomes the dentist's symbolic sword in the moment he resists the mayor. Ironically the mayor is resisted by gold, a metal only he and his supporters might be supposed to afford. He is resisted by the image of his own class. But the gold theme becomes more complex and subtle when we recognize that

it is used not only thematically (in the confrontation) but also as a means of characterization. The dentist is associated with incorruptable metal (perhaps at the point of retribution to become the shining sword of the avenging angel); the mayor's tooth is abscessed, corrupt. (Cardwell 6-7)

As a result of the dentist's bold sense of righteousness, the gold tooth may ultimately represent the triumph of an individual protest against the actions of an intolerant government.

Through the actions of these characters, Márquez creatively explores the potential for humans to overcome oppression. All of them staunchly defend their rights as individuals, and in different ways effectively communicate their resistance to coercive authority. Although Márquez clearly does not endorse the means chosen by each character in making a personal statement, he does leave the impression that the spirit of independence is to be respected.

Death, greed, solitude, religion, decadence and independence do have a discernable relationship to one another, but understanding these six major themes with the mind of Márquez requires an appreciation of his overriding theme of imagination. (Williams 98) Imagination is not an overt theme in the same respect as those mentioned previously, but it is the key to placing the other themes in the perspective intended by Márquez. Throughout his short works, the Colombian writer presents a world in which looking beyond the present reality is essential to overcoming the negative aspects of death, greed, solitude, religion, decadence, and independence. In spite of his seemingly pessimistic portrayal of major themes, Márquez' unifying motif of

imagination adds an entirely new dimension to his treatment of the other six. Márquez incorporates this imagination in his fiction through his bizzare sense of humor and the use of magical realism.

Because the humor of Márquez is often placed in a bleak context, it accomplishes a purpose more significant than simply being witty or entertaining. Instead, it indicates that even when lacking the capacity to overcome problems, mankind can at least learn to acknowledge their relative absurdity. The struggles of Márquez' characters are frequently punctuated with a comic twist, such as the pathetic dilemma of the old man with enormous wings. Certainly the old man engenders sympathy, but the strangeness of the situation disarms our tendency to be frustrated or saddened.

Another practical purpose for Márquez' humor is the freedom which it gives him to communicate, in an appealing way, themes that would be offensive or at least depressing if communicated directly. A subtle, humorous approach is likely to prove ultimately more effective than writing straightforward short stories about such sensitive problems as death, greed, solitude, religious corruption, decadence, and the restriction of individuality. Nabo's adventure with death, the greedy Blacamáns, the Pope swatting mosquitoes, Senator Sánchez' sexual frustration in solitude, the government official shooting at a cloud, and the futile murder attempts of Ulises all establish definitive thematic statements while at the same time being entertaining and funny.

While magical realism can occasionally be humorous, it represents a second distinct aspect of imagination in Márquez' stories. Rather than simply asking readers to suspend their disbelief, the principles of magical realism demand the mental re-creation of an entirely different realm of expectations. This

approach removes or at least restructures limitations, thereby creating new dimensions to the problems presented by his earlier themes. In doing so, magical realism represents a removal from traditional ways of examining these thematic problems, offering one important step towards a solution.

An important role of magical realism for Márquez is its function as a creative release. By inventively expanding and reorganizing the settings and plots for themes which are often troubling, Márquez encourages the mental transformation of problems into sources of imaginative play. Specifically, Márquez applies these far-reaching possibilities of magical realism to his treatment of time, space and behavior.

Márquez portrays time in ways assumed to be impossible in the world most readers are accustomed to experiencing. According to McMurray, García Márquez accomplishes this by compressing "clock time within a limited frame while exploring the vastly expanded temporal realms of his characters' minds." (McMurray 12) In other words, Márquez operates on two distinct levels of time, mental and numerical. "Nabo, The Black Man Who Made The Angels Wait", "Eva Is Inside Her Cat", "The Sea Of Lost Time", "Blacaman The Good", and the early stories dealing with death serve as examples of Márquez' creative restructuring of time.

While Márquez applies the fantastic to time more frequently than space, a number of his stories that exaggerate time also include new perspectives of space. The undersea world of "The Sea Of Lost Time" is a magical realm where dead people can swim, flowers stream in abundance, and submerged villages exist. The presentation of such a world offers an entertaining and hopeful contrast to the decadence of the fictional village on land. "Eva Is Inside Her

Cat" offers a similar combination of time and space, as Eva becomes eternally trapped in "that other universe that moves outside our world." (31) Márquez' early stories of death are especially inviting to his fictional creativity, because the world of death is consistent with the realm of the magical, transcending both time and space. (Rogers 146)

The behavior of characters and the bizzare events that occur in several Márquez stories require the same healthy imagination needed to envision Márquez' worlds of time and space. Among the characters introduced in Márquez' fiction are a dead man who continues to grow, a woman who lives inside her cat, a winged old man, and a grandmother who yields green blood. The events provided by Márquez are no less fascinating, as he unveils curlews pecking out the eyes of three men while they are sitting at a bar, birds falling from the sky, and a smell of roses coming from the sea.

The central role of imagination is particularly relavent to the other themes because it enables a view of the future, providing a basis for goal setting and the motivation to work for change. Márquez' own social and political commitments suggest that he himself possesses a strong image of the ideal and seeks to be an agent in creating such a world. (Byk 115-6, Minta 54-6) Márquez' dedication to imagination offers hope for solving, or at least coping with, the problems presented in his other major themes.

As George Shaw has noted, "one begins to be suspicious of a writer whose range of themes is unlimited since what determines the limits of his craft is the same limitation that underlies his human experience." (Shaw 129) Márquez himself acknowledges that "every single line in every one of my stories has a starting point in reality". Because human experience is not infinite, Márquez

chose to communicate the themes that were familiar to him and that concerned him.

Although not all of Márquez' themes are personally appealing, especially his criticism of the church and capitalism, Márquez does communicate his ideas extremely effectively. He is both entertaining and thought-provoking, and his creativity in presenting his themes is masterful. Despite being somewhat confusing in his early stories, Márquez is an author well worth reading.

Márquez' themes are manifestations of his concern for humanity. Death, greed, solitude, religion, decadence, independence and imagination each explore the vulnerability and potential that are present in individuals and society. While other important motifs must be overlooked, the seven which have been discussed indicate the depth of commitment that Márquez has for mankind:

I have always found in good literature the tendency to destroy the established, the accepted, and to contribute to the creation of new societies, in the end, to better the lives of men (and women).

- Gabriel García Márquez

(Saldivar 31-2)

Gabriel García Márquez has a special desire to motivate people to work for change, and the major themes of his short fiction certainly reflect this hope. Exploring his treatment of these themes reveals that there is indeed a method to his madness.

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