

The Apotheosis of the Regional

Four works by William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez

by Robert Hamilton

William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez—born thirty years apart on different continents, the products of wildly disparate cultures—do not seem at first glance profoundly similar. One was born and bred in Mississippi and lived nearly all his life in the American south. The other hails from Arcataca, Columbia, has experienced state censorship, became a communist, and finds North America a very uncomfortable place. Yet both men are enshrined in the pantheon of the greatest 20th Century novelists, and both have won the Nobel Prize for a lifetime of literary contributions. And although a yawning gulf separates their novels' surface concerns, the issues they wrestle with and sometimes even the techniques in which they write are ultimately very similar.

The four works chosen for this study have been picked deliberately from their authors' extensive *œuvres*, and they work together well in pairs determined by literary technique. Faulkner's *The Hamlet* and Garcia Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude* are comparatively traditional in structure and style, though both certainly showcase distinguishing features of contemporary literature and unmistakable authorial voices—indeed, both men are absolutely *sui generis*. On the other hand, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Garcia Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* flamboyantly exemplify 20th Century experimentalism, including stream-of-consciousness techniques and, in some sections, a total dissolution of the concept of time.

These works are profoundly regional—Garcia Marquez's works deal with his native Columbia and the Caribbean, with its jaguar-infested jungles, afternoon *siestas*, and

autocratic *generalissimos*. Faulkner's books resonate to the themes of the American South, authentically documenting the tensions between whites and blacks, the haunting legacy of the Civil War, and the smell of a small-town general store. But perish the thought that these works are mere "folksy" yarns or the products of some form of chauvinistic regionalism. The men who penned these novels view their native lands with respect, but they transcend regionalism to delve into universal human concerns—the nature of man, the dangers of love, the passing of time. They work wonders in small spaces, building metaphors of all mankind out of their own lives and native clay.

The Life of William Faulkner

William Faulkner was born a true son of the South, and remained one all his life. The overwhelming majority of his novels are set beneath the Mason-Dixon Line, and are filled with Southern customs, themes, legacies, and colloquialisms. He did not simply tack "redneck" stereotypes on to his books for "local color"—rather, he wrote from what he had known and lived in since birth.

William Cuthbert Faulkner was born September 25, 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi. His great-grandfather had been a colonel in the Confederate army and a novelist as well. Several of his books were quite popular in the latter half of the 19th Century. When Faulkner was a boy he often expressed a desire to become a writer just like his great-grandpa—and when he *did* become a writer, the old colonel appeared in some of his fiction as Colonel Sartoris.

William's father, Murry, was not a happy man, being bitter over the sale of the family railroad and his subsequent unemployment (Oates 6). The Falkners (the name was

originally spelled without a “u”) moved to Oxford, Mississippi, where Murry opened a livery stable. Lafayette County and Oxford, its seat, would seem very familiar to many a Faulkner fan, because the Yoknapatawpha County and Jefferson, Miss. of his fiction are closely based on the area in which Faulkner grew up.

At home young Faulkner felt a pull between the masculine world of his father—replete with good hard work and business sense, hunting and horses, drinking, swearing, and conversing with cronies in good Southern fashion—and the world of his mother, who was a quieter influence on him and exposed him to art and literature (Oates 7). In time it became clear that William had chosen his mother’s world, as he became more introspective, sensitive, and poetic (Oates 11-12). The fact that his best friend was a girl, Estelle Oldham, served to reinforce the image. Murry began to wonder whether something might not be a little wrong with his son. But William Faulkner’s literary side didn’t really begin to develop until he met Phil Stone.

Stone, a literate law student at Yale, was a fellow Southerner. Stone met Faulkner in 1914—the same year William dropped out of high school. Faulkner had already begun to read widely and compose poetry, but Stone, four years his senior, opened up new vistas for him, introducing him particularly to Romantic poets like Keats, Yeats, and Faulkner’s favorites, Swinburne and Housman (Blotner 46). Under Stone’s tutelage William continued developing and honing his poetic skills through his high school and college years and beyond, imitating a number of poets and chiefly dwelling on themes of lost love and frustrated sexuality.

In 1918, shortly before the close of the World War I, Faulkner tried to enlist in the United States air corps but was rejected due to his small size. Undaunted, he left for

Toronto, Canada to have a shot at the Royal Air Force, which accepted him. Though the war ended before he saw any action, he did learn to fly and, upon returning to Oxford, basked in the glory of a returning “veteran”. In fact, he posed as an officer and invented a host of yarns about fictional wounds and plane crashes (Blotner 68).

Both before and after his brief stint in the service Faulkner led something of a Bohemian existence, writing poetry and working halfheartedly at odd jobs. Murry Falkner disapproved of and failed to understand his son more than ever. Ironically, though, it was during these times that William developed his taste for bourbon and his passion for hunting and the Southern masculine lifestyle, proving that he had not entirely rejected his father’s legacy.

While still high-school aged Faulkner had fallen in love with Estelle Oldham, his friend since early childhood. His love did not diminish after her marriage to the handsome and promising lawyer Cornell Franklin; William continued giving her passionate poetry even after the birth of her children.

William Faulkner entered the University of Mississippi in 1918 as a special student, taking only three classes. He rarely bothered to attend even these, but he did have many opportunities to publish stories and poems in the college newspaper and write a drama for a literary club he formed. After only three semesters Faulkner dropped out of the University. He never had a high school diploma or college degree.

For the ensuing seven years, Faulkner held many odd jobs and continued writing. His first book to be professionally published was *The Marble Faun*, a poetry collection. It appears that around this time he realized that his true literary gift lay in novelism rather than poetry, and in 1925 he started to work on his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*. Although

this and his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, were both accepted by publishers, he had yet to find his own distinctive territory and voice.

The major watershed came when he began *Flags in the Dust*, the first of his books to be set in his mythical Yoknapatawpha County. It featured Faulkner's great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, as a major character, recast as Colonel Sartoris. He was a central enough character that the revised edition of the book was simply called *Sartoris*. In only two subsequent novels, *Pylon* and *A Fable*, did Faulkner stray far in setting from Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. The fifteen works set in this apocryphal county form a saga unparalleled, perhaps, in all literature. I am unaware of any other author who lavished so much material on one "made up" setting.

Before *Sartoris* was published, Faulkner embarked on one of the greatest ventures of his life. It is remarkable to think that a thirty-one year old writer with only one fairly significant novel under his belt accomplished what Faulkner did in what many dub his magnum opus: the brilliant *The Sound and the Fury*. The book is a staggering example of characterization and perhaps represents the pinnacle of stream-of-consciousness technique, a style that attempts to document the thoughts of characters. It was invented by James Joyce and was a major feature in his great work *Ulysses*. Faulkner once listed Joyce as one of the greatest modern authors and when in Paris frequented the favorite café of the older writer, but never actually met him.

It was about this time that Estelle Oldham, divorced from Cornell Franklin, agreed to marry William Faulkner. Their marriage was destined to be decidedly rocky, but it seems that they loved each other (at least in the beginning), and Faulkner refused to get a

divorce even at the darkest moments of the marriage. He was also completely dedicated to supporting his family, though he often detested the work he had to do.

He frequently wrote popular short stories for money, and he claimed to have written the shocking novel *Sanctuary* for pecuniary reasons alone. On the other hand, Frederick Karl suggests that Faulkner's dismissal of the work may have been defensiveness concerning his departure from the innovative techniques of his previous novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (369).

Faulkner's adult life, taken in general, could not be described as happy. He was chronically short of money, commonly supporting himself in difficult times by writing sensational short stories or creating screenplays in Hollywood, both of which he detested. At one point the entertainment magnate Jack Warner boasted that he had America's greatest writer on his payroll for less than novice screenwriters made.

He had other problems—among them a significant taste for bourbon. Indeed, the Jim Beam company sponsors Faulkner competitions to this day. He was not a clinical alcoholic, but would sometimes go on suicidal drinking binges that resulted in confinement to sanitariums and severe withdrawal symptoms. He also struggled with back problems and grief over the death of his brother Dean, who died after crashing William's own airplane.

These struggles are expressed in Faulkner's fiction in a variety of ways, some of them no doubt so personal that we will never know their significance. But despite his difficult life he went on undaunted, producing some of the greatest novels the world has ever seen. After *As I Lay Dying* came *Light in August*, a story of mankind's struggles and the ambiguity of race relations, and *Absalom, Absalom!*, which Frederick Karl terms

Faulkner's "great historical novel" (547). It tells of the early years of Yoknapatawpha County, the land of which was bought by Thomas Sutpen from Indian tribes. 1940's *Go Down, Moses* is as much like a short story collection as a novel, though Faulkner insisted it was the latter. Its major themes are race issues and man's relation to the natural world—Faulkner was an avid outdoorsman himself, and expressed concern over the disappearance of wild lands.

The first book of the Snopes Trilogy, *The Hamlet*, continues in the tragic vein Faulkner had established in his great works. However, much of the material in *The Hamlet* is hilarious, and prefigures the more "comic" works he would produce until his death, like *The Town*, *The Mansion*, and *The Reivers* (Cowan and Guinness 340-341).

In fact, it seems that Faulkner mellowed considerably with old age. When he won the Nobel Prize for literature late in life, one quote in particular from his acceptance speech became well known: "I believe that mankind will not only endure, but prevail." He also was granted the Pulitzer Prize, for 1954's *A Fable*, and posthumously for his last work, the comic *The Reivers*.

After winning these prestigious awards Faulkner found himself in high demand, and at last financially independent. He was engaged for speeches and goodwill tours to foreign countries, and became the writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia for a time. When in 1962 he died of heart failure at Byhalia, Mississippi, he had become a classic, widely regarded as America's greatest 20th Century literary figure.

The Works of William Faulkner

The hamlet

The Sound and the Fury

The Hamlet

The greatest literature is always able to examine the old concerns and questions of humanity and shed new light upon them. Perhaps more important is the way it makes us examine and rethink those old concerns, and to do so it usually leaves ambiguities standing and gives few black-and-white answers. William Faulkner felt that the duty of the serious writer, as he expressed in his Nobel Prize speech, was to deal with the “old verities of the human heart”. But sometimes it requires a little thought to understand exactly which verities are being addressed and what the author is really saying about them.

The Hamlet is one of several Faulkner novels that tend to polarize critical opinion. Some dismiss all the post-1940 works by declaring that all of Faulkner’s great books had already been written; he was past his prime. Others zero in on *The Hamlet* in particular, accusing it of being a jungle of convoluted prose-poetry, or a novel that sprawls off in far too many directions to equal a unified whole.

On the other hand, Cleanth Brooks, a venerable critic of southern fiction, claims in *William Faulkner: First Encounters* that “*The Hamlet* is a remarkable novel, and in my opinion, rarely given its proper due.” (127-128). David Minter, writing in *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*, says, “[*The Hamlet*] is remarkable for its self-assurance . .

.and it is a strikingly original contribution to modern literature.” (181).

The Hamlet succeeds brilliantly in incorporating the colloquial American tradition of the “tall-tale” into a work of profound literary merit and poetic quality (Brooks *TYC* chapter 9). Faulkner wove several existing short stories into the fabric of the book, such as “Fool About a Horse” and “Barn Burning”, with significant alterations to achieve a natural flow. Even so, many critics think this prodigality of yarn, plot, and subplot to ruin the continuity of the novel. This charge was a recurring one for Faulkner; *Go Down, Moses* originally had “and other stories” tacked on to the title, and Brooks states that many find *Light in August* entirely lacking in unity (*FE* 160).

Indeed, the subplots are legion. Ostensibly, the book is about the rise of Flem Snopes, a man bent only on the acquisition of money and property, and his takeover of Frenchman’s Bend, a rural section of Yoknapatawpha County near the Yoknapatawpha river. It does not finish his story, which is continued in the remaining two novels of the Snopes Trilogy. However, the novel can stand alone with ease.

Frenchman’s Bend, described as a “section” of land, is a small rural community, not exactly a town—it is perfectly summed up by the word “hamlet”(*Hamlet I*). This hamlet is dominated by Will Varner, the principal local landowner, and his son Jody. They run most of the little industries in Frenchman’s Bend (blacksmith’s shop, general store, cotton gin, etc.). Most of the inhabitants live outside the town on farmland.

The Snopes family arrives in the town at the beginning of the novel. They are sharecroppers, ultra-poor whites who drift from farm to farm, cultivating land that they will never own in their wildest dreams. Well, at least most of them will never rise to own land and become prosperous. Flem Snopes is consumed by the desire to become

financially successful, and has no doubt of his ability to rise in life. Using an ingenious combination of threats, business tactics, and an advantageous marriage to Will Varner's daughter, augmented by his single-minded devotion to money, he comes to dominate Frenchman's Bend. By the end of the novel he is ready to move on to the larger city of Jefferson.

This is definitely the main story of *The Hamlet*, but far from the only one. In fact, Flem Snopes and his wife Eula are removed from the action for a large section of the novel. As counterpoint to Flem's story we read much about Eula Varner before she marries him. She is unbelievably mature and voluptuous at a very early age, but unconscious of her own charms, a sort of artless *femme fatale*. Among the most compelling and significant of the subplots is the tale of Labove, the schoolteacher at Frenchman's Bend who falls desperately in love with Eula when she is in early adolescence. He is an obsessive man in many ways and is driven mad by Eula, at last trying unsuccessfully to rape her. He disappears after that, but is more important as an exemplar of a theme than a character *per se*, though one of course detects a love on Faulkner's part on creating the obsessed young man.

The novel is also characterized by Southern-style tall tales, as mentioned above. We read of all sorts of escapades referring to horses and the purchase thereof; the most famous example being the spotted horses episode in which Flem brings some spotted horses, so violent and untamed as to be worthless, into Frenchman's Bend and manages to persuade the community to buy them up—only for all the horses to escape their pen and run around Frenchman's Bend, causing incredible chaos and provoking a series of lawsuits against Flem, who of course contrives to not have to pay any damages.

The best tall-tale-teller in the whole book is V.K. Ratliff, the itinerant sewing-machine agent and virtuoso practitioner of the local “swapping culture”, which Flem Snopes and his family throw permanently off balance (Brooks *FI* 102-103). He is the most likable and sane character in the whole of *The Hamlet*, with enough flaws and foibles to seem endearingly human, but clearly a protagonist and all-around decent fellow. He makes for a perfect counterpoint to Flem, and does as much as the latter to hold the novel together.

But even Ratliff cannot defeat Flem’s new order. The novel ends with Snopes making a huge profit off Ratliff and two of his friends using a “salted goldmine” trick. Ratliff is able to take this in stride, but Flem is deadly serious and does not mind in the least that one of the friends, Henry Armstid, is totally ruined financially and mentally by Flem’s victory. We learn in the next two novels of the Snopes Trilogy of Flem moving on to greater things and finally being defeated, but this book stands alone well as the tale of one man’s horrifyingly amoral subjugation of a hapless country community. It is a compelling tale indeed.

But what of the novel’s sometimes maligned structure? Is it really the tale of a heartless man who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps to take over a hamlet? Is it, as Brooks suggests it can be read, just a glorified Horatio Alger story in which a young, poor man marries into a big business family and rises to success (*TYC* 174)? Certainly, as this book is the first in the *Snopes* Trilogy, its primary purpose is to tell Flem’s story. But, as pointed out before, he is entirely absent from the narrative for a time, and “telling Flem’s story” does not justify stitching in accounts of Labove’s passion for Eula or Ike’s poetical ramblings with his mammalian lover. What are some of the other themes that

make the novel a unity? Do they even exist? What, after all, are the major themes, elements, and concerns of the novel?

One theme that resonates throughout is love. Virtually every character is defined by love or the lack thereof. Space does not permit me to address every instance of this, but noting some of the major ones is helpful in understanding *The Hamlet's* unity.

There is debate as to whether Flem Snopes is actually the main character of this book. I tend to see V.K. Ratliff as being something like the soul of the novel, but there is no question that the book is “about” Flem, inasmuch as it is “about” any character at all. Of all the characters he is the most dangerous and evil—and also the least loving. He is bereft of any human emotion, even marrying his wife for money alone. Flawed as the other characters may be, none are quite as heartless and amoral as Flem.

His wife, Eula Varner, is also morally stunted, but is something of a contrast to him. She is self-centered, more universally loved than loving, but almost seems unaware of her shortcomings and her attractions. All of the young men of the community adore her, and she ends up pregnant out of wedlock—a convenient fact for Flem, who strikes a deal with Will Varner and marries her. Although Eula lives in a climate of romantic love, she never really shows a capacity for self-sacrifice, for Biblical love.

The extensive digression about Labove, the disturbed schoolteacher, must be mentioned here. Labove forms obsessions easily; for instance, though he really doesn't like school or books, he devours them passionately, almost compulsively. Similar is his passion for the teenaged Eula, which is far from true love. Faulkner says that he merely : “. . . wanted her one time as a man with a gangrened hand or foot thirsts after the axe-stroke which will leave him comparatively whole again.” (131). His obsession is just

another example of the misguided and selfish loves harbored by so many of the characters.

Flem's cousin, Ike Snopes, also has a love story of sorts. He is severely retarded and becomes devoted to a cow, which he feeds, cares for, and walks around with all day. This "relationship" is described in lush prose-poetry, full of beautiful nature descriptions. Cleanth Brooks suggests that Ike is to be seen as a foil to Flem, as a complete contrast to his mechanical, unnatural, loveless ethos (*FE* 116).

Only two major characters in the novel express something like Biblical, *agape* love. One is the wife of Mink Snopes, yet another of the extensive Snopes clan. Prior to marrying him she lives a very promiscuous life, but becomes totally attached to Mink. He is full of shortcomings and even abusive, but she is willing to go to any lengths of self-sacrifice to aid him, especially when he gets in trouble with the law.

The other character is V.K. Ratliff, who bears a great love for the community and for mankind in general—another essentially Biblical, *agape* love. He takes everything in stride and is very willing to help the unfortunate—particularly the helpless Ike Snopes, whom he aids in a number of ways. Ratliff is another foil to Flem, in that he demonstrates a coolness or "phlegm" in all situations, but is characterized by humor and charity. He is the ultimate counterpart to Flem and the Snopes clan in general.

Besides love, the other major theme in *The Hamlet* is commercialism and the changes it brings to Frenchman's bend—not only is this a major theme but probably the most obvious one. Flem and his numerous relations are members of a southern phenomenon called the "redneck class". Early in the 20th Century they were a burgeoning poor white class that looked down on blacks but were equally despised by the more aristocratic,

land-based white families. Faulkner's own prejudices can be difficult to sort out—for instance, though he was an even-handed and tireless supporter of civil rights for Negroes, he consistently used derogatory racial language in private letters. But it is clear that whatever Faulkner thought of this redneck class, he saw the upstart and aggressive commercialism associated with it as a definite threat. Minter points out that Frenchman's Bend is a slow, self-satisfied community that the Snopeses take absolutely by storm (180-181). Since Yoknapatawpha County can function as a type for the whole south or even mankind in general, it is very possible that Faulkner saw the Snopes type as an inimical element throughout America.

I've already mentioned that swapping and trading is a major fixture in the culture of Frenchman's Bend. Prior to the advent of the Snopeses it is almost recreational, and the pecuniary results of the transactions are only half of the experience. The men of the community love to strike deals and try to outwit each other in a friendly way. But the greatest fun comes when tales are spun, and the tellers seem to enjoy yarns about bad deals as much as those about good ones. This most of all is what Felm's business style undermines. For him, every action must lead to more money, more possessions, and there is no joy in the process.

Faulkner's treatment of Snopesism, to my mind, is a patently Biblical one. Business and profit are certainly not condemned (look at V.K. Ratliff), but greed and selfishness are shown in the worst light possible.

Another critical charge leveled against this book is that some of the most significant characters are one-dimensional—nobody could ever be as heartless and greedy as Flem; no twelve year old girl would be as voluptuous or irresistible as Eula. Cleanth Brooks,

with his usual perception, helps us with this charge as well. The characters, he suggests in his book *The Yoknapatawpha Country*, are mythological (170-172). In fact, his chapter on *The Hamlet* is entitled “Faulkner’s Savage Arcadia”. This interpretation is borne out well by the text of the novel, which is constantly comparing Eula, at least, to a Greek goddess. “. . .she would sit on the sunny steps and eat like one of the unchaste and perhaps even anonymously pregnant immortals eating bread of Paradise on a sunwise slope of Olympus.” (136). “By merely walking down the aisle between them she would transform the very wooden desks and benches themselves into a grove of Venus. . .” (127). Then there is the passage in which Labove thinks that Eula would be married to a Vulcan figure, a gnome with no passion—which is a prophecy of who she does marry. Brooks suggests that Flem and Eula are types—Flem being the negative force and Eula the positive force (Brooks 172). They are yoked together in a sort of primal yin and yang relationship. Coupled with the frequent usage of Greek and Roman metaphors like those cited above, it is clear that *The Hamlet* bears unmistakable attributes of mythology. It is definitely an incorrect charge to call Faulkner’s characters “flat”, which is generally a term used to deride characters written off the top of the head in sensational fiction. William Faulkner did not write from the top of the head—he knew how to characterize. One need only look at V.K. Ratliff to see that he could easily create a rounded and likable character. Flem and Eula are not artistic blunders written up in haste, but rather characters who resemble the gods of polytheistic religions, who often represent one concept and have only one major attribute (Venus corresponds to love, Bacchus to drunken pleasure, etc.).

In summation, Faulkner's *The Hamlet* does what he says fiction should do: deal with the old verities of the human heart. We learn about many sorts of love, we meet funny characters, obsessed characters, mythological characters. We are shown in tones completely removed from moralizing preachiness that greed and selfishness are destructive and that self-sacrifice and true love are things we should strive for. *The Hamlet* qualifies as great fiction.

The Sound and the Fury

The Sound and the Fury has elicited various reactions from readers and critics—it is praised as the twentieth century's greatest novel as often as it is dreaded by readers who have heard about its “challenging” style. Written in 1928, it is definitely Faulkner's first great work, and surely its breadth of characterization and richness of style has been achieved by few other thirty-year-old men. Through an arresting stream-of-consciousness technique Faulkner displays an amazing capacity to write convincingly from numerous points of view. Furthermore, the book makes the normal literary probe into the deep places of the human experience.

As usual with William Faulkner, the book is set in Yoknapatawpha County and deals with explicitly Southern issues. The “protagonists” (no single character could be called protagonist or antagonist) are either members of the Compson family or their servants. The decline of entire families is a popular literary theme; it has been treated by Thomas Mann, William Butler Yeats, and others. A new dimension is added when we consider the decline of the Compson family, because theirs is the story of the fading of a Southern gentry class and its replacement by self-made men with no claims to “good breeding”.

This story is cast in four parts; three of them are *interior monologues*, essentially, what is going on inside the minds of three brothers—Benjamin, Quentin, and Jason Compson. In the fourth section Faulkner takes over and provides a third-person narrative. The brothers have extremely different minds from one another and do not tell precisely the same story, but the common thread in all of them, which all view in a highly different light, is one of the main catalysts for the unraveling of their family.

The catalyst in question is the promiscuity of the Compson daughter, Candace (Caddy). Faulkner called Caddy his “heart’s darling” and was quoted as saying that *The Sound and the Fury* comprises four failed attempts at telling her story. The *Cliff’s Notes* speculate that Faulkner was indeed aiming high if this book is a failure, since what he created takes its place easily among the greatest works of fiction in English (7-8).

The upshot of the story is as follows: Mr. and Mrs. Compson have four children, mentioned above. Benjy is severely retarded, Quentin moody and introspective, Jason callous and businesslike, while Caddy has a great capacity for love and goodness but as a teenager gets herself involved in improper relationships, to her utter undoing. Her promiscuity, pregnancy, and hasty marriage drive Mr. Compson to drinking and Quentin to suicide, and devastate the idiot Benjy. The personality defects of Mrs. Compson and Jason are intensified.

This seems to be an instance of serious overreacting to a situation that was probably common enough in the ethos in which the Compsons lived. No doubt they are overreacting, but it is the tragically flawed personalities of the Compsons that cause them to flip their lids at this and nearly every other circumstance which comes their way. Essentially, they are unable to adapt to anything—the sins of a daughter, the fluctuations

of the stock market, the ticking of a clock, the wrong route taken around a Confederate monument. I will give brief synopses of the four sections and how they relate to Faulkner's major themes and characters.

The novel's opening has probably frightened away countless readers who might otherwise enjoy the work. In my opinion it is not the most difficult section to read at all—in fact it is almost easy if read with the understanding that elucidation will come later on. The reader must abandon himself to the delectable range of colors and sensations Faulkner has stuffed into this primitive poem (Brooks *FE* 48-49).

The consciousness is that of Benjy Compson. Of course, no sane person has ever experienced the thought patterns of the severely retarded, but Faulkner has given us here an arresting and convincing portrait of what it may be like. As with all stream-of-consciousness, we must understand that the character's thoughts have been transcribed into only their rough textual equivalents. Even so this chapter is quite a feat. Faulkner was somehow able to look at the world with childlike eyes and describe almost everything with startling originality. This passage is unlike anything you've ever read before. Benjy has no concept of time, so the narrative jumps from the present, when he is thirty-three, to his early childhood, and everything in between.

The most important part of the Benjy narrative is his relationship to Caddy. We learn that she is essentially the only person who has ever shown him any real love or care. Benjy does not reveal much about his sister's loss of virginity. However, he commonly remarks that she "smelled like trees," his conception of her scent. When, for instance, she wears perfume for the benefit of one of her lovers, he reacts with great violence. He has some inkling of her sin, and is devastated by her subsequent departure and marriage.

Benjy's section, as fragmented and confused as it is, conveys a huge amount of characterization that Faulkner will utilize later on in the novel. Mrs. Compson, for example, is a fully developed character in this section alone—her whining, ineffectual, and essentially loveless nature, her pride and discontent which she tries to recast as humility and resignation, and her hypochondria stand out like figures in bas-relief—and Faulkner accomplishes this exclusively through dialogue overheard by an idiot. Also the basic character of Caddy, who's mind we never enter, is conveyed—she seems to be basically good, but with a tragic flaw that ruins her life. The same could be said for many other characters, like Jason, the *female* Quentin (Caddy's daughter), and Dilsey, the black slave who seems to be the only character attached to the Compson family in possession of any stability or ability to put difficulties in perspective.

A last word about Benjy's section. The ever-astute Cleanth Brooks, a prominent Southern critic who knew William Faulkner, suggests that the three interior monologues of this novel represent three kinds of poetry (*FE* 61). Benjy's poetry is primitive, associative, and certainly brilliant. Poetic language had come to a crisis in the late 19th Century and early 20th—phrases like “rosy-fingered dawn” and comparable “poetic” devices were simply becoming too hackneyed to tolerate. This portion of *The Sound and the Fury* describes commonplace things and events in extremely original ways, so what we see in Benjy is not a diseased and stunted mind but rather one in possession of a childlike genius. For instance: “She broke the top of the water and held a piece of it against my face. ‘Ice. That means how cold it is.’” “I wasn't crying, but the ground wasn't still, and then I was crying. The ground kept sloping up and the cows ran up the hill.” “Versh's hand came with the spoon, into the bowl. The spoon came up to my

mouth. The steam tickled into my mouth.” Here is how the section ends: “And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep.” However, these brief quotes alone cannot capture the astonishing way in which Faulkner, through Benjy’s mind, captures sensations and sights in vivid, sensory primary colors.

If Benjy’s poetry is primitive and sensory, then Quentin’s is brooding, intellectual, and Romantic (Brooks *FE* 51-52). Quentin surely must rate with Prince Hamlet as one of the ultimate brooding young intellectuals of literature. Brooks draws a fascinating parallel between his thought patterns and the cadences of Swineburne’s poetry, which Faulkner loved so well (*FE* 51-52). He thinks philosophically about time, virginity, his father’s fatalism, and other matters relating to his life and childhood. However, if his mind is far more advanced than Benjy’s it is not much more lucid, and perhaps even more disturbed.

Quentin is a very Southern young man, but for the duration of his narrative he is in New Haven, Connecticut, at Harvard University. Nevertheless the most important and insistent of his thought patterns stray back to Yoknapatawpha County and his sister’s unchaste behavior, which disturbs him perhaps even more than it does anyone else.

Quentin’s entire life and *Weltanschauung* are unraveling, incapable of bearing the shock of his sister’s sins. As mentioned before, this is an overreaction. But Quentin, with his exceedingly sensitive nature, feels his very strong love for his sister irrevocably damaged by her promiscuous adventures, and finds himself almost wishing to commit incest with Caddy so that both of them can live together as pariahs.

Quentin is also unable to live up to his aristocratic code of honor, as he painfully finds out while confronting Dalton Ames, the probable father of Caddy's daughter. Quentin has decided that it is his duty to drive Ames out of town and fight him if he doesn't comply. But, preparing to fight, Quentin passes out without being struck at all. At Harvard, when Quentin spontaneously asks a friend if he ever had a sister, the friend replies "No, but they're all bitches." Quentin starts to fight him over this, but is again soundly beaten.

Since Quentin's close relationship with his sister has been shattered and he finds himself unable to live up to his code of honor, the day of his monologue (June 10, 1910) is spent in preparations for suicide. Brooks suggests that another cause for suicide may have been that he was actually in love with his despair and was afraid that at some point Caddy would not seem worthy of despairing over, as his father had said (Brooks *FE* 58). Another obvious reason is that Quentin needs to escape time. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that Faulkner's characters are like a people looking backward out of an automobile—things far away are clear, nearby things are fuzzy, and future things are wholly invisible (Qtd. in Brooks *FE* 51). Nowhere is this truer than of Quentin, who has no future and only a perfunctory present. He lives essentially in the past (Brooks *TYC* 328-330). But he not only feels a need to escape from his past (perhaps the more appropriate expression would be to *crystallize* or *perpetuate* his past), he is also desperate to escape from the tyranny of the simple counting off of time. He is disturbed by his ability to tell time by the angle of the sun, the chiming of clocks, and the ticking of his watch.

Another Quentin obsession is the shadow, which Faulkner said symbolized death and Quentin's doubts concerning when he should accept death. But on the exterior he seems

very assured, even methodical and ritualistic, as he prepares meticulously for his drowning (Brooks *FE* 54-55).

He also finds himself unable to get rid of a little Italian girl, who follows him everywhere. He calls her “sister”, but her real brother, Julio, accuses Quentin of kidnapping her. The online ClassicNotes suggest that Julio is a double for Quentin, in that Julio feels his sister has been stolen just as Quentin feels Caddy’s loss. Another fascinating possibility, from the same source, is that Dalton Ames, who seems to be Quentin’s nemesis, may be a double of him as well, because Dalton is chivalrous (when Quentin passes out he pretends to have hit him and he manifests concern about Caddy) and able to fight, as Quentin is not.

The Quentin section is a fascinating piece of literature, he himself being a highly-developed character. As Brooks says, many of the allusions in this part of the novel are probably too private for us to fully understand (*TYC* 326). But what can be understood is well-written and thought out enough to take its place as one-fourth of a staggering work of literature.

The third section belongs to Jason Compson, the most lucid but most corrupt of the three brothers. His *tour de force* of a monologue takes place the day before Easter, 1928. It could perhaps be said that this part of the novel does not talk much of Caddy’s promiscuity, which is admittedly one of the principal themes. However, her spirit permeates Jason’s life, despite his refusal to even speak her name. For instance, he is still angry with her because a job opportunity she offered him didn’t work out, he “cares for” her daughter (also named Quentin), embezzles Caddy’s money, and conjures some memories of her.

The question is, does Jason's angry, cynical diatribe count as poetry, as the other sections do? Cleanth Brooks thinks so (*FE* 61), and I would add my own contention that his mode of expression, though its unrelieved bitterness and explosiveness can be wearying, is a fascinating, even enjoyable read because his words are razor-sharp, inventive, and display a sort of Mephistophelean energy often associated with Satanic literary figures. Gone is the fragmentation and beauty of Benjy and Quentin's minds, here replaced by a tirade, angry but basically "sane" and readable (about as readable as Faulkner gets; he always makes the reader dig a little bit, a technique which can occasionally be baffling but is ultimately extremely rewarding). The entire novel's structure is roughly a crescendo from chaos to order, so Jason's thoughts are probably the second-most readable (ClassicNotes).

Like his brothers, Jason is a masterpiece of characterization, though the usual accusations—that he is simply too outrageous to be possible—have been made. It is probably more accurate to say that his character is too outrageous to be *common*. Nevertheless, people like him do exist. And as usual, Faulkner so draws us into his mind and his world that we're ready to believe anything. Jason's frustration at the way everything, from the biggest things in his life down to irritating details like headaches, seems to be going wrong, is something most people can sympathize with. The description of his anger is very realistic, and even the headache he gets from the gasoline smell of his car can almost be felt by the reader.

The major focus of this section is hard to determine; it could be "Jason feeling sorry for himself". Much of the material is devoted to his rocky relationship with his boss and his struggles with money, which he constantly worries about. His far worse than rocky

relationship with his niece, Quentin, also takes up much of the monologue. She is basically a repeat of her mother, but, in the main, devoid of Caddy's capacity for love. Her actions are often cruel, but she is easy to sympathize with because of Jason's horrendous treatment of her. We get the feeling that she has a cruel streak because she was raised in a loveless, bitter, decaying household. We do not pity Jason in the same way because his flaw seems to be temperamental and ineradicable.

We learn from Jason that he is equally cruel to Caddy and Quentin. He remembers a time when Quentin was a baby and Caddy came to town, desperate to see her child. She gave him a hundred dollars to see her for "a minute", which Jason takes literally, driving a coach rapidly by her with the baby in his arms. This is the first instance of his highly sadistic nature—he is always able to justify his viciousness with twisted logic, but we very much get the impression that he enjoys cruelty.

He also hurts Quentin and Caddy by pocketing the money Caddy sends to her daughter. He justifies this because he thinks that keeping her clothed and fed is a fulfillment of his obligation. By letting his mother believe that he is refusing the money, he keeps her quiet and also appeals to her sense of pride—she despises the idea of accepting help.

The ClassicNotes come to the conclusion that Jason is no less "sane" or any less obsessed with Caddy than his brothers. He is very absorbed with her daughter, takes her money, and remains angry with her for years.

At last, in the final section of *The Sound and the Fury*, we are relieved to some extent of the burden of unbalanced and obsessive minds. The narrator is Faulkner himself, speaking in third person, but the major character is Dilsey, the black servant of the

Compsons. She is kindhearted and unselfish, and her psychological equipoise is an incredible relief after the wild fragmentation of the three brothers, Mr. and Mrs.

Compson, Miss Quentin, and practically every other character.

In one of the best of his many insights regarding this book, Cleanth Brooks shows how each Compson brother has a warped sense of time: for Benjy all time is the same, constantly relived with no distinction between past and present. For Quentin, only the past seems to have importance, and he so fears time and its passage that he flees from clocks. Jason's mind thinks only of his future state of wealth and success, a state he is always preparing for, never actually living (he is a perfect example of those men Thoreau saw as living lives of "quiet desperation"). But Dilsey understands past, present, and future in terms of eternity, and though she seems to know that the Compson family, and hence her own life's structure, is ending, she trusts in Christ for her ultimate salvation and reward for her staggeringly difficult life (Brooks *FE* 71).

This fourth section of *The Sound and the Fury* takes place on Easter Sunday, and Faulkner doesn't waste this opportunity to cram it with religion and religious symbols. Most obvious of these is the church service which Dilsey takes Benjy to. The sermon, preached in a heavy dialect, is difficult to understand but clearly has bearing upon the story of the Compsons. Dilsey emerges from the building in unashamed tears, saying "I've seed de first en de last." (297). We can't be certain what she's talking about, but she's probably referring to the Compson family. Her life and the world have been suggested as well (ClassicNotes).

Then there are the novel's Christ figures, which have been the subject of endless debate and puzzlement. For instance, on the morning of Easter Sunday, Miss Quentin's

room is found to be empty, with deliberate attention paid to an article of clothing left behind. Critics have wondered exactly what a tormented girl of questionable morals might have to do with Christ—perhaps the fact that she has run away from the Compson house (symbolizing the grave and hell?) and is not recovered at the novel’s end is telling. Faulkner may have been paralleling her escape to a better life (it is questionable whether she went on to find a better one) with resurrection from the grave.

The more significant fact is that Benjy is thirty-three years old on this particular Easter. He is the character most commonly associated with Christ in this novel. A modicum of parallels exist: Benjy’s age, his chastity (enforced, for he has been castrated), and his seeming lack of evil. It seems that he could be derived from the “holy fool” tradition, a recurring theme in literature and legend, in which the mentally impaired are viewed as somehow closer to God than ordinary people—for instance, in the Wagner opera *Parsifal*, the eponymous hero is considered a “holy fool” and is also a Christ figure. But what of Benjy’s actions? He cannot communicate, cannot reason, and is essentially helpless. Faulkner’s worldview at this point of his life tended more toward pessimism than in older age, so some critics view Benjy as, we might say, a Christ figure for the modern age, a Christ who can no longer hold any sway over the evils and barbarities of the twentieth century, and is like a helpless, castrated fool. However, this critical view does not seem to harmonize with William Faulkner’s beliefs or the rest of the novel. Faulkner was not an orthodox Christian, but he did consider himself to be part of the Christian tradition, and would not have been likely to make such negative statements about Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the only moment of serenity and true understanding seems to come from Dilsey’s childlike trust in God and in the afterlife.

Like all who read *The Sound and the Fury* and try to understand it, I cannot tell for sure what Faulkner was intending to say or do with his religious symbolism in the final section. Perhaps Benjy represents the *seeming* decline of Christianity in the modern age, but Dilsey's faith and Reverend Shegog's sermon demonstrate the *real* power of God. What does seem clear is that the Christian images are not accidental, and also that a strongly apocalyptic vision is conveyed in the final section ("I seed de beginning, now I seed de ending", Shegog sounds like Magog, etc.). But the sense of doom is definitely permeated by a sense of the eternal and of hope. Beyond that, perhaps only Faulkner knew exactly what was meant by this imagery.

There is no question of the merits of *The Sound and the Fury*. The most difficult thing about it, perhaps, is deciding which of its glories is greatest. Is it Faulkner's descriptions of sights, odors, sensations, so vivid that they are almost literally experienced by the reader? Is it the characters, who seem so real that there is a plaque in Cambridge, Mass. memorializing the death of Quentin Compson? Is it the incredible feat of getting into the minds of three very different men? How about sheer beauty of tone, or the depth of the explorations of time, love, consciousness, etc.? *The Sound and the Fury* easily takes its place as one of the greatest modern novels, and indeed holds its own against any novel ever written anywhere.

Comparison:

The Hamlet

The Sound and the Fury

The Sound and the Fury and *The Hamlet* are separated by more than a decade, and focus on very different societal levels. One would expect significant differences,

resulting from the author's growth and the subject matters, but also a general stylistic kinship—we expect both books to “sound like Faulkner”. Furthermore, we would look for overlapping, but not identical, preoccupations. This turns out to be the case exactly.

As a rule of thumb, critics find *The Sound and the Fury* to be William Faulkner's greatest novel, and many see *The Hamlet* as a product of a declining creativity. I do concede that *The Hamlet* does not have quite the immediacy of *The Sound and the Fury*, and some of the prose-poetry has grown more extended and extravagant, and comes somewhere near excessive. It is not my purpose to rate these novels on some sort of “one-to-ten” scale, but I will say this: *The Sound and the Fury* was probably impossible to top (unless *Absalom, Absalom!* tops it, as some seem to contend). But Faulkner was not trying to top it with *The Hamlet*, but was shifting his focus to different struggles and adopting a much more comic worldview. *The Hamlet* is not necessarily “worse” than the earlier book, but its particular greatness is more modest and less assertive.

The easiest difference to spot is stylistic. *The Hamlet* does not indulge in any italic-riddled fragmented interior monologues; Faulkner uses an omniscient perspective throughout the later novel, and his basic technique is *comparatively* traditional, closer to 19th Century forms. Minter claims that *The Hamlet* has much in common with the social commentary-oriented novels of the 1800's, like those of Thackeray or Dickens (182-183). Both Faulkner works are in part stories of the ending of an order, but the later Faulkner was telling his story in a less progressive way. Was he perhaps becoming more nostalgic for old ways?

But even though there are glaring technical differences, the diction is unchanged in essence. Like other artists whose careers dominated the early 20th Century, such as Pablo

Picasso and Igor Stravinsky, Faulkner embraced a variety of styles but always left his unmistakable stamp on them. Mature Faulknerian prose is as distinctive as any of the great authors, just as Homer, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens would never be mistaken for anyone else. It is also some of the most polarizing prose around as well—relished, execrated, constantly imitated and parodied.

All of the novels discussed in this essay deal with time and change, and man's relationship to these concepts. William Faulkner was very concerned with these themes. In *The Sound and the Fury*, this perspective comes across very obviously in the fragmented time-senses of the three Compson brothers and Dilsey's correct understanding of eternity (Brooks *FE* 71). The themes are less obvious in *The Hamlet*, but they are there nonetheless. The novel explores the changes which time brings as the old-fashioned Frenchman's Bend succumbs to the progressive spirit of Snopesism. In this sense Jason is like Flem Snopes (though a far less competent businessman) in that he wholly jettisons the Compson ethos in favor of, again, progressive commercialism and a ruthless pulling-up by one's own bootstraps—the “redneck” dominated “New South” (Minter 98). The culture of the Compsons is petering out, just like that of Frenchman's Bend, and is being replaced by a heartless brand of burgeoning capitalism.

But Faulkner is far from being interested only in the passing away of the past. He is concerned with the ongoing influence of the past, from which none of the Compson brothers can free himself. Here is a significant difference between the books—*The Hamlet* is not particularly concerned with man's haunting by his past.

The Hamlet and *The Sound and the Fury* are both filled with the eccentric, shattered psyches characteristic of Southern fiction, both being complete with a Faulknerian

“idiot”, one of the hallmarks of his characterization. It has been suggested that the three Compson brothers would make something resembling a stable man if all three were combined, but as is all three are magnificently flawed and riddled with blind spots. In *The Hamlet*, we see that Flem is pure greed, Eula pure voluptuousness, Labove pure lust, and so on. Both books also contain one seemingly whole consciousness—V.K. Ratliff and the servant Dilsey.

These two novels are both essentially tragic. Guinness and Cowan point out in *Invitation to the Classics* that the Snopes Trilogy as a whole is a comedy but *The Hamlet* is a tragedy (340-341). Yes, it ends on a starkly powerful tragic note and some of the subplot material ends negatively, but the book is so hilarious in many places (in a way that is not at all ironic or bitter) that it barely seems to pass for tragedy, and indeed has nothing of *The Sound and the Fury*'s doom and gloom about it. In *The Sound and the Fury* we are taken on guided tours through three stormy and doomed minds, while the only sane person is shown simply bearing her lot with some hope for a post-apocalyptic future. In contrast, the humane and comic spirit of V.K. Ratliff sets the tone for a large part of *The Hamlet*. Faulkner was definitely mellowing by the time of his death, and *The Hamlet* shows the author on the road to this softening of worldview.

So although these novels have some significant differences, they also have considerable overlap which could be demonstrated in a sort of stylistic and thematic Venn diagram. Perhaps most important of all, they show Faulkner's evolution from the somewhat pessimistic philosophy of his youth to the optimistic blend of Judeo-Christian and humanistic thought laid down in his Nobel Prize speech.

The Life of Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The details on the life of Gabriel Garcia Marquez are more sketchy than those of William Faulkner's, chiefly because at the time of this writing Garcia Marquez is still alive and politeness forbids biographers from delving too deeply into his privacy. But the course of his eventful public career and much of his private life and struggles are widely known, and shed important light on his fiction—some of which is autobiographical.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was born on the sixth of March in the small village of Arcataca, Columbia. Most sources give 1928 as his year of birth, but Gene Bell-Villada claims that this is incorrect and the actual date is 1927—no explanation is given (42). He was reared by his grandparents in Arcataca until he turned eight, and he credits his grandmother's style of storytelling as the greatest influence on his fiction and his "magic realist" style. His grandparents were rather superstitious, and the tales young "Gabo" heard blended reality and fiction without any apparent contradiction. Garcia Marquez described their house as "full of ghosts. . . a world of fantastic terrors." (Qtd. in Williams 6).

His grandfather, Colonel Marquez, was a veteran of one of Columbia's many civil wars, full of war stories, and had fathered a large number of illegitimate children. He bears a strong resemblance to Colonel Aureliano Buendia from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, although Garcia Marquez claims that the only place he really shows up in his novels is in *Leaf Storm* (Bell-Villada 43-44). His grandmother figures in his fiction too; indeed, her maiden name was Iguaran, the same as that of the matriarch of the Buendia family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Gabo went to live with his parents at age eight and proceeded through grade school, then attended high school in a city called Zipaquira, near Bogota. He found it a lonely and straitlaced place (Bell-Villada 45). About the time he entered law school (which is an undergraduate study in much of the world) he began writing, publishing a number of stories in the Bogota newspaper. These stories were influenced by many contemporary authors, among them Franz Kafka and, very importantly, William Faulkner. Garcia Marquez has always been somewhat solitary and introspective. At school, however, he became associated with other young intellectuals, all of whom were desirous of a new Colombian literature influenced by great modern writers like Joyce, Kafka, Faulkner, and Woolf, and it was these friends who introduced Garcia Marquez to such authors.

But Gabo was not destined to complete a college degree (unless one counts his honorary degree from Columbia University). His studies were interrupted by a major outbreak of civil war in Columbia known as *La Violencia*. The university was closed, and Gabo lost most of his manuscripts to a fire.

Perhaps we'll never know for sure when Garcia Marquez first developed his political sympathies, but no doubt the brutalities of Latin American fascist dictatorships he observed and even collided with helped drive him in the direction of Communism. Nor can we tell exactly what sort of involvement he had with the Communist Party itself, though he seems to have been in fairly close contact with it in youth (Bell-Villada 64). He has remained a leftist and a personal friend of Fidel Castro, but his fiction is amazingly even-handed and about as far from agit-prop as possible. The complexity of his works shows that he has nothing to do with the Soviet-style reactionary art censors.

After the university closed Gabo set out on his career as a journalist—a career he has never given up. He sometimes had a personal column in which he could write about things that interested him, while other times he was employed mostly to write magazine fillers—and he was the first regular movie critic in Columbia (Bell-Villada 50). He worked for a number of periodicals, because the government often shut down papers perceived as dangerous or seditious. Eventually his employers sent him to report in Europe, but when the government closed the paper he decided to live on there for two years.

While in Europe Garcia Marquez toured the East Bloc countries (and was not wholly impressed) and gained firsthand experience of how to live like a bohemian in Paris's Latin Quarter, where he worked as a freelancer. He also continued to work on opuses like *Leaf Storm* and *In Evil Hour*, two early works which contain many Garcia Marquez characteristics. They are, however, only modest preludes to his next work.

When Gabo returned from Europe he married his sweetheart Mercedes, whom he claims to have first proposed to when she was thirteen. He took his new family to the United States (where among other things he toured Faulkner's South), various parts of South America, and finally Mexico, where he has frequently lived. He worked on more journalism and screenplays, most of which he now considers unsalvageable. For a time he felt himself in the grip of a major case of writer's block, claiming he would never write again.

The impetus came back, though, and in a major way. Garcia Marquez made a U-turn on a family vacation, headed back to Mexico City, locked himself in his study, and instructed Mercedes to see to their finances for a while. He worked feverish, eight hour

days transcribing the novel that already existed in his head. During the 18 months it took him to complete the work, Mercedes pawned off furniture, got behind on rent, and accepted the charity of neighbors. All this effort turned out to be well worth it.

The novel that resulted, called *Cien Anos de Soledad* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, surprised everyone by its incredible sales and critical reviews. Gabo had been confident of the book's quality and expected good reviews, but the phenomenal worldwide sales stunned everyone. Even now, thirty-two years after first publication, Gregory Rabassa's unrivaled translation is selling very well. From poverty and worry, Garcia Marquez found himself catapulted to total financial independence and worldwide literary fame.

But Gabo had another work in his head that had to be transcribed. A great poem of power, probing the psyches and lives of tyrants, with a protagonist formed by combining all Latin American dictators with touches of Stalin, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was chiefly written in Spain, where the author got to witness firsthand the decline of the tyrannical Franco regime. After five years of writing the Garcia Marquez was rewarded by fairly good sales and excellent reviews, but the book had a dense and fluid prose style that, though very lyrical, put off many who had loved *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Since finishing the two works he had dreamed of by the mid 1970's, he has shown no signs of slowing down on his novels, journalism, or political work. Indeed, some of his writings have not yet been translated into English. After completing *Autumn*, Gabo wrote *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, a short but powerful book about love and death, which was edited in part by Fidel Castro. *The General in His Labyrinth* told the story of the greatest Latin American hero, Simon Bolivar, from a semi-historical/magical perspective.

In 1982, Gabriel Garcia Marquez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was young compared to most laureates, and was also a surprise pick as the award was expected to go to Octavio Paz, a distinguished Mexican author. His speech focused on South American concerns, but he also paid homage to the speech William Faulkner had made there over two decades before.

After the Prize Gabo wrote *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a novel about a man who loves a woman but does not marry her until a very advanced age. His most recent novel is entitled *Of Love and Other Demons*, a brief but well-received work.

He has remained active in politics, at times acting as a mediator between opposing factions, beginning newspapers, and giving strong opinions on various world events. Furthermore, he never quit his job as journalist, and some of his investigative pieces have been published in book form.

Those who have met Garcia Marquez, like Gene Bell-Villada, say that he lives a quiet, private life, mainly in Mexico City, but is in no sense a recluse. He simply considers his work, his family, and his friends to be his highest priorities (Bell-Villada 61). He has been a highly distinguished contributor to world literature so far; and for all we know he may be on the verge of publishing a new masterpiece!

The Works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez

One Hundred Years of Solitude

The Autumn of the Patriarch

One Hundred Years of Solitude

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a colossal work, not in terms of page numbers but in sheer inventiveness and breadth. The critic William Kennedy, in the *New York Times Book Review* quoted on the back of the Perennial Classics edition, summed it up this way: “*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race. It takes up not long after Genesis left off and carries through to the air age, reporting on everything that happened in between with more lucidity, wit, wisdom, and poetry than is expected from 100 years of novelists. . .Mr. Garcia Marquez has done nothing less than to create in the reader a sense of all that is profound, meaningful, and meaningless in life.” When reading it one does get a sense of reading a chronicle of all human experience and history, all focused in the little Colombian town of Macondo.

Perhaps the principal theme of the novel is time and repetition. One is reminded of George Santayana’s overused but still pertinent quote, “Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.” The easiest way to see how this plays out is in the names of the Buendia family, which dominates the town and the novel’s plot. Representative names from different generations include Jose Arcadio, Ursula, Arcadio, Amaranta, Aureliano, Jose Arcadio Segundo, Aureliano Segundo, Aureliano Jose, Amaranta Ursula, and so on. The book presents very few difficulties of understanding apart from keeping these names straight. But they are not arbitrary; they are used to show that despite the passage of time

and the advance of technology, the Buendia family remains essentially static. Men of the same name tend to share characteristics—Jose Arcadios are strong, stubborn, sensual, and not particularly inventive. Aurelianos are more introverted and intellectual, taking leadership positions (Bell-Villada 95).

Although repetition is important in *Solitude*, it does not present the whole picture of Garcia Marquez's concept of time. I like to think of the time scheme in the book as a big arc made up of small linked circles, like a chain. Thinkers have debated long and hard about how time flows in real life and exactly when certain concepts of time emerged. The debate has usually polarized around cyclical versus linear time; Garcia Marquez has, I believe, included both in this novel. The cycles represent the succeeding generations of Buendias, which seem trapped in sequences of similar events and characteristics. But the novel as a whole shows a very clear arc, in one sense a beginning, climax, and resolution (Bell-Villada 96-98).

This narrative arc has been construed as a history of Columbia, of certain civilizations, and of all mankind (Williams 79). In fact, like many great artists, Garcia Marquez has denied much of the so-called deeper meanings found in this book, ascribing the allegedly significant sections to commonplace origins. On one hand it must be remembered that authors have a tendency to not reveal deep significance in their works, sometimes explaining even the most obviously meaningful passages away. Also, all writers reveal more about themselves than they intend to. Nonetheless, we must avoid the fallacy of deconstructionism, in which each reader, instead of searching for meaning that may exist, goes about imposing his own definition on the work. Literary criticism is

a speculative art, and must always walk the tightrope between taking too many things for granted and imposing nonexistent readings on texts.

A big reason that so many interpretations of this book have been discovered (or imposed) is that it has such a universal and mythic feel. In a nutshell, the action follows the history of Macondo, which begins in a primeval state, at a time when “the world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.” (1). Through endless complexities the city becomes increasingly modern, admitting much U.S. influence. There are setbacks, but Macondo’s general direction is toward more industry and “progress”. Decline, however, is inevitable; a horrible multi-year rainstorm takes its toll and the city begins to be overtaken by ants and vines, until finally the last living inhabitant of Macondo understands the Sanskrit documents, written by the gypsy Melquiades, which tell of the destruction of the town. He reads the documents just before being swept away himself in the great blast of wind that finishes off the city and returns the site to its original state.

Many have pointed out that this story exudes a quality of myth (Williams 79-81). More than most modern books, *Solitude* seems like an ancient document or folk legend—somehow the authorial voice is less intrusive, or seems more organic and authoritative, than usual. The style has an unusual, timeless feel.

Style is always important to a novel, but in Garcia Marquez style is a dominant feature. Evidence of this is the fact that the one term continuously applied to his fiction, a term so worn out that it is used with embarrassment, is “magic realism”. Such a term is bound to be hard to define, but it basically refers to a use of the fantastic to illustrate or shed light on the real world. It is not gratuitous magic, as in many fantasy novels; the

Garcia Marquez style is poles apart from the unicorn-infested alternative worlds of commercial fantasy. Indeed, Garcia Marquez doesn't call attention to the magical things in his books—he almost deadpans them.

This casual acceptance of the magical he credits to his grandmother, who would tell stories of ghosts and such supernatural phenomena without batting an eyelash. As mentioned above Gabo was raised for eight years by his grandparents and was quite close to them, even if they and their house were rather frightening. The stories he heard as a little boy, with their seamless weaving of the normal and the fantastical, are mirrored in his fiction.

In fact, Garcia Marquez draws far more attention to ordinary things, such as touching ice or magnets, treating them as marvels (*OYS* chapter 1). This ironic switching effect is most pronounced toward the beginning of the book, as the gypsies, led by the knowledgeable character Melquiades, bring in rather common things like ice and magnifying glasses which are treated as stunning wonders. But when Jose Arcadio II and his gypsy lover begin to levitate, or later when Jose Arcadio is killed and his blood runs in a gravity defying stream, turning street corners and going under doors, we are told of these things without any fanfare or ado.

Magic realist technique can also be oddly humorous. For instance, one of the Buendias called Remedios the Beauty drives several infatuated young men to death in rather fantastic ways; one of them gives off a sweet-smelling amber liquid instead of blood. Instead of dying she is carried off to heaven along with some sheets she was hanging on a clothes line. Or when Macondo is struck by an insomnia plague, Jose

Arcadio Buendia sets up signs with messages like “God exists” to aid the peoples’ failing memories.

The humorous aspect of the fantasy has led some critics to see this magic realism principally as mockery or parody. Certainly this is an element in the technique. But it is more accurate to say that the novel embraces humor as well as tragedy; more important, however, is its sense of wonder in the world. Garcia Marquez imparts this sense by, as mentioned above, giving exaggerated and fantastic descriptions of commonplace things and events, and by presenting us with a world full of the supernatural and unexpected.

Garcia Marquez fits in quite well with contemporaries like Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, both of whom wrote novels and stories far removed from the realistic world of the nineteenth century or the more modern works of, say, Hemingway. Fantastic and exotic happenings are the order of the day with these authors—Calvino tells the story of an Italian count who lived his life in trees, Borges gives us a vision of the universe as a massive library. These men do not fit into any organized movement, but they share common literary qualities. It is interesting to note that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, the greatest writers of fantasy proper, lived and worked at around the same time. Perhaps all the wonder and magic was a way to counter the harsh realities of the 20th Century.

So much for style. The characters in *Solitude* need to be discussed. Garcia Marquez’s characters are criticized just as much as Faulkner’s. Critics see them as stereotypes, flat people not worth caring about. This may be partially correct, but if so it is clearly intentional. I find most of the characters in *Solitude* to be fascinating, but when they do act more like stereotypes than real people, it is for parodic or illustrative purposes—not

because the author stuck a top-of-the-head character into the book from a lack of insight or ability.

Some characters are rather unreal for humorous purposes. For instance, Remedios the Beauty is an exaggerated parody of the *femme fatale* (Bell-Villada 110). She doesn't act like a normal person would, basically just walking around, performing complicated ablutions in the morning, and living in a sort of unselfconscious, blissfully hermetic world. As mentioned above, she drives four men to death, and it seems that no young man is impervious to her attractions. Garcia Marquez didn't characterize Remedios like this because he knew any girls like her, but because the type is well known to everyone who is aware of chivalry, etc., and by exaggerating this type he can achieve great humorous effect and perhaps say something meaningful about love.

The generational repetitions seen in all the Buendia males and some of the females is a similar case. Jose Arcadio II, who travels around the world as a sailor and lives a life of continuous drinking, fighting, and pleasure-seeking, may be far from the deepest character in literature, but nobody can deny that the type exists. It is probably even more meaningful to the Latin American consciousness, with its concept of *machismo*. In the original Spanish, Jose Arcadio II is called a *protomacho*. He is a product of a dark but very real vein in the South American consciousness. His father, usually called Jose Arcadio Buendia, shares some of these *machismo* traits (vis. his great strength, excellence in cockfighting, etc.). But as Bell-Villada points out, he is a composite of the succeeding Aurelianos and Jose Arcadios (95). He has his introverted side, as evidenced by his angst over the ghost of the man whom he murdered, and his long years of solitude spent chained to the backyard tree. As the main character who dominates the book's opening,

he is also one of the most complex and well-developed. Perhaps this is because he is the forbear of all the Buendias, and so contains all their potential characteristics.

One aspect of which he seems to be devoid is the cruel streak that mars so many of his descendants. For instance, Arcadio, a grandson, becomes military dictator of Macondo for a time, and is the cruelest leader the town has ever seen. He betrays friends without compunction, eventually getting a chance at a dramatic death, shouting at the firing squad that kills him.

Political strife, of course, is a major factor in the book, which deals equally well with public events and domestic issues. The wars in Columbia consume the life of Aureliano Buendia I, who according to the Cliff's Notes is the single character with the most weight and importance in the whole novel (Cliff's Notes 16). After marrying a girl who dies in her first pregnancy, Aureliano becomes politically involved with the liberal party, eventually raising an army and becoming a colonel. He wages (and loses) a huge number of wars throughout his career, also fathering seventeen illegitimate sons named Aureliano, all by different mothers. He doesn't seem to find fulfillment in war, but he sometimes longs for his military days after retirement. Though not as cruel as his nephew Arcadio, he tries to have several friends and innocent men killed, only to be prevented by his mother Ursula. He survives to old age despite ambushes, firing squads, and a suicide attempt.

However, it is finally revealed to us that Colonel Aureliano has no capacity for love. This is part of the reason he retires into the miserable solitude of his later years. He lives alone in a workshop he sets up, fashioning little fish out of gold, melting them down, and

making them again. Like all the Aurelianos, he dies a quiet death with his eyes open (Bell- Villada 95).

Things begin to get more mixed up when the twins, Aureliano Segundo and Jose Arcadio Segundo, are born. They are given identifying articles of clothing, but they swap them and so bear traits opposite their names. Jose Arcadio Segundo becomes a leader and entrepreneur of sorts, excavating a waterway and using it for the productive purpose of shipping in some loose women on a barge. He dies like the Aurelianos, fully awake and eyes open. Aureliano Segundo, on the other hand, lives a dissipated life with his concubine, Petra Cotes, in preference to his puritanical wife Fernanda. He presides over an incredible proliferation of cattle and grows immensely fat, but finally falls into poverty and dies from a voodoo curse placed on him by his outraged wife.

The latter-day Buendia males are rather less impressive. Jose Arcadio III is sent to Rome in hopes that he will become Pope, but instead lives a debauched life there, and on returning to Macondo leads a bizarre life with no companions but some children, who end up killing him after he drives them away. Aureliano Babilonia, though he has a different last name (with echoes of a dead civilization?), is the last adult male Buendia. He lives in a state of incestuous “bliss” with his aunt Amaranta Ursula as the Buendia house decays before the forces of nature, and is the only one to decipher the Sanskrit documents written by Melquiades.

Most critics have noticed that, not just in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but throughout Garcia Marquez’s fiction, the female characters are altogether stronger, more admirable, and far more able to endure hardship than the males (Bell- Villada 100-101). They are the ones who hold homes, families, and cities together while their men rove

about seeking to prove themselves and find themselves through endless feats and bravado.

Certainly, Ursula Iguaran, Jose Arcadio Buendia I's wife, is a long-suffering woman able to keep things running. She lives to more than 100 years, long outlasting her husband, and for many years presides as the dominant figure in the Buendia domestic scene. She is moral but not legalistic, saves several innocent men from her sons' brutality, and actually generates the family income at times. Ursula often seems to be the only sane person in the entire household, and has to put up with much from her relatives—but she bears it all with patience. Eventually she is forced to retire into the solitude of blindness, but continues to act as *materfamilias* while sightless.

Amaranta, sister to Colonel Aureliano and Jose Arcadio II, is a different sort of person. While Ursula is not one to hold grudges, Amaranta becomes hopelessly bitter after experiencing the jealousy and disappointment of a love triangle in her youth. She almost allows herself to fall in love several times, but is always afraid to take a husband at the last moment. She also flirts strangely with her nephew Aureliano Jose, one of many prefigurements of the Buendia family's impending curse of incest.

This relationship prefigures the end of the novel, in which Amaranta Ursula, the last female Buendia, does commit incest with her nephew, fulfilling the Buendia curse (see below). She is altogether a modern woman, having been educated in Europe, but upon returning to Macondo she is as much subject to the Buendia fate and repetitions as anyone else.

Gene Bell-Villada finds another interesting repetition among the female characters, in this case those named Remedios. They all tend to remain immature; one is nicknamed

Meme, the only nickname in the book, which suggests childishness (96). The first Remedios, who marries Colonel Aureliano, dies very young in childbirth, while Remedios the Beauty, as mentioned above, is carried into heaven while still in her early twenties. Renata Remedios similarly doesn't survive long—but long enough to bear the last adult Buendia.

Bell-Villada posits that this repetitive scheme helps solve the enigma of Rebeca, the strange orphan who shows up in Macondo carrying the bones of her parents in a bag. She has a tendency to retire in solitude to suck her thumb and eat dirt—infantile habits (96). He suggests that these traits and her “R” name allow her to be roughly grouped with the girls named Remedios. She is seduced by her adoptive brother Jose Arcadio II and eventually becomes his wife, but after his death lives by herself with a pistol for protection into very old age. Her seduction is another prefigurement of the incest and accompanying curse that haunts the Buendia family.

In analyzing the main characters I have already touched on many of the major themes and topics of *Solitude*, so I'll not take excessive time discussing them. Of course different critics will see diverging themes, but the major ones are pretty obvious: solitude, family dynamics, love, especially manifesting itself as incest, the generational curse which accompanies incest, and to some degree, concepts of time.

Solitude is expressed through the characters and the town of Macondo. The town certainly becomes more attached to the outside world as it grows, but it never really becomes important or incorporated into any sort of well-planned metropolitan system. At the beginning and end it is alone in the midst of nature.

Similarly, all the characters experience solitudes of their own. Sometimes it is obvious; Colonel Aureliano withdraws into his room to make gold fish, Ursula goes blind and so is in a sense alone with herself. Jose Arcadio I's ghost has to sit tied up under a tree by itself for years. Several of the Buendia males spend a lot of time in the room that had been occupied by Melquiades the gypsy, studying his enigmatic documents. They tend to be silent and withdrawn, avoiding contact with anyone. Perhaps the reason for this is that their fates are more closely bound to what is written in the manuscripts—the story of the solitude of Macondo and its inhabitants. Other times it is harder to tell how a character like, say, the gregarious Aureliano Segundo is in solitude, but everyone knows that a person can be solitary and lonely in a psychological sense, even when surrounded by people.

In the synopsis of many great novels, love is a recurring theme. It makes sense, because everyone has fallen in love, we hear love songs continuously on the radio, etc. And of course many people exist with a limited capacity for love because of bitterness, hardship, or other reasons. So Garcia Marquez's characters are always falling into or out of love. Colonel Aureliano never loved anyone in his life, but even he had an abundance of base desire for women (he produced seventeen illegitimate sons). But the most important romantic attraction in the novel is incestuous attraction. It all begins with the marriage of Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran, who were cousins. A story had been told that relatives of theirs had married incestuously and produced a child with a pig's tail. Despite Ursula's fears, her children, of course, turn out normally. Several would-be cases of incest occur throughout the generations of Buendias; they are mentioned above. But finally, the last Buendias living in Macondo (Aureliano Babilonia

and Amaranta Ursula) commence an aunt-nephew relationship. Some see this relationship as the only case of true love in the book; it is more like very intense lust. After living in this situation for months, Amaranta Ursula gives birth to a child with a pig's tail, fulfilling the ancient curse. The child is carried off by red ants, and Aureliano is the only one left as Macondo is reclaimed by nature and he finally understands the manuscripts, actually reading his own fate. He dies with the city.

Time is not a prominent theme in *Solitude*, but there are certainly instances of unusual time concepts in the book. For instance, flashbacks begin the first and second portions of the novel. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." This sentence sets up a huge portion of the book; Aureliano doesn't face the squad until hundreds of pages later. Flashback technique is used extensively in the novel, so we often know what is going to happen before it does. But suspense is nonetheless found throughout the work. Another interesting treatment of time besides the flashbacks is Melquiades's room. It doesn't ever seem to change until the very end of Macondo's history. The manuscripts, everything, are perfectly preserved. The fate of this room seems somehow bound to the fate of the Buendias' solitude.

Solitude is a classic even though it is still rather recent. For some it restored faith in fiction with a conventional plot arc that deals with old, time-honored themes. The real virtue of the book is that it is utterly original, but it is neither inaccessible or prohibitively experimental. The diction and style are amazingly original, but remain extremely limpid and readable. I'll conclude this section with the beautiful ending of the book itself: "Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never

leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.” (447-448).

The Autumn of the Patriarch

The Autumn of the Patriarch, the next Garcia Marquez book after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, took five arduous years to complete, and it is not hard to see why. The book deservedly received excellent critical attention, but many readers who had loved the story of Macondo and its unfailingly clear prose were taken aback by *Autumn*'s incredibly elaborate, unprecedentedly long sentences, its continuously shifting narrators, and its cavalier treatment of time. Bell-Villada points out that the reader of *Autumn* needs to have at least some experience with the modern fiction of the Joyce-Woolf-Faulkner tradition to be able to penetrate the book, whereas *Solitude* is stylistically accessible to the average teenager (though the themes aren't necessarily—Garcia Marquez books are only for mature teens and adults) (150).

The novel's subject is one well known to any Latin American—dictatorship. In a nutshell, the book tells the story of the patriarch, leader of an unspecifiable Caribbean state. The focus is on the decline of his power, his “autumn”. He is set up as dictator while still young by British colonists, who don't expect him to last long. But survival turns out to be his greatest virtue—despite constant coup attempts and violence he dies a natural death.

His reign begins with him ruling fairly well and socializing with the country people (he himself is an illegitimate child from the backwoods). He finds himself increasingly isolated in his palace, with everything engineered to suit him, and all his desires anticipated and met. He is certainly a despot and has cruel acts performed for him; however, even he is shocked when a man named Saenz de la Barra is given control of police work and establishes a reign of terror. When cruelties are performed in his name, however, he doesn't take pains to have them stopped. His crimes more annoy him than truly induce guilt. Bell-Villada says: "In a dynamic that recalls the final scenes in *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, or *Boris Godunov*, we are moved to pity and fear for the patriarch's incapacity to feel guilt or love, while at the same time we stop short of condoning his brutal and despotic reign." (159).

If the narrative line were to be arranged in chronological order, it would document the decline and fall of the patriarch. However, Garcia Marquez chose not to sequence the book in this way. Instead, *Autumn* is divided into six chapters, each of which begins on the same day—the day in which some citizens finally break into the presidential palace and find the general dead. Thus, each chapter is a flashback from the same point. The six flashbacks themselves each move almost chronologically; but the individual details often reach back to the patriarch's youth, or include anachronisms like the simultaneous presence of American Marine vessels and the three caravels of Columbus.

Unlike most other books by Garcia Marquez, the style of *Autumn*, as it were, reaches out and grabs the reader by the collar. In no sense is this a novel in which the language quietly serves the story line. Instead, reading the actual linguistic techniques of the book

is a vital part of experiencing the story. Had it been told in any other way it would have been fundamentally different.

Some, in fact, have wondered if it should be classified as a novel at all (Bell-Villada 153). Garcia Marquez himself has referred to it as a sort of prose poem about power, and indeed the style is extremely poetic and, if I may say so, extremely beautiful. The unique flow of the prose-poetry takes some getting used to, but it can truly grow on the reader. A quote from the book will serve to illustrate the sort of diction Garcia Marquez has used to tell his story. The patriarch is making a rare excursion out of his palace to a slum, a “dogfight district”, trying to find the home of a beauty queen named Manuela Sanchez with whom he has fallen in love: “. . .he dreamed with his eyes open in the back seat of the tin-can car until the sea breeze was gone and the city was gone and in through the chinks of the window came the satanic din of your dogfight district where he saw himself and did not believe it thinking mother of mine Bendicion Alvarado look where I am without you, favor me, but no one recognized in the tumult the desolate eyes, the weak lips, the languid hand on his chest, the voice with the sleeping talk of a great-grandfather looking through a broken glass wearing a white linen suit and a foreman’s hat and going around trying to find out where Manuela Sanchez of my shame lives, the queen of the poor, madam, the one with the rose in her hand, wondering in alarm where could you live. . .” (68). To one unfamiliar with the book this may sound dreadfully confusing. Notice how the narrator changes—at the beginning of the excerpt the general is being talked about: “he dreamed”. Then he himself is talking to Manuela: “*Your* dogfight district”. Soon he is talking to his mother: “look where I am without you”. This happens throughout the book, but after a little time it becomes quite easy to navigate. Also, as

mentioned before, the sentences of the book are long and twisting. Notice that the quote above, though quite long, is just a small part of a huge sentence. In fact, the sixth and final chapter is but one single sentence. Almost the only punctuation ever seen is the comma.

Gene Bell-Villada helpfully points out some of the aspects of this novel that refer specifically to the Caribbean consciousness. For instance, in the quote above the general calls Manuela “Manuela Sanchez of my misfortune”. This is hardly the only occurrence of such tags and descriptions; vis. “my comrade of a lifetime General Rodrigo Aguilar”, “Leticia Nazareno of my shame”, and many others. Some of these descriptions are parodies of the popular songs of the Caribbean (164).

Another interesting feature about these is the way in which they resemble poetic techniques used in Homer’s epic poems. In Homer, formulaic descriptions are used to satisfy the poetic meter. For example, formulae like “Zeus of the wide brows” or “Huge Telemonian Ajax”, in the Greek, fit Homer’s dactylic hexameter. Of course, Garcia Marquez is not working with metered poetry, but he himself has described this book as poetic. It would be presumptuous to insist on a parallel, but for me it stood out too much to be ignored.

The style of *Autumn*, though it certainly holds difficulties, is really an excellent way to tell the patriarch’s story. Bell-Villada discusses several other points of view that Garcia Marquez could have utilized (157-159). For example, he might have told the story from the perspective of someone in the populace, which would have been a distorted picture because the general would have seemed entirely bad. The novel was originally cast as an interior monologue of the dictator himself—again, a perspective that could be skewed in

the other direction. Instead, he gave us a multitude of voices, prejudices, and delusions that provide a well-rounded portrait of the complex ruler. We can see the general desperately wanting his subjects to love him and choosing to believe they do, we see his officers helping dupe him into this belief, and the joy of the people when he is reported dead. In this manner the patriarch becomes a truly great character.

In discussing the characters of this novel, it must be emphasized that the general is overwhelmingly the most significant of all, his personality permeating the story entirely. He is basically a country yokel, and as mentioned above was born to a prostitute mother, Bendicion Alvarado, who never knew who the patriarch's father was. We never find out his name for sure, although in old age, after having become moderately literate, he writes "my name is Zacarias," then modifies his statement to, "I'm me, God damn it." I will continue calling him the patriarch or the general, since there is only a probability that his name indeed is Zacarias. But it is an interesting name, with, as Bell-Villada indicates, Biblical overtones (77-78).

Indeed, the patriarch occupies a position of Biblical dimensions among his people. Many miraculous events are attributed to him, and he goes about distributing "the salt of health". Lepers lurk around the presidential palace all the time, hoping to be healed. He is viewed as a sort of messianic dictator. Garcia Marquez doesn't make it clear whether he actually has some preternatural power, but there are indications that almost every impressive display of power he puts on is a contrived sham. Certainly the lepers in the palace never get any help from him.

For a time the patriarch rules well, living close to the common people and giving them advice about farming, etc. Already good at survival, he goes to a sort of secret oracle to

inquire how long he would live. The figure he receives is that he will die somewhere between the ages of 107 and 232. Though this prognostication is the only one he'll ever believe and it does indeed come true, he kills with his own hands the woman who makes the prediction.

His entire reign is characterized by violence, uprisings, coups d'état, and so on. This, of course, is a very accurate reflection of Latin American politics—and the patriarch shows himself to be very much the equal of this horrific system, even though he at first seems easy to dupe and manipulate.

Sometimes he just gets lucky. One one occasion, a plot to have him killed goes horribly awry when his professional look-alike is shot instead of he. As the double dies, he summons the courage to tell the general something of the truth: “. . .it would be better now to take advantage and look truth in the face general, so you can know that no one has ever told you what he really thinks but that everyone tells you what he wants to hear while he bows to your face and thumbs his nose at you from behind, you might even thank fate that I'm the man who most pities you in this world because I'm the only one who looks like you, the only one honorable enough to sing out to you what everyone says that you're the president of nobody and that you're not on the throne because of your big guns but because the English sat you there and the gringos kept you there. . .” (AP 24). Even so, he is quite good at uncovering plots.

For instance, one time he realizes that a conspiracy is afoot, but none of his underlings are able to get information or identify culprits. Almost on a hunch he begins to doubt his “comrade of a lifetime”, general Rodrigo Aguilar—the last person anyone would suspect. He becomes certain that this close friend is indeed plotting against him, and his

retribution shows the very dark side of his nature. In this scene, the high military men are gathered at a banquet: “. . .it was twelve o’clock but General Rodrigo de Aguilar was not arriving, someone started to get up, please, he said, he turned him to stone with the fatal look of nobody move, nobody breathe, nobody live without my permission until twelve o’clock finished chiming, and then the curtains parted and the distinguished Major General Rodrigo de Aguilar entered on a silver tray stretched out full length on a garnish of cauliflower and laurel leaves, steeped with spices, oven brown, embellished with the uniform of five golden almonds for solemn occasions and the limitless loops of valor on the sleeve of his right arm, fourteen pounds of medals on his chest and a sprig of parsley in his mouth, ready to be served at a banquet of comrades by the official carvers to the petrified horror of the guests as without breathing we witness the exquisite ceremony of carving and serving, and when every plate held an equal portion of minister of defense stuffed with pine nuts and aromatic herbs, he gave the order to begin, eat hearty gentlemen.” (117). Treason may be a capital offense, but this passage indicates a sadistic pleasure in finishing off rivals, something the general can do without evidencing a shred of compunction.

Though the book does deal with some prior events, the focus is obviously on the patriarch’s “autumn”. This is the period that begins roughly at the time the general’s double is killed, extending to his death. It is a time when he finds his power, and especially his influence and credibility, to be waning. Though he is quite able to uncover plots, he nevertheless is constantly deceived by his advisors, thinking that the people love him, and so on. His various edicts and commands are obeyed with a carefully concealed mockery— e.g., when he gets up early one night and declares it to be several hours later

than it is, his underlings paste fake heavenly bodies on his limousine windows to appease him.

Also, his orders become more silly. When his mother dies he sends for Roman Catholic officials to review her life, because he wants her to be canonized. The miracles attributed to her turn out to be entirely contrived, so he kicks out the papal emissaries along with all clergy in retribution, conferring a “civil canonization” on his mother.

Though he does experience times that seem like revivals of his old glory days, like the times after a hurricane when he sails around the flooded streets distributing the “salt of health” and orchestrating operations, the older he gets the more pathetic his reign becomes. At one point he marries a defrocked nun named Leticia Nazareno, who teaches him the rudiments of reading and writing. He can be heard going about the palace singing and chanting grade-school ditties like “. . . I am the king and the law is my thing. . .” and “. . . ginger gibber and gentleman are all spelled with a gee. . .” (163-164).

After Leticia is assassinated he grows increasingly senile. Trying to preserve his memory, he writes various facts down for himself on slips of paper—but he often forgets where they were put, and when he later finds them he doesn’t understand them. It is never quite clear just how senile he becomes, because he will sometimes startle ambassadors by speaking very lucidly after a time of evident confusion. He also begins to go deaf—deafness being an important symbol for solitude in Garcia Marquez’s fiction.

Finally, as he sits in his palace the victim of countless deceptions, his country in a shambles, the American ambassador demands the Caribbean Sea as payment for a debt. Otherwise the patriarch will have to turn the whole country over to U.S. control. At first he is adamantly set against the idea, but eventually he sees the necessity of selling his

beloved ocean. Watching the lighthouse sweep over the lunar dust where the sea used to be is the final sadness the general will have to endure. Soon after making the bargain (the Caribbean is taken to Arizona in numbered crates) he dies a natural death, sleeping on the floor of his palace as predicted. Death appears in bodily form to take him away. Though his actual age at death is unspecified, it is within the range predicted by the oracle.

Apart from the general few other characters resonate throughout the novel; principal among these are the three women who most affect his life: Bendicion Alvarado, his mother; Manuela Sanchez, the beauty queen he falls for; and Leticia Nazareno, his strange and domineering wife.

Bendicion Alvarado is definitely the second-most important character. In some ways she is similar to her son: both are simple and rather backward, neither one seems at all fitted to public life, and both, to differing extent, lead lives of corruption without seeming to even realize it. However, Bendicion comes across as very innocent and good-hearted, despite having worked as a prostitute and a sham bird saleswoman, painting the animals to increase sale value. The unfortunate customers find the dye running off their pets within a few days. Nevertheless, she is a classic long-suffering Garcia Marquez mother-figure. She loves her son to a fault, and we find out at her death that she has had a terrible skin disease for some time which she concealed so as not to distress him. Taken as a whole, her character is utterly unselfish, a fact that transcends her shortcomings.

The general probably never loves anyone in his life, not even his mother, but the one who most fulfills his desires is the former nun Leticia Nazareno, his wife. He first sees her when exiling all clergy from his land. He has her kidnapped, and after some time begins to live with her as a paramour. When they eventually marry, she uses her

considerable persuasiveness to have the clergy brought back into the country, and also to satisfy her desires to make continuous, expensive purchases, at the government's expense. Both Leticia and her son (the general's only legitimate son Emanuel) are torn apart by dogs who seem to have been turned upon them as part of some shady conspiracy. Leticia Nazareno's character is negative: she does act as a mother-figure to the general, caring for him in his senility, but she is at heart selfish and manipulating. This is shown in a magic realist way: the touch of her hands makes foliage die and meat rot.

Her death triggers an investigation, which is headed up by a male character of some significance, Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra. A former aristocrat, he is an archetype of the words "amoral" and "ruthless", conducting fearful tortures and sending the general bags of severed heads on a regular basis. The patriarch can't stand him but allows him to continue his work, feeling that the policeman has more power than he himself. One of the most unforgettable scenes from the book, for me, is when Saenz de la Barra presides over vicious tortures in a former Dutch insane asylum, playing Bruckner records loudly to drown out the screams. He is eventually killed by a mob—the people have been pushed too far.

The third female character is less important than the others, since she is essentially passive, doing and saying very little. It is the general who makes a huge deal about her. She is Manuela Sanchez, the beautiful but poor girl who captures the patriarch's fancy. However, she totally rejects his advances, despite the fact that he rebuilds her neighborhood, visits her daily, and gives her a room filled with expensive toys and gadgets of every description. One night, when the general is on a rooftop with Manuela

to watch the comet that comes by periodically, he finally manages to touch her in the dark. However, at that moment she disappears, never to be found again.

The themes of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* are fairly easy to determine. Just as the patriarch dominates the characters, power is the dominant theme. Power is seen as a strong and pervasive thing which corrupts the wielder absolutely. The general uses and abuses his power for upwards of one hundred years, never feeling more than a surface guilt over the abuses. He dies still clutching convulsively to his presidential authority, totally unrepentant and seemingly unaware of any sort of truth or morality except his own solitude and power (Bell-Villada 159).

Indeed, solitude is a great presence here. That is the other aspect of power—besides corrupting, it tends to isolate the holder. The patriarch is isolated through his inability to love and through his unique position as absolute monarch. His wife turns out to be a shyster, the romance in his life being otherwise restricted to the palace concubines. He neither cares about them nor the countless children he begets by them. At the end of the book he is a sick, tragic old man with failing mental powers and hearing, unable to participate in the world around him. He is certainly locked in the solitude of power.

The Autumn of the Patriarch is one of the most arresting and singular books in all literature, full of stylistic strangeness and unbelievable exaggeration. It has equal measures of humorous parody and cathartic, almost classical tragedy. And it vividly brings to life some very strange characters and highlights some of the pervasive themes of the human experience. It is a truly brilliant portrayal not only of the Caribbean dictator, but of the tyrant of any culture.

Comparison:

One Hundred Years of Solitude

The Autumn of the Patriarch

As in the Faulkner novels discussed above, the most obvious difference between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is style. While *Solitude* sounds anything but archaic, its diction and organization is fairly close to that of the nineteenth century novel—it is told in the third person omniscient point of view, utilizes traditional sentences and paragraphs, places dialogue in quotation marks, and moves in a generally chronological time sequence.

On the other hand, none of the above apply to *Autumn*. It is about as far divorced from the traditional novel as is possible, dispensing with any uniform point of view, ditching the paragraph, extending the sentence to unprecedented length, jettisoning the quotation mark, absorbing dialogue in to the flow of the text, and presenting an utterly fragmented picture of time and events. In other words, it is a fully avant-garde piece of literature, while *Solitude*, though utterly original, is not revolutionary in style.

The novels also differ in location and scale. The town of Macondo in *Solitude* is a fully developed community, described with enough precision that readers can draw a rough map of the town in their heads. The town is a fairly definite geographical point which bears great similarity to Arcataca, Garcia Marquez's home town. The mention of the city of Riohacha and other sites places it clearly in the nation of Columbia. Though Macondo is affected by the great political and international events contained in the novel,

it remains an out-of-the-way, sleepy sort of village, and domestic concerns seem to be at the forefront of the community and the novel.

By contrast, the patriarch in *Autumn* is not only at the center of Garcia Marquez's attention, but also at the center of his unspecified country. Geography and the nature of his capital city are definitely minor concerns—or rather, our inability to determine the place's location may be the important thing, giving the story a resonance throughout Latin America, the Caribbean in particular. Domestic concerns are still definitely important—individual loves, hatreds, friendships, struggles, diseases, etc. fill much of the narrative. However, in *Autumn* the political, national level of events is just as important—the ramifications of tyranny, the problems of diplomacy, and the like are equally in the limelight.

Themes and characters also differ. In *Solitude*, nobody dominates the scene. Aureliano Buendia, for instance, may be a very significant personality, but the novel needs Jose Arcadio Segundo, Amaranta, and Maurico Babilonia as much as it needs him. As a general rule the point of view does not move into the domain of the character's thoughts; instead, we gain insight into their psyches by watching them interact with each other and with the struggles of their lives. The major theme of that novel is solitude, with such issues as family interaction, repetition of the past, and love moved to the background.

The Autumn of the Patriarch is completely dominated by its eponymous anti-hero; he is the only truly significant character in the novel. Furthermore, the narrative voice betrays his consciousness more than it does in *Solitude*; it is not actually stream-of-consciousness, but plainly reveals the feelings of the patriarch, the people, and other

characters. The new and most prominent theme here is power and its ramifications, but solitude is still important—in fact, the two are treated as somewhat synonymous—the general’s overwhelming power is the major cause of his loneliness.

Even though these two novels are different enough that *Autumn* disappointed some fans of *Solitude*, the similarities outweigh the differences. Garcia Marquez is in a class of his own—as with all truly great authors, his own particular voice shines unmistakably through everything he has written. Moving from one of these books to the other, the Garcia Marquez conventions and trademarks stand out obviously—and this even though some of the conventions are new to *Autumn*. They still bear Gabo’s inimitable imprint.

Undoubtedly the most obvious similarity is that horrendously hackneyed term “magic realism”. Both works are characterized by some very extreme exaggeration; this exaggeration has already been discussed. One feature common in both books is the numerical precision and attention to mundane detail used in describing the fantastic events—the exact turns made by Jose Arcadio II’s trickle of blood, Remedios the Beauty rising into heaven while still holding Brabant sheets, the Caribbean being packaged up in numbered crates. This sort of description can be found throughout Garcia Marquez’s fiction—for instance, in the story *The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship* we are given the exact number of champagne glasses that break when the ship runs aground.

It is not only the magical realist style that Garcia Marquez has preserved throughout his oeuvre; his translucent, beautiful, sometimes rather deadpan prosecraft is also essentially the same, though certainly *Autumn* contains more unusual poetic imagery. And even though the sentence/paragraph structure in that novel is far more extreme than in *Solitude*, the earlier work is also characterized by fairly long paragraphs, little

dialogue, and a generally organic, flowing feel. The style of *Autumn* is not as radical a departure as it might seem at first.

Flashback techniques are used in both works, though once again it is much more pronounced in the latter. I said before that *Solitude* moves in a generally chronological fashion, though chapters rarely begin at the “beginning”, but start much later and flash back to this “beginning” via a character’s memory. Likewise, every section of *Autumn* begins at roughly the same time, when the people of the country discover the dead patriarch. The remaining material comprises flashbacks entirely.

And of course Garcia Marquez’s themes, tone, and worldview are quite consistent. One novel tells of a doomed family, the other a doomed general. If the general’s tale is a bit less humorous and more tragic, the reason is probably that *Autumn* is a book about tyrants, and tyrants are almost always going to make for gloomier tales than families. Men and women in Garcia Marquez’s fiction are fundamentally lonely. They are not unredeemable; there are clearly “good” and “bad” people and the good ones live unselfish lives, while the evil are unable to love anyone but themselves. But even those characters who are loving and unselfish are basically tragic too, coming under the scourges of solitude, illness, and death. In this sense Garcia Marquez’s books are thoroughly modern in their presentation of a world with no God to redeem it. However, compared with many other modern novels, the fatalism in the books is never overwhelming, and is mitigated by large amounts of humor and human touches. Rather than seeming depressing or gloomy, they often reach the sad but cathartic heights of classical and Shakespearean tragedy.

Comparison:

William Faulkner

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez: hopefully, they do not seem quite as disparate now as before. To be sure, they are separated by some very significant differences—the winding sentences of Faulkner, with their advanced, collegiate vocabulary, are a far cry from the direct and magical prose of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Faulkner’s drawling Southerners and crumbling aristocracies may seem totally unrelated to the guerrilla warfare and banana companies in Gabo’s fiction. But the similarities are more pointed and arresting: both writers are major practitioners of the literary avant-garde, both are unclassifiable, and both are preoccupied with the “big themes” of great literature and the human heart. However, nothing stands out like the way these men were able to draw on their own homelands, childhoods, and sense of regional allegiance to enrich and define their fiction—and both did it in almost the same way.

Style and diction are extremely important to both of these authors. Any literary giant is going to have a recognizable and fairly consistent writing style—but for someone who has a little acquaintance with these authors’ works, a few sentences read from any mature novel or story would be a dead giveaway, simply because their personalities are stamped unmistakably on every line of the novels. So the fact that diction is important to both authors is a similarity, but when it comes down to the writing styles themselves, we have a major difference. In the following passage from *The Hamlet* William Faulkner describes a rainstorm in his trademark polarizing prose, as loved by aficionados as it is

dreaded by unsuspecting literature students: “. . .the actual rain, from a sky already breaking as if of its own rich over-fertile weight, running in a wild lateral turmoil among the unrecovered leaves, not in drops but in needles of fiery ice which seemed to be not trying to fall but, immune to gravity, earthless, were merely trying to keep pace with the windy uproar which had begotten and foaled them, striking in thin brittle strokes through his hair and shirt and against his lifted face, each brief lance already filled with the glittering promise of its imminent cessation like the brief bright saltless tears of a young girl over a lost flower; then gone too, fled north and eastward beyond the chromatic arch of its own insubstantial armistice, leaving behind it the spent confetti of its carnival to gather and drip leaf by leaf and twig by twig then blade by blade of grass, to gather in murmurous runnels, releasing in mirrored repetition the sky which, glint by glint of fallen gold and blue, the falling drops had prisoned.” (204). Undoubtedly this is a climax of a heavily poetic section, and not all of Faulkner’s prose is nearly so dense or highly wrought. But it is very unmistakable, vintage Faulkner, and gives a good idea of his winding, complicated sentences, populated as they are by advanced vocabulary words.

Here is the beginning of *Solitude*, which I hope will make plain just how different Garcia Marquez’s style is from Faulkner’s: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point. Every year during the month of March a family of ragged gypsies would set up their tents near

the village, and with a great uproar of pipes and kettledrums they would display new inventions. First they brought the magnet.” (*OYS* 1). And the narrative goes on.

Compared with Faulkner, Garcia Marquez’s prose is much more stripped down, though certainly not terse. Into this direct style, Gabo easily incorporates striking statements like “The world was so recent that many things lacked names. . .”. This is the trademark style that he claimed to have inherited directly from his grandmother.

To finish the discussion of differences, one more must be mentioned—the regional differences between the authors. Because the men are from two different continents, the themes and flavors of their works are naturally diverse—though interestingly enough, both come from parts of the Americas dramatically affected by warfare, rife with poverty, and characterized by customs foreign to the average U.S. reader. Nonetheless, there are still more differences than similarities between Mississippi and Columbia.

Faulkner’s world was defined by the American Civil War. When Walker Percy, another Southern writer, received the National Book Award, he was asked why there was such a preponderance of good Southern writers. His answer: “Because we lost the war.” (O’Connor 847). Faulkner’s great-grandfather was a veteran of the war, and many of his characters are haunted by it and by its ramifications for the old way of Southern life. A major theme in both Faulkner books is the termination of the old aristocracies and class distinctions by the upward mobility and aggressive business tactics of the “redneck” class. Another typically Southern theme that resonates in Faulkner’s fiction is the issue of race. Faulkner himself was an advocate of civil rights for blacks, but since his position was too liberal for bigoted whites and too conservative for highly activist blacks like W.E.B. DuBois, he gained many enemies. Issues of race are absent from *The Hamlet*,

and *The Sound and the Fury* doesn't dwell on race relations, but African-Americans do have a major presence in the latter novel, and certainly come across as far more sane and able to cope with life than their white counterparts.

The Caribbean world of Garcia Marquez is much different. Most Americans have traveled to small, agrarian communities something like Jefferson, Miss., and have perhaps run across some people like the drawling farmers in Faulkner's world. But the world of Latin America, full as it is of dictatorships, afternoon siestas, and the concept of *machismo*, is less familiar to readers. Personally, the only other Latin American fiction I had read prior to Garcia Marquez was a few stories by Jorge Luis Borges, many of which are set in Europe or imaginary worlds. My knowledge of the customs of Columbia were no greater than average. But I did not find this an inhibition while reading Garcia Marquez's fiction; rather, I understand the region far better now than I did before.

Certainly, power and politics are central to Garcia Marquez's fiction—especially in *Autumn*. The Southern states may have been profoundly affected by the American Civil War, but Latin American states have been continuously torn by civil strife, rigged elections—virtually every negative feature associated with politics. This fact comes through in the “liberal vs. conservative” struggles in *Solitude*, and of course in the major dissection of tyrannical regimes found in *Autumn*. Nobody in Gabo's fiction goes through life unaffected by politics.

Another pervasive theme is the *machismo* ideal, the strange culture in which men are expected to show their “virility” through boasting and reckless feats of bravado and debauchery. Men are dragged into this unpleasant world while still in their teens. This *machismo* is not in any sense presented as a good thing by the author, because it fractures

families and forces the women of the household to struggle to keep things together in the face of irresponsibility and infidelity of the menfolk.

So it is clear that personal style and regional diversity cause a number of differences between these two great authors. But what of similarities? They are manifold. The similarities are especially marked in this case, since Faulkner was a major influence on Garcia Marquez.

First, both men are giants of modern literature who won the Nobel Prize for their contributions to the *belles-lettres*. They have earned their places as truly great writers, are featured in “great books” collections, and taught in colleges frequently. Both men are recognized as being classes unto themselves; rather than writing derivative fiction or slavishly adhering to a movement, they are true originals, leaders of the literary world.

As such, they have consistently dealt with the major themes that literature tackles. Commercial fiction (Harlequin romances, cheap thrillers, etc.) are pumped merely to entertain. What sets true literature apart is its ability to provoke thought and address fundamental human concerns. I have stressed in my analyses how often these books talk in provocative and deep ways about love, death, hatred, the passage of time, the nature of progress, politics, power, the family and its breakdown, God, Jesus Christ, nature, and many other basic issues close to every human heart. This is what classifies these novels as great works, and also what will make them worthwhile reading for future generations and keep them from passing away. After all, how many popular thrillers from the thirties or sixties do you have on your shelf? And yet these works endure.

The most remarkable similarity is the way in which William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez have appropriated their homelands, heritages, and childhoods in their

novels. Flannery O'Connor, a great Southern Catholic author, wrote that a fiction writer ceases to be great when he loses sight of his region and heritage (843-848). The success of these two "regional" authors would seem to corroborate her contention. This seems to be the area in which Faulkner most influenced Garcia Marquez, and the similarities are quite stunning. Both men almost wholesale included their hometowns in their novels, both fictionalized their grandfathers, both were highly impressed by and documented boyhood experiences, and both wrote about outside influences on their regions with a certain ambivalence (sometimes with decided disapproval). Even after childhood they shared similar experiences—both had a rocky relationship with college and tended to be solitary, withdrawn, and intensely devoted to books. These experiences made it into their novels, especially in the forms of Quentin Compson and the young men's literary group that forms near the end of *Solitude*.

Ultimately, these authors are defined by their regional heritages, as well as their own qualities of genius. Their differences spring from highly individual and inimitable styles, and from proceeding out of highly different cultures. But in spite of this, they both appropriate their cultures in very similar ways, and this enriches and defines their fictional styles and concerns, helping them remain some of the brightest lights in the constellation of modern literature.

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William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez—born a generation apart on different continents, with very divergent careers, and yet ultimately both belonging to the same tradition, the tradition of great books and literary genius. They are products of their times and places, but this makes them better writers, not worse. It has been seen that these

“regional” masterpieces are anything but folksy yarns, but actually products of genius, unflinchingly facing the most difficult ideas and concepts that any of us wrestle with. They begin with the rich raw material of life as lived in unfamiliar, regional communities and cultures, and make something universally applicable out of it. They speak to everyone; this is the measure of great writing.

Ultimately, these books are not treasured because of beautiful, winding prose or “magical realism”, though such things certainly help. They are great because they give such honest and provocative pictures of humanity at its best and worst, man’s relationship with God and his fellows, and, in Faulkner’s own famous words, “the human heart in conflict with itself.”

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