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Ambiguity and Apocalypse: Metafictional Reading Strategies in The Crying of Lot 49 and One Hundred Years of Solitude

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AMBIGUITY AND APOCALYPSE: METAFICTIONAL READING
STRATEGIES IN THE CRYING OF LOT 49 AND
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude posit reading strategies linked by similar methodologies and complementary conclusions. The exposition in the following chapters examines the novels' methodologies on three levels—the utilization of historical background, the Principle of Uncertainty, and apocalyptic endings—to establish a basis for the novels' shared perspective on narrative and, by default, approaches to engaging narrative. This thesis argues that the novels demonstrate that as uncertainty increases within narrative the potential for meaning increases, and the converse—as uncertainty decreases, the potential for meaning decreases. The resultant apocalyptic endings of the novels depict the opposing extremes and the requisite failure of both. Finally, this thesis will demonstrate that through metaphor connecting these failed attempts to reading narrative, both novels show reading to be a dynamic act in which one must negotiate the compass of uncertainty to reach not necessarily meaning, but rather the potential for meaning.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 (1965) and Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) posit reading strategies linked by similar methodologies and complementary conclusions. The exposition in the following chapters examines the novels' methodologies on three levels—the utilization of historical background, the Principle of Uncertainty, and apocalyptic endings—to establish a basis for the novels' shared perspective on narrative and, by default, approaches to engaging narrative. This thesis argues that the novels demonstrate that as uncertainty increases within narrative the potential for meaning increases, and the converse—as uncertainty decreases, the potential for meaning decreases. Uncertainty, then, is not an obstacle to be overcome, but a necessary difficulty to be embraced. The resultant apocalyptic endings of the novels depict the opposing extremes and requisite failure of both. In The Crying of Lot 49, the potential for meaning is maximized when Oedipa's uncertainty is at its height. The apocalypse represented occurs not because of this uncertainty but because Oedipa fails to embrace that uncertainty in her persistent quest for the impossible Word, or objective truth which is wholly free from uncertainty. In One Hundred Years of Solitude, the potential for meaning is condensed to a single representation articulated in the parchments. However, it is the fact that all potentiality has therefore been annulled which results in the apocalypse. Finally, this thesis will demonstrate that through metaphor connecting these failed attempts to reading narrative, both novels show reading to be a

dynamic act in which one must negotiate the compass of uncertainty to reach not necessarily meaning, but rather the potential for meaning.

For the sake of argument, the aforementioned similarities shared by the novels can be explained as functioning within a tripartite process. First, each novel depicts a cultural and historical reality that it simultaneously undermines, resulting in ever-increasing uncertainty within the narrative. Second, through undermining the cultural and historical realities depicted, the novels evoke another reading parallel to the “normal” reading of each—that is, a secondary narrative which comprises commentary on the primary narrative and narrative form, in general. Third, both narrative levels finalize in an epistemological collapse brought about by the burden of the aforementioned uncertainty—an epistemological collapse portrayed through shared apocalyptic conclusions.

Beginning with the first stage of this process, Thomas Schaub claims that “Pynchon’s work belongs with those American narratives which recognize and enact the dark underside ‘invisible yet congruent with the cheered land’ [149],” explaining that “In this tradition promise is congruent with decline, and ‘education’ always means instruction in the poverty, decay, and death which the bright surfaces of America deny” (146-147). His description very aptly summarizes the mode and material of The Crying of Lot 49 by pointing out that the novel addresses both the “bright surfaces” and the “dark underside” of the American status quo. Initially, Pynchon situates his “American narrative” solely as a reflection upon the “bright surfaces”—Tupperware parties, televisions, record-hops—all the expectations, amenities, services, and material objects of desire with which he

paints the canvas of latter postwar American life. Yet this is a fleeting moment. Almost immediately the novel begins to distort this reflection, or rather to show the distortions in it, revealing the “dark underside” of the socially outcast—the “disenfranchised” (as they come to be called) masses barred from participation in the American mainstream—through Oedipa Maas’s search for Tristero, in which she and the reader together discover these disenfranchised masses.

In complementary fashion, Gene H. Bell-Villada claims a similar historical and cultural foundation for Márquez’s work:

One Hundred Years of Solitude has as its big subject and wide view not only the full spectrum of human diversity but also some three centuries of Colombian and by extension Latin American history. This total edifice García Márquez built in great degree by rooting his account in concrete, verifiable data. From the attack by Sir Francis Drake on Riohacha (a real incident that occurred in 1596)...to the bitter banana workers’ strike and army massacre (based closely on the bloody United Fruit events of 1928)...García Márquez is scrupulously faithful to his collective past, reinvent and embellish it though he may. The fact that One Hundred Years of Solitude is required reading in many Latin American history and political science courses in the the U.S. goes a long way toward demonstrating the essential truth of García Márquez’s novel, its over-all correspondence to a broad social and historical reality. (215)

Here, Bell-Villada identifies two crucial components of Márquez’s “total edifice,” as he calls it: the “full spectrum of human diversity” and the narrowed scope of “some three

centuries of Columbian and...Latin American history.” Without both of these elements, Márquez’s work would not be nearly so vast in purview. The first component is the result of Márquez’s creation of a myth of origins in the founding of Macondo. Michael Palencia-Roth offers a brilliant exposition on myth in One Hundred Years of Solitude in his Myth and the Modern Novel. He explains that technically speaking Macondo does not begin as an origin myth but rather as a cosmogony:

Cosmogonic myths recount the beginnings of things: the origins of the world, the first stirrings of consciousness, the creation of men and of a paradise. One finds cosmogony in the Bible in the first three chapters of *Genesis*, from Creation to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The cosmogony to be found in *Cien anos de soledad* is scattered throughout the first two chapters. (56)

While Palencia-Roth’s work requires such differentiation, this discussion does not use the term *origin myth* in the technical sense, since later the term is meant to denote nothing more than Macondo’s mythical status in the general sense. Nevertheless, his comments illuminate the connection between myth and Bell-Villada’s “full spectrum of human diversity.” All humanity, not only that part residing in Latin America, falls within the scope of One Hundred Years of Solitude.

On the other hand, the second of the two components of Márquez’s novel, the narrowed scope of Latin American (especially Colombian) history, is equally necessary. Historical moorings anchor the novel to reality and give it an accessible basis for the reader. Also, more importantly, it is this history that gives Márquez, like Pynchon, a collection of information in which to reveal uncertainty—One Hundred Years of

Solitude's own "dark underside," such as Colonel Aureliano Buendia's pointless warring and Macondo/Colombia's collective denial of the banana plantation massacre.

Both novels, then, use what Bell-Villada refers to as a fundamental "correspondence to a broad social and historical reality" to expose the ambiguity pervading this reality and, thusly, its narrative equivalent. Out of this ambiguity—mainly through reactions to it both within the narrative and outside of it—comes a secondary narrative, a reading of the first reading, in each case. For both novels, the secondary narrative portrays failed responses to textual ambiguity through failed cognitive approaches to uncertain reality in the primary narratives. In The Crying of Lot 49, the secondary narrative takes the form of a binary opposition between Oedipa's stance as both a "Puritan" and a "tourist/voyeur" regarding information. She seeks the "direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (95)—or, in other words (pun not intended), truth on the magnitude of divine (read "objective") inspiration. However, she is as much a part of the night she wants to abolish as the outcasts she beholds one fateful night in San Francisco: "So it went. Oedipa played the voyeur and listener" (100)—voyeurs want to behold. These approaches both fail to provide her with certain meaning or relief from ambiguity, leaving her crushed under the weight of an epistemological crisis so impenetrable and relentless that she reaches a point in which she "hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was" (141). Oedipa's crisis attempts to thrust itself upon Pynchon's reader, since the reader is privy to no more information or certainty than Oedipa is, eventually leading the reader through the same downward progression in understanding The Crying of Lot 49.

In One Hundred Years of Solitude, the secondary narrative takes almost the same form as the previous example. In the example discussed in Chapter Two, when Aureliano Triste brings the train to Macondo, the train carries with it communicative devices—namely, the film projector and the telegraph—which challenge the townspeople’s sense of reality. For example, the projector they regard with indignation, since it does not imitate their reality at all—“a character who had died and was buried in one film... would reappear alive and transformed into an Arab in the next one” (223). The requirement from a communicative device—a text, like one of Bruno Crespi’s films or Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude—to operate within the framework of their experience demonstrates an expectation for a circumscribed mimesis between text and their reality. Without this defined mimesis, no one—Márquez’s reader included—knows “for certain where the limits of reality lay” (224). Therefore, the epistemological quandary the people of Macondo experience is the same the reader experiences throughout the text.

Finally, in both novels, the uncertainty developed therein comes to a climactic end in apocalypse. The epistemological struggles within the narratives bring about this sort of conclusion, since a conclusion that lets characters out of narrative entanglement without consequence stands diametrically opposed to the persistently maintained uncertainty in both novels. However, neither novel moves from crisis directly to apocalypse. Instead, both portray the apocalypse as the result of collapsing cycles within the narrative which foreshadow the apocalypse but defer it until the end. Elizabeth Dipple’s brief description of *mise en abyme* in metafictional writing as “The idea of infinitely mirrored repetitions...” (9) provides a term for this construct. In Pynchon’s novel, this mirroring

effect is represented most effectively through the relationship between Lot 49, the Tristero forgeries in Pierce Inverarity's stamp collection, and The Crying of Lot 49, the narrative. The stamp collection, and the forgeries in particular, immediately upon being introduced becomes a stand-in for the narrative, reflecting the fractured, inherently valueless nature of the language from which the narrative is derived. Because Oedipa quasi-religiously seeks the Word (as an informational "Puritan"), she misses the "thousands of little colored windows"—for the reader, the words—that make up what could be a communicative text, a text which communicates more than simply the possibility of Tristero. For Oedipa, the stamp collection only serves to draw her into the search for Tristero. In the end, both Pierce's Lot 49 and Lot 49 are broken up by the necessary conclusion of the novel. Pierce's Lot 49 is about to be destroyed by its being auctioned off to different bidders, and the encompassing Lot 49 is about to be annihilated by its resulting end of the narrative. These two "lots" collapse together at the end of the novel, leaving Oedipa trapped behind auction room's "the heavy door" which shuts out the "windows and the sun" (152)—forever dividing both from those windows that promise "revelation" into "deep vistas of time and space" (31).

Example of *mise en abyme* are more plentiful, though no more elaborate, in One Hundred Years of Solitude than in The Crying of Lot 49. Mirror and dream imagery within the primary narrative literally epitomizes the notion of "infinitely mirrored repetitions." From José Arcadio Buendía's dream of Macondo as a city with "houses of mirror walls" (24), to his later dream of the repeating rooms, to Colonel Aureliano Buendía's repeating dream of "an empty house with white walls" (265), this imagery runs

the length of the novel, culminating in the “speaking mirror” (416) of the parchments. In fact, it is the “speaking mirror” of the parchments which foretells its own destruction and that of Macondo in the apocalyptic whirlwind at the end.

As both of these models show, the infinitely mirrored repetitions seem to be bound in only by the apocalyptic endings of the novels, which in turn function as examples of *mise en abyme* and part of the outer frame for it both cases. The apocalyptic conclusion of each novel reflects the simultaneous destruction of the text within the text, the stamp collection of The Crying of Lot 49 and the parchments of One Hundred Years of Solitude, effectively becoming yet another mirrored repetition. However, each apocalyptic ending also cuts off the repetitions by concluding its respective narrative. In doing so, the apocalyptic endings serve to provide an example of and framework for the constantly deferred meaning of the novels. Out of what would seem to be the ultimate finality—apocalypse—both novels continue to project the possibility of revelation or meaning without ever really offering it. Though Oedipa can only summon “courage you find you have when there is nothing more to lose” (151) at the breaking up of the stamp collection, she nevertheless witnesses the dispersion of this connection into the hands of the numerous “bidders”—others inside the text and outside of it who may also discover “much of the revelation” that “was to come through the stamp collection” (31). Likewise, though Márquez writes that “the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men...because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth” (417), in actuality the “city of mirrors” and the race that inhabits it have a second opportunity to exist every time

their story—that inscribed in the parchments—is “deciphered” through the reading of the novel. It is because the stamp collection and the parchments are crafted within narrative—a definite, limited entity—that each can be accessed indefinitely, along with the potential for meaning suggested by both. The apocalyptic endings, in bringing about the end of the narratives and the act of reading, actually guarantee the continuation of both, belying the novels’ shared processes. Schaub offers a useful metaphor for this relationship between apocalypse and the continuity it engenders in his discussion of ambiguity in The Crying of Lot 49. He describes the concept of entropy in its dual roles in thermodynamics and information theory, as follows:

Metaphorically, one compensates the other. In both, entropy is a measurement of disorganization, but in information theory disorganization increases the potential information which a message may convey, while in thermodynamics entropy is a measure of the disorganization of molecules within closed systems and possesses no positive connotation. (21)

Throughout Pynchon’s novel, Oedipa experiences a breakdown—a continuous disorganization—of her understanding of the world around her. She begins at a point of maximum organization in her undisturbed existence in Kinneret. Her days are so well arranged and ordered that she need only look for a discrepancy among them to recall “anything unusual” which would have indicated Pierce’s actions, a discrepancy she indeed finds after “shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed more or less identical, or all pointing the same way like a conjurer’s deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye” (2). The end of the novel, however, finds her drinking “bourbon

until the sun went down and it was as dark as it would ever get. Then she went out and drove on the freeway for a while with her lights out, to see what would happen” (146). This image of aimless motion in the dark (“as dark as it would ever get”) within the closed, circuitous system of the freeway shows Oedipa right before the point of maximum disorganization during the figurative apocalypse at the end of the novel, depicted in part by darkness similar to that in this scene (the auctioneers close out the sun right before the auction begins). Immediately following this moment, the auction takes place and the stamp collection is broken-up, representing maximum disorganization which therefore “increases the potential information which a message may convey”—the message in this case being the “revelation” the stamp collection could communicate.

This metaphor works equally well for One Hundred Years of Solitude, in which there is a similar progression from maximum organization at the time of Macondo’s mythical origins as an Edenic world to maximum disorganization in the “fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane” (416). Schaub’s model perhaps works even better for Márquez’s work than Pynchon’s, because opposite the literal “thermodynamic” collapse, or disorganization, of Macondo is the zenith of informational organization experienced by Aureliano Babilonia when in a “prodigious instant Melquiades’ final keys were revealed to him” (415) and the parchments can finally be understood. In this way, the apocalypse—the cataclysmic running down of the world of Macondo—renders both the parchments and therefore One Hundred Years of Solitude capable of communicating information because potentiality is

reduced or even eliminated by increased informational organization, allowing for a single document which recounts the history of Macondo, and by extension, the human race.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CRYING OF LOT 49: SOCIAL CRITICISM AND METAPHOR

Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 is a grand, insidious metaphor. In fact, it is a metaphor within a metaphor; that is, on one level it is a social exposé wrapped up in the trappings of a mystery novel, while on another level, it is an example itself of the limitations of language to effect change. The first level of metaphor comprises Oedipa Maas's exploration of the social underworld—in effect, “another world”—in search of a clandestine, anarchic organization. Her discovery of the former is told through the search for the latter. The second level of metaphor comprises Pynchon's exposition of social ills through language, especially in narrative form. The revelation of the alternative reality of society's outcasts effects no change within the novel and intimates the novel's own inability to directly effect change.

The plot contains the framework for the first or inner metaphor, which in turn gives rise to the second or encompassing other. Pynchon's strategy proceeds as follows. He depicts the social environment of the 1950's and early 1960's—the status quo of American life—while at the same time indicating fractures and inconsistencies in that model. Then, through the possibility of the mysterious Tristero's existence, Pynchon provides a catalyst for Oedipa's introduction to reality outside the status quo. Next, Pynchon uses Oedipa's search for Tristero to portray society's hidden underbelly—the lives of those excluded from participation in mainstream American life. This portrayal functions as a critique of the dominant mindset of the period by revealing the ignorance

or ambivalence of mainstream American society concerning the nation's actual state of affairs.

At the same time, Pynchon's critique expands beyond the machinations of the plot through extending the primary metaphor to include the novel, the reader, and language itself. By couching his social criticism within a masterfully crafted, engaging mystery—the first level of the text, the narrative of Oedipa's investigative ordeal—Pynchon allows the mystery story to subsume the social criticism. The novel invites the reader to become as caught up in the mystery as Oedipa is, since the narrative is told entirely through her perspective. Although the gritty *reality* of life in America in all its disparity and decrepitude for masses of people is situated directly alongside the sheer *possibility* of a clandestine mail system, it is this reality which gets largely ignored by Oedipa and, consequently, the reader. From the novel's start to finish, there is never any conclusive evidence which either confirms or denies the existence of Tristero, but the assorted depictions of middle-class malaise, inner-city misery, and disillusionment all-around are real enough. Nevertheless, Oedipa, in pursuit of what is never given more authenticity than an intriguing fiction (Tristero), misses the hard reality before her very eyes. This camouflaging effect of fiction, particularly in the narrative form of the novel, is a recurring theme in The Crying of Lot 49.

Through this juxtaposition of fiction and reality, Pynchon reveals a disjunction between the reader and the text. The disjunction is caused by the fact that, as with information internalized in "real" life, information given within a text must be interpreted before it can be said to have meaning. As Oedipa discovers through the upheaval of her

most basic assumptions about reality, with this need for interpretation comes the possibility for multiple interpretations, resulting in an undefined, very often unstable relationship between the reader and the text. On its own, the text The Crying of Lot 49 ultimately does not communicate a singular, coherent, verifiable meaning to the reader. With its shifting, hazy boundaries between fiction and reality—between Tristero and San Francisco's disenfranchised masses, for instance—the novel's narrative form constrains the communication of meaning; or, put more simply, the fictional aspect of the text obscures the reality presented within the text.

Exacerbating the situation—or, perhaps, its root cause—is language's inherent lack of self-agency, which Pynchon first explains by way of the metaphor within metaphor scenario previously introduced. Since the narrative structures of the novel ultimately fail to provide meaning and collapse into ambiguity, and since narrative is a construct of language, the problem must lie in the language? This additional, more fundamental level of the problem of determining meaning in the text intensifies the disjunction between reader and text. If both narrative form and the language used to create it are either ambiguous or impotent, how is the reader to go about determining meaning in, or even understanding, not only The Crying of Lot 49 but any narrative? This question lies at the heart of novel.

Social Criticism as Catalyst

At the start, Pynchon's first maneuver is to situate the novel in the status quo of 50's and early 60's culture. The Crying of Lot 49 opens to a thoroughly typical day in the life of a suburban housewife. Oedipa is found returning from a Tupperware party, the

highlight of which involves the inferior quality of another housewife's spread. Her husband, Wendell "Mucho" Maas, completes Pynchon's representation of a normal household of the period, since he is the sole bread-winner. Oedipa does not have a career, and her conjecturing about the letter from Pierce Inverarity, her one-time lover, is subordinated to a play-by-play of her preparing the home "against the arrival of her husband" (2). She recognizes the routine nature of her daily life in the midst of this conjecturing as she "wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be first to admit it?) more or less identical" (2), trying to find an "odd one"—something that would make one of the days stick out from the unmemorable mass of them. Normalcy, then, is an uninterrupted parade of days filled with Tupperware parties, preparing dinner, awaiting her husband and nothing more. She is the "happy housewife heroine," to borrow Betty Friedan's term, and he is the modestly successful husband who provides for them both.

Nevertheless, there are breaks in this model suburban existence. For example, cases of mental illness are common throughout the novel. Oedipa has "hallucinations," for which she sees a psychotherapist, Dr. Hilarius, whose own mental problems become apparent later in the book. The Maas's lawyer, Roseman, attends group therapy sessions with Oedipa, along with "a photographer from Palo Alto who thought he was a volleyball" (9). Mucho Maas experiences a nightly-recurring dream which causes him to "wake up hollering" (118) for years on end. It is of no small importance that all of these characters who exhibit mental problems otherwise successfully fill recognizable, legitimate roles in society—there is a housewife, a psychotherapist, a lawyer, a

photographer, and a used-car salesman turned disk jockey. Ironically—and significantly, for Pynchon’s point—fulfilling set roles within the system does not guarantee happiness, or fulfillment, in exchange.

A second example of breaks in the system is the marital infidelities committed by both Oedipa and Mucho. Oedipa has an affair with Metzger, and Mucho has trysts with an unspecified number of underage girls. Oedipa is aware of Mucho’s several crimes against their marriage (committed before her own): “She knew the pattern because it had happened a few times already,” but she “had been most scrupulously fair about it” (32) and avoids even talking about his adulterous behavior. What is most telling about these infidelities is the casual way in which they are carried out. The one time Oedipa did ask Mucho about his affairs, she only asks “if he wasn’t worried about the penal code,” (32) or in other words, about statutory rape. One would be amiss to ignore Pynchon’s obvious play on words here—burlesque as it is, the joke contributes to the overall sense of decay epitomized by the conversation itself. In Mucho’s seemingly heartless reply—“Of course”—it is a quality “in his tone of voice...something between annoyance and agony” (32) which informs more than the reply itself. Neither of them wants to engage the other in the matter, because to engage it would be to admit the failure of their own union and the cornerstone of the American Dream, the home.

Pynchon’s revealing such fractures in what is supposed to be an idealized setting not only serves as part of his commentary on society but also signals to his audience that there is a dichotomy between the reality which his characters, representing society in general, are living and reality as it actually is. This is why psychological troubles are a

common theme in the novel. The very nature of these problems reinforces the notion of a distorted view of the world, such as in the case of Oedipa's hallucinations and Roseman's paranoia. When the two realities are so juxtaposed that no amount of distortion will reconcile them, distortion becomes suppression, insanity, or both. Oedipa, the "happy housewife heroine," ignores Mucho's blatant womanizing, refusing to confront him about it in conscious effort to avoid "rocking the boat," so to speak. She chooses to suppress the truth about Mucho for what she feels to be the greater good; indeed, she notes "Like all their inabilities to communicate, this too had a virtuous motive" (32-33). Mucho so violently suppresses memories from the car lot which reveal the dark side of American consumerism that he develops night terrors, eventually driving him to drug addiction. Pynchon's message is two-fold: first, what mainstream society takes to be reality is terribly skewed; second, anything which contradicts this skewed worldview is to be ignored at all costs. In the American Dream, deviations from the established worldview, such as conscious or subconscious questioning of the status quo, have no place—regardless of the transparency of its inconsistencies.

While Pynchon's depiction of cultural complacency with a deeply flawed status quo is in itself an important part of his social criticism in The Crying of Lot 49, it is even more important for him to develop a means of jarring Oedipa out of that complacency. Pointing out *the* status quo's internal ruptures is only the first stage of Pynchon's much more comprehensive social critique. The next stage requires him to discuss what and who the system excludes. Oedipa's going to San Narciso to execute Pierce Inverarity's will provides the occasion for launching this discussion. It is through the process of executing

the will in San Narciso, away from the cultural confines of her life in Kinneret, that Oedipa discovers the possibility of Tristero's existence. This discovery sparks a chain reaction of further discoveries and events which eventually leads Oedipa to the home of John Nefastis and her subsequent hasty escape from his domicile.

The freeway-San Francisco episode which follows this escape is extremely important to Pynchon's project because it juxtaposes representations of the status quo and its intrinsic consumerism with representations of the "separate, silent, unsuspected world" (101) of those excluded from it. Ownership of automobiles has been equated with prosperity, and thusly the realization of the American Dream, since before the post-war economic boom of the 50's—one of Herbert Hoover's 1928 campaign slogans was "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." Yet, the dramatic, unprecedented growth of the automobile industry in the 50's reveals just how important automobiles had become to the American public. Stephen Whitfield notes that by the early 1950's

the assets of GM were greater than Argentina's, its revenues eight times larger than the state of New York's...By 1955, when GM became the first company to earn a billion dollars in a single year and rolled its fifty millionth car off the assembly lines, Americans had spent sixty-five billion dollars on automobiles—a fifth of the gross national product... Harlow Curtice [president of GM] , Time's "Man of the Year" in 1955, ceased bothering to talk in terms of GM's percentages of the car market. He spoke instead of his corporation's share of the GNP. (74)

If the automobile is the preeminent icon (rivaled only by the television set) of the American Dream, for Pynchon it is most certainly the equally preeminent representative

of American consumerism. The freeway scene, then, with its “rush hour” traffic of symbolized consumerism, represents mindless conformity to the status quo. All the cars are pointed in the same direction, as are their drivers, with more drivers trying to get on the “American freeway” (87), both literally and figuratively speaking. At first, Oedipa does not even realize that she is on the freeway: “She drove more or less automatically until a swift boy in a Mustang, perhaps unable to contain the new sense of virility his auto gave him, nearly killed her and she realized that she was on the freeway, heading irreversibly for the Bay Bridge” (87). Like the rest of the drivers on the freeway, she is a participant in the General Motors version of America but recognizes neither her role as a participant nor the fact that it is only a version of reality in which she is participating.

The freeway scene constitutes an interesting pause in Oedipa’s developmental process. In San Narciso, Oedipa can neither escape “her Tristero problem” nor its terrifying implications which threaten to overwhelm her—it is only after she delves into the Tristero problem that she begins to realize that her previous assumptions about reality are unqualified, that there is nuance and ambiguity which has been hidden from her. However, on the freeway she is in a sense whisked away from the immediacy of these issues. The freeway is a representation—a relapse, even—of Oedipa’s pre-San Narciso, pre-Tristero reality. Situated thusly, she can think “leisurely” (87) about her discoveries in the same “absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus” (10) she experiences in Kinneret. The freeway provides distance, literally and figuratively, between Oedipa and the concerns which lay behind her in San Narciso.

The depiction of the smog or haze radiating from the city further connects Kinneret and the freeway. The smog in San Francisco resembles the “salt fogs of Kinneret” in which Oedipa is “a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner” (10). Both phenomena create the illusion of isolation, or in Pynchon’s words, “the sense of buffering, insulation” (10). On the road to San Francisco, she is again the pensive girl, insulated from reality through the same “formless magic” as before (12), only symbolized now by smog and the “freeway madness” which causes it. This insulation allows Oedipa to step back, as it were, from what she has experienced in an attempt to piece together what she has discovered into a coherent picture:

Either Tristero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpenetrated with the dead man’s estate. Here in San Francisco, away from all tangible assests of that estate, there might still be a chance of getting the whole thing to go away...She had only to drift tonight, at random, and watch nothing happen, to be convinced it was purely nervous, a little something for her shrink to fix. (88)

Instead, it takes Oedipa “no more than an hour to catch sight of a muted post horn” (88). More important, however, is what she discovers through her search for the muted post horn of Tristero. She discovers the “disinherited” of America. Oedipa finds “Decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawal, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there was somehow always the post horn” (100). She sees the horn in The Greek Way, a gay bar. She sees it on darkened, shabby streets off the tourist beat. She sees it marked on an “anarcho-syndicalist paper *Regeneración*” and carved onto the back of a seat “among an

exhausted busful of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts all over the city” (98). She finds it in a black ghetto, and it being drawn by a Mexican girl out in the worst hours of the city night. Lastly, she sees it tattooed on the hand of a broken old man, who instructs her to look for a WASTE mailbox (the system of communication connected to Tristero) “under the freeway” (102). If the freeway represents the status quo, then it is only natural that Oedipa discover the world of those excluded from the status quo under the freeway. Oedipa discovers

...God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U. S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world. (101)

The novel uses Oedipa’s obsessive pursuit of Tristero to display this other world and introduce the second stage of its critique in The Crying of Lot 49. Even before this novel was published, Pynchon himself described the notion of parallel, mutually exclusive “worlds” in the context of the Watts racial unrest, noting that “lying much closer to the heart of L.A.’s racial sickness is the coexistence of two very different cultures: one white and one black” (qtd. in Nadel 230). While San Francisco is not Los Angeles and Pynchon is not particularly addressing racial problems in Lot 49, it is not much of a stretch to extrapolate from his statement the general idea of parallel worlds in the novel. Pynchon

recreates and expands in fictional form his real-world observations by juxtaposition of the freeway model of American life and life under the American freeway, as depicted through Oedipa's experience. She is the "listener," "the private eye" (100) who allows Pynchon to reveal and communicate the desperation and misery of the disenfranchised. He does not quibble with reasons for why the situation is the way it is. Pynchon suggests it could be "hate," "indifference," or "ignorance"—the *why* does not matter as much as the recognition that the situation *is*.

Metaphor within Metaphor

One of the great ironies of the novel is the fact that Oedipa does not recognize the plight Pynchon uses her to depict. She fails to comprehend the situation that truly *is* right in front of her. According to Molly Hite, in Oedipa's numerous encounters with the disinherited citizens of the other world, "She is struck by compassion and empathy in each of her encounters with these solitary and perversely endearing characters, but she avoids identification, refuses to rest in compassion, and continues her journey toward what she hopes is transcendence" (85). After The Greek Way, Oedipa "spent the rest of the night finding the image of the Tristero post horn" (94). Pynchon's wording implies intention. She *spent* her time in San Francisco finding what she wanted to find—clues to solve the Tristero mystery. It is not that she wants Tristero to exist; that is quite opposite of the truth. Rather, she wants an answer to the questions about reality which the Tristero mystery has raised, "the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (95). The term "Word" recalls Biblical language: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (NIV, John 1:1). Pynchon equates the

Word to the concept of God, or absolute Truth. “The cry that might abolish the night”—the word that might illuminate the darkness, in other words—is the Truth. This is what Hite means by Oedipa’s searching for “transcendence.” Oedipa has pursued the Word since her faith in the truth of the status quo is shattered by the potentiality of WASTE and Tristero. Without the Word—an axis, or center, around which reality by necessity must revolve—Oedipa cannot locate meaning. For Jacques Derrida, “The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude which itself is beyond the reach of play” (279). Oedipa’s life before San Narciso demonstrates Derrida’s “play constituted on the basis of fundamental immobility” by way of her unquestioning “certitude” in the status quo, since the status quo can undoubtedly be thought of as a “play which itself is beyond the reach of play.” After San Narciso, she no longer feels that “reassuring certitude” because the status quo has been shown to be very much within the reach of play. The only way to regain that certitude is to reestablish a center, a “fundamental immobility” on which to base her perception of reality, and by extension, meaning. Therefore, she must find an answer to the mystery which robbed her of it in the first place, Tristero.

As a result, she is so preoccupied with finding an answer to the Tristero question that she is blinded to the literal reality before her. Hite concurs:

Pynchon’s detailed depictions of suffering and alienation in contemporary America are important in themselves...They are what is important, in fact. As the quest develops, Oedipa’s world begins to provoke more compassion. Meaning

seeps out from the interstices of the text: the interest of Mr. Thoth, the old sailor, and even the ill-fated Driblette does not lie in the clues each provides but in the meticulous thumbnail sketch of an individual life that Pynchon offers in each case... Oedipa's willingness to use them and then dispose of them suggests she is still synced into the American dream. She does not value waste. She moves relentlessly toward the conclusion. (91)

To Oedipa, everything which happens to her and everyone she encounters in San Francisco comprises a "clue" which "is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for performance" (95). Oedipa's engagement with that other world is summarized by her concluding that "I can't help" (102). She only holds the old sailor because she "was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it" (102). She does not want to lose yet another example of the muted post horn to confusion over whether or not she actually saw it or just dreamed it. Oedipa does mail his letter for him, but she has ulterior motives, for mailing the letter will give her an opportunity to observe the WASTE system. Even when she gives him ten dollars, what seems like charity smacks more of residual guilt over the fact that she "cannot help." This is not to say that Oedipa has no "compassion," only that what compassion she does have is mitigated by what she sees as the real object of her expedition into the world under the freeway.

It is this understanding of the San Francisco narrative which provides the basis for the overarching, second level of metaphor present in The Crying of Lot 49. Oedipa, in a moment of clarity at the end of the scene with the old sailor, recognizes that "The act of

metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost” (105). The Tristero motif is a metaphor—a method of actualizing social criticism in the terms of a mystery story. Yet, the metaphor itself, Tristero, resists any attempt at clarity, resolution, or meaning. At the end of the novel, an exhausted Oedipa outlines four “symmetrical” ways of explaining Tristero, each of which is as possible as the next. If the metaphor itself is inexplicable, or its meaning cannot at least be narrowed down to less than four possibilities, then what truth value can it actually communicate? The answer to this question lies in Pynchon’s formulation of the act of metaphor: it is a *thrust* at truth and a lie. The term *thrust at truth* allows for the fictional nature of the metaphor—as a fiction it is a lie—while at the same time promising no more than an attempt at truth. Any promise of more than an attempt at truth constitutes a formulation of what Pynchon calls the Word, or absolute truth—that assumed “concept of centered structure” which Derrida derides in his Writing and Difference and Pynchon argues against in Lot 49. By conscientiously abstaining from any positing of truth, Pynchon allows himself to be “implicated in the game,” in Derrida’s words. He places his novel under its own scrutiny, implicating it as a part of the world he is writing about instead of attempting to situate it within a nonexistent centered structure of objectified truth.

The result is the encompassing metaphor of the novel—a metaphor which utilizes and mirrors the first, reaching out of the text to include the reader. Pynchon invites his audience into the mystery of Tristero, just as he does Oedipa. The reader also experiences the “peculiar seduction” Oedipa experiences, only not at the hands of Metzger, but of Pynchon himself. The mystery of Tristero—the questions of what it means, how it works,

what Pynchon is trying to say through it—displaces and subjugates the social problems it reveals. The novel virtually forces the same images and encounters onto the reader that it does Oedipa, but the reader, too, finds herself looking for signs of Tristero in the faces of the “disinherited.” In the case of Oedipa, Hite explains that

In trying to transform her night’s adventures into some kind of explanatory system, Oedipa effectively denies that she is part of what she perceives. Because she aims at complete transcendence, she keeps construing events as clues that will carry her forward, away from humanity, toward a supernatural level of being that subsumes humanity to its own inscrutable purposes. (87)

Similar to Oedipa, Pynchon’s readers are inevitably led to try to posit “some kind of explanatory system” in an attempt to understand Tristero and the book itself. Meanwhile, the lie of the metaphor threatens to overwhelm its thrust at truth—Pynchon’s brilliant social critique of his era—as it does for Pynchon’s heroine. What begins as an integral part of the metaphor meant to reveal it becomes hidden by objectification. Here is perhaps Pynchon’s strongest criticism at this stage: we objectify that which we do not identify with, even while reading a text which transparently decries such objectification.

When all of Oedipa’s attempts to formulate an explanatory system fail, she is left mentally stranded, her world stripped of what meaning she thought it had. She sits “for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void” (141). The reader equally suffers Oedipa’s epistemic crisis because no one “reading” of her experience outstrips the other possibilities, leaving Oedipa increasingly neurotic and the reader thoroughly confused. The novel withholds any sense of either

immediate or final resolution, thereby precluding any form of didacticism, direct or inferred, and leaving meaning in the text up to the reader's own devices. As previously noted, the absence of identifiable meaning resulting from the "de-centering" effect of narrative ambiguity calls into question the efficacy of language to communicate meaning. Obviously, this situation leads to a troubling dilemma: how is the reader to engage a text when its language may or may not communicate meaning?

Binary Reading Approaches and Epistemological Crisis

True to form, Pynchon does not offer a definitive answer for the singularly critical problem his novel poses. Instead, he depicts by way of contrast the basic methodological approaches readers take in engaging texts and shows how each of these approaches fails. Two particular episodes reflect the gist of his criticism: Oedipa's conversation with Randolph Driblette and the scene outside The Greek Way. In a rare deviation from his normally convoluted manner of writing, Pynchon seems to explicitly question the value of fastidious textual analysis in the first of these episodes. Consequently, the conversation bears repeating at length. After Oedipa begins to question him about his choice in scripts for The Courier's Tragedy, Driblette asks,

"Why...is everybody so interested in texts?"

"Who else?" Too quickly. Maybe he had only been talking in general.

...

"You don't understand," getting mad. "You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that filing cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for,

but—” a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head—“in here. That’s what I’m for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? They’re rote noises to hold line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor’s memory, right? But the reality is in *this* head. Mine. I’m the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth...(61-62)

Merely posing such a question as Driblette’s first—a text’s questioning the emphasis upon texts—seems counter-intuitive, even fatalistic, on the novel’s part. Yet, as has been previously indicated, the question of texts and language is at the heart of The Crying of Lot 49. In contrast to Oedipa’s tacit assumption about the significance of the text—particularly the significance of the word *Tristero*—Driblette unabashedly challenges the value of the text outside of its inspiration for the ideas he brings to life, the “spirit” he gives “flesh.” Language is a tool. Words are means of framing and expressing concepts—simply “rote noises for holding line bashes in” and getting “past the bone barriers around an actor’s memory”—but are intrinsically valueless, or as Driblette puts it, “The words, who cares?” Referring to words as “rote noises” asserts that language is nothing more than a collection of arbitrarily defined sounds assimilated by repetition not cognition. These noises have no epistemic value. The mechanism which utilizes the tool of language is the mind, “the projector at the planetarium,” where Driblette locates meaning—“the reality is within *this* head”—rather than within the text. Epistemic value is a function of the mind, and meaning is subjective to the individual mind, as denoted by the italicized “this.”

His challenge casts into sharp relief what he characterizes as the Puritanical obsession with words and texts—the implicit faith placed in the meaningfulness of erstwhile arbitrarily-defined rote noises and the power of the text to give shape to reality. Oedipa, like “Puritans are about the Bible,” assigns meaning to the text itself, to words which are only signs and symbols. In fact, as a literary Puritan, she assigns *all* meaning to the text, elevating the text to a sacred height. Through Driblette, the novel specifically associates this mindset with the world of literary criticism when Driblette implores Oedipa, “Don’t drag me into your scholarly disputes” (61). Afterwards, in her position as the executrix of Pierce Inverarity’s will—itsself a text—Oedipa decides it is “part of her duty, wasn’t it, to try to be what Driblette was, the dark machine in the center of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her?” (64). That the novel couches this notion within a question raises doubts about her understanding of Driblette’s point. In a telling moment which confirms Driblette’s earlier criticism, Oedipa, “under the symbol [the post horn] she’d copied off the latrine wall of The Scope into her memo book,” writes “*Shall I project a world?*” (64). Here, figuratively and—later in the novel—literally, Oedipa subjugates and substitutes her search for meaning with a search for the post horn, for the symbol of Tristero. If she can ascertain the significance of that word, she will have the “Meaning” she feels it is her “duty” to secure. She mistakes Driblette’s injunction, or rather misapplies it within her preconceived cognitive framework, in which sign and symbol—language—have near-Biblical significance and are to be approached as having final authority, like Scripture (for the Puritan).

The reader is complicit in the “Puritan” approach to texts and language, because the reader’s perspective is bound to Oedipa’s. The reader, along with Oedipa, searches for meaning amongst the multitudinous signs and symbols exponentially proliferating in the text, attempting to solve the twisted riddle and bring it “into pulsing, stelliferous Meaning.”

Though less explicit than the first, the second episode delineating the novel’s criticism of reading approaches, the scene outside *The Greek Way*, is no less potent. This scene foreshadows what amounts to Oedipa’s mute horn-guided tour through the metropolitan underground of society’s rejects, and—as a trope of that episode which immediately follows—the scene connects the objectifying nature of “tourist” mentality with the metaphor of Oedipa’s search for meaning. After arriving in San Francisco, she finds “herself being herded, along with other badged citizens” (89) in the direction of the bar. Before entering, a tour guide “briefs” the group:

“Now in here...you are going to see the members of the third sex, the lavender crowd this city by the Bay is so justly famous for. To some of you the experience may seem a little bit queer, but remember, try not to act like a bunch of tourists. If you get propositioned it’ll all be in fun, just part of the gay night life to be found here in famous North Beach. Two drinks and when you hear the whistle it means out, on the double, regroup right here. If you’re well behaved we’ll hit Finocchio’s next.” He blew the whistle twice and the tourists breaking into a yell, swept Oedipa inside, in a frenzied assault on the bar. (89)

It is important to realize that Oedipa does not go into the bar completely of her own accord: “Oh, no, Oedipa thought, not a fag joint, no; and for a minute tried to fight out of the human surge” (89). She and the other “citizens”—the novel’s depiction of mainstream society—are “herded” about and lead to look upon this example of alternative culture—in this case, “the third sex”—as tourists, something other than themselves. In other words, mainstream society insulates itself from this segment of its population—this Other—by objectifying it. That Other is kept at arm’s length by viewing it, rather than as part of society, as spectacle—an intriguing, obscene fiction which can be abandoned and forgotten about after “two drinks” and a “whistle.” If reality reaches out and touches them—“If you get propositioned”—they are admonished to remember that “it’ll all be in fun,” perhaps a little “queer” but no more disturbing than any other fiction. The guide promises them another safe look into the spectacle: “If you’re well behaved we’ll hit Finocchio’s next”—Finocchio’s being a San Francisco club famous for its female impersonators. The group’s “yell” and “frenzied assault” makes transparent their zeal “to see,” but they are seeing as spectators, with the promise of moving on to other unfamiliar, titillating sights. Although the tour guide implores the group to “try not to act like a bunch of tourists” (89), they actually show themselves to be more than tourists, figuratively speaking. They are voyeurs. The “frenzied” desire to behold the Other but not engage it amounts to voyeurism, confirmed by the identification of the Other with sexuality, here. A short time afterward, the novel further confirms this connection by referring to Oedipa, part of the herd at The Greek Way (though originally unwilling), as a “voyeur” (100) during her later nighttime wanderings through the city.

Again, as in the case of the first episode, the reader is complicit in this tourist/voyeur approach, because the reader's perspective is bound to Oedipa's. As suggested in a passage mentioned previously, the reader peers into "the separate, silent, unsuspected world" of those who have been forced into a "withdrawal...unpublicized, private" (101). The reader, too, "feeling invisible" eavesdrops on the poker game at the airport (99), is "fascinated" by "an old man huddled, shaking with grief" and bearing the image of the post horn on his hand (101), "prowls among the sunless, concrete underpinnings of the freeway, finding drunks, bums, pedestrians, pederasts, hookers, walking psychotic" (105), and stalks a carrier in an illicit mail system for his own satisfaction (106). These approaches toward engaging reality—for the reader, engaging the text—are at extremes, yet in Oedipa, as the representative of the reader, these modes are conjoined. Ultimately, however, the extremes are irreconcilable. Though she embodies and utilizes both the sacrosanct veneration of the puritan and the gross detachment of the tourist-voyeur, Oedipa is no closer to attaining "pulsing stelliferous Meaning" at the end of the narrative than she was at the beginning. Instead, the merging of these approaches results in an epistemological collapse—a spiraling vortex of ambiguity and confusion.

CHAPTER THREE

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE: MACONDO AS MYTH, HISTORY, AND METAPHOR

Like Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude can also be read as a treatise on the limitations of narrative form and the efficacy of language in communicating meaning. The novel contains within its tales of love, pain, and family a none-too-subtle investigation into the nature of narrative and therefore the relationship between experience and memory, since narrative is nothing if not, in some sense, a particularized record of the interplay between these facets of the human condition. Márquez carries out this investigation through a series of metaphors. The primary metaphor—Macondo as a representation of humanity—is used to establish and illuminate the second, encompassing metaphor—Macondo as narrative. The second level of metaphor arises from the first and comprises Márquez's critique of narrative form. Since Macondo is representative of human experience, Macondo's story is a record of that experience and becomes the proving ground for Márquez's critique of narrative.

Márquez's first move is to establish Macondo as mythically significant. Instead of fashioning Macondo as a typical South American village from the beginning, Márquez models its founding after the Genesis myth in Scripture, connecting Macondo to one of the original myths of human origins. Consequently, Macondo becomes a metaphor for the human community at large. What transpires in Macondo is meant to mirror the course and nature of human experience.

Such a setting allows Márquez to create and manipulate the town's "history" for his own purposes. The fact that Macondo is a fictional setting allows him to escape dealing with the inherent morass of historical backgrounds. However, to make his narrative relevant to the "real" world, Márquez also shows Macondo to be historically viable as well as mythically significant. By anchoring Macondo, a fictional setting, within real-world time and place—three hundred years after Sir Francis Drake's attacks along the Colombian coastline—Márquez situates his story within a historical framework.

Yet, in contrast to a straight historical record, the saga of Macondo is far from coherent. It is a patchwork of multitudinous digressions, anecdotes, family lore, and fantasy melded together with reality. While the sense of reality is maintained by carefully placed historical moorings including—by way of example—the previously mentioned attacks by Drake, even these historical markers are subject to interpretation within the novel, both on the part of the various characters and the reader. To make matters even more complicated, the novel presents the reader with seemingly endless layers of convolution due to its shifting perspective and blatant synthesis of contradictions. These layers of convolution disengage the reader from the text by making differentiating between what is "fiction"—or as Márquez says often in the text, "illusion"—and what is "real" in the narrative impossible to determine, effectively disallowing verifiable meaning. In the absence of meaning, the reader, like the characters being read about, is set adrift amongst myriad possibilities. In so doing, the novel shows narrative—both this narrative of Macondo and, therefore, any narrative of human experience—to be devoid of

objective, intransmutable meaning, even over the course of one hundred years (and some four hundred pages).

Mythical Macondo

To understand Macondo's narrative function, one must understand the significance of Macondo's mythic origins. While Márquez does give Macondo a historical context, the fact of the matter is that the village is still a fictional entity. By way of explanation, the opening paragraph of One Hundred Years of Solitude introduces two of the most important concepts in the novel: memory and myth. In fact, the first sentence is a memory. Márquez writes, "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (1). Colonel Aureliano Buendía, a character who has yet to be introduced, is called from the middle of the text many chapters later to remember a childhood event which has such a powerful impact that he recalls it while awaiting his death at the hands of a firing squad. Obviously, what is more important to Márquez at this point is not the circumstances surrounding the memory but the memory itself, because the depiction of this reminiscence rather than the scene of the Colonel's execution comprises the rest of the chapter. That the beginning of the novel is couched in memory is very important. Instead of beginning the novel at the "beginning"—that is, with the origins of Macondo, the epicenter of the novel's teeming action—Márquez both fast-forwards and rewinds time at once; Macondo has not been founded yet but it is already being remembered. This technique dramatically emphasizes the importance of memory in Márquez's writing agenda by making the narrative subject to the recollection of a character within it. The

ensuing narrative relating the history of Macondo will be, Márquez indicates, dependent upon the people, the community of Macondo, who inhabit and remember it. Furthermore, Márquez establishes the fact that his novel is not going to be written in linear, chronological fashion. The narrative is subject to forces beyond sequential events and expected movement of time. This effect immediately begins to subvert the reader's sense of bearings while reading the novel, undermining the narrative's objective status and emphasizing that Macondo truly is a fiction.

The opening line of the novel situates what immediately follows as memory, and what follows is the first indication of Macondo as myth: "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point" (1). Macondo is a new world. In fact, it can be considered to be Márquez's version of Eden. José Arcadio Buendía—Macondo's Adam, or first man—

had set up the placement of the houses in such a way that from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort, and he had lined up the streets with such good sense that no house got more sun than another during the hot time of the day. Within a few years Macondo was a village that was more orderly and hardworking than any known until then by its three hundred inhabitants. It was a truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died. (9)

Macondo is the ideal community. Its leadership is both inspired and communally minded. There is perfect social order, everyone is young, and there is no death. In fact, Macondo is too ideal to be real. Here, Márquez reconstructs and re-imagines Eden for his own

purposes. This world is new because the myth has just been freshly created *ex nihilo*. It is new because in creating Macondo as a myth of origins, Márquez must wipe from the minds of its inhabitants the “old” world they left behind in Riohacha and in its place construct another. As such, the world for Macondo’s founders *is* “recent.” Its newness and idealized state recalls a hypothesized time preceding humanity’s later development, as depicted in the pre-Fall account of the Book of Genesis.

José Arcadio Buendía’s first dream seconds such an encompassing theme. In the dream, when the future founder of Macondo asks for its name, he is given “a name that he had never heard, that had no meaning at all,” (24). Yet, almost the entirety of the novel transpires in Macondo. It is the home of the Buendía clan, the launching point of Colonel Aureliano’s wars, and the staging area of its own apocalypse. The city is identified by meaninglessness, as denoted by its name, but at the same time the name has “a supernatural echo in his dream,” (24). The name resounds on a plane beyond the natural plane, or the surface of reality; that is, Macondo embodies an overarching idea.

However, such a world is not logically possible. Its juxtaposition to reality cements its status as myth. Literally, Macondo is formed in spite of reality: “They did not lay out any definite itinerary. They simply tried to go in a direction opposite to the road to Riohacha so that they would not leave any trace or meet any people they knew” (23). Accordingly, in keeping with the Genesis myth, it is the coming of an outsider that brings about the first corruption of this Edenic state. Because of Melquiades and his gypsies, or rather the knowledge they bring to the closed-off, isolated community, Josa Arcadio Buendía—“a kind of youthful patriarch” (8)—loses “That spirit of social initiative” (9)

which defined him and blessed the community he founded and formed. Replacing this original drive is “the fever of magnets, the astronomical calculations, the dreams of transmutation, and the urge to discover the wonders of the world” (9). This display of an unrestrained appetite for knowledge while disregarding the utopian paradise before him—arguably the sin of Eden—nicely completes Márquez’s reconstruction of the Genesis myth.

Historical Macondo

Although Márquez is sure to establish Macondo within a historical framework, the fact that he waits until the second chapter to do so reveals his sense of priority. The myth of Macondo arises from the history of Macondo, yet it is the myth which is clearly the focus of Márquez’s endeavors. The time is three hundred years after Drake’s attack on Riohacha along what is now Colombia’s coastline. The novel never actually depicts the attack, although ostensibly this is reason for Úrsula’s ancestors moving from the coast to the village where the Buendías live. Márquez simply uses the briefest mention of the raid at the beginning of the second chapter to situate the novel in a particular time and place to lend it credence.

He continues to remind the reader throughout the novel that Macondo, as a representation of reality, is connected to the real world. Later on, the first characters not original to the founding of the community arrive—Don Apolinar Moscote, the magistrate, and his family. The magistrate sets up shop, nailing “up on the wall the shield of the republic that he had brought with him” (55). Before this point, Macondo only seemed connected to the outer world by its earlier historical “origins” in the Iguarán’s

flight from Riohacha. With the arrival of a magistrate and the government he represents, Macondo is subsumed within a larger organization, ceasing to be its own world and becoming a frontier town. Confirming this metamorphosis is the fact that immediately after the settling of the magistrate and his family in Macondo—and only after this point—does Márquez allow the commercial influx of foreign goods into Macondo. While Melquiades’ gypsies do trade with the people of Macondo, the gypsies themselves are not a part of the “real world,” finally having been “wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge” (38). With the advent of “Viennese furniture, the Bohemian crystal, the table service from the Indies Company, the tablecloths from Holland” (59), Márquez connects Macondo to a world even greater than that which thrusts itself upon Macondo by way of a magistrate and governmental crest.

Later, Macondo becomes embroiled in the political chaos of the budding South American republic. Even Macondo, imagined community that it is, does not escape the ultimately futile, though brutal, warring between the rival “Liberal” and “Conservative” factions. Aureliano Buendía, who becomes known as *Colonel* Aureliano Buendía after the outbreak of the wars, raises the village to a new level of significance in this climate by leading thirty-two campaigns during the conflict, garnering the first real attention directed toward Macondo from outside influences.

Throughout the fighting, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, unbeknownst to him, further solidifies Macondo’s place in the encompassing world by fathering seventeen sons, one of whom—Aureliano Triste—brings the first railroad to the town. The building of the

railroad is crucial to the town's history for two reasons: first, it is through the coming of the railroad that the banana company finds Macondo; and second, like Drake's attacks on Riohacha, this is another historically accurate point of connection signaling Macondo's status as a representation of reality. The banana industry, represented by the company which invades Macondo, and the violence it visits upon Colombia and other Latin American countries, depicted by the massacre the company instigates, are facts of Latin American history. The massacre itself is a fictionalized account of an actual event (Janes 79). Márquez both memorializes and utilizes the massacre and reactions to it in the novel.

A-Historical Macondo

Márquez's purposeful, consistent placement of historical reference points throughout the text does more than simply give Macondo the guise of reality. It also provides the basis for his critique of narrative. What he does is show how no singular explanation for or interpretation of these historical events is objectively "true." History itself and meaning that is derived from it flexes due to the tension between both differing perspectives and memory. In describing Márquez's manipulation of historical "fact," Regina Janes writes that "Instead of cleaving to a realistic historical time frame, he bends historical references as he bends realistic geography...For poetic purposes, he takes shocking liberties with 'real' history and rejects the historian's condition, captive to the truths of a foolish world" (67). From Macondo's origins in the Iguarán's leaving Riohacha to the town's figurative death after the departure of the banana company, Márquez undermines the factual interpretation of each historical event by introducing

alternative explanations for these events. Drake's attacks on Riohacha become subject to the consequences resulting from them:

...every time Úrsula became exercised over her husband's mad ideas, she would leap back over three hundred years of fate and curse the day that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha. It was simply her way of giving herself some relief, because actually they were joined till death by a bond that was more solid than love: a common prick of conscience. They were cousins. (20)

In the novel, Drake's attack—historical fact—in itself has no value or intrinsic meaning. There is no explanation given for them, except as a way of coping with marital frustrations between Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía. Úrsula blames Drake for her marrying such an eccentric, stubborn man. While this episode is humorous, it reveals two things. First, Úrsula utilizes another's actions to explain her own and to help expiate her own guilt. Secondly, the “actual” reason for an objective, historical occurrence is unimportant. At this point, the novel does not explain why Drake attacks Riohacha. All that matters, as the episode itself suggests, is the way it impacts those who remember it or how they believe it impacted them. True, the Iguarán's left Riohacha for the sake of Úrsula's great-great-grandmother, “who did not dare fall asleep lest she dream of the English and their ferocious attack dogs as they came through the windows of her bedroom” (19). Her husband, after the attacks,

spent half the value of his store on medicines and pastimes in an attempt to alleviate her terror. Finally, he sold the business and took the family to live far from the sea in a settlement of peaceful Indians located in the foothills, where he

built his wife a bedroom without windows so that the pirates of her dream would have no way to get in. (19)

Clearly, Riohacha survived the attack. Businesses are still flourishing, as evidenced by the continued success of the Iguaráns' store before they sell it and by the fact that they were able to sell it at all. Yet in the mind of Úrsula's great-great-grandmother—who "gave up all kinds of social activity," which is still going on after the attack—the marauding English are ever-present. The psychological damage suffered by this woman is far worse than the literal damage done to her community. What motivates the Iguaráns to leave Riohacha, then, is not Drake's attack at all but rather the mental health of Úrsula's great-great-grandmother. Her haunting memory of the attack overrides her ability to functionally engage reality. Later, Úrsula further reinterprets history by blaming Drake, not just for the Iguaráns' leaving Riohacha behind, but for her own actions three hundred years removed. The historical Drake has relatively little to do with Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía's marriage, but by presenting this way of reassigning blame as an attempt to assuage Úrsula's "prick of conscience," the novel deftly camouflages the devaluation of Drake's actions from being a historical event in its own right to becoming a mere scapegoat for the later actions of others.

At the end of the novel, he revisits the Riohacha episode through Aureliano Babilonia's reading of the parchments and confirms that "Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha only so that they [Aureliano Babilonia and Aramanta Úrsula] could seek each other through the most intricate labyrinths of blood" (416). That is, without realizing it, Drake attacked Riohacha for the sole purpose of guaranteeing the marriage of two people

who would be born three centuries after his own time—his own intentions notwithstanding, of course. What the novel rather transparently indicates is that historical facts and events have no stable meaning or explanatory value. Regardless of what Drake's attack on Riohacha means for Drake's biography, British naval history, the annals of European colonialism, or any other field of inquiry, for Úrsula's great-great-grandmother, Úrsula, and Aureliano Babilonia the event has different meanings, meanings unique to each of these individuals. Márquez's treatment of Drake's attack on Riohacha is both the example of and frame for Macondo's previously noted series of encounters with the outside world. Each stage of Macondo's history reveals the disconnection between events and actions on one hand and meaning on the other.

Similarly, the magistrate's coming to Macondo, while an expected event due to the village's being founded within the jurisdiction of a national government, is nevertheless characterized by arbitrariness. As José Arcadio Buendía himself notes, the town does not need him:

he gave a detailed account of how they had founded the village, of how they had distributed the land, opened the roads, and introduced the improvements that necessity required without having bothered the government and without anyone having bothered them...No one was upset that the government had not helped them. On the contrary they were happy that up until then it had let them grow in peace, and he hoped that it would continue leaving them that way (56)

Don Apolinar Moscote's arrival is as arbitrary and needless as is his first act as magistrate, passing a decree that "all the houses be painted blue in celebration of the

anniversary of national independence” (55). His attempt to impose external order upon a situation that neither asks for it nor requires it leads to the first serious (serio-comic, perhaps) conflict in Macondo. The conflict itself is rather silly, but it is the catalyst for a battle of wills between an outsider—the magistrate, an enforcer of other people’s laws and forms of order—against Macondo itself, which is represented first in the form of José Arcadio Buendía, the village’s foremost founder, and then in the form of the entire collective of founders. However one defines the role of government, it cannot be denied that the people of Macondo had been to this point a good government unto themselves, an argument which José Arcadio Buendía clearly lays out. Therefore external government is unnecessary—meaningless in purpose and, as this conflict demonstrates, inadequate in efficacy. The very ridiculousness of the conflict highlights the needlessness of external government in Macondo and consequently, the instability of externally imposed order. Through this instability, the novel again shows that meaning is not intrinsically or objectively definable. Instead, it is an elusive, arbitrarily defined quality.

Not surprisingly, this sense of ambiguity or uncertainty is echoed in the later revolutions which follow shortly after the government recognizes Macondo by sending the magistrate. War breaks out between the ruling Conservative party and the Liberals. Regardless of the ideals each side claims to uphold, the fighting disintegrates into abject chaos as the rival factions display their real agenda, a shared pursuit for power. Ironically enough, the war is contrived. Don Apolinar Moscote, representative of the Conservative party, tampers with the elections in “a town with no political passions” (95). Earlier, the magistrate had sent soldiers “from house to house confiscating hunting weapons,

machetes, and even kitchen knives” (95) to prevent violence, but he later reveals to Aureliano that he only collected these things “as proof that the Liberals were preparing for war” (96). Márquez notes that what “really caused the indignation of the town was not the results of the elections but the fact that the soldiers had not returned the weapons” (96). Stoking the flames of discontent are the subtle machinations of Dr. Alirio Noguera, the fraudulent physician, who due to “his instincts of an agitator” (97), not political ideals, “made contact with the young people in the town, who lacked political knowledge, and he embarked on a stealthy campaign of instigation” (97). Macondo’s citizens do not care about the elections or political parties—they do care about their kitchen knives. The town’s youth, so instrumental in bringing about the revolt in Macondo shortly after this point, know nothing about politics until they are poisoned with Noguera’s “skein of subversion” (97) and “instigated” to action by that “agitator.” Arcadio, José Arcadio’s son by Pilar Ternera, is one of those youths so poisoned. His uncle Aureliano “tried to calm down his drive,” recommending “discretion and prudence to him” (99). However, Arcadio is “deaf to his calm reasoning, to his sense of reality” (99). War does come to Macondo, but in Macondo—as in the rest of the country—it shows itself to be meaningless, devoid of “calm reasoning” and any “sense of reality.” The war is the result of a contrived situation rather than disagreement based upon genuine principle. Even the way Don Apolinar Moscote first characterizes the Liberal party to Aureliano—“The Liberals, he said, were Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests” while “The Conservatives, on the other hand, who had received their power directly from God,

proposed the establishment of public order and morality” (95)—further reveals the irrationality at the roots of the impending disaster.

Installed as Macondo’s leader after Aureliano seizes the town from the occupying Conservative forces, Arcadio continues to show himself to be an exemplar of irrationality and to be thoroughly devoid of principle. For one who reproached Aureliano “in public for his weakness of character” (99-100), Arcadio is even more arbitrary in judgment than his Conservative predecessor and more violent than the Conservative army captain who he replaces. To Colonel Aureliano Buendía’s parting injunction that he “try to have it [Macondo] in better shape when we return,” he “gave a very personal interpretation” (104). Arcadio’s municipal endeavors include inventing “a uniform with the braid and epaulets of a marshal, inspired by the prints in one of Melquiades’ books” and issuing “harebrained decrees” (105), of which he “would read as many as four a day in order to decree and institute everything that came into his head” (104). His achievements include once having someone “shot for disrespect for the authorities” (104-105) after this person causes people to laugh when Arcadio enters a store, laughter which Arcadio takes to be at his expense. After Don Apolinar Moscote makes a comment about his rule, Arcadio “assaulted the house [Don Apolinar Moscote’s house], destroyed the furniture, flogged the daughters” (105), and would have killed the magistrate had Úrsula not stepped in and saved him. In light of his actions, Arcadio’s idealistic, “fiery proclamations” (104) are as arbitrarily defined as the semblance of righteousness Don Apolinar Moscote and the Conservatives pretend to maintain. As part of his uniform, he wears the deposed Conservative captain’s sword—the same captain who had presided over the extra-judicial

execution of Noguera, the unwarranted beating of Father Nicanor, and the barbaric bludgeoning of a woman “who had been bitten by a mad dog” (100). Arcadio, mirroring the captain in his military regalia and despotic behavior, is indistinguishable from the people and principles he so fervently claims to despise.

With Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Márquez continues to represent the collapse of the war and its opposing ideologies into gross ambiguity. Except for almost constant bloodshed and misery, the Colonel’s brutal campaigns, thirty-two in all, lead to nothing. As Márquez puts it, “The only thing left of all that was a street that bore his name in Macondo” (103). Each campaign is part of a cycle of initial optimism descending to disappointment and eventual defeat, each one being as pointless as the rest. During the seventeenth campaign—not coincidentally halfway through his full cycle of thirty-two—Colonel Aureliano Buendía realizes that he does not know why he is fighting. After much thought, he discusses the problem with his friend, Colonel Gerineldo Márquez:

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

“What other reason could there be?” Colonel Gerineldo Márquez answered. “For the great Liberal party.”

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

“That’s bad,” Colonel Gerineldo Márquez said.

Colonel Aureliano Buendía was amused at his alarm. “Naturally,” he said. “But in any case it’s better than not knowing why you’re fighting.” He looked at him in the eyes and added with a smile:

“Or fighting, like you, for something that doesn’t have any meaning for anyone.”

(135-136)

This depiction of epistemological collapse into uncertainty, perhaps the most tragic in One Hundred Years of Solitude, is so blatant that it speaks for itself. Young Aureliano, who at one time “could not understand how people arrived at the extremes of waging war over things that could not be touched with the hand” (95) becomes Colonel Aureliano Buendía, who at the end of his campaigns goes “to inconceivable extremes of cruelty to put down the rebellion of his own officers” (170), and the man himself confesses that he does not know why.

Metaphorical Macondo

Márquez introduces the notion of the metaphorical in One Hundred Years of Solitude through “mystery” and repeatedly directs attention to this theme by way of direct reference and conspicuously similar imagery. In the first chapter, he announces through José Arcadio Buendía that this mystery—the misconstrued phenomenon of ice—is “the great invention of our time” (18). José Arcadio Buendía makes this declaration reverently “with his hand on the [ice] cake, as if giving testimony on the holy scriptures” (18). He does not understand what he experiences, but he attempts to attach meaning to it nonetheless. From the very beginning, the novel lays the foundation for what becomes

one of the central themes of the novel: the mysterious nature of the testimony, or narrative, of human experience.

The three parallel threads—the mythical, historical, and a-historical—comprise the first level of metaphor in One Hundred Years of Solitude: the encapsulation of human experience—from origins through successive levels of development (and, eventually, death)—within one frame of focus, the town of Macondo. All the while, through constructing this primary metaphor, the novel depicts the decidedly ambiguous nature of assumedly objective experience, ambiguity which he both mimics and compounds by way of the narrative's own labyrinthine structure and composition. Inasmuch, Macondo becomes a metaphor for narrative through which the novel probes the limitations of narrative form. Naturally, in the presence of such multifarious textual ambiguity and the resulting absence of verifiable meaning, the question arises: how is one to engage the text? Furthermore, does this ambiguity—this de-centeredness—not, at its roots, lie within the language out of which the text is formed?

Of course, Márquez does not give a decisive answer for these questions. To do so would jeopardize the persistent sense of ambiguity he takes such pains to craft and maintain throughout the narrative. The fact that he does not let his own narrative escape these questions in itself is perhaps the most telling measure of all. Nevertheless, Márquez does address the issue in the text in relating the events accompanying the coming of the train to Macondo.

Colonel Aureliano Buendía's wide-ranging warring, representative of Latin American political turmoil, is the pretext for his fathering seventeen sons, all named

Aureliano. One of these sons, Aureliano Triste, is responsible for bringing the first railroad to Macondo, the “innocent yellow train that was to bring so many ambiguities and certainties, so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, so many changes, calamities, and feelings of nostalgia to Macondo” (222). In an uncommon, explicitly communicative moment, Márquez signals that this event carries great import for Macondo, and consequently the novel, by denoting the lasting, intangible effects that will be brought about by way of the railroad. His transparency emphasizes the significance of what follows.

However, the coming of the train is not important in itself; rather, it is what the train brings to Macondo, literally and figuratively, which warrants attention. The townspeople become

...indignant over the living images that the prosperous merchant Bruno Crespi projected in the theater...for a character who had died and was buried in one film and for whose misfortune tears of affliction had been shed would appear alive and transformed into an Arab in the next one. The audience, who paid two cents apiece to share the difficulties of the actors, would not tolerate that outlandish fraud...The Mayor at the urging of Bruno Crespi, explained in a proclamation that the cinema was a machine of illusions...With that discouraging explanation many felt that they had been victims of some new and showy gypsy business and they decided not to return to the movies, considering that they already had too many troubles of their own to weep over the acted-out misfortunes of imaginary beings. (223)

Márquez draws a clear parallel between the cinema and his own narrative. Like the films shown in Bruno Crespi's cinema, his narrative shows "living images" which live, die, and come back to life either in the form of memories, replicas, or more dramatically (pun intended), as apparitions. Prudencio Aguilar, whom José Arcadio Buendía kills before founding Macondo, later "would come twice a day to chat with him" (139). Colonel Aureliano Buendía's seventeen sons are "men of the most varied appearance, of all types and colors, but all with a solitary air that would have been enough to identify them anywhere on earth" (215). The citizens of Macondo regard with nearly religious conviction what they see displayed before them in the theater. Film here representing textual form, they view the text, as it were, and ascribe the images it presents—mere symbols within the text—to reality. Instead of seeing the images as images, as representations of a thing, they hold the images to be the things in themselves. When this method of viewing, or "reading," fails due to the multiplicity (or duplicity) of the images—that is, ambiguity within the text—such as when one image takes the form of another from film to film, these viewers or "readers" are left in crisis, although their reaction indicates that they fault the text itself rather than their own understanding of how to "read" it. Without question, Márquez's reader is subjected to the same "outlandish fraud" Bruno Crespi's moviegoers are subjected to in the resurrection of characters and the fantastic plurality and ambiguity of both characters and events running through the entirety of One Hundred Years of Solitude. The narrative, like the cinema, is a "machine of illusions" displaying the "acted-out misfortunes of imaginary beings" as well as their occasional moments of happiness. It is faith in the synchronicity between the "living

images” and reality that causes the reader, like the moviegoers in Macondo, to be concerned only with what the text could impart—meaning in all the madness and “misfortune.” The result is that the reader arrives at a choice between binary opposites in cognitive approaches: dogmatic adherence to the text as a facsimile of reality, which the novel shows to be impossible in every sense; and permanent disengagement from the text, which forces the question of relevance back upon the text and language on the whole.

The dilemma is further exemplified through continued commentary relating the effects of the coming of the railroad on the populace of Macondo:

...when someone from the town had the opportunity to test the crude reality of the telephone installed in the railroad station...even the most incredulous were upset. It was as if God had decided to put to the test every capacity for surprise and was keeping the inhabitants of Macondo in a permanent alternation between excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation, to such an extreme that no one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay. It was an intricate stew of truths and mirages...(224)

Yet again, the novel couches an intimated missive in terms of a communicative device—in this case, the telegraph. The device confounds its users even as they use it. There is not a better metaphor for narrative, especially for this particular narrative, in the whole remainder of the novel. The device, in all its “crude reality,” is a stand-in for narrative, and Márquez, in an act of self-implication and ironic self-deprecation, places his own novel squarely within the scope of his criticism. Nonetheless, his self-deprecation is

ironic in light of the fact that immediately after calling out his own work as “crude,” he references himself in his role as the author “as if” he were “God.” Indeed, the “god” or author of this narrative does keep both his characters and his reader “in permanent alternation between excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation.” Nothing in One Hundred Years of Solitude can be known for sure—even concerning the most fundamental aspects of reality, such as life and death. Taking into account an earlier example, the reader is asked to believe that Sir Francis Drake did attack Riohacha, not for the reasons he believed he did, but so that Aureliano Babilonia and Aramanta Úrsula “could seek each other through the most intricate labyrinths of blood.” Later, through the eyes of José Arcadio Segundo, the reader witnesses masses of protesting workers “swept down by the wave of bullets” from “the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns” (306) only to be told later that “There haven’t been any dead here...nothing has happened in Macondo” (308). Although of the “man corpses, woman corpses, child corpses” (307) he estimates “There must have been three thousand,” José Arcadio Segundo finds that his own brother disbelieves him and that “The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally accepted: there were no dead...” (309). The reader suffers along with José Arcadio Segundo in a debilitating epistemological crisis of knowledge when faced with these irreconcilable opposites, but the novel does nothing to resolve this crisis—of which this particular episode is just one example out of a series too expansive to recount. Instead, the novel constantly nurtures and adds to it throughout the text. In each facet of its existence, as mythical or historical

(and a-historical), Macondo's story is "an intricate stew of truth and mirages." Like the inhabitants of Macondo, at no point in One Hundred Years of Solitude does the reader truly know "for certain where the limits of reality lay."

CHAPTER FOUR

PYNCHON, MÁRQUEZ, AND METAFICTION

Crisis and Strategies

Through the course of their respective novels, both Pynchon and Márquez leave the reader in the same condition, in the same place: stripped of all conventional narrative bearings and stranded in the resulting darkness of epistemic uncertainty. Their novels show the presumed connection between narrative and reality to be faulty at best and demonstrate the inability of narrative, or the language it is crafted from, to communicate stable meaning—meaning which is wholly objective or approaches the status of Truth.

Furthermore, both novels are so meticulous in fabricating narrative ambiguity and convoluted that what little surety (perhaps surety is too strong a word) can be gleaned from one stage of critical analysis is nearly swept away by another. As wholly “de-centered,” organic works there is no central mechanism in either which, if accessed and understood, would unlock the mysteries of these texts. This situation leaves the reader trapped within yet another level of uncertainty: without narrative conventions, and assumptions about narrative, to fall back on, how does one approach The Crying of Lot 49 and One Hundred Years of Solitude? How does one approach any narrative after encountering the likes of these? The former identifies and extirpates its depiction of the traditional binary paradigm of reading strategies, that of the “Puritan” and that of the “tourist/voyeur.” Similarly, the latter castigates the arbitrary authoritarianism exhibited in the assumedly necessary binary orbit of textual reality and realistic text. Between the two of them, these novels almost entirely rule out reading as it is commonly known.

While a conclusive answer to this conundrum is patently impossible to derive from either text, both texts offer a framework for what can be utilized as a strategy for apprehension—a functional reading strategy, so to speak. A functional reading strategy such as the one about to be explained should not be confused with claims about methods of locating bona fide meaning or reconciling narrative ambiguity within the texts. Rather, such a strategy simply suggests an approach for grappling with the interminable convolutions of these narratives.

Since both novels can be considered texts about texts, analyzing the novels' treatment of the various "texts" within them can offer insight into how to treat the novels themselves. Pynchon's title identifies his novel's primary internal text: Lot 49, Pierce Inverarity's massive stamp collection. The primary example of internal texts in One Hundred Years of Solitude is slightly more complex—it is an amalgam of Melquiades' parchments and the mirror and dream imagery which foreshadows, parallels, and culminates in the parchments. Analysis of the relationship between each of these internal texts and its respective encompassing novel reveals a meta-fictional narrative woven into the primary narratives of both novels. As Roberto González Echevarría puts it, "It is commonplace...to say that the novel always includes the story of how it is written, that it is a self-reflexive genre. The question is why and how it is so at specific moments" (29). In each case, the meta-fictional element functioning within the novel mirrors the essential activity of the primary narrative, a process represented most dramatically by and culminating in the apocalyptic ending shared by both.

The Crying of Lot 49 and Lot 49

With almost any other author or novel, one would most likely be justified in automatically assigning thematic significance or some level of textual import to the title the author has chosen for the novel. However, as this thesis demonstrates, with Pynchon and The Crying of Lot 49 nothing can be taken for granted, even something so basic as a title. Nevertheless, in this case, even a normally sound supposition like this one would be incorrect. As Genghis Cohen explains to Oedipa, “crying” refers to an auctioneer’s role: “We say an auctioneer ‘cries’ a sale” (151). And, indeed, Lot 49, a portion Pierce Inverarity’s stamp collection, is up for sale at the end of the novel. Yet, such a title—with its other, immediately obvious possible implications—begs further examination.

Inverarity’s stamp collection assumes a critical role in the novel. Not only does it serve as one of the main vehicles for Oedipa’s descent into epistemological chaos, but it also serves as a representation—or a reflection—of the novel itself. The novel uses the stamp collection to both manifest and symbolize the metafictional project of The Crying of Lot 49, a function which can be demonstrated by analysis of the stamp collection’s remarkable entrance into and exit from the narrative—the only points at which it is considered in its entirety.

Pynchon introduces the stamp collection immediately following Oedipa’s “peculiar” seduction at the hands of Metzger, after which to Oedipa it seems “As if...there were revelation in progress all around her” (31). It is important to note at this point before going any further that the “As if” qualifier, which renders “revelation in progress” possible but not certain, bears what Thomas Schaub refers to as “religious

implications...for Oedipa's clues may be sacred signs as well as secular information”

(31). This religious overtone is important to the argument's development at a later moment. Continuing with the previous potentiality, Pynchon discloses that

Much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left, his substitute often for her—thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time: savannahs teeming with elands and gazelles, galleons sailing west into the void, Hitler heads, sunsets, cedars of Lebanon, allegorical faces that never were, he would spend hours peering into each one, ignoring her. She had never seen the fascination. The thought that now it would all have to be inventoried and appraised was only another headache. No suspicion at all that it might have something to tell her...what after all could the mute stamps have told her...(31-32)

That what Oedipa experiences later on actually is *revelation* remains to be seen at this point in the novel, though it becomes quite obvious by the end that this “revelation” is certainly not revelation as the term is normally used. The stamp collection, in itself, is not a revelatory document—it is not even a document, in the proper sense. The “thousands of little colored windows” are a vast amalgam of purposefully collected, but never purposefully used, devices both allowing and depicting communication over untold geographical and chronological spans both literally and figuratively. On the surface, these devices, the stamps, do not directly communicate values. Pierce “would spend hours peering into each one” and it is never clear whether he gains anything from his study but the ire of his mistress, who afterwards regards them as “only ex-rivals” (32). One uses a

stamp to conduct communication, such as in the form of a letter (like Pierce's codicil) to which one affixes a stamp so that the letter may be "communicated to" another party. As such, the stamps are only "windows" through which information may be passed.

However, these windows, as Pynchon states, are "windows into deep vistas of space and time." The weightiness of this denotation—should Pynchon be momentarily desisting from his normal devilry—indicates significance beyond the surface-level value of the stamps. Still functioning as "windows," the stamps become portals through which, in their role as communicative implements, "deep vistas" can be cognitively experienced. Exactly what he means by "deep vistas" Pynchon does not say, yet in connection with the "revelation" that "was to come through the stamp collection," it is more than safe to claim information-bearing—but not *meaning*-bearing—qualities on the part of the stamps themselves.

Therefore, the stamp collection takes on a life of its own, becoming recognizable as a text within the text. It is not only a tool for communicating information; though its value is indefinite and vaguely circumscribed, it is nevertheless a quantity of information in itself. Accordingly, the stamp collection reflects the undefined (perhaps indefinable) nature and convoluted structure of the narrative on the whole. The narrative, like the stamp collection, is a collection of "thousands of little colored windows." In terms of the narrative, the "windows" are words, which are "colored" in the sense of being inscribed in an artifact, the book The Crying of Lot 49, and there are thousands of them in the book (not so many thousands as in One Hundred Years of Solitude, but thousands nonetheless). These thousands of inscribed words do in fact reveal "deep vistas," like

Pynchon notes the stamps do for Oedipa. As explained in the first chapter, Pynchon's reader mirrors Oedipa in her quest for revelation—for meaning—throughout the course of the novel, from her optimistic beginning to her catastrophic cognitive collapse at the end. The reader, who cannot see into the narrative future and ascertain the utilization and significance of the stamps, since this is knowledge that is equally barred to Oedipa, cannot possibly fathom the reason for Pierce's "fascination" or Pynchon's fixation with the stamps. At this point, the reader, too, has "No suspicion at all that it might have something to tell." Although after this mention the reader is privy to the notion that the stamps "might" have something to communicate to Oedipa and thusly the reader herself, the novel diffuses this "suspicion" by couching the notion in terms of a possibility and by allowing the collection as a whole to disappear quietly from the narrative. Tellingly enough, hereafter the stamps are not discussed again as a unit until the very end of the novel.

Pynchon's rhetorical question—"what after all could the mute stamps have told her...?"—concerning Oedipa's, and by extension the reader's, relationship to the collection directs attention back to Oedipa's preconceptions about determining meaning. Oedipa, soon to come into her own as Driblette's Puritan and a closet tourist/voyeur, regards the collection with the "inventory and appraise" approach of the former and the unstudied disconnectedness of the latter—dealing with the collection was, after all, "only another headache," especially considering the frustrated sexual undertones of the figurative "love triangle" between Oedipa, Pierce Inverarity, and his stamps (her "ex-rivals," remember). Since it is Oedipa's semiconscious but unwavering commitment to

these approaches which leads to her crisis in the end, the first stirrings of these approaches in Oedipa's consideration of the stamp collection fares no better for her. To her, it is a collection of "mute stamps," but in truth it is her methods of listening which deafen her to what the stamps could have told her. Likewise, for the reader, who the novel implicates along with Oedipa in warped methodology, the thousands of windows/words comprising The Crying of Lot 49 are mute in the sense that the end of the narrative leaves the reader grasping for meaning when that is not what the narrative has to offer. The mixed metaphor only intensifies, not diminishes, understanding the extent to which narrative allows the reader to blind (or deafen) himself to the "deep vistas" it makes accessible.

The end of this meta-fictional frame coincides with the end of the narrative. As soon as Oedipa enters the room in which the auction is to be held and where the "Tristero 'forgeries' were to be sold, as Lot 49" (145),

An assistant closed the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun. She heard a lock snap shut; the sound echoed for a moment. Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps to a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of Lot 49. (152)

Fittingly, the novel closes with apocalyptic imagery. With the closing of the "heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun," the door closes on the source and symbol of life for the world, not just the external world sustained by the closed energy transfer from the sun to the earth but also the necessarily closed world of the novel, as well. Oedipa's hearing

the “lock snap shut” further enhances the idea of the novel’s world being shut off from its life source as the novel winds down to its figurative demise. Once again appropriating unmistakably Biblical language, this time from the Book of Revelation, the novel compares Passerine the auctioneer—the one presiding over the destruction of the stamp collection—to a “descending angel” whose role is markedly similar to the “mighty angel coming down from heaven” who heralds the last and final trumpet in St. John’s Apocalypse (Revelation 10:1).

Both the stamp collection and the novel come to an end at the same moment. The crying, or auctioning off, of Lot 49 fulfills Pynchon’s earlier foreshadowing of the fate of the stamp collection, which is “about to be broken up into lots, on route to any number of new masters” (32). This breaking-up of the text within the text mirrors the apocalypse suffered by the narrative itself, which at the close of the text—at the end of the reader’s act of reading, that is—will be annihilated by its ceasing to be experienced.

Mirrors within Mirrors in One Hundred Years of Solitude

In lieu of objective meaning—or Truth—Márquez offers no substitute save continuous convolution itself, a cyclical rendering of *un*-meaning which he figuratively represents in the novel through repeated instances of mirror and dream imagery. The succession of mirror and dream imagery runs the length of the novel and “reflects” the multifaceted, prismatic nature of narrative, as One Hundred Years of Solitude reveals it to be. In conjunction with the narrative’s mythic attributes—supernatural phenomena and fantastic events, characters, etc.—this pervasive mirroring effect further confounds any

sense of conclusive meaning and literally epitomizes Márquez's critique of narrative form.

Several critical episodes transpire which serve to illuminate Márquez's thoughts on the matter. Analysis of these major episodes, each one an example of mirror imagery or dream sequence or both, reveals them to be connected in such a way that they can be viewed as a metafictional narrative encapsulated within the primary narrative. This second narrative becomes the focus of the primary narrative by the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude and invites a different reading, or parallel reading alongside the first, of the primary narrative itself.

The first of these episodes occurs very early in the novel, suggestive of its future thematic importance. During his search for the sea, José Arcadio Buendía dreams one night of "a city with houses having mirror walls" (24). The "mirror walls" trouble him, but he does not "succeed in deciphering the dream...until the day he discovered ice" (24). José Arcadio Buendía, as is typical of him, seizes on the most literal interpretation of his dream. Yet the novel indicates a deeper, less literal interpretation of the dream, a fact confirmed by the explanation that José Arcadio Buendía only "thought he understood its deep meaning," (24). The novel virtually states that the dream has "deep" significance, and both its treatment of José Arcadio Buendía's interpretation and the sheer ridiculousness of such an idea (a city made of ice) clearly point to a metaphorical alternative. The author offers a clue to this quandary, noting that José Arcadio Buendía is "filled with fear and jubilation at the contact with mystery," which he regards "without

understanding,” (17). He applies the literal to the non-literal, revealing a supremely confused, though amusing intellect in the process.

As if to confirm the importance or meaning of the earlier depiction of metaphorical mirrors in José Arcadio Buendía’s dream, the novel again employs mirror imagery in the second of that character’s dreams. Toward the end of his life, José Arcadio Buendía has fallen into not so much senility as permanent incomprehensibility. He is aware of the workings of his own mind, but not of that which happens around him. He often dreams of an endless series of rooms, “as in a gallery of parallel mirrors” (139), through which he wanders until awakened by the memory of Prudencio Aguilar. At the beginning and end of his Macondo experience, José Arcadio Buendía dreams of mirrored images which he cannot explain. What is even more interesting, however, is the fact that he dies because he believes that he has returned to the original, real room—the real world—but is still in fact dreaming. He confuses image and reality for the last time.

In relentless application of mirror imagery, Márquez notes that the final method the household uses to determine José Arcadio Buendía’s condition is a mirror held close to his nose. Reality, whatever it may be, is determined not directly but through a secondary means, through image and impression—the reflected movement of nostrils and the telling mist of breath on the surface of the mirror (were he to be still alive).

The dreams and mirrors do not end with José Arcadio Buendía. Colonel Aureliano Buendía has a similar dream to that of his father’s. Aureliano, as boy, touches the block of ice along with his father: “Little José Arcadio refused to touch it. Aureliano, on the other hand, took a step forward and put his hand on it, withdrawing it immediately.

‘It’s boiling,’ he exclaimed, startled” (17). Like his father, he is branded, in a sense, by the experience of the ice. He remembers it while standing before an execution squad and on the day of his death. It is no coincidence that José Arcadio, who does not touch the ice, does not have the dreams which visit his father and brother. Their shared dispositions, signaled by their shared reaction to the ice, lead them to spend the greater part of their lives sequestered in the laboratory, cut off from the rest of the Buendía household. True, Colonel Aureliano has his military campaigns, but he himself admits that the only reason he continues fighting is his pride (135). As soon as he allows himself to be consumed by his own disillusionment, he settles back in Macondo and returns to his largely uninterrupted isolation, or solitude, in the workshop.

Colonel Aureliano’s dream of “an empty house with white walls” (265) is reminiscent of his father’s in that it repeats itself night after night. His dream, however, cannot be remembered “except within the dream itself” (265). It is its own record, to which the man experiencing it only has access on its own terms. It is an entity which both arises from him yet is also separate from him. The last time he has this dream—and, not insignificantly, the moment Márquez chooses to describe the Colonel’s dream—is the day Aureliano dies. On this day, he allows his memories to resurface as he watches the parade pass: “and for the first time since his youth he knowingly fell into a trap of nostalgia and relived that prodigious afternoon of the gypsies when his father took him to see ice” (266-267). His final experience of the inaccessible dream immediately precedes an influx of exiled, emotionally and spiritually charged memories brought about by actual

events occurring before him. The correlation between memory and actuality—image and reality—leads to Aureliano’s epistemic crisis:

once more he saw the face of his miserable solitude when everything had passed by and there was nothing but the bright expanse of the street and the air full of flying ants with a few onlookers peering into the precipice of uncertainty. Then went to the chestnut tree, thinking about the circus, and while he urinated he tried to keep on thinking about the circus, but he could no longer find the memory.

(267)

His experience and memory of experience merge, stripping him of the ability to cognitively apprehend either. Aureliano dies in an infantile state, with “his head in between his shoulders like a baby chick” (267). The similarities between his end and that of his father are several and significant. Colonel Aureliano dies under the same chestnut tree which sheltered José Arcadio Buendía in his dementia for years. Both deaths are heralded by strikingly similar recurring dreams. Lastly (as it pertains to this discussion), both deaths are the result of the dissolution of the barrier between image and reality: José Arcadio Buendía gets stuck in his own mind by the memory of Prudencio Agilar, and Colonel Aureliano effectively loses his ability to function when the previously dammed-up floodwaters of his memory overwhelm his waking reality.

The novel’s critique of narrative comes to a crescendo, both figuratively and literally, at the very end in the revelation of the parchments to Aureliano Babilonia. The description of the parchments bears reproducing at length:

It was the history of the family, written by Melquiades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time. He had written it in Sanskrit, which was his mother tongue, and he had encoded the even lines in the private cipher of the Emperor Augustus and the odd ones in a Lacedemonian military code. The final protection, which Aureliano had begun to glimpse when he let himself be confused by the love of Amaranta Úrsula, was based on the fact that Melquiades had not put events in the order of man's conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant. (415)

Again, Biblical imagery conveys the significance of this event: the revelation of the parchments calls to mind the sealed scroll in the books of Daniel and Revelation in Scripture. Like Daniel, who is instructed to “close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end” (12:4), Melquiades devises a series of safeguards to ensure that the parchments are not to be read and understood until the end of the history which the parchments both foretell and record. According to Scripture, the scroll will not be open for all to read and understand until the proper moment, at the “time of the end,”—the Apocalypse. So, too, are Melquiades' parchments indecipherable until the end of Macondo:

he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror... 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...(416-417)

Márquez doggedly persists with his emphasis on mirrors by describing the parchments as “a speaking mirror” and invoking José Arcadio Buendía’s original vision of Macondo, “the city of mirrors.” The parchments are the “speaking mirror” which reflects in totality the history, or narrative of Macondo, but the parchments themselves are included in this history and are subject to their own narration. The parchments, then, are the full realization of the mirrors and mirrored dreams.

Considering the fact that there is a direct line connecting each of the aforementioned dreams and instances of mirror imagery from father to son to the final namesake of the son (José Arcadio Buendía to Colonel Aureliano to the last Aureliano), culminating in the ultimate metaphor “speaking mirror”—the summary of narrative in the novel and of the novel—it is clear that the mirror imagery and dreams comprise a commentary on narrative itself. Like the mirrored surfaces and moments in the novel, narrative is a repetitive reflection of experience and memory. Narrative is therefore subject to the same flaws and deficiencies which plague human engagement with these things. Experience cannot be fully apprehended by human beings, whose perspective is limited by time and space. Memory is not a perfect record of even the severely limited experience which human beings can apprehend. Furthermore, those memories which are retained are constantly in a state of flux as time passes and experience becomes confused with memory and *vice versa*. Therefore the human experience (comprising both experience and memory), the basis of narrative, is a far from stable thing. It is not an

objective reality or definable state. It cannot be codified or plotted with any external sense of accuracy.

What is left to those who wish to construct a narrative, as Márquez and other humans are wont to do, is to gather the reflected, refracted, and sometimes otherwise distorted images of human experience from the imperfect though shining walls of the mind. These images are necessarily secondhand because they have been processed by limited human cognition, as a reflected image from a mirror imperfectly resembles the actual object being reflected. Stored in the seemingly endless rooms of the mind, these images can never be understood in their entirety because no one mind has the power or understanding to view all events without the divide between experience and memory. Narrative contains both experience and memory, but, to borrow scientific terminology, it is a colloid rather than a compound. In each of the previously mentioned episodes in the novel when experience and memory are confused or blended, annihilation results. José Arcadio Buendía dies as a result of his dream experience being interfered with by a memory. Aureliano dies when his memories overwhelm his immediate experience, leaving him without memory and the inability to experience further. Aureliano Babilonia, and Macondo are blown into oblivion by the apocalyptic whirlwind which accompanies his reading of the parchments, which completely reverses the natural separation between experience and memory as he calls into being the events which were foretold and are happening. Even the great Melquiades and his tribe of gypsies are “wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge” (38). Melquiades is subject to the laws of human experience—when he breaks them by

penning all the experience and memory of Macondo “in such a way that they coexisted in one instant,” he, too, is annihilated.

One Hundred Years of Solitude offers its audience this sort of reflected, refracted perspective. Of this novel, Stephen Minta says that

The story of Macondo is...a highly self-conscious literary work. It is concerned with the function of writing generally, with the proper role of literature, its limits, illusions, and deceptions. One of the most problematical aspects of any narrative is that, by its very form, it can so easily work to undermine our sense of the utterly unrepeatable nature of experience. (178)

The recurring mirrors and dreams haunt the reality of the human experience in the novel, continually calling into question the boundary between memory and experience while at the same time enforcing that boundary. Yet even as the Macondo narrative (primary narrative) careens to a close, he simultaneously broadens its significance by allowing it to take on another dimension, a dimension in which the experience of reading the narrative becomes a question in itself. Echevarría points out that the reader, like Aureliano Babilonia, does not have access to the meaning of the parchments until the end (29). Similarly, the reader cannot fully comprehend the parchments, and therefore the novel, until the end of both. The reader, in effect, takes the place of Aureliano Babilonia, and the parchments are the novel. Aureliano’s surname, which is only used in relation to him at the very end, takes on new significance in this light: *babilonia* means “confusion.” In his discussion of the metafictional aspect of One Hundred Years of Solitude, Iddo Landau says of metafiction that “...the distinction between the actual fictional work we are

reading and holding in our hands as part of reality and the fictional world which the work describes is blurred or collapses,” (115). The mirrors and dreams turn on the reader when the reader comes to realize that one is recreating the story of Macondo as one reads it. The act of simultaneous construction and destruction warps the traditional understanding of narrative such that it includes the reader within a second narrative, the narrative of reading the first. The memory of all that transpires in the novel read to completion and the experience of this aforementioned act create an endless cyclical effect reflected in the myriad mirrors and recurring dreams of José Arcadio Buendía, Colonel Aureliano, and Aureliano Babilonia. In an ingenious way, the novel guarantees that the reader is caught in this cycle: if the reader attempts to escape the cycle by ceasing to read the narrative, he is only proving the parchments correct in their prophesy that Macondo “would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men.” It would seem that the novel’s final comment on narrative is that it cannot be divorced from those reading it. Born out of human experience, it requires human experience to exist.

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