

INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a modern Colombian writer who has shown a great fascination ^{with} death in his novels. Macondo, the fictional world of the novelist, is a world teeming with mysteries and miracles. Moreover, it is a world in which death is a predominant figure. Not many modern western writers confront death as openly as Marquez does; however, the subject of death has fascinated many Latin American writers. In fact, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* places the obsessions of contemporary Latin American writing in an illuminating context.

In this thesis, I will examine Garcia Marquez' confrontation with death, through his works, and attempt to trace an emerging attitude or attitudes. On the one hand Garcia Marquez displays an attitude to death, that is secular in its outlook, and leaning heavily towards a modern existentialist view. This view sees death as meaningless and pessimistic, and lingers on the morbidity of death images.

On the other hand, one can detect in his confrontation with death, lingering religious attitudes. His imagination is striving to eliminate as much as possible, the evidences of physical dissolution by rearranging them in the view of eternity and regarding them as a transition to the spiritual life. In *No One Writes to the Colonel* and other stories, the story *The Handsomest Drowned Man* supports this transcendental view of death.

In the other view of death, the modern existentialist, pessimistic view, we have the predominance of the *momento mori*, the conqueror worm, and other paraphernalia of maggotry. Marquez, in his

modern existentialist view of death, sees the sterility and decadence of the modern 'wasteland' in the systems and institutions of Colombian politics and religion. He transposes these images of death and decay and sterility into a symbolic language. Throughout his books his language and style are modified and varied to deal with the different kinds of death as he sees them.

It is possible to trace from a study of his works, a very complex picture of his attitude to death.

Perhaps before we begin, it might be expedient to answer the question - Why does Marquez show such an obsessive concern with death? I believe that Marquez is attempting firstly, to work out his own views on death, views that are of necessity ambivalent, because of the ambivalent nature of man's view of his condition. His, Marquez', is the struggle of the sensitive modern artist as he undergoes the conflicts of a society of changing values that undermine the forcefulness of the system of eschatology.

Secondly, I believe that he is attempting to suggest to his readers that one of the novel's fundamental aims is to tell us something about the nature of contemporary Latin American writing, which we can see through Marquez' own works; that it acts as a kind of interpretative mediation. In this thesis I shall look at the different ways in which Marquez has used language as his own tool, which he modifies and varies to present his message, to deal with death.

In *Leafstorm and Other Stories*, published in 1955, death is used as a means of exploring the corruption and hypocrisy of the political and the religious institutions. It is done in a very unique way. By setting up the dead man as the focal point, and by use of a varying narrative perspective, he explores the relationship between the dead man and the rest of the town. By using, as a framework for

the story, a parallel to the classic *Antigone* by Sophocles, the attitudes of the town, representative of Colombian society, are revealed and scrutinized.

In *Leafstorm and Other Stories* I will also look at the story *The Handsomest Drowned Man*. I will focus on *Leafstorm* and *The Handsomest Drowned Man* to reveal two contrasting views of death and two contrasting treatments of death in terms of technical and linguistic devices.

In *No One Writes to the Colonel*, published in 1958, death is presented as a grim reality that seems to confirm the unimportance and futility of human life buried in economic survival. This story disguises a strong political message in the death of one of the characters, Agustin. He was the Colonel's son and has been killed by the anarchical forces in the town for distributing political pamphlets. Here Marquez makes a bold comment on the political anarchy of the society, and ^{this} labels ^{the} story as the closest Marquez will come to protest literature.

In this text I will also look at the story *Big Mama's Funeral* where death is treated in the symbolic tradition. It is obvious that Big Mama represents the establishment, the complex of wealthy and powerful landholders who control major portions of the national economy and who are a specific cause of the terrible *violencia* (violence). Her actual death is a metaphoric symbol of the death of the old political and social establishment.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* death is sometimes dealt with within a symbolic tradition, where it points to the novel being seen as a language of signs and patterns with intricate metaphorical and symbolic relationships. I will look at death in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as it functions as metaphor. In this kind of death, characters remain biologically alive, but exist in a death-in-life stasis.

In *Autumn of the Patriarch* I propose to examine how death, boldly speaking, the death of the dictator, dictates the basic narrative structure of the novel. We shall see how the organization of the narrative demonstrates a precise system constructed by Garcia Marquez. I propose to compare the work, *Autumn of the Patriarch* to *Leafstorm* to show how Marquez has used *Leafstorm* as the testing ground for this precise system, the organization of the narrative structure.

At the end of this thesis, I hope to show that Marquez has used the presentation of death in his works to point to political, social and other realities and as a means of working out his own attitudes to the subject.