

MINUTES  
of the Meeting of  
The Novel Club of Cleveland  
Tuesday, April 5, 2011

Location: Home of Whitney Lloyd, 2600 Wellington, Cleveland Heights

Hosts: Jack Conomy and Whitney Lloyd

Novel: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Papers: Biographical, Joyce Kessler; Critical, Bob Jackson

Approximately thirty members and friends of The Novel Club gathered at the home of Whitney Lloyd on April 5, 2011. Clyde asked for agenda items for the annual meeting, and requested reports from any other committees. The annual business meeting will take place May 1 at the home of Jay and Toby Siegel, beginning at 3:30 p.m. Toby circulated a sign-up list for contributions of food for the meeting. An Evite will be sent out to clarify the location and time. Siegels will be out of town before the meeting, so Leigh Fabens will take calls. Minutes of the March meeting were read.

**Joyce Kessler presented this month's biographical paper, entitled "The Writer's Labyrinth."**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was as a child fascinated with objects having potential magic as the "souls of things." He remembered as a baby wanting to be changed so as not to soil his new overalls, and described it as his first "aesthetic experience." He wanted to write stories that awakened the magic of his childhood in his grandfather's house, woven together with family stories of ghosts and mysteries which were told by his grandmother, servants, and others. He has never been able to sort through all the stories of his family's history, including that of a duel fought by his grandfather which was often told but from so many perspectives that it "resisted narrative." At a certain point he had a sudden insight how to tell these stories—to tell them "with a brick face" as his grandmother had done, mixing the fantastic and supernatural with the ordinary, believing them all together—and this approach yielded *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which was published in 1967.

Born in 1928, Gabriel was cared for by his maternal grandparents during his early years while his parents sought to improve their fortunes. He later studied law in Bogota, though he disliked law and Bogota. He gradually began to study literature, and to write and publish. William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka were among his early influences. Against the backdrop of "la violencia," the extended civil war in Colombia, he continued to write and publish both journalism and fiction. After a certain controversial journalistic publication, Garcia Marquez was sent by his employer to Italy for his own safety. Starting from that point, he traveled Europe, and sent back writings advocating Communism. He followed Cuban revolution and chronicled it. This began a period of intense political involvement, advocating socialist governments. He later began to doubt the superiority of socialism over democracy. He completed a book-length criticism of the Cuban revolution, but has not yet released the text.

Among his other most famous fictional works are *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, published in 1981, and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, published in 1985. In the meanwhile, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. He felt “terrified” to find himself in the company of previous Nobel Literature laureates, and said that the best thing about the Nobel ceremony was the release of yellow butterflies. He believes that yellow roses protect him, and has often written with a yellow rose on his desk.

Garcia Marquez is recently seen as writing less about politics, and more about love. He continued publishing fiction through the 1990s. He also founded New Journalism Foundation, sponsoring fellowships throughout South America, hoping to make the violent world about which he had written obsolete. In 1999, he purchased a news magazine. He has served as an executive in film foundations, producing films of several of his works. In 1999, he developed cancer of the lymph nodes. After successful treatment he is in remission and working on his memoirs. *Living to Tell the Tale*, the first of three projected volumes, was published in 2002.

### **Bob Jackson delivered the critical analysis.**

Of all Garcia Marquez’s works, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967, is the most complex. It has been called a “brilliant amalgamation” of elements from his own other works plus those of other authors including Faulkner. Its basic structure traces the Buendia family over one hundred years, beginning sometime in the early twentieth century. The fates of the Buendias and their town of Macondo are parallel. Perhaps the story also parallels that of the wandering tribes of Israel. The main aim of the novel is hard to identify— is it mainly satirical? Mainly intending to show that the line between fantasy and reality is unclear? Cultural relativity is an element, as for example a telescope may be an ordinary instrument or a fantastic object. Historical characters and mythical ones, memories and fantasies mix together freely. The main characters’ fear of bearing a pig-tailed child contributes to their solitude through the course of the novel.

Harold Bloom wrote that this novel is almost “too dense.” Each sentence, each word, each event carries such significance that it is almost too much for the reader. Novel club readers differed in their responses to this suggestion. Some who have read it numerous times concur that with “long attention” and repeated readings it develops more beauty and interest; also, having read the author’s memoir makes the novel more approachable, since the novel has many autobiographical elements. Others noted that it is helpful to read the shorter works (stories and novellas) as a lead-up to the masterpiece. Interest was expressed in combining this novel with Faulkner’s works in a multi-cultural course.

The Magical Realism of the novel seemed to several readers to be a still-effective technique. There was difference of opinion as to whether or not the novel was a good candidate to become the basis of a feature film, in which the dreamy, transformative characters at the heart of the novel could be conveyed through various special effects.

Some readers objected that the characters do not seem to develop; others responded that this is perhaps characteristic of Magical Realism, and/or that the novel is after all meant to be less about character development than about the total arc of a civilization over a century, the rise and fall of a family and a society. If readers don’t care very much about individual characters, perhaps this is because the book’s main concern is about place. If so, would familiarity with the folk tales of the place invoked be important to appreciation of the work? It was suggested

that the story has some characteristics of fable or parable, with characters functioning as exemplars of groups which have risen and fallen in the cyclic development of civilization, parallel to that of, for example, the Roman Empire. The incest theme is another example of this, with the pig-tailed baby here echoing consequences of incest in royal families of other historical cultures, and at the same time a consequence of solitude/isolation. Garcia Marquez's Nobel Prize acceptance lecture, which was distributed for our perusal, indeed suggests that Latin America in 1982 was living through a political phase similar to much earlier stages of European history.

Similarities were noted between this story line and that of our January text, Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (published in 1982). Readers noted that Allende's later book may be indebted to the earlier one, yet is presented in a more simple, linear way and is therefore perhaps more accessible.

Further discussion concerned parallels between this work and 1) those of Faulkner (to whom Garcia Marquez refers in the Nobel lecture as "my master"); 2) historical events related to the European conquest of South America and its later commercial exploitation; and 3) Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, which also seems to consider a broad sweep of history.

On the question of whether the novel presents a philosophy, opinions differed. Perhaps story-telling is more important than philosophy here; perhaps bits of different philosophies waft through the waves of Magical Realism; perhaps in showing problems of both liberalism and conservatism, the novel suggests a sort of political nihilism.

Overall response to the novel was mixed, but both presenters and numerous others concurred that it is a great if idiosyncratic work of twentieth-century literature.

Ten o'clock having arrived, the group returned to the refreshment tables for further treats and conversation, and the meeting ended for another month.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Fox