

**Narrative as a Trap: How the Reader Becomes a Buendía in
*One Hundred Years of Solitude***

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Abstract

This article examines *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez as a narrative that gradually draws the reader into the disoriented and predetermined world inhabited by the Buendía family. Although scholars have extensively examined this novel through the lens of magical realism, cyclical time and postcolonial discourse, this study shifts attention towards experiential engagement of the reader with the text. It notes that the recurring use of names causes identities to blur while the novel's fluctuating sense of time draws the reader into the same uncertainty experienced by the Buendía family. The final revelation of Melquiades' manuscript, written 100 years in advance, redefines the act of reading as an encounter with predestination, revealing that both the characters and the reader have been moving through an already determined narrative structure. Drawing upon reader-response theory and narrative temporality, the present article proposes that the solitude expands beyond the emotional isolation of characters to become an epistemological condition experienced by the reader. In this way, the novel does not merely represent repetition and entrapment but also repeats them within the reading process itself, ultimately turning the reader into a symbolic participant in the fate of the Buendía lineage.

Keywords: Magical Realism, Reader-Response Theory, Narrative Temporality, Predestination, Epistemological Condition

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez is one of the few novels that immerse readers in its narrative world with unusual intensity. The story of the Buendía family unfolds through repeated identities, overlapping moments in time and events that echo across generations, making it difficult for the reader to maintain certainty. As Márquez writes, “the future was confused by the past, but in spite of that they had learned to recognize the predictions” (Márquez 52). As the narrative progresses, the experience of reading the novel becomes similar to living in Macondo itself—disorienting, cyclical and often impossible to fully comprehend. Márquez captures this atmosphere of repetition when he writes, “time was not passing . . . it was turning in a circle” (131). This effect is not merely a result of narrative complexity but a carefully constructed artistic strategy through which Gabriel García Márquez invites the reader into the same patterns that govern the lives of his characters. As Úrsula observes, “it’s as if time were going around in a circle and we had returned to the beginning” (262).

Critical studies of the novel have approached it from multiple perspectives, particularly its treatment of time, history, solitude, political violence and the distinctive narrative techniques associated with magical realism. However, hardly any attention has been paid to the reader’s direct experience of moving through the narrative. The present study argues that the novel functions as a narrative trap that gradually transforms the reader from an outside observer into an active participant within its structure. Through repeated names such as Jose Arcadio, Aureliano, Remedios, Amaranta and Úrsula, along with its shifting chronology and the final revelation of Melquiades’ manuscript written a hundred years in advance, the novel creates uncertainty that mirrors the experience of the Buendía family itself. The inevitability of this pattern is anticipated in the prophetic statement that “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth” (417).

Drawing upon Wolfgang Iser’s view that “the reader himself is obliged to supply the missing links” (Iser 280) and Frank Kermode’s observation that “we project ourselves . . . past the End, so as to see the structure whole” (Kermode 8), this article argues that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* does not merely depict cycles of repetition and inevitability but structurally compels the reader to experience them through its fragmented temporality and circular narrative design.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, repetition becomes a powerful narrative device that unsettles the reader’s sense of clarity and identity. The novel features intentionally repeated names across seven generations of the Buendía family to reflect the cyclical nature of time and fate in Macondo. The naming patterns are heavily gendered, with men

often named as Josè Arcadio or Aureliano, and women named Urula, Remedios, or Amaranta. Along with names, it also has recurring personality traits across generations, which gradually make it difficult to distinguish one character from another. As Márquez notes, “While the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the José Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign”(182). Gradually, individual identities begin to dissolve into recurring patterns, making each character seem like part of an inherited cycle shaping the Buendia family’s existence (Márquez 54). The confusion created by these repetitions reflects José Arcadio Buendía’s observation that **“the world was so recent that many things lacked names”** (1), suggesting a reality where identity and meaning remain unstable from the very beginning.

Equally important is the novel’s treatment of time. Events do not unfold in chronological sequence but frequently overlap and echo one another. Colonel Aureliano Buendia’s memory of childhood while facing the firing squad collapses past and present into a single moment as he recalls, **“that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice”** (1). Similarly, prophecies appear before the events they predict, while generations seem to exist simultaneously rather than sequentially. Time therefore becomes fluid and circular, where past moments repeatedly return and merge with the present. This temporal instability is reflected in the description of Macondo as a place where **“there were no dead buried in the earth”** (79), blurring distinctions between memory, history and present reality.

Such narrative movement can be better understood through Paul Ricoeur’s idea through Paul Ricoeur’s observation that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative” (Ricoeur 52). In the novel, however, narrative no longer organises time clearly but produces a looping structure that resists certainty and coherence. As a result, the reader experiences the same uncertainty that governs life in Macondo. The novel does not merely depict confusion; it actively recreates it within the act of reading itself.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the final decoding of Melquíades’ manuscript stands as the most powerful moment because it completely transforms the reader’s understanding of the narrative. Until this moment, the story appears to unfold with uncertainty, as though the characters are moving freely through time and experience. The reader follows generations of the Buendía family believing that events are developing naturally, despite the recurring patterns and prophecies scattered throughout the novel. However, the revelation that Melquíades had written the entire history of the family a hundred years in advance suddenly alters the meaning of everything that has already been

read. The sense of predestination becomes increasingly visible through Melquíades' manuscripts, which contain "the destiny of the family, written by Melquíades, down to the most trivial details" (415).

The scene gains even greater significance when Aureliano Babilonia finally deciphers the manuscript and realises that he is reading the prophecy of his own final moments at the very instant they occur. In this bizarre convergence of reading and experience, interpretation itself becomes a form of entrapment. He ultimately identifies the recurring patterns and the inescapable destiny shaping the Buendía family, yet this understanding emerges only after the possibility of change has vanished. Even after uncovering the hidden order governing his existence, he remains confined within it. Knowledge offers no freedom; instead, it confirms the impossibility of escape. Márquez intensifies this moment when he writes that Aureliano began to decipher the manuscripts **"as if he were looking into a speaking mirror"** (416), suggesting the terrifying collapse between reader, text and fate.

The manuscript episode also gives the novel a metafictional dimension by exposing the process through which narrative is constructed and interpreted. Patricia Waugh argues that metafictional writing "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (Waugh 2), while Linda Hutcheon describes postmodern fiction as "intensely self-reflexive" (Hutcheon 1). In this way, Melquíades' manuscript transforms the novel into a text that reflects upon its own creation, interpretation and predetermined form. At this particular moment, the reader undergoes an experience similar to Aureliano's own. What once appeared to be uncertain and open is now revealed to have always been predetermined. Frank Kermode argues that readers seek meaning through endings because "we project ourselves . . . past the End, so as to see the structure whole" (Kermode 175), and this idea becomes central to the conclusion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The ending reorganises the entire narrative, turning earlier experiences into signs of a destiny that had already been written. Understanding comes only at the moment of destruction, trapping both Aureliano and the reader inside a narrative whose conclusion was inevitable from the very beginning.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the reader steadily becomes entrapped in the same cyclical patterns that shape the lives of the Buendía family. Repeated names with similar appearances and recurring events make it even more difficult to tell apart characters, organise chronology and fully comprehend the narrative. This confusion is not simply a stylistic feature but an essential part of the novel's structure. Michael Wood remarks that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* presents "a world where the marvellous and

the everyday are equally real” (Wood 27). This unusual narrative balance deepens the reader’s uncertainty because extraordinary incidents are narrated with the same simplicity as ordinary events. Gradually, the distinction between reality, memory and prophecy begins to disappear, causing the reader to experience the same instability and disorientation that shape the lives of the Buendía family in Macondo. Márquez reinforces this atmosphere when he writes that **“all the Buendías were marked by a solitary air”** (7), suggesting the repetitive inheritance of both identity and fate across generations.

Wolfgang Iser argues that literary texts are completed through the active participation of readers, since “the meaning of the text is generated through the act of reading” (Iser 274). However, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* moves one step beyond the simple reader participation. The reader does not merely interpret the narrative but becomes trapped within its structure. The reader’s attempt to construct coherence is repeatedly disrupted as identities blur across generations, different moments in time merge together, and understanding arrives only in retrospect. The instability of interpretation is reflected in the image of Melquíades’ manuscripts, which appear **“written in Sanskrit”** (Márquez 417), symbolising a text that resists immediate comprehension.

In this way, the reader begins to resemble a Buendía figure, caught within patterns that seem impossible to escape. Just as the characters repeatedly return to similar destinies, the reader repeatedly searches for certainty but faces only further uncertainty. The novel therefore transforms reading from observation into participation, drawing the reader directly into its cyclical and predetermined world. This sense of inevitability is captured in the final prophecy that “the first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants” (Márquez 417). The novel, therefore, destabilises not only narrative sequence but also the reader’s confidence in interpretation itself.

In conclusion, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, through its repeated names, shifting chronology, the insomnia plague and the final decoding of Melquíades’ manuscript, gradually transforms narrative into an experiential structure rather than a simple act of storytelling (46, 417). The reader’s difficulty in distinguishing identities, organising time and achieving complete understanding mirrors the ambiguity that shapes the lives of the Buendía family. In this way, the novel creates a similar experience between the character and the reader, where both remain trapped within recurring patterns and predetermined actions. The reader therefore becomes not only an interpreter of the narrative but also a symbolic participant within its closed and self-repeating structure.

This article has explored how the novel allows the reader to experience the same uncertainty, repetition and sense of inevitability that shape the lives of the Buendía family.

As a result, the reader no longer remains a detached observer but gradually becomes part of the novel's cyclical and predetermined world. Márquez ultimately ensures that solitude is not only narrated but formally experienced through the act of reading itself.

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