

## Time and Solitude: Parameters of Being in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

William Golding's schoolroom classic, *Lord of the Flies* and the Latin American landmark fiction of Magic Realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez share several features, perhaps the most striking being the use of clearly defined figures that evoke, in the first novel, Christian archetypes and in the second promethean heroes, goddess-like beauties and flawed mortals caught in a mythological web of fate and human passions. Much has been written on this theme: Golding himself commented on his debt to the Christian idea of original sin and the Christian interpretation of the universal theme of good and evil in his portrayal of figures such as the solitary visionary, Simon and the fallen angel become savage, Jack (Golding 42). And Roberto Gonzales Echevarría places *One Hundred Years of Solitude* squarely in the camp of Latin American novels which take myth as a starting point in his essay "Cien años de soledad: The Novel as Myth and Archive" (107).

An interesting aspect of this use of religion versus myth is the attendant interpretation of time that is inherent in these belief systems. Christianity, with its teleological and eschatological focus implies a strictly linear time frame while mythology, older and spread across different cultures, encompasses both a linear and circular treatment of time. As both *Lord of the Flies* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* borrow heavily from religion and myth in plot and characterization, it is interesting to trace how this framework applies to representations of time in these two novels. Moreover, just as we find an exploration of deep ontological themes in both religion and the various mythological traditions of the world presented through figures such as Christ or, for example, Odysseus and Prometheus from the Greek tradition and Isis from the Egyptian, who embark on solitary quests of great meaning and purpose filled with danger and struggle, so we find characters in *Lord of the Flies* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who struggle not only against physical obstacles but against the painful challenges imposed on them by the human condition itself. Among these challenges, solitude is perhaps the greatest and both Golding and Márquez create highly sympathetic characters whose various flaws are, if not redeemed, at least made more understandable when placed in the context of the terrible and destructive force of their solitude.

*Lord of the Flies* does not strictly follow a Christian framework but there are many parallels with the story of Christ thematically and temporally. In Christianity, one is born into a world of struggle with original sin, in *Lord of the Flies*, the boys are symbolically reborn into the world of the island marked by the sins of their fathers as embodied in the societal norms they have inherited, including the impulse towards violence and war; in the Christian ethic, those who suffer in a hostile and imperfect world wait for delivery from evil in the form of a messiah, in *Lord of the Flies*, the boys wait for rescue and it is a father figure who eventually arrives to save them; in both scenarios, reward will come only after a period of trial in which the individual is tested and in which he is presented the opportunity to follow the path towards good or the path toward evil. And finally, at the end, transgressors will be given the opportunity to repent and to be washed clean again.

Golding's choice of an uninhabited island presents other interpretations, however, than those connected with Christianity. We are all born into a place and time and it can be

argued that we are each of us nothing but a historical construct. In this sense time determines, to a large extent, who and what we are. Thus, when suddenly deposited on an island seemingly outside of the time they have known, the characters in *Lord of the Flies* struggle with the conflict that arises between identities formed in the England of the middle of the twentieth century and those that emerge in response to a place that exists in a more primitive timeframe. For Ralph, Jack and the others, there is the trajectory of time spanning their stay on the island in which the characters operate in an increasingly primitive mode, but there is also the suggestion of a parallel time line in which the boys operate by the rules and norms of the society which they have left but of which they still feel a part. In his essay "Small Savages," Louis J. Halle comments on the influence of the "English political experience since Runnymede" which the boys have absorbed and which initially directs their behavior; the youths spontaneously mimic the rational behavior of the societal structure out of which they have just been rudely ejected in a literal and figurative sense. Thus, early on even Jack, who will revert most readily to primitive instincts on the island, argues that the boys have "got to have rules and obey them" since they are, after all, English and not savages (53). Thus the life and time that go on just beyond the horizon and which they initially expect to rejoin, maintains its power over the boys albeit in varying degrees.

We can see the internal struggle that the conflict between the two realities creates; there is the unrestricted and impulsive behavior that this regressive existence on the island invites, and there is the "invisible yet strong. . . . taboo of the old life" that controls the boys' brutal impulses with more or less success. Thus when a lesser character, Roger, flirts with the impulse to hit one of the "littluns" on the beach with a stone, he finds that his arm is "conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins," so that round the younger squatting child "was the protection of parents and school and policemen and law (81). Whereas Jack is eager to abandon all that it means to be English in the mid-twentieth century, Roger still feels the pull of history; he still belongs to a time that spans the evolution and development of civilization in the West.

Thus, the plunge to the island suggests a kind of Wellsian journey to another time out of history where the day is not punctuated by morning class and afternoon tea, by rules and good sportsmanship, but by the slant of light and the emergence of the "miraculous, throbbing stars" (76) at night. It is a time and place where the exigencies of survival dictate behavior and where individual rights give way to group dynamics. It is a world where, as Rousseau wrote in his essay "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," nature treats humans "exactly as Sparta treated the children of her citizens: those who come well-formed into the world she renders strong and robust, and all the rest she destroys" (Nelson 220). In this world, the elimination of Piggy and Simon is not tragic; it is only necessary. They are too civilized, too domesticated. Rousseau could be talking of Piggy when he writes of man, "he grows weak, timid and servile; his effeminate way of life totally enervates his strength and courage" (223, 224). Though Ralph weeps for "the end of innocence" that these deaths represent, and Golding clearly finds the Christian virtues represented in these characters morally superior to the action, courage and initiative represented by Jack, the reader is left with a pessimistic view of humankind. After all, the officer in shining white, the messiah who represents the best that Western civilization has to offer, is yet part of a civilization that has harnessed the most destructive force ever known for the purpose of destroying members of his own species.

This superficially happy ending underscores the theme of solitude in this novel, though clearly, it is far more subtle here than in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Still, the isolation and alienation that seems inherent in the human condition is effectively achieved in *Lord of the Flies* through several devices. The choice of a deserted island is an obvious metaphor for isolation and solitude and the bleakness of their prospects is highlighted by the boys' early assessment of their situation: "They're all dead," Piggy says of the adults they have just left behind, "an' this is an island. Nobody don't know we're here" (11). While this Eden in which the boys find themselves with its abundant fruit and paradisiacal beauty initially promises adventure and camaraderie, its remoteness and mirages, themselves a symbol for the false promise of appearances, serve increasingly to reflect the isolation that the boys come to recognize in themselves.

At the outset, it appears that only the bespectacled Piggy, an orphan and obvious outsider by virtue of his appearance, lower class speech patterns and health defects, is isolated from the main body of boys. But as the two natural leaders, Ralph and Jack, discover their own natures on the island, they find they are "two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate" (71). One belongs to "the brilliant world of hunting tactics, fierce exhilaration" and the other to "longing and baffled commonsense" (93) and it becomes increasingly clear that understanding between them is impossible.

Lesser characters, too, stand out in their stark isolation from the humanity represented by the group, none more so than the enigmatic Simon who steals away to hide in the "cabin-like" space created by the dense vegetation of the jungle. Here the magnitude of Simon's solitude is underscored by Golding's lyrical description of nature: "The deep sea breaking miles away on the reef made an undertone less perceptible than the susurrations of the blood" (74). Even the pathetic "littluns", who unlike the bigger boys seem to exist as a unit as they alternately cry, play, clamor and stuff themselves on ripe fruit, do not escape the isolating effect of the insidious island and when one wanders off to play as "The great Pacific tide comes in," (79) he becomes a potentially tragic possibility vulnerable to both the older boy, Roger, and the elemental forces that are insensitive to man's pain and fear.

While there are redeeming moments in the story, such as Ralph's belated recognition of the loyalty, intelligence and common sense present in Piggy, and the eventual rescue and restoration of the boys to their civilized state, Golding's dark message is ultimately unrelieved. Even as Ralph stands before the officer in the final scene, the dark knowledge of what has passed solidifies the solitude that encases him and one senses that the "end of innocence" and the "darkness of man's heart" that he mourns encompass, too, the terrible isolation that man's brutality to fellow man has imposed on him.

If the action in *Lord of the Flies* takes place along a regressive, almost prehistoric timeline, time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seems at once linear and circular. As a sort of Biblical retelling of Genesis there is a distinct beginning, albeit one with roots in an even deeper past, and a clear indication that the story is moving to a conclusion in the future. As Michael Wood points out in his review of the book, "There is a suggestion of a teleology here, of a work moving towards its resolution." Indeed, with the Biblical overtones comes an eschatological schema which is carried through to the all-effacing cyclone of mythic proportions with which the story culminates. From the first line on, "Many years later, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon,"

the reader realizes he is at a point in time from which he can move forward and backward and from which he will witness both the unfolding of the Buendía family's saga and its doubling back to various points in its genealogy.

This particular device of presenting a memory of an earlier time from some point in the future is one Márquez employs throughout the novel, in particular with the character of Colonel Aureliano Buendía. In her essay, "The Myth of Apocalypse and Human Temporality in García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* and *El otoño del patriarca*," Lois Parkinson Zamora calls this a "retrospective future tense," and a close attention to the ways in which it is used reveals the author's fidelity to the eschatological theme. As we progress along the one hundred-year timeline, the "Many years later" of the opening line reappears as "Years later," "a few years later," then "some months later" and finally "three months later" creating a sense of impending doom as the entire town finds itself in a "process of annihilation, consuming itself from within, ending at every moment but never ending its ending" (409). As Zamora puts it, "the end of the history of Macondo approaches relentlessly" (52). By the end of the novel we have witnessed the Buendía family's entire span of temporal existence and the complete history of Macondo along with it.

Though Zamora is correct in saying that the time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is linear, successive and purposeful and that it is this "end that makes time finite and comprehensible, giving significance and shape to our temporal existence," (49), time in the novel is not as straightforward as this suggests. Within the one-hundred year period, time seems to double back on itself as events echo past occurrences, characters retrace the footsteps of their ancestors, descendants exhibit the same flaws and tendencies as their namesakes, and ghosts from earlier days commune with the living. The Buendías are not insensible to an awareness of the moments they seem to have lived before as when Colonel Aureliano Buendía remarks to his mother on the day of his preordained but never realized execution, "This morning when they brought me in, I had the impression that I had already been through all that before" (127). When Ursula finds herself echoing the rest of this same conversation year's later, she shudders "with the evidence that time was not passing . . . but that it was turning in a circle" (341). The reader is constantly aware of these echoes and mirror images, of *déjà vu* moments that make us stop along with the characters and search our memories of what we have read, much as we do the narratives of our own lives.

This circular aspect of Macondo's history is not the only departure from linear time. Much as the author does himself, an omnipotent narrator stands outside time and recounts the events of past, present and future; indeed for Melquíades the Gypsy linear time is irrelevant. The events for which the characters wait are already known to him; their future is already past. Even his physical form seems to defy time as we know it and when he arrives back in the village after many years absence, he looks younger than when he last visited. Echevarría sees in Melquíades a Borges-like figure who, "Old beyond age, enigmatic, blind," and "entirely devoted to fiction" is "the librarian and keeper of the Archive" (117). The temporal immunity attached to Melquíades preserves the room in which his archives are kept from the ravages of time that implacably consume the rest of the house. Here there is no passage of years, only a hermetic Now where it is always March and always Monday. In this room past, present and future are unified as Melquíades watches over the hermeneutic endeavors of the patriarch, Jose

Arcadio Buendía and, later, the few chosen descendants who venture to approach the musty and crumbling pages of esoteric script, until finally, as nature and time reclaim the Buendía patrimony, the last Aureliano deciphers his family's history "among the prehistoric plants and steaming puddles and luminous insects that had removed all trace of man's passage on earth from the room" (421). It is only moments before his own demise that this last Aureliano realizes, and the reader through him, that the end of the line has truly arrived, that all that has happened "is, at last, unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more . . ." (422). But though the genealogy ends, and the story with it, the reader yet retains a sense of meaning and fulfillment; somehow it is enough that it existed at all and played itself out in a self-contained century of intoxicating passions, endeavors, reveries, pain, joy and, ultimately, solitude.

Despite the exuberant life that fills this century, Márquez, in yet another brilliant unification of beginning and end, underscores with the final line of the novel the message inherent in the title; the Buendías have been "condemned" to a century of solitude and no one escapes it. There is the patriarch, José Arcadio Buendía, who ends his days babbling in a tongue no one can understand and who is left tied to a tree in the most inclement of weather, the matriarch Ursula whose decline reduces her to a mute and suffering plaything for the cruelly mischievous children and whose final blindness plunges her into "the impenetrable loneliness of decrepitude." Colonel Aureliano Buendía becomes "Lost in the solitude of his own power" while his sister-in-law Rebeca and sister Amaranta rot in an enmity born of rivalry and nurtured by half a century of spite. Those outside the family or who marry into it do not escape this suffocating solitude. The stern wife Fernanda exceeds even the Colonel's capacity for gloom and grows ever more faithful "to the paternal decree to be buried alive" while the young Remedios Moscote, the only truly cheerful occupant of the house, dies young "with a pair of twins crossed in her stomach" leaving as a legacy only a faded and mysterious photograph that her descendants do not recognize. Pilar Ternera, the happy whore, tires "of waiting for the man who would stay, of the men who left, of the countless men who missed the road to her house," and the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar haunts the patriarch with his "immense desolation" and yearning for life. It is the collective force of all this solitude that, after the relentless years and the additional burden of generations, gathers like steam in a closed pot until it finally explodes into the mythic wind that wipes out all traces of the family.

This recognition of and deep sensitivity to the pathos of the human condition ties these two disparate novels together as much as do the quality of fable and the mytho-religious overtones they both possess. If Márquez's tale is the more sympathetic, it is due to the author's unconditional embrace of his characters in their entirety. The Buendías all-too-human foibles are presented with affection, indulgence and humor, unlike Golding's unforgiving and heavy-handed depiction of Jack, for instance, whose evil is underscored by his physical appearance. By allowing for the fullness and breadth of human nature and creating universal characters of both flesh-and-blood immediacy and archetypal force, the exotic world of Macondo resonates across cultures in ways Golding's cardboard cut-out world does not. If, as Echevarría says, "our desire for meaning can only be satisfied by myth," (123) the fictional world of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes closer to providing that meaning and closer to the reality of human existence.

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