“A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth” (García Márquez, “The Solitude” 91). These momentous lines addressed to the world in 1982 when Márquez received the Nobel Prize are filled with both immense anguish as well as with glints of hope — an extremely depressive evaluation of Latin American state of affairs as well as an assurance for a better future. This speech acts as a mirror, reflecting the sufferings of millions of Latin Americans:

There have been five wars and seventeen military coups; there emerged a diabolic dictator who is carrying out, in God’s name, the first Latin American ethnocide of our time. In the meantime, twenty million Latin American children died before the age of one — more than have been born in Europe since 1970. Those missing because of repression number nearly one hundred and twenty thousand, which is as if no one could account for all the inhabitants of Upsala. Numerous women arrested while pregnant have given birth in Argentine prisons, yet nobody knows the whereabouts and identity of their children, who were furtively adopted or sent to an orphanage by order of the military authorities. Because they tried to change this state of things, nearly two hundred thousand men and women have died throughout the continent and over one hundred thousand have lost their lives in three small and ill-fated countries of Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. (García Márquez, “The Solitude” 88)
Such an almost unimaginable description of events and situations turn life into an
ing credible mess and as he says it becomes difficult to represent the same (in words) in
a credible manner. The list of inimitable suffering goes on and he justifyingly says
that such reality is a “reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines
each instant of our countless daily deaths . . .” (García Márquez, “The Solitude” 89).

A lot has been chronicled about Latin America since the days of the Spanish
Conquest. The chronicles of Columbus and the Spanish conquistadors who set foot on
a continent which was unheard of earlier in Europe speaks of a marvellous world. As
Iris Zavala says, these early chronicles are “the poetic fancies of chroniclers and
travelers” (109). These early tales of the newly explored lands most often described
“the unreal in distant settlements, inhabited by giants, filled with outsize animals and
hybrid monsters” (109); and in Márquez’s own words, these tales “contained the
seeds of our present-day novels” (“The Solitude” 87).

Márquez has most often been critical of the way Latin America has been
projected over the centuries since the European conquest, and as Gerald Martin
reflects: “We Europeans, one reflects, have always viewed Latin America, like Africa,
through all the twists and turns of a long historical relationship . . . as alternately the
earthly paradise or the heart of darkness, their inhabitants as noble or ignoble savages,
according to the opportune requirements of the movement” (“On ‘magical’” 96). One
Hundred, then, is the modern-day twentieth century chronicle — a saga of the
Buendía family’s origin, the founding of Macondo as well as its whole history of
development and decay; a history which every Latin American could understand and
accept as his/her own, because it no longer remained the story of just the Buendía’s
and Macondo, but, rather encompassed the history of Latin America itself. The hopes and frustrations, the conquests and the defeats, the revelry and debauchery of the Macondan inhabitants becomes a medium of self-reflection for the Latin American inhabitants themselves, and herein lies the very essence of Latin Americanness which permeates throughout the book; and for this very essence Ilan Stavans calls it “an irreplaceable piece in the Latin American cultural puzzle” (10) as it “contains the DNA of its people” (10).

*One Hundred* is the result of years of struggle to integrate his experiences as well as accumulated memories and as Bell-Villada says: “Literature is different after *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; so are our thoughts about life and fiction” (*García Márquez* 292). The house at Aracataca and its memories never left Márquez and his first ten years of life there would continue to obsess him, and “the attempt to recover it, recreate it and master his memories of it was a large part of what would make him a writer” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 29), and it was much later in *One Hundred* did the obsession fully realize and exhaust itself, and in such a way that Gabito’s vivid but anguished and often terrifying childhood could become materialized for all eternity as the magical world of Macondo, at which point the view from Colonel Márquez’s house would encompass not only the little town of Aracataca but also the rest of his native Colombia and indeed the whole of Latin America and beyond. (30)
He had always been struggling deep inside to give shape and form to his experiences in his grandparents’ home, just as he experienced them. While his grandfather initiated him into the real, practical world showing him things and narrating events (from the civil war days and the banana massacre), and it was he “who installed him in the man’s world of politics and history; took him out, so to speak, into the daylight” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 45); his grandmother existed in an absolutely other-worldly world and every night ghosts, dead men and witches of his grandma’s world would come and haunt him. He lived in two worlds — which he tried to merge with his own accumulated experiences over the years, so that

Many years later, when García Márquez managed to reconstruct these two ways of interpreting and narrating reality, both of them involving a tone of absolute certainty — the worldly, rationalizing sententiousness of his grandfather and the other-worldly oracular declamations of his grandmother — leavened by his own inimitable sense of humor, he would be able to develop a world-view and a corresponding narrative technique which would be instantly recognizable to the readers of each new book. (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 37)

Narrating bizarre events in an ordinary set up and treating them as normal activity, in *One Hundred* the categories of ‘real’ and what we call ‘magical’ are blurred and Márquez acknowledges that

. . . *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had to be written that way because that’s how my grandmother talked. I tried to find the language that was most suitable for the book, and I remembered that my grandmother used to tell me the most atrocious things without getting all worked up, as if she’d just seen them. I then realized that that imperturbability and
that richness of imagery with which my grandma told stories was what gave verisimilitude to mine. (“And Now” 12)

And, moreover it was not just the grandmother’s beliefs; rather, the entire Caribbean world had its own beliefs and superstitions which occupied as much importance as any rational idea, which Márquez explains:

Clearly, the Latin-American environment is marvelous. Particularly the Caribbean. I happen to come from the Caribbean part of Colombia, which is a fantastic place — completely different from the Andean part, the highlands. During the colonial period of Colombian history, all the people who considered themselves respectable went to the interior — to Bogotá. On the coast, all that were left were bandits — bandits in the good sense — and dancers, adventurers, people full of gaiety. The coastal people were descendants of pirates and smugglers, with a mixture of black slaves. To grow up in such an environment is to have fantastic resources for poetry. Also, in the Caribbean, we are capable of believing anything, because we have the influences of all those different cultures, mixed in with Catholicism and our own local beliefs. I think that gives us an open-mindedness to look beyond apparent reality. (“Playboy Interview” 112)

He creates a world where the ordinary and the magical co-exist or in other words, he gives voice to those unusual and often absurd occurrences which are hardly given any importance in a rational world. This is, in effect, an affirmation of the folk beliefs and
customs of an entire system of belief which otherwise is either neglected or never prioritized. In a way, this handling of the ‘magic’ and the ‘real’ provides a new way of understanding categories without having to rely on absolute truth or fixed definitions . . . that by breaking down the notion of an absolute truth, and a singular version of reality, magical realism allows for the possibility of many truths to exist simultaneously. (Bowers 67)

However, *One Hundred* is not simply a folk story privileging the magical aspect of a typical remote Latin American life, nor does it try to establish that Latin American life is always to be seen in ‘magical’ terms and in James Higgins’s terms:

. . . the magical realism of *Cien años* does not imply that Latin American reality is somehow inherently magical, though the novel does highlight the prodigious dimensions of the natural environment and the excesses of political life. Nor does the much-bandied term ‘fantasy’ have much meaning in relation to *Cien años*, since every event described, no matter how fantastic it might appear, has a perfectly logical explanation . . . The story of Macondo, in fact, reflects the general pattern of Latin America’s history. It is founded by settlers fleeing a homeland haunted by the specter of violence and is born of a utopian dream, being built on the spot where José Arcadio has a vision of a luminous city of houses walled with mirrors (p. 97). By the final page, however, the city of mirrors has become a city of mirages. Macondo thus represents the dream of a brave new world that America seemed to promise and that was cruelly proved illusory by the
subsequent course of history. *Cien años*, in effect, is a demystifying rewriting of the history of the subcontinent. (38-40)

Moreover, it needs to be seen how this inclination for a magical reality actually works in the lives of the Macondans as Edwin Williamson postulates his idea about it: “. . . if one examines how magical realism actually functions in the narrative, it will become clear that there is an intimate connection between it and the degenerative process described in the novel; indeed, magical realism can be shown to be a manifestation of the malaise that causes the decline of the Buendía family” (46). Márquez’s narrative, then, is more than just a celebration of the folk and myths and magic — it installs as well as subverts the same.

“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” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 1*). The novel opens with this image of Colonel Buendía facing a firing squad and remembering the day when his father took him one afternoon to show him ice. The beginning lines itself set the pattern of the entire story where the present and the past co-mingle. Instead of beginning with the founding of the place, it begins many years later when Colonel Buendía had to face the firing squad during the Civil War. Macondo was no more the quaint, little village that it used to be with almost no connection with the rest of the world and it was this remote and innocent world that he remembered when faced with near death — Macondo, then, was a world which “was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 1*).
Márquez artfully inserts popular beliefs and personal stories as well as myths (Biblical and others). The founding of Macondo has its origin in an exodus — an exodus to find peace from the guilt of a crime committed. In order to defend his honour, José Arcadio Buendía killed Prudencio Aguilar who had questioned the relationship between Buendía and his wife Úrsula. José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula were cousins and when they got married, Úrsula’s mind was filled with the fear and guilt of committing incest and the customary belief that they “would suffer the shame of breeding iguanas” (García Márquez, One Hundred 20). This belief can also be related to one of Columbus’s chronicles where he mentions two islands called “... Cibán and Anán, whose inhabitants are born with the tails of animals” (Zavala 110).

Prudencio’s death, however, took away José Arcadio Buendía’s peace of mind. At first, the feeling of guilt started haunting the couple and gradually they started seeing the ghost of Prudencio. Constantly tormented by the presence of the ghost (or rather, the guilty conscience), he decided to leave the place and thus began the journey in search of a new place — a place so far away that it would help erase the tormenting past; and that was how “they undertook the crossing of the mountain. Several friends of José Arcadio Buendía, young men like him, excited by the adventure, dismantled their houses and packed up, along with their wives and children, to head toward the land that no one had promised them” (García Márquez, One Hundred 23). The Biblical parallel here is evident: “... just as the Jews fled Egypt and spent years in the wilderness before reaching the promised land...” (Bell-Villada, García Márquez 77); José Arcadio Buendía and his followers also embarked on a similar arduous journey, however, ironically “to head toward the land that no one had promised them” (García Márquez, One Hundred 23). After more than two years
of wandering and without any hope of reaching the sea, they reached a place near a
river where José Arcadio Buendía had a dream that “. . . right there a noisy city with
houses having mirror walls rose up. He asked what city it was and they answered him
with a name that he had never heard, that had no meaning at all, but had a
supernatural echo in his dream: Macondo . . . and there they founded the village” (24-
25), and thus Macondo was established.

Márquez describes Macondo in the opening paragraph itself through the
memories of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, when it “was a village of twenty adobe
houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished
stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so
recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary
to point” (García Márquez, One Hundred 1). Márquez’s portrayal certainly reflects
the picture of a new world where “many things lacked names”— an idyllic picture of
a beautiful, hopeful place and in Lorna Robinson’s words:

. . . there is something distinctly ancient and mythical in his portrayal
of the early Macondo that harks back to a world of innocence and
unblemished natural beauty. Sparse population and clear flowing water
are conspicuous symbols of a lost paradise, particularly in these
modern times of sprawling cities and pollution; the simile of the stones
as being like prehistoric eggs emphasizes the primeval quality of this
setting, invoking the notions of ancient and new in the very fecund
symbol of the egg. (80)

However, the very first line of the novel which precedes this idyllic depiction of
Macondo, deflates any idea of the possibility of Macondo retaining the positivity of
its earlier times because Colonel Aureliano Buendía remembers the idyllic Macondo while he was facing a firing squad during the Civil War which rather “suggests the realities of decline through the negative developments of human civilization . . .” (Robinson 81).

There is also a personal story mixed in the fictive one. Márquez’s grandparents were residents of a peaceful town called Barrancas but for a fateful incident (Colonel Márquez killed his fellow Liberal compatriot Medardo Pacheco) which forced them to leave the place and resettle in Aracataca. In Márquez’s own words:

The move to Aracataca was seen by my grandparents as a journey into forgetting. In their service they brought two Goajiro Indians — Alirio and Apolinar — and an Indian woman — Meme — purchased in their own region for a hundred pesos each when slavery had already been abolished. The colonel, pursued by sinister remorse for having killed a man in an affair of honor, brought everything necessary for recreating the past as far away as possible from his bad memories . . . This was the first incident from real life that stirred my writer’s instincts, and I still have not been able to exorcise it. Ever since I gained the use of my reason, I had been aware of the magnitude and weight that the drama had in our house . . . . (Living 37-38)

Just as Colonel Nicolas Márquez brought his family from Barrancas to the coastal town of Aracataca in order to begin life anew, in a similar manner José Arcadio Buendía led his family and his followers into an absolutely new and unexplored territory.
Macondo was so remote that it was cut off from other human settlements for a long time until it was visited for the first time by gypsies who “had found their way by the song of the birds” (García Márquez, One Hundred 10). Just as “in the same way that Columbus and other navigators let themselves be led in order to find lands unknown to them. According to some nautical historians, before the inventing and perfecting of the compass, sailors used to release birds that would lead them to land” (Zavala 114). In fact, Macondo’s isolation points to a salient feature of Colombia’s physical and social geography. For most of its history Colombia’s population has been relatively sparse and scattered in small, disconnected communities. As the relatively few travel accounts of the eighteenth century and the more numerous ones of the nineteenth make clear, historically large stretches of territory have been lightly inhabited, or even almost empty of people. (Safford and Palacios 1)

And this early phase of Macondo’s history “evokes Latin America’s colonial period, when communities lived isolated from one another and the viceroyalties themselves had little contact with the distant metropolis” (Higgins 40).

For a long time the Macondans’ connection with the outer world was only through the gypsies who marvelled them every time they visited with the various instruments they brought along with them — various scientific instruments which were ‘marvels’ of the outer world for the people of Macondo. One among the gypsies was a man called Melquíades who introduced the first object — a magnet. Such a
thing which pulled all the utensils, pots and nails from their houses was never heard or seen earlier and it left them in wonder. Filled with excitement, José Arcadio Buendía thought of making use of the magnet to extract gold. And despite Melquíades’s warnings against the enterprise, he persisted, but the only thing that was unearthed was “a suit of fifteenth-century armor which had all of its pieces soldered together with rust and inside of which there was the hollow resonance of an enormous stone-filled gourd” (García Márquez, *One Hundred Days*). After that failure, he made other similar failed attempts with the telescope and a magnifying glass. And during one of his feverish scientific research, he solemnly declared one day that the earth was round. The humour in this situation lies in the seriousness with which he and his family feels about it (since, for the readers as well as people outside Macondo, it is already a known fact): “The children would remember for the rest of their lives the august solemnity with which their father, devastated by his prolonged vigil and by the wrath of his imagination, revealed his discovery to them:

‘The earth is round, like an orange.’ ” (García Márquez, *One Hundred Days*).

Although described in a humorous manner, these episodes of scientific failure actually shows Macondo’s disadvantageous situation. It is so remote and isolated and their inhabitants are so innocent as well as underdeveloped (in terms of science and education) that it is ill-equipped and unprepared to match steps with the outer world. Even the sporadic incursions from the outer world (the gypsies’ visits) only further proved their incapacities; and José Arcadio Buendía himself actually realized Macondo’s backwardness in relation to the outer world: “ ‘Incredible things are happening in the world,’ he said to Úrsula. ‘Right there across the river there are all kinds of magical instruments while we keep on living like donkeys.’ ” (8).
Every time the gypsies surprise the inhabitants of Macondo with their ‘magical’ instruments, Márquez actually points out the Macondans’ vulnerability. Macondo’s isolation reflects Latin America’s isolation and in fact through these events: “Latin America’s isolation from intellectual developments in Europe is hilariously brought out” (Higgins 40), and “the novel thus ironically debunks Spain’s claim to have bequeathed to America the benefits of European civilization” (40).

Impelled by the urge to “put Macondo in contact with the great inventions” (García Márquez, One Hundred 10), José Arcadio Buendía prepared his men for another expedition in order to find a way that would lead them to “contact with civilization” (11). This expedition was a treacherous one as Márquez describes it in detail:

During the first days they did not come across any appreciable obstacle . . . Then, for more than ten days, they did not see the sun again. The ground became soft and damp, like volcanic ash, and the vegetation was thicker and thicker, and the cries of the birds and the uproar of the monkeys became more and more remote, and the world became eternally sad . . . Exhausted by the long crossing, they hung up their hammocks and slept deeply for the first time in two weeks. When they woke up, with the sun already high in the sky, they were speechless with fascination. Before them, surrounded by ferns and palm trees, white and powdery in the silent morning light, was an enormous Spanish galleon. (García Márquez, One Hundred 11-12)

The finding of the ancient Spanish galleon, however, shattered José Arcadio Buendía’s dreams as it was an indication that the sea was nearby and his “dreams
ended as he faced that ashen, foamy, dirty sea, which had not merited the risks and sacrifices of the adventure” (13). This dangerous and difficult expedition parallels those of the early Spanish conquistadors who undertook such risks to further spread Spanish power and rule over the American lands:

In April 1536, about six hundred men started south on land under the leadership of Lugo’s chief judicial officer, Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, a Salamanca law graduate, with support from six or seven small ships that were to sail to a rendezvous with them in the lower Magdalena River. From the outset the expedition suffered heavy losses. In a storm two ships sank at the mouth of the Magdalena, while others were carried westward to Cartagena. Meanwhile, the main force trooping overland suffered from food scarcities; the indigenes’ poisoned arrows; the hot, damp climate of the Magdalena; and mosquitos, ticks, and worms. Eventually, the land force hacked its way more than three hundred miles upriver to La Tora (now Barrancabermeja). When an exploratory party found the river above La Tora too swift to be easily navigable and the forest banks virtually uninhabited by indigenes, whose provisions were needed, some of Jiménez’s men wanted to turn back, particularly as many were dying at the unhealthy site of La Tora . . . Finally, early in March 1537, eleven months after leaving Santa Marta, some 170 men and 30 horses emerged on the mountain plains inhabited by the Muiscas. (Safford and Palacios 31)
However, the expedition in the novel is not just a simple reminder of the dangerous exploratory journeys as depicted in the chronicles; rather the entire episode is a parody of the Conquest and the explorations of the brave conquistadors; since here in this novel, the expedition of José Arcadio Buendía fails to make any contact with civilization. Here the men of Macondo

re-enact the ordeals of the Spanish explorers and conquistadores in order to make contact with the civilization that Spain allegedly spread to its colonies . . . Significantly, the Macondo men’s expedition fails to make contact with civilization and succeeds only in finding the hulk of an old Spanish galleon, stranded on dry land and overgrown with vegetation (p. 83), symbol of a heritage that is anachronistic, out of context and ill equipped to tackle the awesome American environment.

(Higgins 40-41)

The Spanish galleon assumes a spectral quality here, just as the haunting figure of Prudencio’s ghost. The presence of ghosts or specters might indicate them to be aspects of ‘magical realism’; however as Daniel Erickson states: “Attending to its placement within historical time and space will show that the spectral, although a fantastic figure, is not an antirealist figure, but is part of García Márquez’s engagement with the changing history of Latin America” (143). These specters are not just fantastic, haunting figures but are rather metaphorical indications of a lingering colonial past because although colonialism in Latin America had ended, it “nevertheless continues to bequeath a considerable legacy to post colonial Latin America. The novel exploits the dialectical presence of the specter to capture the
seemingly anachronistic persistence of the colonial past in post colonial Latin America” (Erickson 158).

The finding of the Spanish galleon as well as the fifteenth century suit of armor which was earlier unearthed by José Arcadio Buendía are reminders of a colonial past, and as Brian Conniff ironically states: “Searching for gold, José Arcadio finds the remains of Spanish imperialism” (142). The rusted, broken down piece of armour as well as the empty and worn out Spanish galleon seems out of place and “empty of any real content in the post colonial world of the characters” (Erickson 159); however, for all their dislocation, emptiness and absence these relics of colonialism are nevertheless entrenched within the geographical and temporal landscape. This suggests that the colonial past continues to haunt Latin American society, even though it has supposedly been broken with in the post colonial era. The sound of the suit of armor, after all, is not silence but a “hollow resonance”, a phrase that encapsulates the persisting traces of colonialism in the world of One Hundred Years of Solitude. (Erickson 159)

The failed expedition led José Arcadio Buendía to lament:

" ‘We’ll never get anywhere,’ he lamented to Úrsula.
‘We’re going to rot our lives away here without receiving the benefits of science.’ " (García Márquez, One Hundred 13). This already marks the beginning of suffering which their isolation and ignorance would engender. This realization made him decide to move Macondo to a better place but Úrsula’s will to stay was so firm that he had to relent. This decision to stay, however, had a deep impact on him and would
subsequently affect the future of Macondo, which of course nobody could have realized then. “Exhaling a deep sign of resignation” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 15*), he decided to stay in Macondo and fulfill his obligation towards his two sons — José Arcadio and Aureliano Buendía. At the moment of his resignation, however, “Something occurred inside of him then, something mysterious and definitive that uprooted him from his own time and carried him adrift through an unexplored region of his memory” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 14*). In a way, this decision “deeply affects José Arcadio Buendía’s conception of time” (Williamson 49). According to Edwin Williamson, José Arcadio Buendía’s act of resignation provides the key to the significance of Macondo’s decline. It shows that the process of degeneration is set in train by a free human choice, a loss of nerve in fact, and not by some irresistible force of destiny which mysteriously impels the Buendías towards a predetermined end. . . it condemns the Buendías to a life without science, to a state of mind, that is, which cannot make firm distinctions between objective fact and the subjective projections of desire. Subsequent generations will find themselves prey to urgent promptings of dream, imagination and memory; their perceptions of the external world will be coloured to such a degree that their hold on reality remains dangerously fragile, having them open to delusion or, worse still, deception and exploitation. (49)

Macondo was visited by another group of gypsies who informed José Arcadio Buendía that Melquíades had “succumbed to the fever on the beach at Singapore and that his body had been thrown into the deepest part of the Java sea” (García Márquez,
They brought with them “a thousand more inventions so ingenious and unusual that . . . the inhabitants of Macondo found themselves lost in their own streets, confused by the crowded fair” (17). And for the first time they were introduced to “ice”, which for them was no less than any great marvellous invention: “. . . José Arcadio Buendía ventured a murmur:

‘It’s the largest diamond in the world.’ . . .

‘This is the great invention of our time.’” (García Márquez, One Hundred 18).

The solemn and serious manner in which the Buendías reacted to this discovery of ice as their “heart filled with fear and jubilation at the contact with mystery” (18), actually points to their ignorance as well as their vulnerability to such an exposure. The gypsies extracted thirty reales from José Arcadio Buendía just in order to have a look at the ‘ice’ and an extra ten reales for touching it. It was presented as a simple depiction of paying and experiencing something new, but nonetheless it was a minor exploitation of their ignorance as well as a reflection of how vulnerable they were to exploitation which would prove sinister later on. And it would be important to remember that every time the gypsies came, the inhabitants became ‘lost’ and ‘confused’ in their own place.

The founding of Macondo was based on a dream (when José Arcadio Buendía had dreamt of a city with mirror walls). When they encountered the ‘magical’ thing called ‘ice’ for the first time; José Arcadio Buendía felt that he now understood the dream of the ‘mirror walls’:

José Arcadio Buendía did not succeed in deciphering the dream of houses with mirror walls until the day he discovered ice. Then he thought he understood its deep meaning. He thought that in the near
future they would be able to manufacture blocks of ice on a large scale from such a common material as water and with them build the new houses of the village. Macondo would no longer be a burning place, where the hinges and door knockers twisted with the heat, but would be changed into a wintry city. (García Márquez, One Hundred 25)

José Arcadio Buendía never realizes that his supposed understanding of his ‘dream’ as well as its connection to ‘ice’ is purely a misinterpretation. The images of ‘mirror’ and ‘ice’ are important for the understanding of Macondo’s peripheral relations with the outer world (or rather Latin America’s peripheral relations with Europe). Daniel Erickson postulates the meaning of the images of ice and mirror in relation to Macondo:

Like his rediscovery of the earth’s spherical nature, José Arcadio Buendía’s misinterpretation of ice is not an expression of childlike innocence but of his socially isolated consciousness, again showing that his ignorance is rooted in Macondo’s social isolation and underdevelopment . . . The images of a city of both mirrors and ice also specifically foreground the conditions of dependence and underdevelopment that characterize Macondo’s history. Just as they do in the conclusion, the “mirror walls” signify Latin America’s dependent “reflection” of the foreign metropolis. This is extended in José Arcadio Buendía’s somewhat disingenuous reinterpretation of his dream as envisioning a city of ice. Building on his earlier wonder at the ice, José Arcadio Buendía wishes, somewhat inappropriately, to transpose the European norm of “a wintry city” into the “burning
place” of the tropics, without regard for Latin America’s native conditions. Both images are metaphors for what García Márquez sees as Latin America’s mechanical, “mimetic and unrealistic” replication of alien European and North American political and economic models that fail to recognize the “given and inherited circumstances” with which it must make its own history . . . The foundation of Macondo, which represents the supposed New World of Latin America, is prompted by a *dream* that is subsequently misinterpreted. Moreover, his misinterpretation is doubly delusive, in that it is completely inappropriate and implausible considering the tropical reality of Latin America. The passage suggests that misinterpretation and self-deception have plagued Macondo from its very foundation, not just dreams and visions, but also the misinterpretation of such fantasies. (178-80)

In the meantime, the fear of incest as well as illegitimacy always remained a concern in Úrsula’s mind; so much so that when her daughter Amaranta was born, the first thing that she checked was whether “all of her parts were human” (García Márquez, *One Hundred* 31). However, incest as well as illegitimacy would haunt the Buendías till the end. The first illegitimate child was born to Pilar Ternera and the Buendía’s eldest son José Arcadio. Even before the birth of his son, José Arcadio abandoned Macondo out of fear of the consequences of his illicit relationship. Úrsula admitted the child into her family with “the condition that the child should never know his true identity” (38) and he was named Arcadio. The Buendías accommodated another girl Rebecca who was a daughter of their deceased friends into their family.
With time Macondo changed and was gradually populated by other people who came from across the swamp, so that “from the narrow village of past times it changed into an active town with stores and workshops and a permanent commercial route . . .” (García Márquez, *One Hundred*) 39, and the Buendías grew into a distinguished and prominent family.

Amongst the many men and women who came to Macondo was a Guajiro Indian woman named Visitación and her brother. They arrived in Macondo trying to escape “from a plague of insomnia that had been scourging their tribe for several years” (García Márquez, *One Hundred*) 38. But there was no escape. The first symptoms of the plague was seen in Rebecca’s eyes, and “terrified, exhausted by her fate, Visitación recognized in those eyes the symptoms of the sickness whose threat had obliged her and her brother to exile themselves from an age-old kingdom where they had been prince and princess. It was the insomnia plague” (45). The Buendías did not understand her alarm until she explained that

the most fearsome part of the sickness of insomnia was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation: a loss of memory. She meant that when the sick person became used to his state of vigil, the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past. (García Márquez, *One Hundred* 45)
This memory sickness or insomnia plague is another strange event that occurs. Although in the first instance, this strange illness seems unbelievable and sounds rather like “one of the many illnesses invented by the Indians” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 45*); but Márquez’s political intent in this occurrence is more than evident and as Michael Bell states: “ Appropriately, the memory sickness, like the pox, is a result of conquest” (45).

Before the Europeans arrived, America was already occupied by a native population and at the time of European contact there were “over 350 major tribal groups, divided into more than 50 major linguistic groups, spread across the Americas” (Eakin 28). But the beginning of the Spanish military conquest over the lands of America subsequently led to a drastic decline of the native population. The military conquest by the Spanish was aided by physical and biological deterrents which proved even more fatal for the Native Americans, because “none of the Native American populations had exposure to diseases that ravaged the Old World: influenza, small pox, measles, malaria, yellow fever, plague, typhus. For this lack of exposure and immunity, they would pay a very high price during the European invasion and conquest” (27), and as these diseases annihilated millions, the standard estimate of the fatal impact on Native Americans “is that 85 to 90 percent of population of the Americas had disappeared within 50 years. This is the largest demographic catastrophe in human history” (Eakin 59). In their military invasions, the Spanish started occupying lands and villages by “subduing all the native peoples in a ferocious series of battles. The conquistadores very quickly abandoned nearly all efforts at negotiation and alliance. In most cases, they simply employed brutal force and bloody destruction of the Indians” (63). The gradual subjugation and annihilation
of the native population also meant a gradual suppression of their respective cultures and religious beliefs and as “military conquest and religious conversion advanced together throughout the Americas — the sword and the cross marched side by side” (Eakin 123). For the Christian missionaries, their objective was “the complete and total annihilation of pre-Columbian religious beliefs and practices” (128).

This process of forceful and gradual erasure of one’s spiritual and cultural history is what Márquez politicizes through the insomnia plague. The Spanish conquest resulted not only in the physical and political dominance over the natives but it also entailed the destruction of their pre-Columbian cultural past which had adverse implications on the lives of Native Americans. Visitación and her brother Cataure could identify the illness because they had “suffered from this illness already, having forgotten their own cultural past with the pressures of the colonization of Macondo”, and “the Indians’ loss presages Macondo’s loss of its own Edenic past in the turbulence of civil war and economic colonization by the Yankees” (Zamora 197).

An awareness of the past is essential for any person or for that matter, any society. As David Lowenthal states:

Awareness of the past is in myriad ways essential to our well-being . . .

How do we come to know about the past? How do we acquire this essential background? The simple answer is that we remember things, read or hear stories and chronicles, and live among relics from previous times. The past surrounds and saturates us; every scene, every statement, every action retains residual content from earlier times. All present awareness is grounded on past perceptions and acts. . . . (185)
As Visitación describes the symptoms of the insomnia plague, the most worrisome thing about it is the ‘loss of memory’ as “all awareness of the past is founded on memory” (Lowenthal 193). According to Lowenthal:

Remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity . . . to know what we were confirms that we are. Self continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become . . . Loss of memory destroys one’s personality and deprives life of meaning. (197)

And hence, no wonder, Visitación and her brother had been trying unsuccessfully to escape from the effects of this terrible sickness — a sickness that made one forget one’s past, that made one lose one’s sense of identity and even “the awareness of his own being” and which finally relegated one into a life “of idiocy that had no past”.

Macondo, too, got infected by the plague until Melquíades returned and restored the town to normalcy. Melquíades, who was heard to be dead had indeed “been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude” (García Márquez, One Hundred 50). Melquíades stayed back in Macondo and dedicated himself to experiments and in finding the secrets of life. Interestingly, Melquíades deciphered the scribblings of Nostradamus and according to him; he “had found a prediction of the future of Macondo. It was to be a luminous city with great glass houses where there was no trace remaining of the race of the Buendías” (55). His prediction at this initial stage of the novel actually holds an important key to the understanding of the ending of this novel.
Although Macondo had changed from a quaint, remote village into a bustling town, yet till then there was “little sense that Macondo belongs to a larger political unit, but such isolation was typical of Latin American towns . . .” (Echevarría 19). Macondo till then had experienced almost no political authority or interference, until one day Úrsula got an official order to paint her house blue and not white. It was issued by a magistrate — Don Apolinar Moscote.

The advent of Apolinar Moscote and his barefoot soldiers marks the advent of the Republican era; and the first order that he gave was to paint all the houses blue. Till then Macondo had existed peacefully without any authority interfering in any matter (serious or trivial) — be it the building of houses or painting them in their own desired colours. José Arcadio Buendía, being one of the founders of the place had enjoyed a privileged status of authority in Macondo. This interference by Apolinar Moscote was not at all welcome and the conflict between them marks the beginning of a political conflict that would have no end. Moscote was the unwanted outsider who was given authority over the town as representative of the central government. Reversing the conventional wisdom that has traditionally attributed the political instability of the nineteenth century to the “barbaric” countryside, whose backwardness and lawlessness supposedly hindered the “civilized cities” efforts to lead the subcontinent toward order and progress, the novel identifies government intervention in local affairs as the origin of Macondo’s troubles. Till then it had always been a well-ordered community, and, far from bringing law and order, the new magistrate immediately stirs up unrest by decreeing that
all houses are to be painted blue (pp. 133-134), the color of the ruling Conservative party, an act symptomatic of the autocratic and insensitive impositions of central government. (Higgins 41)

Shortly after the building of the Buendía’s new home, Melquíades died and was buried in Macondo and became the first man to be buried there since the founding of the place. An important shift took place in José Arcadio Buendía’s life after the death of Melquíades. As a usual part of the bizarre occurrences in the novel, the senior Buendía saw the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar again. Prudencio’s reappearance marked the beginning of José Arcadio Buendía’s gradual alienation with physical reality. He began losing consciousness of time. Time remained static. For him all the days were same as Monday. He began to regress deep into the past, losing contact with real time and at one time he started uttering a “fluent but completely incomprehensible language” (García Márquez, One Hundred 81).

For José Arcadio Buendía, the return of the ghost was an indication of the inescapable hold of the past onto the present and in due course of time, he lost the very idea of a ‘changing’ time — the man who always sought ‘progress’ was now regressing into an obsession with the past so much so that the ‘incomprehensible language’ that he spoke was later on found out to be Latin — the language of the past. This regression into the past, however, is not just an act of resignation but also an act of inaction — an escape, which Márquez cleverly narrates and which should not be taken just as a mere, normal occurrence in the absurd life of the Macondans:

He begins to neglect his experiments and takes to conversing with ghosts until his communion with the past intensifies to a point at which
he smashes up his laboratory and, believing it to be forever a Monday in March, imagines that he has abolished time altogether (pp. 73-4). By abandoning himself to his memories, he shuts out the uncertainties of the future and attempts to bend time back upon itself as if to recover a state of pristine innocence that would spirit away by magic those acts committed in the actual course of his life. This magical escape from history into a kind of cycle of nostalgia will become yet another powerful legacy in the Buendía family. (Williamson 49-50)

It would be important to note that in this novel, Márquez narrates the family history of the Buendías in concurrence with the general history of the region. The private and the public intermingle.

Illegitimacy and the tangled web of family genealogy that marks the entire Buendía family line is also Márquez’s personal attempt at coming to terms with his own personal and chaotic family line as well as an ironic reflection on the complexities and hypocrisies of a Latin American society, where ‘illiteracy and incest’ “was common in Colombia and remains more common in Latin America than most other parts of the world though of course . . .” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 5), it was a social stigma. In Colombia, these ‘natural’ sons and daughters (the illegitimate children), as they were called, were symbols of social stigma in a profoundly Catholic society, with all the traditional hierarchies and snobberies, in which the lowest orders were blacks or Indians (to whom, of course, no respectable family would wish to be related in any way despite the fact that, in Colombia, almost all families, including
the most respectable ones, have such relations). This chaotic mixture of race and class, with so many ways of being illegitimate but only one straight and narrow path to true respectability. (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 5)

This is the world of Colombia revisited in Macondo.

In the midst of the madness and mayhem in the family, José Arcadio — the eldest son of the Buendías who disappeared long time back, returned. And he revived Úrsula’s fears of incest when he married Rebecca. Much to Úrsula’s strictness and pretensions of belonging to an elite family, illegitimacy and incest would always bother them. Even before marrying Rebecca, José Arcadio already had a son (named Arcadio) through Pilar Ternera. Much later, another illegitimate child, named Aureliano José (the child of Aureliano Buendía and Pilar Ternera) was accepted into the family. Hence, the two grandsons of the Buendía family were both illegitimate. Aureliano married Remedios Moscote (the youngest daughter of Don Apolinar Moscote); and this alliance with the Buendías consolidated Moscote’s authority in the town, who till then had hardly any control over Macondo as the mayor. With José Arcadio Buendía losing himself in the magical reality of a static time, he lost control not just of time and his own life but he also lost the authority that he had over Macondo; and slowly Moscote tightened his grip over the town and once “he returned with six policemen armed with rifles to whom he entrusted the maintenance of order, and no one remembered the original agreement not to have armed men in the town” (García Márquez, One Hundred 90).
It was the beginning of difficult times. As Macondo gradually developed and came under the purview of governmental authority, it would mark the beginning of a different chapter for Macondo, where its earlier innocence and happiness would be just a part of the past.

Two major political parties have always dominated Colombian politics — the Conservatives and the Liberals. Both parties with their distinctive ideologies sought to dominate, in the process of which many wars were fought and multitudes of lives were lost. Ironically, although they fought with separate ideologies in mind, the sole purpose of it was however — power.

Political tussle and conflicts were common in almost all the newly formed Latin American republics following their independence from Spain. However, Colombia’s internal conflicts and disturbing rate of massacres were alarming:

Actually, during the decades following independence from Spain in the 1820s, most of the new Latin American republics would be bled by intermittent warfare between feudal-minded Hispanophile Conservatives on one side and Liberals modeled after Anglo-French principles on the other. In Nueva Granada and what was finally named “Colombia”, however, the inter party clashes were especially harsh, with casualties typically reaching the five-and-six-figure range.

At first there did exist clear ideological distinctions: early on Colombian Conservatives favored centralized government, a powerful church, and limited suffrage, whereas their Liberal challengers advocated greater federalism, broader tolerance and secularization, and
expansion of individual rights. In time Conservatives would steal away Liberal rhetoric, the Liberals themselves would compromise here and there, and in the long run there came to be little generally to differentiate the respective ideas, demographic bases and practical goals of the two leading parties. In the twentieth century they would evolve as multiclass organizations with both militant and moderate wings, and with affiliation more a matter of family loyalties than ideology. (Bell-Villada, García Márquez 24)

A major portion of *One Hundred* covers the trying situation of endless civil wars, mindless killings, increasing corruption and the gradual degradation of an entire community. Aureliano Buendía becomes the pivotal character of this period. As the country plunges into the war between the Conservatives and the Liberals, it would see Aureliano evolving into Colonel Aureliano Buendía.

Márquez brilliantly spins a story of a futile, endless political conflict. The war tale seemed to repeat itself. Colonel Buendía seemed to be fighting an eternal battle. The deepest irony lied in the fact that while at one point of time Aureliano “could not understand how people arrived at the extreme of waging war over things that could not be touched with the hand” (García Márquez, *One Hundred* 99), he later morphoses into a tyrant who would have got anyone killed for those same ‘things’ that once he did not understand.

In Macondo, the tensions began with the elections. Aureliano witnessed the first act of manipulation when Don Apolinar Moscote altered the number of votes in
favour of the Conservatives, which prompted Aureliano to declare: “‘If I were a Liberal’, he said, ‘I’d go to war because of those ballots.’” (García Márquez, One Hundred 100). In Colombia, elections and their manipulation often led to political violence:

Both Liberals and Conservatives pursued strategies to keep adversaries off the electoral rolls, to keep them away from the polls, and to discount their votes once they were cast. From these practices to outright civil war was often just a short step. Almost all state-level insurrections during the federal period came out of electoral disputes; an alleged vote fraud in Santander triggered the national civil war of 1885, which put an end to federalism altogether. In 1899, the Senate’s rejection of an electoral reform law was one of the precipitants of the War of the Thousand Days. (Palacios 23)

And this was surely going to be one of the reasons why Aureliano would take up arms.

*One Hundred* begins with the image of Colonel Aureliano Buendía facing a firing squad as he reminisces about the once pristine and innocent world of Macondo. At this point when Aureliano decides to fight for Liberal causes, Macondo’s degeneration have also been set in motion. Aureliano’s never ending battles and surrenders fill up the later pages of the book echoing the endless blood bath of Colombia.
Finally, he realized that the war fought for multiple decades was meaningless. As he was forced to surrender as well as compromise with his ideas of reform, he realized that all along it was simply a fight for power, where ideology never mattered:

. . . They asked first that he renounce the revision of property titles in order to get back the support of the Liberal landowners. They asked, secondly, that he renounce the fight against clerical influence in order to obtain the support of the Catholic masses. They asked, finally, that he renounce the aim of equal rights for natural and illegitimate children in order to preserve the integrity of the home.

“That means,” Colonel Aureliano Buendía said, smiling when the reading was over, that all we’re fighting for is power.”

“They’re tactical changes,” one of the delegates replied. “Right now the main thing is to broaden the popular base of the war. Then we’ll have another look.”

One of Colonel Aureliano Buendía’s political advisers hastened to intervene.

“It’s a contradiction,” he said. “If these changes are for good, it means that the Conservative regime is good. If we succeed in broadening the popular base of the war with them, as you people say, it means that the regime has a broad popular base. It means, in short, that for almost twenty years we’ve been fighting against the sentiments of the nation.” (García Márquez, One Hundred 172)
And finally, Colonel Aureliano surrendered himself as he resolved to put an end to the war which had “turned into little more than a naked struggle for power” (Williamson 53).

In the midst of all the wars and subsequent deaths; Úrsula was fighting the lost battle against her fears of incest and illegitimacy, as Arcadio had three illegitimate children — Remedios, José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Segundo. Colonel Aureliano himself had seventeen illegitimate children, all of whom were accepted by Úrsula.

Márquez continues using spectral metaphors to highlight Latin America’s continued dependence and its relation to its colonial past and subsequent “contradictions and tensions that have resulted from Latin America’s colonial heritage” (Erickson 161). Like the decrepit Spanish galleon and the suit of armour in the earlier part which were reminders of the colonial past; Fernanda del Carpio (Aureliano Segundo’s wife) is presented like an “anachronistic colonial ‘relic’” (160).

She was a woman who was “born and raised in a city six hundred miles away, a gloomy city where on ghostly nights the coaches of the viceroys still rattled through the cobbled streets” (García Márquez, One Hundred 210); and despite their questionable pecuniary state, she was made to believe in the illusory grandeur of their heritage. The hollowness of their pretensions are mockingly presented in Márquez’s mordant lines:

. . . Fernanda doubted her childhood vision, but her mother scolded her disbelief.
“We are immensely rich and powerful”, she told her. “One day you will be a queen”.

She believed it, even though they were sitting at the long table with a linen tablecloth and silver service to have a cup of watered chocolate and a sweet bun. (García Márquez, One Hundred 211)

However, when Fernanda came into the Buendía family, she began to impose the customs of her ancestors . . . As long as Úrsula had full use of her faculties some of the old customs survived and the life of the family kept some quality of her impulsiveness, but when she lost her sight and the weight of her years relegated her to a corner, the circle of rigidity begun by Fernanda from the moment she arrived finally closed completely and no one but she determined the destiny of the family. (García Márquez, One Hundred 216-17)

The mock-Gothic tone of description of Fernanda’s ‘gloomy’ city in ‘ghostly nights’ highlights the spectral nature of the place — it is more like a ghost town with its residents living in an archaic social order, and in Erickson’s words: “Fernanda’s city and the social order it represents are presented as anachronistic remnants of Spanish colonialism and the aristocracy, the belated ghosts of a moribund European aristocratic heritage” (160). However, for all its archaism and spectral aura, Fernanda’s city and social order, is reflective of “the remote central government that repeatedly subordinates Macondo’s autonomy” (161), and hence, despite her ghostly archaism,
. . . Fernanda is nevertheless a part of this ruling social order. This is underscored by Fernanda's influence within the house, despite the ridicule and disobedience of the other family members . . . So, despite Fernanda and the highland city being “lost in the world”, they nevertheless manage to function within, and even dominate, the social world of the present. (Erickson 161)

Fernanda’s attempt to impose her archaic and obsolete customs was absolutely impractical considering Macondo’s distance and difference from her highland city. Nonetheless, she did not fail. The family’s customs and way of living was made to compromise with her rigid, highland morbid customs which did not fit in the overall Macondian environment. Márquez deftly exploits this condition within the Buendía family to capture the real contradictions and tensions that have resulted from Latin America’s colonial heritage . . . The spectral character of Fernanda, her city, and her social class cannot be regarded as merely baroque ornamentation; the anachronistic presence of the ghost, appearing in the wrong time, is used to metaphorically represent the persistence of European colonial social structures within postcolonial Latin America . . . For García Márquez, the Colombian highlands are home to an archaic, alienated, and unreal, but nevertheless dominant, political power, inherited from colonial times. His use of the spectral in One Hundred Years of Solitude reflects the continuation of a colonial class structure despite the ostensible discontinuity of political independence. Many historians argue that Latin America’s independence from
Spanish domination did not signal a fundamental rupture with the past, but in some ways intensified the social relations that existed under colonialism. The spectral’s anachronistic persistence captures these tensions between historical continuity and discontinuity, persistence and change. (Erickson 161-162)

There was a brief period of peace and prosperity in Macondo after the war. The ‘delirious prosperity’ of Aureliano Segundo was a part of this phase, when he became a rich owner of land and livestock. It was a blissful period marked with rapid growth of business and equally marked with merriment, so much so that Aureliano Segundo “papered the house inside and out and from top to bottom with one-peso bank notes” (García Márquez, One Hundred 197). During this time, Aureliano Triste (one of Colonel Buendía’s sons) brought the most important technological achievement into Macondo — the train, which was the ultimate symbol of ‘progress’ of Macondo. It was Triste’s attempt to “link the town with the rest of the world” (García Márquez, One Hundred 226).

Márquez’s introduction of the locomotive is, however, filled with a tense supposition — an anticipation of the doom that was to follow: “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” (García Márquez, One Hundred 228).

When Macondo was linked with the outer world, the people were bemused by the various technological inventions of the modern world: the cinema, the
phonograph, the telephone and ultimately the banana industry. In the early periods, the gypsies and their objects had marvelled the Macondans. That period itself showed Macondo’s inability to match up with the pace of progress and development with the outer world, which also made them vulnerable to exploitation and deception. And then later the ‘link’ with the outer world and the modern technical inventions were set to amaze them even more. The changes and the objects of change were no less magical for them and 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. (García Márquez, One Hundred 230)

The Macondans’ inability to have a grasp of their reality would eventually lead to their massive exploitation.

Mr. Herbert’s (the ‘gringo’ as Coloneal Aureliano would call him) arrival into the town and the setting up of the Banana Company would initiate a process of dependence. Macondo’s prosperity, progress and finally its very survival would depend on the Banana Company. And to begin with, as the Company set its roots in Macondo, Márquez invests it with the powers of ‘Divine Providence’ so as to anticipate the ‘divine’ powers of the Company which would be responsible for Macondo’s ‘delirious prosperity’ as well as its cataclysmic destruction.
As Macondo was now linked to the outer world, ‘progress’ too followed and Mr. Herbert’s Banana Company was established which would transform Macondo’s history as never before. The Company and its plantations attracted huge number of people/outsiders who populated Macondo in search of jobs offered by the Banana Company. Although the Banana Company symbolized ‘progress’ and development, Márquez is quite doubtful about its importance and although Macondo was then swamped in prosperity, he casts his doubts about the Company:

No one knew yet what they were after, or whether they were actually nothing but philanthropists, and they had already caused a colossal disturbance, much more than that of the old gypsies, but less transitory and understandable. Endowed with means that had been reserved for Divine Providence in former times, they changed the pattern of the rains, accelerated the cycle of harvests, and moved the river from where it had always been and put it with its white stones and icy currents on the other side of the town, behind the cemetery. (García Márquez, One Hundred 233)

The Banana Company of Macondo is modelled on the actual United Fruit Company which emerged as a result of the merger between Andrew W. Preston’s Boston Fruit Company and Minor C. Keith’s banana trade holdings. The Company founded large plantations in Colombia, Ecuador, and the West Indies; and with increasing trade and business, the Company became a monopoly business as well as affecting political and business structures as per its benefit:

By the mid-1920s Colombia had become the largest exporter of bananas in the world; by the 1930s, 60 percent of the industry and 75
percent of the banana producing land had fallen under the control of
the United Fruit Company. This near-monopoly allowed the company
to manipulate the price of fruit by, for example, leaving large tracts of
land uncultivated (to create less supply, which would cause more
demand, leading to higher prices). Some estimated that up to 85
percent of the company’s land was left fallow — this in a country
where many people were undernourished for want of land and food.
Such tactics were bound to inspire controversy. (Turgeon 402-03)

Aracataca, the place where Márquez was born was one such town which flourished on
the plantation economy and ironically, its desolation and decadence was also the
result of the Company when it decided to leave Aracataca:

It was the banana boom that brought to Aracataca electricity, its first
orchestra, the avenue named Camellón 20 de Julio, a church, as well as
a weekly lottery game. But the United Fruit Company’s exploitation of
both natural and human resources resulted in accusations of
neocolonisation. (Stavans 19-20)

There were similar accusations of exploitation by the Banana Company in
Macondo. Led by José Arcadio Segundo, the workers protested against their
exploitation:

The protests of the workers this time were based on the lack of sanitary
facilities in their living quarters, the nonexistence of medical services,
and terrible working conditions. They stated, furthermore, that they
were not being paid in real money but in scrip, which was good only to
buy Virginia ham in the company commissaries. José Arcadio Segundo was put in jail because he revealed that the scrip system was a way for the company to finance its fruit ships . . . the company physicians did not examine the sick but had them line up behind one another in the dispensaries and a nurse would put a pill the color of copper sulfate on their tongues, whether they had malaria, gonorrhea, or constipation. (García Márquez, One Hundred 305-6)

However, the Company was powerful enough to deflect their accusations, so much so that its lawyers even proved that

. . . the demands lacked all validity for the simple reason that the banana company did not have, never had, and never would have any workers in its service because they were all hired on a temporary and occasional basis. So that the fable of the Virginia ham was nonsense, the same as that of the miraculous pills and the Yuletide toilets, and by a decision of the court it was established and set down in solemn decrees that the workers did not exist. (García Márquez, One Hundred 307)

As the protests intensified and the workers went on strike, the Company was aided by government troops and soon the situation “was threatening to lead to a bloody and unequal civil war” (García Márquez, One Hundred 309), and it was then that “the authorities called upon the workers to gather in Macondo” where the “civil and military leader of the province would arrive on the following Friday ready to intercede in the conflict” (309). The incident that was to follow would strike the final
blow on Macondo. More than three thousand men, women and children gathered at the station waiting for the leader. However, instead of the officer who was supposed to bring some solution, an army lieutenant read out a decree signed by General Carlos Cortes Vargas and his secretary Major Enrique García Isaza, declaring the strikers to be nothing more than a “bunch of hoodlums” (310) and authorized the army to use bullets to thwart their protest.

The crowd was given five minutes to disperse after which the captain ordered to fire

. . . and fourteen machine guns answered at once . . . A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion . . . The survivors, instead of getting down, tried to go back to the small square, and the panic became a dragon’s tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, toward the other dragon’s tail in the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease. They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. The child saw a woman kneeling with her arms in the shape of a cross in an open space, mysteriously free of the stampede. José Arcadio Segundo put him up there at the moment he fell with his face bathed in blood, before the colossal troop wiped out the empty space, the kneeling women, the light of the high, drought-stricken sky, and the
whorish world where Úrsula Iguarán had sold so many little candy animals. (García Márquez, One Hundred 311-312)

At one stroke, the once peaceful and innocent Macondo turned into a crude site of a horrendous crime.

Márquez’s methodical description of the manner in which the people were gunned down heightens the cruelty of the act:

. . . the comparison between the machine guns cutting down the innocent bystanders and the peeling of an onion adds a disturbingly mundane aspect to the scene, as if the murder of hundreds of innocent people were nothing more than a routine assignment for the perpetrators who proceed “systematically” with the slaughter with geometric precision.

The passage concludes with a shift from the panoramic view of the desperate multitude to a focus on the pitiless death of a single individual. Eerily detached in an almost filmic close-up, “mysteriously free of the stampede”, a lone woman places a human face on the atrocity. Her kneeling posture connotes both a prayer for divine intervention and supplication to her murderers for mercy. Her “arms in the shape of a cross” evoke both the biblical Crucifixion and Francisco de Goya’s iconic painting of political martyrdom, The Third of May, which portrays a Spanish partisan standing in a similar Christ-like position before a French firing squad. Her subsequent death becomes part of the apocalyptic end of the scene after the “colossal” (the word
colossal evokes the Colossus, an enormous statue from the ancient world, and perhaps another Goya painting of a monstrous giant who stalks the countryside) military force has “wiped out” not only humanity but, indeed, nature (“the light of the high, drought-stricken sky”) itself . . . Perhaps even more poignant are the final words that refer back to an earlier, simpler time when José Arcadio Segundo’s grandmother Úrsula first sold confections to help support the young Buendía family. In the wake of the horrendous crime that the reader has just witnessed, that innocent time is now forever lost, replaced by a “whorish world” of greed, corruption and brutality. (Reinholtz 114)

This entire incident has its parallel in the actual history of Colombia:

The historical record of the United Fruit Company’s operation in Colombia furnishes a textbook case of overseas imperialism and colonialism, a story vividly suggestive of a novel by Conrad, Foster, Graham Greene — or García Márquez. From what were comparatively modest holdings around 1900, United’s dominions in the northern, coastal portions of Colombia expanded rapidly to become a state-within-a-state and the de facto power in that region. In addition to the best lands, United had its own railroads, general stores, and telegraph system; with its network of canals it monopolized irrigation; and its water practices violated Colombia’s Civil Code. Its labor policies left much to be desired, and already in 1918 United Fruit had responded to protests over low wages with a promise to consult with Company headquarters in Boston. The promise came to nothing.
By 1925 a number of anarchist and communist labor unions were formulating strike plans and preparing organizers. On 6 October 1928, the strike leadership confronted management with its list of demands. The first and most basic of these was that the Company acknowledge the fact that it had employees, in as much as its labor recruitment method had been one of relying solely on subcontractors who rounded up workers for United, a tactic whereby the firm had successfully evaded national laws regarding employee safety and security. The strike organizers also demanded “hygienic dwelling places”, “social hygiene”, “a day of rest in seven”, and “the establishment of hospitals in sufficient numbers”. Last but not least, they wanted an end to the system of paying the worker in credit slips, with which he had been obligated to purchase his provisions, at high prices, in Company commissaries. With this practice the firm had further reduced its labor costs and also steered clientele away from local merchants, who, not surprisingly, felt no love for United Fruit.

Meanwhile, tensions had been mounting, and the Company manager Thomas Bradshaw feigned absence from Santa Marta. But, according to congressional testimony by the union leader Alberto Castrillón, “the simple truth is that he was merely trying to evade any negotiations whatsoever with the workers and their demands. After several days’ search . . . he was casually found . . . while arranging the purchase of an automobile, and he absolutely refused to deal with the workers, and in a rather surly voice he declared them legally
incompetent for negotiations of any kind, given that the Company had no workers”.

With the talks at an impasse, the thirty-two thousand workers went out on strike on 7 October. The response of Conservative government in distant Bogotá was a military occupation of the Banana Zone. The soldiers themselves were eventually put to work cutting and shipping banana bunches as strikebreakers. In spite of repressive laws and constant intimidation the workers stood fast, and on 5 December the government declared a state of siege.

That night a few hundred workers and their families assembled in the central plaza at Ciénaga, a town located some thirty miles north of Aracataca. At 1 A.M., General Carlos Cortés Vargas sent an army detachment to make a show of strength at the plaza. The state of siege announcement was read out loud to the strikers, and they were given five minutes to disperse. The five minutes ticked by, and they were given just one more. And finally a massive barrage of gun fire broke out. The proprietor of a nearby hotel heard someone screaming “Í AY MI MADRE!” (a common Spanish exclamation, roughly equivalent to “Oh my God!”). Several witnesses reported having seen the bodies thrown into trucks, which then headed toward the sea. (Bell-Villada, “Banana strike” 133-4)

José Arcadio Segundo was the sole survivor of that incident and as he tried to escape from the train that was carrying the dead bodies, he saw “the man corpses, woman corpses, child corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected
bananas” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 312*). The tragedy did not end there. The greater tragedy lied in the fact that nobody remembered the terrible act of inhumanity:

José Arcadio Segundo did not speak until he had finished drinking his coffee.

“‘There must have been three thousand of them’, he murmured.

“What?”

“The dead”, he clarified. “It must have been all of the people who were at the station.”

The woman measured him with a pitying look. “There haven’t been any dead here,” she said. “Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo.” (García Márquez, *One Hundred 313-4*)

The truth of the incident was already being suppressed by those in power, so much so that even Aureliano Segundo did not believe his brother’s version of what happened in the station:

Aureliano Segundo . . . did not believe the version of the massacre or the nightmare trip of the train loaded with corpses travelling toward the sea either. The night before he had read an extraordinary proclamation to the nation which said that the workers had left the station and had returned home in peaceful groups. The proclamation also stated that the union leaders, with great patriotic spirit, had reduced their demands to two points: a reform of medical services and the building of latrines in the living quarters. (García Márquez, *One Hundred 314-15*)
Despite José Arcadio Segundo’s attempt, the truth remained untold; or rather the corruptive forces of the company as well as the government tried everything in their power to eliminate the last vestiges of the brutal truth:

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, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped. (315)

Political repression continued. Every sentence of Márquez attacks the vile nature of the government and its repressive measures:

At night, after taps, they [the soldiers] knocked doors down with their rifle butts, hauled suspects out of their beds, and took them off on trips from which there was no return. The search for and extermination of the hoodlums, murderers, arsonists, and rebels of Decree No. 4 was still going on, but the military denied it even to the relatives of the victims who crowded the commandants’ offices in search of news. “You must have been dreaming,” the officers insisted. “Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town”. In that way they were finally able to wipe out the union leaders. (García Márquez, One Hundred 316)

The sinister way of “wiping out the union leaders” by taking them off for trips “from which there was no return” itself spoke volumes about the repressive tactics. The authorities were successful in erasing the memories of the massacre. Nobody believed
José Arcadio Buendía’s version of the massacre and all those who could were already brutally suppressed.

The truth was so ‘mangled’ that people even doubted whether the massacre actually happened. Just as in this novel where the truth was forcefully repressed, so did it happen in 1928. There were different versions of casualties as well as different responses towards the whole incident. Gene H. Bell-Villada’s personal experience proves as to how much the truth was distorted, as he recounts his visit to Aracataca in August 1982:

But my “Macondian” experience would reach a kind of climax when the youthful General Secretary of the town introduced me to an elderly retiree, who for years had worked as timekeeper (he used the English word) for United Fruit. His brothers had also been Company employees, and he remembered with great wistfulness the glory days of Banana prosperity, when there was lots of money to spare and folks would dance the native cumbia with peso bills burning away in their upheld hands.

I asked him what he thought about the strikers. This is what he answered. “Look, those people only caused problems and ruined everything. And let me tell you, all that stuff about massacres or whatever, its all just a story. Lies. It never happened. The most I heard of was two guys shot. Look, if there really were all those dead, then you tell me, where’d they dump the corpses?” Thus spoke the senior citizen, in those words more or less, and at that point I became
especially aware of the extent to which García Márquez works from reality. (Bell-Villada, “Banana strike” 136)

As the authorities were trying to “wipe out the union leaders”, José Arcadio Segundo took refuge in Melquíades’s room. When he realized that his voice would never be heard, he resigned himself to hide in Melquíades’s room. And magically he was saved from persecution from the authorities when they did not ‘see’ him inside the room during one of their raids. And since then, he severed his ties with the outer world and immersed himself in the reading of Melquíades’s manuscripts with the feeling of being protected by “the supernatural light, by the sound of the rain, by the feeling of being invisible” (García Márquez, One Hundred 318). However, his escape from persecution as well as his decision to escape the vicissitudes of history was somewhat similar to the first patriarch José Arcadio Buendías’s escape into nostalgia. And this escape from reality would inevitably have a negative impact on Macondo itself:

The peace experienced by José Arcadio the Second is, of course, bought at a price — the last nugget of historical consciousness is absorbed into a magical sphere. The last Buendía rebel thus plays into the hands of his oppressors, who now proceed with impunity to erase the massacre from the history books. Given that José Arcadio the Second abdicates his responsibility as a witness to history, the Buendías lose all vestige of objectivity, and with it, the capacity to discriminate between elementary differential categories such as truth and falsehood. As a result, the town as a whole suffers the fate that had previously befallen the characters individually. It is completely
isolated from the external world by rains which are said to presage its eventual destruction, and it sinks into a state of lethargy as it begins to lose its grip on reality. (Williamson 56)

The rain which started on the day of the massacre continued and the company suspended its activities. It was an almost Biblical rain, as it “rained for four years, eleven months, and two days” (García Márquez, One Hundred 320), and Macondo tried hard to survive the deluge. However, the process of destruction had already started. The deluge and the subsequent decay of Macondo was the physical/natural manifestation of the actual decay brought about by the exploitation of Macondo by the Banana Company and as it abandoned its operations in Macondo, the Company (like the deluge) struck the final blow on Macondo:

Macondo was in ruins. In the swampy streets there were the remains of furniture, animal skeletons covered with red lilies, the last memories of the hordes of newcomers who had fled Macondo as wildly as they had arrived. The houses that had been built with such taste during the banana fever had been abandoned. The banana company tore down its installations. All that remained of the former wired-in city were the ruins. The wooden houses, the cool terraces for breezy card-playing afternoons, seemed to have been blown away in an anticipation of the prophetic wind that years later would wipe Macondo off the face of the earth. (García Márquez, One Hundred 336)

The rains destroyed Aureliano Segundo’s immense property and he was reduced to selling lotteries to survive. The man who once papered his house with one-peso bills
now “barely had enough means to see that the family did not starve to death” (García Márquez, One Hundred 343). Aureliano’s prosperity as well as his decline is actually suggestive of Macondo’s prosperity and decay.

José Arcadio Buendía — the patriarch of the Buendía family and the founder of Macondo had once dreamt of Macondo as a noisy city with houses of mirror walls, reflective of a modern world developed by scientific progress. The mirror walls suggest ‘reflection’ — and in the case of Macondo, José Arcadio Buendía had conceived Macondo as a reflection of the developed nations, especially of Europe (owing to Latin America’s colonial link with Europe). However, this aspiration proves to be a delusion because Macondo’s relation with the outer world has never been on equal terms. Its isolation and backwardness had made it dependent on the ‘outer’ world to bring in progress and development. As the gypsies (coming from outside of Macondo) in the beginning amazed the people with the inventions, so does later on Macondo depends on the ‘forces’ coming from outside, like the Banana Company (reflective of US imperialism) for its so-called development. From the beginning till the later stage, Macondo’s continued dependence on the ‘outer’ world for its own progress is suggestive of “Latin America’s continuing history of economic and political dependence upon Europe and, later, the United States . . .” (Erickson 162).

According to James Higgins, José Arcadio Buendía’s dream of building up a modern, scientifically and technologically developed Macondo . . . in effect, is a constant of Latin American thought since Independence, the aspiration to “modernize” on the model of the
advanced industrial nations in order to achieve a similar level of
development. In the event, Macondo does come to enjoy a period of
economic growth. However, “modernization” does not come about as
the result of internal development but is imported from the outside, and
hence José Arcadio’s original dream of a city of mirrors takes on an
ironic significance in that Macondo’s role becomes that of reflecting
the developed world. And, though Macondo does undoubtedly prosper
and progress, it continues to trail behind the rest of the world, and,
furthermore, it finds itself the victim of foreign economic and cultural
imperialism. (43)

Macondo’s fluctuating conditions of prosperity and decline reflects Latin
America’s acute economic dependency:

The heritage of agrarian economies built on the export of raw materials
and foodstuffs was one of the most pronounced legacies of the
nineteenth century. In the most extreme cases, Latin American
economies in the early twentieth century depended almost entirely on a
single crop or mineral for their success: sugar in Cuba, coffee in much
of Central America, Colombia, and Brazil; tin in Bolivia; copper in
Chile; wheat and beef in Argentina. These “mono cultural” economies
had successfully entered into the international trading system, and the
revenues from exports fueled the economic growth and expansion of
infrastructure all across Latin America. Yet, it also made these
economies extremely vulnerable to the rise and fall of commodities
prices in Europe and the United States. These economies became roller
coasters lurching up and down with the shifting demand for their products in the North Atlantic world. The great depression of 1929 shattered most of the economies of Latin America as the demand for the exports of the so-called economy of desserts (coffee, sugar, bananas) plummeted. (Eakin 13)

Macondo’s later stage of development, prosperity, and subsequent economic decline illustrates:

. . . Latin America’s neo colonial status as an economic dependency of international capital, particularly North American. No sooner had Macondo embarked on a phase of autonomous economic development than it falls under the domination of North American capital and, incorporated into the world economy as a source of primary products, becomes subject to cycles of boom and recession determined by the fluctuations of the international market. Aureliano Segundo accumulates a fantastic fortune quite fortuitously, thanks to the astonishing fertility of his livestock (p. 267), and the whole community enjoys an equally fortuitous prosperity generated by the banana boom. Macondo’s experience of prosperity is thus due not to any real economic development but to the amazing richness of the region’s natural resources and to international demand for those resources. Hence it is defenseless against sudden slumps in the market. Symbol of such slumps is the great deluge that ruins Aureliano Segundo by killing his stock and that halts banana production and leads to the departure of the company, turning Macondo into a ghost town. (Higgins 43-44)
In Lorna Robinson’s words: “Expressed in the microcosm of Macondo is Latin America’s sense of being victim of a European dream, envisioned as an earthly paradise, populated and exploited for its resources, and left at the mercy of other continent’s economies and whims” (86).

Although the authorities were successful in erasing the memories of the massacre, yet José Arcadio Segundo kept the memories alive and the details of the incident was passed on to the next generation of the Buendías. Aureliano Segundo’s three children (Meme Buendía, José Arcadio and Amaranta Úrsula) were born during the period of Macondo’s happy phase as a boom town; but it was Aureliano (the illegitimate son of Meme Buendía and Mauricio Babilonia) who learnt about the massacre from his grandfather. But after years of the massacre, no one really believed Aureliano “because it was radically opposed to the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks” (García Márquez, One Hundred 355). Aureliano was the illegitimate son of Meme Buendía and Mauricio Babilonia (an apprentice mechanic working for the Banana Company) and Fernanda tried every means to sequester him (Aureliano) from the public as well as from his own family including his uncle José Arcadio and Amaranta Úrsula. And except for Fernanda, no one knew the origins of his birth. The fear of incest and illegitimacy which haunted Úrsula would remain till the end. Mauricio Babilonia was an apprentice mechanic. Conventionally, the Buendías represented the powerful oligarchy — a class which had traditionally lorded over Macondo; in the same way as the powerful landowning oligarchy that had traditionally ruled Latin America. But Aureliano was the first offspring of a worker class — the class which first started the strike and the call for a revolution for change. It was the strike which transformed Macondo’s destiny.
Macondo’s ruin was a direct result of the strike and eventually the massacre. May be the massacre would not have happened or at least the guilty would not have gone unpunished but for the complicity between the government and the Banana Company. And as José Arcadio Segundo failed to act in that time of crisis by taking refuge in Melquíades’s room, the little amount of hope too was shattered.

Úrsula’s fear of incest within the family and the myth of the birth of a child with a pig’s tail eventually comes true when Aureliano is born — the son of Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula. Aureliano Babilonia’s origin was kept hidden by Fernanda and as a result of which he and Amaranta never knew that they actually shared the relationship of a nephew and an aunt. The child Aureliano with the pig’s tail was the last of the Buendía line as Macondo inched towards its final destruction.

Drowned in the depths of his solitude and suffering (since Amaranta and the child died), Aureliano Babilonia immersed himself in the final reading of Melquíades’s manuscripts which for years the Buendía men had been trying to decipher. Finally, he realized that the manuscripts were actually “the history of the family, written by Melquíades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time” (García Márquez, One Hundred 421).

The final lines of the novel remains one of the most discussed and debated topic for critics as well as readers. The final doom and destruction of Macondo has evoked numerous responses ranging from it being declared as one of the most pessimistic ending among the twentieth century novels, while some also finds
optimism even as Macondo is wiped away from the face of the earth by the “biblical hurricane”.

As Aureliano Babilonia gradually unlocked the keys of the manuscript, Macondo was “already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane . . .” (García Márquez, One Hundred 422). Every event and every moment of the Buendía family was inscribed and 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, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. (García Márquez, One Hundred 422)

This concluding line of the novel finally brings an end to the novel as well as to the “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude”. Many critics have argued about the evident fictionality of the whole story as Aureliano Babilonia realizes that his story as well as that of his entire race was conjured by Melquíades, and that even

Aureliano’s attempt to decipher the prophetic manuscripts was predetermined. The conclusion suggest that the Buendías were merely specters, whose predetermined existence was guaranteed by Melquíades’s prophetic writings, and thus the family line ends with the final line of the manuscripts. (Erickson 169)
However, this is one of the many possible readings of the novel’s conclusion. A close examination of the socio-historical grounds that the novel and its entire story and events are pitted in reveals that “this final apocalypse and reduction of Macondo to a spectral “city of mirrors (or mirages)” metaphorically transposes Latin America’s history of dependence and underdevelopment” (169). Seen from a socio-historical point of view, this final destruction by a biblical hurricane is the ultimate showdown of a historical process that had occurred much earlier. Macondo’s fate was predetermined, no doubt by Melquíades. Keeping this aside, one would realize that the people of Macondo were never controllers of their own destiny. Just as the gypsies’ incursions would ‘confuse’ them in their own village; so did later on the Banana Company. The Banana Company with “means that had been reserved for Divine Providence” controlled the destinies of the people. The terrible massacre of the workers presages the fated annihilation of Macondo and a close examination of Márquez’s description of the massacre and the language used helps in the understanding of the final lines.

The fatal end of the race is already guaranteed when Márquez begins the chapter of the massacre. “A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion” (García Márquez, One Hundred 311). The intensity of the words that Márquez uses during the narration of the massacre such as the “seismic voice”, “volcanic breath”, the “roar of a cataclysm”, with “a great potential of expansion” leads way to the final “surge of wind” whose “cyclonic strength tore the doors and windows off their hinges, pulled off the roof of the east wing, and uprooted the foundations” (García Márquez, One Hundred 422). Just as the “gigantic whirlwind” (311) created by the machine guns
“wiped out” (312) the “whorish world where Úrsula Iguarán had sold so many little candy animals” (312), so does the “fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble” (422) finally destroys Macondo.

The post-massacre decline of Macondo foreshadows its final destruction. After the massacre it rained for “four years, 11 months and two days” (García Márquez, *One Hundred* 320), which “inevitably brings to mind the biblical Flood, though rather than cleanse Macondo and allow its people to start anew, the rains are the beginning of the end —” (Bell-Villada, *García Márquez* 78). Márquez almost hints at the final sweeping away of the ‘whorish world’ of Macondo when he describes its ruined state after the rains where the beautiful houses of the once prosperous town “seemed to have blown away in an anticipation of the prophetic wind that years later would wipe Macondo off the face of the earth” (García Márquez, *One Hundred* 336). This “anticipation of the prophetic wind” can be taken as the author’s hint that “the banana company is the real destructive storm here, the historical reality that underlies the mythical apocalypse of the conclusion” (Erickson 172). The image of the “gigantic whirlwind” created by bullets which kill thousands of workers is a fitting image for the final “biblical hurricane”, which eventually would annihilate the world of Macondo; and this apocalyptic wind is a realized metaphor for Latin America’s exploitation by foreign capital, exemplified by the United Fruit invasion of Colombia. Macondo is “spun about” into “dust and rubble” by the swirling hurricane, just as Latin America has been underdeveloped and exploited by the forces of metropolitan capital. The conclusion is a metaphorical redoubling of the historical devastation already wrought by the banana company,
sweeping up the leaf storm which has, in effect, already “wiped out” . . . the “whorish world” (249) of neocolonial Macondo. (Erickson 172-3)

Throughout Macondo’s history, the Buendías as well as the people of Macondo have most often been controlled by outer/foreign forces or events. The gypsies who came from distant lands introduced them to marvellous inventions which attracted as well as bemused them. The introduction to politics and political wars also began with the arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote. These outside agencies which brought about their political ideologies led to the countless civil wars in which Macondo lost many men as well as its former Arcadian serenity and innocence. ‘Technological inventions’ as well as consecutive ‘progress’ was always a result of outer forces. The most advanced technological creation was brought from outside — the train — which was also the harbinger of so-called ‘progress’; as along with it also came the Banana Company. In a matter of time the destinies of Macondo’s inhabitants came to be directly or indirectly controlled by the Company; so much so that it was in their powers to declare the workers as non-existent as well as totally obliterate the entire gruesome massacre from the memories of the people and also from its history. No wonder by the time of Macondo’s final decline there was no trace of the massacre in the history of Macondo:

Every time that Aureliano mentioned the matter, not only the proprietress but some people older than she would repudiate the myth of the workers hemmed in at the station and the train with two hundred cars loaded with dead people, and they would even insist that, after all, everything had been set forth in judicial documents and in primary-
school text books: that the banana company had never existed. (García Márquez, One Hundred 396)

Macondo’s history, hence, was also controlled by the Company. They were never controllers of their own destiny. Hence, when Aureliano Babilonia decodes Melquíades’s manuscript and realizes that their whole life history is predetermined, it can be read as a metaphor for the historical experience of dependence. Aureliano’s revelation that Macondo is a spectral figure of someone else’s design captures the way in which this history of colonial and postcolonial dependence has restricted Latin Americans’ ability to determine their own historical development. (Erickson 173)

This inability to determine one’s own destiny can also be related to the theme of solitude, which according to Stephen Minta is not just a psychological concern for Márquez but a concern for Latin America’s subordinate and peripheral status to foreign/imperial powers:

Solitude . . . fascinates him as an expression of the collective isolation of Latin American people, a people for whom history has seemed a process to be endured rather than created, a people divorced from a sense of history because theirs has been written by outsiders, a people condemned to a peripheral role in relation to a greater world whose limits have been defined elsewhere. (qtd. in Eickson 173)
This conception of solitude pinpoints the reality of political dependence that underlies Aureliano’s final revelation, the powerlessness that results from Latin America’s peripheral relation to the “greater world” that determines its history . . . suggesting that the history in which the Macondans’ belong is not their own history, in which they purposefully act, but is, in a concrete sense, determined from afar. (Erickson 173-4)

Seen from such a socio-politico-historical perspective, the end of Macondo as well as the closure of the novel reads as extremely pessimistic; where “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth” (García Márquez, One Hundred 422).

There, however, also lies the possibility of finding hope. A more hopeful interpretation of the conclusion is possible, if not absolute.

The solitude of the Buendías can also be related to their egoism, and in effect, it can also be taken “as a reflection of the egoistic, individualistic values by which they live. And their propensity to incest mirrors the selfish, inward-looking attitude of a privileged oligarchy jealously defending its class interests against other sectors of society” (Higgins 45).

Melquíades had once predicted that Macondo would be a luminous city but there would be “no trace remaining of the race of the Buendías” (García Márquez, One Hundred 55). Hence, what Aureliano was reading in Melquíades’s manuscripts
could also be taken as an “imminent demise of his own class” (Higgins 45). Many critics interpret the biblical hurricane as the socialist revolution that would sweep away the injustices of the old oligarchic order. This book itself was written during the time when at a socio political level, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution generated an atmosphere of optimism throughout Latin America. Aureliano Babilonia was the first among the Buendías with a working class origin (since his father was an apprentice mechanic in the Company), and moreover his uncle José Arcadio transmitted the untold sufferings and the unrecorded story of the massacre to him. It was Aureliano who was destined to be able to decipher the manuscript because it was he who had “broken out of the narrow perspective of his own privileged class and developed a social awareness (Higgins 46), which would enable him to “arrive at an understanding of Macondo’s history and to see that it must culminate in a new socialist ethos that will do away with the old oligarchic and neocolonial order” (46).

Irrespective of the interpretations, Márquez’s socio-political concerns are amply evident. The entire story of the one hundred years of the Buendía race as well as that of Macondo is like a chest-filled with priceless jewels — every chapter, every event, every moment is priceless and deeply embedded in the history of an entire nation.

In his speech “The Solitude of Latin America”, Márquez makes a very deliberate and strong statement; justifying the rights of Latin American people to be able to live life on their own terms, to be able to form governments of peace and stability, to be able to establish equality (in a region which is an example of gross socio-economic inequities for centuries), and finally be able to control their destinies.
without any imperial power (be it European or North American) hovering over them. Macondo was conceived as a utopia which however turned into a fearful dystopic world, but, nevertheless, Márquez does not lose hope of the possibility of a better and a more humane world (a world where Macondans might have a second opportunity on earth):

... it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.

(García Márquez, “The Solitude” 90-91)