THE PANGS OF LOVE: DEATH DECAY AND LONELINESS

Wilson Rockey “The problem of loneliness in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez”, Department of English, University of Calicut, 1999
Garcia Marquez's characters share the aspects of solitude which Octavio Paz has pointed out in his *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. In the words of Linda B. Hall, "For both Octavio Paz and Garcia Marquez the deepest form of communion and the closest antidote to solitude is sexual love" (Hall, 1973, 255). In his essay, "The Dialectic of Solitude", Paz comments that solitude is the most profound fact of the human condition. According to him, man is the only creature who is painfully aware of his state of being lonely. So he seeks out the love of others to get rid of his loneliness. The various characters in novels like *CDF*, *LTC*, *OLD* and *SP* are tortured by the feeling that they are alone. They seek the friendship and physical presence of other characters. When these attempts fail, they retreat to total loneliness.

**CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD**

*CDF* is a powerful indictment of Latin American society. It presents a rotten, decaying civilization where people are indifferent to the destinies of each other. It is a journalistic investigation into a
murder which took place twenty seven years ago. Salman Rushdie comments in an article titled "Angel Gabriel" published in London Review of Books:

The book and its narrator probe slowly, painfully through the mists of half accurate memories, equivocations, contradictory versions, trying to establish what happened and why; and achieve only provisional answers (Rushdie, 1982, 4).

The original title of the novel is Cronica de una muerte anunciada, ie, 'The Chronicle of an announced death'. "Aren't 'Big Mama's Funeral', One Hundred Years of Solitude and The Autumn of the Patriarch all chronicles of death foretold?", asks Anibal Gonzalez (1988, 69). Garcia Marquez employs the technique of journalistic reporting to narrate the incident. He considers "journalism's influence on his work not so much as a matter of style but as one of rhetorical strategems which he uses to give verisimilitude to his stories" (Gonzalez, 63). Journalism taught him strategies to give validity to his stories such as:

Giving Remedios the Beautiful sheets (white sheets) in order to make her go up into
heaven, or giving a cup of chocolate (and not another drink) to Father Nicanor Reina before he levitates ten centimetres above the ground are very useful tricks of journalism (Mendoza, 1983, 44).

In 1951, when the event took place Garcia Marquez was not interested in it because if he wrote a novel it might affect the real characters who were still alive. His mother had asked him not to write about the people known to her personally. But Garcia Marquez was deeply interested in one point: that the murder could have been averted because the murderers themselves were not much interested in the bloody act. That no one tried to interrupt them was quite strange.

The novel is "an almost straightforward reconstruction of a murder that took place years earlier" (Bandhopadhyay, 1987, 92). The narrator moves backward and forward in the novel's time frame. The narrative is a re-enactment of the murder. "Indeed the destruction of the chronological order creates a jigsaw puzzle of a highly complex character" (Bandhopadhyay, 95). The text tries to constitute a kind of ritual repetition of the crime. "The novel appears to posit a homology between the way the crime takes place and the
manner in which the narrative of the crime is constructed" (Alonso, 1987, 155). The narrator is "trying to put back together the broken mirror of memory from so many scattered shreds..." (Alonso, 158). D. Keith Mano calls it "a simile for the fiction making process" (1983, 699).

The real event occurred on January 22, 1951 in Sucre, Colombia. When he discovered that his wife Margarita was not a virgin, Miguel Reyes Palancia gave her back to her mother. Her brother, Victor Chica Salas, killed Cayetano Gentile Climento for deflowering his sister. It was a killing to protect the honour of the family. Miguel Reyes Palancia later married Henriqueza Obregon in Costa Rica and had twelve children. He lived as an insurance agent in Barranquilla.

In CDF, Bayardo San Roman discovers on his wedding night that his bride Angela Vicario is not a virgin. He sends her back to her house. When questioned, she reveals that it is Santiago Nazar who deflowered her. Her brothers, the Vicario twins, Pablo and Pedro announce their intention of killing Santiago Nazar and kill him in front of his house. Everyone considers it as a murder to protect the honour of the family. Many years later, the repenting husband returns and receives the girl.
"Chronicle of a Death Foretold is about honour and about its opposite -- that is to say, dishonour, shame" (Rushdie, 4). Its beginning, "On the day they were going to kill him..." (1) reminds us of the beginning of HYS. A lot of people had heard that the Vicario twins were planning to kill Santiago Nazar. The Black cook in his house, Victorio Guzman, and her daughter, Divina Flor knew it. Prudencia Cotes, the fiancee of Pablo Vicario knew that they were going to kill him. Clotilde Armenta, the shop keeper knew their intentions. But nobody tried to prevent them. Nobody gave a warning to Santiago Nazar.

The Vicario twins were reluctant to carry out the revenge. That was why they announced it to the town people. It was their duty to kill Santiago. They thought the people would prevent them from the terrible act. They were the victims of the circumstance. They were forced to kill Santiago Nazar. People probably thought that they should not interfere with the act of revenge. "All have ostensibly cast-iron excuses, loss of nerve, forgetfulness, failing to take the threat seriously, not wishing to become involved" (Hughes, 1982, 24).
"The narrator/author plays the role of investigative reporter, interviewing those who knew the victim and the murderers and those who saw the crime" (Grossman, 1981, 72). The story develops gradually from memory of officials, shopkeepers, gossips and whores. According to William H. Gass "Chronicle of a Death" does not tell but pieces together the torn apart body of a story...(Gass, 1983, 83). Grossman considers the murder as an act of fate:

There is a chorus of onlookers who know that the Vicario brothers will disembowel the alleged lover of their sister, Angela. They know, but they do nothing to prevent the murder, to stop the brothers, to warn the victim, for how can they interfere with what has already been determined by Fate and the demanding Furies of honour and machismo? (Grossman, 72).

Arnold M. Penuel has studied in detail the features of the novel: "In a sense the failure of the townspeople to prevent the murder when the brothers provide them every opportunity to do so transforms the twins into unwilling tools of the town's collective will" (Penuel, 1985, 755). They strictly follow the
code of honour. It results in the murder. The affairs of honour are sacred to them. In a sense, the town itself is the protagonist of the novel. "The novel's chief interest lies in exploring the town's collective psyche or communal values" (Penuel, 755).

Santiago Nazar's death is to be viewed as a communal sacrifice. He is an innocent victim, the scape-goat. His death is of public nature, it is widely announced, all wait eagerly for it and it has witnesses. Penuel considers it a ritual sacrifice:

The atmosphere of almost orgiastic excitement occasioned mainly by the wedding, but intensified by the anticipation of the Bishop's arrival, prepares the multitude psychologically for the culminating and most exciting event of all: the sacrifice of Santiago (Penuel, 762).

The sacrifice has its impacts on the community. Clotilde Armenta's husband, Don Rogelio de la Flor dies on witnessing the murder, after witnessing the autopsy Lazaro Aponte turns to vegetarianism, Hortensio Baute goes insane. Angela Vicario changes her life and sends letters to Bayardo San Roman which results in their reunion. Penuel analyses the collective behaviour of the town:
The town's crime is principally the result of its subjugation to the collective conscience of its forbears... Like Angela, before her awakening, the town's collective behaviour is largely determined by unconscious forces...(Penuel, 766).

Nobody prevents the murder because they are in the hands of fate. In Gregory Rabassa's words:

What unites so much of Garcia Marquez's writings is the sense of inexorability, of fatefulness. Things often come to an end that has been there all the while, in spite of what might have been done to avoid it, and often mysteriously and unexplicably...(Rabassa, 1982, 49).

In CDF, the hand of doom is unavoidable. Fate chose Santiago Nazar as the victim for a communal sacrificial rite. "Who killed Santiago Nazar? The Vicario brothers, to be sure; the whole town. perhaps" (Diaz-Migoyo, 1988, 81).

It is not certain who deflowered Angela Vicario. The narrator, a friend of Santiago Nazar, believes that he may not be the person. He discovers
evidences also to prove the innocence of Santiago Nazar. In a town where nothing is secret, nobody has discovered an affair between Santiago Nazar and Angela Vicario. He does not know till the moment of his death why he is being killed by the Vicario twins.

That he will be killed is a certainty to many of the characters in the novel. There is a sense of foreknowledge. "The town's collective knowledge of the crime-to-be and its unbearable guilt, is built on discrete instances of individual foresight..." (Alonso, 154). For instance, Hortensia Baute sees the knives dripping blood before the actual murder. Early in the morning of the day, Divina Flor feels that Santiago Nazar's hands are those of a deadman. When reminded that Nazar usually went about armed, Pedro Vicario says, "Deadmen can't shoot" (CDF, 110), implying that he is already dead.

Bayardo San Roman is "Romantic and exotic" (Crossman, 73). He is the son of General Petronio San Roman, the Conservative hero who defeated Colonel Aureliano Buendia. His mother is Alberta Simonds, a mulatto who was once declared the most beautiful woman in the Antilles. "He is a princely figure, a cowboy, a knight and an adventurer....He is the prototypical
mysterious stranger who is wealthy and wildly attractive, whose origins are unknown" (Grossman, 63).

He goes from town to town looking for a faithful woman to marry. He has a way of speaking that hides more than it reveals. He is an engineer, telegraph operator, swimmer and has wide medical knowledge. He takes communion, he drinks but never brawls. He is a soldier of fortune, a bear-tamer and a diver after buried fortune.

His marriage to Angela Vicario is loveless, a marriage of convenience. Angela hates Bayardo San Roman. He has no regard for the feelings of the girl. He tries to negate his lack of love with a show of wealth. "In many ways, then, the novel offers itself as an icy demythologising of both romantic love and the romantic folly it inspires..." (Buford, 1982, 965).

The love of virginity leads to a disaster in CDF. "The cult of virginity is an integral part of the cult of death" (Penuel, 758). In HYS also the obsession with virginity leads to loneliness and death. "For Garcia Marquez the cult of virginity is a vestige of taboo morality and symbolizes sterility in human relations and ultimately death. Santiago's death is the end product of this cult" (Penuel, 758).
The double standard for man and woman in sexual matters is criticised in the novel. Maria Alejandrina Cervantes's house of prostitution exists as a threat to the morality of the community. The young men of the town relieve their sorrows in her apostolic lap.

"She was the one who ravaged" the narrator's "generation's virginity" (CDF, 87). Santiago Nazar is notorious as a deflowerer of virgins. He tries to seduce Divina Flor, the Black cook's daughter. Yet, nobody finds fault with men. But, when Angela Vicario is no virgin, she is abused and sent back to her parents. García Márquez is against the concept of machismo. In an interview, he tells Rita Guibert that "machismo is cowardly, a lack of manliness" (Guibert, 1973, 316).

The book contains an attack on the Catholic Church. Santiago does not go to his ranch that day because of the arrival of the Bishop. The Bishop refuses to disembark and continues his journey with a hasty blessing. In refusing to disembark, the Bishop betrays the people's faith and hope. The cocks brought by the people on the dock and the cacophony of crowing indicate the decadence of the Church. The Bishop was
fond of coxcomb soup. It shows his voluptuousness and the betrayal of the principles of Christ. Fr. Amador displays the Church's attitude towards life and death when he performs the autopsy of Santiago Nazar's dead body. He pulls out the sliced up intestines, gives an angry blessing and throws them into the garbage pail. Penuel calls it an inhuman act. "Not content with killing the body, the Church feels compelled to destroy it completely until it loses its identity through dispersal" (Penuel, 760).

There are numerous Biblical and religious allusions in the novel. 'Santiago' means St. James, one of the disciples of Christ. 'Nazar' may indicate Nazarine, Jesus Christ. His father's estate is called 'The Divine Face'. The Vicario twins are named Peter (Pedro) and Paul (Pablo), two important disciples of Christ. Vicario' means vicar or deputy. The Pope is the vicar of Christ on earth. The Vicarios' father is named Poncio after Pontius Pilate. So Santiago Nazar becomes a Christ figure. "Church is presented as having stayed so far from its original teachings that it has symbolically slain its own founder" (Penuel, 760). The crowing of the cocks relates Santiago's death to that of Christ. The premature deaths of Christ and Santiago are foretold. Both are victims of the multitude's ignorance and fear of life.
"Chronicle of a Death Foretold deconstructs a version of the New Testament" (McGuirk, 1987, 188). When the Church fails to cater to the needs of the soul, Maria Alejandrina Cervantes offers solace to the disturbed hearts. The narrator himself approaches her for consolation. Her devotion and real concern for human needs is a parody of the role played by the Church. "Associated with Maria are authentic grief, human feelings, and an effort of tender consolation" (Penuel, 762).

"There is not a single line in my novels which is not based on reality", Garcia Marquez told Pliniyo Apuleyo Mendoza (Mendoza, 50). In this novel there are references to people close to him. Thus we find references to Mercedes, his wife; Margot, his sister; Luis Enrique, his brother; Luisa Santiago, his mother and Gerineldo Marquez, his grandfather. He had worked as a reporter in 'El Universal', El Heraldo' and 'El Espectador'. This experience helped him to present a horrifying murder in the form of a chronicle. The novel has a claustrophobic atmosphere. Its mood is sombre and tragic.

Joseph Epstein is of the view that Garcia Marquez "combines the two powerful traditions of Latin
American writing: the left wing 'engage tradition' of the Communist poet Pablo Neruda and the modernist 'mandarin tradition' of Jorge Luis Borges" (Epstein, 1983, 65). He believes that in CDF, the Borges tradition predominates. Anthony Burgess comments on the shortcomings of the novel: "The little novel is an honest record, cunningly contrived, but it seems to abet a complacent debasement of morality rather than to open up larger vistas" (Burgess, 1983, 36).

**LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA**

*LTC* is a brilliant exploration of the solitude of love. Garcia Marquez has blended with it themes like aging, death and decay. The story is set in a Caribbean town which is recurrently plagued by cholera. In this novel also Garcia Marquez returns to his favourite "historical period -- from independence to the first decades of the twentieth century" (Franco, 1988, 573).

It belongs to the literary genre generally known as 'folletin', a sentimental and lachrymose love story. It is a realistic novel with elements of television soap operas. Garcia Marquez "writes with impassioned control, out of a maniacal serenity" (Pynchon, 1988, 1). Pynchon calls it a "shining and heart-breaking novel" (Pynchon, 49).
Garcia Marquez is obsessed with plagues. There is a famous insomnia plague in HYS. In the same novel, birds fall dead inside houses reminding us of Camus's *La Peste* (The Plague). In an interview with Marlise Simons, Garcia Marquez comments: "Plagues are like imponderable dangers that surprise people. They seem to have a quality of destiny. It is the phenomenon of death on a mass scale" (Simons, 1983, 23). He believes that the great plagues have always produced terrific excesses. People are deeply affected by plagues and hence he is interested in plagues.

In LTC the setting is not a magical world like Macondo. Here no one ascends to heaven. On the contrary, ordinary events take place in a sleepy provincial capital. "The genius of *Love in the Time of Cholera* is the filling in of the gaps of ordinary life, the munificence of detail that can be extracted from a place where...nothing had happened for four centuries" (Gray, 1988, 77). Here "everything was known, and many things were known even before they happened" (LTC, 339).

"The time of cholera is the time of romantic love" (Wood, 1988, 9). In this novel, love is treated as a disease. "Love is like cholera, even its physical
symptoms, dizziness, nausea, fever and the rest can be the same" (Wood, 9). The love described in the novel both defies and redeems time, anger and contagion..." (Beverley, 1988, 410).

The novel tells of Florentino Ariza's passion for Fermina Daza, a wealthy beautiful girl. Though he succeeds in getting his sweetheart's love, her father does not approve of the relationship and sends her on a long journey of forgetting. When she returns, she rejects him and marries a highly esteemed young doctor. Dejected, Florentino Ariza leads a solitary life, seduces innumerable ladies and waits for the death of his rival, Dr. Juvenal Urbino. When he dies he offers her his love again. The former lovers gradually find true love and solicitude.

The novel took its origin from two sources. The first was the love affair of Garcia Marquez's parents. It closely resembles the affair between Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza. Garcia Marquez's mother belonged to a well-to-do family and his father was a poor telegraph operator. Yet he wooed her with love letters, violin serenades, and telegraph messages. Then her father sent her on a long voyage to forget him. His messages followed her everywhere. When she
returned they got married. (In the novel, Fermina Daza rejects Florentino Ariza when she returns). The second source was the murder of an old American couple who would meet every year in Acapulco. They were in their eighties and married to other people. When they went boating, they were killed by the boatman. Garcia Marquez combined these two stories in LTC. The single visual image behind the work was that of two old people dancing a bolero on the deck of a boat.

The novel begins with the death of the Antillean refugee Jeremiah de St. Amour, followed by the death of Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Dr. Urbino, 81 years old, dies on the Pentecost Sunday falling from a ladder while trying to retrieve a pet parrot. He was one of the most distinguished citizens of the city. When the funeral is over Florentino Ariza, President of the River Company of the Caribbean, approaches the widow of the dead physician and repeats his eternal fidelity and love. Fermina Daza again rejects him. Then we have a flashback which takes us to the passionate love affair between Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza. The middle chapters deal with Florentino Ariza's escapades and Fermina Daza's married life. The last chapter brings us back to the present. Florentino Ariza courts Fermina Daza again.
Both Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza are half-orphans. The former had no mother while the latter had no father. Fermina Daza is described as a beautiful adolescent. She walks "with natural haughtiness" (LTC, 56). Her "doe's gait" makes her "seem immune to gravity" (LTC, 56). Their love and separation is the major theme of the novel. Fermina Daza is under the strict care of her aunt. Her father who became rich through illegal means wants to make her a great lady. She put an end to the affair when she learned that she was in love not with the unfortunate man but with the idea of love itself. Her rejection is a major setback to him. But he is prepared to wait till she is free again.

She marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino, a highly esteemed doctor, far above her station in life. Dr. Urbino fights against cholera, as his father did. He promotes measures of public health. Fermina Daza gracefully plays the role of wife, mother and household manager. She spends her time in Paris like the fashionable ladies of Latin America. Yet she always felt as if her life had been lent to her by her husband. It was a happy married life. Yet, there was something wrong. She felt it like "the pea in the bed of the Princess" (Carter, 1988, 14). "The questions of
marriage and the curtailment of personal freedom preoccupy Garcia Marquez in this novel" (Fiddian, 1987, 200).

Florentino Ariza does not marry at all. He has a brilliant career at the River Company of the Caribbean, ending up as its President. He is an excellent womanizer, with women ranging from a school girl to a fifty-year-old widow. Often his relationships end in catastrophe. A beautiful pigeon trainer has been killed by her cuckolded husband. The school girl, America Vicuna, commits suicide.

Florentino Ariza, the depressed lover, embarks on a course of womanizing. He has to his credit "622 long term liaisons apart from countless fleeting adventures..." (LTC, 152). Still he keeps his fidelity, his craving for a life with Fermina Daza. At the end of the novel he says, "I have remained a virgin for you" (LTC, 339).

Florentino Ariza's passion is consummated after fifty one years, nine months and four days. The consummation takes place in a river boat. To protect their privacy the Captain decides to hoist the flag of cholera. It is the love of old people with wrinkled skin, sagged breasts, withered neck and decaying bones.
The couple experiences "the tranquil, wholesome love of experienced grand parents" (LTC, 345). The boat is destined to go up and down the river perpetually. It is an "autumnal romance" (Franco, 573).

In "New Fidelity", they discover the new love. The boat moves along the ravaged land. Not much life is left. Though the yellow quarantine flag ensures privacy, they will never touch the land. The Captain discovers that "it is life more than death that has no limits" (LTC, 348). They enjoy the last fragrance of love.

Michael Wood speaks of Garcia Marquez's fondness for numbers in his essay "Hearstick" published in The New York Review of Books. There are one hundred years of solitude, the rain pours down on Macondo for 4 years 11 months and 2 days, one eats eight quarters of coffee, 30 raw eggs and the juice of 40 oranges and Florentino Ariza's love is consummated after fifty one years, nine months and four days. "The numbers call up an air of legend, a precision that wildly mocks the idea of precision. But numbers can also suggest patience, an intimacy with the slow passage of time" (Wood, 6).
The novel "is an extra-ordinary poetisation of old age" (Strawson, 1988, 42). In the first part Jeremiah de St. Amour commits suicide by inhaling the fumes of gold cyanide. His name suggests the loneliness of love. He dies of gerentophobia, to escape the indignities of old age. It is an overture to the novel. Jeremiah de St. Amour has decided that he will die at sixty. "As the date approached he had gradually succumbed to despair as if his death had been not his own decision but an inexorable destiny" (LTC, 15). Jeremiah de St. Amour's death is a resolution against old age. Florentino Ariza is tortured by the thought that death will conquer him. His fierce war of love will be turned to dust and nothingness.

Various types of love are described in the novel. "Nothing one does in bed is immoral if it helps to perpetuate love", Florentino Ariza tells the widow Nazret (LTC, 151). Bailey finds in the novel the manifestations of various types of love:

Love in all its varied manifestations is celebrated and lamented in this eventful novel: platonic love, loveless love, the love that grows suddenly between two people who have lived together without it; maniacal love and love which is sickness unto death (Bailey, 1988, 29).
Garcia Marquez describes the pangs of unrequited love: the fever, the cramps and the heartburn.

Florentino Ariza's passion for Fermina Daza is "extravagant, pink, innocent, high pitched romantic love" (Simpson, 1988, 22). He goes to her house to deliver a message to her father. He finds her teaching her aunt to read. He woos her through letters. He sends her a lock of his own hair. She sends him the veins of leaves dried in dictionaries, the wings of butterflies and the feathers of magic birds.

Florentino Ariza eats roses until he shows the symptoms of cholera. He gives her an ultimatum and receives a reply on a page torn from a school notebook. She lives in the kingdom of childhood, of pure and eternal love, devoid of the earthiness and the torment of the body. Her reply is: "Very well, I will marry you if you promise not to make me eat egg-plant" (LTCC, 71).

When she is sent on a long journey it is the end of their childhood. Florentino Ariza also feels it so. He dives for sunken galleons in search of gold. There is no external obstacle in their affair. Fermina has achieved maturity. Her way of walking displays it.
The change in her braid has erased all girlish traces. Earlier she let it hang down her back. She now wore it twisted over her left shoulder.

She marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino not for money. "She was stunned by the fear of an opportunity slipping away, and by the imminence of her twenty first birthday. Her father's business was on the ruin. Daza was alone in the world. Her former school mates were enjoying life.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino is a man who went to Europe and inherited its liberalism. He fights against superstitions. S.M.J. Minta calls him an outsider:

Yet he remains as a man who will never know his own country... a man blinded by the promise of a dream that is forever future. In the end it is Urbino who appears ridiculous, one who dies not for science, not love but for a parrot (Minta, 1988, 730).

His son is an ordinary doctor who even failed to produce a child. His daughter also produces no son. The great tradition of medical practice ends with him. LTC is a "celebration of all that Urbino is not: it is a novel in praise of spontaneity, sexual passion,"
disorder and vitality and of...old age over death..." (Minta, 730).

The bizarre and the outlandish dominate the novel. Garcia Marquez is interested in communities doomed for isolation. The time of cholera becomes the time of romantic love in this novel. "Like cholera, love is mortal, exclusive and undiscriminating" (Wood, 9). The novelist infuses the themes of decay and solitude through the landscape. It shows the stagnation and devastation of Latin America.

OF LOVE AND OTHER DEMONS

An atmosphere of death, decay and solitude permeates OLD. In this novel, Garcia Marquez takes us to a Caribbean town where slave trade and religious hegemony determine the destiny of the citizens. The ship with unexplainable series of death on board, the corpses thrown into the sea, and the disfigured swollen bodies with a strange majenta colouring washed ashore -- all introduced in the first page itself -- take us to the dark world of pagan beliefs and superstitions.

"The excellence of Garcia Marquez lies in the originality of his multi-layered story-telling" (Gill, 1987, 144). OLD is an example. On October 26, 1949,
while he was working as a journalist, he was sent to the cemetery of the Clarissan nuns at Santa Clara. When a burial crypt that bore the name 'Sierva Maria' was opened, a stream of long hair spilled out. He had heard of a twelve-year-old girl with hair trailing behind her like a bridal train, who had died of rabies. This incident helped him to write OLD. As S.P. Ganguly comments, "Memories and experience have played a vital role in his career as a writer" (Ganguly, 1987, 176).

Garcia Marquez explores "Latin American life to its roots or origin" (Gill, 144). In this novel he presents the events that follow when Sierva Maria, a twelve-year-old Marquise was bitten by a mad dog. The two important characters in this novel trapped in the inescapable labyrinths of solitude are the Marquis and his wife, Bernarda. Her craving for extreme sensations ruins Bernarda, an untamed Mestiza. She was "seductive, rapacious and brazen with a hunger in her womb that could have satisfied an entire barracks" (OLD, 8).

The Marquis is a "funereal effeminate man" "pale" and "forlorn" in appearance (OLD, 9). His house is in melancholy ruin. Sierva Maria is brought up in the slave quarters and picks up their superstitions.
Bernarda hates the girl and is not bothered when she is bitten by a mad dog. The Marquis consults Abrenuncio, a notorious and unconventional doctor who employs innovative methods. He examines the girl and assures that she is out of danger.

No medicine was available for rabies in those days. Often the patients were poisoned by their people to avoid a ghastly death. They would commend the dying to St Hubert, tie them to a pillar and prolong their suffering. The slaves secretly treat Sierva Maria. She is asked to chew a paste of manaju and she is placed naked in the onion cellar to counteract the evil spell of the dog.

"In much of his work Garcia Marquez has turned his home town into a dream kingdom of shattered expectations built on nostalgia..." (Rodman, 1983, 16). The Marquis in the novel is an example. He is a victim of circumstances. He is the son of an illustrious knight. When he falls in love with Dulce Olivia, an inmate of the nearby mental asylum, his father exiles him to his country estate. He is frightened of the loneliness. Then he has a shocking dream: the animals in the estate abandon the place and cross and fields in absolute silence beneath the full moon. He renounces
his love and marries Dona Ollala Mendoza, who is soon struck down by lightning. He lives alone in the mansion, frightened by death. He feels that he will be killed by his own slaves and so keeps a pack of ferocious mastiffs. He loses faith also. But within a year he is trapped into a marriage with Bernarda who comes there to supply pickled herring. Soon Sierva Maria is born. Bernarda spends her time in wild sexual orgies with her slaves.

Then the girl starts howling and barking. She has to bear many cures and healings associated with the primitive beliefs and superstitions. One doctor applies caustic poultices, another leeches on her back. She is subjected to herbal baths and enemas. Her body is scalded with mustard plasters and blistering poultices. Finally Sagunta applies her witchcraft. But these cannot cure her sickness. She has a fiery ulcer as a result of these wild treatments.

The Bishop summons the Marquis and questions him about his daughter's wild ravings. He concludes that they are symptoms of demonic possession. The Bishop orders the Marquis to confine the girl in the convent of Santa Clara.
The Marquis takes Sierva Maria to the convent. The girl becomes a victim of the rivalry between the Fransiscan Fathers and the Clarissan nuns. Josefa Miranda, the abbess, hates the decision of the Fransiscan Bishop to hand over a possessed girl to her convent.

In the convent Sierva Maria is treated as one truly possessed with the devil. Her deeds are exaggerated and recorded as the actions of Satan. The nuns approach her for favours. Those who devoted their lives for the worship of Christ want Sierva Maria to intercede for them with the devil. They gamble, smoke and drink. The decay prevalent in the cloisters is shocking. Garcia Marquez points out the lapses of the Church which fail to nurture true notions of beliefs and worship. Instead, the Church worships false gods.

Dr. Abrenuncio alone protests against leaving Sierva Maria at Santa Clara for exorcising. He vehemently criticizes the heartlessness of the Church:

There is not much difference between that and the witchcraft of the Blacks. In fact it is even worse because...the Holy Office is happy to break innocents on the rack or burn them alive in a public spectacle (OLD, 72).
The doctor reflects Garcia Marquez's own indignation at the cruel practices of Orthodox Christianity when he comments: "I think that killing her would have been more Christian than burning her alive" (OLD, 72). The Church executed mental patients for demonic possession or heresy, instead of giving proper treatment. Sierva Maria also awaits such a punishment.

The Bishop appoints a young priest, Cayetano Delaura, to exorcise Sierva Maria. He does not have the character or the training to become an exorcist. He fails and the girl becomes a victim of witch-hunting. After the arrival of Sierva Maria, everything ordinary that happens in the convent has something supernatural about it. Delaura is sceptic about such stories. He feels that the girl is not possessed. He knows that people attribute certain things they do not understand to the demon. He knows that even if the girl is not possessed by any demon, she is in the most propitious environment for becoming so.

The girl spits on his face and attacks him. But gradually he wins her confidence. The priest soon falls in love with her. The image of Sierva Maria with her fiery hair over her shoulders haunts the priest's
dreams. Like a passionate lover he visits her every day and recites love songs. He informs the Bishop that the girl is not possessed. What seems demonic to others are the customs of the Blacks. The girl is frightened because she feels that she is going to die. Her solitude nurtures the horrors of death. Delaura wants to save the girl, but he is helpless.

The Viceroy who visits the city also wants to save the girl. Ironically the Bishop speaks of the failure of the Church: "We have crossed the ocean sea to improve the law of Christ, and we have done so with Masses and processions and festivals for patron saints, but not in the souls of men" (OLD, 102).

When the Bishop learns of Delaura's passion for Sierva Maria, he strips him of his privileges and sends him to the Amor de Dios hospital to nurse the lepers. The Bishop blames Delaura for not confining himself to facing demons with the authority of Christ, but discussing matters of faith with them. Those who intercede for Dalaura argue that the exorcists sometimes become possessed with the demons they are trying to drive out. But the Bishop is adamant. He erases his former confidant from his heart.
With all humility Delaura nurses the lepers. Dr. Abrenuncio feels pity for him and believes that it is a waste of talent. Though he is an atheist, the doctor speaks of the need for clerics to win the souls of the patients. Delaura's friends abandon him. Still he is obsessed with thoughts of Sierva Maria. Love, like a demon traps him. He is doomed to fall.

One night Delaura enters the convent through an underground tunnel and climbs the wall to see her. He visits her every night. Like a foolish lover he offers to do anything for her. Love, not the demon, has possessed him.

The Bishop himself assumes the responsibility of exorcising Sierva Maria. Her long hair is cut and she is taken to the Church. The Bishop shouts to the demon to leave her body. Sierva Maria shouts louder. Exhausted and breathless, the Bishop falls down. The Church, it is clear, misunderstands the true nature of certain occurrences and considers them as the work of Satan. The fight against the illusory is certain to fail.

The Bishop then appoints another priest, Thomas de Aquino de Narvaez, to exorcise her. But he dies in mysterious circumstances. Sierva Maria asks...
Delaura to rescue her. She asks him to marry her and leave the place. But Delaura tries to free her with the help of her father. The Marquis has sought the help of Dulca Olivia to get rid of his solitude. He goes in search of his wife to the Mahates Sugar plantations and dies there without the knowledge of anyone. His skeleton is discovered two years later. Bernard also meets a gloomy and solitary end.

When Martina Laborde, an ex-nun serving life imprisonment, escapes from the convent, the secret tunnel is closed. Delaura cannot enter the convent. He is mad with love. Dr. Abrenuncio dissuades him. He hates love: "To him, love was an emotion contra natura that condemned two strangers to a base and unhealthy dependence... (OLD, 145). He rejects the precepts of the Church which give importance to death than to life. He seems to be the voice of reason. Though hated by all and condemned as an atheist, he stands for human values and genuine consideration for fellow beings.

Then Delaura goes straight to the convent to see the girl. Possessed with love, he loses his senses. Ironically, he himself is taken for the devil by the nuns. They hold the crucifix against him and shout "Vade retro Satana" (OLD, 146). He is handed
over to the Holy Office, and is condemned for heresy. But he saves his life. He serves his sentence as a nurse at Amor de Dios hospital. Thus he loses his brilliant career and his important position in the Church. He loses them for love. His fall shows the failure of love.

The Bishop continues his exorcism. Sierva Maria rebels. She shouts and bellows. She is starving and is given an enema of holy water. When one of her legs becomes free, she kicks into the Bishop's lower abdomen, knocking him to the ground. In this act is reflected Garcia Marquez's own attempt to debunk the corrupt and superstitious clergy. They have to be kicked out at any cost. Otherwise, they will torture the poor and the destitute. This seems to be his message in this novel.

Sierva Maria does not know that happened to Delaura. She has a dream again. She sees herself sitting on the window eating grapes. She pulls them off two by two. It symbolically presents the end of her days. She dies that night. Her skin shines and her hair grows again. Later she is worshipped as a giver of boons. Garcia Marquez seems to assert the holiness of her sacrifice. The views of Alfred Kazin are quite relevant here:
Strange things happen in the land of Marquez. As with Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, every sentence breaks the silence of a vast emptiness, the famous New World 'Solitude' that is the unconscious despair of his characters but the sign of Marquez's genius (Kazin, 1972, 1).

He believes that 'a book must have an immensity about it in the same way life is enormous...' (Kennedy, 1976, 16). OLD proves this fact. It is yet another novel in the great gallery of novels supplied by Garcia Marquez to World Literature.

STRANGE PILGRIMS

SP is a collection of short stories. Loneliness, love and death emerge as the major themes in them. The setting is often bizarre and conveys a dark and dismal view of mankind. A sense of doom prevails in them.

"Bon Voyage Mr. President", the first story, portrays the loneliness of a former President who visits Switzerland to undergo treatment for an illness. Death dominates his thoughts. He is "one more incognito in the city of incognitos...The years of
glory and power had been left behind forever and now only the years of his death remained" (SP, 3-4). He wants to be forgotten by everyone. He feels that he is paying a high price for his foolishness. He is another Col. Buendia who wants to hide in total oblivion. He survives by teaching students Latin and Spanish. The news of his death has already appeared in six lines on the fifth page of a newspaper. His only son was killed by his officers during a rebellion that was aimed to overthrow his father. He lives in a garret in utter poverty. He undergoes surgery. He has to depend on the mercy of Homero Ray, a man from his own country who is working as an ambulance driver in a hospital.

"The Saint" is the story of Margarito Durate who waits in Rome to convince the Vatican authorities of the sainthood of his daughter. His attempt proves futile. The author feels that "while he was still alive he had spent twenty two years for the legitimate cause of his own canonization" (SP, 53).

"Sleeping Beauty and the Airplane" reveals an anecdote in which the author meets and travels with a beautiful lady who does not care for him or for anything else. "I Sell My Dreams" is about Frau Dreida who predicted the fortunes of others by her dreams.
When she is killed in an accident the author remembers how he met her in Vienna thirteen years ago. She lived by selling her dreams.

"I only Came to Use the Phone" has a surrealistic aura about it. It is the story of Maria who is accidentally trapped in a mental asylum for females. All her efforts to escape from that hell fail. Her husband waits and then drops her. When she succeeds in contacting him, he feels that she is mad. Maria rejects him and remains inside the asylum.

"The Ghost of August" tells a strange experience. The writer, his wife and their two sons visit the castle where the Venezuelan writer Miguel Oreto Silva lived. It was supposed to be haunted by the ghost of Ludovico, the great patron of arts and of war, who built the castle. In a moment of madness he had stabbed his lady, turned his ferocious dogs on himself and was torn to pieces. The author does not believe in the existence of ghosts and sleeps in a modernised and well-furnished room. The next morning, to his absolute horror, he finds that he and his wife are in the bed-chamber of Ludovico, "under the canopy and the dusty curtains and the sheets soaked with still-warm blood of his accursed bed" (SP, 96).
"Maria dos Prazers" is a story of old age and death. Maria dos Prazers, an ex-prostitute, is convinced of her imminent death and makes arrangement for a decent funeral in a cemetery. No one is there to weep for her death. So she teaches her pet dog, Noi to weep and to reach her would-be-burial place. But life surprises her with a new lover in the form of a taxi driver.

"Seventeen Poisoned Englishmen" is the story of Senora Prudencia Linero, 72, who travels from Riohacha, Colombia, to Rome to meet the Pope. She miraculously escapes from food poisoning in which seventeen Englishmen are killed.

"Tramontana" speaks of the death of a young Caribbean. Eleven Swedes take him away to Cadaques, where he is a singer in a bar. It is a city frequented by tramontanas. He is terribly afraid of the tramontana, a violent and depressing wind that goes on blowing for hours. To escape from that he refuses to go with them. They drag him along with them to cure him of his African superstitions. The boy, terrified by his imminent return to Cadaques, throws himself from the speeding van and dies.

"Miss Forbes's Summer of Happiness" is the story of two boys who are having training in good manners and table etiquette, under a German governess.
named Miss Forbes. They hate the rigorous exercises and the overassuming mannerisms of the lady. They poison her. But the next day she is found dead, in a pool of blood, stabbed to death by an unknown hand.

"Light is like Water" is the story of two boys Toto and Joel, who break a glowing bulb and row their boat in the golden light as light fills the room like water. They invite their friends also for the adventure and they turn on so many lights at the same time that all of them are drowned.

"The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow" is the most haunting story in the collection. It is the story of Nena Daconte and Billy Sanchez who are on their way to Paris to enjoy their honeymoon. Nena's finger bleeds all the way and she dies in a hospital. Billy Sanchez cannot see her, he is lost in the town and frantically searches for her. It is the story of his desolation and loneliness.

Some of these stories have a Pinteresque quality about them. The threat of an external menace is very much evident in them. The characters flee from the clutches of death. But death overpowers them. Garcia Marquez uses magical realism too in these stories. They are stories of despair, and isolation.
WORKS CITED


