

Essay on "One Hundred Years of Solitude"  
By Thomas Brusilovsky

In his book, "One Hundred Years of Solitude", García Márquez shows a society where the roles of men and woman are strictly delineated and yet given equal power within the scope of the story. In the book, men are flighty, violent, and inconsistent, often driven to do incredibly foolish things over and over with only the flimsiest of provocations. They abuse their power, ignore their responsibilities, and become easily corrupted by the lure of wealth, land, and knowledge. On the other hand, women are represented as reliable, practical, and nurturing. There are certainly female characters with negatively presented characteristics, but overwhelmingly the female characters of the story possess far more positive traits than their male counterparts. An excellent example of this dynamic is Úrsula when taken as a counterpoint to the many generations of male Buendía that she cares and provides for throughout her life. While her family members ignore their duties and waste their lives and money on frivolities, she stands as a reliable pillar of the family that keeps them above water through all the troubles her family drags themselves into. Overall, despite the often rather traditional characterization, the women of "One Hundred Years of Solitude" such as Úrsula Iguarán are powerful characters who form a solid core without which the events of the novel would not be possible.

Even from the very start of the novel, we begin to see this division of roles between the male and female characters. José Arcadio Buendía leaps from invention to invention, unable to ignore the lure of the most recent shiny wonder brought to him. He spends days and weeks playing with his newest toys and disregards his actual duties. Meanwhile, his wife Úrsula toils away at the real work, struggling to keep their family afloat despite her husband's flighty eccentricities as he burns through what meager wealth they had achieved up until then. It is written clearly in the text, despite being warned that such things will not work, José is blinded by dreams of fortune and "he traded his mule and a pair of goats for the two magnetized ingots. Úrsula Iguarán, his wife, who relied on those animals to increase their poor domestic holdings, was unable to dissuade him" (Márquez 1). From the very first time we are introduced to some of the stories main characters, the female character is written as a dependable, practical individual who wants what is best for their family, trying to increase their family holdings. The male character is just the opposite, trading away what gains his wife has made for something that he has already been told would not work.

Following the lives of Úrsula and José, we see this dynamic repeated over and over as the couple ages. José remains the unbothered dreamer, spending his days on all sorts of pointless pursuits, never even dedicating himself to one thing properly. Úrsula meanwhile continues to strive to bring stability and good life to their family. While José argues with Melquíades about the far future of Macondo and tried to prove the existence or absence of god through photography, "Úrsula fought to preserve common sense in that extravagant house, having broadened her business of little candy animals with an oven that went all night turning out baskets and more baskets of bread and a prodigious variety of puddings, meringues, and cookies, which disappeared in a few hours on the roads winding through the swamp. She had reached an age where she had a right to rest, but she was nonetheless more and more active" (Márquez 56). Despite being at an age where it was clear she should be retiring and working for her own hobbies and interests, she remains the proud pillar of her family. For all their lives together, her husband contributed little to their household and took far more than his due, but Úrsula ensured

that their family could not just survive, but thrive in the places and situations into which her husband dragged them.

Even as she grows older and the family members for whom she is caring for shift as the generations live and die, Úrsula remains the calm and reasonable support that her family depends on. Many years later, when her husband is dead and gone and the family's good fortunes had been all but squandered by generations of reckless men, Úrsula continues to work to keep her family going strong. Seeing the ruin that has been brought to her family home while she lay in bed, she decides that this is not a situation that she can allow to continue. "A person can't live in neglect like this, she said. If we go on like this we'll be devoured by animals. From then on, she did not have a moment of repose" (Márquez 330). Despite being blind and almost on death's door, Úrsula does not let this get in the way of her duty and responsibility. She does not want her family to fall to ruin due to the foolish actions of her descendants. Even on her deathbed, her main desire is for her family to continue on and she spends many of her final moments giving advice to her family on how they could continue on without her. After some deep prayer, she gave her family "bits of practical advice to stop the red ants from bringing the house down, to keep the lamp burning by Remedios daguerreotype, and never to let any Buendía marry a person of the same blood because their children would be born with the tail of a pig" (Márquez 342). In life as in death, Úrsula remained strong for her family.

All in all, the female characters of "One Hundred Years of Solitude" are often portrayed in very traditional roles, but are still strong characters without whom the story could not have progressed. Úrsula Iguarán is one of the first characters introduced in the book and remains in the story longer than any other character. Throughout her time in the story, she is a constant, dependable pillar of her family that stands in stark contrast with her flighty, irresponsible husband and other male characters. Though she makes few actions outside the traditional female realms of the family and household, she is unquestionable one of the most determined and strong-willed characters shown in the book. It is only through her actions and determination that many of the windfalls that fell upon the household could occur and without her influence the family would have fallen to ruin far sooner than it eventually did. It is no surprise that after she dies and no one is there to step into her role, the family collapses soon after.