# Sexual Violence in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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*This article addresses sensitive issues such as rape, sexual violence, and child sex abuse.*

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez constructs a magical realistic world of Macondo and alludes to political and social realities of 20th century Latin America through the family history of the Buendías. Although male characters are more numerous in the narrative, previous scholars have argued for the ascendancy of women and suggested that Márquez attempts to "overcome the initial, binary opposition" between masculinity and femininity (Sims 43). However, as few of them carefully examines the language used to portray sexual intercourse in the book, sexual violence against women, especially rape, is often overlooked as a significant form of female oppression in the masculine society. Drawing on a feminist perspective, I will argue that despite the superficial representation of powerful women, they are ultimately subject to male oppression in Márquez's magical realistic society as they are highly vulnerable to sexual violence. Examining the language used to describe sexual intercourse between men and women in the book, I will expose how sexual violence against woman is normalized and rendered as a casual occurrence in women's daily lives in the book. As such, I will end by exploring how the book reflects the reality of female oppression in the society.

Constructing a fictional world in his magical realistic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colombian author and Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez alludes to the social and political reality of twentieth-century Latin America through the private history of the Buendía family and the public history of their town Macondo. In the narrative, although male characters are more numerous, female characters appear to have more insights, carry out more responsibilities, and possess more magical powers. Highlighting powerful and intellectual women, previous scholars, such as Robert L. Sims, have argued that Márquez attempts to "overcome the initial, binary opposition" between masculinity and femininity (Sims 43). Unfortunately, the representation of female power and ascendancy is only superficial. In the magical realistic world constructed by Márquez, women are subject to male oppression in the form of sexual violence, particularly rape, sexual harassment, and child sexual abuse. Besides the fact that women are deprived of control over their physical bodies, their resistance and voices are constantly suppressed by the narrator whose masculine language romanticizes and justifies sexual violence. Examining the novel's masculine narrative perspective and sexual language, I argue that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reinforces female degradation and oppression in the masculine society by normalizing sexual violence with romanticized language, undermining female voices in male fantasies, and granting women only superficial power.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the entire story is narrated by a man whose masculine perspective affects how every event and emotion is experienced and presented. Pamela L. Moore points out that the overall structure and particularly the ending of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* show its masculine nature (91). The narrator starts with the founding story of Macondo, narrates the development of the town along with seven generations of the Buendía family, and ends the narrative with the dramatic demise of both the family and the town. In the final scene, the last male character, Aureliano, manages to decipher the manuscript passed down to him from the first patriarch and discovers that the manuscript is essentially a prophecy written a long time ago about him and his family (Márquez 447). This scene suggests that in nature, the manuscript Aureliano is reading is the novel that the readers are reading. Thus, the novel is essentially "a history written, translated and read by men" where, as Moore further argues, sexuality is portrayed with "masculine violence and female victimization" (91-92). Given its masculine nature, the narrative is inherently slippery because the narrator can easily cover the reality of sexual violence and oppression against women under his elaborate and deceptive language.

Through a masculine lens, rape and other forms of sexual abuse in the novel are often written in romanticized language that emphasizes the woman's inner sexual desires, neglects her refusal to have sexual intercourse, and highlights her sexual pleasure during the painful experience. For example, when Rebeca goes into the bedroom of José Arcadio Buendía, she is described to be motivated by her own desire—she "could no longer resist" the man's physical attraction (Márquez 100). She soon "felt an impulse to retreat," which clearly indicates that she does not want to be in the space or have sexual relationship with the man (Márquez 100). But before she is able to leave, the enormous José Arcadio "grabbed" her into his bed "like a little bird," "[stroked] her ankle […] then her calves, then her thighs" and eventually raped her (Márquez 100-101). The rape is dramatically romanticized — Rebeca "lost herself in the inconceivable pleasure of that unbearable pain, splashing marsh of the hammock which absorbed the explosion of blood like a blotter" (Márquez 101). "Pain" is depicted as "pleasure" in this violent scene; one reason behind such misrepresentation could be that the male narrator is simply unable to understand and describe the pain experienced by Rebeca. The other reason may be that the narrator is purposefully distorting the reality. Using the hyperbolic yet generic adjective "unbearable," he only provides a vague description of the pain. With the concrete simile "like a blotter," he attempts to objectify the pain and overlook the psychological harm on Rebeca. By emphasizing Rebeca's "inconceivable pleasure" over her "unbearable pain," he distorts the reality to provide justification for this act of sexual violence as a pleasurable experience for the female victim. Another explanation is also plausible: the narrator could be blinded by his male fantasy and is not even aware that his perception is wrong. As Babara Younoszai suggests, this romanticizing mentality "is the male fantasy operational;" the notion that females enjoy sexual pleasure during their sexual assault is "an attitude held and expressed by many convicted rapists" (37). Blinded by male fantasy, the narrator may be convinced that Rebeca is actually enjoying her rape. No matter if the narrator intentionally or subconsciously romanticizes Rebeca's rape as sexual pleasure, the description is problematic and reaffirms that the narrative is inherently a masculine text. It reflects sexual violence and oppression against women and may further perpetuate it in society.

The same pattern of sexual violence is experienced by another female character, Amaranta Úrsula, who is raped by her nephew Aureliano. When Aureliano goes into her room "almost on tiptoes, stumbling from drunkenness," Amaranta Úrsula directly tells him to "go away," even though her refusal is recorded as "voiceless" (Márquez 426). When Aureliano keeps advancing, she "defended herself sincerely with the astuteness of a wise woman" (Márquez 426). Despite that the narrator describes her self-defense in a playful tone, Amaranta Úrsula clearly refuses to have sexual intercourse and actively tries to fight off the man. Like Rebeca, she is eventually overpowered by the man as he "dropped her on her back on the bed. With a brutal tug he pulled off her bathrobe before she had time to resist" (Márquez 426). At this point, the narrator starts to describe Amaranta Úrsula's actions in a tone that undermines her previous self-defense: "suddenly, almost playfully, like one more bit of mischief, Amaranta Úrsula dropped her defense, and when she tried to recover, frightened by what she herself had made possible, it was too late" (Márquez 427). The words "playfully," "mischief," and "dropped" make it almost seem like Amaranta Úrsula has been playing with Aureliano for the whole time. The phrase "herself had made possible" excuses the perpetrator by blaming Amaranta Úrsula for her own rape, overlooking her unequivocal refusal to have a sexual relationship in the first place. Just like Rebeca, Amaranta Úrsula is voiceless during the rape and is silenced even in expressing her pain; she had to "grope for the towel to put a gag between her teeth" to prevent her husband working next door from hearing her "cat howls that were already tearing at her insides" (Márquez 427). Throughout the brutal scene, her will and her voice are suppressed by both the male perpetrator and the male narrator whose language is an ultimate perpetuation of "a male's concept of power and prowess" (Younoszai 36).

The most heartbreaking case demonstrating romanticized sexual violence and silenced female voice is that of Remedios Moscote, the child bride of Aureliano Buendía who is later known as Colonel Aureliano Buendía. Shortly after her menstruation cycle starts, Remedios Moscote marries Aureliano, soon conceives his twins, and dies in her early teens when she accidentally drinks a cup of poisonous wine. In the entire narrative, little Remedios Moscote does not have a single line in her own voice. The narrator's limited description of her includes that "little Remedios had reached puberty before getting over the habits of childhood," which shows her immaturity and innocence through a nonchalant and indifferent tone coming out of a man (Márquez 87). The immaturity magically disappears after her wedding day, after which "the sense of responsibility, the natural grace, the calm control that Remedios would have in the face of adverse circumstances was revealed" (Márquez 88). The words "responsibility," "grace," and "control" are usually associated with adulthood and maturity. Using these words, the narrator presents Remedios as a full-grown adult, thereby providing justification for her child marriage and premature pregnancy. Although there is no depiction of sexual intercourse between Remedios and her husband, the brief depiction that "Remedios was so confused and at the same time amazed at the revelation that she wanted to talk to everybody about the details of the wedding night" shows that the child has no conception of human sexuality and is very likely to be sexually abused by a husband who is old enough to be her father (Márquez 87). As a confused victim of child marriage and possibly child sexual abuse, Remedios could have suffered from both physical and psychological harm, but neither the narrator nor Remedios describes the experience. As a man, the narrator is either unable to elaborate on Remedios' experience for lack of understanding, or he simply sees the situation as normal and justified. Remedios is too young to fully grasp and tell of her experience. Again, this heartbreaking narrative of a young girl demonstrates the prevalence of sexual violence and oppression against women in the patriarchal society.

A similar pattern of sexual violence is experienced by all other female characters named Remedios in the narrative, who are "varyingly childish, innocent, and immature" (Bell-Villada 72). The pattern shows the unchanging reality of female oppression in the patriarchal society across generations. The first Remedios dies at a young age. Five generations later, the final Remedios, Renata Remedios Buendía nicknamed Meme, dies at an old age but has been never reached mental maturity. She is even described as "scatterbrained" by Bell-Villada (72). Raised by a deeply religious mother and educated at a nun school bound by traditional values, Meme has no more than a scattered and blurred conception of human sexuality when she graduates from school in her late teens. The first time when she holds hands with a young man, Mauricio Babilonia, she is "dazed by a confused feeling of pleasure and rage" (Márquez 307). The word "confused" and the emotion of bewilderment, both of which appear in the case of Remedios Moscote and reflect the immaturity and ignorance of sexuality shared by the two characters. Later, when Meme "surrendered to Mauricio Babilonia without resistance," the romanticized language almost sounds as if Meme willingly chooses to have a sexual relationship. However, her will comes out of a confused mentality that could have been easily manipulated by the man (Márquez 311). Like Remedios Moscote, Meme is likely to undergo physical pain and sexual abuse in this relationship, even though there is no explicit description of sexual intercourse. Young, immature, and voiceless in the patriarchal world, Meme eventually conceives a child as Remedios Moscote did. The parallel between their lives shows the prevalence of violence and oppression against women across time in the society.

There is yet another Remedios in the narrative who is born after Remedios Moscote and before Meme. She is Remedios the Beauty, an intriguing character and a special case in the narrative because of her mental condition, her magical power, and the peculiar way that she leaves the world. Based on the narrator, she "was thought to be mentally retarded" throughout her life (Márquez 177). By incorporating the phrase "thought to be," the narrator could be implying that he has doubts about the nature of her mental condition. Alternatively, he could be convinced of her sanity but is simply unwilling to acknowledge it. He resorts to dropping the hint through Colonel Aureliano Buendía, a male notorious for "disobey[ing] the patriarchal imperative" (Sims 41). According to the Colonel, "it seemed as if some penetrating lucidity permitted [Remedios the Beauty] to see the reality of things beyond any formalism" (Márquez 214). This statement suggests that Remedios the Beauty is intellectual and insightful. As the narrative goes on, Remedios the Beauty demonstrates becomes increasingly unashamed of her body. She "did not understand why women complicated their lives with corsets and petticoats" and reduced her clothing to a "loose cassock over her naked body," through which she achieves agency and freedom over her body (Márquez 248). Thus, given the masculine bias of the narrator, it is highly possible that Remedios the Beauty is "thought to be mentally retarded" only because she is a woman who openly resists social norms and takes an active control over how she wants to dress her body. In this case, the narrator's ambiguous language about her mental state once again shows the masculine nature of the narrative, which degrades women as mentally disabled for disobeying social norms and taking control of their own bodies.

Regardless of the real nature of her mental state, Remedios the Beauty is susceptible to sexual violence in her society. The narrator says that "the more she did away with fashion [...] and the more she passed over conventions as she obeyed spontaneity, the more disturbing her beauty became and the more provocative she became to men" (Márquez 248). Emphasizing "she" and "her," his language again shifts the blame on Remedios the Beauty herself for being sexually assaulted and justifies men's lust for her. Before long, several men attempt a sexual assault on Remedios the Beauty. They fail as a group because Remedios the Beauty and her friends "managed to take refuge in a nearby house just as they were about to be assaulted by a pack of ferocious males," but one man "had managed to attack [Remedios the Beauty's] stomach with a hand that was more like the claw of an eagle clinging to the edge of a precipice" (Márquez 252-53). The words "pack" and "ferocious" characterize men as hungry wolves while the words "claw" and "clinging" indicate force and pain; the metaphorical language shows the fear and physical harm experienced by women and the threats of sexual violence constantly lurking around them. Although the three characters named Remedios are all affected by sexual violence, Remedios the Beauty is not an easy target like Remedios Moscote and Meme. She has the magical "power of death" which causes all the men who have sexually harassed or assaulted her to die tragically (Márquez 253). Her magical power keeps her body mostly intact, setting her apart from other female victims. However, Remedios the Beauty is by no means a symbol of female empowerment because she is "not a creature of this world" and cannot represent any other female in the narrative (Márquez 213). Her dramatic departure from the world and ascension into the sky suggest that her power is unattainable by ordinary females on earth: "Remedios the Beauty wav[es] goodbye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her…and [the sheets] were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her" (Márquez 255). Here, the romanticized and unrealistic account of the death of Remedios the beauty is the narrator's re-assertion that the power to resist sexual violence is only available to a creature not belonging to this world. Therefore, ordinary females have no option but to live with the reality of male dominance on the earth.

Although several ordinary women possess varying degrees of power, their earthly power is inherently different from that of Remedios the Beauty. While the power of Remedios the Beauty defends her from sexual violence and destroys the male perpetrators, the power of other women either proves futile in giving them control over their physical bodies, further perpetuates oppression and sexual violence, or both. Úrsula Iguarán, the matriarch of the Buendía family, seems to have the greatest power in the narrative. According to Bell-Villada, she is the only "positively heroic figure" and "major character depicted without humor or irony, with reverence and awe" in the entire narrative (72-73). Also, as Sims points out, Úrsula Iguarán "repeatedly assumes the functions of the patriarch as the men abandon their patriarchal duties" by tending fields, educating children, and running businesses (42). Despite her power in the family, her body is still subject to her husband's command. After marriage, Úrsula does not want to have sexual intercourse with her husband and wears a pair of buckled chastity pants before bed because she "fear[s] that her stout and willful husband would rape her while she slept," but she eventually gives in when her husband demands, "take them off" (Márquez 23-24). According to the narrator, she "had no doubt" about her husband's command; she only "murmured" to him that he should be "responsible for what happens'" (Márquez 24). In the presence of the patriarch, the seemingly powerful matriarch shows no doubt of his authority, has no intention to resist, and is hardly given any voice. Her power in the family is only superficial and does not even give her control over her own body.

Two powerful women outside the Buendía household are Pilar Ternera and Petra Cotes, whose names "carry comparable connotations stone and strength" (Bell-Villada 75). Pilar Ternera is a fortuneteller and has the clairvoyance to tell the fate of each member in the Buendía family. As she counsels many Buendía men and guides their actions, she effectively uses her power to push along the family history. Yet, the narrator purposefully pictures her as a desperate old woman who is tired of waiting "for the man who would stay, of the men who left" and opens her body to any man who comes to her (Márquez 73-74). Focusing on the physical and mental decay of Pilar, noting that her "breasts had withered" and "the coals of her heart had gone out," the narrator surrounds her with an air of desperation, hopelessness, and passivity instead of power, insight, and influence (Márquez 73). When she immediately takes the young and drunk Colonel Aureliano Buendía to bed without asking any questions as soon as he says "'I've come to sleep with you,'" her obedience, passivity, and lack of voice show that she has no power over herself (Márquez 73). Petra Cotes, the mistress of Aureliano Segundo, has the magical power to increase her lover's livestock by having sex with him. Essentially treated as a fertility goddess, Petra Cotes' power merely serves as a "material means of support" for Aureliano Segundo, rather than a way to assert to her own agency (Bell-Villada 75). These two powerful women, similar to Úrsula Iguarán, use their powers and bodies to serve men. They do not have the power to dominate their own lives and are dominated by men in the oppressive patriarchal society.

The final powerful woman is also the final female character in the narrative, Amaranta Úrsula. After living in Belgium for years, she comes back to Macondo as an enlightened woman who is "so spontaneous, so emancipated, with such a free and modern spirit" (Márquez 406). Although modernity seems to have empowered her, she is held powerless by her nephew Aureliano who rapes her in her room as previously described. In the midst of the changing world, the small room in which she is raped symbolizes the unchanging reality of sexual violence and oppression against women. While Diane E. Marting argues that Amaranta Úrsula is "a newly sexed woman" because she enjoys extensive sexual activity with Aureliano (30), she forgets that this female character is presented through a masculine perspective that overlooks sexual violence and distorts rape into a romantic love affair. Furthermore, Mating argues that the narrative associates the emergence of the "newly sexed woman" with the final demise of her family and Macondo. As such, the narrative becomes a "cautionary tale against the new forms of female sexuality" told by a man, which manifests its masculine nature (30). While Marting is right about the masculine nature, she also suggests that the narrative attempts to define a new female sexuality. The narrative makes no such attempt. The premise of Marting's argument is wrong because Amaranta Úrsula has never been a "newly sexed woman" (30). Her immense sexual vitality is triggered only after her rape by Aureliano. She dies of hemorrhage when she gives birth to a child. Both events fit into a traditional masculine narrative, in which female sexuality is aroused by men while women risk their lives for childbirth. In addition, the final demise of Macondo is not directly associated with the emergence of Amaranta Úrsula, but with Aureliano's eventual success at deciphering the ancient manuscript, which marks the completion of the male-centered narrative and reveals its masculine nature in an explicit way. Throughout the narrative, Amaranta Úrsula remains the victim and the oppressed woman, no matter how much power and agency modernity seems to have given her. From beginning to the end, the narrative is masculine by all means, no matter how the society depicted seems to have progressed with time.

As Márquez acknowledges that his work "is both derivative and reflective of the realities of womanhood in his homeland," *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a sharp reflection of the patriarchal society and its violence and oppression against women (Solomon). With its masculine narrative, romanticized language, suppressed female voice, and superficial representation of female power, the novel renders women in subjugation and perpetuates oppression against them in the society, especially in the form of sexual violence. Although the novel is valuable for its masterful style of magical realism and allusion to Latin American society, its representation of masculinity and femininity should be treated critically. Instead of a romantic and sensual narrative, the novel is essentially a mirror image of a patriarchal society full of sexual violence and oppression against women, as well as a painful reminder of the physical and psychological trauma that women experience.♦

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