

## **Problematic Communication and Theories of Language in *One Hundred Years of Solitude***

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This essay explores ideas relating to the nature of language, literacy and communication as presented in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), and expounds on how these ideas contribute to the novel's more central theme of personal isolation. The analysis suggests García Márquez engages with theories of language ranging from the Biblical account of Babel to more contemporary concerns such as the nature of reference and the influence of language and literacy on thought; of particular interest is the conflict that García Márquez identifies between the communicative and cognitive functions of language. In developing these themes, García Márquez effortlessly shifts from philosophical enquiry and reflection to humour and derision, but underlying each of these concerns is a profound appreciation of the interaction between a sense of isolation and the many forms of communicative breakdown. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: [journal@transformativestudies.org](mailto:journal@transformativestudies.org) Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2013 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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The genetic endowment that most readily distinguishes the human species is the faculty of language, and in many ways the use of language is at the centre of the human experience, facilitating interpersonal relations, mediating thought, and communicating thoughts and emotions. Yet despite the centrality of language to the essence of the human experience, its nature is somewhat opaque and – judging by Plato’s *Cratylus*, the biblical Tower of Babel, and much 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy – a source of enduring fascination. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez explores a number of theoretical aspects of language, and in so doing, develops a surprising tension between the interpersonal function of language as a communicative tool, and its cognitive function as a mediating tool of thought. Although thought is ever present, García Márquez recognizes that there is something miraculous yet delicate in successful communication, and that problems of communication are far more common than we assume. Three recurring types of interaction problem are illustrated throughout the novel: the inability to communicate, the lack of will to communicate, and miscommunication. These serve various purposes in the novel, but all contribute to a fundamental theme of personal isolation.

The most well-known of the ancient tales of problematic communication is the Tower of Babel myth, in which the construction of the great tower is abandoned when God divides human language in order to thwart the builders’ efforts. As such, it is not only a tale of problematic communication and interpersonal division, but also an early attempt to explain language phenomena, in this case language diversity. Allusions to Babel in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are part of the broader context of biblical references, but they also develop specific themes related to language and the relation between miscommunication and solitude. An assumption at the heart of the Babel myth is that there was an original language from which all others are descended. Such a view has persisted through time, and various arguments, generally reflecting some ethnic or sectarian bias, have been put forward in identifying this presumably innate language. For instance, in attempting to prove his hypothesis, King James IV of Scotland (1473-1513) replicated earlier experiments of having a pair children raised together in isolation. The reported result was unequivocal: the children did develop fluent Hebrew (Fromkin, Blair, & Collins, 1999, p. 49). Others which were claimed to be this original language are Phrygian, German, Aramaic, and Chinese (p. 49).

In García Márquez’s writing, it is Latin that is presented, tongue in cheek, as the original, innate language. In *A Very Old Man with*

*Enormous Wings*, Father Gonzaga greets the title character, an angel, in Latin, but immediately suspects some type of hoax when the angel fails to respond, evidently not understanding “the language of God” (219). In fact, the angel speaks in an “incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor’s voice” (218). The inference, quite in keeping with much Latin American Catholicism, is that the poor and disenfranchised are closer to heaven than those at the top of the political and socio-economic hierarchy. The humour in this passage arises from the combination of Father Gonzaga’s conviction, and our immediate sense that although his argument is valid, he fails to recognize the fundamentally unsound premise (Latin spoken in heaven) on which it is constructed. García Márquez’s target here is both the dogma and snobbery surrounding Latin, and the acceptability of flawed logic in theological debates.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez returns to this idea. As José Arcadio Buendía descends into madness, convinced that the world was stuck on Monday, he is reduced to an animal state, tied to a tree in the courtyard, frothing at the mouth and “shouting like a man possessed in some high-sounding and fluent but completely incomprehensible language” (81). As José Arcadio Buendía’s mental and physical faculties deteriorate, he is returning to a more primal, regressed state, in which he loses the abilities both to communicate in Spanish and to comprehend its use. He has regressed to a subhuman, bestial state, unable to function in community and family life, with only his basic instincts intact. One of these basic instincts appears to be the ability to speak Latin. Latin, it appears, has always resided within him, submerged within the layers of knowledge acquired through the processes of socialization. It is revealed only as his social and cultural adaptations dissipate. The origins of these events may have their basis in widely reported – although unverified – claims in which stroke victims have lost their first language, but ‘recovered’ a language that they were not known to speak (e.g. Croatian Girl Wakes).

This presentation of Latin as an innate language humorously mocks outdated theories of language, and also mocks traditional views of the pre-eminence of Latin in such areas as liturgy and education. On the one hand, some religious figures treat Latin with sacred reverence, and the pompous Fernanda del Carpio learns to write Latin poetry as part of her training to be Queen. Yet this is contrasted with the way José Arcadio Buendía “would announce his daily needs with urgent Latin phrases,” and his ghost curses in Latin an “incomprehensible phrase” when Colonel Aureliano Buendía startles him by urinating on his shoes” (269). García Márquez reminds us that although ancient Latin may have now

become the preserve of church and school, its origins are no more sacred than that of any other language. Indeed, when José Arcadio Buendía's speech is described as "devilish jargon" (86), we are reminded that Latin is just as capable as any other language of being used to utter obscenities, make threats, or blaspheme.

José Arcadio Buendía's Latin serves a further purpose which is much more central to the core themes of the novel. In losing his ability to speak Spanish, what José Arcadio Buendía experiences is a deeply troubling and profoundly isolating inability to communicate with the living. From being a fully participating, indeed central, figure of the community, his experiments and intellectual enquiries gradually strip him of his communicative capacities. This occurs firstly through a developing introversion, in which he periodically loses the will to interact with those around him, in favour of his pursuit of knowledge. Allied to this is a growing lack of *common ground* (see Clark, 1996) with others, in this case meaning that his understanding of the world, and his interest in it, has little overlap with that of the people around him. Thus, when he does speak, he makes little sense and is of little interest to others, and vice versa. Finally he suffers the debilitating regression into Latin. In this way José Arcadio Buendía is robbed of the ability to communicate, becoming ostracised and neglected, with his interpersonal relationships existing at only the most basic levels of having his physical needs provided for. His final state mirrors, in many ways, the initial state of the lone expatriate living amongst a different language community, in which the overwhelming experience is often one of bewilderment and profound isolation during the early stages of culture shock (Pederson 1995). This may have been influenced by García Márquez's experience working and travelling through Europe in the mid-1950s, in such places as Hungary, Poland, Italy and France. The extended periods in the latter two countries, in particular, may provide further reasoning behind the symbolism of José Arcadio Buendía's use of Latin: to García Márquez, colloquial Italian and French would initially have felt familiar, yet may have been largely incomprehensible.

Such problematic communication is a frequently recurring event through the novel, with allusions to Babel helping to develop a more general sense in which individuals and communities become isolated. In the biblical story, God creates confusion and dispersal between language groups as punishment for the pride of the inhabitants of Babel. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Buendía initiates an exodus by leaving Riohacha in self-imposed punishment for the pride-induced

slaying of Prudencio Aguilar. In founding Macondo, his followers remain for a long time cut off from the rest of the world.

As *One Hundred Years of Solitude* progresses, the number of foreign languages blooms, a Babel-like phenomena that seems at odds with the isolated location and modest size of Macondo. Early on, Melquíades is distinguished by his “harsh accent” (*OHYS* 2), and only later are the gypsies revealed to speak a different first language, from which the first communication problems occur. It seems no coincidence that – with the exception of Guajiro – the languages mentioned are all Indo-European languages sharing with Spanish a common ancestor, all having evolved separately through the dispersal of communities: Italian, Latin, English, Sanskrit, French, Catalan, Greek, as well as presumably the “disordered gabble” of the Caribbean blacks (234), and ultimately José Arcadio’s “complex hodgepodge of languages” (73). Macondo, then, can be seen as a microcosm of the human experience of diaspora, and the subsequent isolation generated by physical and temporal distance.

The Babel-like diffusion and confusion of languages becomes a central factor in the solitude of the characters. Early on José Arcadio Buendía is initially unable to discover the fate of Melquíades because the other gypsies do not speak Spanish (16-17); Mr. Jack Brown refuses to speak Spanish, talking “only in a strange tongue” (260); the parchments are written in indecipherable coded Sanskrit; and Úrsula needs sign language to communicate with the Indians she encounters while in pursuit of José Arcadio (35). More significantly, as children, Arcadio and Amaranta not only learn Visitación’s Guajiro language first, but refuse to speak Spanish, symbolising not just intergenerational communication problems, but also their personal sense of separateness from the community. Arcadio, in particular, “never succeeded in communicating with anyone better than he did with Visitacion and Cataure in their language” (114). This refusal to speak Spanish alarms José Arcadio Buendía, prompting Úrsula to reply that “[c]hildren inherit their parents’ madness” (41). Úrsula’s reply refers to José Arcadio Buendía’s habits of talking to himself, and muttering over arcane and fanciful obsessions. That is, Úrsula likens José Arcadio Buendía speech to an idiolect: a private language that only he can understand. This comment foreshadows José Arcadio Buendía’s descent into madness and literal inability to communicate.

In keeping with the cyclic nature of time within the novel, the Babel-like dispersion of languages is resolved with the introduction of little Aureliano, or more precisely, in the final moments of Macondo after little Aureliano learns his surname: Babilonia. The product of an affair

between Meme and Mauricio Babilonia, he is a humiliation to Fernanda, a bastard, and she keeps him confined to his room, hidden from the world, and raised in near total isolation. There he learns to read, and solely through books, he learns to speak Sanskrit, English, French, Latin and Greek, in addition to his native Spanish. Yet despite his linguistic prowess, until relatively late in his life, he has little opportunity or inclination to communicate. For Aureliano Babilonia, then, communication exists mostly as the relation between reader and a distant, unknown author, mediated through text.

Aureliano Babilonia also represents the culmination of a further chain of ideas in which two core functions of language are explored. In popular culture, as well as across a number of academic disciplines, the dominant theoretical approach to language sees it primarily as a communicative tool. That is, the evolutionary advantage of language, as well as main function, are seen as being fundamentally communicative in nature. It is also widely assumed that language is closely related to thought, and there is evidence that, at the very least, language enables complex thought processes (Baldo, Bunge, Wilson, & Dronkers, 2010; Sapir, 1978). The core functions of language then, on the one hand, are to provide the means with which to communicate, thus enabling much of the social and cultural aspects of life. On the other hand, the more internal aspects of language are its role as a system of internal representation and manipulation, essentially allowing human modes of complex thought. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez develops a surprising tension between these two functions of language, in which the act of teaching somebody to read is the central symbol.

At one level, a distinction is made between the enthusiastic readers, the reluctant or infrequent readers, and the illiterate. This quality becomes symbolic of their nature. The more introspective characters such as Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Pietro Crespi, Melquiades, Fernanda, José Arcadio Segundo, little Aureliano, and at times Amaranta, tend to spend a great deal of time either reading or writing. The reluctant readers José Arcadio and, at times, Aureliano Segundo, are flamboyant socialisers, leading exuberant and at times hedonistic lifestyles. For José Arcadio, the significance of the written word serves mainly as the form for his tattoos, even to the extent of “his unusual masculinity” being “completely covered with tattoos of words in several languages intertwined in blue and red” (93). In contrast to these is the small set of eternally illiterate characters who reside outside the dichotomy of thinker-hedonist. Their illiteracy symbolizes their unsophisticated, natural qualities: the exaggerated and idealized

femininity of Remedios the Beauty, the heroic mother figure of Santa Sofia de la Piedad, and the wild magnetism of General Teófilo Vargas. Meanwhile, the most stoic and reliable figures, Úrsula, and presumably Petra Cotes, are able to read, but have little time or apparently inclination to do so, as they immerse themselves in the activities of family or community.

Through the novel, learning to read is seen as a rite of passage, representing intellectual growth, and perhaps symbolizing the movement from childhood into adulthood. Repeatedly, characters are found teaching someone to read, and ironically, these times are among the few recurring moments of extended, focused communication between different generations of Buendía's. José Arcadio Buendía was "alien to the existence of his sons" (15) but then "gave them his best hours" (16), particularly in teaching the boys to read and write. Aureliano wins over little Remedios through his dedication to teaching her to read; Úrsula "managed to arouse a great love in little Amaranta Úrsula, who was just like her, and whom she taught how to read" (288). These are, generally, times of dedicated attention in the family interactions, in which relationships are built. The exception is Arcadio, who is taught distractedly by Aureliano in a manner "as he would have done with a stranger," and it is perhaps this type of neglect that moulds Arcadio's nature and shapes his future as a brutal dictator.

The irony in this intimacy of teaching is that what results from the ensuing literacy can go in either of two directions. On the one hand, reading and writing letters can be a way of bridging isolation, and there are numerous examples here, from Pietro Crespi's letters to Rebeca, the letters of Fernanda and her father, the Catalan bookseller and Aureliano, and so on. In letters, and some other forms of writing, the written text is a mediating tool allowing interpersonal communication to transcend temporal and spatial distance. The communicative act of letter reading, then, is a three place relationship between reader, text, and writer. However many texts, such as the mass-produced encyclopaedias and stories in Melquíades' room, are interpersonal in only the weakest sense. With no specific addressee, the writer either adopts a distant, impersonal tone, or merely feigns a more intimate one. With no knowledge of the author, the readers' response, as they may typically see it, is to the text, not to the author. For the reader then, the communicative element in such reading activity is no longer a three-place relationship, but a two-place relationship between reader and text.

More than this, reading and writing are (nearly always) solitary activities, in which the character often engages to such an extent that he

or she becomes oblivious to the external world. In this way, language may virtually cease to be an act of interpersonal communication, and instead becomes an almost purely cognitive activity. This is illustrated in the confidence with which Aureliano Babilonia is able to make love to Amaranta Úrsula undisturbed, knowing that Gaston has sat down to write a letter. This solitary and engrossing aspect of the written word is found first in the experiences of José Arcadio Buendía, who becomes obsessive in his reading to the point of deep isolation. The experience is repeated in others, such as Aureliano Segundo and José Arcadio Segundo.

García Márquez develops, then, a tension between the two main functions of language: firstly, the social and inter-personal dimension, secondly the introspective, intellectual dimension, especially as mediated by the written word. While these can happily co-exist, very often among the Buendías the introspective function squeezes out, or triumphs over, the communicative. The gift of literacy, then, provides a means to maintain relationships over distance, but also represents a path into introversion and isolation. The irony, therefore, is that although those interactions involved in teaching literacy are some of the most personal and intimate in the novel, they play a role in initiating much of the solitude that occurs.

Further, the act of reading provides an indirect conduit for the experience of reality. When reading, one experiences reality not through the senses, or through action, but through interpreting the reported impressions of others. Direct experience may be reported by the writer, but such knowledge is only indirectly obtained by the reader. Communication in this way is somewhat unreliable, as the numerous misleading reports of the deaths of Colonel Aureliano Buendía's and Pietro Crespi's mother demonstrate, and particularly the fabricated news reports and history books regarding the massacre of the banana workers. This aspect of reading is explored to its extreme in Aureliano Babilonia, who has direct experience of very little of the world, but has an extraordinary knowledge of distant places and times. Yet for him, language has served almost entirely in thought, and it is relatively late in his life that he uses language to communicate much beyond his basic physical needs. He is a person of highly developed cognitive and literacy skills, but with very poor socio-pragmatic competence. He lives most of his life trapped indoors, afraid of the outside world and afraid of people, exploring life through books. Thus he sees the world not as it is there to be experienced, but through the reconstruction of the experience of a distant and often anonymous writer. The text he sees occurs at the end of a long chain in which experience is first filtered by the author, before

being reframed and edited, and encoded in that person's choice of language. Thus, despite Aureliano Babilonia's extraordinary knowledge, it is also shallow and impoverished. He lacks the social skills developed through the interpersonal use of language, and is thus poorly adapted to the world. Whereas solitude can be a peaceful, pleasant state, there is no doubt that Aureliano Babilonia's isolation robs him of much of the pleasures and experiences of life.

Beyond both the physical inability to communicate such as developed through the references to Babel, and the lack of will to communicate such as represented by the introversion of thought and reading, problematic communication is also represented in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* through frequent incidents of miscommunication. These passages further illustrate the themes of solitude and isolation. Such an example occurs when Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, rejected by Amaranta, finds himself 'lost in solitude' and reaches out to his closest friend during a telegraph conversation:

'Aureliano', he said sadly on the key, 'it's raining in Macondo.'

There was a long silence on the line. Suddenly the apparatus jumped with the pitiless letters from Colonel Aureliano Buendía.

'Don't be a jackass, Gerineldo,' the signals said. 'It's natural for it to be raining in August.'

They had not seen each other for such a long time that Colonel Gerineldo Márquez was upset by the aggressiveness of the reaction" (OHYS 168).

Colonel Aureliano Buendía understands the propositional content, but misunderstands the communicative intent, and particularly the interpersonal dimension, of the message. The miscommunication illustrates, firstly, the psychological distance that has opened between these two friends through physical separation over a prolonged period. It also illustrates Colonel Aureliano Buendía's increasing lack of emotion or concern for others. Colonel Gerineldo Márquez's reaction is typical for such situations; he believes that his friend lacks empathy for him, and is dismissing his feelings as an irrelevancy.

Although this miscommunication occurs at the level of the implicature, and specifically relates to emotions, the majority of miscommunication is of another type – referential miscommunication – and again, García Márquez here explores issues concerning the nature of language. The semantic and pragmatic concept of *reference* concerns the relationship between certain words (or use of words) and the entities that

they indicate. As such, reference relates both to what words mean, and *how* they mean. An interest in such concerns stretches back at least to Plato's *Cratylus*. In the decades immediately preceding and following the writing of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, these were, and to a large extent continue to be, important concerns in the philosophy of language, linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence. Aspects of the novel are shaped by a particular set of views about reference, some of which García Márquez subverts in order to develop further dimensions to the key themes of solitude and the cyclic nature of history.

Before considering referential miscommunication, the case will be made for García Márquez's more general interest in issues of reference. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there is, firstly, a tension in *how* words mean. García Márquez explores, on the one hand, a possibility that appears to have wide currency as a folk theory: the idea that a name shapes the person to whom it is applied. Undoubtedly some names, particularly unusual or otherwise notable ones, may have social and cultural significance that influences the lives of those who bear the name. One need only contemplate the consequences of naming a child Adolf in the contemporary world. However, García Márquez explores not the social response, and therefore indirect influence of names, but the possibility that the name acts directly upon the bearer. In this view, names have a meaning independent of whom they are applied to, and the bearer of the name somehow comes to adopt characteristics encoded by the name.

In the novel it is Úrsula who becomes convinced that the choice of name is critical, noting that “[w]hile the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the José Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign” (187). Earlier, she has gone against Arcadio's wishes that his daughter be baptized Úrsula, reasoning that “a person suffers too much with that name” (123). Only the twins Aureliano Segundo and José Arcadio Segundo do not embody these distinct qualities, and Úrsula begins to wonder whether they have confused themselves during one of “their intricate games of confusion,” in which they swap clothing and names, and “had become changed forever” (187), such that they are a mixture of the Aureliano and José Arcadio traits. Elsewhere, other names appear to reflect the nature of the bearer: Captain Roque Carnicero, Santa Sofía de la Piedad, and perhaps Prudencio Aguilar.

However, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the question of *how* words mean is explored to a far greater extent under a more conventional

theory of reference. On the first page there is an initial biblical allusion whereby “[t]he world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point.” This relates directly to Genesis 2.19, in which God creates birds and animals and brings them to Adam to be labelled according to his whims. The theory of language behind this view is that the names of objects are arbitrary, but linked in a causal chain back to the initial act of naming (Kripke 1980). Words, or at least nouns, are conventional labels for entities in the world and successful communication involves following the rules.

The origin of words and names is humorously addressed in the passage in which Aureliano Babilonia goes to the parish house to try to discover his origins. Searching for the name Aureliano Buendía, the priest tells him that the significance of the name is not from his parentage but because “[m]any years ago there used to be a street here with that name and in those days people had the custom of naming their children after streets” (414-15). This preposterous and hilarious explanation seems to mock the amateur etymologists, or word-watchers, whose newspaper columns are similarly prone to making dubious and even fraudulent claims as to the origin of words (Pinker 383-84).

Assuming the biblical account of names as arbitrary labels, García Márquez uses the sleeping sickness episodes to engage in a thought experiment: if words are arbitrary signs, how would memory loss affect language? The insomnia sufferers begin losing their childhood memories, and “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” (45). Aureliano and José Arcadio Buendía embark on a scheme to label in ink everything with its name. Thinking through the inevitable consequences of this memory loss, José Arcadio Buendía “realised that the day might come when things would be recognised by their inscriptions but that no one would remember the use” (48), and so they embark on the plan to expand the labels to include a statement of their function. He realises, however, that ultimately he will forget the writing system too.

Two premises appear to underlie García Márquez’s thought experiment. The first of these is the view of language as a series of discrete memorised parts (including arbitrary names) of a code. The second premise appears to be a folk view of memory in which memory is considered a single cognitive faculty. If that were the case, then it is logical that an individual’s mental lexicon would appear to be vulnerable to amnesia.

In fact, real-life amnesia essentially does not appear to pervade the mental lexicon in the way that the sleeping sickness does in Macondo, although some forms of brain damage, including stroke and Alzheimer's disease may affect both memory and language. Furthermore, language loss is often limited specifically to the inability to recall proper names (Valentine 85). The condition *anomia*, in which sufferers struggle to recall words, usually results from brain injury but may also be found among the elderly. Thus the logical outcome of García Márquez's thought experiment does not appear to correspond with the real-life evidence, and it is perhaps his intention to prompt us to ask why.

The answer is almost certainly to be found in the premises. Concerning the theory of language, entities and events may indeed be labelled rather arbitrarily with an invented word, as the Genesis account suggests. Much more often, however, there is an underlying linguistic principle behind the formation of a conventional name, such as compounding (e.g. *tea* and *spoon* becoming *teaspoon*), morphology (*teach* and *-er* becoming *teacher*), and blending (*motor* and *hotel* becoming *motel*). Thus words are connected to each other through multiple relationships with other entries in lexicon. To forget the word *teaspoon*, one would effectively have to simultaneously forget at least one of *tea* and *spoon*, lest one recreate the forgotten word. Likewise to forget the word *teach*, one would have to simultaneously forget *teaching* and *teachable* (or the morphological *-er* and *-able* rules). More than this, one would need to forget other relationships and networks of words simultaneously. For example, when we want to remember the name of a month in a second language, we often simply start by reciting the other months in order *January, February, March* and so on. To forget even modestly frequent words then, the form of memory loss would perhaps have to be sudden and dramatic, affecting whole strings of language rather than the gradual and incremental loss of words that the people of Macondo experience. The exception to this, however, is the ease with which we forget proper names. Stivers, Enfield and Levinson (4) argue that this is likely to be precisely because names do not have the same degree of semantic connectedness as other word types.

It seems clear then that García Márquez explores, in a modest way, the theoretical concept of reference. More central to the novel is reference as the basis for miscommunication. Such problems arise whenever a speaker mentions a person or object (a referent) with the intention of making it clear to their audience who or what they mean, yet the listener misidentifies the referent. Such occurrences are frequent in *One Hundred*

*Years of Solitude*, and collectively serve the purpose of developing themes of isolation.

Most notably, it is a case of referential miscommunication which leads to José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula being sent an orphan, Rebecca, accompanied with a letter in which they are misidentified as loved ones of the writer, and relations of “that unforgettable friend Nicanor Ulloa and his very worthy wife Rebeca Montiel”. The miscommunication surely arises from the intended recipients sharing the same names as José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula. A consequence of this miscommunication is that Rebecca, far from being comforted by the familiarity of relatives, is isolated and emotionally withdrawn. She refuses to communicate, and reacts violently. Seen within the broader context of the novel, this one initial act of miscommunication, the mistaken blood-ties that it asserts, are behind perhaps the greatest solitude in the story, beginning when Rebeca and José Arcadio are partially ostracised for their ‘incestuous’ relationship, and culminating in Rebeca’s hermetic isolation after José Arcadio is killed. There is a great irony here in that their initial banishment from the family home is due to Úrsula’s fear of incest, when in fact – unlike a number of other sexual relationships through the novel – they are not related. Moreover, despite Úrsula being nearly certain that Rebeca is unrelated, the miscommunication – like a false accusation – creates a lingering element of doubt that is enough to divide the Buendía family.

Similar themes of interpersonal distance, this time familial distance, are also present in other examples of miscommunication. When Pilar Ternera gives birth to José Arcadio, the family takes in the child at José Arcadio Buendía’s insistence, but “he imposed the condition that the child should never know his true identity. Although he was given the name José Arcadio, they ended up calling him simply Arcadio so as to avoid confusion” (38). In these events there is, firstly, the tragedy that such a barrier is constructed between mother and child. The motivation appears to be a combination of a desire to protect Arcadio from the shame of his birth out of wedlock, and to exclude Pilar Ternera from official status in the family. The effect is that Arcadio grows up rather isolated and somewhat bitter, closer to Visitación than his relatives, and speaking Guajiro. Presumably these experiences shape his future as a tyrant. There is, secondly, great humour in this passage, in the notion that (José) Arcadio should be named after his father José Arcadio, who was named after his father José Arcadio Buendía, yet must never know his true identity. Seemingly against the odds, he never discovers his

parentage, which only emphasizes the emotional distance in his relationship with José Arcadio.

In a perceived case of referential miscommunication, Amaranta blames herself for the death of little Remedios, believing that her prayers for a disaster were misinterpreted by God (89). Amaranta appears to believe her failing was due to a lack of specificity in whom the disaster should befall. This possibility of a fallible God, subject to miscommunication, is foreshadowed shortly before Remedios's death when some of the townspeople attend the sermons of Father Nicanor "so that God would not take the disdain for His intermediary as a personal insult" (85). In these passages the author points out the somewhat contradictory views of God that may be simultaneously held: that God is all powerful, and yet subject to the same weaknesses as humans.

A different form of problematic reference is faced by Fernanda, whose "twisted habit of not calling things by their names made her put first things last and use 'expelled' for 'gave birth' and 'burning' for 'flow' so that it would be all less shameful" (324). This leads Fernanda to misdiagnose her condition, and in her correspondence with the invisible doctors "her pernicious habit of not calling things by their names had brought about a new confusion" (353). Here, Fernanda's exaggerated use of euphemisms recalls her use of the gold chamberpot. They reveal not just an acute embarrassment around bowel and bladder functions, but the need for her claim to social superiority to be recognised. After being raised to believe she was royalty, Fernanda is snobbish and aloof, and the abasement of her bowel movements – the great social leveller – is masked by the seeming grandeur of *where* she defecates. She sees her urinary troubles as an even greater humiliation and threat to her perceived social superiority: not only does she produce bodily waste like everyone else, but she actually leaks urine into her clothes. In response, Fernanda masks the issue in near nonsensical gibberish, greatly extending the length of the discomfort and embarrassment, when a simple pessary would have solved the problem immediately. García Márquez allows us the humour, and perhaps pleasure, in viewing Fernanda's discomfort borne of her own snobbery. Yet by this stage Fernanda's snobbery has already reached a vicious climax in the shooting of Mauricio Babilonia, and Meme's banishment to a nunnery. Meme lives out in her life separated from Mauricio and her family, separated from her child, and in one of the great stories of solitude, she never utters another word. On initial reading, Fernanda is surely the least sympathetic of the female characters, and perhaps the least sympathetic of all the Buendías, yet the tragedies she sets in motion – for Meme,

Mauricio Babilonia, Aureliano Babilonia, Amaranta Úrsula and the final Aureliano – are her own tragedies too, largely resulting in the destruction of her descendants. Her inability to deal with the possibility of being judged or disapproved of by the wider community is an unbearable burden to her, and it appears that no sacrifice is too large to maintain the appearance of virtue. These character flaws are a direct result of the delusions of grandeur fostered by her father as he struggles to come to terms with the declining fortunes of his family, perhaps living out his own fantasies through his daughter.

The miscommunications of Fernanda, then, are an expression of her personal failings. This is also true of Colonel Aureliano Buendía's misunderstanding of Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, and Amaranta's belief that she has miscommunicated with God. Miscommunication is, of course, generally considered undesirable for each interlocutor. Speakers not only wish to appear coherent, but feel face-threatened by the fact of the message being altered by another party, and by the prospect of "imposing a specific line of understanding on the hearer" (Tzanne 194). For listeners the risk is "of appearing slow-witted" (Smith, Noda, Andrews, & Jucker 1871). What García Márquez demonstrates, however, is that miscommunication is very often related to problematic interpersonal relations. In Colonel Aureliano Buendía's case it is symptomatic of the disruption of his relationship to his closest friend. In Amaranta's case her bitterness, threats to murder Rebeca, and prayers for disaster, seem far removed from the values a deity would expect, and thus also represent a distance between the spiritual beliefs that Amaranta professes towards her God, and the reality of her behaviour. Metaphorically then, there is an interpersonal distance between Amaranta and her God. In Fernanda's case there is a further element of interpersonal distance involved: she does not have, and never has had, any friends with whom to speak to about private matters. Eventually, it is her son to whom she confides with her enquiry over the pessary. She never attempts this with her husband or any friends. Even with Úrsula and the correspondence with the 'invisible doctors,' she speaks in confusing euphemisms.

As the episodes relating to Fernanda demonstrate, successful reference is central to coherent discourse. Sometimes such miscommunication can be the result of personal failings, such as those of Fernanda, but others are caused by inherent ambiguities in language, where one word can be applied to many individual objects, or one name to many people. The immediate consequences of miscommunication are obvious, and are apparent in Fernanda's prolonged discomfort. A further consequence is

the damage to relationships caused by efforts to avoid further problems. Despite the frequency with which we encounter such communicative problems in everyday life, there are limits to the extent to which we are prepared to tolerate people who persistently trigger communication problems. After all, a sustained struggle to communicate with a deficient speaker can be discouraging and unrewarding. Thus in spite of our best intentions, we may seek to avoid such people. This truth is illustrated by José Arcadio Buendía abandoning Melquíades to the loneliness of his room as Melquíades “seemed to confuse the people he was speaking to . . . and he would answer questions with a complex hodgepodge of languages.” Melquíades both misidentifies his interlocutors and speaks in an impenetrable code, which becomes both tedious and alienating for José Arcadio Buendía. Ultimately, the result is Melquíades becoming isolated from his adopted family.

The referential miscommunications within the novel can be seen within a broader context of misidentification, much of which occurs through a failure of the senses. These include José Arcadio Buendía's hallucinations, in which he mistakes Úrsula for Prudencio Aguilar; the senility of Úrsula, who confuses her great-great-great grandson for her son; the identity tricks played by José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Segundo; and the failure of multiple characters to recognize their blood-ties to Pilar Ternera. All these are hurtful. Little is overtly made of this in the text, but from the circumstances in which these misidentifications occur, the pain is obvious. Indeed, this is foreshadowed in José Arcadio Buendía's bluffing in welcoming Melquíades during the sleeping sickness, “afraid that he had known him at another time and that he did not remember him now” (50). What José Arcadio Buendía knows is that, under normal circumstances, to be forgotten is to become an irrelevancy from the past. When one is forgotten by a valued friend, this can magnify a sense of worthlessness. For Úrsula, knowing that her husband has lost his mind is a rational consolation, yet not one that is always possible to behold.

Problems of identification also serve two further related thematic purposes. Firstly, the family's slow recognition of José Arcadio, Melquíades, and Cataure on their returns to Macondo emphasises the lost years of a relationship, in which prolonged absences create an interpersonal distance. Although with casual friends and acquaintances we may resume our relationships almost seamlessly, this is often much more difficult with close friends and family. The previous closeness of a relationship may be irretrievable, as Aureliano and Úrsula experience in their attempt to reclaim José Arcadio as a brother and son. Secondly, in

some cases characters are fooled into misidentification and their range of reactions are instructive. In the case of Petra Cotes confusing her lover with his twin, the hurt is partly the betrayal of her intimacy and partly the humiliation of being made a fool. Similarly, confusion develops among the townspeople over the distinction between actor and character in the movies in Bruno Crespi's theatre, and they betrayed after investing emotionally in the concerns of the characters. All such problems emphasize the extent to which individuals are separated from each other and how rarely they connect. Even when close bonds are formed between couples, it is then as couples that they become isolated from the community, such as José Arcadio and Rebecca, Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Úrsula, and to an extent Aureliano Segundo and Petra Cotes.

The experience of miscommunication, and particularly referential miscommunication, is extended to the reader through García Márquez's stylistic choices. Elsewhere, there is an overwhelming consensus that writing should be clear and precise (e.g. Strunk & White 73-80). Undoubtedly, at the core of clear prose is the ability to introduce and subsequently maintain a network of connections among specific characters, objects, and other entities. Of course, some caveats apply. Obscurity in some academic and corporate writing is used to create a barrier excluding those outside the discourse community. Literature often requires a great deal of attention and effort from the reader; characters engage in problematic communication, talking at cross purposes; and readers are distracted by red herrings and 'garden path' sentences. But rarely in literature has the use of names, or other referring expressions, been so deliberately employed to create strain on the reader as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The first experience of reading this novel requires frequent consultation with the Buendía family tree, and even so, references to characters become confusing. At the end of the novel, when we recall events and personalities or when we discuss them with friends, we insist on clarification and confirmation of who we mean.

Thus García Márquez plays with reference, creating strain for the reader through the recurring use of names over successive generations. One reason for this is undoubtedly to emphasize the cyclic nature of history, yet this explanation is surely insufficient as such an effect is easily achieved without such processing strain. Rather, the strained references are used to parallel the experiences of the characters, who on numerous occasions, struggle or fail to recognize those who are close to them. García Márquez appears to taunt the reader over these challenges, with Pilar Ternera's first child being "given the name José Arcadio, [but] they ended up calling him simply Arcadio so as to avoid confusion" (38),

and describing Úrsula's senile confusions over which generation of Aureliano and José Arcadio she is talking to (333).

A further stylistic device that García Márquez frequently employs is to introduce new and returning characters through a series of descriptions and events before revealing their name. The reader's experience again parallels that of the characters, in which the name provides a final dash of colour to a first impression of a new person. For returning characters, such as Melquíades, José Arcadio, and Cataure, the delayed naming mimics the slow dawning of recognition.

In the final stages of the novel, a number of threads – such as the Úrsula's fear of incest – are drawn together before the final, extraordinary conclusion. One of these is when a mystery letter arrives from Barcelona, perhaps bearing news of the death of the wise Catalanian. As Amaranta Úrsula is about to open it, Aureliano snatches it away. "'Not this one,' he told her. 'I don't want to know what it says'" (416). At this moment, the couple has almost entirely retreated from the world, no longer wishing to communicate with others. When Amaranta Úrsula and the baby die, Aureliano is utterly alone in Macondo, and the only surviving Buendía. Having spent most of his life alone in his room, his interaction with the world is shown to have been a brief respite from deep isolation. Nailing shut the house, Aureliano effectively renounces all forms of communication, and returns to reading Melquíades' parchments. Thus the interpersonal function of language has finally succumbed to the purely intrapersonal cognitive functions. Communication problems cease to exist: the coded Sanskrit may now be read with ease and the mysteries of earlier generations are clarified, from the impenetrable chanting of Melquíades to Arcadio, to the significance of José Arcadio calling Aureliano Babilonia a bastard.

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