

## Invitation to World Literature: One Hundred Years of Solitude Video Transcript

Stavans:

It would be easier to imagine the world without a certain color than without One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Peña:

The same year that One Hundred Years came out, Sergeant Pepper's came out. There's like a before and an after Sgt. Peppers. There's like a before and an after One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Damrosch:

It's got political conflict, it's got hopeless love, it's got golden flowers raining down from the sky.

Felber:

Decaying, extraordinary, ingenious, and messed-up.

Cisneros:

"If you bear iguanas, we'll raise iguanas," he said.

Smith:

It's just a small thing to even call it a book. I mean it is whole universe that's been created that, you're being asked to step into.

## GRAPHIC: 100 YEARS OF SOLITUDE

von der Walde:

One Hundred Years of Solitude was written in 1967 by Gabriel García Márquez, a Colombian author who was living at the time in Mexico.

Peña:

Probably like most people, I often love and think about the very first line in the novel.

von der Walde :

(Reading in Spanish)

Cisneros:

(Reading): Many years later as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.

Prose:

First sentences, openings, are promises of what's to come and this is a huge promise that the novel delivers on.

## GRAPHIC: A BOOK OF FOUNDATIONS

Stavans:

At the very basic [level] the book is about a family.

von der Walde:

How different moments of transformation change and progress in a Latin American country affect this family. It's the civil wars, the arrival of technology, a massacre.

Cisneros :

It has all the properties of a telenovella; multiple characters, circular time, love affairs and drama.

Stavans:

This is a book of origins. This is a book of foundations. This is a book about how we, Latin Americans came to be.

## GRAPHIC: MAGICAL REALISM

Damrosch:

The novel is best known for crystallizing the mode called magical realism, (lo real mágico), a combination of the every day and a kind of natural reporting style in which extraordinary things happen. Gypsies float by on magical carpets. A woman ascends to heaven, folding laundry as she goes.

Okrent:

There's a plague of insomnia. No one can sleep. There's a five-year rainfall. Yellow flowers that fall from the heaven and carpet the whole town.

Prose :

(Reading): That Sunday in fact Rebecca arrived. She was only 11 years old. Her entire baggage consisted of a small trunk, a little rocking chair with small hand painted flowers, and a canvas sack which kept making a clack, clack, clack sound where she carried her parents' bones.

Okrent :

You know, if you read it literally, say, oh, what kind of person carries around a sack of bones in it? Well it's a person in One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Smith:

It was like going back to the things you could believe when you were 4 or 5 years old. And I like that feeling like being surrounded by that.

Okrent:

Impossible in the world that we live in is absolutely logical in the world of One Hundred Years of Solitude that García Márquez has created.

## GRAPHIC: PLACES REAL AND IMAGINED

Okrent:

The book begins dramatically with a firing squad about to execute Colonel Aureliano Buendía. Then suddenly we go back to the story of his parents and the founding of the town. Fleeing another town where he's killed a man who was haunting him. Jose Arcadio Buendía decides to settle in another town, but the dead will not know because no one will ever have died there. So the background is almost a biblical quality of an exodus to a new Eden, a creation from the beginning.

Prose:

(Reading): Jose Arcadia Buendía dreamed that night that right there a noisy city with houses having mirror walls rose up. He asked what city it was, and they answered him with a name that he'd never heard, that had no meaning at all. It had a supernatural echo, Macondo.

Damrosch:

Macondo the town is a fantastic place where imaginary things happen. It's also based on García Márquez's own hometown in Colombia, Aracataca.

Ferry:

It was apparently the sign for a banana plantation. They saw a train stop where he's traveling with his mother and he simply liked the word. He was born in Aracataca but he lived in the whole Caribbean coastal region of Columbia.

Obando:

We all believe that the coast of Colombia, you know, from La Guajira to Cartegena, Barranquilla, Santa Marta, the coast, it's one big Macondo because the way people behave are very similar to the way how things that you would see in the book, you know.

Ferry:

García Márquez was quoted as saying that he found his raw material somewhere in the place between realism and nostalgia.

Damrosch:

His book lends stories he used to hear from his grandfather and his grandmother. His grandfather connected to the real political history of the country. His grandmother, someone who would tell the most fantastic things he says, with a face like a brick.

## GRAPHIC: BUENDÍA FAMILY TREE

von der Walde:

One Hundred Years of Solitude is the story of four generations of a family.

Ferry:

The patriarch of the Buendía family is Jose Arcadio Buendía, who married Ursula Iguarán.

von der Walde:

Then they have three children, which is Colonel Aureliano, Jose Arcadio, and Amaranta.

Cisneros:

When I was teaching at an alternative high school... I would slip and say the wrong name, there'd be someone on the class that would shout out and say oh no, that's not who it was, it was Jose Aureliano.

Smith:

Jose Arcadio, I keep wanting, to say Arcadio and Aureliano,

Damrosch:

Jose Aurelio, is it Arcadio... Arcadio? Yes. Arcadio, not Aureliano. Heh.

Cisneros:

And then there were those of us like me, who couldn't care less... That perhaps the point was to become confused? Because over generations of time, it's as if the same person is being born and dying.

von der Walde:

One, two, three, four, five, six. That's five generations, and then the last one it's the baby.

GRAPHIC: FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

Damrosch:

We see the history of the town and the family devolving from generation to generation. Gradually the patriarch Jose Arcadio becomes senile or crazy. Starts speaking in Latin. They have to tie him to a tree in the courtyard.

Felber:

And he spends an interminable amount of time; it's just, that's just dad in the backyard, tied to the tree... One thing that's so fascinating about that is after a little while he wants to be at the tree. That's how I want to go out, tied to a tree. I hope you're listening, honey. Tree.

Damrosch:

The book then focuses on the next generation. His three children, ... Jose Arcadio, the implacable Amaranta, and especially Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the central magnetic character of the entire book.

GRAPHIC: COLONEL AURELIANO BUENDIA

Stavans:

Colonel Aureliano Buendía he is the archetype or the prototype of the macho. There is a very interesting Dos Equis commercial, that makes me think every time I see it, of the Colonel Aureliano Buendía ; the man to erase all other men.

DOS EQUIS COMMERCIAL:

His beard alone has experienced more than a lesser man's entire body, his blood smells like cologne...

Okrent:

(Reading): He survived fourteen attempts on this life, seventy-three ambushes and a firing squad. He lived through a dose of strychnine in his coffee that was enough to kill a horse.

DOS EQUIS COMMERCIAL:

...he is the most interesting man in the world.

von der Walde:

Colonel Aureliano Buendía is a very important character. Not only because he occupies a good portion of it but because he puts Macondo on a political map.

Damrosch:

Aureliano is a figure in whom we see a dawning of a political awareness. He discovers that elections are completely fixed. Ballot boxes are stuffed and his sense of justice is outraged and he becomes a rebel. He starts a series of hopeless revolutions, one after another.

Peña :

Everything in the book has a foot in a reality. It's a novel written just a few years after the official end of what the Colombians call La Violencia, when at least two hundred thousand Colombians lost their lives in these internecine political battles.

von der Walde:

Colonel Aureliano Buendía he represents something that was central for García Márquez and his development. I think the figure of his grandfather who fought in these wars.

Stavans:

Colonel Aureliano Buendía organized thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all. He had seventeen male children by seventeen different women and they were exterminated one after the other on a single night before the oldest one had reached the age of thirty-five. He is presented as liberal and always dreaming that war is justified in so far as it will bring equality and justice.

GRAPHIC: GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Stavans:

The book is written by a forty year-old Gabriel García Márquez. García Márquez had moved to Mexico with his wife and family. He was hoping for a break in writing screenplays.

Peña :

For a number of years he was itinerant working in Mexico City I think, in Venezuela, mainly doing newspaper work. But was really quite unknown as a writer until One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Stavans:

In 1965 all of a sudden Gabriel Márquez got this inspiration. And for a period of 15, 16 months he doesn't want anybody to knock at the door. There's hardly any food. He tells his wife, Mercedes, let's not talk about food. My role right now is only to write. He was ready to go and he let it out.

Stavans:

This book literally descended in Buenos Aires, the capitol of high culture in Latin America. And within weeks it was selling like hot potatoes. Everybody was talking about it and there is a famous anecdote of García Márquez showing up with his wife, in Buenos Aires, in a theater. And he got a standing ovation in this city where he had been a nobody just weeks prior to that.

Peña:

I think people felt that it was a book that really captured something that was very specifically Latin American. That was a time when really Latin Americans in the states, unless they really searched for them, had very few images of themselves and very few positive images... Here was somebody who had taken that culture and history and given it an incredible spin.

Stavans:

In many ways Latin America had been seen for generations as an awkward, primitive, continent, derivative of what Spain, Europe, and the United States were all about without anything original.

Peña:

Suddenly here was this novel which burst on the scene. And suddenly everything Latin seemed at the forefront. It was the Latin Americans who were setting the pace. It was a Latin American novel that seemed like the freshest arrival in literature.

von der Walde:

At that point it was just such a big cultural phenomenon you wanted to read it. I was reading it. I was having such a great time and my best friend at school wanted to read it, too, so we just split it in two. And so I gave her the first part while I finished the second. I still have that copy. Split it in two, I never thought it was going to be valuable.

Damrosch:

The book rapidly became an international best seller. It was translated into English just 3 years after its original publication.

Okrent :

There's a great talent in this translation by Gregory Rabassa that enables me to believe that I'm reading the book as it was written.

Okrent :

When it came out it was enormously well received in serious literary quarters. I believe it was William Kennedy, a wonderful writer himself, said that there are two books that everyone must read. One was the book of Genesis and the other is One Hundred Years of Solitude. You don't get blurbs much better than that one.

Peña :

And of course since that time, each, new novel has been greeted rapturously. It was of course awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982.

Obando :

The whole country stopped. And I think very few things have the power to do that. I mean the entire country stopped to witness this. It was like winning the soccer World Cup.

von der Walde :

People in Columbia still think that it's their Nobel, that it's the whole country, because One Hundred Years of Solitude has become so much the nation's pride. It was a way of showing we have something more than just violence, cocaine, problems.

GRAPHIC: EXTERNAL FORCES

Obando:

More than anything I think he wanted to capture a time in history... when change came and how people reacted to that change.

von der Walde:

The arrival of the train to Macondo. One of the Aurelianos brings the train...

A woman who was washing clothes in her river during the hottest time of the day ran screaming down the main street in an alarming state of commotion. "It's coming!" she finally explained; "Something frightful, like a kitchen dragging a village behind it."

Felber:

I think in most places in the book, things are pretty good, right until somebody shows up with a new miracle.

von der Walde:

The arrival of the train is of course going to bring all sorts of people to Macondo. The most important moment is the visit of this Mr. Herbert who sees a banana for the first time in his life. And this is where García Márquez creates an amazing comic effect. You have first the people of Macondo not understanding the train. But some pages later you have this American not understanding the banana...

(Reading): With the suspicious attention of a diamond merchant he examined the banana meticulously, dissecting it with a special scalpel, everybody waited for Mr. Herbert to pass the final and revealing judgment. But he did not say anything that allowed anyone to guess his intentions.

## GRAPHIC: INFLUENCES

Damrosch:

García Márquez is a very worldly author. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is inspired both by the American, William Faulkner, and his rural Southern fiction of Yoknapatawpha County. Particularly by Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Which had a big impression on him when he read it.

Stavans:

When Kafka introduces Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* and tells us that one...after a restless night one morning he has become a huge bug that in some ways is already a magical realist statement. When Lewis Carroll presents Alice in *Wonderland* he introduces us to a magical world of rabbits that have to run and cats that disappear. There is something magical and exotic about them and yet something that is presented in a mundane and a realistic and straightforward fashion.

Okrent:

One artist does have an element of García Márquez, of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in his work and that's Mark Chagall. The flying figures in Chagall, the rich coloration of the figures as they soar around and apart from the ground, um that's very similar in some ways.

Damrosch:

García Márquez has had a huge impact on writers around the world from Salman Rushdie in India, to Sandra Cisneros, and Toni Morrison in the United States.

Cisneros:

I think as a young Latina it is very important to read this book. It gave us permission to write about our realities especially when we didn't see our reality in North American literature.

Damrosch:

García Márquez's magical realism has inspired many filmmakers from the film, *Like Water for Chocolate*, the work of Terry Gilliam—*Time Bandits*, *Brazil*.

Stavans:

Francis Ford Coppola once went to him and said I'd love to turn this into a movie... and he said no and we're all the better for it... because the book itself is already so cinematic.

#### GRAPHIC: THE BUENDÍA MATRIARCH

Okrent:

The women they stay in Macondo... and there's this stable base. Now when I say stable some of these women are extremely unstable and their lives are tragic and bizarre at times. But they are, to me, they're the essence of Macondo.

Peña:

If you take for example Ursula the original matriarch there's a wonderful passage it's right when they first install electric lights where she forgets she's blind and I just love that, that idea of just someone forgetting their blind... the women sort of go much more with the flow, you know, and that's why...that's, I think, the secret of their strength.

Cisneros:

I like Ursula. Because she's always just this tremendous force of energy that keeps everything going through all the disasters of life.

Felber:

She's so long-suffering and yet, so very vocal about her suffering. She's a mom.

Smith:

(Reading): Don't forget that as long as God gives us life we will still be mothers. And no matter how revolutionary you may be we have the right to pull down your pants and give you a whipping at the first sign of disrespect.

It sounds like something that I used to hear time and time again, in the African-American community. The mothers were like; you are not too old for me to pull your pants down right here... Doesn't matter how old you get, boy!

#### GRAPHIC: UNITED FRUIT COMPANY

Damrosch:

The town had been able to absorb the earlier incursions of a colonial government and a church. Things got much more difficult now with this wholesale invasion of American commercialism. The street becomes chaotic. They can't recognize their own town. Look at the mess we've gotten ourselves into, Aureliano Buendía said at the time, just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas.

Okrent:

Macondo gets discovered by an American banana company and the banana company moves into town, sets up near town and becomes an ongoing presence.

Prose:

Banana republic; certainly One Hundred Years of Solitude is about the reality of what that was, which was exploitation, colonialism, you know the destruction of local cultures. All those things. And it's there in the novel.

Stavans:

García Márquez is a socialist... There are crucial moments in the novel that allow us to understand the politics of the writer. There is an extraordinary strike, workers' strike that is seen from the point of view of a child... The strikers are going against the United Fruit Company and the United Fruit Company invites the army to come in.

Damrosch:

This leads to the central violent event of the book, a massacre of striking banana workers, based on events that actually happened, when García Márquez was a year old.

Cisneros:

3,000 people in the square, children, mothers, men, women...

Ferry:

This really happened. And part of the sadness or the solitude or the nostalgia that he speaks about I think is the loss produced by political violence.

von der Walde:

It's the one point where the story is not told in terms of something a bit comical... It is really told like a horrible nightmare.

Damrosch:

(Reading): They were pinned in, swirling about on a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around, like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. The child saw a woman kneeling with her arms in the shape of a cross in an open space mysteriously free of the stampeded. Jose Arcadio Segundo put him up there. At the moment he fell with his face bathed in blood before the colossal troupe wiped out the empty space, the kneeling woman, the life of the high drought-stricken sky and the whorish world where Ursula Iguaran has sold so many little candy animals...

This new slaughter is...is the culmination and conclusion of this whole, sad, political history... the final loss of innocence of the town.

GRAHPIC: REMEDIOS THE BEAUTY

Damrosch:

Each generation brings us vivid new characters such as Remedios the Beauty in the fourth generation of the family.

von der Walde:

She is just amazingly attractive. Remedios la bella is the only women in the Buendía family who has this sexual power. It's not only that men fall for her, to the point of killing themselves just to be able to be close to her, in a way the reader is always seduced by Remedios as well.

Obando:

For the spring/summer 2006 my collection was called the remains of Remedios the Beauty... And it was really based on all the specific moments of Remedios throughout the story and we captured certain moments and we imagine how she would be dressed and how we think she should have been dressed... this is a specific look. It was kind of really inspired by the final moment of Remedios when she kind of goes up into the sky wrapped into sheets, the white sheets.

Peña:

I've always been a particular fan of the passage when Remedios ascends into heaven. . I mean that always seemed to me just so perfectly done.

Damrosch:

(Reading): Remedios the Beauty was clutching a sheet, by the other end, and Fernanda felt a delicate wind of light, pull the sheets out of her hands, and opened the up wide. Amaranta felt a mysterious trembling in the lace of her petticoats and she tried to grasp the sheet, so she wouldn't fall down. At the instance in which Remedios the Beauty began to rise.

Peña:

(Reading): She left the sheets to the mercy of the light, as she watched Remedios the Beauty waving goodbye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her... and they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest flying birds of memory could reach her.

Damrosch:

Particularly excellent here is the varied reactions of the villagers, when Remedios disappears from the religious to the practical.

Fernanda, burning with envy, finally accepted the miracle and for a long time she kept praying to God to send her back her sheets.

GRAPHIC: THE TOWN MOVES ON

Felber:

You could say it's extraordinarily funny at the same time, as being incredibly sad... But I don't know if that makes somebody want to read the book, because you cannot sum up the story. I don't know, can you sum up the story? No, that's not it. No, try again, no?

Nothing?... The only way to recommend this the book to somebody is, I think is to just put in front of their face.

Peña:

I think I expected it was gonna be a very serious, very heavy book. I mean that's what great works of literature were. And suddenly you're reading something that's full of all these kind of funny innuendos, weird asides, unexpected things happening and things like that.

Smith:

When you stop reading the book like you have to put it down for the night... the town moves on while you're sleeping and then you wake up and...and join it and say, okay, what's happened in the meantime... then you know you're invested in a deeper way than just this is a book I'm reading.

Okrent:

As you read your imagination takes what the writer has created and populates it and puts colors in it and... When I see a movie... There's not the opportunity... for the reader to take off into his own imagination the way you can with a book, with a great book... I tell people pick this up... and I guarantee you, you will not be able to stop.

Stavans:

Come with me. I will show you how Latin America works.

GRAPHIC: 100 YEARS OF SOLITUDE