

The Autumn of the Patriarch Study Guide

The Autumn of the Patriarch by Gabriel García Márquez

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Autumn of the Patriarch Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Chapter 4.....	11
Chapter 5.....	13
Chapter 6.....	15
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	25
Style.....	27
Quotes.....	29
Topics for Discussion.....	31



Plot Summary

The dictator of a country on the Caribbean Sea in South America, the General, is dead and his palace is invaded. The vultures have invaded the palace when the dictator died, and then the common people follow in. The narrator reminisces about the life and times of the General. During a long series of wars, known as the Federalist wars, the General becomes the Head of State of the nation. He is also head of the Liberals and he is put into power with the help of the British Navy. Later the US marines occupy the country and finally leave. The occupiers leave because they are afraid of an epidemic of disease. The General is very close to his mother Bendicion Alvarado, and together with her, he occupies the Presidential palace. Later, she is sent to a suburban mansion, to keep her from making crude remarks about the General. The former occupiers have left the despot in place to run the nation and enjoy the whorehouse, as they say. The General does have thousands of concubines, and thousands of children by them, all who are born after seven months. He attacks the women and has sex with them with his clothes on when he wants one of them.

The General's closest crony is the Defense Minister Gen. Rodrigo de Aguilar, who he consults with often, and also is his partner for playing dominoes. The General at a certain point develops an obsession with a woman named Manuela Sanchez, who is the queen of the slums. He visits Manuela with her mother and courts her, but she disappears at the time of a solar eclipse. The General is depressed and does not recover until he helps the capital city recover from a catastrophic hurricane. After a series of scandals, the General becomes suspicious of the Defense Minister. The General suspects that the Defense Minister is participating in conspiracies to kill him, and ends up serving the corpse of the Defense Minister as the main course at a banquet where the Defense Minister is supposed to speak.

Bendicion Alvarado, the General's mother, dies, and her body is displayed all over the nation. The General demands that she be canonized as a Saint. Despite the General's best effort, the pope's representatives refuse to canonize the General's mother and the General expels all the Catholic clergy from the nation. The General notices a young novice nun, Leticia Nazareno, as she is expelled. She is later kidnapped and becomes the General's lover, and then wife and mother of his only legitimate child, Emanuel. The clergy and the church are brought back, but Leticia becomes more and more greedy, plus she brings her greedy family to the country. Finally, Leticia and the child are assassinated.

The General is old and weak, but still wants to get revenge on members of his High Command and other conspirators in the assassinations. Finally, the General hires a torturer and assassin from the old feudal regime, Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra. Jose kills many people and sends their skulls to the General, which are first mistaken for coconuts. Jose eventually sets up a torture center and has more power than the General. The General is able to outfox Jose by appealing directly to the people, and has the mob kill Jose. Then the General forms a new civilian regime. Now the General is very old, but is usually undisturbed and allowed to play various sexual and other games,



including those with school girls. His last complaint is that he is forced to sell the Caribbean Sea. A company sections it off and ships it to Arizona. The General is mostly ignored after that, except that he still occasionally commits unnecessary crimes against innocent people. The General finally dies, and the mob invades the palace. The people celebrate the ending of an era.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The dictator of a country on the Caribbean Sea in South America, the General, is dead and his palace is invaded. The vultures have invaded the palace when the dictator died, and then the common people follow in. The narrator reminisces about the life and times of the General. During a long series of wars, known as the Federalist wars, the General becomes the Head of State of the nation. He is also head of the Liberals, and he is put into power with the help of the British Navy. Later the US marines occupy the country and finally leave. The occupiers leave because they are afraid of an epidemic of disease.

The General has a first death, but lives on until his second death, since the first death was of his double, Patricio Aragone. Patricio Aragone functions as the double of the general, and a false president. This impostor is discovered, but not shot, because the dictator finds him useful. This way, the dictator can be at two places at one time, sending his double, Patricio, to the second place. After Patricio comes back, sighing about a woman, the dictator lets him fornicate with the concubines as well, and he does this regularly thereafter. The many children at the palace could be fathered by either the Dictator or Patricio, the double. The only man that the Dictator fully trusts is the Defense Minister, General Rodrigo de Aguilar. The General receives a "spontaneous outburst of love" in a public demonstration of approval of the regime. After this happens, the General decides to seek this love by traveling all around the nation. Of course, after the first spontaneous outburst, all subsequent outbursts of love for the General are arranged by the Secret Service.

A major event is the death of the General's double, Patricio Aragones, who is poisoned to death by a slow-acting poison on a dart. Patricio is taken back to the palace, and in his death agonies tells the General how much he, Patricio, despises the General, and that he just thought that he had to do the job of being a double for him. The population is easily deceived by the despot's apparent death. There is a funeral, with Patricio's body lying at state, as the dead General. There are some people, notably "the good fishwife", who genuinely mourn the passing of the General. However, things soon get out of hand and people, including the General's cabinet ministers, with a few exceptions, the concubines, and the General's children, begin to celebrate the General's apparent death. At this point, the General comes out and deploys his Presidential guard. The Presidential Guard massacres all of the ministers with the exception of the Minister of Health, the dictator's personal physician, and the Defense Minister, Rodrigo de Aguilar.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The story begins with a mob invading the Presidential palace, when the General, the dictator, is finally dead. The General is in power for a very long time. A key event and symbol in the story is the passage of a comet, which is connected to events in the Dictator's life. He says that he hopes to see the second and even the third passing of the comet. If it were Haley's comet, that would mean appearing once every eighty-six years. The General does whatever he wants, raping women and executing people. There are constant intrigues by factions that want to take power. The General is successful in smashing these conspiracies and killing large numbers of people. The General is uneducated and illiterate, but has a finely tuned intuition for smelling out troubles and conspiracies against his regime. The General does whatever he wants and his personal habits are scandalous. He has sex with any one of his concubines at siesta time, without either him or the girl getting fully undressed, and with the many children watching.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The General thinks back to when the US marines occupied the country and finally leave. The occupiers leave because they are afraid of an epidemic of disease. The General's mother, Bendicion Alvarado, is unhappy that the occupiers leave, since her son, the General, has more freedom and does not depend on her as much as before. The only person who gets away with insulting the dictator, the General, is his mother Bendicion Alvarado, who says, publicly, that if she knew he would be President, she would have sent him to school. She says this at a dinner that commemorates when the country was invaded. The mother of the dictator is eventually sent to a mansion in the suburbs. She does not like the big house and stays in the servant's quarters, sewing and painting birds. The General has other problems with the generals left over from the Federalist wars. The Federalists were a coalition of Generals that overthrew the Poet-General Laureano Munoz. They then divide the provinces of the country among themselves. Each petty federalist dictator has his own cattle herd and harem of women. The country is in a total state of chaos as the fate of the nation is left to scores of mercenary armies. When the Federalist Generals and the Liberals have driven out the Conservatives, they set up their little kingdoms and still keep coming back to the Presidential Palace. They defecate all over the place. There is a meeting of the Federalist Generals. The Federalist mini-dictators all start to be unexpectedly killed. The only Federalist General to survive is the full-blooded Indian General, Saturno Santos, who does not drink and is very careful about self-preservation. The official statement on the Federalist Generals is that their escorts murdered the Generals. The despot, the General, follows the Indian, Saturno Santos, but the Indian is hard to kill, so the General instead decides to give Saturno Santos a job as his "back-up" man. The Indian Saturno Santos becomes the General's bodyguard, until, because of "uric acid" buildup and age, he has to retire. The Indian offers to be killed by the General, but is instead retired to his home village.

The General goes to his mother's mansion in the suburbs and plays dominoes there with his trusted Defense Minister Rodrigo de Aguilar. The Minister of Health and the Minister of Defense have the General meet Manuela Sanchez, the so-called queen of the poor, and the General agrees to help the Dogfight District get running water and electricity. There is an anonymous song that eventually the parrots hear and begin to sing about the General and what an idiot he is. The Secret Police have to attack and exterminate courtyards of parrots to stop them from singing. The gifts to Manuela Sanchez from the General continue to pile up, and they even include mechanical and scientific gifts. Then the General offers to bring her a comet. The General, Manuela Sanchez, and Manuela's mother wait for a special event. Then, miraculously, the General's comet arrives in the sky. Somehow, this passage of a comet is seen to have been done through the power of the General. Next the General is informed of an upcoming eclipse. While the comet has only alarmed Manuela Sanchez, when the eclipse occurs she disappears entirely.



Chapter 2 Analysis

The General here is shown in his classic backstabbing mode, scheming and killing his opponents to take total power. The General then tries to show his absolute power by decreeing a change in the time of day. A humorous passage in the novel is the meeting of the General with Manuela Sanchez, the slum beauty queen. The General has a classic case of the Madonna/Whore complex. He has hundreds of concubines as his whores, but he worships a good woman, Manuela Sanchez, as his untouchable Madonna. The General is not able to arrange to have her kidnapped and rape her like he does to other women, and instead meets Manuela with her mother. Likewise, he still has total respect for his mother, Bendicion Alvarado. The General goes to a soothsayer. He finds out that despite how broken-hearted he is that the General will not die of love. Finally, when the General leads the effort to rebuild the capital after a catastrophic hurricane, from a rowboat, he feels better, and he gets over Manuela Sanchez.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

There is a dusty plain outside the palace where the Caribbean Sea once was. The General changes the time and days of holidays. When his bird loses a cockfight, the person owning the winning bird feels obligated to give it to the General. Then the same man, in disgrace, kills himself. The General does not realize how the fear of him makes people kill themselves and do similar extreme things. At this point, the General is in the first flush of his power, and the prime of life, not the dreary ending and "autumn" of his power. The General stops running around the country with a group of senators because he fears receiving the same treatment that the Roman dictator Julius Caesar received, which is assassination. As the General plays dominoes with the Defense Minister Gen. Rodrigo de Aguilar, he wonders if he has given the Defense Minister too much power. The General becomes depressed. Then the General thinks again of the horrible hurricane that hit the city. In preparation, everything that can be nailed down is nailed down. Cattle are brought inside the Presidential offices. Despite the rain and wind of the hurricane, the General walks around and wonders where Manuela Sanchez is. The General retreats back to his mother, B. Alvarado's suburban mansion, where she makes a chicken for him. The great despot, the General, gets over the hurricane and is distracted and forgets about Manuela Sanchez.

When a young man visits the General's office and comes up with a proposal to wipe out all the Conservatives all over the Western Hemisphere, the General refuses to listen and tells his Secret Service to totally ignore the young man. After the hurricane, the General declares a political amnesty and lets exiles come back to help rebuild the nation, with the exception of writers. The General is then hit with the problem of what to do with a group of two thousand children under the age of seven. The children were used to pick the winner of the national lottery. The children always have the General, who is the President, win, but then they are kept locked up in a dungeon, so they don't reveal that the lottery is rigged. This has been going on for a while, and now the two thousand children are imprisoned in a jail under the harbor. Finally the General decides to eliminate the children by having them put on barges. Then three military men are ordered to haul the barges out to sea, and then blow them up. After, the three men are shot as common criminals, for obeying such a horrible order.

Now there are uprisings against the General's government. Some revolts are stopped by marching in and pretending to surrender, and then on a pretext, having everyone shot. The General becomes more suspicious when the Defense Minister asks what has happened to the two thousand children. Shortly after, a dangerous rebellion breaks out, led by General B. Barboza, of the Conde barracks. The "insurrectionists" are throwing rocks through the windows of the Presidential Palace. As usual, every morning at the palace, the rebels see the milk cart come out. Each day the General checks on the milking of the cows. The porter pulls the cart out with milk for the rebels, and drinks some, to show that it is not poisoned. A minute later, the cart with six barrels of dynamite



concealed, blows up. All the leaders of the rebellion are killed in the explosion. Soon after, the General is attacked by a "bogus leper". There are lepers hanging about the Palace grounds. The false leper is about to shoot the General, but hesitates as the General offers his open chest to the man, and the attempted-assassin is struck down by the Presidential guard. The body of the assassin is cut up in quarters and displayed all over the country. The General remains upset. Then the General realizes that there is a traitor in his midst. He finds an "omen" in a game of dominoes with the Defense Minister Rodrigo de Aguilar. The General is certain that the Defense Minister is behind the conspiracies against him. The General proceeds to imagine a whole series of events. The Defense Minister must have smuggled ammunition to the rebels and is in league with the Ambassador of the United States or England. At a banquet scheduled to take place, where the leaders of the Presidential Guard are present, and the Defense Minister is supposed to make a speech in praise of the General, there is a long delay in starting the dinner. Finally, at midnight, the Defense Minister comes out on a platter, with parsley in his mouth. He is cut up and served for dinner.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Much of what the General does is absurd, and is in fact a satire of how a dictator likes to order people around and pretend that he knows everything. In Columbia, there has been a long standing feud and sometimes war between the Liberal party and the Conservative party, a possible model for the factions mentioned in the novel. The author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, is a journalist who is in exile much of his life. Perhaps he is referring to himself when he mentions that the political amnesty excludes writers.

The General has the thought that for him, "the fatherland means staying alive", so he refuses the request of the young man to get involved with foreign intrigues. In the matter of the kidnapped children, the General let his pleasure in fraud and greed get the better of him. Even under a dictatorship, people become desperate when their children have been taken away from them. The General refuses to receive diplomats, claiming to be ill. The General meets his army chiefs and says that the situation is under control. He has the two thousand children shipped to the remote regions of the country. The General tells international observers that the story of the missing children is a lie that was concocted by enemies of the regime. The observers look all over the capital city for the children.

The General then sends the children to other isolated spots in the country, and alternately makes them suffers and helps them. He knows that he is committing a horrible crime, but kills the children anyway. This sets the General up to be attacked by military factions, and also increases his paranoia. It is not clear if the Defense Minister is involved in conspiracies against the General or not. What is important is that the General thinks that he is involved, so the Defense Minister is killed, and in an act of outrageousness, served on a silver platter.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Bendicion Alvarado, the General's mother, knows that she is dying, and tries to tell the General the family secrets, such as how a drunken bum made her pregnant with the General in the back of a bar. However, the General is not really interested. Everyone in the nation knows that Bendicion Alvarado, the General's mother is dying, despite lying reports to the contrary. After telling the General to take care of her birds, the next morning B. Alvarado is dead. The body is taken to the convent of the Sisters of Charity, where nine bishops sing for the late B. Alvarado. The General thinks back to the Federalist war, when his mother followed him around and preserved him from being trampled by mules. B. Alvarado follows the General when he occupies the Presidential Palace. Her body is displayed with a photo, which she posed for many years ago, when she was young and beautiful. The settlements in the jungle see the riverboat, only this time, not with the General visiting as he did years ago, but with the body of Bendicion Alvarado.

The General decides that now his mother must be canonized and made a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. The Papal Nuncio, the pope's representative, is invited over to the Presidential Palace. The Papal Nuncio concludes that this is not a miracle. The picture on the sheet was done by a painter, with cheap wall paint. Shortly after, a mob attacks the palace of the Papal Nuncio. The mob steals his things and then drags the Nuncio out, taking off his clothes. After the Nuncio is beaten, the General has the Nuncio thrown into the sea on a raft, with food and water for three days. The start of the canonization toward sainthood for Bendicion Alvarado, the General's mother is made, and Monsignor Demetrius Aldous, the Eritrean is the new Papal representative sent to the nation to check on this matter. Father Demetrius is checking on the last details to grant sainthood to B. Alvarado. The priest travels into the backwoods of the nation. Everyone continues to say nice things about B. Alvarado, but they cannot find her records. They find three records for the birth of the General. The priest is near to getting to the bottom of the story, and finding out what really happened with B. Alvarado and her family. Just at this point, he is riding a mule along a ridge, when suddenly there is a big explosion and the priest and the mule fall down below the ridge. The General gets mad when this happens and says that his orders have been disregarded, and he orders that the priest be found alive and brought to the Presidential palace.

Father Demetrius says that a giant apparatus has been put together to sell saintly relics and profit off the death and alleged sainthood of B. Alvarado. The General decides that the entire Catholic church shall be expelled from the nation. The church's property is expropriated and given to the cult of the Saint B. Alvarado, the General's mother. All of the priests and nuns are also expelled, both foreign and native-born. The government fears that the clergy will secretly bring their jewelry and gold coins with them, so the clergy is ordered to embark completely naked onto the ships leaving the country. As a group of nuns get on board of a ship leaving the country, a naked nun catches the



General's eye, and the officials with him look up her name and call it out, Leticia Nazareno. She replies, "Present". Months later, the nation's secret service kidnaps the novice nun, Leticia Nazareno, from a convent on the island of Jamaica. Leticia is drugged and shipped in a packing crate and brought to the General's palace.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Not letting the Archbishop give Bendicion Alvarado the last rites foreshadows the upcoming fight with the church over B. Alvarado's canonization as a saint. People say that they see the corpse smile, even after the salt and ice are gone. The population yells that a miracle has occurred. The General also remembers that during the Federalist war, his life was saved by her prayers that made the bullets bend away from him and allowed the "Liberals" to be victorious. The body is finally returned to the capital and preserved. Later it is found out, in another scandal, that Bendicion's body had been sent to a taxidermist and left like a stuffed animal. In another display of his desire for absolute power, the General expels the church for not canonizing his mother. First the papal nuncio is beaten and left on a raft. The General has higher hopes with the friendly second papal representative. The Eritrean Father seems to be more of a regular guy, he is fun to be with and likes to dance, and the General has hope that he will succeed in making his mother a saint. Then the second papal representative is almost killed, because he starts uncovering the family secrets in his journey to the interior. Apparently, the General wants to avoid having the priest find out the truth about his filthy family and the degenerate life of Ms. B. Alvarado, but he does not wish for Father Demetrius to be killed. The expulsion of the church sets a string of events into motion, including the kidnapping of Leticia Nazareno. The church symbolizes one of the centers of powers that even as a dictator, is not under control of the General, as he also is not able to confront the Imperialist powers, such as the British and the Americans.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Leticia Nazareno teaches the General how to read and write. The General spends hours reciting little rhymes to help him to learn to read and write. Then, she asks him to let the nuns come back to the country that were expelled. Leticia realizes that she is pregnant and demands that the General marry her. In addition, all the churches are reopened and God himself is brought back into the nation. The Pope gives the General a sash, a medal and an award for restoring the Church to its former position. Leticia has the cult of the General's mother, Bendicion Alvarado, forgotten, because she wants to be the only woman in the heart of the General. The son is named Emmanuel, that God is with us as it says in the Bible, and immediately is declared a Major-General.

This is when Leticia starts making her shopping sprees. This is told from the point of view of a narrator. Leticia begins to go shopping on Wednesday mornings, with the child, and grabs up everything that she wants. Leticia has an evil touch, which makes the vegetables and food she grabs without paying, rot. Then, she complains that she is getting inferior merchandise. As a nun, she begged for contributions for God, and now she grabs goods in the name of the State. Finally, a delegation of creditors comes to the Presidential Palace. A nice, young and pleasant naval officer comes to see them and take down their complaints, but nothing is done. The looting of the nation is accelerated as Leticia Nazareno's relatives begin to arrive from the Antilles Islands in the Caribbean.

There is the first assassination attempt against Leticia and the child. Their limousine blows up just before they are to go to the market on a Wednesday. The General is mad at himself for not foreseeing the danger. The General meets with his high command of fourteen Generals, which he has not done for a while. The General finds out that seven of the other Generals and the Commander-in-Chief are totally loyal, but he does not have the power to stop the other Generals. The General orders some of the looting done by the Nazareno family and the church be stopped. The greediest of the Nazarenos are killed in secret. Then Leticia demands to go out for another shopping spree, where she grabs up all sorts of goods for the upcoming celebration of Christmas. The next Wednesday, Leticia and the child go out again to the Wednesday morning market. There they are attacked by a pack of sixty dogs and killed and eaten, despite the protection of the Presidential Guard. The General waits until he can get revenge.

Three of the men are killed, the ones who trained the killer dogs that killed Leticia and the child, and two brothers are captured in a gun battle. The General is asked to commute their sentence. Instead, he orders that the brothers are executed by the old method of being drawn and quartered. The General prays to his deceased mother to give him strength to fight against his enemies. He finally sends the dogs that ate his wife and child away to the countryside. The General finds a survivor of the old aristocracy, named Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra. The man is thirty-two years old, well-dressed and well-educated. Jose travels with his dog all the time, a Doberman. Jose demands



that the General give him a huge budget and the ability to do whatever he wants. In exchange, Jose says, he will deliver the assassins of the General's wife and child. Jose impresses the General, and the General gives him a huge amount of power. A new terror apparatus is set up, on top of all the other terror apparatuses. The General receives a sack with what looks like coconuts. After a rotting smell develops, it is discovered that the sack contains six skulls and receipts for the six dead people and their alleged methods of death. New people are cabinet ministers and running the government. Jose tells the General that the General is still "the power", and that the people running the government are not important. Jose Ignacio tells the General that it is time to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of his coming to power on August 12th. The General does not feel like celebrating, and locks himself up in his room.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Again, the point of view of the novel is of the people who invade the Presidential Palace after the death of the General. It seems that a cabinet official is thinking and that is the narrator. The point of view of the story then shifts back to the General, in the first person. It's hard to imagine a nation more uncivilized and savage than under the General, but this could be true. A state of total lawlessness and anarchy can be worse than having even a bad and tyrannical government.

In the case of Leticia Nazareno, the General's wife, one can see someone who acts as an agent of civilized behavior and education also in the midst of looting the nation. The General enjoys being with Leticia Nazareno, both sexually and also in learning to read and write. Leticia seems to enjoy her time with the General. Then she uses her position as wife of the General to promote her greed, her family's greed, and that of the church. Leticia was once a novice nun herself, so it's natural that she wants to restore the church, but the looting is what makes her a target for assassination. Civilization itself can unleash a tendency toward barbarism, through greed. Leticia Nazareno's murder unleashes a counter-reaction from the General, which develops slowly. The General wants to forget Leticia and his child and has her possessions piled up in an unused room. The dogs that ate Leticia and the child are still tied up in the courtyard. The General is sad because he does not yet have enough power to get revenge for the deaths of his wife and son. Finally, the trainers of the dogs are found and their plot is discovered, and they are killed in the most brutal manner possible, by torture and quartering their bodies. Once the General hires the assassin from the old regime, the torturer Jose Ignacio Saenz, the reign of terror begins and accelerates. The General regrets letting Jose set up a new torture apparatus, and feels himself losing power and becoming more isolated.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The General uses candy to tempt girls to come closer to him at a spot at the Presidential palace. One day, the girl-narrator does come closer and is grabbed by the General and brought into the palace, thrown into a pile of hay. The General plays with her genitals and inserts bread and other things into her, after eating them. The narrator fantasizes that the General is eating her whole body and often comes back to be lifted into the palace. Then one day, the military send men to her home with lots of money for the narrator and her family and they are all sent into exile for years. The narrator never again can feel the warmth and tenderness of the sexual experience she has with the General. The narrator wonders if the General even notices her absence. The General goes on to drag other school girls that he tempts inside, in through the skylight.

The point of view shifts back again to the General. The General is being pressured to give up the Caribbean Sea, in order to pay the interest on the national debt. Everything has been stolen over the history of the nation, from the rubber produced, to the cocoa, to natural resources. The only thing left to steal is the sea, which is likened to a rich bowl of clam chowder. The General thinks back to the recent death of Jose Ignacio, but this does not let him avoid the question of paying the interest on the national debt. The General still waits for one of the girls from the school next door to come to him, so he can capture her and enjoy playing with her sexually. Then one day, the general asks a girl that he captures from the school, what does she learn in school? The girl tells him that she is a waterfront whore, who has been dressed up to appear as a school girl and act that way. Meanwhile, Jose sets up a torture chamber a short distance from the Presidential palace, in an old Dutch lunatic asylum. The General is shocked when he sees the place, and makes Jose promise not to torture children under the age of five, to make their parents confess, as he was doing. Jose must say that the General knows nothing about this torture center. The General remembers all the trouble he once had in getting rid of the children who fraudulently picked the winning lottery number. Jose has a network of agents that monitor exiles and enemies of the state all over the world. The General is totally isolated, though he tries to get a reading on what the High Command thinks of the power and methods of this civilian, Jose Ignacio Saenz. The General finds out that somehow Jose has put together a film of the General that shows him discussing with the High Command the national finances and other problems, which is broadcast to the nation. The General is enraged about this fraud, and has Jose explain how he concocted it. Jose has been having questions asked of the General in his Friday audiences with people, and the answers are recorded. In some other way, the images of the General talking are synthesized. The General outwits Jose by appealing to the people, using television and other means, and the General is the one leading the rebellion against the terror machine of Jose Ignacio Saenz. The mob drags Jose out of his torture chamber. His human-eating dog is killed, and Jose is killed and strung up on a lamppost.



The Ambassador wants to land US marines because of an alleged yellow fever epidemic. The old sources of wealth have dried up, such as the quinine and cocoa plantations. The new Ambassador wants to take over the sea, which the Ambassador calls a delicious dish to be eaten. The Ambassador's demands reminds the General how he first came into power. He declared that there was a yellow fever plague, and declared martial law long ago. Then only the General had the cure for the disease. The General at the last minute spreads salt and the people are healed who pick up and eat the salt, in a miracle, back then. The nation is a mess, and the General is told that either the marines have to invade or he must sell the sea. Finally, engineers are deployed who cut the sea up in sections, and ship it off to the deserts of Arizona. All that is left is a giant lunar dust bowl. The General tries to create an insurrection against the gringos. His military disguise themselves as agitators, but no one wants to demonstrate and be shot down.

The General is shuffling around the Presidential palace, with only three or four servants. At night he locks himself up in his room and hears the voices of his mother and thinks of his battles to take power many years ago. The former Poet-General Lautauro Munoz was found dead in the palace, with his dead wife and daughter. Lautauro had made the mistake of defying the British Fleet. At this point, the General is declared President, Leader, and Commander-in-Chief. The General and his mother cannot believe that they have succeeded in occupying the Presidential palace. There is almost no furniture, and the English forces are stealing anything else that they could. Now the General is old and alone and he wonders, what is the value of being in power? That is what the General wondered from the start, when he thought that he would be in power for only a short time.

The General's own government ignores him, and they show him a closed-circuit television program that is broadcast upside down. Still, the General takes a magic potion so he can have sex with a woman again. The General does not enjoy the women that are brought in from overseas, and he is totally impotent with them. The General is still able to enjoy sex by surprising and raping a laundry woman, and he gives her and her children a government pension. The last night of his life, the General sings to the cows at the palace and goes to the milking stall. He counts the cows and looks over the chickens. The General sees a dead cow and orders that it be cleaned up. He passes the room with the stuffed body of his mother and wishes her a good death, and she wishes him the same back. The General locks himself in his room, and he hears someone call him "Nicanor". He finds that this is the female angel of death, speaking to him. The General tries to put off death, even at this last moment, but cannot. The General dies, trapped by his own illusions and the lies that he creates. The yells of approval that he gets in life were staged by force. At some point, the people wonder if the General, the Dictator is even real. Finally, they happily celebrate his death and the end of his reign.



Chapter 6 Analysis

A new school has been built for the girls of elite families, far away from the General, he finds out. The General thinks back to all the tricks that have been played on him during the years that Jose Ignacio ran the secret service and terror operation. Construction workers were always doing renovations on the Presidential palace, keeping the General boxed in and unable to do anything. The General is told that now everything is better and more orderly, and he keeps quiet under the dominance of the Jose Ignacio and his secret service. The General does not move against Jose, though he dreams of getting rid of him. The General is fascinated but also repulsed by Jose and his human-like Doberman dog that stays with Jose all the time. Even after Jose is ousted and eliminated, the General is getting old and spacey-minded, and is easy to manipulate. Mobilizing to destroy Jose Ignacio is the last major act of the General, which he does by asking for strength from his late departed mother.

The thin layer of development and growing of gardens and herbs is the Potemkin village that the General sees while riding in his limousine. This serves to cover up the collapse of the nation. The General is deceived, because there is nothing left to pay the interest on the debt. There is a constantly changing Ambassador, with at least five ones mentioned. Perhaps they could not bear to stay in the General's nation for very long. The General now is very old. He cannot have normal sexual relations usually, but still continues with his perversions with the school girls. The General is shocked that the girls are whores who are paid to impersonate school girls. Nothing is real anymore in the General's world; since the torturer Jose Ignacio is destroyed, he has become a figurehead who never goes out. This has some resemblance to the last days of General Franco in Spain, who ruled for forty years. Finally the General dies, and the people celebrate.



Characters

The General, the Dictator

The General, who is also the President, ruler, dictator, and despot of the nation, is the central character of the book. The book is mostly his memoirs, in a confusing form, since each chapter starts with the General being found dead. The General takes power during the chaos of the Federalist wars with the backing of the British fleet, and enters the Presidential palace along with his mother. He deals with many real and imagined conspiracies to remove him from ruling the nation. At one point, he removes or assassinates the entire High Command, except for his friends, the Defense Minister and the Health Minister. Later, the General suspects that his Defense Minister, a colleague from long ago, is running conspiracies against the General, and has him killed. The Defense Minister's corpse is served for dinner, at a banquet where he is supposed to speak. The General can be brutal, though he claims to be connected to the people of his nation and sometimes is able to do magical tasks, such as curing a plague with the salt he leaves behind.

The General has many concubines, and about five thousand children, all of whom are born after only seven months. He has sex with women on demand, and does not take his clothes off or seek privacy to do it. The General is extremely attached to his mother, Bendicion Alvarado, and becomes very upset when she dies. He tries to have her declared a saint and is unsuccessful, afterward expelling the Catholic Church. The General finally marries Leticia Nazareno, who is one of the novice nuns that is expelled, and is after kidnapped. The General has a son with her, but later, Leticia and the son are assassinated, because Leticia's greed makes her a target of powerful forces. The General is a combination of extremes and stereotypes of Latin American and European dictators. He is subservient first to the British Empire, and later to the Americans. He kills people at whim, yet often later denies that he is responsible for these crimes. His excuse is usually that he is working for the good of the nation.

Leticia Nazareno, the General's Wife

Leticia Nazareno is a novice nun who is expelled from the nation with the other Catholic clergy. As she leaves, she is noticed by the General, whose aides take down her name. In a few months, Leticia is kidnapped and sent back to the nation in a packing crate. The General has her sleep in his bed, but is very cautious about approaching her sexually. After more than a year, the General has sex with Leticia, after she compels him to take off all his clothes, which he usually does not do. Leticia becomes pregnant, and forces the General to marry her. She also compels the General to first have the poor nuns return to the nation, and then later return the Church to all its lands and power. After Leticia's son, Emmanuel, is born, she begins to grab large amounts of goods in her trips to the Wednesday open market. Leticia tells the merchants to charge the bills to the Presidential Palace, which none of them dare to do. Finally, a delegation



of merchants complains directly to the General about Leticia's huge grabs of valuable merchandise. Leticia's relatives, the Nazarenos, also come to the nation and participate in the looting. Leticia and her son become objects of hatred to generals in the High Command and there is an attempted assassination. Despite these warnings, she continues in her ways and is assassinated, together with Emmanuel, when she goes to the market by a pack of sixty trained hunting dogs.

Bendicion Alvarado, the General's Mother

Bendicion Alvarado is the General's mother and his major connection to human feelings. She accompanies him during the Federalist wars and enters the Presidential palace with him upon his seizure of power. Later, after the Marines have invaded and finally left, Bendicion Alvarado moves to a suburban mansion, so that the General does not have her embarrassing him repeatedly. She is a somewhat modest woman, one who does not have extravagant material needs. She lives in the servant's quarters of the suburban mansion because she is more comfortable there. Bendicion spends her time doing things such as painting birds and caring for caged birds. After a long life, Bendicion finally sickens and dies. On her deathbed, she tries to tell the General about some of her sordid past, for example, that she conceived him having sex with men in the back of a bar, but the General ignores this. This later comes back to haunt the General, when he attempts to have her canonized. The General is crushed over his mother's death and has her body taken around the nation. Later, he demands that she is declared a saint.

Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra

Jose is a 32-year old man, who is a remnant of the families of the feudal regime that ruled the nation before the General, during the "time of the Goths." He meets with the General and tells him that he will be able to find and kill those behind the assassination of Leticia Nazareno and Emmanuel, her son. Jose is almost always accompanied by his ferocious, man-eating Doberman dog, named Lord Kochel. Jose arranges assassinations, and then has delivered to the General sacks of the victims' heads. He forms a new secret service and torture bureau, which he runs out of the old Dutch Mental Asylum. Jose forms a new government and the General is turned into a powerless figurehead. Finally, the General runs a popular insurrection against Jose. Jose, along with his dog, is killed by a mob, and a new civilian regime is named by the General, who regains his power.

Demetrius Aldous, the Eritrean Father, the Papal Special Rep

Demetrius Aldous, also known as the Eritrean, is the Pope's special representative. He is sent to the nation after the Pope agrees to investigate the claims to canonize Bendicion Alvarado, the General's mother, as a saint. The Eritrean is very friendly and mixes with the common people. He spends a long time certifying and getting statements



of the sworn testimony of the miracles of Bendicion Alvarado. He makes an investigation of the interior of the nation to get the General's and Bendicion's birth records and other records. There he is almost murdered, by being thrown into a ditch. Later, he asserts to the General's face the total fraud of the operation to canonize the General's mother. In retaliation, the entire Catholic Church is expropriated, and its clergy is expelled.

Patricio Aragones, the General's Double

Patricio Aragones is the General's double. The General discovers Patricio impersonating him for purposes of making money. Rather than imprison Patricio, the General uses him as a double until his death. Patricio is killed in an assassination that the General later admits he staged in order to find out who is loyal to the regime. So Patricio finds his last use in staging the General's own death.

Manuela Sanchez

Manuela Sanchez is the queen of the slums in the capital, in the Dogfight district. The General develops a crush on her and visits her home in the presence of Manuela's mother. Before the General can make Manuela his wife or concubine, she disappears at the time of a solar eclipse, and is never found again.

Emmanuel, the General's son by Leticia Nazareno

Emmanuel is the General's son by Leticia Nazareno. Upon his birth, he is immediately declared a Major-General. Emmanuel goes to diplomatic receptions and has a miniature General's uniform. He goes with his mother, Leticia, to the market often, and is assassinated there with her.

The Papal Nuncio

The Papal Nuncio, the head of the Pope's mission in the nation, is asked to declare the General's deceased mother, Bendicion Alvarado, a saint. He refuses to do this, when he declares that the miraculous picture on her bed sheet of her is really just a cheap paint job. He is run out of the nation, and sent to drift on a raft in major sea lines.

The Ambassadors, the American, British, and Dutch Ambassador

There is a string of Ambassadors from Great Britain, the United States, Holland, Germany, and other European powers. They usually demand that the General pay the nation's interest payments on the debt, on time. These Ambassadors are often cronies



of the General, though their names keep changing. Later, they demand that the General sell his rights to the Caribbean Sea, which is carted off.

The Defense Minister, General Rodrigo de Aguilar-

The Defense Minister is the General's closest confidant. He helps the General defeat a coup attempt. Later, the General loses his trust in the Defense Minister. He has the Defense Minister killed and his corpse served to eat at a banquet.

The Poet, Ruben Dario

The Poet, Ruben Dario comes to perform at the National Theater. The audience includes the General, his wife Leticia, and his son.

The Full-Blooded Indian General, Saturno Santos

Saturno is the only other general who survives the conference of the Federalist generals. He becomes the bodyguard of the General.

The Good Fishwife

The Good Fishwife mourns the General at his fake death, and is rewarded by the General.



Objects/Places

The Nation

The nation is where the story takes place. It is never named, but in general seems to be Columbia or Venezuela, which are both large nations on the Caribbean Sea. Other aspects of the nation, such as the long-term of the time in power of the General, resemble Francisco Franco's Spain.

The Nation's Capital

The nation's capital is a large city and port on the Caribbean Sea.

The Federalist Wars

The Federalist Wars are a series of wars after the fall of the ancient regime of the Goths. The Federalists divide the nation up into fourteen states that are ruled by different generals. There is a peace conference at the Presidential palace, during which the General manages to kill all the other generals, except for the full-blooded Indian General, Saturno Santos.

The Federalist Generals

The Federalist generals participate in the Federalist wars; there are fourteen of them and they all control a section of national territory. All of them are killed by the General, except General Saturno Santos.

The Government House, the Presidential Palace

The Government House, usually called the Presidential Palace, is where the General lives. The surrounding grounds have the shacks where his concubines live, and also cows and chickens. Lepers and cripples hang around the palace and sometimes go inside.

The Lepers and the Cripples

The lepers and the cripples are constantly hanging around the Presidential palace. Only occasionally are they removed, as by Leticia Nazareno, and by the torturer Jose Ignacio Saenz.



The High Command

The High Command is the group of Generals that lead the army. They are usually dominated by the General, but occasionally there is rebellion from there, as in the assassination of Leticia Nazareno and her son, which is sponsored by members of the High Command, the General believes.

The Doberman of Jose Ignacio Saenz de Barra, Lord Kochel

The Doberman of Jose Ignacio Saenz de Barra, called Lord Kochel, is a large dog that is used to eating human flesh.

The Cows and Chickens of the Presidential Palace

Generally, cows and chickens wander around the Presidential palace and also sometimes inside the palace.

The Conde Barracks, San Jeronimo Base, the Harbor Fort

The Conde barracks, San Jeronimo base, and Harbor fort are military installations around the capital.

The General's Herniated Testicle

The General's herniated testicle is large and hangs out. Sometimes he has it supported in a walker or some other device.

The Wednesday market, the Garden Market

The Wednesday garden is an open market held every Wednesday in the capital. This is where Leticia Nazareno does most of her shopping, and this is where she and the child are assassinated.

The Suburban Mansion of Bendicion Alvarado

The suburban mansion of Bendicion Alvarado is a place that the General buys for his mother, so she can stay out of trouble in the capital.



The Comet

The comet is a marker of the General's life. It comes early in the General's life and comes again when he is infatuated with Manuela Sanchez. He thinks that he will live to see it again.

The Sea

The nation is on the Caribbean Sea. Later in the novel, the nation is forced to sell the sea, in order to pay the interest on the debt. The sea is transported in sections to the Arizona desert, and all that is left is a basin, or crater, of dust.

The National Debt, the Interest on the Debt

The nation constantly owes debt and interest on the debt, for reasons that no one can remember. The British Fleet, the Dutch, the Germans, and later the American marines all intervene in the nation to secure payment of the interest on the debt.

The Conservatives, the Liberals

The Conservatives and the Liberals are the two opposing political parties in the nation. The General is a member of the Liberal party, or at least that is where he comes from.

House on the Reefs

The House on the Reefs is the retirement home for deposed dictators that the General set up.

The Dogfight District

The Dogfight district is the slum in the capital which is the home of Manuela Sanchez.

The Goths

The Goths is the general term used to refer to the feudal rulers of the nation before the General takes over.

The Sixty Killer Dogs

The sixty killer dogs are imported and trained to kill and devour Leticia Nazareno, the President's wife and his child, Emmanuel.



Themes

An Endless Dictatorship

The General is portrayed as someone who is in power either over one hundred years, or over two hundred years. In the beginning he is put into power with the help of the British fleet, and at the end, he is threatened with invasion by the US Marines, unless he sells the Sea. His dictatorship is tolerated as a necessary evil, not because of overwhelming military force. In fact, the military is the greatest threat to the dictatorship, not only because other generals want to take power, but because if the General commits unacceptable abuses, the military are the only ones who have the power to challenge these abuses. Though the General is portrayed as a dictator and a monster, he also gets people in the military and the population to cooperate with him. For example, hundreds of people sign on to witness miracles that the General's mother does, and to support the application to make her a saint after she dies. There are various festivals and dinners that the military participates in as well. The author seems to promote the inevitability of the dictatorship. Only when the General directly confronts the military is there a need for a huge secret police apparatus, and even the General is compelled to revolt against this state within a state.

Pride, Authority and Paranoia

The General abuses the patriotic feelings of the population in order to get them to put up with his crimes. He uses various tricks to maintain his power and authority. By having a double and having him be killed, which is apparently the case, the General gets an opportunity to see who in the population and the military High Command really support him. When he sees the common people who grieve over his so-called death, he is filled with feelings of pride, but when others rejoice in his alleged death, the General joyfully plots to have them killed. However, his paranoia is often the General's downfall, as in when he kills and serves for dinner the Defense Minister. A strange twist of the novel is that the General's perception of reality is what is given to the reader as the reality. The reader is totally infected with the General's paranoia, and alleged conspiracies become real, whether they are plausible or not. In the General's confrontations with other authorities, such as the Church and the Imperial powers, he is alternatively submissive and confrontational. The General knows that his power to take on the Church is limited. Even when he expels it, he is convinced soon to take it back, ironically by his wife Leticia Nazareno. Likewise, the General knows that he cannot succeed in defeating the Imperial powers, but tries through various tricks and strategies to defy them.

Backwardness and Poverty

The nation is characterized as a continental nation on the Caribbean Sea. It has a national debt, which it is not able to pay the interest on. It is a plaything of the imperial



powers. Though the General has near absolute power in the nation, only checked by other powerful forces, he is not only subject to the imperial powers, but also the British Empire, the United States, and other European countries. The capital is built poorly, and is all but destroyed by a large hurricane. All the General can do is direct the relief effort from a rowboat that floats around the city. Health services are limited; the Minister of Health's main function is that of the General's personal physician. Plagues of yellow fever and other diseases periodically decimate the population, and are also possible excuses for invasions and the declaration of martial law. Due to the lack of a large class of educated, prosperous people, it is questionable what benefit there would be by having a democracy. Before the General is in power, there is chaos and disorder during the time of the Goths and the divided rule of the Federalist generals. Despite the arbitrary crimes of the General's rule, it is indefinitely accepted as a positive alternative to total chaos and anarchy.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel changes rapidly and unexpectedly. The novel begins from the point of view of a crowd invading the Presidential palace after the death of the General. It shifts after a while to the third person describing the point of view of the General, and various other people responding to him. Due to the stream of consciousness style of the novel, with its use of the third person and the first person to refer to the General in the same sentence, the point of view becomes confusing; for example, the General is referred to as both "he, him, his" and "I, me, mine". Generally the point of view is mainly in the third person, with the use of "I, me, mine" referring to text that is spoken or thought dialogue. It is also confusing because, other than this, dialogue is not clearly marked off. For long sections of the novel, the point of view is that of the General, in the first person, as dialogue, or also other characters, such as the girl lured by the old general to be lifted through his skylight, in chapter six, p. 208.

Setting

The setting of the novel is a nation on the Caribbean Sea that resembles the author's native Columbia, but also could be the neighboring nation of Venezuela. Both of these nations have had periods under dictatorial rule. In other ways, the nation resembles Spain under the Dictator Francisco Franco, who was in power for forty years, and had wide shifts in his administration. At first Franco Spain was a fascist dictatorship, and then later it became a neutral country, an ally of Western countries, and finally a nation in transition to democracy in the last years of Franco's life in power. The poverty of the nation clearly evokes a nation in South America or somewhere in the developing sector of nations. The nation is quite poor, and is intervened on by other nations such as the British Empire, the Netherlands, Germany, and later the United States. It is usually invaded on the excuse of payment of the foreign debt and interest on the debt. Most of the action of the novel takes place in the unnamed capital city and its immediate surroundings, such as the suburban mansion of the General's mother. Sometimes, the General goes or sends people into the interior of the nation, which is less developed, with only one railroad which finally falls apart. The General and his mother are originally from the interior, so for them, even the capital is a more developed setting.

Language and Meaning

The novel is originally written in Spanish, but seems to be put into a lively translation into English by Gregory Rabassa. The most difficult thing about the novel is the language and sentence structure. The language is a sort of stream-of-consciousness of a series of narrators. There is no conventional grammar, and sentences can continue for a page or more. The novel is obviously a denunciation of dictators and dictatorships,



and seems to be based on a variety of dictators in real life, such as Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco. Unlike others of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's books, there is no attempt to get a distance from the subject, and instead there is an intimate feeling of the thoughts of the General. Likewise, there is an implicit attack on the United States, Great Britain, and other imperial powers for imposing this dictatorship on the nation. These nations and others are the ones who demand the payment of the national debt and interest, though the economy of the nation has totally collapsed. It is unclear why the author chose to write sentences with a mix of first person subjects and third person subjects. This forces the reader to slow down and think over carefully the meaning of each sentence, which is perhaps exactly what the author intends to force the reader to do.

Structure

The novel is broken up into six chapters of about forty pages each. It can be difficult to find an advancing plot, as the story is the disjointed memoirs of the General who is the dictator, and other people who are affected by him. Each chapter begins with the mob going into the Presidential palace when they find out he is dead, or other people reacting to the General's death. After a short introductory passage, each chapter goes back to the time when the General is still alive and actively in power. In chapter one, the General's early career is discussed as he comes to power and consolidates his power. In the second chapter, there are more attempts to overthrow the General. The General also becomes obsessed with Manuela Sanchez, who later disappears. The third chapter discusses the devastation caused by a hurricane that hits the capital and the problem of the two thousand imprisoned children who are eventually eliminated. The General then has to suppress a coup attempt and ends up blaming his buddy, the Defense Minister, who in revenge, is killed and served at a banquet. Chapter four centers around the death of the General's mother Bendicion Alvarado and the attempt to declare her a saint. Then, the General expels the Church and has the novice nun, Leticia Nazareno, kidnapped. In the rest of the book, Leticia Nazareno marries the General, has his legitimate child, and later is assassinated. She also teaches the General how to read and write. The General plots revenge, and hires a torturer and assassin to lead the secret service, Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra, who is later killed to stop his reign of terror. The General then faces the necessity of selling the sea to pay the interest on the national debt. The General becomes more withdrawn and finally dies.



Quotes

"the body that had been pecked at, the smooth maiden hands with the ring of power on the bone of the third finger, and his whole body was sprouting tiny lichens and parasitic animals from the depths of the sea," Chap. 1, pp. 5-6

"and he had more time to take care of the armed forces, not because the armed forces were what sustained his power, as we all thought, quite the contrary, because they were his most feared natural enemy," Chap. 1, p. 12

"the instant the machine guns' death jubilation started up by the front of the building, the butcher feast of the presidential guard who with great pleasure and great honor general sir carried out his fierce orders that no one should escape alive from the meeting where treason was being hatched," Chap. 1, p. 30

"The second time he was found, chewed away by vultures in the same office, wearing the same clothes and in the same position, none of us was old enough to remember what had happened the first time, but we knew that no evidence of his death was final, because there was always another truth behind the truth. Chap. 2, p. 41

"to celebrate a providential event that he awaited on the roof of Manuela Sanchez's house, sitting between her and her mother, breathing strongly so that they would not notice the difficulties of his heart under a sky numb with evil omens, breathing in the first time the nocturnal breath of Manuela Sanchez," Chap. 2, p. 76

"above all when Manuela Sanchez evaporated into the shadows of the eclipse and he wanted to feel himself in the full bloom of his barbarity once more so he could pluck out the rage of deception which was cooking his innards," Chap. 3, p. 89

"and a casual event like the discovery of two thousand sequestered children permitted him to discover that it was not just one man who failed him but the whole supreme command of the armed forces who are only good for making me use up more milk and in times of trouble they shit in the plate they've just eaten out of," Chap. 2, p. 107

"the distinguished Major General Rodrigo de Aguilar entered on a silver tray stretched out full length on a garnish of cauliflower and laurel leaves, steeped with spices, oven brown, embellished with the uniform of five golden almonds for solemn occasions" Chap. 3, p. 117

"Bendicion Alvarado had stopped breathing, and then he unwrapped the loathsome body and saw in the tenuous glow of the first cock's crow that there was another identical body with the hand on the heart painted in profile on the sheet," Chap. 4, p. 126



"so he assumed personal command of the rescue operation with the unrepeatable order that within a maximum of forty-eight hours you find him alive and bring him to me and if you find him dead bring him to me alive, and if you don't find him bring him to me," Chap. 4, p.142

"he protested, insensitive to the pleas of Leticia Nazareno of my misfortune who had crossed her legs to ask him for the restitution of the confessional schools expropriated by the government," Chap. 5, p. 164

"so I began showing him that Leticia Nazareno owed us for an amount of taffeta twice the nautical distance to Santa Maria del Altar, that is, one hundred ninety leagues, and he said aha as if to himself, and I ended up by showing him that the total debt with the special discount for your excellency was equal to six times the grand prize in the lottery for ten years," Chap. 5, p. 176

"He entered his service under the simple condition that you give me a budget of eight hundred fifty million without my having to give an accounting to anyone and with no authority over me but that of your excellency and in the course of two years I will deliver to you the real assassins of Leticia Nazareno and the child," Chap. 5, p. 196

"don't worry Nacho, he would give in, do your duty, so that Jose Ignacio Saenz de la Barra would go back once more with is powers intact to the torture he had set up less than five hundred yards from the presidential palace in the innocent colonial masonry building which had been the Dutch insane asylum," Chap. 6, p. 216

"this country isn't worth a plug nickel, except for the sea of course, which was diaphanous and succulent and all it needed was flame underneath to cook the great clam chowder of the universe in its own crater," Chap. 6, p. 228



Topics for Discussion

Discuss fatalism. The General commits many crimes, but most of the people seem to accept him. Can a nation as described in the novel ever become a better place, or is the nation destined to be a backward dictatorship?

Discuss greed. The General wants power, but he seems to be careful about their greed, with the exception of fixing the national lottery. Is the General put into and maintained in power more to satisfy the greed of foreign powers, to pay interest on the national debt?

The General's quality of seeking domination is seen in his keeping a huge harem of concubines. Is this just an exaggeration of the tendency of many men in power to have many mistresses?

Discuss dictatorship. In many ways, the General's dictatorship does not disturb the common people, except for some specific crimes. Can a dictatorship have an everyday banality to it? Is it always bad or evil? Is it an acceptable form of government?

Jose Ignacio Saenz becomes the head of a new secret police, to track down the killers of the General's wife and son. He commits evil for pleasure. Is this more evil than the acts of the General?

Discuss pride. The General is heartbroken when his mother Bendicion Alvarado dies. He wants to show his pride in his mother's virtue by declaring her a saint. How does this sin of pride affect his regime? Does it set into motion a chain of events that nearly destroys the regime?

Though the General treats most women like objects, some, like his mother and later, his wife, become worshipped above all else. Does the General's treatment of women tell us anything else about his methods of government and life?

Discuss point of view. The rambling, stream-of-consciousness style of writing of the author can make it difficult to determine what point of view is used. The intended effect is to give the reader a feel for being inside the mind of the General and other characters. Does this enhance the reader's knowledge of the General and his dictatorship, or make the novel more difficult to understand? Are there any benefits to this use of form and this style of writing?

The nation, from before the coming to power of the General, until after his death, is beset by unpayable debts. Are the nation's creditors guilty of the quality and length of the dictatorship? Would these problems be solved by a democratic regime?