Collected Stories Study Guide

Collected Stories by Gabriel García Márquez

Contents

Plot Summary

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a fabulist, a sorcerer with language whose surprising and potent imagery and characters impel the reader from one story to another in this collection that spans 1947 to 1972. One of the benefits of this collection is that the reader sees the development and maturation of a most amazing literary talent from his earliest days to his award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. Garcia Marquez' earliest stories are strange metaphysical creations that seem to occupy a place somewhere between the living and the dead, where time is relative and past, present and future coexist. The influence of Edgar Allan Poe is apparent in stories that concern death, decay and transfiguration. Except that Garcia Marquez, unlike Poe, has access to modern theories of physics and notions of time/space that the melancholy Richmonder lacked. Garcia Marques artfully exploits some of these ideas in his early stories without resorting to science fiction genre writing. Another strong influence on Garcia Marquez as a writer is Franz Kafka, particularly his surrealist "Metamorphosis."

Garcia Marquez' style of writing has been characterized as "magical realism," a fluid way of communicating in which the ordinary and the completely improbable coexist quite comfortably. This approach has been traced to a youth spent in Aracata, Colombia with his maternal grandparents where the writer listened to fantastic tales, folk beliefs and superstitions from his grandparents as well as the local residents. Adding to this taste for the supernatural, the young Garcia Marquez was often taken by his grandfather to circuses where he marveled at the strange creatures and began to develop a sense of the everyday world as strange and unpredictable. Another literary influence in Garcia Marquez' early development as a writer was Faulkner, with his cryptic but engaging story-telling style, malleable sense of time and bizarre characters.

The evolution of his art takes Garcia Marquez past his early experiments where the influence of his literary models, as well as his life models, are evident to his more mature writing in which he finds his true voice to create unusual but fully human characters with many dimensions, as well as story lines that do not require so much a willing suspension of disbelief as a complementary imagination supported by a child-like curiosity. It is this more mature style that shows itself in Garcia Marquez' later short stories as well as in his novels, "One Hundred Years of Solitude" and "Love in the Time of Cholera."

Shortly after beginning his career as a fiction writer Garcia Marquez became a newspaper journalist for El Heraldo in Barranquilla, Colombia. He worked for a series of newspapers in his native country and in Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela and the United States while also writing his novel and stories. He once told a reporter that he always considered his true profession to be that of journalist. That may well be the case, and his short stories may be missives from the dark back country of the mind that most people would rather not visit—a place that offers little certainty but much enchantment.

The Third Resignation

The Third Resignation Summary

In this eerie 1947 story, the only characters are an unnamed boy who exists in a shadow land somewhere between life and death—perhaps facing a premature burial. The narrator describes the young man kept alive inside a concrete coffin "through a complex system of autonutrition," where his body continues to grow, like a gene-spliced tomato run amok, although he is technically dead. The dilemma is deepened when the doctors describe the boy as having a "living death" during which he experiences normal growth. The doctor orders a normal-sized coffin for an adult be built; his mother places three pillows at one end to keep the seven-year-old boy comfortable during his living death journey. As the boy grows, his mother gradually unravels the wool in his pillows to allow him more room.

The narrator fixes the age of the boy-into-man as 25, and he is of normal height and weight, thus the coffin is two feet too long because the doctor had expected him to grow into a large man like his father. The dying man is bothered by certain noises, but most by the sound of mice inside his coffin. Toward those small creatures with smooth fur that run all over his body, the man feels only terror—especially when one of them climbs up to his eyelids and feverishly tries to eat his cornea. Unable to move and speechless, the dying man experiences a new death as he surrenders to vertigo.

The Third Resignation Analysis

This story, written when Garcia Marquez was just 19 years old, owes much to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Premature Burial." In fact, the narrator who is presumably dead throughout the entire narrative (which raises interesting questions of point of view) at one point thinks he is going to be buried alive. That notion is finally put to rest once the narrator reaches his "third resignation," or putrefaction, before he can accept his own death. This is Poe on steroids, a new level of creepiness and sheer disgust that even the master of tales of horror eschewed. Garcia Marquez' unique ability to engage in what was later termed "magical realism" is at full play in this story. Simply put, this is the juxtaposition of the completely surreal, the unimaginable, the shocking with the literal and predictable events of the day. A man dies and is placed in a coffin. He begins to rot and disintegrate, thereby giving off a stench that grabs even his attention as his still-functioning mind ruminates on his life.

The bizarre context for the story is laid out when a doctor tells the mother of a seven-year-old boy that he has a grave illness, death, but that he will do everything within his power to keep her son alive. The boy somehow "lives" and grows physically until the age of 18, when he "dies" and begins to approach his third resignation. The semi-permeable membrane between the living and the dead seems to be the author's point of

view, as he witnesses and describes what occurs to this poor soul who is trapped in a life-in-death, death-in-life struggle.

The Other Side of Death

The Other Side of Death Summary

Garcia Marquez takes the reader into another death-in-life experience, this time through the device of twin brothers—one dead and the other living. The narrator describes the living brother's obsession with death as he witnesses the formaldehyde preparation of his brother's corpse and reflects on the nature of decay and disintegration. The living brother describes a recurrent nightmare in which he is riding on a train and his brother pops out from behind a tree, chases the train, and signals for his brother to stop the train. But the train continues and his brother collapses on the tracks, frothing at the mouth and gasping for air. Then the narrator sees in his dream a tumor on one of his toes, removes it with a brutal screwdriver self-surgery, and pulls out a long yellow string that is exposed by the removal of the tumor. The narrator experiences a kind of vicarious spiritual death as he continues to be obsessed with his brother, even after burial. He realizes that his dream tumor parallels his brother's intestinal tumor that took his life. His identification with the dead brother becomes so intense that he experiences abdominal pain and becomes nauseated—from the residual smell of the formaldehyde and horrifying images of his brother's diseases and death.

The Other Side of Death Analysis

Written one year after "The Third Resignation," this story continues Garcia Marquez' dark fascination with death and decay. Like his earlier story, antecedents in abundance can be found in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. However, Poe is able to communicate a feeling for the utter frenzy of madness and the macabre on a visceral level that is truly horrifying. Garcia Marquez is too committed to trying to make the reader wonder whether his mordant tales could possibly have a shred of truth in them, while Poe writes from the point of view of one who knows the truth about the living and the undead and has gone insane as a result. Poe thus writes as one whose madness is a form of enlightenment—a freshly revealed truth to which Garcia Marquez seems unable or unwilling to commit himself. Thus, his stories lack the intensity and immediacy of Poe's, even though they mimic their strangeness and terror.

Eva is inside her Cat

Eva is inside her Cat Summary

A beautiful woman who is subject to insomnia searches in vain through her house for the cat, only to realize that her spirit has somehow been transported into the cat. Eva tries to come to terms with her existence inside the furry body of a cat. To further complicate matters, Eva must contend with thousands of "hot, tiny insects who, with the approach of dawn, awoke each day and ran about on their moving feet" inside her bloodstream—some kind of unknowable curse that is the inheritance of her special class of beautiful women. Eva curses her ancestors for giving her beauty and the curse of the insects, and is obsessed with her memory of "the boy," a child who was buried five years earlier in a dank, wet hole from which he tries to extricate himself with feverish clawing and chewing. Eva suddenly desires an orange from the orange tree near where the boy is buried. Despite the realization that the oranges would contain parts of the boy, Eva is mad with desire for the fruit. At the point of despair and ready to disappear into a remote region of the universe, Eva realizes that she can reincarnate herself within her cat and continue an earthly life—even eating the orange she has long desired.

Eva is inside her Cat Analysis

Garcia Marquez takes his readers once again into the Twilight Zone of consciousness, in this instance the hallucinatory world of a beautiful young woman named Eva who is dying. Although her illness is never specified, its spiritual and metaphysical dimensions are manifested in the fears that haunt her mind. Eva feels the pain in her body as hot pin pricks inside her arteries caused by some kind of insects who have cohabitated with woman since the dawn of time. As her consciousness becomes more and more warped, it also becomes more disembodied and her soul is freed to roam at will through space and time. She remembers a boy who died young and was buried near an orange tree; she imagines him trying to dig his way to the surface; she imagines that she can hear him sobbing in the earth. Whether through her illness, drugs, or some kind of witchcraft, Eva enters the life-in-death zone that seems to be an ideé fixé to Garcia Marquez at this point in his career.

Through the tortured and atomized consciousness of the dying Eva, Garcia Marquez paints a portrait of a struggle for life with all of its ambiguities and disappointments. Eva wrestles with the notion of whether she wants to live, decides that even being reincarnated as an animal is preferable to death, then finds that death is inevitable anyway, much like Shakespeare's "Out, out, brief candle, life's but a walking shadow/ A poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more./ It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." This story demonstrates how Garcia Marquez uses the magical realism technique to show how

opposites such as life/death, pain/pleasure, joy/sorrow are what add depth and richness to life, which is always in any case too brief and bittersweet.

Bitterness for Three Sleepwalkers

Bitterness for Three Sleepwalkers Summary

In this short short story from 1949, Garcia Marquez deals briefly with the concept of reincarnation. The narrator is an indefinite "we," whom the reader assumes must be the family and relatives of an unnamed old woman whose physical decay has left her more deranged spirit than fleshly human. Once again, the author's fascination with the netherworld between the living and the dead is on display here. The three narrators (sleepwalkers) discover the old woman early one morning, chewing desperately into the earth. They turn her over and she seems dull and lifeless, although not yet dead. The woman says she does not know how she got to the courtyard but believes it has something to do with hearing the song of a cricket trying to push the wall of her room down. The old lady explains she must keep her vigil against the insect and provide counter-pressure from her side of the wall. The family has the house treated to rid it of insects, which stops the nocturnal pacing of the old woman who believes she hears the cricket in various parts of the house.

Bitterness for Three Sleepwalkers Analysis

Garcia Marquez adds to his morbid palette of stories that cover the gamut from the living to the dead, this piece about the penultimate decay of a family matriarch. The strange sense of disembodiment that suffuses the story is crystallized in the collective "we" that serves as the narrative voice. The reader assumes these are the three relatives, or "sleepwalkers" of the title, who are charged with the care of the old woman who is physically and mentally decaying. The old woman's obsession with crickets that drives her to roam the house at night and finally to climb into the cistern when she believes she hears a cricket seems like more than a geriatric symptom. Within the strange, darkened world created by Garcia Marquez, the cricket becomes a symbol for some primal curse lost to the mists of time. Only through death will the old woman escape it.

Dialogue with the Mirror

Dialogue with the Mirror Summary

In this tiny masterpiece, Garcia Marquez somewhat humorously describes a man awakening, coming fully to his senses as he shaves, and struggling to remember the name of a particular shop he passes every day with an assortment of goods from hardware to liquor. The man carries on a frantic interior monologue as he races through his morning paces: "Having to shave when I have to be over the books in 20 minutes. Bath eight minutes, five if I hurry, breakfast seven. Unpleasant old sausages." As his thoughts race inside his head, the man looks into the mirror and briefly sees his dead twin brother; steam from hot water in the basin rises and the man wastes a few of his precious minutes making inane faces at himself in the mirror. As thoughts and sensations flood his awakening brain, he obsesses on the name of the store he cannot quite recall. Peldora? Paldopra? Pendora? He is delighted with himself for remembering that what he wants to say is that Mabel's store—the one with the kidneys in gravy, the hardware, and the liquor—is a Pandora's box.

Dialogue with the Mirror Analysis

By describing a man awakening from deep sleep, gradually coming to his senses, then to full consciousness and finally to a sort of metaphysical awareness, Garcia Marquez depicts the layers of consciousness that must be activated to "tune in" to the magical realism that lies everywhere around us. He suggests that the world is constantly filled with ongoing miracles and that the existence side-by-side of the natural and the supernatural is just the expression of two types of reality. This is demonstrated by the two aspects of the man's awakening, referred to in the story as the "esthete" and the "mathematician," or the rational and the intuitive. When these two aspects of the man's consciousness are both functioning in a complementary fashion, he is able to recall a half-idea that lingers in the back of his head—the name of a store he had been unable to remember. The union of these two aspects of the man's consciousness is represented as a happy dog, wagging his tail at the smell of the kidneys in gravy.

Eyes of a Blue Dog

Eyes of a Blue Dog Summary

A man and woman (perhaps, a statue) meet in dreamland. The man is enchanted by the dream woman's copper-like skin, and in a dream she tells him she is made of "laminated metal." Whenever she appears in his dreams, she tells him: "eyes of a blue dog." Likewise, the woman dreams of the man and tells him where they will meet upon awakening. However, the man can never seem to remember anything but the phrase, "eyes of a blue dog." In dreams, the man and woman talk to each other and agree to meet but their waking lives seem dream-like and insubstantial, and they find it difficult to connect in the "real world." In one of their dream meetings, the woman undresses as she stands beside a couple of candles for warmth. The man is pleased with her copper skin, and she confesses that sometimes she feels as if she is made of metal. The man says that in some of his dreams, he thinks she is only a small bronze statue in the corner of a museum. The woman tells him that, if they ever meet, he should put his ear to her ribs because she echoes when she sleeps on her left side. The woman walks down the street saying "eyes of a blue dog" loudly in hopes of finding the man. She says it to waiters, scratches it onto tabletops and writes it on steamed-up windows of public buildings. She goes into a pharmacy and tells the pharmacist, "eyes of a blue dog," and he replies that she does have eyes like that. She writes the phrase in red lipstick on the tile floor, and the store clerk gives her a rag and tells her to clean it up.

Eyes of a Blue Dog Analysis

It is possible, with this author, to admire his imagination and technical skill while at the same time rejecting his artistic conceits as utter lunacy. In this story, Garcia Marquez explores the distant netherworlds of consciousness where dream and reality blend into each other. In smoothly written, plausible narrative style the author draws his readers along until they are trapped inside an airtight world that light and sound cannot penetrate, and where the "characters" seem no more substantial than disembodied spirits condemned to a kind of living limbo. By exaggeration, Garcia Marquez evidently hopes to convince the reader that this deranged state is how "reality" is, seen from a slightly jarred perspective.

However, this approach to writing fiction asks a tremendous amount of "willing suspension of disbelief" from the reader without really delivering any new insights into human nature or novel views of the world. The reader is asked to accept at face value the narrator as infallible witness to another world without being invited into that world. These peculiar, vacuum-sealed stories come across as strange specimens of an alien life form without offering any explanation of how parallel universes function, why they intersect with the one most of us live in, and without offering much insight to the reader about why any of this matters. As examples of his early fiction, the stories are valuable

keys to Garcia Marquez' later development as a writer, but are in many cases impenetrable.

The Woman Who Came at Six O'Clock

The Woman Who Came at Six O'Clock Summary

José, the lackadaisical owner of a restaurant, looks up from wiping the countertop just as his daily visitor enters at the usual 6 p.m. The woman he calls Queenie comes and sits down at the counter, and right away gets into an argument with José over what time she arrived. José reminds her that she comes in every day at 6 p.m., tells him she is hungry as a dog, and he fixes her something good—and free—to eat. She tells him this day is not like every other day, and that she has been there for 15 minutes already. Their dance continues as she insists she has already been there for a quarter hour. José shrugs and says 10 or 15 minutes one way or the other does not matter. However, she insists it does matter, and that she came at 5:45 p.m. José says he would like to kill every man who has slept with her. He tells her to go home and sleep it off, and she answers that she is not drunk. Queenie asks José if, since he said he would like to kill anyone she sleeps with her, he would defend her if she did the same. She becomes intensely concentrated and tells José the police will believe anything he tells them. José is evasive about whether he would lie to cover for her. She says she is leaving town and quitting prostitution, saying: "Men disgust me."

The Woman Who Came at Six O'Clock Analysis

In this well-crafted, existentialist story, two people who are joined in friendship become co-conspirators in murder. The woman, Queenie, is the classic good-hearted prostitute who decides to end her career with a bang, so to speak, or maybe more than one. She carefully wheedles the generous restaurateur José into lying to provide her with an alibi. Disgusted with men and with herself, it appears, she has killed at least two of her customers. When he finally agrees, she demands that he expand the scope of the alibi to cover more time for the second murder. The tension in this story builds gradually as the two characters circle each other with word play that gradually becomes more serious until the final lines when the extent of her crimes becomes apparent. This is a suspenseful story unlike the previous works that center on decay and the border between the living and the dead. The two characters in this story push each other to their psychological limits, and further. The prostitute, who has used José repeatedly for free handouts, knows that he is secretly infatuated with her and manipulates him into agreeing to lie to cover her whereabouts. In the course of their interaction, José notices for the first time her worn, aged appearance after years of plying her trade. So when she asks him to cover for an additional 15 minutes of time, the story ends abruptly and the reader is left to wonder whether she has pushed José beyond his limits—especially since he may be totally disenchanted with Queenie because of her crimes and because she is no longer attractive to him.

Nabo: the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait

Nabo: the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait Summary

Nabo, a two-dimensional character who works in a stable currying horses, is found facedown in the hay, having slept stuporously for several days. When he is awakened, Nabo is disoriented as to time and place. He remembers going to the square on every Saturday night to listen to the band that has a black saxophone player who wears horn-rimmed glasses, then stopping after the black man disappeared from the band. Nabo recalls going to sleep in the stable, rolling over and seeing the black musician, who tells him cryptically "we're waiting for you in the choir." Nabo cannot make any sense of that remark, unless it is somehow connected with the fact that he sings to the horses while caring for them. When he returns to the square several Saturdays and finds another saxophone player has replaced the Negro, Nabo goes to sleep for two years. Nabo is discovered sleeping in the hay with a head wound and is locked up in a room in the house for 14 years until one of the girls decides she wants to see him. When the door opens, Nabo sees the black musician again and says a horse kicked him. "They" decide Nabo is peaceful and content inside his locked room, where food is shoved under the door and always an empty plate comes out. When a smell of decaying biological waste comes from the room, "they" decide Nabo is dead, but are not quite sure since the plates of food continue to be eaten. Nabo resumes talking inside his room and says that if he can find his comb he will go to the choir, albeit 15 years after the fact.

Nabo: the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait Analysis

Garcia Marquez invents a prose style for this story that mirrors the confused mental state of the lead character, Nabo, from a kick to his head by a horse. The antecedent for this style can be found in William Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," a harrowing account of a poor southern family trying to cope with the death of its matriarch. The characters, including at least one retarded man, intersect only in their interior monologues as they try to bury the dead woman. A similarity between both kaleidoscopic styles is evident in time warping, blurred boundaries between characters, and the obsessive single-mindedness of damaged people. Nabo, a horse currier in what seems to be a large estate, appears to be the model of hard work and predictability before his injury. Not knowing exactly what to do with him because of his obvious delirium and disability, "they" (the family) lock Nabo up inside the house for 15 years and keep him alive in a kind of solitary confinement. During his confinement, he hallucinates and relives the injury and time leading up to it, especially the disappearance of a black saxophone player from a band that Nabo once enjoyed hearing in the town square. Nabo re-

experiences the kick to his head and a call from someone to come join the choir repeatedly, which gives the narrative a circular rhythm to match his own circular thought processes. While this makes for a fascinating display of Garcia Marquez' skills as a writer, it also subordinates character development to technique and plot. The reader knows as little about Nabo at the end of the story as at the beginning, despite having been on the dipsy-doodle ride of the author's opaque prose styling.

Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses

Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses Summary

This story begins with an interior monologue in which the narrator notes that since it is Sunday and it has stopped raining, "I'll take a bouquet of roses to my grave." Then the narrator ruminates on the ease or difficulty of reaching the child's grave and remembers that "she" is lost in a mystical reverie, which makes it impossible for him to snatch a few flowers from the altar because "she" snaps out of her swoon just as he approaches. The narrator calculates that he will now have to wait until "she" takes her Sunday siesta to grab some flowers to take to the grave. He recalls that when he passed her in the hall the previous week, she seemed like the girl who 40 years earlier had leaned over his bed and said: "Now that they've put in the toothpicks your eyes are open and hard." The narrator recalls the child who, 40 years ago, changed clothes in the next room and who had, for the last 20 years, been growing roses. He also recalls his clay-encrusted shoes that have sat beside the extinguished stove for 40 years in the abandoned house. He is alone in the corner, listening to the sound of rotting wood, when she returns wearing the same clothes, still a child, not fat and with swollen ankles as now, holding a suitcase. When she sees him, sitting in the chair, she calls: "Boy! Boy!" Then he realizes that she has returned to stay, in the next room, "conversing silently with the saints." When someone comes to buy roses, she tells them which roses to pick, tucks the money away carefully and returns to her rocking chair and to the invalid grandson who has sat in the corner since his grandmother was five years old.

Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses Analysis

Is this a tale of incest or indigestion? It is hard to tell from the multi-layered dimensions of time and place that vibrate in another of Garcia Marquez' brain teasers. Ostensibly the story of a man and older woman living in separate rooms in a large, "abandoned" mansion, this story remains an enigma at the end because of the obsession of the narrator to place one more garland of roses on the grave of his child set on a distant knoll where the townspeople bury their dead. The narrator schemes to get the roses from the older woman, who places them each Sunday on her altar to the saints, divided into those for sale and those dedicated to her saints. As he waits for her to nod off to sleep, he time travels backwards and forwards, listens to the wood rotting in the old house, and smells the stale air trapped in closets. He recalls when the old woman was just a child, and remembers when she left and returned to the house 20 years later, still a child, to find him covered with cobwebs and dust, sitting rigid in his chair. As he schemes to get the roses, the narrator shows a sense of guilt bordering on madness. Is

the long-dead child the offspring of an act of incest? Is the child himself, or the woman? Will she find out that it is he who has been disarranging her roses on Sundays, and not the wind?

The Night of the Curlews

The Night of the Curlews Summary

Several adults and a child fumble about in confusion, trying to escape a nightclub where sudden darkness has descended against the fading sounds of a Wurlitzer jukebox. As three people, referred to only as "we" by the author, rise from their table and attempt to leave, they bump into others in the hallway also trying to exit. To make way for the others, the three step aside from the doorway. However, then a disembodied voice intones: "We can't get out of here. The curlews have pecked out our eyes." The verbal exchange (one hesitates to call it dialogue) continues between formless people in the dark, in a non-sequitor fashion reminiscent of absurdist playwrights such as Ianesco or Beckett. The characters bump against walls, into each other, and into the futility of their situation as they try to determine where they are by their senses of touch and smell. When they encounter boxes, one person says they are coffins and another contends they are steamer trunks. They encounter a woman's hand and seem to be relieved that she is alive and not a corpse. The woman says she remembers reading in the newspaper about three men who were drinking in a courtyard where there were several curlews. When one of the men sings like a curlew, the birds become irritated and peck out their eyes.

The Night of the Curlews Analysis

Obscurity in literature is not necessarily profundity, as any reader of this story could attest. Either this very short story is evidence of a paucity of plotting, characterization and the usual authorial devices that keep a reader reading, or else it is a tepid absurdist drama masquerading as a morality play. A case could be made for either or both scenarios. Knowing Garcia Marquez, however, mostly from his later works the casual observer is disinclined to believe the former explanation but more likely to look for symbols within the story to unravel its meaning. Do the three blind men represent a riff on the Three Wise Men of biblical origin, or perhaps the Three Blind Mice of the children's song? Due to their blindness, confusion and terror, the three maimed men seem another example of a kind of death-in-life similar to earlier examples in other stories of this collection. Perhaps these three men, unjustly punished for the crime of drunken hilarity, personalize a cruel existentialist fate that can be taken as everyone's fate in the modern world.

The intersecting monologues of the shadowy characters in this bleak story suggest the disconnection and discontent of the post-industrial age, where survival saps the energy so that emotions are flattened and perceptions dulled. For these people, indeed, there is "No Exit."

Monologue of Isabel

Monologue of Isabel Summary

A torrential jungle rain causes flooding. Bodies pop up out of their coffins and float about in the flooded streets. A traumatized cow appears in the courtyard, stuck in the mud and confused. Indian servants struggle to save furniture from the rising flood waters, to no avail. People lose their loved ones, then their minds. Isabel, the pregnant narrator of this apocalyptic tale, is at first pleased that the rains have brought moisture to her plants when the storm commences just after Mass on Sunday. By Tuesday, the family has lost track of time, meals, and any sense of connection to the outside world. Wednesday slips away unnoticed amid the constant drumbeat of rain. Someone carries two-day-old news that the trains have stopped because the flooding river has washed away the tracks. Splashing through the water on the veranda, Isabel's stepmother carries a lantern in one hand and her rosary in the other, imploring others to pray for the corpses floating in the cemetery. Isabel awakens her husband, Martin, that night to ask if he smells the decomposing bodies. He rolls over and tells her pregnant women are always imagining things. By Thursday, all sense of time disappears and it seems the day never existed.

Monologue of Isabel Analysis

Another collision between the physical and metaphysical worlds, but this time Garcia Marquez makes his characters clearer, the action relevant to their lives and their lives of interest to the reader. The deluge that overwhelms the jungle village of Macondo is analogous to currents in life that can overwhelm a person at any time, and in the wake of devastating floods people lose their sense of time and personal identity like shell-shocked casualties of any modern war. This setting of collapse, where the ordinary rules of the world seem suspended, is the fertile ground of Garcia Marquez' imagination and the place where the physical and metaphysical world intersect. The fatigue and delirium brought about by the trauma of the storm, as well as isolation from the rest of the village, is the hallucinatory agent that causes some of the characters in this story to lose touch with reality. When the storm is finally passed, the earth is eerily silent. The reader thinks of the mental clarity and serenity experienced by epileptics after a seizure.

Tuesday Siesta

Tuesday Siesta Summary

A stoic middle-aged woman and her 12-year-old daughter ride a train through the steaming jungle on a hot August afternoon to carry flowers to the fresh grave of her son. Smoke from the steam locomotive pours through the open window near their third class seats, threatening to ruin their simple but dignified dresses. They eat a plain meal out of a plastic sack as the train chugs through miles of banana plantations. The only sign of life seems to be the pool hall across the street. It is 2 p.m. and the town is taking a siesta. They disembark the train and head directly to the parish house, where the woman tells the doorkeeper she needs to see the priest to get the keys to the cemetery. The woman explains that her son was a good man, that she told him never to steal anything that anyone needed to eat and that he obeyed. The priest's sister appears and offers the woman and child a parasol to blunt the heat. The woman, clutching the keys to the cemetery in one hand and her daughter in the other, thanks the priest for his help and heads directly outside through the front door, into the suffocating heat, toward her son's grave to leave the bouquet of flowers.

Tuesday Siesta Analysis

This stark, but straightforward, tale bears the traits of existentialism that holds man is alone in a godless universe and must rely on his own intellect and capabilities for rational thought. The sleepy priest who at first seems indifferent to the woman and child represents not only the clergy but also God, who seems absent and uninvolved in human affairs. Despite the obvious condemnation by the priest of the murdered son, his mother evidences a durable love for Carlos based on her belief that he was a good man. Garcia Marquez seems to be saying that human love is tougher and more real than divine love, at least the kind purveyed through religious institutions. As the woman and her daughter proceed into the torrid afternoon where uncertainties hover, they are upheld by their own will power and love and not by any sort of higher power. In many ways, this story from 1962 is a crystallization of the existentialist philosophy that makes its point by direct juxtaposition of the somnolent clergy with its endless bureaucracy symbolized by the log book into which the priest must enter the names of the visitors, with the simple and selfless love of the mother and daughter who are ready to endure any hardship to honor their lost loved one.

One of These Days

One of These Days Summary

Aurelio Escovar, a dentist, is a small, meticulous man As he works carefully on a set of false teeth with his pedal-powered drill and polisher, his 11-year-old son comes to tell him the mayor wants to know if he will pull his infected tooth. The dentist tells his son to inform the mayor he is not there. The mayor overhears their conversation and tells the boy he will shoot the dentist if he does not remove his aching tooth. Escovar gently stops pumping the drill. and pulls open his lower drawer that contains a pistol. He then tells his son to let the mayor come and shoot him. The mayor enters, one side of his face shaved and the other swollen and unshaved. At the sight of the desperate man, the dentist closes the drawer and quietly tells the mayor to sit down. As he sterilizes his instruments in boiling water, the dentist looks inside the mayor's mouth and says the tooth must be extracted without anesthesia because it is abscessed. The mayor smiles wanly but the dentist ignores him as he grasps the lower wisdom tooth with forceps, and the mayor cringes in anticipation. "Now you'll pay for our 20 dead men," the dentist says bitterly, and with a jerk of his wrist pulls out the infected tooth. As the mayor sweats and spits, the dentist hands him a clean cloth and tells him to go home and gargle with salt water. The mayor rises to leave and tells the dentist to send the bill. The dentist asks whether it should go to him or to the town. The mayor answers that they are both the same.

One of These Days Analysis

Garcia Marquez' ability to tell a succinct, tightly-woven tale emerges in this story written some 20 years after the earlier stories in this collection that are nebulous, dream-like. The author has distilled the essence of his story into a mere three pages but within those brief paragraphs manages to convey a clear sense of both the character of the dentist, who is revolted by the mayor, and the politician who is indifferent to the pain of others but unable to bear his own pain. The reader is not told any more about the 20 dead men but must assume they met their fate through some act of stupidity or incompetence on the part of the mayor. Whatever his crime, it is sufficiently grievous that the dentist—a self-aware, self-righteous man—seems to delight in inflicting some pain on him as a patient. Thus, the reader experiences a stark and lucid example of karmic payback, administered with a sudden twist of the wrist.

There Are No Thieves in This Town

There Are No Thieves in This Town Summary

Damaso is a 20-something layabout and petty thief married to a middle-aged washerwoman named Ana. They live in a small rented room near the center of town. Damaso is a night prowler who frequents the local bar and pool hall. He comes home at dawn, slips into bed with his sleeping wife and lights a cigarette. She awakens and he puts a small bundle in her lap while he goes to the bathroom. While he urinates, she opens the package to find three billiard balls. When he returns, she asks him what they are good for and he replies, to play billiards. Then he confesses that he has robbed the pool hall and taken the billiard balls in hopes of selling them. Ana protests that he could have been shot, and that it is unfair for him to leave her alone at night. Damaso admits that stealing the billiard balls was stupid, and his wife tells him to return them. Later that night, Damaso returns to the pool hall, drinks several beers, and punches out a ham whose appearance displeases him. Still inebriated, he returns home to get the billiard balls and sneaks back—in full moonlight—to replace them after the pool hall is closed. While stumbling about in the pool hall for a place to leave the balls, the owner appears with a steel rod in hand. Damaso admits that he stole the balls and has come to return them. The owner says, all is well, except for the missing 200 pesos. Damaso says the owner knows that there was no money in the pool hall. "There were 200 peses," he replies. "And now they're going to take them out of your hide, not so much for being a thief as for being a fool."

There Are No Thieves in This Town Analysis

Garcia Marquez gives the reader an interesting puzzle in this story: who does more harm, thief or liar? Domaso, the dull but determined pool hall cipher, steals billiard balls as the first step in what he thinks will be a large business operation stealing billiard balls from one town and selling them in another. Meanwhile he is totally dependent on his older wife, Ana, for support. After he steals the billiard balls and, with Ana's encouragement, decides to return them, the pool hall owner, catches him in the act and demands that Domaso return the 200 pesos that he claims were stolen at the same time. Domaso admits that he stole the balls, but denies taking any money. Meanwhile, an innocent black man becomes the scapegoat for the town's outrage because he is black, and an obvious outsider. The police and the citizens are convinced the culprit is the black man, who is severely beaten by the police during his arrest and sent away in shackles. His culpability is obvious, one citizen observes, since "there are no thieves in this town." Immediately the reader is aware that there is a truth-telling but deluded thief about to be undone by a lying but upstanding citizen. Xenophobia, hypocrisy, human parasitism, greed and stupidity are well displayed in this story.

Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon

Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon Summary

Balthazar, who is almost 30, designs and makes an extraordinary wire bird cage for troupials, the large, brightly-colored national bird of Venezuela. His partner, Ursula, with whom he has lived unwed for four years, is irritated with Balthazar for having neglected his carpenter shop for two weeks to complete the ornate birdcage. She tells him to shave and clean up and to ask at least 50 pesos for the cage. In fact, she says, he should demand 60 pesos. When he delivers the birdcage to the Jose Montiel residence, Senora Montiel exclaims about its beauty, then her husband appears and demands to know what the cage is, and Balthazar tells him it is specially made for his son, Pepe. When Pepe returns from school, his irate father asks if he ordered the cage. The boy bites his lip and refuses to answer. Montiel hands the cage back to Balthazar and tells him he has no business entering into a contract with a minor. Pepe's mother orders her son to give the birdcage back to Balthazar, but Balthazar tells them to keep it, that he made the cage as a gift for Pepe and did not expect any money for it. Balthazar leaves the house and the cage as Montiel has a temper tantrum and curses him. Very pleased with himself, Balthazar then goes to the tavern, gets drunk, sleeps with two women, then drags himself outside where he passes out in the street. Women who pass him on their way to Mass are afraid to look at him, believing he is dead.

Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon Analysis

This is a tragi-comic tale that reveals, if nothing else, Garcia Marquez' familiarity with and fondness for peasants and simple folk. Garcia Marquez seems to say in this story that even the best intentions of good-hearted honest people can sometimes lead them astray, but that their innate goodness seems to confer some kind of immunity on them. Balthazar and the young boy, Pepe, seem to be the only two people with completely pure motives in the story. Balthazar's wife wants him to charge as much as he can get from the supposedly wealthy Montiel family but apparently does not care about the fact her carpenter husband has created a fabulous work of art in the wire bird cage. The doctor wants to please his wife by buying the birdcage, but places unreasonable demands on Balthazar, who remains faithful to his promise to the boy. Pepe's parents become outraged and accuse Balthazar of trying to pull off some kind of shakedown, but he tells them the cage is merely a gift for their son. Satisfied with his unselfish gift to the boy, Balthazar rewards himself by getting drunk and emptying out his bank account. Perhaps Garcia Marquez is also saying that the rewards of unselfish love are misunderstanding, contempt, and rejection, However, to the truly good-hearted, those things do not matter because of the inner satisfaction they receive from giving.

Montiel's Widow

Montiel's Widow Summary

This story expands on the death of Jose Montiel (aqua Chepe Montiel) and its effects on his widow. As a corpse, Montiel is immaculately dressed and so alive-looking that it is not until his coffin is screwed shut and placed in the family mausoleum that the townsfolk believe he is actually dead, and not playing some kind of trick. Despite the widow's wish that their home would be filled with flowers and mourners, only a few family members attend the funeral and the only flowers consist of a wreath from the municipal government. In the imposition of a dictatorship, Montiel aligned himself with the brutal mayor and planned the massacre of poor people and deportation of wealthy ones. By this method, the takeover is complete within a year and Jose Montiel becomes the wealthiest and most powerful man in town. To accomplish this, the mayor riddles the houses of the wealthy and gives them 24 hours to leave town, then Montiel appears and offers them a pittance for their homes and land. His widow becomes a complete recluse and occasionally writes to her children to warn them against returning home. In their letters to her, the widow's children say they cannot imagine returning because of the political assassinations and savagery. When the embittered woman receives a letter from her daughters describing a warm and colorful butcher shop in Paris, she smiles. The widow goes upstairs and lies down next to a cooling fan and "sees" Big Mama in the patio, She asks Big Mama when she will die. Big Mama replies, "When the tiredness begins in your arm."

Montiel's Widow Analysis

The theme of this story might well be identified as karma, as in the biblical admonition: "The wages of sin is death." In this case, the physical death is that of Jose Montiel, a wealthy political schemer who aligns himself with a brutal dictatorial mayor and is hated by everyone except his widow. Working with the corrupt politician to arrange the assassination of political foes and to force the wealthy off their property so he can take it for himself, Montiel becomes a very wealthy man. His widow, who enjoys the wealth but is conflicted over the means through which it is obtained, defends her husband against detractors and maintains a charade to her children that she knows nothing about their father's criminal history. After his death, the widow becomes an embittered, delusional old woman who wants only death to come and take her.

One Day after Saturday

One Day after Saturday Summary

Rebecca becomes alarmed when she discovers that most of her screens are torn and she goes to make a complaint to the mayor about local juvenile delinquents. The mayor corrects her, saying it is not the local boys but the birds that have done the damage. The mayor says the whole town has been experiencing the torn screens and birds for several days. When the 94-year-old parish priest Anthony Isabel also finds dead birds in the sacristy, he curses cats for killing the birds, then finds a third dead bird on Friday near the bench where he likes to sit, near the train station. Father Isabel, who has astonished the town on three occasions by reporting that he has seen the devil, begins to wonder whether the dead birds are connected to a nauseating stench that permeates the town. On Saturday, while sitting on his favorite bench, Father Isabel observes a young man disembark the train and head for the Hotel Macondo. After the Sunday Mass, the servant Argenida tells Rebecca that the priest has finally gone mad, announcing from the pulpit that he has seen the Wandering Jew. Rebecca says the priest is right—that is why the birds are dying—and covers herself with a black shawl and races off to the church to hear the rest of the sermon. However, Father Isabel stops in mid-sermon because his whole body is shaking violently. He notices there are people in the church for the first time, and asks the young acolyte to take up a collection to expel the Wandering Jew. The priest directs the acolyte to take the collection and give it to the young boy who was first into the church that morning, so that he can buy a new hat.

One Day after Saturday Analysis

With this short story published in 1962, Garcia Marquez seems to have come full circle from the spooky, existentialist stories of his youth to a warmer, more full-blooded accounting of the human condition. Randomness and inevitability dance around each other in this tale that ends happily for all concerned, in a manner reminiscent of the Christmas classic "It's a Wonderful Life." The chain of events from beginning to end seems quite disconnected and random until the final paragraph when the dizzy priest's humanity shines through as he takes up a collection to buy a poor young man a new hat. In order to get to that point, the author shows how the priest uses his parishioners' fears to perform a humanitarian mission—albeit a small one. By declaring the spate of dead birds dropping from the sky a sign of the presence of the Wandering Jew, Father Isabel first rouses their fears then gives them a means to dispel them by making a generous donation to drive the Wandering Jew from their midst. Long written off by the townsfolk as crazy, the priest demonstrates an uncanny knowledge of human nature combined with the skill to manipulate it to serve a good purpose. The result is a quirky, heart-warming and amusing story that has much in common with Garcia Marquez' later fiction that made him a global celebrity.

Artificial Roses

Artificial Roses Summary

Mina, a young woman who lives with her mother and blind grandmother and helps to make rose bouquets for their livelihood, awakens late on a Friday morning and scrambles about for a dress for Friday Mass. The only dress she can find is a bare-shouldered one with detachable sleeves, but the sleeves are still wet from having been washed the day before by her blind grandmother. When she runs out of time, she puts the wet sleeves on the dress and scampers out of the house. In 15 minutes, Mina returns and goes to the bathroom. She announces that she cannot go to Mass because her sleeves are wet and her dress wrinkled. Mina sits down with a cup of coffee in the doorway with her grandmother. Mina blames her grandmother for her missing church and tells the blind grandmother she needs to go to confession because she caused Mina to miss first Friday Mass. The grandmother says her conscience is clear, and then Mina goes into her room and stuffs some letters into her bodice, goes to the bathroom, puts the letters in the toilet and flushes it. Mina sets up her artificial rose shop in the living room as a friend, Trinidad, arrives to help. In the box containing the rose petals, Mina sees something furry and asks whether her friend has bought new shoes. Trinidad replies that they are dead mice from the church. Mina takes the dead mice into the bathroom and flushes them down the toilet. The grandmother asks Mina again why she did not go to Mass, and Mina again replies that the reason is the condition of her dress. The grandmother says she knows that Mina stays up practically all night writing in her room, which is the real reason she missed Mass. Also, the grandmother says, she believes Mina came back after only 15 minutes because she had hoped to meet someone along the way but was disappointed. She also questions why Mina went to the bathroom twice, when she usually only goes once. The mother, hearing the conversation, asks what is going on and the grandmother replies that she is crazy but evidently her daughter is not thinking of sending her to the madhouse unless she starts throwing stones.

Artificial Roses Analysis

With this very short story, it is not so much a case of three blind mice but three dead mice and a blind woman. This oblique narrative of first love and heartbreak is all the more effective because of the empathic way in which Mina's blind grandmother "sees" with her intuition and heart the struggle that her granddaughter is going through. Although deprived of her sight, she can nevertheless determine from hearing Mina's breathing late at night that she is staying up late to write love letters to the young man who she hopes to see on the way to Friday mass. When her dress is wet and wrinkled, the fact Mina puts it on anyway and hurries out to Mass but returns within 15 minutes, goes to her room and flushes his letters down the toilet also are indications to the grandmother of what is going on. Mina's mother, although in full possession of her senses, seems to understand far less about her daughter than does the blind woman.

Whenever the mother wants to know what is up between Mina and her grandmother, the blind woman says she is crazy and should not be taken seriously. However, in this elliptical relationship between Mina and her grandmother, there is obviously a lot of love despite the grandmother's nagging and Mina's anger. The reader has the sense at the end that this caring relationship will help Mina endure her painful rejection.

Big Mama's Funeral

Big Mama's Funeral Summary

Ninety-two-year-old Big Mama is the matriarch of a huge clan in the community of Macondo, which appears elsewhere in this collection. Father Anthony Isabel, who also appears in "One Day After Saturday," ministers to the spiritual needs of Big Mama in the last weeks of her life. Due to her alleged wealth, numerous aunts, uncles, cousins and sisters-in-law gather in a protracted wake that precedes the reading of her will and disposition of her estate. Her physician, convinced that Big Mama is dying, orders salves, stimulants and suppositories. Big Mama lists among her possessions three containers of gold coins buried near her house that had never been found despite numerous and vigorous attempts. Big Mama also lists her immaterial possessions, including the colors of the national flag, the Supreme Court, beauty queens, transcendental speeches, and the underprivileged and political statements. In the midst of this final list, Big Mama belches loudly and dies. When the newspaper runs her obituary on the front page, it is accompanied by a photo of a 20-year-old Big Mama, whose willowy beauty is to become the official image remembered by residents of Macondo. Meanwhile, Big Mama's corpse lies in state in the jungle heat, as her descendants await telegrams from afar to decide how to proceed. As soon as her body is removed for the funeral and burial, her nephews, nieces, godchildren, servants and supposed friends remove the doors of her house, pull up the flooring, dig up the foundation and divide it, Big Mama is buried in a coffin covered with a lead plinth. Nothing is left except a huge mess from weeks of crowds awaiting the funeral, and the memory of Big Mama.

Big Mama's Funeral Analysis

Using a mock heroic style of humor usually associated with the English poet Alexander Pope, Garcia Marquez provides his readers with a comic exposure of the nature of power and corruption. His language is appropriately overblown and grandiose, which both reflects and mocks the empty strutting of the powerful politicians in the South American Republic of Macondo as they come to pay respects to Big Mama, the supposedly wealthy matriarch of an old family. Big Mama has led the life of a wealthy aristocrat on the backs of peasants who exist in a kind of feudal system of tenant farming. In addition to her wealth, Big Mama has secret assets: a buried treasure chest filled with gold coins as well as a box filled with fraudulent ballots bearing the names of deceased people in her district used to get her cronies elected to power. The president and the chief prelate for her country attend the funeral, as well as hundreds of idle, curious relatives hoping to learn of their inheritance. Big Mama scowls at the greedy relatives and in-laws, and refuses last rites. After the spectacle of her ornate funeral and quick burial, everyone leaves puzzled about where he wealth is located. The mess from the weeks-long deathwatch is cleaned up, and all is soon forgotten. The story is another morality tale about the emptiness and transience of power gained through corruption,

and about the hyperbole used by the less powerful to try to gain a bit of power or wealth themselves through flattery and false loyalty.

In its ironic message, "Big Mama's Funeral" calls to mind Percy Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," which describes an ancient and forgotten monument to a powerful king of antiquity, found lost in the sands of the desert and the mists of time. The traveler wipes away the sand to read the inscription: "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair." But there are no works or any other remnant of Ozymandias anywhere in sight, except the forgotten tombstone.

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Summary

During an intense rainy season, Pelayo and his wife Elisenda are overrun with crabs. Pelayo kills so many crabs in their home that he has to carry the dead ones back to the sea. On one trip home from a visit to the sea, Pelayo notices a very old man lying facedown in the mud. The man cannot seem to get up because of his very large wings. The man is dressed as a rag picker and appears very old and scruffy. When they speak to him, he answers in an unknown dialect but with the strong voice of a sailor. A neighbor advises them that the creature is an angel. When word gets out that a real angel is in the home of Pelayo and Elisenda, villagers crowd around and peer into the windows. Before sunset, Pelayo drags the angel to the chicken coop where he locks him up with the hens. When they go out the next morning, Pelayo and Elisenda find the angel surrounded by people, throwing food to him and treating him like a carnival freak. Father Gonzaga arrives early in the morning and asks to have a look. The angel is drying his battered wings in the sun in a far corner of the coop. Interest in the angel wanes when a traveling carnival with a woman who has been turned into a spider comes to the village. Pelayo and Elisenda breathe a sigh of relief and watch as the angel slowly recovers and survives the first winter. Then, with newly sprouted feathers, the angel takes off one day and flies away, becoming only "an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea."

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings Analysis

This story is designated "A Tale for Children," but the author obviously intends it for adults as well since its symbolism is so clear. The angel represents a physical embodiment of the supernatural in human life, or any force for which humans have no explanation. When Pelayo discovers the battered old man with long wings lying facedown in the mud during a violent rainstorm, he drags him home and puts him in the chicken coop. This seems a cruel and unfeeling thing to do, but it quickly becomes the essence of tolerance and acceptance as the townsfolk flock to Pelayo and Elisenda's to be entertained, as if at a carnival. The crowd understands the angel as a circus freak and throws food at him. The local priest, puzzled, tries to determine whether the angel is "real" or just another trick by the devil. Finally, the angel heals his battered wings, grows new feathers, and flies away. The author's message seems to be that the kindest, most prudent way to treat the unknown or alien is with respect—and not to seek entertainment, profit or religious prestige by abusing it.

The Sea of Lost Time

The Sea of Lost Time Summary

In a change of pattern, the winter seas stop pounding the coastal village with tons of garbage and a scent of roses rises in March. Tobias is delighted with the fragrance, but his wife Clotilde smells nothing because she does not know the smell of a rose. The harsh sea sometimes denies the fishermen anything in their nets but garbage, and dynamite only brings up old shipwrecks. Often when the tide goes out, it leaves the streets filled with dead fish. The few women in the town are unhappy, bitter at their fate. Petra, one of the few women, tells her husband she wants to be buried alive "beneath the ground like proper people." One night, Tobias smells something different from the sea and awakens his wife to tell her. One of the townsfolk says the smell is coming from Catarino's restaurant, Catarino cranks up his old gramophone and everyone in the town listens to the music from the restaurant. Mr. Herbert arrives the same night and sets up a trunk overflowing with money in the middle of the street. He tells everyone that he is the richest man in the world and he is traveling around giving money to those in need. Patricio gets 48 pesos when he does 48 bird imitations. At midnight, Mr. Herbert packs up his trunks of money and goes to Catarino's. He turns to a woman and asks if he can help with any of her problems. She replies that she is a whore and likes the work, and tells him to leave her alone. When Mr. Herbert awakens, Jacob tells him he has been asleep for centuries. When he tells Jacob he is starving, Jacob says everyone else in the village is also starving and they must go to the beach and dig for crabs. Mr. Herbert says the smell will never return; Tobias disagrees; Clotilde agrees because, she says, it was Tobias who caused an excitement about the smell in the first instance. Mr. Herbert says he is leaving and advises Tobias and Clotilde to leave also. When he comes to bed and encounters a groggy Clotilde, he says he wants to tell her there is a village at the bottom of the sea and she tells him, "For the love of God, don't start up with those things again." They finally fall asleep when the cool wind rises.

The Sea of Lost Time Analysis

This hallucinatory narrative has much in common with a dream, or nightmare, and in fact leaves the question open for the reader whether the surrealistic series of seemingly disconnected events is a dream experienced by Tobias, husband of Elisende. It is Tobias who first detects the scent of roses coming from the nearby sea—a frightening and threatening presence that usually delivers only grief to the villagers. Due to sea storms, the village is overrun with crabs and they go after Tobias all night, until a cool pre-dawn breeze drives them away. It is possible that this is when he falls deeply asleep and experiences the events in this story, not unlike the dreaming Molly Bloom in James Joyce's "Ulysses."

Within this strange tale of premature burial and odors from the sea that can sicken and kill, there is a parallel story about a man (Mr. Herbert) who comes to town to give away

huge sums of money and who eventually takes Tobias on an undersea journey to an enchanted place where roses grow. After these fantastic experiences, Tobias wants to tell his wife about them but she tells him to calm down and go back to sleep. Dream or surreality? Or perhaps Tobias has told such fantastic lies that he believes them himself.

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World Summary

A group of children discovers a drowned man who washes up on the beach, and they play with the corpse all afternoon—burying him in the sand then digging him out—until someone sees them and alerts the village. When the men come to take him away, they find the huge man is tremendously heavy—not just from being waterlogged but also on account of his size. The townsfolk are convinced he is a stranger without even cleaning off his face. Using fish scaling tools, the village women clean the crust and debris from the man. He is not only the biggest and strongest man they have ever seen, but also the most virile and handsome. Compared with this colossus, their own men seem weak and small. The men improvise a litter to haul the man to one of the ships for burial at sea. Realizing that the women do not want to let go of Esteban, the men grow irritable and bark orders at the women. However, because the men also fear that their women might dream about handsome drowned men while they are at sea, they decide to put on an elaborate funeral. Although the men are grateful when the ship finally departs for sea burial, they agree to make a memorial to Esteban of vast rows of flowers on the hills above the village so that people on passing ships will smell the flowers and ask about the pleasant fragrance. Then the ship's captain will come down from the bridge in dress uniform and, in 14 different languages, explain that the flower gardens are a tribute to Esteban.

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World Analysis

This story, another of Garcia Marquez' pieces for children, is nothing if not a parable on the power of the maternal instinct and its ability to take command of a situation and overrule men. In the small fishing village, the wives of the sailors are overcome with maternal impulses as they clean and make funeral clothing for a man called Esteban. A handsome giant whose corpse drifts ashore, he is at first shunned as an outsider until one of the women recognizes him as one of their own group. His size, strength and good looks—apparently even after being in the sea for a while—cause the women to yearn for something their husbands cannot seem to provide. Sensing this shift, the men who at first want only to be rid of the corpse so they can get on with their day's work, decide to placate the women by having an elaborate funeral for Esteban and agreeing to build large flower garden in the hills above the town as a memorial to him.

Death Constant Beyond Love

Death Constant Beyond Love Summary

In an election campaign that Senator Onesimo Sanchez undertakes every four years, he stops in the poor village of Rosal del Virrey. Sanchez knows he has but six months and 11 days to live. Nelson Farina, an escapee from Devil's Island penitentiary who has lived in the village for many years, has repeatedly asked the senator for a false identity card so he cannot be extradited to face punishment. As the senator strolls down the street, dispensing favors and largesse such as a donkey to one poor peasant, he sees Farina resting in his hammock. When the senator asks how he is, Farina replies in French that he should know. Later that day, while making another speech the senator tears off a piece of a calendar, folds it into a butterfly. He releases the paper butterfly, which commences to fly all around the room and out the door. Laura Farina, the beautiful 19-year-old daughter of Nelson Farina, watches the butterfly and follows it outside. Later as the senator is leaving he notices Laura standing at the entrance to his hotel room. He asks her what she is doing there, and she replies in French that she is there on behalf of her father. He removes his sweaty clothes and sits on the cot as Laura kneels to help him get his boots off. He remarks that she is but a child, and she answers that she will soon be 19. He holds her between his legs and caresses her, moving his hands down to where he hopes to "find" her. His hand encounters a chastity belt with padlock. The senator demands to know where the key is, and she tells him his father will give him the key if he does the favor he has requested. She tells him she can go get the key, and he tells her to just relax and hold him. In that position, six months and 11 days later, publicly disgraced because of his affair with Laura Farina, he dies.

Death Constant Beyond Love Analysis

A sham politician believes that he has fallen in love with a young woman only to find that he has no genuine emotions, only the ability to manipulate and deceive others. Senator Sanchez makes a career out of promising pie-in-the-sky to his constituents but only following through with small favors. With only a few days more than six months to live, he is knocked out of his socks by 19-year-old Laura Farina, the daughter of a man who has repeatedly asked him for a favor. She comes to his room and offers herself to him, but the senator cannot have her because she is wearing a chastity belt to which only her father, Nelson Farina, has the key. The senator says he will do her father the favor to get the key, but ends up not taking the young woman and dying in painful disgrace. Neither the senator nor the girl's father get what they wanted. Perhaps this is Garcia Marquez weaving another parable about the importance of honesty and the futility of deception.

The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship

The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship Summary

This is a single-sentence short story. It begins with a stream-of-consciousness recitation of the mysterious breakup and sinking of a huge ocean liner without a sound, and ends years later with the loud, dramatic crash of another huge ocean liner in the same location. The narrator remembers when, as a boy, his mother allowed him to stay out late one night in March and he saw the barest outlines of the ocean liner as it struck the rocks, and then silently sank. Then, on the same day in March a year later, the young man sees the ghost ship again and watches it sink again. He runs home to tell his mother, who thinks he is delusional. One year later, when he witnesses the same thing for the third time, the boy runs into town proclaiming what he has seen and is beaten. The next year on the same night in March, he steals a boat and goes out in the harbor to wait for the huge ocean liner. He rows the small boat in front of the ocean liner with a flashing light onboard, to lure the ship into the harbor so he can convince the towns people that he is not a liar. The ship appears on schedule, however this time it is not an elusive ghost ship but a real steel vessel with live passengers, lights ablaze, and wheezing boilers. The boy barely has time to get out of the way before the catastrophe occurs. The ship sends up a horrendous crashing sound as it runs aground. However, the gigantic wreckage is palpable proof for everyone that he did not lie and that the ship has, indeed, run aground in front of the church. He is finally vindicated.

The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship Analysis

Whether this story is a case of premonitory visions on the part of the young man, or an over-active imagination, or perhaps a time warp, is open to discussion. Once again, Garcia Marquez creates a sense of mystery proportional to his sense of wonder apparent in lush descriptions of sea life and the world that surrounds the narrator. The reader is left to ponder whether the narrator has an extrasensory ability to foretell events, and is frustrated that the town thinks him a liar—until the actual event occurs in the physical world. There is a faint suggestion, too, of intersecting dimensions of time and space that mirrors some of the current theories of the universe. In any event, Garcia Marquez uses the physical world as a starting point to create his own magical world—to which the reader can only respond, "Why not?"

Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles

Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles Summary

After a hilarious opening scene in which a poisonous snake accidentally bites Blacaman and swells up like a blimp while rolling around on the ground laughing hysterically, the assembled crowd buys all of his nostrums. The narrator, who refers to himself as Blacaman the Good, is fascinated with the shyster and asks if he can learn some of his magic, especially fortune-telling. Blacaman tells the young man quite seriously that he already has the thing most important to learn—the face of an idiot. The narrator describes talking to his father that night and being sold to Blacaman the Bad for a few coins and a deck of cards. The pair take off to make their way in the world, but although Blacaman the Bad is very skilled they find themselves starving, and Blacaman hopes he can train his apprentice in fortune telling so they can survive. The younger man cannot learn to be a fortune-teller and the older man decides to return him to his father. However, at that moment Blacaman the Bad invents a sewing machine powered by electricity from cups placed on the body where there is pain. As they plan for the success of his invention, the two hear of an invasion by gringo marines who slaughter great populations of humans, plants and animals. They survive for a while by living in the ruins of a colonial mission and eating smoked salamanders, and eventually the cobwebs from underground cisterns. The old man confesses that the poisonous bushmaster snake that bit him had its poison glands removed, and that his antidote is turpentine and rhubarb.

Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles Analysis

If the price of learning black magic is to give one's soul to the devil, then both characters in this story seem to have made the same dark bargain. Blacaman the Bad teaches some of his ruses to a young man who calls himself Blacaman the Good, to make the distinction between the two. Blacaman the Bad plays tricks on people to convince them to buy his cures, and then moves onto another town. A local boy becomes enchanted with his magic and wants to learn, and Blacaman says he has the basic talent—the appearance of an idiot. Thus insulted, Blacaman the Good follows his mentor until he becomes disenchanted, and goes his on way in an attempt to practice the art of fortune telling without deceiving people. Meanwhile, Blacaman the Bad finally meets his death when he asks the marines to shoot him so he can demonstrate the restorative powers of one of his medicines.

Blacaman the Good buries his mentor in a special crypt and administers a life-restoring potion so he can listen to the old man suffer inside his tomb forever—presumably by taking the potion himself and administering it to the older man. The point seems to be that the bonds of evil perpetrated through deceit and trickery can be just as long lasting and painful as virtuous bonds with those we love and respect. Garcia Marquez uses his old trick of treating time and death as contingencies that can be altered at will, to

demonstrate how the two Blacamans will be tied together forever in pain and suffering as a direct result of their sins of deception and dishonesty.

The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother

The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother Summary

Fourteen-year-old Erendira and her grandmother live in a huge mansion built by Erendira's grandfather, Amadis, an infamous smuggler. She waits on her grandmother, Cinderella-style, hand and foot, day and night. She fixes her hair, dresses her, put on her makeup, cooks all the meals, cleans and does laundry. Erendira learns to perform her duties while half-asleep, as her half-asleep grandmother continues to bark orders. When Erendira drops, exhausted, into bed the wind blows over her candle that sets the mansion ablaze. Erendira's grandmother tells her she will not live long enough to repay her for the disaster. Erendira's grandmother tricks her out to prostitution in a squalid encounter with an old widower. After all the men in the town spend their money on Erendira, the grandmother loads both of them onto the back of a truck to go where the smugglers are. Onboard are the exhumed remains of the two Amadises. Erendira and her grandmother get out of the truck and build themselves a small shack out of sheets of metal and rugs. The grandmother dresses and primps Erendira, who lies on a mattress like a posing actress. When the mailman comes by, the grandmother signals to him to come inside. They negotiate a deal for him to pay less than the going rate of 50 pesos in exchange for telling his friends about Erendira. A line of men forms in front of their tent in San Miguel del Desierto, and a Dutchman stops to ask what is being sold. Someone tells him a beautiful young woman named Edrendira. Later, the Dutchman's son Ulises steals money from his father and visits Erendira. He tells her she can and must leave, that he will come the next night to get her and they will escape through the desert. Ulises agrees to kill her grandmother, makes a pie of arsenic and serves it to the grandmother. He refuses a piece of the pie and the grandmother eats it all. As Erendira and Ulises watch, the grandmother starts playing the piano and singing well past midnight. The next day, she is fit as a fiddle but notices her hair coming out in clumps. Finally Ulises attacks the grandmother with a knife, and a mighty struggle ensues in which her green blood is smeared over herself and Ulises. Repeated knife thrusts finally kill the grandmother, and Ulises sits exhausted by the grandmother. When he looks up, he sees Erendira run out of the tent into the night, never to be seen or heard from again.

The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother Analysis

The most complex and convoluted story in this collection, "Innocent Erendira" tells a tale of epic brutality and mistreatment by an evil grandmother of her granddaughter. The grandmother holds the girl in a form of familiar enslavement and makes her work so hard that Erendira exists in a kind of sleepwalking state, too numb to refuse or refute

anything her beastly grandmother demands. Ultimately, the grandmother holds Erendira responsible for causing a fire that burns down her inherited mansion built by her smuggler husband. The grandmother takes Erendira around the desert, offering her services as a prostitute until a young Dutchman falls in love with Erendira and tries to help her. He kidnaps her from the mission where missionaries concerned about how she is exploited by her grandmother have taken her. Then, at Erendira's request, he kills the grandmother but Erendira runs off wearing her grandmother's gold vest into the night, never to be seen again.

Perhaps the message here is one of original sin. The crimes of the Amadis, two generations of smugglers, seem to have created a world of pure evil that has corrupted the grandmother and crushed Erendira's soul. Although love in the form of a decent young man provides Erendira with the chance to escape this web of evil, she flees in fear because she has never known love and is a damaged creature, trying to survive as best she can.

Characters

Eva's cat

Eva is a beautiful young woman who is dying. Through some sort of witchcraft, her soul is transplanted into her cat in a strange ploy to cheat death in "Eva Is Inside Her Cat." Transformations of men into animals, gods, or demi-gods are, of course, common in folk tales and mythology. Garcia Marquez borrows this ancient device to create a new existential dilemma, thus combining a time-honored literary tradition with the most modern of existentialist worldviews. Eva seems to have made some kind of Faustian bargain to swap souls with her cat, in a vain effort to avoid witnessing her own loss of beauty and decay.

Big Mama

Big Mama is the matriarch of most of the Republic of Macondo, a fictional district set in a South American jungle near the sea. She owns most of the land within the republic, and thousands of resident tenant farmers provide her with large sums of rent. In addition she supposedly owns three containers of gold coins. Her real political power rests with fraudulent electoral ballots used to put her henchmen into office. These include the president and high prelate of the republic. Most of her power, however, derives from the general perception that she has vast amounts of power.

Nabo

Nabo is an aging stable boy in the short story that bears his name. Nabo becomes enchanted with a "Negro" saxophone player in a band that performs Saturdays in the town square. One day Nabo realizes that the saxophonist is no longer in the band and he stops going to the concerts. However, he tells everyone that he has been kicked in the head by a horse, which explains his distorted thinking, memory and perception of current events. These seem to reel around in his head in an endless loop, keeping him constantly confused.

Queen

Queen is the nickname that Jose the bartender gives to his prostitute friend who comes in every day to get a free meal in "The Woman Who Came at Six O'Clock." One day, Queen comes in at 6 p.m. and asks Jose to tell anyone who asks that she has been there since 5:45 p.m. He agrees but she will not tell him the reason; she has murdered one of her clients and wants an alibi to give her time to escape to another town.

Isabel

Isabel is the narrator in "Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo." She tells a story of her parents getting servants to move furniture about inside their house because of the risng flood waters, while the ever-deepening rain water and isolation cause the family to first lose track of time, then meals, then to slip into a kind of passive derangement.

Aurelio Escovar

Aurelio Escovar is the meticulous dentist in "One of These Days" who is pressed into service extracting an infected wisdom tooth for the corrupt mayor, whom he hates. When he is told the mayor will kill him unless Escovar sees him, he lets the politician into his clinic while reaching for a revolver—that he does not need. When he yanks the mayor's rotten tooth out without benefit of anesthesia, he tells the mayor his pain is in retribution for causing the deaths of 20 local young men, presumably political opponents.

Damaso

Damaso is the ne'er-do-well in "There Are No Thieves in This Town" who steals billiard balls from the local pool parlor, then envisions starting a large-scale operation involving theft of ivory billiard balls in one town and sale of the stolen items in another town. Stricken with guilt after stealing the balls, Damaso sneaks back into the pool parlor one night to return them but is caught in the act by the owner—who says he will press charges for theft of the billiard balls plus 200 pesos he claims were taken from the cash register. However, Damaso maintains there never was any money and he did not take it.

Balthazar

Balthazar is the good-hearted wood worker who offers to make an elaborate wire bird cage for the son of a local gangster. When he comes to deliver the cage, the gangster says he never ordered such an item, but Balthazar says it is a gift for his son. The gangster starts ranting about the fact he was not consulted and Balthazar flees to the local tavern, where he gets drunk and passes out in the street—a fine spectacle for those going to Mass to witness on a Sunday morning.

Father Anthony Isabel

Father Anthony is an aging and probably senile priest who appears in "One Day After Saturday," in which he proclaims that a spate of falling dead birds is a sign of the Wandering Jew, and in "Big Mama's Funeral" conducts the last rites and funeral services for the matriarch and ruler of the Republic of Macondo.

Mina

Mina is the young woman in "Artificial Roses" who races off to Mass in a wet, wrinkled dress then returns shortly afterward. She disappears into the bathroom, where her blind grandmother hears he flushing something down the toilet. When she emerges, the grandmother says she knows that the girl has been staying up late at night writing love letters, and that Mina came back so soon after leaving for Mass because someone (her boyfriend) she was supposed to meet on the way to church disappointed her.

Objects/Places

Limbo

In mythology, limbo is the place where souls go before being assigned either to heaven or hell. Earlier fiction writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, created spine-chilling tales of horror that built upon the notion of a netherworld between life and death ("The Premature Burial" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"), but Garcia Marquez creates a new twist on this theme by allowing his characters, or personages, to glide freely between the two worlds and to experience emotions and thoughts in both. This new level of creepiness probably serves as a reminder of the dichotomies of the modern world, with all of its freedoms and choices, versus the old world where beliefs and behaviors were much less rigid. In the limbo world of the first third of this collection, most of the characters are nameless and faceless, their exact geographic location difficult to pin down. In Garcia Marquez' limbo time, space, dimensionality, life and death flow together like a Ganges River of the subconscious.

The mirror

A man works feverishly to get ready for work before a mirror in "Dialogue with the Mirror." As he shaves and prepares himself cosmetically, he is amused by the way his image apes his every movement. Meanwhile, while he grooms himself physically his consciousness reawakens and begins to fit together the assorted bits and pieces of memory, perception and dreams that emerge. Realizing that he has wasted too much time, the man hurries to finish. In the mirror, he sees a streak of blood where he has cut himself on the arm. However when he looks at his arm, there is no cut. The man wonders whether his speed could have caused the disconnect between image and reality.

Curlews

Curlews are long-beaked shore birds who use their bills to pull food out of the sand and surf. In "The Night of the Curlews," three drinking partners amuse themselves by mimicking the sounds of nearby curlews. The birds are not pleased, and fly in to pluck out their eyes. Thereafter follows a darkly symbolic tale about people wandering around inside a restaurant, looking for the way outside.

Macondo

Macondo is a jungle republic, presumably in South America, hit by torrential rains and flooding in "Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo." To varying degrees, the prolonged wetness and destruction unhinge those who must live through the storm. Some lose all sense of time, some become morose, others become frozen with fear. In

another story, "Big Mama's Funeral," it is referred to as "The Kingdom of Macondo," signifying a larger district.

Banana train

A banana train carries a middle-aged woman and her 11-year-old daughter through the steamy jungle and to a small town where they stop at the cemetery to place flowers on the grave of the woman's son, who has been murdered in "Tuesday Siesta." The train arrives at 2 p.m. during siesta time, and departs at 4 p.m., leaving them very little time to rouse the somnolent priest and gain access to their loved one's grave.

Dentist's chair

The dentist's chair in "One of these Days" is where a small town dentist gets revenge on a corrupt mayor for the deaths of 20 young men by pulling out an impacted wisdom tooth without anesthesia.

Rosal del Virrey

Rosal del Virrey is where Senator Sanches meets Laura Farina, the love of his life, six months before his death in "Death Constant Beyond Love." The village is a wharf for smugglers by night and a nondescript inlet on the desert by day. Ironically, too, the town has no roses.

Ghost ship

In "The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship," an ocean liner passes silently at night by the bay, disappearing when the light from the harbor beacon strikes its sides, then reappearing faintly in the darkness.

Maria del Darien

Maria del Darien is a town somewhere on the Caribbean Sea where a necromancer, embalmer, and hypnotist named Blacaman the Bad lives. The narrator identifies himself as Blacaman the Good, and recalls that the town of Maria del Darien was devoured by fire ants.

Catarino's

Catarino's is a bar and communal gathering place for locals in "The Sea of Lost Time" where most of the action takes place. It faces on the sea, which usually carries foul odors to the land.

Themes

Perception is Reality

The single unifying theme of this collection of short stories is Garcia Marquez' awareness that human perception is human reality. As the reader is taken, or forced, through time as it advances, retreats, stands still, and overlaps with other times, it becomes clear that time itself is not constant but a subjective feature of the mind and as much an identifying character trait as temperament or judgment. Characters in this Faulknerian world do not so much interact as intersect, and try to communicate from their different perceptions of reality. Using this device, Garcia Marquez is able to juxtapose the living and the dead, and those in between, in a strange web of fluid time and circumstance. There is an air of witchcraft about a person buried who does not believe she is dead and who eagerly awaits the arrival of a loved one in her world of insects and spreading roots. The jovial bartender who allows himself to be duped into believing that he can change time to satisfy his prostitute friend leaves the reader wondering whether she has actually murdered two of her customers. The brain-damaged, elderly stable boy whose mind is set in an endless loop because of kick to his head by a horse seems to represent an example of arrested time. People who have insects living under their skin, who listen to wood rotting in their own house, who can communicate with the dead populate these stories as freakish examples of how time defines and distorts reality, and is the ultimate definition of reality. In this sense, the prose of Garcia Marquez seems to reflect a quantum mechanics view of the world in which nothing is solid, but people, animals, the earth are merely the crystalizing of tendencies of matter to be arranged a certain way but subject to mutation at any moment. Thus the narrative tension in his stories derives from the conflict between potential and actuality, between the physical and the metaphysical, between what seems "real" and the shifting subatomic, or ghost, world always just out of our perception.

Character is Destiny

Throughout this collection, in numerous settings and with diverse people, the author repeats the theme that character and its outward manifestation in actions, creates individual destiny. Sometimes this destiny is a tortuous death-in-life, as in the case of the young man in "The Third Resignation" who is kept alive by his doctor in a kind of vegetative state only to haunt and drive his parents to the brink of insanity. The reward for trying to play God seems to be a curse on them from the almighty. An old woman who totters near death may be closer to salvation, Garcia Marquez suggests, because of reincarnation, although there is hardly any guarantee about what form she may take because of her karma. In another story, "One of these Days," a quiet village dentist gets satisfaction in inflicting pain on a corrupt mayor as he pulls out a rotten tooth without anesthesia—retribution for the mayor causing the death of 20 young men. In every instance, spiritual and physical deformities seem to be linked directly to character, and

the choices that individuals make. These choices can have immediate, direct consequences or long-range consequences even after death. However, there is a dark certainty in the stories that justice will be served through some means and there is no escape from those consequences despite the Christian tradition of forgiveness and redemptive mercy. In this sense, Garcia Marquez' vision is existentialist: man alone in the universe with only his own thoughts and actions to define reality.

The Magical is Everywhere

Consistent with the designation of his prose as "magical realism," Garcia Marquez gives the reader a woman who switches souls with her cat, an angel who falls to earth, a child who ages in a kind of living death condition, birds that take revenge on humans, a brain-damaged stable boy whose head injury who becomes tuned into another reality. All these, and more, surrealistic occurrences are encompassed in these stories wherein the author juxtaposes a gritty sort of peasant reality with the absolutely fanciful and irrational—a characteristic of the folk tales he learned as a child. Perhaps this results from indigenous folk religion in South America in which animals and creatures become human and vice versa and a pantheism in which everything living has a human soul, and its collision with the Christian doctrines of the Catholic church. This combination of native religions with Christianity is known as syncretism and is common throughout the world wherever an outside set of beliefs has been imposed on an aboriginal culture. In constructing his stories so that the supernatural has equal status with the "real," Garcia Marquez is able to introduce an element of whimsy and excitement not usually found in short stories outside the science fiction or horror genres of fiction.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in most of the stories in this collection is obscure—at once inside and outside the narrative. When he uses the voice of the objective narrator, the author never identifies himself but speaks as if he has a kind of infused enlightenment of not only the physical world but of the spirit world which is superimposed. The detached, anonymous narrative voice enables the author to assume any point of view within the story, including the subjective point of view of each of the characters in the living, physical world as well as their souls and the strange, sometimes hideous spiritual deformities they carry like a curse. The experience for the reader is not unlike that of a child at summer camp, gathered around a blazing campfire with other children listening to adults tell hair-raising ghost stories. Improbability and disbelief become suspended because of the powerful story-telling abilities of the speaker. When Garcia Marquez wants to be more directly involved in a story, he typically assumes the voice of an unidentified, nebulous "we." Using this collective pronoun rather than the more typical first person "i" enables the author to move about rather freely within the story and to leave it to the reader's imagination to fill in specifics of time, place and other characters. In this sense, Garcia Marquez' stories are radically innovative because they require the reader to define his or her own point of view to make sense of the free-floating narrative, to re-read portions of the story for affirmation or refutation of that point of view, and to internalize the story so as to fully assimilate it.

Setting

The ultimate setting of all the stories is the dark netherworld of the author's imagination, the part of the brain that can suddenly turn a pleasant dream into a nightmare by dredging up ancient fears to interact with blissful fantasies. The precise physical setting in most of these stories is usually not clear. What is more important is their placement within the psyche and their ability to fuse the surreal with the physical in a way that is unnerving. Although obviously influenced by earlier writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, by contrast Garcia Marquez conveys a sense of fear and terror by leaving the precise settings of his stories unclear. The reader's sense of dread is not focused, for example, so much on a swinging pendulum with a razor-sharp edge but on the nameless fear that lurks in a foggy night, or in the creaking of ancient wooden beams, or in obsessive reliving of the past that overtakes present reality. When the setting is not the amorphous territory between the living and the dead, or the real and surreal, it is usually a small town somewhere in South America—often an isolated jungle village probably drawn from the author's experiences growing up in Colombia. However, whether the immediate setting is the shadow world between life and death or a hot August afternoon in the jungle, the universal setting in these stories is the human heart—with all of its conflicting darkness and capacity for light and joy.

Language and Meaning

The rich descriptive powers that Garcia Marquez exhibits in his later fiction are in evidence in these stories. He carefully avoids the shop-worn and obvious uses of language which gives his prose the delightful element of surprise. Whether the tale itself is dark and the language appropriately opaque or light and humorous, the reader is immediately seduced into whatever world the author has created. His sophisticated use of narrative devices such as fluid time, interior monologue as well as intersecting interior monologues, combine with adroit use of symbolism and vivid imagery to give the reader a sense of immediacy and physicality—even in those tales where seemingly disembodied spirits cry out for love, justice, revenge, or mischief. The author's ability to interchange human and animal spirits and physical realities no doubt stems from his childhood exposure to folk myths that combined the everyday with the fantastic. In Garcia Marquez' stories, language conveys the sense that the real and the fantastic usually exist side-by-side, and that all we need do to experience the totality of life is to open our eyes and pay attention. The author has an exceptional "ear" for everyday speech and uses it effectively to convey some of the absurdity in the world and in his stories.

Structure

These stories are structured individually—some in a stream-of-consciousness style and others in a straight narrative fashion. The book is divided into three sections: Eyes of a Blue Dog, which includes some of the author's earliest fiction; Big Mama's Funeral, in which Garcia Marquez's style evolves into a more accessible format; and The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother. There is are a considerable number of interlocking characters about half-way through the collection, so that the same characters appear then reappear in another story. This style is reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio" in which a series of short stories focused on individuals within the town gives the reader different perspectives. These characters and their perspectives—looked at in the aggregate—form a mosaic pattern whose shape and identity can only be visualized by stepping back for moment and appreciating that the author has created a rich tapestry of life in many dimensions.

Quotes

"He couldn't be dead because he had an exact awareness of everything: of the life that was spinning and murmuring about him. Of the warm smell of heliotrope that came in through the open window and mingled with the other 'smell.' He was quite aware of the slow dripping of the water in the cistern. Of the cricket that had stayed in the corner and was still chirping, thinking that early morning was still there. Everything denied his death. Everything except the 'smell,'" (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"A few moments before he had been happy with his death, because he had thought he was dead. Because a dead man can be happy with his irremediable situation. But a living person can't resign himself to being buried alive. Yet his members wouldn't respond to his call. He couldn't express himself and that was what caused his terror, the greatest terror of his life and of his death. They were going to bury him alive. He might be able to feel, be aware of the moment they nailed up the box. He would feel the emptiness of the body suspended across the shoulders of friends as his anguish and desperation grew with every step of the procession," (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"Death had squeezed her into life like a spider, biting her in a rage, ready to make her succumb. But the final moment was taking its time. Her hands, those hands that men squeezed like imbeciles with manifest animal nervousness, were motionless, paralyzed by fear, by that irrational terror that came from within with no motive, just from knowing that she was abandoned in that ancient house. She tried to react and couldn't. Fear had absorbed her completely and remained there, fixed, tenacious, almost corporeal, as if it were some invisible person who had made up his mind not to leave her room," (Chapter 3, p. 29).

"But it was difficult to resign herself to live forgotten forever. Why did she have to feel the desire to eat a mouse? Who would rule in that synthesis of woman and cat? Would the primitive animal instinct of the body rule, or the pure will of the woman? The answer was crystal clear. There was no reason to be afraid. She would incarnate herself in the cat and would eat her desired orange. Besides, she would be a strange being, a cat with the intelligence of a beautiful woman," (Chapter 4, p. 35).

"She would have been the respectable lady of the house if she had been the wife of a solid citizen or the concubine of a punctual man. But she became accustomed to living in only one dimension, like a straight line, perhaps because her vices or her virtues could not be seen in profile. We'd known that for many years now. We weren't even surprised one morning, after getting up, when we found her face down in the courtyard, biting the earth in a hard, ecstatic way," (Chapter 5, p. 39).

"We had been seeing each other for several years. Sometimes, when we were already together, somebody would drop a spoon outside and we would wake up. Little by little we'd been coming to understand that our friendship was subordinated to things, to the simplest of happenings. Our meetings always ended that way, with the fall of a spoon early in the morning," (Chapter 6, p. 55).

"The woman sucked in the first drag of thick smoke, crossed her arms, her elbows still on the counter, and remained looking at the street through the wide restaurant window. She had a melancholy expression. A bored and vulgar melancholy," (Chapter 7, p. 59).

"Jose drew back and looked at the clock. Then he looked at the customer, who was still silent, waiting in the corner, and finally at the meat roasting in the pan. Only then did he speak. "I really don't understand, queen," he said. "Don't be foolish, Jose," the woman said. "Just remember that I've been here since five-thirty," (Chapter 7, p. 72).

"Now that it's stopped raining and the noonday sun has probably hardened the soapy slope, I should be able to reach the grave where my child's body rests, mingled now, dispersed among the snails and roots," (Chapter 9, p. 83).

"She returned many years later. So much time had passed that the smell of musk in the room had blended in with the smell of the dust, with the dry and tiny breath of the insects. I was alone in the house, sitting in the corner waiting. And I had learned to make out the sound of rotting wood, the flutter of the air becoming old in the closed bedrooms," (Chapter 9, p. 85).

"We sat down. An invisible sun began to warm us on the shoulders. But not even the presence of the sun interested us. We felt it there, everywhere, having already lost the notion of distance, time, direction. Several voices passed. We kept on sitting like that, shoulder to shoulder, waiting, in that passing of voices, in that passing of images, for a smell or a voice that was known to us to pass. The sun was above our heads, still warming us," (Chapter 10, p. 93).

"That day we lost track of meals. At siesta time my stepmother served a plate of tasteless soup and a piece of stale bread. But actually we hadn't eaten since sunset on Monday and I think that from then on we stopped thinking. We were paralyzed, drugged by the rain, given over to the collapse of nature with a peaceful and resigned attitude, " (Chapter 11, p. 97).

"On a certain occasion, her daughters wrote her about the butcher shops of Paris. They told her about the pink pigs that were killed there and then hung up whole in the doorways, decorated with wreaths and garlands of flowers. At the end of the letter, a hand different from her daughter's had added, 'Imagine! They put the biggest and prettiest carnation in the pig's ass," (Chapter 16, p. 164).

"They wanted to tie the anchor from a cargo ship to him [Esteban] so that he would sink easily into the deepest waves, where fish are blind and divers die of nostalgia, and bad currents would not bring him back to shore, as had happened with other bodies. But the more they hurried, the more the women thought of ways to waste time," (Chapter 22, p. 251).

"The news reached us that the marines had invaded the country under the pretext of exterminating yellow fever and were going about beheading every inveterate or eventual potter they found in their path, and not only the natives out of precaution, but also the Chinese for distraction, the Negroes from habit, and the Hindus because they

were snake charmers and then they wiped out all the flora and fauna and all the mineral wealth they were able to because their specialists in our affairs had taught them that the people along the Caribbean had the ability to change their nature in order to confuse gringos," (Chapter 25, p. 277).

Topics for Discussion

In many of the stories in the first part of this collection, the author does not identify characters or setting by name, and often the time elements seem confusing. Are these devices effective for carrying out the author's intent? What is the author's intent in employing these devices?

What is the author's attitude toward his characters? Compassionate? Ironic? Detached? If there is an overall message that runs through this collection about the author's view of humanity, what is it?

Some of the stories resemble in form the fable, in which human traits are ascribed to animals to be more carefully examined. In "Eva Is Inside Her Cat," for example, a beautiful woman somehow exchanges her soul with that of her cat so as to avoid witnessing her own aging. What is the core truth Garcia Marquez communicates by this device?

In "The Woman Who Came at Six O'Clock," a small town prostitute gets disgusted with her customer and shoots him, then flees to the local watering hole where she asks Jose, the owner, to cover for her if the police ask questions. She wants him to say she was in the bar 15 minutes earlier than she actually came, so that she can escape and start a new life. He agrees, then she asks him to add another 15 minutes to the alibi. Confused, he asks her why and she answers with an enigmatic smile. What does her request for more time mean? Will she stay or flee if he grants her request?

Three drunken men have their eyes pecked out by curlews in "The the Curlews," after one of the men has mocked the birds' cries. Plunged into the dark of blindness, the men stumble about inside the cafe until they finally get outside and wait for the warmth of the sun. Is this an allegorical tale in which the author communicates some essential moral lesson? If so, what is the truth, the lesson?

In "One of These Days," a corrupt and murderous small town mayor gets his infected wisdom tooth pulled by a fastidious dentist who must perform the operation without anesthesia. As he painfully yanks out the tooth, the dentist tells him the pain is his reward for killing 20 young men. The dentist asks where to send his bill—to the mayor personally or to the town. The mayor says it does not matter; they are both the same. Obviously, the dentist's attempt to teach the mayor a lesson has failed but the dentist is pleased with himself, nevertheless. What does this story tell us about revenge?

In "Balthazar's Marvelous Afternoon," a poor carpenter makes an intricate and beautiful bird cage for the son of a wealthy gangster. When he delivers the cage, the father gets angry and says he will not pay for it. Balthazar says it is a gift and he never expected to be paid. The little boy is delighted; the father has a fit. Balthazar is greeted as a hero at the tavern, where he gets drunk and then sleeps with two women, passing out in the street in a happy delirium. What does the author say in this story about the nature of good and evil and the pleasure of giving rather than material comfort?

Folk wisdom, Catholicism and simple notions of revenge, retribution and the life or death of the spirit suffuse the stories in this collection. Overall, would you say that Garcia Marquez' point of view toward these stories is nihilistic, moralistic, or existentialist? Or does the author float above the stories as a kind of ironic observer?