Eyes of a Blue Dog Study Guide

Eyes of a Blue Dog by Gabriel García Márquez

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Contents

Introduction

The most famous work by the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez is his 1967 novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), one of Latin America's finest examples of magic realism, a literary style that incorporates fantastical or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction. After the international success of this novel, García Márquez went on to publish a prodigious amount of writing, winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982. As of 2004, he was one of the world's most influential living authors, whose broad innovations on the rules of fiction have inspired countless writers to incorporate epic, myth, and fantasy into their works, challenging the ways it is possible to perceive a story.

Some of García Márquez's most interesting, exciting, and daring work, however, was written in the years before he became internationally famous, when his unique style was still developing and he was one among many writers of a Latin American literary renaissance. In 1950, for example, he wrote an intriguing story entitled "Eyes of a Blue Dog," which takes place entirely within its narrator's dream, using the logic of the unconscious and the unique contradictions of the dream world to portray a frustrated relationship between a man and a woman. Despite their deep desire for each other, these characters are unable to meet in real life or even touch in the dream world, a situation that García Márquez uses to represent the loneliness of the unconscious mind and its desperate longings. Anthologized in a collection by the same name in 1972, "Eyes of a Blue Dog" is now available in García Márquez's *Collected Stories*, translated from Spanish by Gregory Rabassa and published in 1984 by Harper & Row.

Author Biography

García Márquez was born in Aracataca, Colombia, on March 6, 1928, and lived the first eight years of his life with his maternal grandparents. After the death of his grandfather, a colonel, he moved to a river port town with his parents, and in 1940 he entered a high school near Bogotá on a scholarship. He entered law school at the University of Bogotá in 1947, but after the university closed in the following year due to civil war, he transferred to the University of Cartagena in northern Colombia.

By this time García Márquez had begun writing journalism and fiction, and in 1950, the same year he wrote "Eyes of a Blue Dog," he dropped out of law school to work for various newspapers. He wrote for Bogotá's prominent periodical, the *Espectador*, until it was shut down by the government, and then he traveled in Europe and South America as a freelance writer before returning to Colombia to marry Mercedes Barcha. In 1959, he took a key role in launching a branch of *Prensa Latina*, the news-wire service started by Cuban President Fidel Castro, but he resigned from his post and moved with his family to Mexico City in 1960.

After he moved to New York in 1961, García Márquez published his first novella, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (*No One Writes to the Colonel*), which deals with a small Colombian town during the 1940s and 1950s. The novella was successful, as was García Márquez's subsequent fiction, but it was with the publication of *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) in 1967 that he met with international popularity and acclaim. A widely influential stylistic achievement, the novel combines fantasy with realism to tell a story across six generations in the mythical Colombian town of Macondo.

In the 1970s and afterward, García Márquez continued to write novels and short fiction, living for periods in Mexico, France, Spain, and the United States. In addition to his career as a writer, he has been involved in various political action groups, has worked as a teacher, and has made a number of films for Spanish television. García Márquez has received numerous literary awards including the Neustadt International Prize for literature in 1972 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982. In 1999, he was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, and as of 2004 he was at work on volume II of his memoirs, which will concentrate on his life after 1955.

Plot Summary

The story begins with a narrator leaning back on a chair, looking at a woman whose hand is on an oil lamp. They look at each other for a few minutes, and then the narrator says, "Eyes of a blue dog," which she repeats, saying she will never forget that and has written it everywhere. Walking to a dressing table, the woman looks at the narrator in the mirror and powders her nose before returning to the lamp and commenting that she is afraid someone is dreaming about the room, revealing her secrets. They each comment on the cold, and the woman returns to the dressing table where, despite the fact that he has turned his back to her, the narrator can tell what she is doing. He tells her that he can see her, and the woman says that this is impossible.

With the narrator facing her again, the woman asks him to do something about the cold, and she begins to undress. The narrator tells her he had always wanted to see her like that. Naked, the woman discusses how sometimes she thinks that they are both made of metal, and she tells him that if they ever find each other in real life, to put his ear on her ribs and hear her echoing. She says that her life has been dedicated to finding the narrator in reality, recognizing him with the phrase "Eyes of a blue dog," and she describes all of the different places she has uttered and written the phrase in order to find him.

The narrator says that everyday he tries to remember the phrase but that he always forgets it. She tells him she wishes he could at least remember the city in which she has been writing it, and he tells her that he would like to touch her. She asks for a cigarette and says that she wonders why she cannot remember where she wrote the phrase, musing that sometimes she thinks that she may merely have dreamed that she wrote it everywhere. He walks over to give her the cigarette and says that if he could only remember the phrase tomorrow, he could find her. She tells him that the cigarette is warming her up, and he says that he is glad, because it frightens him to see her trembling.

After mentioning that they have been seeing each other this way for several years and that each meeting ends when they hear the drop of a spoon in the morning, the narrator remembers the first time he asked her who she was. She had replied that she did not remember, and they had realized that they had met in previous dreams. The narrator then repeats that he would like to touch her, and she tells him that he would ruin everything. He insists that it does not matter, but she says that when he wakes up he will have forgotten, and she stays behind the lamp.

The narrator tells the woman that it is already dawning, and he takes the doorknob in his hand. The woman tells him not to open the door because the hallway is full of difficult dreams, but the narrator opens the door halfway and smells "vegetable earth, damp fields," telling her that he does not think there is a hallway there. She says this is because there is a woman outside dreaming about the country, and the narrator tells her that he has to leave in order to wake up. The wind and the smells cease, and the narrator tells the woman that he will recognize her tomorrow from their phrase. She tells

him with a sad smile that he will not remember anything and puts her hands back over the lamp, saying, "You're the only man who doesn't remember anything of what he's dreamed after he wakes up."

Summary

Eyes of a Blue Dog is a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, which is a dream scenario between a man and a woman whose love is never fully realized in real life. The story begins with the thoughts of a man who is watching a woman and trying to decide whether or not the woman is looking at him for the first time or he is looking at her for the first time. It is only when the woman turns around behind an oil lamp that the man realizes it is he who looks at her for the first time. The man is sitting on a chair balanced on one of the back legs contemplating the woman as they just look at each other for a few minutes. The narrator notices the woman's hand is now on the oil lamp and he recognizes the familiar cast of her eyelids which he sees every night.

The narrator then comments on another ritual in which he tells the woman, "eyes of a blue dog" and the woman responds that the two of them will never forget that phrase. The woman repeats the phrase and tells the man that she has written it everywhere. The woman walks to her dressing table and powders her face and reveals her fear that someone else is dreaming about this room, which would reveal all her secrets.

The woman is cold and comments that the man cannot feel the cold but he replies that he does feel it sometimes; maybe the sheet has fallen off. The woman returns to her former position at her dressing table and the man can see her actions despite the woman's back to him and the fact that there is no mirror. The man can see the woman lower her eyes and keep them focused on her brassiere and tells the woman this, but the woman does not believe the man.

The man moves his chair around and sees that the woman now warms her hands over the open flame of the lamp declaring that she is going to catch cold and asks the man to do something about the cold. Nevertheless, the woman begins to undress and the man offers to turn his back to the wall again but the woman says that this is unnecessary because he will see her just as he did before.

The woman's skin glows a warm copper color in the lamplight and the man comments that he has always wanted to see her in this way. The woman is trying to warm her naked body over the flame of the lamp claiming that she feels as if she is made of metal. The woman explains that sometimes she can hear her heart beating as if echoing as if she were a hollow metal structure. The woman tells the man that if they ever find each other in real life she wants him to put his ear to her ribs and listen to her echoes.

The woman tells the man that she has searched for the man for years and has used the phrase, "eyes of a blue dog" in the hopes that someone will understand and direct the woman to the man or that the man she repeats it to will be the man himself. The woman has embarrassed herself in the name of love by repeating the phrase to waiters, writing the phrase in the condensation on windows, even writing the phrase on the clean tile of a drugstore with a bright red lipstick but the man never materializes.

The man tries to console the woman by telling her that he tries to remember the phrase every day so that he can find her and is never able to recall it but promises not to forget tomorrow although he has made that same promise many times and never remembers. The woman would have some consolation if only the man could remember what city the woman is in when she writes the phrase.

The man tells the woman that he would like to touch her now to which the woman raises her face to say that the man has never said that before. The woman is distressed that she cannot remember the city where she wrote the phrase and worries that perhaps that has been a dream too. The man rises to give the woman a cigarette and she lights it from the lamp's flame before the man can offer a lit match.

The narrator again tells the woman that if only he could remember the phrase, "eyes of a blue dog" tomorrow he knows he could find her. The woman comments that the cigarette is warming her and the man is pleased because he does not like to see her trembling beside the lamp. The narrator states that he and the woman have been meeting this way for several years and their encounters are always interrupted or ended by something like the sound of a spoon dropping in the morning.

The man remembers the first time he saw the woman and they agree it was in a room very much like the one in which they are sitting, but the woman feels certain that they have met in other places too. The man notices the copper color of the woman's skin, which has turned from a metallic state to something warm and malleable and tells the woman that he would like to touch her.

The woman does not want to be touched because it will ruin everything but the man states that it does not matter because all that is needed for the situation to be righted again is for them to turn over their pillows. The woman still resists the touch and stays behind the lamp despite the man's claim that everything will be all right once they turn over the pillows.

The man tells the woman that the dawn is approaching and moves to the door and the woman asks him not to open the door because the hallway has many difficult dreams. The woman knows this because she was just there and returned when she realized she had been sleeping on her heart. Nevertheless, the man opens the door a little bit and smells the earth and feels a slight breeze.

The man cannot tell if there is any hallway outside the door. All he can sense is a smell of the country. The woman declares that what the man smells is not the country but rather a woman who is also dreaming of the country. The man will not be deterred and tells the woman he must leave the room and go to breakfast in order to wake up.

The wind has quieted down and the only sound is that of a person who has turned over in bed. The man once again tells the woman that he will look for signs of the phrase, "eyes of a blue dog" and he will find her but the woman is resigned to the fact that the man will not remember anything about her during the day.

Analysis

Neither the man nor the woman is ever named in this story, which is told from the man's dream perspective. It is not clear if the man has ever seen the woman in reality but seems as if she is someone who exists only in his dream state because he cannot remember her in the light of day. His loneliness in reality drives the need for the woman to be created in his dreams because he cannot secure a satisfactory relationship in real life.

Obviously the man would like for the relationship to take form because of the use of the phrase, "eyes of a blue dog," as a memory trigger each night. It is the man's hope that one night the memory trigger will take hold firmly enough to carry through to his waking hours so that he can make the relationship a reality. The man's hope for finding a woman who will reciprocate his feelings is symbolized by the woman who shows even more fervor for consummating the relationship by her intensity and fervent search for him during the day as exhibited by her use of the phrase.

The oil lamp in the dream sequence symbolizes warmth and clarity for the man who is unable to find either in his waking life. The woman never strays from the vicinity of the lamp for its warmth and she is cast in a warm glow from its light, which makes her appear warm and malleable unlike the realities of the fear of approaching women in real life.

The man is never overly concerned about his lack of bringing the relationship to a satisfying state and at times states that if the couple is separated all that will be necessary to return is the turning over of a pillow and falling back into the dream. However, the recurring frustration of never touching in the dream or being able to connect in any way emphasizes the author's intent to show loneliness through the subconscious mind of a man who could represent any man or woman in the throes of isolation or longing.

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Characters

Clerk

The drugstore clerk orders the woman to clean up the mess she has made after she writes "Eyes of a blue dog" on the floor with lipstick.

Narrator

The narrator of the story is both the speaker, from whose perspective the reader experiences the story, and the dreamer, whose mind is creating the environment into which the woman enters. Like the woman he desires, the narrator seems quite lonely, unable to find the object of his desire in real life or even touch her in his dream. The fact that he does not touch her despite his repeated desire to do so, his indistinct and puzzled knowledge of her and their history, and the cold that had given him "the certainty of [his] solitude" all emphasize this loneliness. Also, the narrator's ability to see the woman just as well when he is facing the wall and his inability to remember her outside of his dreams create doubt about whether he is able to interact with other people or develop any kind of connection with them.

Less physically distinct than the woman, the narrator's only descriptions, aside from the details that he is a smoker who leans back on one leg of his chair, come from the woman's perspective. She tells him that she has sometimes thought of him as a "little brown statue in the corner of some museum," and she says that she once associated him with a smell that she notices in a drugstore. Although he turns his back to her, the narrator is earnestly attracted to the woman, repeatedly asking to touch her and watching her primping rituals very carefully. There is also a hint of violence toward her, such as when he tells her that he has always wanted to see her "as if [she'd] been beaten."

Since the narrator is dreaming the landscape and events of the story, his character is expressed by the properties of the dream itself. The woman could represent the object of his desire, the cold room with a lamp could represent how he sees himself, and his difficult and obscure interaction with the woman could represent how he relates to others. Or, the dream could be less specifically symbolic but nevertheless represent the narrator's unconscious world, full of loneliness, confusion, and frustration. The basic fears and desires of the narrator's unconscious are the main focus of his characterization, and the hints about the narrator's waking life, including the dropping of the spoon and the breathing of someone sleeping, simply add another dimension to the nature of the principle subject, his unconscious self.

Woman

The unnamed woman in the room with the narrator is a somewhat lonely and sad figure, associated with fire, ash, and metal. Made up with powder and crimson lipstick, she has long, "quiet," tremulous hands, which the narrator compares to the wings of a hen. Her skin is yellow like "soft, malleable copper," but it changes color and substance in the course of the story, turning red when she is sad and appearing like "plate," or laminated metal, when she is sleeping, as she says, "on my heart." She spends much of the story trembling, naked and cold, beside the lamp, while the narrator watches from his chair.

Beginning with a "slippery and oily" look, which gradually heats up until it is "burning, roasting," and finishing with features that are "darkened by a bitter cloud," the woman's description resembles the life of a flame such as that of an oil lamp. She is continually warming, even "toasting" and "consum[ing]" herself by the flame of the lamp; her pillow is "burning" her knee while she sleeps, and her eyes are consistently associated with ash and hot coals. Although this association with fire may partly suggest that she is passionate and romantic, it chiefly seems to be a way of emphasizing her capacity to consume herself and burn out. Indeed, the last paragraph's fluttering wind, which leaves her with a resigned smile, seems to blow out her flame and leave her "features darkened" as though she has been extinguished.

When the woman smiles sadly in resignation to her fate, she reveals that she is surrendering to the greater forces that keep her apart from the narrator. However, this contrasts with the side of her personality that is desperate and even obsessive about finding him; in fact, she tells the narrator that her entire life had been dedicated to finding him. These and other contradictions, such as the fact that she has long and quiet hands and a pampered face despite the skin of her belly being "full of deep pits, as if you'd been beaten," make the woman seem quite mysterious. It is even possible that she is nothing more than a figment of the narrator's imagination, or the abstract object of his desire which he can never reach, despite the vividness of her character portrait.

Themes

Loneliness and Isolation

García Márquez portrays the narrator's dream world as a place of loneliness and isolation that will not allow an intimate connection between two people who desire each other. The narrator and the woman cannot touch each other, meet in waking life, control when they see each other in dreams, nor stay together when a noise distracts them from their sleep. The narrator cannot even remember the woman when he wakes, and the woman is unsure whether she has merely dreamed her agonizing search for him. Although the dream landscape is full of desire and longing, a place for powerful and literally burning passions, the narrator and the woman cannot consummate their relationship, and they remain forever at a distance.

This sense of isolation, which is common in García Márquez's early fiction, is particularly stark in the world of dreams, where the narrator's deepest and most insatiable desires emerge. However, unlike many of García Márquez's stories, there is a kernel of potential for a relationship between two people that desire each other and seem to share a deep understanding. Despite the loneliness that characterizes their relationship and the fact that they will never be together in a full or complete sense, the narrator and the woman are capable of feeling togetherness in their dreams. In fact, the woman does not want to touch the narrator out of fear that this contact will "ruin everything," which implies that they have a deep and meaningful connection that is more important than physical contact. Also, when the woman discusses her longing for the narrator in real life, or when the narrator states that his and the woman's friendship is subordinated to "the simplest of happenings," they imply that the things that make up their waking lives are somehow less vital and important than the relationship of their dreams. Whereas the narrator's cigarette is able to warm the woman in the dream, it seems that nothing is able to warm her or relieve her solitude in real life.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" poses provocative questions about what loneliness and isolation actually mean. It is possible that the story emphasizes the frustration and futility of all relationships, since the narrator will never remember the woman outside of the dream world. Or, it is possible that the story implies that two people, although they are unable to have a physical relationship and although they are lonely and isolated in real life, can have vital and powerful unconscious connections. Either way, García Márquez challenges the reader's preconceptions about companionship and desire. Desperation and difficulty are revealed to be unavoidable aspects of a relationship, while distance and separation seem to be a necessary part of desire.

The Unconscious

The world of dreams is associated with the unconscious, and one of García Márquez's principle interests in "Eyes of a Blue Dog" is to capture the unique atmosphere of this

phenomenon. Portraying the narrator's dream simultaneously as an intensely, physically real environment and a vast, obscure netherworld, the story allows the reader an insight into the complexities of the unconscious mind. Countless novels and short stories make reference to the unconscious, and the characterization process almost always takes into consideration the inner workings of the mind, but García Márquez is unique in setting the entire story in the unconscious. Reality is a side note, the subject of several memories outside the dream, which may refer to yet another dream or merely to another layer of the woman's or the narrator's unconscious minds.

From this perspective, within the unconscious world, the reader is able to perceive the desires and fears that underlie everyday life and motivate conscious actions. It is not necessarily clear from the story, however, to what degree and in what way the unconscious world affects waking life, nor is it clear what result conscious actions have in the unconscious mind. García Márquez poses questions throughout the story about the mysteries of this interaction, suggesting through the woman's obsessive quest to find the narrator that unconscious desires can overwhelm conscious life. However, the woman's situation also highlights the possibility of a complete separation between the conscious and unconscious worlds, since she will never find the narrator in real life.

The intriguing final line of the story, identifying the narrator as unique among men in his inability to remember what he has dreamed when he is awake, implies that it is impossible for the narrator to fulfill his unconscious desires. It seems to suggest that no other man has this problem, although the woman may be ironic in her statement, actually meaning that no one remembers his or her dreams. Indeed, the woman is also unable to remember her dreams, or at least encounters a disconnection between her conscious and unconscious memories, since she is unable to remember where she has written "Eyes of a blue dog" while she is dreaming. The conclusion of "Eyes of a Blue Dog," therefore, does not seem to resolve the question it poses about how unconscious desire manifests itself in waking life, despite the suggestion that the narrator and the woman are resigned to hopelessness and isolation. It is possible that García Márquez prefers to stress the ambiguity of the relationship between unconsciousness and consciousness, leaving its mysteries unresolved.

Style

Magic Realism

Magic realism is a technique associated with post—World War II Latin American fiction that blends elements of myth, fantasy, and the supernatural with an otherwise realistic storytelling technique. The fantastical aspects of this style can range from magical transformations and supernatural powers in humans and animals to epic struggles such as those found in the Bible or classical mythology to new realms of perception and awareness such as the point of view from a dead body or within an animal. In "Eyes of a Blue Dog," García Márquez uses magic realism to portray an extended fantasy about the experience of a dream world. Although a dream is not a supernatural idea, the manner in which the reader enters into this world uses aspects of fantasy and is foreign to everyday experience.

García Márquez employs the style of magic realism for a variety of reasons that relate to his thematic goals, and he is interested in challenging the way that readers interact with fiction. Magic realism is a stylistic innovation, an advance in technique that allows readers to understand events and themes in a unique and vivid way. For example, the phrase "when I sleep on my heart," though it is difficult to picture in exact terms, provides a stark insight into the woman's character. Similarly, although it does not seem to make sense that the narrator can see the woman when he is facing away from her, this detail allows the reader to understand the essence of their contradictory relationship, which is both extremely close and strikingly distanced. García Márquez is very much aware of the insightfulness that his technique can allow, and he is adept at using magic realism as a powerful tool to convey some of the perplexing and complex truths about how humans experience, desire, feel, and remember.

Dream Narrative

Aside from his general stylistic approach of magic realism, García Márquez uses a number of specific techniques such as an obscure time frame, ambiguous events in the narrative, and unclear "diction," or word choice, to make his reader feel that he or she is inside a dream world. These stylistic choices are crucial in establishing a compelling setting and addressing García Márquez's key themes, and they are vital in creating the memorable and unique atmosphere of the story. Perhaps the defining feature of these devices is their combination of haziness and obscurity with specific, intense details. García Márquez uses many contradictory phrases and describes a series of mysterious events, to the point that the reader can easily become disoriented, but the author balances this practice with striking and grounded details, which makes the reader feel that the events must actually be occurring.

For example, the time frame of the narrator and the woman's relationship is unclear, and basic details such as what will happen if they touch, where the outside door leads, and

whether they will ever be able to meet in real life are not clarified. However, details such as the sound of someone sleeping and the anticipation of a spoon falling to wake them up ground the reader in a sense of reality and coherent progression. Indeed, there are many other moments described with specific, almost unforgettable detail, such as the woman's discussion about how she is made of metal and the narrator's description of how she says "I'm warming up," as if the phrase had burned up on a scrap of paper, that make the dream world seem substantial and real at the same time that they draw attention to its surreal strangeness. The title phrase itself, which the narrator created after seeing the woman's eyes, variously described as "hot-coal eyes" and "eyes of ash," is an excellent example of how the García Márquez combines the intensely specific with the mysteriously obscure, emphasizing the contradictions that define the experience of a dream.

Historical Context

Hispanic Avant-garde

The years following World War II saw an exciting and remarkable output of literature by Hispanic writers, principally in Latin America. Because they departed from previous styles like literary modernism, creating new and innovative genres such as magic realism, the writers of this period became known as the Hispanic avant-garde, a French term that means artistically advanced and daring. García Márquez was one of the most prominent of these writers, but he was preceded by the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, whom García Márquez admired greatly and frequently acknowledged as a major influence on his own work. Rebelling against the symbolist tradition of literary modernism, Borges helped to create a new style of writing that referred not to elements of the real world, but instead to other texts, and he resisted a linear view of time and space.

The Hispanic avant-garde movement was global in nature, partly because influential Latin American writers like García Márquez and Julio Cortázar spent much of their lives abroad, and many of its writers were influenced by a new literary movement developing in Europe and the United States, called postmodernism. Heavily influenced by post—World War II psychoanalytical theorists such as Jacques Lacan, postmodernism is known for challenging traditional understandings of perception and representation. Other influences and techniques, however, were uniquely Latin American in nature, such as magic realism, which incorporates elements of myth, fantasy, and the supernatural into otherwise realistic writing. "Eyes of a Blue Dog" was written in the early stages of the Hispanic avant-garde movement, and it incorporates a variety of influences, including postmodernism and magic realism, into its experimental style.

Colombia in the 1940s and 1950s

Colombia has had a long history of violent political strife between its two main parties, the liberals and the conservatives, but the era of the 1940s and 1950s was particularly volatile. The political environment had been tense since a large strike in 1928 ended in violence, and tensions increased during World War II, which Colombia entered on the side of the allies. In the 1940s a liberal politician named Jorge Eliécer Gaitán rose to power on the platform that he would support peasants and the poor, and in 1947 Gaitán became the leader of the liberal party when they gained control of the congress. In 1948, however, Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá, and the city erupted into riots in which thousands of people were killed.

In the series of events that followed, both parties organized guerilla armies that swept through the land and terrorized civilians. This period, called "La Violencia," continued when, in 1953, a military coup placed General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in power. A bipartisan coalition formed a provisional government in 1958, but not before over

150,000 people had died in La Violencia. "Eyes of a Blue Dog" was written at the height of these tensions, and, although it does not directly address political themes, its author was very politically active at the time. In fact, García Márquez, like other writers and intellectuals, was compelled to leave Colombia in the mid-1950s because he feared the consequences of challenging the government in his journalism and fiction.

Critical Overview

Although García Márquez's body of work has inspired an enormous amount of critical recognition and praise, the stories of his early period have not received the amount of attention that his later novels have. As Raymond L. Williams points out in his discussion of the author in *Twayne's World Author Series Online*: "The stories from the 1947—1952 period are mostly unknown beyond the Hispanic world and relatively ignored by critics, even among Hispanists." "Eyes of a Blue Dog" is no exception to this rule; in fact, the Peruvian fiction and prose writer Mario Vargas Llosa notes in his 1971 book, *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio* (*García Márquez: The Story of a Deicide*), that in style and structure the story is the weakest of the period.

In his 1990 biography, *García Márquez: The Man and His Work*, Gene H. Bell-Villada suggests that in 1950 García Márquez was writing under the "lopsided spell" of Czech writer Franz Kafka's short stories, arguing that "Eyes of a Blue Dog" is a "strangely dark" story "depicting individuals trapped within their . . . heads." Later in his biographical study, however, Bell-Villada cites "Eyes of a Blue Dog" as one of the "sweeter and more touching" stories of a group that he finds "brooding and morose," and he characterizes the narrator's relationship with the woman as a "passionate amour." Raymond L. Williams also comments briefly on the outside influences of "Eyes of a Blue Dog," arguing that its central relationship "portrays a situation reflecting French existentialist literature: its point of departure is two persons isolated in a room."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Trudell is an independent scholar with a bachelor's degree in English literature. In the following essay, Trudell discusses García Márquez's portrayal of the unconscious mind in his story, highlighting the story's commentary on erotic desire.

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of "Eyes of a Blue Dog" is the intense, frustrated passion between its narrator and the woman of his dreams. Their desire for each other is "impossible" and will never be consummated, yet they repeat their desperate meetings anyway, with incredible urgency. From the opening moment of the story, when they spend minutes simply looking at each other, to the final moment, despite the woman's sad acknowledgement that the narrator will never remember her when awake, they are subject to mysterious and overpowering desires. Although they do not seem to have any coherent explanation, these erotic desires are the central forces in the narrator's unconscious mind, and it is clear that they are among his most fundamental emotions. This essay will argue that the complex, desperate, and frustrated love between the narrator and the woman is characteristic of the new ways in which writers were beginning to think about unconscious desire in the 1950s.

Unlike modernist writers, whose view of the unconscious mind tended to be influenced by the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, García Márquez was writing during a period in which the unconscious was no longer considered to operate in a world of straightforward symbolism. Linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan contributed to the view that the unconscious responded not simply to universal symbols but complex systems of meaning and representation that do not necessarily have a basis in the real world. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, therefore, as a new view of human psychology was emerging, many writers began experimenting with innovative ways of representing the unconscious in their work. Although García Márquez has always been wary of subscribing to critical theory, he and his contemporaries were inevitably influenced by this new, more complex understanding of the unconscious.

Multilayered psychological complexity is immediately apparent in "Eyes of a Blue Dog," which does not treat the dream world as a by-product of childhood trauma represented by universal symbolism. Instead, the narrator's dream world is a mysterious phenomenon that is not the source of any system of symbols or encoded meanings that can be applied to the narrator's conscious life. In fact, the story does not have much, if any, connection to reality at all; the only traces of the narrator's waking life in the narrative are the suggestion of a spoon dropping and the sound of someone sleeping. Like the woman's efforts to write "Eyes of a blue dog" everywhere she goes, however, it is possible that these are merely small traces that have escaped from another layer of dreaming. As she says when she is wondering why she cannot remember the city in which she lives: "It's just that sometimes I think that I've dreamed that too." This moment suggests that the narrator and the woman are disconnected from the real world, caught in an endless, layered system of unconscious meaning.

The woman's awareness that she may merely have dreamt about writing her and the narrator's phrase all over the city is one of the most striking examples of the dream world's separation from reality, but, on closer examination, it becomes clear that García Márquez makes reference to additional layers of dreaming throughout the story. One important example is the mysterious ambiguity about the history and locations of the narrator and the woman's meetings. When the woman reveals that the narrator invented their identifying phrase "on the first day," and when she remembers hazily that they must have "met in other dreams" as opposed to in real life, she implies that she is not a representation or symbol of something or someone in the real world. Also, when the narrator mentions that their relationship "was subordinated to things, to the simplest of happenings," it suggests that their relationship does not affect these actual things and happenings, but is completely separate from them. Perhaps the clearest evidence that the dream world is entirely distanced from reality, however, is the fact that the narrator cannot remember "anything of what he's dreamed after he wakes up."

Since the narrator's erotic relationship with the woman is at the center of his unconscious world, this new vision of the unconscious, which distances the narrator and the woman's relationship from real life and views their passion as locked within a labyrinth of layered memory and significance, allows García Márquez to comment on the themes of love and desire in a new and exciting manner. Erotic desire is not, here, a forbidden manifestation of childhood desires for a parent, like that of a piece of fiction influenced by Freudian theory. Instead, "Eyes of a Blue Dog" portrays desire as an internal, contained, unconscious phenomenon that is impossible to satisfy in real life. The narrator is unable to be with his lover outside of his dream world because she is an unattainable by-product of his mind's unique and untranslatable longings.

One important piece of evidence to support this claim is the narrator's insistence on turning his chair away from the woman and his ability to see her without looking at her. The narrator describes the wall as "another blind mirror in which I couldn't see her," which is a confusing and ambiguous statement but nevertheless an apt description of how the narrator sees and feels the woman's presence without even needing to look at her, though he is still fundamentally distanced from her. This contradiction is developed further by the narrator's description of the woman seeing him "in the depths of the mirror, my face turned toward the wall." The idea of the "depths of the mirror," an image that emphasizes the many layers of dreams and worlds of meaning through which the narrator and the woman experience each other, suggests that the narrator's understanding of the woman is in fact a reflection of himself and his own distinctive desires. In other words, the object of the narrator's erotic desire is nothing more than a reflection of a reflection of himself.

García Márquez does not mean to imply that the narrator is abnormally narcissistic or self-absorbed, but that an attraction to a dream ideal of one's own creation is a central fact of unconscious desire. It is no surprise that this desire is full of unresolved frustration and confusion, because the narrator can never satisfy his desire for his own fantasy. The narrator cannot even seem to understand or remember the baffling contradictions of his unconscious life, so it is natural that García Márquez would characterize his attempt to break through all of the layers of meaning that divide him

from the object of his desire as "impossible." Perhaps this is why the narrator expresses a desire to see the woman "with the skin of [her] belly full of deep pits, as if [she]'d been beaten." The violent aspect of their relationship is an expression of the desperation they feel. This may also explain why the flame of the lamp and the narrator's cigarette are recurring images. A tool both of violence and of the warmth that brings them together, fire serves as a useful emblem for the contradictory emotions of their relationship.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" does not abandon the narrator and the woman's relationship as hopeless, and García Márquez is careful to highlight their intense connection. Descriptions of the woman's "clenched fists" and "tightened teeth" emphasize her passion, and there is a glimmer of hope that they will come together, when the narrator's cigarette seems to warm her. When the narrator is telling her he wants to touch her for the first time and when, while she is like "yellow, soft, malleable copper," the narrator seems ready actually to touch her, there is a great deal of hope for a release from the tension of their frustrated desire. The narrator has extraordinarily tender feelings for the woman, which is why he is frightened to see her trembling, and there is even the sense that, given the intensity of their desire for each other, nothing could compare to it or override it.

Because he is inspired by the period's revelations about the complex mysteries of the unconscious, however, García Márquez denies the narrator and the woman any true moment of togetherness, and he consistently renders their love "subordinated" to reality. The woman's "surrender to the impossible, the unreachable" at the end of the story reasserts the inevitable, vast distances between individuals that are characteristic of post-Freudian psychological theory. The narrator and the woman have a desperate and passionate desire for each other, stemming from the most basic of unconscious feelings, but it is ultimately impossible and unreal because it is buried in the impenetrable layers of the narrator's own mind. García Márquez recognizes advances in psychological theory and maintains that, because it is rooted in the narrator's unconscious, such a deep passion cannot be reciprocated.

Source: Scott Trudell, Critical Essay on "Eyes of a Blue Dog," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Holm is a short story and novel author, as well as a freelance writer. In this essay, Holm looks at García Márquez's use of surrealism, magic realism, and other writing techniques that give this story its dreamlike quality.

Gabriel García Márquez is widely recognized as a writer of magic realism. Magic realism blends the fantastic with the ordinary, mundane details of everyday life. In "Eyes of a Blue Dog," Márquez uses magic realism techniques, surrealism, and other literary crafts to give this story its dreamlike quality. This is particularly appropriate because the story occurs within the combined dream reality of the two main characters. Although one could argue that the story is not true magic realism, since it does not take place in everyday, conscious reality, many surreal and magic realism elements are present in this example of Márquez's storytelling.

Márquez gives the reader immediate hints that this story will be not about the typical reality of everyday experience. In the first paragraph, the narrator refers to the woman's "slippery and oily" look. It is a strange way to describe a glance, and suggests a hint of darkness and otherworldliness, very much like a dream. When the man sees the woman's eyelids "lighted up as on every night," the reader again is given a clue that this will be a story out of the ordinary. Eyes may light up, but eyelids usually do not. Yet Márquez has provided this information in a subtle way. Not only are eyelids lighting up, but they are lighting up every night. The author describes the woman's "great hot coal eyes," rather than using a more cliched description such as "bright eyes" or "smoldering eyes." "Hot coal eyes" also suggests otherworldliness, darkness, and night□the time of the dream. Márquez's descriptions are packed with information, yet it is given to the reader gradually, letting the reader figure out that these characters are going through a repeated, shared dream sequence, in which extraordinary phenomena may occur. With these subtle nuances and details, Márquez avoids insulting his reader by stating things too obviously. The reader is allowed to gradually discover the story as it unfolds.

By the second paragraph, the astute reader will probably figure out that this story is, indeed, taking place in dreamtime. The woman gives the reader a clue when she says, "I'm afraid that someone is dreaming about this room and revealing my secrets." This is the first time in the story that dreaming is explicitly mentioned. When the man says, "Maybe the sheet fell off," Márquez is making it clear to the reader that the man (and the woman) are indeed straddling two realities□their shared dream and the ordinary reality that they occupy. And this is exciting territory for a reader to occupy; to imagine and experience being in dreamtime, even collaborating with the characters' experience of dreamtime, while maintaining a blurry awareness of the "real" world. In ordinary reality, the woman's fear that someone is dreaming about her room might seem like a paranoid delusion. But in Márquez's surreal landscape, strange statements such as these are juxtaposed continuously with the details of everyday life (the "harsh, strong smoke" of a cigarette, a pink mother-of-pearl makeup box, the "clean, new tiles of the drugstore"). If someone else is dreaming about the room and revealing the woman's secrets, why is it that other characters never appear in the room? Márquez seems to suggest that other

people's dreams lurk right outside the door in the hallway, but perhaps these two characters are able to create boundaries around their shared dream that exclude others. In the world of magic realism, the surreal is continuously contrasted with the ordinary. People dream; people are conscious of and can sense the ordinary world around them (cold, heat, sheets coming off). But Márquez's use of magic realism in this story makes it possible for these two characters to share a dream-world, where they will continue to meet in the dreams they intentionally create.

Above and beyond the use of magic realism, Márquez uses many techniques to give this story a surreal, otherworldly, and dreamlike quality. Dreams often do not make sense, and do not follow the rules and conventions of ordinary life (much like magic realism). The characters' first exchange is an important clue to acclimate the reader to the surreal possibilities of the story, prompting the reader to expect more.

It was then that I remembered the usual thing, when I said to her: "Eyes of a blue dog." Without taking her hand off the lamp she said to me: "That. We'll never forget that." She left the orbit, sighing: "Eyes of a blue dog. I've written it everywhere."

In the real world, apparent strangers do not usually greet each other this way. Gradually, the reader learns that these characters do know each other, though the woman always starts out remembering more than the man. But with the initial presentation of such strange dialog, the reader is directed to expect more surrealism. Márquez, with this dialog presentation and the other surreal hints that have already been given (eyelids that light up, slippery and oily gazes), is directing the reader to suspend his or her disbelief and to accept that the world in this story is both ordinary and out of the ordinary.

Márquez's use of prose also gives "Eyes of a Blue Dog" a surreal, dreamlike tone. The author's paragraphs are longer than what is often found in contemporary fiction. This has the effect of giving the paragraphs a run-on, stream-of-consciousness quality, much like the progression of a dream. Márquez seems to ignore a modern-day writing convention that involves creating a new paragraph whenever a new character begins to speak, or when characters cease speaking and the prose returns to narrative. The author may be deliberately ignoring this writing convention. When a reader sees a paragraph break, he or she inserts a mental pause. When prose with paragraph breaks is read out loud, the reader inserts an implied pause between paragraphs. "Eyes of a Blue Dog" would read and would flow much differently if the author had used more paragraph breaks around dialog. In this example, the woman and the man talk, unimpeded by the formation of new paragraphs. It gives their words a sense of flowing into each other and unraveling; much like the fluidity of a dream. Perhaps also, since it is a shared dream, it makes sense to not separate each speaker with a paragraph break. Perhaps the author is using this technique as another subtle allusion to a shared dream experience:

And she said: "It's like□what do you call it□laminated metal." She drew closer to the lamp. "I would have liked to hear you," I said. And she said: "If we find each other

sometime, put your ear to my ribs when I sleep." I heard her breathe heavily as she talked. And she said that for years she'd done nothing different.

Imagine how differently this would read with conventional paragraph breaks:

And she said: "It's like□what do you call it□laminated metal." She drew closer to the lamp.

"I would have liked to hear you," I said.

These characters occupy a completely shared experience. Even when they are not using direct dialog, sentences often follow into one another. A sentence that starts "And she said . . ." is followed by a sentence starting with "I heard her . . ." It is as if the author is suggesting that these two people are almost, at least in this dream-world, one entity.

The author also uses the word "and" at the beginning of sentences to give his narrative a fluid quality. In the segment quoted below, which includes dialog, imagine how different the tone of the story would be if these sentences started without "and," and a new paragraph started each time a different character spoke. Such a conventional approach would work for a realistic, fast-paced suspense story, but it would change the tone of "Eyes of a Blue Dog" completely.

And over the flame she held the same long and tremulous hand that she had been warming before sitting down at the mirror. And she said: "You don't feel the cold." And I said to her: "Sometimes." And she said to me: "You must feel it now." And then I understood why I couldn't have been alone in the seat.

In "Eyes of a Blue Dog" the reader never learns the names of the characters and is only given a description of the woman. This may also be a deliberate choice by the author to add to the surrealism of the story. Names carry associations for readers, and might ground the characters more firmly in readers' imaginations, making characters seem more conventionally real. Naming the characters would also bring the reader closer to the characters, as would more physical description. If the characters are not named and not fully described, the story is slightly distanced from the reader, adding to the tone of unearthliness that already permeates the story. And even though Márquez describes the woman, her description actually enhances the surreal elements. She is, after all, the one with the eyelids that glow and the "hot coal eyes." Her otherworldly "eyes of ash" inspired the man to create the strange, signature phrase "eyes of a blue dog." The odd phrase (and the women's eyes) is simply accepted without question by both characters. In magic realism, strange happenings or odd situations (or phrases, in this case) are accepted as normal. Waiters bow reverently when the woman approaches them saying nothing more than "eyes of a blue dog." All these surreal events add to the otherworldly quality of the story.

Still more evidence of magic realism shows up throughout the story. The woman changes from "hard and cold metal" to "yellow, soft, malleable copper." The characters smell the freshness of the country outside the room, in the hallway. The man's cigarette

butt seemingly dissolves into nothingness. The man says, "the butt had disappeared between my fingers. I'd forgotten that I was smoking." It is as if his forgetting that he was smoking caused the cigarette to disappear; as if his thoughts could control this version of reality. The man's other dreams also control the reality of this dream□pieces of a former dream (involving a woman who longs for the country) lurk outside the room in a hallway. Somehow the woman with the "eyes of a blue dog" understands this. Somehow both this man and woman have shared pieces of previous dreams above and beyond their shared, repetitive dream. This makes sense in terms of conscious reality, but in this story, the reader has already been asked to suspend disbelief. In the surreal world of the dream landscape that Márquez has created, much is possible. At the same time, the use of surrealism relates to and advances this story, and does not jar the reader out of the story.

Joseph Epstein, writing in *Commentary*, claims that Márquez's writing improved once the author added the element of politics to his writing. Epstein calls Márquez's earlier works, including "Eyes of a Blue Dog," "dryly abstract and bleak." While "Eyes of a Blue Dog" may not resemble the full blown magic realism of Márquez's later work, it is easy to see the influence of surrealism and magic realism in this story.

Source: Catherine Dybiec Holm, Critical Essay on "Eyes of a Blue Dog," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #3

Kerschen is a freelance writer and adjunct college English instructor. In this essay, Kerschen examines an early short story of García Márquez that uses magical realism to express the fluidity between dreams and reality as well as the impossibility of crossing the border from dreams into reality.

Magical realism is a unique literary style that developed among Latin American writers. The term "magical realism" was coined in 1925 by Franz Roh, a German art critic who was trying to describe a visual response to the inexplicable aspects of reality. In the 1940s, Latin American writers took up the style. Its most notable explanation came in a 1949 essay by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. Eventually, Gabriel García Márquez, the 1982 Nobel laureate and native of Columbia, would popularize this branch of literature through his internationally acclaimed works, especially *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in English in 1970. Magical realism combines the rational with the supernatural by setting fantastic events in the normal world. It is a paradoxical literary technique that attempts a truer reality than conventional realism will allow.

Garcia Marquez first began experimenting with magical realism in his short stories. "Eyes of a Blue Dog," written in 1950, is an early example of his ability, as described by literary critic Susan de Carvalho, to create a world where, "[r]eality and fantasy are inseparable, described with no change of tone, no narrative incredulity." He intricately weaves together the dream world with our perceptions of waking life, thus making "the separation between dream and reality" "as unclear as is the separation between life and death." Through this technique he explores every human being's innate need for love, for a connection to another, and the emptiness that can be consuming without love. In "Eyes of a Blue Dog," Garcia Marquez presents very real human dilemmas through the lens of a surreal dream.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" is set in a room where a man is sitting in a chair and staring at a woman as she warms her hands over a lamp. Although readers discover later, at the end of the long second paragraph, that the man is dreaming, the story does not initially make this situation obvious. In fact, Garcia Marquez grounds his opening imagery in solid, concrete descriptions: a cigarette, the "harsh, strong smoke," the "chair, balancing on one of the rear legs," the lamp, the woman's "long and quiet hand," the dressing table, and the "mathematical light." All are familiar and tangible images that draw readers into the story and orient us to the scene. The image of the man balancing in his chair implies gravity and weight, and the possibility that these two things could work against him and tip him over. The cigarette and smoke remind us that the man is breathing and the lamp tells us that the woman can feel cold. In a dream, of course, things such as gravity, heat, and cold do not really exist, but the author is purposely trying to establish this fictive world on firm, realistic ground before he takes the readers to places they are not expecting. He locates the "realism" before he explores the "magical."

The first hints of the actual location of the characters begin to come in the second paragraph when the man and the woman discuss the coldness of the room. The man says, "Now I feel it . . . [and] it's strange because the night is quiet. Maybe the sheet fell off." This statement is incongruous with the already given information because there has so far been no other mention of a sheet. The statement acts as a small hint of what is to come. The man is aware of something beyond what he sees and is in fact aware that he is really in bed asleep. If he feels cold, it must be because his sheet is no longer covering his body, not because there is a lack of warmth in the room in which he currently perceives himself to be. Thus the readers become cognizant that all is not what they might have originally expected.

It is at the end of the second paragraph and the beginning of the third that the readers realize that these two people are visiting each other in a dream. They have, in fact, seen each other in dreams for several years and are trying to find one another in their waking lives as well. The woman uses the phrase "Eyes of a blue dog" to help her find "the man of her dreams"□writing it on walls, saying it aloud as she walks, desperately hoping he will hear her and recognize her. However, he always forgets the phrase upon waking from the dream and, therefore, does not remember to look for her. Each is trapped in an unending attempt to merge their dreams with reality, finding that they do not have the capacity to do so.

The dream-versus-reality motif allows Garcia Marquez to explore deeper meanings and themes of the common human existence. The search that drives these two characters is representative of the universal search for connection□the search for love. Without it, the characters are left feeling listless and, as scholar Raymond Williams explains, their "stark surroundings are matched by their frigid dialogue." Indeed, even though they are in the same dream room together, and though they talk about their desire to meet each other in their waking life, the characters are unable to connect. The man reclines in his chair, facing the wall, as the woman sits in front of the dressing table mirror, yet as he stares at the wall he believes he can see her putting on her lipstick. He sees her, and yet he doesn't see her. She is there in the room with him, and yet he turns away. The man attempts to touch the woman and finds that he can't. The woman tells him, "You'll ruin everything," and slowly he realizes he is about to wake up. Just as they are about to make contact, they are forced to end the dream. The man tries to reassure himself that they will have another chance, for "all we have to do is turn the pillow over in order to meet again," but the woman knows another effort will be just as futile. She knows he is "the only man in the world who doesn't remember anything of what he's dreamed after he wakes up." These two people seek connection, and yet they have no hope of making their dreams a reality.

The female character in this story seems particularly invested in finding and making a connection with the man. She goes to great lengths, both in the dream world and in her description of reality, to find and make herself available to the male character. Her nudity throughout most of the story is a symbol of her vulnerability and of her willingness to share herself completely. In her effort to connect, she removes every boundary she can. Her makeup, a symbol of femininity, is meant to attract him, and in her waking life she is even willing to humiliate herself in her quest to find this man she sees only in her

dreams. While in a drugstore one day, she becomes convinced that the man is near, so she writes "Eyes of a blue dog" in red lipstick on the floor tiles. The store clerk makes her clean it up, so she spends "the whole afternoon on all fours, washing the tiles and saying: 'Eyes of a blue dog,' until people gathered at the door and said she was crazy." Yet none of these efforts are enough to rid her of her emptiness. She feels hollow to the point that she doesn't even recognize herself as human anymore; as she says, "Sometimes I think I'm made of metal." She sees herself as no more than a cold, lifeless, impenetrable shell, and she pins her hopes on finding this man who will be able to warm her. Yet in the end, with "a smile of surrender to the impossible, the unreachable," she knows she will never see him anywhere but in her dreams.

Toni Morrison and Salmon Rushdie are just two of many world-famous authors who have used magical realism in their works. Like Garcia Marquez, they too have been able to create a world where, as Carvalho says, "characters simply adjust their lives to incorporate unforeseen and, for the reader, bizarre circumstances." A common theme that has emerged in magical realism is the use of cyclical rather than linear time. This device causes events to occur over and over again without the characters ever achieving the goals they seek. Such is the situation in "Eyes of a Blue Dog," yet this strange world addresses interesting aspects of emotion and interaction outside the bounds of standard narrative. "Eyes of a Blue Dog" breaks the boundaries between dreams and reality and thus reminds us of the extent to which these two states of being are truly intertwined.

Source: Lois Kerschen, Critical Essay on "Eyes of a Blue Dog," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Topics for Further Study

García Márquez's collection *Eyes of a Blue Dog* (1972), anthologized in *Collected Stories* (1984), contains eleven short stories written between 1947 and 1955. Read the other ten of these stories, and compare them to "Eyes of a Blue Dog." How do the stories compare in style and structure? How do they differ? What makes "Eyes of a Blue Dog" unique? Choose one story and compare it in depth to "Eyes of a Blue Dog."

Many critics would characterize "Eyes of a Blue Dog" as experimental in style and form. Discuss what, in your opinion, makes the story experimental, citing examples from the text. How does the story challenge you as a reader? How does it ask you to interpret the language and events of the story differently from other short stories you have read? How is it experimental in comparison to the other fiction of the 1950s? Describe why you think García Márquez is interested in experimentation, and discuss the results of his innovative stylistic approach.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" is a fantasy about the unconscious dream world, so it lends itself to examination from the standpoint of psychological theory. Familiarize yourself with the basic psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, and describe how García Márquez reflects or refutes these theories in his story. Or, do some research into the psychological theory that was in vogue in the 1950s, such as that of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and apply what you have learned to "Eyes of a Blue Dog." You may also choose to approach the story from the perspective of contemporary psychology, discussing the insights of the story that cohere, or do not cohere, with modern understandings of the unconscious. As you form your answer, think about the ways in which García Márquez's style inspires his reader to visualize the unconscious.

"Eyes of a Blue Dog" does not appear to have much political subtext, but it was written during a tense and violent point in Colombian history, at which time García Márquez was working as a journalist. Read about La Violencia in Colombia and about García Márquez's life in the 1940s and 1950s. What were the effects of this social climate on artists and writers of the era? How did La Violencia affect García Márquez's other writings, and how did Colombian writers and intellectuals during this period affect the country's history? Describe the place of a story like "Eyes of a Blue Dog" in this atmosphere. How might politics have affected García Márquez's writing process? Can you see any traces of the political environment in "Eyes of a Blue Dog?" If so, describe them; if not, discuss why not.

Compare and Contrast

1950: The Hispanic avant-garde movement, which will inspire Latin American writers for decades, is gathering momentum. Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges are currently writing some of their most exciting material.

Today: Latin American literature continues to make use of fantasy and myth, but this style no longer dominates the literary scene.

1950: Violence rages throughout Colombia. By 1953, more than 150,000 Colombians will have died as a result of the violent civil conflict that erupted after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

Today: Because of ruthless right-wing paramilitaries and Marxist guerillas who engage in the kidnapping and drug trades, violence remains prevalent in Colombia, particularly in rural areas.

1950: Psychological theory about the workings of the unconscious mind is heavily influenced by French theorists such as Jacques Lacan, who is applying advances in modern linguistics to the field of psychology.

Today: Behavioral and structural research into the makeup of the brain, assisted by new imaging technology, is providing a wealth of insight into psychology.

1950: García Márquez has recently dropped out of law school and is working as a journalist for a prominent Colombian paper during a tense political period.

Today: Nearing the end of his monumental career, García Márquez is battling lymphatic cancer and working on volume 2 of his memoirs, traveling between Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Cartagena, Colombia.

What Do I Read Next?

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) is García Márquez's masterpiece of magic realism. Tracing the history of a family in a small Colombian town, the work incorporates elements of mythical fantasy, the supernatural, and political commentary into its compelling narrative.

Richard Linklater's animated film *Waking Life* (2001) follows a man through a dream world in which he contemplates questions about meaning, perception, and human existence.

The House of the Spirits, which first appeared in English in 1985, is Isabel Allende's first widely successful novel, and through a sophisticated use of magic realism it tells the story of four women characters that have various kinds of relationships with the passionate and violent Esteban Trueba.

Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) is an intriguing mystery tale as well as an exploration of philosophical questions about time, perception, and meaning.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, written in 1915 but not published in English until 1937, is the elusive and fascinating story of a man's transformation into an insect.

Further Study

García Márquez, Gabriel, *Living to Tell the Tale*, translated by Edith Grossman, Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

In this vivid memoir (volume 1 in a projected series of three), García Márquez deals with the time period spanning his birth through 1955.

McGuirk, Bernard, "Characterization in the Early Fiction of Gabriel García Márquez," in *Gabriel García Márquez: New Readings*, edited by Bernard McGuirk and Richard Cardwell, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 5—16.

McGuirk's book provides an interesting discussion of the characterization techniques in García Márquez's early short stories, although it does not mention "Eyes of a Blue Dog" specifically.

Pelayo, Rubén, *Gabriel García Márquez: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 2001.

This work offers a useful blend of contextual information and criticism on the author.

Penuel, Arnold M., *Intertextuality in García Márquez*, Spanish Literature Publications Company, 1994.

Penuel's text discusses the influence of postmodern theory on García Márquez's works.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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