The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World Study Guide

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World by Gabriel García Márquez

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Introduction

Gabriel Garcia Marquez began writing fiction as a young journalist in Bogota, Colombia, in the late 1940s. His masterpiece, *Cien anos de soledad {One Hundred Years of Solitude),* received worldwide critical acclaim when it was published, first in Spanish in 1967 and then in translation after 1970. Many of his short stories were written before this novel, but were not published collectively until 1972 or later. Thus, readers and critics were already familiar with his style when they read "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," one of the short stories published in *Leaf Storm and Other Stories* in 1972.

Garcia Marquez, considered by many to be Colombia's foremost writer, has gained much of his recognition by writing stories that operate on a mythical, almost allegorical, level. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" takes this type of storytelling into a realm of the fantastic that seems to have no connection to a particular time or place. Nevertheless, Garcia Marquez has been influenced by his upbringing in a coastal Colombian village during the turbulent 1930s. While drawing direct parallels between specific locations and time periods is possible, the nature of Garcia Marquez's work is such that readers can understand his characters not only as inhabitants of a local village but, simultaneously, as universal examples of the human race as well, "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" has always interested critics, both thors who interpret the story as a comment on Colombian history or politics and those who seek more global applications for the lessons the story imparts. Many post-modern writers have shown interest in Garcia Marquez's work as well. They include Chilean writer Isabelle Allende and American writer Toni Morrison, both of whom have adapted Garcia Marquez's magic realism approach in their own works.

Author Biography

Born in 1928, Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez spent the first eight years of his life in the small Colombian village of Aracataca. His grandmother cultivated his imagination with fantastic stories of Colombian history and myth. Her influence, combined with the superstitions and myths of the townspeople, provided the writer with a rich background from- which he created his fiction. Upon returning to Aracataca some years later, Garcia Marquez found the town suffering from many years of economic and social decline. A sense of nostalgia for his first home spurred his sense of history and his desire to preserve the great myths and stories of his childhood.

Garcia Marquez attended the University of Bogota. In 1948 it closed down due to civil warfare, and he transferred to the University of Cartegena and entered the journalism field. He eventually left school to pursue this career full time, publishing short pieces of fiction in addition to news stories. His first novella, La hojarasca was published in 1955. It was translated into English in 1972 as the title piece in *Leaf Storm and Other Stories*, which included the translation of' "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World." Meanwhile, Garcia Marquez's journalism had become increasingly political. After writing a series of articles exposing the carrying of contraband cargo by the Colombian navy, he moved to Europe to avoid the wratfi of the government.

Most of Garcia Marquez's short stories were written in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Many of these were collected and published in 1972 under such titles as *Ojos de perro azul (Eyes of a Blue Dog),* and *La incredible y triste historia de la Candida Erendira y de su abuela desalmada (The Incredible and Sad Story of Poor Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother),* Critics generally considered these works unconventional because of their use of such experimental techniques as multiple narrators, shifting points of view, and fantastic events. Another collection, *Los funerales de la Mama Grande (The Funeral of Big Mama),* found an enthusiastic audience who admired its use of archetypal, mythical characters who function in timeless, often nameless, places.

Garcia Marquez remains best known, however, for his many novels. He achieved worldwide fame for his 1967 masterpiece *den anos de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude),* which tells the history of the fictional village of Macondo, based on the real history of Aracataca. After living in Paris, and then returning to Colombia, Garcia Marquez settled in Mexico, where he now resides. He is widely considered Colombia's foremost writer. In 1982 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, an indication of his worldwide reputation.

Plot Summary

"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" begins when the children of a small coastal village see an unfamiliar bulge in the sea. When it washes up on the beach they realize it is a drowned man. For the rest of the afternoon they play with the corpse until another villager sees them and tells the rest of the villagers. The men of the village then carry the body to the nearest house, remarking that he weighs almost as much as a horse. He is also taller than other men and barely fits in the house.

The tiny village sits on the cliff of a sparsely vegetated cape. The villagers twenty or so houses have stone courtyards in which no flowers grow. That evening the men travel to neighboring villages to see if any of them will claim the dead stranger. While they are gone the women of the village care for the drowned man, noticing that the vegetation growing on him comes from distant oceans and that his clothes are tattered. He also seems proud. Not until they finish cleaning the body do the women see how awesome a man he is. He is the most supreme example of a man they have ever seen—the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built.

He is so large that nothing in the village will fit him: not a bed, a table, nor a set of clothes. The women decide to make him pants from a sail and a shirt from fine bridal linen so they can bury him with dignity. As they sew, they begin to create a fantasy about the man. They think that if such a man lived among them, doors would be wider, ceilings higher, floors and bedsteads stronger, and his wife would be the happiest woman. The man could call fish out of the sea and make flowers grow on the dry cliffs. Even now, because of him, the wind is steadier than ever and the sea more restless. The women secretly compare him to their own men, who suddenly seem the weakest, meanest, and most useless people.

They name him Esteban, further personalizing him. They realize that he will have to be dragged along the ground to be buried in the sea. That is when they realize how unhappy he must have been with his body while he was alive. He would have been forever ducking under doorways and hitting his head on the ceiling. When visiting people, he would have had to stand in order not to break his guests' furniture, and he would have never known if people were being polite to him simply because they feared his size. When the women cover his face with a handkerchief he looks so irrevocably dead—and so much like their own men would look—that they cry for him, and he becomes the most destitute, most peaceful, and most obliging man on earth.

The men return at dawn with the news that Esteban is not from any of the neighboring villages, and the women rejoice that he belongs to them. The men want to throw the body into the sea and get rid of the intruder, but the more they hurry, the more excuses the women come up with to keep him. One of the men finally expresses anger that the women are making such a fuss over a stranger, and the women remove the handkerchief covering Esteban's face. With one look, the men can see Esteban's shame at his size and for disrupting them. The villagers, now united, hold a splendid funeral for Esteban. The village is filled with flowers and neighbors who have heard of

the drowned man. Saddened at having to lose him, the villagers choose a family for him and make everyone his kin. Their sadness is so powerful that sailors at sea who hear their weeping run off course. After Esteban is gone, they know there will always be one missing among them.

The villagers now see the barrenness of their village and their lives. After the funeral, they decide to change things: they will build bigger houses so Esteban's memory will have no trouble visiting; they will paint their homes to honor his memory; and they will plant flowers on the cliffs so that in the future passengers on ocean liners will smell the aroma and the captains of the ships will point to their roses and say; "That's Esteban's village."

Summary

"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is a short story about the body of a dead man that washed ashore in a town that desperately needed something to believe in. Through the literary effect of magical realism, the drowned man comes to symbolize all the beauty of life.

The children first saw the body that washed upon the shore. When they initially spotted it, the children thought it was an enemy ship or a whale, but when they removed the seaweed and other ocean debris that had become attached during its journey, there was no mistaking the fact that the large object was indeed a human body.

The children played with the body all afternoon and were stopped only when a passing adult happened to see them. Word that there was a body on the beach spread quickly throughout the village and, before long, the dead man was taken to the nearest house. The men who moved the man noticed that he was heavier than any body they had carried before, which caused them to assume that he had been floating in the sea for a long time. Because he was very tall, the villagers wondered if some people had the ability to continue growing even in death.

The village was quite small, about twenty houses in all. Because of this, all the residents knew each other and it did not take long for the residents to know that the dead man was not one of their own. The village was situated on a small cape with little land and no flowers. Because there was little spare land, villagers that died were buried at sea.

When night came, the men did not go out to work at sea as they normally did. Instead, they went to the neighboring villages to see if there was anyone missing. Meanwhile, the women of the village remained behind to clean the drowned man's body. As they removed the vegetation that had attached to him during his journey, they noticed that the plants and grasses were from faraway oceans. They also noticed that not only did he have a peaceful look on his face, but also that he was quite possibly the strongest and best built man they had ever seen.

Because the man was so big, the villagers had trouble finding a suitable manner in which to hold his wake. There was no bed big enough in the entire village, nor were there clothes that would fit him. As a result, the women decided to make him clothes from a piece of sail and some bridal linen. As they sewed his clothes, each woman wondered in silence what it would have been like to have the man live among them; they supposed his home would have been the biggest in the village and that his wife would have been the happiest woman in the entire village. They also imagined that he would have had the ability to draw water from the barren ground and that their village would be adorned with flowers. As the woman imagined all the great deeds this dead man could have accomplished, they dismissed their own husbands as weak, incapable men.

The women's thoughts were eventually interrupted by the oldest among them who pronounced that the man should be called "Esteban." While most of the women agreed with this decision, there were some who imagined him to be "Lautaro;" nonetheless, they conceded to the old woman's wishes and began to refer to the dead man as "Esteban."

After the women were finished dressing the man, they began to dread the thought of dragging him along the ground when the time came to give him his at-sea burial. As they contemplated this, they began to imagine how the man's size must have affected his life: having to duck his head through doorways, and always opting to stand during visits rather than risk breaking a chair. They imagined how people must have pitied him for his size.

The women's despair became even more pronounced when they covered the man's face with a handkerchief. With his face covered, there was no mistaking the fact that the man was dead and this brought many of the women to tears. Their tears turned to jubilation when the men of the village returned with the news that the drowned man was not known in any of the neighboring villages.

The men were puzzled by this reaction; for to them, the drowned man was just another thing to be dealt with. Anxious to dispose of him before the heat of the day bore down on them, the men began the task of constructing a device on which to carry the man to the cliff. They pondered whether they should tie a ship's anchor to him so that there would be no chance of his returning to their shore. Yet, as anxious as the men were to complete their task, the women found ways to delay the burial. They spent so much time decorating the drowned man's body with relics and other items that the men began to voice their impatience. In response to this, one of the women lifted the handkerchief from the dead man's face, an act that left the men as awestruck as the women by the drowned man's presence.

Now that they are united in their purpose, the men and women set out to hold the most spectacular funeral that the village had ever experienced. One woman went to a neighboring village for flowers and returned with another woman who had come to see the drowned man. This set off a steady stream of visitors and curiosity-seekers, all of whom came bearing flowers. Soon, there were so many flowers in the tiny village that it was difficult to walk.

Wanting to ensure that the drowned man had a family, the villagers selected a mother and father for him as well as aunts, uncles and cousins from among the village's remaining residents. When the time came to return the man to the sea, many fought for the privilege of carrying him to the cliff. As they walked with the drowned man through the village they became aware, perhaps for the first time, of how desolate and barren their streets really were.

Despite their earlier insistence that they would tie the heaviest anchor they could find to the drowned man, they reconsidered so that the man could come back whenever he wished. As they threw the drowned man back into the sea, they did so with the

realization that he would forever be a part of them and that from this moment on, their village would no longer be complete. They also knew that Esteban's memory would forever remain with them. They would ensure this by painting their homes bright colors, digging for springs to irrigate their barren land so that they could adorn the village with more flowers than one could possibly imagine. They would do this all in the hope that, in years to come, their little village would become known as the place where Esteban lived.

Analysis

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is a short story that explores the dichotomy of life and death.

On the surface, this story appears to be a rather tall-tale of a seaside village's reaction to finding the body of an unusually large man washed up along their beach. Indeed, there are a number of things that make this story seem implausible: the fact that the children play with the corpse after they discover it, the reactions of the village's women residents - cleaning his body and sewing new clothes only to throw him back into the sea, giving him a name, assigning villagers to be his parents and family members, and crying for the life they imagined he had - and the sheer size of the man. Beneath its bizarre surface, however, this story is about the promises of eternal life.

Recall that as the story begins, the village is described as barren with dull colored homes and no flowers. There is scarcely room for the children to play safely and the men of the village work at sea during the night. All of these images are meant to portray an image of gloom and darkness and are used to show how mortal life pales in comparison to the eternity spent in the Kingdom of God. This is seen in the transformation the village undergoes after the drowned man is returned to the sea for his burial - the houses are now painted in bright colors and the men of the village dig for springs so that flowers can grow. In fact, the story's final image of the village as a place that is laden with fresh flowers and abundant sunshine is in direct contrast with the story's initial description of the same village as being "made up of twenty-odd wooden houses that had stone courtyards with no flowers and which were spread about on the end of a desert-like cape."

Therefore, the actions taken by the women are symbolic of how anyone who believes in the promises of Heaven would prepare during their time on Earth; that is, by trying to avoid sin and other temptations and by living morally clean lives. As they clean away the vegetation, mud, and other debris that has attached itself to the drowned man, they are essentially peeling away the layers of his life to expose his soul.

Another example of this can be seen in the drowned man himself. As the women point out, he appears to be happy in death; a condition they attribute to the fact that he is at long last freed from the encumbrances of his size. However, his happiness can also be attributed to the fact that he knows that he will spend all of eternity in the company of God. Following this line of thought, the man's enormous size can be symbolic of the

vastness of Heaven and that his life there will be much fuller than the life he had here on Earth.

Even the clothes the women dress the man in are symbolic of eternal life. As they prepare him for his burial, the women dress the man in what the reader assumes is all white: with pants made from a sail and a shirt made from bridal linen. This is significant because white is the color associated with baptism, a rite many believe represents being born into eternal life.

One final example is seen in the man's journey. There are ultimately three parts: his death, the time he spends among the villagers, and his return to the sea. Again, following the premise that the things that transpire in this tale are all symbolic of Heaven, it can be concluded that the time the drowned man spends in the village is analogous to spending time in Purgatory and that his final commendation to the sea represents his admission into Heaven.

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Characters

Esteban

Although he is a stranger—and a dead stranger at that—Esteban plays a central role in the villagers' lives. He does not speak, yet his face and his body speak for him, telling the villagers how sorry he is to be such a bother, large and cumbersome as he is. They intuit that he is kind and considerate, yet authoritative enough to command the fish to jump into his boat when he is fishing. The women of the village find him "speaking" to them in other ways, making them compare their husbands to his splendid size and handsome features. His presence in the village forces them to examine their lives and to work together to beautify their village. Esteban exists, then, not in the body of the dead man the village children have found on the beach, but in the minds of the villagers themselves, who are inspired to better their lives.

The Villagers

The inhabitants of this tiny fishing village struggle daily in a harsh climate. Their strip of land is so narrow that there is not even enough room to bury their dead. The village is so small that the drowned man is immediately identified as a stranger, since "they simply had to look at one another to see that they were all there." No one in the village is named, increasing the sense that they live and act as a group. The women respond to Esteban with care, then admiration, then longing, and finally, ownership. The men respond at first with irritation and jealousy, but gradually they too begin to feel compassion and pity. The solidarity of the villagers is borne out by the way that all of them take responsibility for Esteban just as all of them will eventually take responsibility for beautifying their village after he is gone. Garcia Marquez used the village of Aracataca and its people as loose models for this story, which also reflects his socialistic beliefs.

Themes

Myth and the Human Condition

"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" illustrates the collective human tendency to create myths. The form of the story makes clear that the "long ago and far away" setting of the story takes precedence over a reading of the story that places the village in an exact location or time period. Myths often center around heroic figures whose special powers or deeds create an ideal that members of that society may attempt to live up to. Esteban becomes such an ideal for the villagers, who are so inspired by him that they plant beautiful gardens and improve their homes "so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into beams." Thus, this once dirty and diminished drowned man inspires an entire village to strive for something better and more beautiful. Such myths last through time and across cultures, as demonstrated at the end of the story when it is predicted that captains of passenger ships will identify "Esteban's village" for curious passengers.

That the human imagination seeks explanations for the unknown is the focus of the tale. Much of the story involves village women creating stories about Esteban's life and what it would be like to share it with him: "They thought that if that magnificent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor, his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame held together by iron bolts, and his wife would have been the happiest woman." Through their imagination Esteban is first admirable, then lovable, and finally cherished by all. He becomes representative of the whole village, and at his funeral they choose relatives for him in such a way "that through him all the inhabitants of the village became kinsmen." This act highlights another aspect of the human condition: the need to reach out to others and become connected in some way. By casting Esteban back into the sea from which he came, the villagers recognize the ocean as a bond, a connection between other people and other lands, including the faraway land from which the drowned man originated.

Beauty and Aesthetics

The importance of the drowned man to the village is in direct proportion to the villagers' perception of his beauty. When he first washes onto the beach, covered with seaweed and grime, the children of the village think of him as no more than a novel plaything. It is only after the women of the village begin to clean him off that they appreciate his strength and beauty. They are so amazed at his physical being that "there was no room for him in their imagination." But soon they do use their imaginations, attributing to him not only pride and authority, but also obliging tenderness and consideration. Esteban's beauty gains him a sympathetic viewpoint in their imaginations. His beauty and size contrast with not only their men—who by comparison are "the weakest, meanest, and most useless creatures on earth"—but with the village itself. Their hastily constructed

homes and empty courtyards on a tiny, bare strip of land reflect the villagers themselves, who have little understanding of or imagination for things outside of their own subsistence. Esteban, by bringing beauty into the village, initiates a permanent change of character for the villagers. Their willingness to reach out to Esteban and claim him as one of their own in order to "lose" him at the funeral has created a sense that there is something more for them than life and death: there is beauty, something entirely extraordinary. Thus the story of Esteban becomes, for the villagers, the story about the power of beauty to enter and change their lives.

Style

Point of View

The simplicity with which "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" is told conceals a rather complex narrative technique. The villagers, finding a drowned man on their beach, begin to admire and then love him as they prepare him for proper burial. The third-person narrator, however, only describes the man through the eyes of the villagers. It is their conceptualization of the drowned man, not any objective viewpoint, that the reader receives. Furthermore, the point of view shifts away from the villagers at certain times in the narrative, such as when the imaginary hostess worries about her chair and he "never knowing perhaps that the ones who said don't go, Esteban, at least wait till the coffee's ready, were the ones who later on would whisper the big boob finally left, how nice, the handsome fool has gone," This complex approach to narration provides cues not only about Esteban, but about the villagers themselves as they view him in the context of their own lives.

Setting

The setting of the story is also more complex than it first seems. Because no exact location is named and the villagers appear to be isolated from the outside world, the village has the feel of a faraway land. The village does not have modern technology; they use a primitive, wheelless sled to convey Esteban to his funeral. Thus the story occupies a timeless, prehistoric era. Nevertheless, the seaside village is very similar to the coastal areas near Garcia Marquez's childhood home, and the ocean liners mentioned at the end of the story verify that this is an actual location in the present day which can be reached. The village, then, exists both as a faraway, mythical place, and as an actual locale. It represents something magic or mythical, but also something real.

Magic Realism

Although the term was first used to refer to a modern type of painting in the 1920s, magic realism later became associated with a particular type of fiction, especially that written by Latin Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Magic realist fiction incorporates both fantastic events and realistic details.

The arrival of a "Wednesday dead body" on the shore of a fishing village is not necessarily a magical event. What brings the story into the realm of the fabulous is the reaction of the villagers, whose response to his arrival is anything but ordinary. That a dead man can have so much influence on a village full of people who seem used to finding drowning victims on their beach creates a sense that this event is something extraordinary. The mythical namelessness of the village and the historically vague setting add to this perception. At the same time, details such as the ocean liner at the end of the story ground it firmly in a real place and time. Thus the story is neither

fantasy, nor reality, but a combination of the two. The impulse behind magic realism is often attributed to several factors, including the superstition of Latin America's indigenous populations. In the case of Garcia Marquez, credit is also given to the influence of his maternal grandmother, a storyteller whose magical tales affected Garcia Marquez's imagination very early in life.

Allusion

Allusion in literature occurs when an aspect in a story implies or makes an indirect reference to something outside of the story. Garcia Marquez is well-known for his ability to blend native South American legends with European myths and stories. Even in a story as short as "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" one can find allusions to the biblical story of Jonah (through the children's assumption that the form washing ashore is a beached whale), Jonathan *Swift's Gulliver's Travels* (in which a shipwrecked man washes ashore in a country full of tiny people), and even the Greek god Zeus, whose sexual prowess highlights many Greek myths. More obvious allusions include the notion that Esteban connotes the ancient god Quetzalcoatl, who in Aztec myth emphasizes peacefulness and self-sacrifice when he comes from the sea. Like Esteban, Quetzalcoatl leaves via the sea, promising a return that leaves a lasting expectation in those he leaves behind. Esteban's name alludes to two historical figures: St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, whose name is the English translation of Esteban; and Estevanico, an African who explored parts of the New World in the 1500s.

Garcia Marquez also makes an allusion to the Greek warrior Odysseus, whose adventures are chronicled in Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus's seafaring adventures include a voyage past the Sirens, whose irresistible singing could not be heard by any man without him abandoning his destination and turning toward them. The women's crying at Esteban's funeral has a similar effect: "Some sailors who heard the weeping from a distance went off course and people heard of one who had himself tied to the mainmast, remembering ancient fables about sirens." The abundant allusions in the story suggest that the various cultures that Garcia Marquez refers to are more closely related than is often imagined. Every culture has its saints and its heroes; "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" demonstrates the process through which these figures become important in their respective cultures.

Historical Context

Political Background

During the period of European imperialism following Columbus's arrival in the New World, Colombia's indigenous tribes could offer little resistance to Spanish conquest. For the most part, these tribes amalgamated (intermarried and lived together in society) with their Spanish conquerors. Consequently, much of the Colombian population consists of *mestizos*—people of both native Colombian and Spanish origin.

A former part of the Spanish colonial empire named New Granada that gained its freedom from Spain in 1810, Colombia suffered from several civil wars throughout the nineteenth century. By the mid-1800s Liberals and Conservatives comprised the opposing political groups that would subject Colombia to frequent and bloody revolutions. Severe fighting reached its height between 1899 and 1903, a period known as the War of a Thousand Days. During this time there was a continuing separation between wealthy elite landowners, often of European descent, and freed slaves and indigenous populations whose lands had been confiscated and redistributed. Meanwhile, Colombia was struggling to grow its export trade, which consisted largely of coffee, petroleum, and bananas, under Conservative leadership.

Social Policies

The Depression of the 1930s meant severe economic hardship for Colombia due to its growing dependence on exporting goods whose worth plummeted on the world market. The Conservative government in power at this time was replaced by Liberal president Alfonso Lopez, whose biggest reform was a move to redistribute land from wealthy landowners who were not using their land productively to peasant "squatters" who depended on their plots for subsistence. The Depression also meant an increase in domestic industry, since competition with imported goods was significantly reduced. Assisting Colombia's poorest residents has been an ongoing concern for Colombian government, particularly during Liberal administrations.

Critical Overview

Although Garcia Marquez wrote "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" several years before it and other short stories were published in English in 1972, most readers of English at that time knew only of his most famous work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Many early reviewers were somewhat disappointed in the sparse, short stories. They contained neither the grand historic sweep of One Hundred Years nor the complex character development that wins reader affection through increased familiarity. John Sturrock in the *New York Times Book Review* considered the stories "makeweights," "the ambitious but as yet uncertain and over-abstract tales of a writer too young to recognize that even the most imaginative fiction needs to be filled with things as well as strange thoughts." Some reviewers expressed distaste for the Garcia Marquez's style. John Leonard in the *New York Times* called them "rather typical examples of postwar existentialist futzing around." Leonard went on to say that "humor is not permitted in such fiction, nor rounded characters, society, politics, history,"

Not all reviewers shared these opinions. Some found much to admire in Garcia Marquez's short stories, including not only his unique style and his social agenda but also his insistence that fantastic things are real. Alfred Kazin, in the *New York Times Book Review*, described the pressures of literary achievement and social responsibility that keep Garcia Marquez on the artistic side of propaganda. Kazin saw "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" as a manifestation of the author's vision of the natural world as a place of both myth and reality. Other critics found humor in the story, pointing out the naming of Esteban as an especially wry observation on human nature,

Garcia Marquez has amassed a considerable reputation since translations of his work first appeared. With the 1982 Nobel Prize in literature to his credit, he has gained increased critical respect as well.' "The HandsomestDrowned Man in the World" is no longer dismissed as "A Story for Children"— as some subtitles refer to the story— though it certainly works on a literal level as a children's story. More recently, critics have begun to examine the larger implications of particular aspects of the story, including the naming of Esteban, the changes he brings to the village, and the character of the villagers themselves.

In later criticism, the focus has been on Garcia Marquez's particular narrative techniques rather than the plot of the story itself. Kathleen McNerney discussed Garcia Marquez's characteristically shifting point of view in *Understanding Garcia Marquez*. Often within the same paragraph, McNerney purported, readers receive not only the villagers's point of view, but they also see Esteban through the eyes of a hostess and as Esteban sees himself, abashed and ashamed in the tiny homes of his neighbors. In *Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, Raymond Williams examined the role of the reader in the story. Not only can readers find humor in their assumed superiority over the odd, superstitious villagers, but the notion of imagination becomes prevalent as well because, just as the villagers analyze the drowned man, readers analyze the villagers. Readers cannot accept the story as real, but it still exists, just as the inexplicable dead man cannot be ignored by the villagers. In that acceptance comes an understanding of

the limitless imagination. Esteban's appearance changes the town, said Marta Frosch in a *Books Abroad* article, but only because the town has recreated him as a human being whose abilities and shortcomings are imagined for him.

Critics have cited similarities between Garcia Marquez's work and that of a number of acclaimed twentieth-century waters in an attempt to locate possible influences. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" has been compared by many to the work of Franz Kafka, which contains a similar sparse quality of unreality. Ernest Hemingway is also known for providing spare details that carry more weight than they appear to at first. Like Garcia Marquez, William Faulkner has memorialized his place of residence in his literary works. Perhaps the largest influence on Garcia Marquez, however, is the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, whose 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo {The Kingdom of This World)* influenced many of Latin America's magic realist writers. Nevertheless, Garcia Marquez retains his own narrative style, and his own approach to reality. His work asks the reader to examine his or her beliefs and morals, to understand the choices of others, and to learn from the experience.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Rena Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses Marquez's use of magic realism in "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World."

When Gabriel Garcia Marquez published his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967, both the author and the writing technique he used, magic realism, were catapulted into the international spotlight. Magic realism (the term was first used in 1925 by a German art critic, and about twenty-five years later, it was rediscovered by a Caribbean writer) explores the overlap between fantasy and reality and thus reveals the mysterious elements hidden in day-to-day life. As a literary style, it was born in Latin America where writers such as Garcia Marquez, who were raised hearing tales of mystical folklore, were open to viewing the world through a more imaginative, less rigid lens than "realistic" waters. Magic realism creates a different type of background for the events of the day to play themselves out against, one in which the inhabitants are accepting of extraordinary occurrences and thus forge amongst themselves a new set of shared beliefs. Combining elements of the fantastic and magical, the mythic, the imaginative, and the religious, magic realism expands human perceptions of reality.

Much of the power of magic realism derives from the way it blends the fantastic and the everyday by depicting incredible events, supporting them with realistic details, and chronicling everything in a matter-of-fact tone. According to Morton P. Levitt in "The Meticulous Modernist Fictions of Garcia Marquez," Garcia Marquez, who was a journalist, says that his style derives from his grandmother, who "told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness." Garcia Marquez grew up in a small town that had little to offer except for a sense of the past, according to Levitt: "like so many Latin American towns [it] lived on remembrances, myth, solitude and nostalgia." Garcia Marquez presents this multiple reality in his stories; one reality is that of the fantastic, but another reality is the author's (and the reader's) complete acceptance of the fantastic. Garcia Marquez's use of tone shows the events he narrates to be credible—things that could happen at any time. The fantastic becomes utterly natural.

In addition to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez's short story "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" highlights his talents at using magic realism to draw the reader into a world unlike one in which most people dwell. Since its first publication in a collection of short stories in 1972, the work has won attention and drawn praise from critics based far from Garcia Marquez's native Colombia, including reviewers for Time and John Updike writing for The New Yorker. Alfred Kazin, in a review of *Leaf Storm and Other Stories* in *Critical Essays on Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, refers to "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" as one of the author's "beautiful early stories" in which his vision "expresses itself with perfect charm," and V.S. Pritchett notes in *New Statesman* that the story "easily leaps into the comical and exuberant."

In the story, Garcia Marquez presents a tiny coastal town filled with people who seem unremarkable in any way except in their ability to accept the fantastic and thus enrich their own lives. At the story's beginning, the emptiness of the villagers's lives can be seen in their surroundings. The town is built on a stony cliff upon which nothing grows.

Their homes, which are spread out on a "desertlike cape," have "stone courtyards with no flowers." The villagers have very little space in which to cultivate themselves. Even the dead must be tossed out, over the side of the cliffs.

Because die villagers naturally accept the fantastic, an enormous drowned man who washes upon their shore does not frighten them nor do they reject him. Instead of being freakish for his size, he is "the tallest, strongest, most virile and best built man they had ever seen." The drowned man, whom they come to call Esteban, has more ideal qualities than just the physical. He is compassionate, recognizing the anxiety that his size causes and possessing the awful knowledge that "the lady of the house looked for her most resistant chair and begged him, frightened to death, sit here." He feels shame at being such a bother to the villagers; had he known he was going to drown, "he would have looked for a more discreet place." While others might have turned on him for his unusual characteristics, the villagers not only show him kindness but actually embrace him. He becomes their model and they will better their village and their lives in his honor.

The villagers live in a land where mystical things can happen and where intuition and magic count for more than strict reality. Their partiality for the imaginative is apparent even before they are touched by Esteban, in the mothers's fears that "the wind would carry off their children." Their calm acceptance of the phenomenal, however, is most clearly apparent when they regard Esteban. He weighs almost as much as a horse "and they said to each other diat maybe... the water had gotten into his bones." He hardly fits inside the house, and "they thought that maybe the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men." These comments on the nature of his size are not rationalizations; the villagers are not bothered by his size, they simply do not need to explain his physical state. Their comments are spoken as asides, noting unimportant yet interesting details.

Because the villagers do not spend their time wondering how Esteban came to exist, they can concentrate on what is important: the man. Looking in his face they see that "he did not have the lonely look of other drowned men who came out of the sea or that haggard, needy look of men who drowned in rivers." When they realize that he will have to be dragged to his funeral (no one can carry him), they understand the shame and awkwardness his size caused him in life. Not only do they understand how Esteban feels, but they begin to understand a bit more about their own lives. As the women sit up all night, sewing an outfit for Esteban, "it seemed to them that the wind had never been so steady nor the sea so restless... and they supposed that the change had something to do with the dead man." Already their lives, fed fay the "calm and bountiful" sea, are changing.

The lives of the villagers will continue to change over the next twenty-four hours and on into the future. To honor Esteban's memory, the villagers will build larger homes so that he can pass through freely without shame at his size. They will paint the houses bright colors and "break their backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers on the cliffs." In the future, passengers on great oceanliners will smell the villagers's gardens and be told "that's Esteban's village." What Esteban's visit has made them realize is how terribly empty their lives had been. Though they knew that "they were no longer present, that they would never be," by making their home a place good enough for Esteban, they are ennching themselves as well.

The use of another element of magic realism helps justify the monumental effect Esteban had: the mythic. In the personage of Esteban are shades of heroes from different cultures and time periods. His very name, Spanish for Stephen, invokes St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Esteban also may recall Estevanico (a diminutive form of the name), an African slave who explored Florida and the Southwest United States in the 1500s. He was the first African many Indians had ever seen, and they thought he might be a god and gave him many gifts. As with Esteban, his appearance led him to be revered as something more than an ordinary man; just as the villagers would strive "to make Esteban's memory eternal," legends were passed down for generations, right until the present day, about Estevanico.

Esteban also unites the village and himself through a connection to different myths and mythical figures. The village women become as powerful as figures of Greek mythology when "sailors who heard [their] weeping ... went off course and people heard of one who had himself tied to the mainmast, remembering ancient fables about sirens." This allusion to Homer's *Odyssey* also brings to mind that epic's hero, Odysseus, who, during his ten-year voyage, washed up on the shore of several islands and effected sometimes radical changes on their inhabitants. Esteban is also tied to the ancient Aztec god Quetzalcoatl who arrived from the sea. He had a civilizing effect on the Aztec people, leading them from the sacnfice of others to self-sacrifice in order to achieve their goals. Because of his close tie with the sea, his statue in the Aztec capital showed him covered in snail shells and flowers, much like Esteban, who washed up on shore "covered with a crust of mud and scales." The defeated Quetzalcoatl left his people, again by the sea, but according to legend he returns periodically to bring about change and revolution. Esteban could very well be the villagers's personal Quetzalcoatl.

If all these references need to be interpreted in order to understand the story, what then is to be made of the subtitle ("A Tale for Children") which sometimes accompanies the story? Perhaps it is not really necessary to know how the story works, only that it does work. It can exist as a fairy tale without drawing criticism for its lack of reality. As a children' s story, it is allowed to simply entertain. The story may best be seen as presenting the multiple realities that are inherent to magic realism. Just as the villagers have to be open to possibilities in order to reap the benefits of Esteban's visit, so must readers suspend their disbelief.

Source: Rena Korb, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

Bell-VHlada is an educator, critic, and biographer. In the following essay, he discusses Garcia Marquez's short fiction, including "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," which he calls a "folklore science-fiction."

Had Garcia Marquez never put any of his novels to paper, his shorter fiction would have still gained him some niche in literary history. Already in 1967 the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti was to observe that "some of the stories gathered in *Big Mama's Funeral* can be considered among the most perfect instances of the genre ever written in Latin America." We might venture yet further and say that those pieces, along with the novella No One Writes to the Colonel and the stories collected in Garcia Marquez the socialist well knows that the imagination and its dreams are as crucial a force in political life as is economic fact."

Innocent Erendira, put Garcia Marquez in the company of such acknowledged masters of short fiction as [Anton] Chekhov, [Thomas] Mann, [James] Joyce, [John] Cheever, or Grace Paley.

The author cites [Ernest] Hemingway as the chief influence on his own story writing. The admission is borne out by the pieces themselves, with their spare, minimal prose that captures life's little disturbances and moments of solitude, evokes major emotion in a snatch of dialogue or in the slightest of gestures. Garcia Marquez remarked in 1950 that "the North Americans ... are writing today's best short stories," and Hemingway in this regard served him as much as mentor as did [William] Faulkner and [Virginia] Woolf for his longer works. Particularly influential was Hemingway's "iceberg" theory of the short story—often cited by Garcia Marquez—whereby the author makes visible only one-seventh of what is to be communicated, the other six-sevenths lying implicitly beneath the narrative's surface.

The stories offer pleasures of a sort different from those we know from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. They are miracles not of mythic sweep but of understatement, conjuring up as they do the subtle, small-scale, mostly interpersonal upsets and triumphs of common village folk—the sleepy priests, pool-hall souses, provincial wheeler-dealers, troubled but stouthearted women, and the abandoned, the mismatched, or the bereaved. In later pieces, Garcia Marquez will emerge with his visionary side full-grown and include fantastical materials—a wizened angel or a ghost ship. But there is a key element never absent from the Colombian author's stories, be they "magical" or realistic: the climate of his world. Every one of these short pieces has at least a reference either to the intense daytime heat or the tropical rain and its effects on characters' lives (their slowness in midafternoon, their ill health in rainy season). The consummate craft of the narratives should also be noted: Garcia Marquez typically spends weeks or even months on a single short story, feeling pleased when completing just two lines in a day....

In "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," the only entity with a name is the eponymous cadaver, whom the villagers choose to call "Esteban," (The Catholic church's first martyr, we may recall, was St. Stephen.) When his tall, strong, broad-shouldered, lifeless body is washed ashore near a seafaring hamlet of "twenty-odd houses," the irruption from another, remote, unknown world excites the romantic, myth-producing imaginations of the sad and isolated townsfolk, He strikes them as proud, "the most virile and best-built man they had ever seen," and from there they infer for him the power to stop the winds and call fish from the sea. The women in particular fantasize about him, alive and polite as a fellow villager in their lives, and inasmuch as it is they who prepare his corpse for sea burial, they grow particularly attached to their ideas and images of him. The males by contrast get to feeling jealous and look forward to his being returned at last to the deep.

If the women's collective role in this story shows mythmaking's more specifically erotic side, in the ritual ocean burial the affective bonds are extended and "all the inhabitants of the village became kinsmen." Hints at Odysseus's adventure of the sirens help place the incident of Esteban within a larger ancestral continuum of seafaring fable. Through these intimations of a greater and more beautiful cosmos the villagers are reminded of "the desolation of their streets" and (by extension) of their lives. And so we probably can trust the omniscient narrator's prediction that the inhabitants, in response, will thence beautify and make fertile their hamlet, and give it some fame as "Esteban's village." In some of his best long narratives Garcia Marquez forged a kind of fantastical history; here we see him experimenting in turn with a fantastical anthropology, as it were, a "folklore science-fiction" that speculates on the humbler origins and organizational powers of a commonly created and shared popular myth. Garcia Marquez the socialist well knows that the imagination and its dreams are as crucial a force in political life as is economic fact.

Source: Gene H. Bell-Villada, "The Master of Short Forms," in his *Garcia Marquez- The Man and His Work,* University of North Carolina Press, 1990, pp. 119-36.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpted essay, Davis talks about the environment of some of Garcia Marquez 's short stories, and how he uses "a heroic figure to revolutionize mundane reality."

Since the publication in 1972 of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' penultimate collection of short stories [*Leaf Storm and Other Stories*], critics have been hard pressed to analyze the enigmatic, fabulous tales that make up the group. Several stories are developed from the tension between the sea and the land, the latter almost always being a boring place inhabited by citizens of limited imagination. In several cases, unusual apparitions from the sea provoke traumatic explosions of imagination in one or many of the inhabitants of an otherwise staid region___

As a whole, the stories create a fabulous environment, and the Caribbean becomes as prodigious a sea as the Mediterranean was for Homer. Gradually the land areas around it become permeated with beings from other times and other civilizations. The original inhabitants are disturbed by the heroic characters, and at the end of the story, nothing is as it was before. Forced to see themselves and their world as they are, some natives seize the opportunity to change, so that their world begins to adjust itself to the heroic demands of the travelers from other realms.

One of the most enigmatic stories in the collection, "Elahogadomashermosodelmundo" ["The Handsomest Man in the World"], illustrates the manner in which Garcia Marquez utilizes a heroic figure to revolutionize mundane reality. To achieve the appropriate reaction from the reader to the disparate elements in the story, Garcia Marquez creates a constant tension between a small fishing village and the sea which borders it. The tension heightens as the story progresses, and it remains unresolved at the open-ended conclusion. The meaning of the story must be developed in the mind of the reader, for it is not readily apparent from the various elements of the plot.

As the story progresses, both the nature of the village and that of the drowned man who washes up on a nearby beach are gradually revealed. The village is small, and its few inhabitants live in houses rapidly constructed of boards. In this village devoid of beauty, patios are filled with rocks rather than with flowers. The physical poverty of the village functions as an objective correlative of thecapacity of soul of its natives. There is hope, however, for the village does contain children, who welcome the drowned man to their village as one of their own.

As the drowned man first appears, floating in the sea, the children on the beach pretend that he might be an enemy ship or a whale. When at last he washes ashore, he turns out to be a dead man, all covered with marine animals and residue from shipwrecks. The children play "funeral" with him all afternoon, burying him in the sand, then digging him up again. Eventually an adult notices their unusual toy, gives a shout of alarm, and the men carry the drowned man to the nearest house.

The men react quite differently to the dead man. Although they do not doubt he is a man, they refuse to accept him as one of them. Worried that he may be from their village, they look from man to man and realize that they are complete. The rest of the story illustrates how ironic is Garcia M£rquez' use of "complete" in this village. The men do notice the Homeric size of the stranger. He is heavy as a horse and will not fit into any house in the village. Leaving the body sprawled on the beach, the men leave to investigate his identity in nearby villages.

The women clean the body and, as they see the face for the first time, they are, literally, breathless. The drowned man is the most perfect being they have ever seen, and their poor imagination cannot accommodate him. They proceed, in a scene reminding the reader of the remotest, matriarchal period of man's past, to surround him in a circle on the beach. As the usually calm sea roars and seems anxious, the women sew clumsy garments for the drowned man. Fantasizing about his sexual prowess, the women indulge in a series of mental voyages: "Andaban extraviadas por esos dedalos de fantasia...."

Since the women have exercised their imagination rarely in the past, they must proceed from the known (their village) to the miraculous (the drowned man's effect on the village). They imagine how their village would have to become if a being as fabulous as the *ahogado* were to live there. They compare their boring lives with husbands who fish every night to the spectacular possibilities provided by such a splendid man ("el mejor armado que habfan visto jama's")- The drowned man would have magical powers to call fish from the water, cause water to gush from rocks, and to plant flowers even in a rock wall.

Not content with an anonymous dead man, the women name him Stephen. After he has been dressed, curiously enough, as a huge baby, and given a martyr's name, the sea calms, as though satisfied. The women take their second mental voyage, speculating about the personality of Stephen. Because of his size, he would have been uncomfortable in their village. The women realize how innately hostile the group is to anything different, and they fear he would have been considered "el bobo grande" or "el tonto hermoso." By this time Stephen has assumed so much personality that he hardly seems dead, and the women cover his face so that the rising sun will not bother him.

Returning from a frustrating night, the men do not understand the fascination of the huge body for their wives. They jealously fear comparison with him and only want to throw him back into the sea with an anchor tied to his ankles. After they see Stephen's face, however, his beauty convinces them of the sincerity of his manner of being (which Garcfa Marquez ironically twists into "modo deestar.")

The funeral rites for Stephen are resplendent with flowers. The village elects honorary parents and other relatives for Stephen, so that through this ritual everyone is now related to everyone else. After his body is returned to the sea, Stephen's memory causes the village to rebuild houses, plant roses, and paint with bright colors. Even more important, the villagers now realize that they are incomplete and always will be. The faculty of soul which they had so dreadfully lacked has begun to develop, however,

and imagination, stimulated by so powerful a trauma as Stephen's visit, can hardly be prevented from expanding....

The women attribute to the giant the personality of dignified arrogance, a characteristic which xeminds one of Zeus and almost all the Greek heroes. The highly charged eroticism provoked by Stephen's size is also reminiscent of the amorous adventures of Zeus, as well as of the sexual trials of Odysseus. The women's thoughts revolve around the Homeric size of Stephen's (hypothetical) bed, and Garcia M£rquez slyly directs the reader's memory back to the close of the *Odyssey*, as Penelope uses the characteristics of Odysseus' bed to ascertain the identity of the stranger who claims to be her husband....

Stephen's godlike qualities are constantly reinforced by his relationship to the sea. The Caribbean usually is calm in the area of the village, but on the Tuesday night the women spend sewing around Stephen on the beach, they notice that the sea had never seemed so distressed. The empathy between Stephen and the anxious sea becomes prophetic. Stephen is a product of the sea, whether he is a man or a god, and the sea that produced him will receive him again. The cyclical nature of this relationship reveals itself in Stephen's strange clothes. The women find it difficult to construct clothing large enough for the giant, so that his apparel is amazingly like that of a baby (a "sietemesino"). It is as if the brief period in the village provides Stephen with a chance to reincarnate himself before he returns to the sea for another voyage___

The funeral ceremony provides Garcfa Mdrquez with the last ritual in the story. The flowers and the wailing of the women give a peculiarly primitive aspect to the funeral, reiterating that grandness within simplicity that marks Beowulfs funeral and the many leave-takings in the *Iliad*, The storyteller ironically twists the llanto into an alluring melody, as he relates that "Algunos marineros que oyeron el llanto a la distancia perdieron la certeza del rumbo, y se supo de uno que se hizo amarrar al palo mayor, recordando antiguas fibulas de sirenas." This last allusion connects Stephen's funeral to Odysseus' trial with Circe and, simultaneously, suggests the power of art to transform reality, to create beauty from sadness.

A constant feature of Garcia Marquez' style has been his fusion of Greek, Spanish, and American literary models and mythology. The most exotic aspects of Stephen's visit to the village correlate with the widely disseminated myth of Quetzalcoatl, the pre-Columbian god worshiped by several tribes of Central America and Mexico. Like Stephen, Quetzalcoatl arrived from the sea and brought a new civilizing influence upon the various forms of culture which he encountered. A new vision of beauty, of human relationships, and of time itself derived from Quetzalcoatl's emphasis upon self-sacrifice rather than the commonly accepted sacrifice of others. Indigenous resistance to Quetzalcoatl's revolutionary influence took the form of a magician, who, in the course of his epic struggle against the peaceful god, was able to make dead bodies incredibly heavy. Stephen, it will be remembered, seemed impossibly heavy to the men who carried his body from the shore. Within Aztec mythology, QuetzalcoatI is at times called Ehecatl, the lord of the wind; it is therefore not surprising that the wind should rage and the sea be troubled on the night of Stephen's appearance....

In his combination of Homeric and modern aspects of Odysseus' personality with pre-Columbian heroic constructs, Garcia Marquez creates still another embodiment of the archetype of man's refusal to accept reality as it is. His villagers, incited by a lively dead man, completely change from within, and their new self is reflected in their village, famous for the legend of Stephen, the martyr whose death stimulates new life.

Source: Mary E. Davis, "The Voyage Beyond the Map: 'El Ahogado Mas Hermoso Del Mundo,' " in *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No 1,1979, pp. 25-33.

Topics for Further Study

Research La Violencia, Colombia's fifteen-year penod of civil strife, and consider ways in which "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" might be a comment on the events occurring in Colombia at this time.

Look for information on the following religious and mythological figures in the story and analyze their significance to the work: St. Stephen, Estevanico, Jonah, Zeus, Quetzalcoatl.

Read a chapter of Homer's *Odyssey* and look for points of similarity between Homer's tale and the events of this story.

Explore the psychology of *totemism* and determine what Esteban has come to symbolize for the villagers.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: Garcia Marquez composes several short stories that blend realistic elements with the fantastic. This style, known as magic realism, becomes popular among Hispanic writers.

1990s: *Como agua para chocolate*, a magic realist novel by Mexican writer Laura Esquivel, is translated into English as *Like Water for Chocolate*. The novel becomes a best-seller and spawns a popular film version.

Colombia, 1950s: Colombia is in the midst of *La Violencia*, a fifteen-year period of violence in which over 200,000 people are murdered.

Colombia, 1990s: Cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar Gavira turns himself in to Colombian authorities to avoid facing trial in the United States. The lucrative cocaine trade has resulted in hundreds of murders within the past years, including the assassinations of top officials.

Colombia, 1950s: Colombia's largest exports are fishing, forestry, and petroleum products. Coffee is the number one cash crop.

Colombia, today: Coffee continues to be the country's leading legal export. Millions work in the fields harvesting coffee beans for as little as $1.50 per day.

La Violencia

Opposition between the Liberal and Conservative parties in Colombia has been extremely hostile and violent. This confrontation escalated during the period between 1948 and 1962 known as La Violencia. Although initially sparked by the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, much of the following fifteen years of fighting was caused by existing hostilities between the two parties. Some 200,000 people lost their lives in the fighting, much of which involved extreme acts of cruelty to the victims.

La Violencia involved a wide spectrum of Colombians's concerns. Peasants who had improved their land under the 1930s land reform found that they were required to pay exorbitant legal fees to gain title in some areas of the country. Guerilla leaders, increasingly the sons of small farmers and merchants, were able to gain peasant support as they ambushed and retaliated against each other in longstanding feuds regarding family relationships, political party (which is inherited in Colombia), and government ties. Migrating groups of peasants looking for work in other areas joined the fray. The government abdicated control in many areas, leading to multiple bids for power by local groups in many towns and cities.

It was during La Violencia that president Laureano Gomez, a Conservative, instituted a fascist government in an attempt to regain control. He was overthrown by the military and populist president General Gustave Rojas Pinilla, who in turn was driven from office

by the military. Finally, the National Front, a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives, arranged a truce. Garcia Marquez covered many of these events as a journalist before treating them in his fictional works. La Violencia has been one of the most fictionalized events in Colombia's history.

The 1960s

Colombia continued its struggle for economic development in the 1960s; intervention by the United States increased Colombia's dependence on outside assistance, but did little to help the economy. The 1960s were a period of high unemployment, low coffee export prices, and economic stagnation. Under Conservative president Guillermo Leon Valencia, union workers received a forty percent wage increase and inflation skyrocketed. Deflationary pricing resulted in high unemployment. Government policy later improved, however, and by the late 1960s Colombia's economy was growing again. During this time, migration to the cities continued, and by 1970 over half of Columbia's population consisted of urban residents.

Colombia Today

Because so much of Colombia's development was distributed unevenly, there remains a large gap between economic classes. Approximately 20 percent of Colombia's population lives below the poverty level, many of them in slums on the outskirts of Colombia's urban areas. Fear of military intervention in the government, violence, and acts of terrorism still exist. A large drug-trafficking problem continues to plague the nation as well. Nevertheless, the decades after La Violencia have seen Colombia become one of the most urbanized and modernized countries in Latin America.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez and History

Although little of Colombia's history makes its way into "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," the history of Colombia is an important part of Garcia Marquez's work. The isolation of the village, the mythical sense of time portrayed, and the anonymity of the characters make the absence of history so obvious that one begins to question why Garcia Marquez has chosen deliberately to omit this information. This omission technique can be found in other works of magic realism as well. One explanation for its use, according to critics, is to protect the author, particularly if he or she is writing something controversial in countries where freedom of speech is curtailed by the government. By making the story "about" something other than one's own country, the writer can safely express controversial viewpoints. Another possibility is that Garcia Marquez avoids a specific history to make the characters and the action representative of all people, not just those of a particular place. Nevertheless, the kindness and love the villagers show to the drowned man, when read against the background of Colombian history, contrasts sharply with the violence and cruelty that belongs to much of Colombia's past.

What Do I Read Next?

"A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is another story by Garcia Marquez that features a stranger's arrival in a seaside village.

One Hundred Years of Solitude, translated by Gregory Rabassa in 1970, is Garcia Marquez's landmark magic realism novel about a marvelous village, Macondo, and its equally wondrous founding family.

One of the most important influences on Garcia Marquez, Alejo Carpentier's 1949 novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, is a magic realist look at Haiti's troubled history through the eyes of a slave.

Jonathan Swift's 1726 novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, is the story of a man washed ashore on foreign lands. The reception Gulliver receives in this satirical comment on human nature is quite different from the love given to Esteban in Garcia Marquez's story.

The Old Man and the Sea, written in 1952 by Ernest Hemingway, is a classic story of human nature explored through the metaphor of fishing

Further Study

Byk, John. "From Fact to Fiction: Gabnel Garcia Marquez and the Short Story," in Mid-American Review, Vol VI.No. 2,1986, pp. 111-16

Discusses the progression of Garcia Marquez's short stones from his early, traditional style, to his later, fully developed style of magical realism.

The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume III, edited by Leslie Bethel, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Covers the history of Latin America since 1930 from a political and economic perspective.

Epstein, Joseph "How Good is Gabriel Garcia Marquez?," in Commentary, May, 1983, pp. 59-65.

Epstein calls "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" "charming" and admires the writer's considerable talent for making readers see things in novel ways

Levitt, Morton P "From Realism to Magic Realism: The Meticulous Modernist Fictions of Garcia Marquez," in Gabriel Garcia Marquez, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1989, pp. 227-42.

Levitt discusses magic realism as a literary technique, provides examples of it in Garcia Marquez's work, and shows Garcia Marquez's relationship to it through quotations from the author.

McMurray, George R. Introduction to *Critical Essays on Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, edited by George R McMurray, G. K Hall, 1987, pp. 1-23.

McMurray discusses the history of Garcia Marquez's publications and gives an overview of critical reception to his work.

Review in T*he Times Literary Supplement*, September 29, 1927, p 1140.

The reviewer finds Garcia Marquez a "storyteller" rather than a "short-story writer," and goes on to discuss the peculiarity of his fantastic approach to drab reality.

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Kazin, Alfred. Review of *Leaf Storm and Other Stones*, in *Critical Essays on Gabriel Garcia Marquez*, edited by George R. McMurray, G. K. Hall & Co., 1987, pp 26-29

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BOOKRAGS

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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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