

Novel Choice Activity Four

DIRECTIONS: For each of the three novels there are four selections from a critical work on the novel (at the end of this handout). Using each of the selections, complete the following tasks:

- 1) Read each of the four selections, then for TWO of them, in one to two sentences, create a statement of theme; that is, use the selection to craft an argument that you believe the novel is making, using the generic information about common themes in literature as an additional resource to help you (see the list below this). This statement of theme should be detailed and specific. You may either appropriate the argument of the selection, or you can use some aspect of the selection as a starting point.

Following are some of the most common themes in literature, followed by specific examples for each. Remember, the topics are just that: *topics*. A theme would be how the author feels about the topic, not the topic itself (which just indicates an area of possible inquiry). Note also that the examples are meant to be illustrative of the sorts of themes one could generate about that topic, not be an exhaustive account of *all* possible themes for that topic.

- a. The individual in nature
e.g., nature is at war with us and proves our vulnerability; nature and people trade off with one another; nature sustains and develops individuals
- b. The individual in society
e.g., society and a person's inner nature are always at war; social influences determine a person's fate; people draw strength from others
- c. The individual and the gods
e.g., religion provides meaning to the individual or society; religion undermines the individual or society; the gods are benevolent and reward individuals; the gods are indifferent and let fate run its undetermined course; there is no higher power to which an individual can appeal
- d. Human relations
e.g., romantic relationships are bound to fail; romantic relationships provide meaning to individuals; parent/child relationships sustain and develop the personal growth individuals; parent/child relationships undermine and harm the personal growth individuals; love conquers all; love is a vain hope
- e. Growth and initiation
e.g., individuals must go through trial to mature; childhood shapes adult personalities; it is never too late to grow as individuals
- f. Time and history
e.g., time passes quickly, and there is never enough of it; there is nothing new (ideas are recycled); individuals should enjoy the present; as time progresses, society improves; as time progresses, society degrades; events in the past inform the present and future

- g. Death
 - e.g., death is a part of living; death is not the end (religion, spirituality, or memory); the idea of death spurs individual growth
- h. Alienation
 - e.g., people are isolated and alone; through alienation comes self-knowledge; modern society is alienating, and this is bad
- i. The nature of people
 - e.g., though they frequently make mistakes, people are essentially good; though they may incidentally accomplish good, people are fatally flawed
- j. The nature of the world
 - e.g., there is an order and purpose to life; there is an essential justice in the universe; there is no meaning and purpose to life; there is no justice in the universe

- 2) **After you have generated a theme statement, think of one way the novel explores this theme. It could be in terms of different characters (probably the easiest), circumstances, concepts, or some other subdivision of your choosing.**
- 3) **After this, list (in paraphrase) the best four or five pieces of evidence from the novel that would support it. Unless the argument would rule out this option, you should try to choose evidence from throughout the novel (not just clustered around one part-- especially not just the beginning).**
- 4) **After you have listed the evidence, write a paragraph that explains how this evidence would be used to prove the thesis. This should be developed enough to where the argument is clear, but it should only be an outline of the point it would make, not a fully developed explanation.**
- 5) **If your evidence and explanations are identical to someone else's, neither person will receive credit for doing the work. While I appreciate the fact that working with other people might *potentially* produce better evidence choices, unless you experience the struggle of finding and evaluating these choices yourself, you will be unlikely to be able to write about the novel coherently.**
- 6) **This is due Monday April 29, and you can use it on the timed writing on the following day. The prompt for the timed writing will be based on one of the four topic areas (chosen at random at the beginning of class). This assignment is (essentially) asking you to make your own review sheet, and the timed writing will go much smoother for you if you've done this assignment beforehand. All the standard late penalties apply. If you turn the assignment in late, but do not want points deducted, complete the assignment for all four topic areas.**
- 7) **You may, of course, prepare outlines for all four topic areas on your own to prepare for the timed writing. At the very least, I would strongly suggest having read all four selections and have thought about how one would approach such a potential topic.**

Two Examples (both using García Lorca's *Yerma*)

Sample Selection (You will have a total of FOUR of similar selections to address): McDermid, Paul. *Love, Desire and Identity in the Theatre of Federico García Lorca*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007. (151-152)

It seems rather odd that Yerma, a woman who appears single-minded in her pursuit of a child, should balk at the idea of restricting her life to the single occupation of childcare. But here we anticipate a realization that Yerma's 'child' is an ideal--representative of a need that can never be materially met. Yerma will never be fulfilled by the sexual desire that produces a real child: instead, she will pursue the ideal of Love the child represents for her. Yerma's search for a 'child' takes her out of a feminine enclosure and into the outdoors where men enjoy a liberty Yerma needs to explore. [...] The work environment of the male is a liberation from the life-draining female confinement. Yerma equate her house with death, as if being confined to the house, the station of the female, were suffocating her [...] Yerma makes it quite clear that her pursuit of a (symbolic) child is frustrated by the limits of her female body, and the gender located and culturally constructed upon it. Yerma defines her predicament in the contours of the body: 'Una cosa es querer con la cabeza y otra cosa es que el cuerpo, ¡maldito sea el cuerpo!, no nos responda' (OC III:480). Despite her intense longing for a child, her body offers no reply except the prison of gender.

Statement of Theme (the individual in society): Society constructs ideals to which individuals in that society aspire. In *Yerma*, García Lorca argues that when individuals pathologically adhere to an unrealistic or undesirable norm, it can lead to psychological distress and self-destructive behavior.

[Notice I am preserving the ability for you to add to the original argument or discuss ideas that the original argument suggests or implies. In other words, you can use the original selection's argument or idea without modification, or you can use it as a starting point-- as long as it remains true to the spirit of the original. You may not, however, abandon the selection entirely; there has to be some connection.]

Example Approach One – Freudian Desire (the first approach to proving the statement of theme): **1)** Yerma displaces sexual desire completely into a socially acceptable desire for a child (super-ego). Though acknowledging her eagerness to lose her virginity on her wedding night, Yerma conceives of this only in terms of her desire for motherhood (3). **2)** The pagan old woman accuses Yerma of being "empty," lacking the healthy enjoyment of pleasure that should accompany sexual activity. Yerma refuses to admit this lack, not recognizing it as essential. Instead she claims she is "filling up with hate"-- a displacement of the sexual energies being repressed by the super ego (12). **3)** Yerma agrees with Juan that her place is in the home, but she recognizes it as a "tomb." The idealized view of womanhood (passive, domestic) has been internalized, even as Yerma senses the hollowness of that ideal (28); **4)** Yerma suggests that she is "disgusted" by carnal pleasure, but she wishes she were a "mountain of fire" to melt Juan's coldness, a conflict between id (unbridled passion) and super-ego (unlimited denial) (38). **5)** Yerma symbolically murders Juan in response to his pleas for a sexual relationship uncoupled from the socially sanctioned justification of procreation. Symbolically, the super-ego murders the id, a result explicitly identified as "barren" (53).

Example Analysis One: Society determines the values internalized by the developing super-ego-- in this instance, a complex of passive gender norms (“the angel of the hearth”) and a religious obligation to procreate. At the same time sexual desire is constructed as both unfeminine and sinful. All of this leads to a conflict whereby Yerma cannot acknowledge her status as a sexual being and cannot admit to possessing sexual desire (not for her husband Juan, and certainly not for Victor, who the play strongly implies would have been the better match). As a result, Yerma represses these feelings and displaces them into the socially acceptable ideal of motherhood. Her descent into madness reflects her inability to reconcile the two mutually exclusive alternatives-- a result García Lorca argues is due to a limiting and unrealistic conception of femininity that denies an essential part of one’s humanity.

Example Approach Two – “Angels of the Hearth” (*angelos del hogar*): **1)** The imagery used to describe María’s impregnation is religious in nature, viz. a dove entering through her ear that mirrors Catholic iconography depicting the Annunciation. Procreation is linked in this way to religious duty and conceived in terms of the sacred (7). **2)** The Second Girl summarizes the domestic role of Spanish women in the early 20th century as restricted to the domestic sphere of motherhood, cooking, and cleaning. Though she rebels against this limited view of femininity, she has no alternative but to submit (14). **3)** The washerwomen conceive of the failure to embody gender norms as a moral failing. Those who are not mothers are (in their eyes) either unnatural (like the two step-sisters) or wanton (like Yerma, who they suggest has illicit desires for Victor) (19-20). **4)** Yerma idealizes the pains and inconveniences of motherhood, interpreting Dolores’ story of a new mother “soaked with [the] blood” of childbirth as a divinely sanctioned event (37). **5)** When Yerma claims that she has “killed [her] son” by strangling Juan, it is a recognition that she will never fulfill the role for which society has prepared her. She recognizes that she is “barren” and “alone”-- alienated from the only kind of feminine role that she can conceive (53).

Example Analysis Two: As an ideal, an “angel of the hearth” restricts a woman to a very limited sphere of action. As someone who cannot embody this ideal, however, even this limited space is denied to Yerma. In a society with more options for women, this might not necessarily be a problem. However, since society conceives of motherhood as a sacred duty-- and any deviation as a perversion of femininity-- Yerma is alienated from the only productive model of what it means to be a woman and is thus denied the chance to ever become a fully integrated member of society. Her descent into madness at the end of the play is a marker of this alienation and a measure of her deviance from the norm. This constricting ideal of womanhood, then, is what García Lorca criticizes, for it is not just Yerma who is “barren” at the end of the play, but the gender norm itself.

Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

Selection One: Mariaconcetta Costantini. "Hunger and the Food Metaphors in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*." *The Famished Road: Ben Okri's Imaginary Homelands*. Ed. Vanessa Guignery. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013 (100-103).

The spiritual food needed [...] is often rendered in terms of biological nourishment, which sustains the body of the community to reawaken its dormant energies [...]. If women join forces to nurture their community, men help them accomplish the hard task of butchering the animal. By means of food, the gender roles they perform establish the premises for a social harmony synesthetically reinforced by the delicious smells and the songs which fill in the room. In the same way as cooking favours cooperation, solidarity and merriment, the libation offered to the ancestors is meant to reinforce the ties between living and dead, a bond from which traditional societies drew their coalescing force. By activating all these relations, Dad revives for a moment the communal spirit of the West African world which has been stifled by the penetration of an alien culture [...] [in the ways that] Nigerians had lost their communal values at the dawn of independence [...] [toward] a desire for individual satiety compatible with foreign models of self-contentment. [...] The selfish drive to satiety is the enemy Dad determines to oppose from the very beginning [...] By insisting on people's greed, Okri denounces the Nigerians' submission to the imperatives of the marketplace-- a problem that afflicted the process of political independence and continues to plague the nation in the era of global capitalism. This bleak reality is counteracted in the novel's fictional dimension by the idealistic impulses of Dad and other characters, who courageously attempt to awaken people to their responsibilities.

Selection Two: David C.L. Lim. *The Infinite Longing for Home: Desire and the Nation in the Selected Writings of Ben Okri and K.S. Maniam*. Amsterdam: New York, 2004 (70-71).

Recall certain remarks Okri has made on his strategy of contextual unfixity. In response to the question of how his work reflects life in Nigeria, he says: "The first thing I'd say is that I think: it's important to understand that a piece of writing is, first of all, a piece of writing. By that I mean that one may be writing about Nigeria, but that terrain may be the place in which one can best see very strong universal concerns." On *TFR* specifically, Okri explains that the aim was to write an "unfixed book, a river" text that reflected the African aesthetic." He describes this aesthetic as "bound to a way of looking at the world in more than three dimensions," and as characterized by a boundless openness to endless possibilities and a celebration of riddles and paradoxes.' Crucially, he says, any attempt to fix the aesthetic "too much within national or tribal boundaries" would only contradict the spirit of the work. Okri's strategy of contextual unfixity works hand in hand with what we might call his technique of 'narrative stealth' to circumvent interpretative closure. In a videotaped interview by Edward Blishen," Okri remarks that people rarely want to know or read about their condition, to confront and vanquish the "ghosts and monsters that we all carry within us"; or, in the words of his character Dad, "the corpses in the consciousness of all peoples, [...] things that weigh us down and drag us towards death and prevent us from growing" (*SOE* 289). That is why, Okri says, with certain works he finds it necessary to eschew social realism for what he calls "a deeper kind of realism" so as to lure readers into thinking that "they are reading about something else when in fact they are reading about themselves."

Selection Three: Ato Quayson. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Rev Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri*. Oxford: Indiana University Press, 1997 (122).

In Okri's novel, the famished road has multivalent significance. On the one hand it has an umbilical connection to the genesis of creation itself as hinted in the very first sentence of the novel: 'In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world.' It is because it was once a river that the road remains 'always hungry'. Later in the novel, a story is told that relates the road's hunger for 'appeasement to its having been reduced from a ravenous god to a mere belly.' It is also possible to suggest another application of the symbol with reference to the human hunger for journeys and movement. It is not by accident that Azaro is persistently on the move, with an itinerary traversing both the real and spirit-worlds. But this hunger for movement is also a hunger for completion and meaning, something which the novel suggests is extremely difficult to reach. For one thing, given its genealogy, the road is unending. Furthermore, it always has two and possibly four sides to it, all of which manifest themselves at different times: its two side edges, its surface and its belly. Thus in *The Famished Road*, the road itself is hungry as well as transferring its existential hunger to humans. It ensures that closure and completion remain highly problematic even though constantly desired. With his title, Okri makes an important ritual gesture towards the literary tradition he is elaborating as well as to the indigenous traditions and beliefs. From the very outset he pays homage to both.

Selection Four: Teresa Washington. *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts. Manifestations of Àjé In African Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005 (262).

After Azaro absconds with and buries this root, Koto is seen sacrificing with fervor at a crossroads. This time she is successful, for it is not spirits she conjures, but Politics. With mouths filled with lies and a van full of free poison milk, Politics, in the form of the Party of the Rich-- adversaries of, but indistinguishable from, the Party of the Poor-- arrives in the township [...] Politics melds sustenance with violence in the community, as the people pummel one another to receive free milk, 'blood mixed with milk on the earth.' Just outside the melee, Madame Koto is seen conferring with politicians and, later, 'leaving the scene of confusion with the utmost dignity' (*The Famished Road*, 125). She has initiated the courtship ritual with Politics [...] whose power lies in 'selfishness, money and politics.' Divisions are immediately drawn, as Politics threatens the community: Join our particular party or (and) perish. The only people who benefit from political fraternization are Madame Koto and the landlord. The rest of the community becomes political refugees in their land of origin. Despite promises of wealth and rejuvenation, the community begins its three-novel-long slide into abject poverty.

Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

Selection One: Michael Seatz. *Murakami Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006 (2801-281).

[Tōru] is very often confronting boundaries, and engaging with limits: the boundaries of subjectivity, the boundaries of the body, the boundaries of social constraint and censure, the boundaries of sexual engagement (marital/extra-marital/dream-state). But the attempts at shoring up boundaries around

corporeality and subjectivity are always tentative, and need to be continually renewed. At the bottom of the well 'with its moldy smell and its trace of dampness', he undertakes a strangely contradictory musing (utilizing woman as metaphor) on the tension between maintaining a discernable self and loss-of-self, the slide into an amorphous, undifferentiated state of non-being [...] [Tōru's] justification for going down into the well is to find access to the 'non-real', virtual space into which Kumiko has disappeared, but the price which must be paid is a surrendering of his sense of self: subjectivity here is at best confused, and in an extreme sense, under suspension. In [Tōru's] allegorical quest for Kumiko, the key metaphoric devices are 'the wall' (*kabe*) and the well (*ido*). In terms of the Freudian tripartite structure of Super-ego, Ego and Id, the well clearly signifies the Id as the seat of dark passions, the death instinct and so on. The well is the position from which [Tōru] launches himself into sex as well as unbridled acts of violence-- attacking the guitar player and Wataya Noboru.

Selection Two: Jay Rubin. *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. London: Vintage, 2005 (223-225).

The Second World War, [Murakami] admits [...] is just too big, too much of a towering monument to grasp in its entirety. It was possible to get a handle on Nomonhan, however: a four-month undeclared war staged in a limited area that may have been Japan's first experience of having its un-modern worldview-- its 'warview'-- trounced by a country that knew how to establish supply lines before going to war rather than simply hoping for the best. Fewer than 20,000 Japanese troops lost their lives in Nomonhan, but the number soared to over 2,000,000 in the Second World War. In both cases, they were the victims of a system that will make any sacrifice to preserve 'face' and that blindly trusts to luck rather than efficient modern planning. 'They were murdered,' says Murakami, 'used up like so many nameless articles of consumption-- with terrible inefficiency within the hermetically sealed system we call Japan [...] But what have we Japanese learned from that dizzying tragedy? [...] We did away with the pre-war emperor system and put the Peace Constitution in its place. And as a result we have, to be sure, come to live in an efficient, rational world based on the ideology of a modern civil society, and that efficiency has brought about an almost overwhelming prosperity in our society. Yet, I (and perhaps many others) can't seem to escape the suspicion that even now, in many areas of society, we are being peacefully and quietly obliterated as nameless articles of consumption. We go on believing that we live in the so-called free 'civil state' we call 'Japan' with our fundamental human rights guaranteed, but is this truly the case? Peel back a layer of skin, and what do we find breathing and pulsating there but the same old sealed national system or ideology.' As far as Murakami is concerned, nothing has changed in all the decades since Nomonhan. Perhaps the peeling of the skin of the spy and nationalist zealot Yamamoto is a metaphor for the need to look beneath the outer layer to discover why Japan, even in peacetime, continues to regard its own people as expendable commodities.

Selection Three: Matthew Strecher. *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*. The University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 2002 (104-105).

There is a clear link between the 'core identity,' sexuality, and violence, one that is perhaps inevitable given the fact that coitus itself involves a penetration and is thus innately a violation, a literal invasion of the body. Murakami's use of images related to bladed weapons-- the knife used to skin Lt. Mamiya's commander, the bayonet used to kill the Chinese prisoners, or the knife Wataya Noboru

wields in the final confrontation with Tōru-- suggests no more or less of a penetration than Noboru's invasion of Kanō Crete's body. Perhaps it is inevitable, then, that the means to restoring the core identities that have been lost is also sexual, and that Tōru, an essentially passive being up until the end of the novel when he bludgeons Noboru to death with a baseball bat, is the key to this. Much of his function as a mystical healer is foreshadowed in his relationship with Kanō Crete, the former prostitute who, through magical means, now visits Tōru in his dreams. Significantly, her character overlaps with that of the 'telephone woman,' Kumiko, for when they meet it is in the unconscious hotel room, and Kanō Crete writhes atop him wearing a blue dress he recognizes as his wife's. Most important, however, is that unlike the encounter between Kanō Crete and Wataya Noboru, in which Noboru clearly occupied the position of dominance while Kanō Crete was helpless, the sexual roles between herself and Tōru are reversed in his dreamscape, where in the first instance she performs fellatio on him, and in the second he lies on his back and she sits astride him, and he ejaculates into her. This reassertion of control, of a dominant role, not only helps Kanō Crete to reestablish a sense of self, severely disrupted by Noboru, but also suggests through the superimposition of her character on Kumiko's that the secret to reversing the effects of Noboru's mutilation is for the victim to take an active role.

Selection Four: Matthew Strecher. *Haruki Murakami's The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2006 (47-48).

If the 'other' exists in the realm of the unconscious, how then does Toru encounter his own 'other' in the conscious world? The answer lies in the concept of the 'nostalgic image' [...] The concept of the nostalgic image is fairly straightforward, but demands a leap of faith on the part of readers, because it is heavily dependent on the magical elements in the text. It refers to a recurring motif in Murakami fiction in which the protagonist longs desperately for someone or something he has lost-- a friend, a lover, an object-- and in response, his unconscious mind, using his memories of the object or person in question, creates a likeness, or a surrogate, which then appears in the conscious world as a character in the story. There is, however, one major catch: nothing ever really looks quite the same in both worlds. Thus, to the protagonist as well as the hapless reader of Murakami fiction, the relationship between the 'nostalgic image' character and its origin is often obscure [...] In the context of Murakami's fictional world this means that nothing passes from the unconscious into the conscious world without experiencing some kind of radical transformation in appearance. Nevertheless, we can usually spot these 'image characters' by their peculiarity.

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Selection One: Regina James. *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*. Boston: Twayne, 1991 (77-80).

Critics who charge that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* abandons the struggle for a free, revolutionary Latin America must think that without victory there is no struggle. In its radical critique of conventional politics, the novel argues both the futility and the necessity of resistance. Against the colonel's will to justice, the politicians in black coats weave their flimsy webs of political compromise, discussion, delay, and deferral that the colonel cannot break through. The politicians are all the same, whether they meet in cold early morning cafés to munch on who said what or send specious letters of

condolence to their enemies or file infinite briefs for the banana company. That radical critique comprehends a critique of radicalism. Whether it carries that radical critique to the explicit endorsement of a revolutionary position, the reader's judgment [...] may decide. García Márquez follows the historically free account of Col. Aureliano Buendía's wars with the historically precise account of "the events in the banana zone of the Department of Magdalena between November 1928 and March 1929," including the "incident" at the Ciénaga train station in December 1928. [...] When García Márquez also reconstructs the strike, he unites a personal myth and a political paradigm. A reality erased by tacit agreement and official historiography is reestablished, and the memory loss caused by insomnia plagues is undone [...] The point, again, is that the narrative restores to reality an event the "official story" denies. The story recovered here is rather minor by the standards of modern atrocities, just as the Terror of the French Revolution dwindles to nothing beside our gulags and holocausts. But the act of remembering is the paradigmatic act: it is the act of consciousness that creates a conscience in us.

Selection Two: Sandra Boschetto. "One Hundred Years of Solitude in Interdisciplinary Courses." *Approaches to Teaching García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Ed. María Elena de Valdéz and Mario J. Valdéz. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1990 (62).

In *One Hundred Years* the assumptions of the industrial revolution emerge as just that-- a set of assumptions. García Márquez's readers learn to see them as formulations of reality and not as reality itself. In studying these assumptions, we investigate an era's perception. The readers of *One Hundred Years* can study an outlook on the world and recognize that certain imaginative forms are cognate with it. Magical realism, for example, can be understood as a challenge not so much to conventions of literary realism as to basic assumptions of modern positivistic thought: a critique of the vanity of Western civilization and an understanding of cultural relativity. The political turmoil that continues to cloud Latin America has helped nourish a skepticism about the values of the industrial revolution. As students are confronted with this skepticism in *One Hundred Years*, they may confront other questions. Does history shape technology, or, as appears evident from the Latin American model, does technology shape history? This question is important for developing an overview of the significance of technology in Latin America and for understanding nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western ideology, with its conscious effort to invest technological progress with democratic legitimacy. The historical inevitability accorded technological 'progress,' particularly by the nineteenth-century positivists, is problematic in a society such as Macondo (Latin America), which perceives divine purpose as the prime mover in the unfolding of national history. The ability to predict the future presupposes some conception of rational historical causation. But with the progressive waves of gypsies-- who are viewed as symbols of advancing technology and its parent, scientific progress-- this conception is lost in Macondo. Events are inexplicable, and people are the playthings of fortune. 'It was as if God had decided to put to the test every capacity for surprise and was keeping the inhabitants of Macondo in a permanent alternation between excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation, to such an extreme that no one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay' (212). Technology is presented as an irrational force that appears to have been substituted for an otherwise failed sense of history-- that is, of logic and purpose in the unfolding of events.

Selection Three: James Higgins. “*Cien años de soledad.*” *Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude: A Casebook.* Ed. Gene H. Bell-Villada. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 (46-47).

The story of the Buendías also reveals the limited nature of the individual’s control of his own destiny. Experience teaches Pilar Ternera that “the history of the family was a mechanism of irreversible repetitions” (p. 470), while Ursula observes that “time wasn’t passing ... but going round in circles” (p. 409). These insights are sparked off by the perception that the same character traits are passed on from generation to generation (p. 258) and that each new generation engages in activities that echo those of its predecessors. [...] Implied here is not merely that the human personality is largely shaped by heredity and environment, but also that individual life is subject to generic laws in that, since all men live out a limited range of experiences, every human existence corresponds to an archetypal pattern. The world that the Buendias inhabit is one that fails to come up to the level of man’s expectations, and their history is a catalog of “lost dreams” p. 438) and “numerous frustrated enterprises” (p. 452). Again and again the characters find fulfillment denied them [...] Not only are the Buendías’ hopes and aspirations thwarted by life, but also misfortunes arbitrarily befall them [...] For many of the characters, indeed, life becomes synonymous with suffering, and a recurring motif is withdrawal from the world in a symbolic retreat to the refuge of the womb. In *Cien años*, peace of mind is achieved only when the Buendías opt out of active emotional involvement in life.

Selection Four: Michael Wood. *Landmarks of World Literature: García Márquez 100 Years of Solitude.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 (34-36).

When García Márquez, receiving the Nobel Prize, spoke of the solitude of Latin America-- that was the title of his acceptance speech-- he meant its difference, its strangeness to others, and the failure of supposedly friendly countries to offer concrete support to its aspirations. It is true that he also took pride in what he saw as the source of this difference, the extravagant unlikeliness of much of life in Latin America, but this is precisely the reverse side of the same coin. Solitude is like progress: one always has too much or too little. It is worth pausing over the word. *Soledad* is an alluring, mournful, much-used Spanish noun, suggesting both a doom and a solace, a flight from love but also from lies, a claim to dignity which is also a submission to neglect. *Loneliness* has some of this flavour, but only some. *Soledad* is part of a culture which calls its streets paradise or bitterness or disenchantment; and gives girls names like Virtues, Sorrows and Mercies. *Soledad* is itself a girl’s name, and the name of Octavio Paz’s Mexican labyrinth. *Soledades* is the title of one of the most famous poems in the Spanish language, Gongora’s evocation of a pastoral shipwreck [...] There are individual solitudes which are not the mark of the family or of the writer’s conspiracy against his characters but responses to particular, troubling experiences: sexual initiation is a ‘fearful solitude’ [31: 35]; the possibility of fatherhood makes a man ‘anxious for solitude’ [35: 39] [...] Incest too, the great family terror and temptation, is an aspect of the theme, a refusal of the world of others, of the outside [...] García Márquez himself is inclined to moralize this issue in a rather narrow way. ‘The Buendías’, he said in an interview, ‘were incapable of loving and this is the key to their solitude and their frustration. Solitude, I believe, is the opposite of solidarity.’ Elsewhere he has insisted that this is ‘a political concept: solitude considered as the negation of solidarity.’ It is true that the attraction of solitude, or quietism, is very dangerous, and especially for politically disaffected or despairing Latin Americans.