

One Hundred Years of Solitude: **Cultural and Historical Contexts**

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Before he wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez was a well-respected writer but not known outside his Latin American literary circle. The novel's publication in 1967 changed everything, propelling García Márquez into international fame and shining a bright spotlight on Latin American literature. Most critics consider *One Hundred Years* to be the greatest—and the final—novel of the Latin Boom, a literary movement spanning the 1960s in which Latin American writers changed the framework of Latin American fiction and for the first time received international recognition on the same level of authors such as Vladimir Nabokov and Günter Grass. According to scholar Robin Fiddian:

The boom represented a qualitative shift in the writing of Latin American fiction, and demonstrated “an assertion of self-confident modernity” that was felt in literary circles throughout the subcontinent. An immediate benefit to the authors who participated was a sense, especially strong at the height of the boom, of collaboration in a collective enterprise and the discovery of an identity and purpose around which individuals and groups could unite. (10)

The success of the Boom coincided with the Cuban Revolution, occurring at a time when creative, cultural, and political changes were rippling across Latin America. The Boom writers, all of whom supported the Revolution, wanted to provide Latin America with a new literary voice, and, with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as one reviewer pointed out, García Márquez “brings, singled-handed a new banner to their collective venture” (Martínez 35).

Published at a time when many American and European authors and literary critics were arguing over the death of the novel, the reception

of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* showed that readers were hungry for a novel with a strong cast of characters, epic scope, narrative prose, and imaginative style. Across Latin America, people of all socio-economic classes and various backgrounds recognized their world in the intoxicating words of García Márquez. An early review in an Argentine journal called the novel “a minute metaphor of life in America, its struggles, its nightmares and its frustrations” (Martínez 35). For many readers, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* brilliantly captured the sociopolitical history of Latin America and the deep belief that the Cuban Revolution would bring change. Fellow Boom writers lavishly praised the book, with Julio Cortázar calling it “the literary equivalent to the Cuban Revolution” and Mario Vargas Llosa describing it as an epic creation, a “total novel” (qtd. in Janes 15). It also transcended the boundaries of regionalism, introducing people across the world to the history and myths of Latin America. In a review for *The New York Times*, Robert Kiely wrote that *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which was the first Latin American literary work to land on U.S. best-seller lists, was “so filled with humor, rich detail and startling distortion that it brings to mind the best of Faulkner and Günter Grass. It is a South American Genesis, an earthy piece of enchantment” (para. 13).

The Boom authors typically questioned realism and naturalism and turned instead to modernism for literary inspiration. Their writing marked a clear break from earlier Latin American novels’ style of social realism, which tended to be didactic and narrowly regionalist. In one early review for *Primera Plana*, a leading Argentine journal, Tomás Eloy Martínez attested, “If the literature of Latin America is emerging at the present time—as it almost certainly is—as the most exceptional of all literatures, this is due solely to the fact of its acceptance of its obligation to be subversive and its lawless incursion into a realm of imagination without boundaries” (35). As the Boom writers experimented with style, narrative, and perspective, their work was also infused with the politics and history of Latin America. “The boom novel is never