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“Among Mankind’s Deepest Needs”: Repetitive Grief and Intimate Isolation in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

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Human beings crave intimacy. It's an inevitability—something we are born needing, taught to want as we grow up, and continue to crave, seek, and cherish for the rest of our lives. However, achieving such intimacy—at least in terms of what would normally be considered a happy, healthy, griefless relationship—is not always as simple as it sounds. Both Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* attempt an examination of the breakdown of human intimacy. These novels, though written by wholly different men from wholly different regions, manage to evoke a similar perspective on the concept of grief—born out of relational instances of shame, sacrifice, and betrayal—as it arises in close relationships. Grief, as it exists within the context of a relationship that is already isolated in its interpersonality¹, manages to create an even deeper isolation for the individual futilely seeking relational comfort in a struggling intimate attachment.

This is the case for nearly all of the characters of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The novel focuses on the wayward intimacy of two quasi-couples, Tomas and Tereza and Sabina and Franz. Much of the novel explores the attempts of Tereza—a quiet waitress from the small town of Zurich—to escape from the “vast concentration camp of bodies” that defined her mother's world by marrying a charming, but philandering doctor by the name of Tomas, who ultimately enmeshes Tereza even further into the very terror she was seeking to escape (Kundera 47). Sabina, a painter with whom Tomas engages in a contract of “erotic friendship,” struggles to find her place in a world of relational betrayals—namely those that she perpetrates against others—while Franz, a professor who worships the brief affair he had with the untameable painter, leaves his judgmental wife and takes up with a modest, though devoted, student with “oversized glasses” (125). Though Kundera's contemplative style manages to inject

¹ For clarification, the concept of interpersonality is being defined in this essay as the isolated intimacy which exists for two or more individuals in a close relationship.

a certain amount of humor into the characters' various attempts to find happiness—or at least, avoid misery—in their respective relationships, the true depth of the grief that exists within them is starkly undeniable.

The same could be said of the complex intimacies existing within the Buendia clan of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The novel follows a family whose foundations were born out of a wary marriage between cousins and a subsequent murder to maintain the honor of the patriarch, Jose Arcadio Buendia. This family subsists through multiple generations—with many family members being given the same name—of minimal triumphs and countless egregious griefs, including death, betrayal, incest, insanity, civil war, and self-inflicted aloneness. The broad scope of this novel makes it difficult to fully examine the true depth of every single grief that exists for every single member of the Buendia clan, but I will seek to aptly investigate these griefs in the manner in which they inevitably cycle through the family, affecting not only specific members, but also the family narrative as a whole. Similarly to Kundera, Garcia Marquez utilizes his indelible sense of humor to bring both a unique perspective and strange sense of clarity to the family's often overwhelming tragedies.

In fact, both authors seek to portray the griefs experienced by their respective characters in an equally realistic and compassionate manner. In exploring the intimacy which exists on multiple levels—both in the isolation of the relationship itself, as well as in the further, personal isolation of individuals recognizing the failures of their relationships—both Kundera and Garcia Marquez have managed to create a vastly complex and full-bodied picture of grief as it exists within the realm of the intimate relationship. Through the use of similar repetitive structures, philosophizing narrators, and excursions into the world of magical realism, both authors create a

means of exploring the way in which grief, iterated cyclically and perpetually, shapes a close relationship, and ultimately redefines the very nature of the intimacy itself.

The modern field of psychology—having spent decades studying intimate relationships between humans and the way in which such close bonds form—has certain intelligence to offer on the concept. There are several theories that have sought to achieve a full understanding of the complexities of human intimacy. Out of these various attempts, attachment theory has been perhaps the most essential in furthering the field of relationship science. This theory, studied extensively by many including Inge Bretherton in her article “The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth,” was developed in the late 1950s through the joint research of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (759). Though this particular theory, as it was initially developed, focuses almost exclusively on the close, intimate bond between an infant and its mother, attachment theory serves as the basis for the further development and advancement of what psychologists Cindy Hazan and Phillip R. Shaver call “the science of relationships” (68). In fact, Hazan and Shaver have worked to take Bowlby and Ainsworth’s initial work with attachment theory and apply it to adult romantic relationships. Both Bowlby and Ainsworth’s and Hazan and Shaver’s respective work in examining intimate relationships is critical to the psychological understanding of how these relationships are supposed to work: “...parental figures tend to be permanent members of the hierarchy, but their positions naturally change as a child matures. Others are added to or dropped from the hierarchy. Eventually with the formation of a pair bond in adulthood, a peer—usually a sexual partner—assumes the position of primary attachment figure and ascends to the top of the hierarchy” (Hazan and Shaver 69). It would seem then that attachments—or intimate bonds—are considered to be an inevitable part of the average human life. Humans first bond deeply and intimately with their parental figures or caretakers,

and that intimacy is then later transferred over to a peer relationship with, as Hazan and Shaver note, “a sexual partner” (69). Hazan and Shaver’s description of the attachments formed and their ready transference between parental and romantic figures also suggests equivalence of an individual’s intimate relationships. This transference ultimately means that neither an intimate parental relationship nor an intimate romantic relationship has more significance; rather they are both equally significant at different times within an individual’s life.

This concept of intimate equivalence especially makes sense when considering exactly how the idea of an intimate relationship is utilized in both novels. It can certainly be argued that Kundera, in the context of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, examines an intimate relationship strictly within the sphere of the romantic, while Garcia Marquez, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, tends to focus on intimacy within the realm of the familial relationship. However, I would argue that the relationships examined within either novel, rather than being easily boxed into two distinct categories, instead are understood to be fluid and void of concrete labels. Though the relationship between Tomas and Tereza could easily be termed wholly romantic—the two met in the small restaurant where Tereza worked as waitress, she went to Prague to meet him, they made love, they married—it is impossible to ignore the ways in which other “outside” familial relationships have shaped their union. For instance, Tereza’s relationship with her mother completely dictates the way in which she interacts with her husband, Tomas: “She had come to him to escape her mother’s world, a world where all bodies were equal” (Kundera 58). For Tereza, the relationship she has with Tomas—including the grief she shares with him—ultimately stems from the relationship and grief she shared with her mother. The needs she developed in childhood, void of the individualized love she craved, readily transferred over to her adult, romantic attachment.

Similarly, the relationships which Garcia Marquez creates in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—a complex web of Buendia’s living, loving, suffering, and dying across five generations—constantly seek to avoid strict delineations between the romantic and the familial. From the very beginning, the relationship between Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran, who are cousins, blurs the relational lines within the Buendia clan. Many of their descendants follow suit, engaging in relationships that not only cross over into the realm of the incestuous, but which also cement the definition of an intimate relationship as something that is neither wholly romantic nor wholly familial, but rather encompassing of both. Accordingly, the terms *romantic* and *familial* are intertwined in the concept of the family, in which the initial romantic couple serves as the foundation and then subsequently depends on the future romantic attachments of its offspring to maintain the context of the “family unit.”

Before continuing is important to clarify that the utilization of psychological concepts in this essay is necessary to grasping the comparative examination of these terms—specifically those relating to intimacy and grief—within the novels identified. Though the examination of these complex concepts may ultimately be a little reductive, the purpose of their use within this essay is to offer a rudimentary basis for understanding the standards by which intimacy and grief are typically understood in terms of modern psychology. From there, it is possible to discern the differences between the scientific perspective and that employed by both Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In other words, by first examining the scientific norm accompanying these two essential concepts—intimate relationships and grief—we can then begin to see how Kundera and Garcia Marquez’s novels seek to stray from that norm, and perhaps even understand why they choose to do so.

In that vein, we must also examine the ideals that psychology provides for a healthy and happy intimate relationship. The expected behavior for such a union is, in part, often determined by the individuals involved in the relationship, as well as the context of the relationship which they have created. However, there are certainly a few basic categories of behavior and interaction to which most relationships theoretically subscribe, as explained by Harry T. Reis and W. Andrew Collins in “Relationships, Human Behavior, and Psychological Science.” Reis and Collins list these categories as “cooperation and competition, adherence to social norms, coalition formation, attachment, face perception, social inclusion and exclusion, communication of emotion, romantic jealousy, empathy, and commitment”² (233-234). These behavioral norms, as they are described by Reis and Collins, present a scientific interpretation of the normal boundaries and behavioral expectations for a relationship. In many ways, this objective precedent readily ties into Kundera’s statements concerning the contract laid down between the individuals involved in an intimate relationship. For Tomas, this contract was twofold. The first was his “unwritten contract of erotic friendship” with Sabina, which “stipulated that Tomas should exclude all love from his life” (Kundera 13). The moment Tomas fell in love with Tereza, he violated the most critical clause of that contract, and so ruined the basis of intimacy on which the erotic friendship was founded. The second contract consisted of the unspoken understandings on which Tomas and Tereza had built their marriage—namely that, though Tomas could and would go on sleeping with other women, Tereza was responsible for maintaining complete fidelity: “Their love was an oddly asymmetrical construction: it was supported by the absolute certainty of her fidelity like a gigantic edifice supported by a single column” (160). Though not exactly a

² Reis and Collins go on to explain that these “processes,” as they have termed them, cannot be applied equally to all of the relationships an individual’s life, but are rather applied selectively. Other processes, or relational expectations not included in this list may also be applied to an intimate relationship, depending on the needs of the individuals involved (234).

fair determination of their relational duties to one another in the same sense that Reis and Collins have described it, Tomas and Tereza still held each other to some sort of standard of behavioral expectation, which, when broken, inevitably threatens the stability of their union.

Though Garcia Marquez does not designate formal relational contracts in the same manner as Kundera, it is obvious that there are certain behavioral expectations between the various members of the Buendia clan. For instance, Jose Arcadio Buendia, the patriarch of the family—who spearheaded the effort to found the town of Macondo, among several other large and enterprising projects—was expected to provide, to lead, and to maintain a certain level of familial decorum. His wife, Ursula Iguaran, gave him a considerable amount of freedom with the expectation that he would continue to act along the—to use Kundera’s terms—unspoken “contract” of their relationship. However, when Jose Arcadio Buendia flew into an inconsolable rage after yet another failed endeavor—“[grabbing] the bar from a door and with the savage violence of his uncommon strength [smashing] to dust the equipment in the alchemy laboratory... [and] shouting like a man possessed”—he had, in failing to abide by the behavioral expectations as they were laid down by Ursula Iguaran, undoubtedly broken the terms of that contract (Garcia Marquez 78). The family responded accordingly by tying the raging Jose Arcadio Buendia to the chestnut tree in the courtyard of their house as he continued “barking in the strange language and giving off a green froth at the mouth” (78). Just as with the contracts set down by the characters of Kundera’s novel, and in line with the psychological precedents provided by Reis and Collins, a breach of the relational contract threatens the state of the intimate union, both romantic and familial.

In setting down that there are certain expectations involved in maintaining a healthy, happy intimate relationship, Reis and Collins are also establishing the idea that the failure to live

up to those expectations results in relational consequences, namely—as will be examined in this essay and as proven by the example above—relational grief. When, as stated by Reis and Collins, the people involved in a relationship “respond (or not) to each other’s wishes, concerns, abilities, and emotional expressions” or when “they modify their behavior to be together (or not),” the persons involved in that relationship are either abiding by the unstated unexpectations of their interpersonal intimacy, or, they are not—and when they are not, they expose both themselves and each other to the deeper, intrapersonal³ isolation of relational grief (Reis and Collins 234).

While, in modern psychological terms, the concept of grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, in this essay, and in the context of the intimate relationships created and explored by Kundera and Garcia Marquez, the grief experienced within these relationships stems not only from bereavement, but also the despair felt at the emotional separation and stunted communication arising out of intimate shame, betrayal, and sacrifice. In fact, the loss or failure of love is, in itself, a type of bereavement, which, in some cases—and most certainly in the case of these two novels—can often prove to be even more painful than the loss of a loved one through death.

Grief—as a disease, as a perception, and as an experience—has had a long history in and of itself. Most simply, grief can be defined as an intense, emotional reaction to loss. However, according to Leeat Granek, a practicing critical health psychologist, in her article “Grief as Pathology: The Evolution of Grief Theory in Psychology from Freud to the Present,” grief has gone through a number of definitional transitions according to our various attempts to both better understand the emotion and, in many cases, find a way to rid ourselves of it. Richard Burton, who first began to explore the concept of “melancholy” in the mid-17th century, dramatically

³ For clarification, intrapersonal is defined, in this essay, as the sphere of isolation beyond the interpersonal; intrapersonal can encompass only one individual.

described it as “a cruel torture of the soul, a most inexplicable grief, poisoned worm, consuming body and soul, and gnawing the very heart, a perpetual executioner, continual night, profound darkness”(Burton n.p.)—and this is only the beginning of his intensive, fervent attempt to define the concept. Burton’s exploration of melancholy was a far cry from the modern psychological interpretation of grief, which was first introduced as a term capable of scientific study and understanding by Sigmund Freud (49). Today, grief, in psychological terms, is considered to be a “pathological condition necessitating psychological intervention,” with psychologists aiming to “get people functioning and back to work in a timely and cost efficient manner” (48). In other words, grief, as a medical condition, has the connotation of being atypical and unacceptable and, despite the fact that the entirety of the human population will inevitably experience grief—whether from the loss of a loved one through death or as a result of bereavement stemming from another type of loss, such as the failure of an intimate relationship—at some point in their lives, the psychological interpretation of grief connotes very little societal understanding for the very natural human emotion.

It is this perspective on grief—the cold, scientific understanding of this deeply human experience as nothing more than an emotional disturbance and symptomatic disease that needs to be evaluated, treated, and eradicated—which both Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seek to challenge. Both of these novels manage to evoke a similar perspective on the predicament—or perhaps, opportunity—of grief within the context of intimate relationships. These two novels, both often considered to be the signature works of two of the world’s most celebrated and most prolific contemporary authors, attempt to redefine the concept of grief, delving into both the complexities of its causation and the convoluted necessity of its manifestation.

The Cyclical Iteration of Grief as an Overarching Narrative Structure

The novelists' attempt at redefinition is first understood in the way in which both authors approach the overarching structure of grief. As it is typically examined within the field of modern psychology, grief is often considered to be a process. The first to postulate the idea of grieving in terms of processional phases was Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who, in her foundational text *On Death and Dying*, described five predetermined stages through which a grieving individual would pass: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance⁴ (ix). Martha R. Fowlkes, in her article "The Social Regulation of Grief," also recognizes the typical expectations of the grieving process as it has been scientifically studied, stating, "grief is understood as a private emotional experience with a predictable symptomology" (636). The "working through" of grief as it is defined by Kubler-Ross, is described by Fowlkes as being viewed "substantially in terms of the intraphysic⁵ attributes of the individual in conjunction with the effects of the timing and cause of death and certain demographic variables" (636). This wholly scientific interpretation of the grieving process leaves little room for understanding the full scope of emotional variability through which an actual human being, in the midst of grief, will actually experience.

However, grief as it is explored in these two novels cannot be so easily described in terms of a finite process. The characters of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seem to find themselves locked in a cyclical iteration of that process, fully represented by the way in which Kundera and Garcia Marquez have chosen to structure their novels. According to author E.L. Doctorow, in his article "Four Characters Under Two

⁴ In Kubler-Ross's model of grief, once the individual has passed through the five stages, they have, in hopeful terms, completely moved beyond the grief caused by that initial incident.

⁵ Intraphysic is a psychological term which refers to the internal psychological processes—either positive, negative, or neutral—of an individual.

Tyrannies: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*,” both Kundera and Garcia Marquez “know how to get ahead of [the] story and circle back to it and run it through again with a different emphasis” (29). This overarching structure—repetitive and cyclical in itself—is, in many ways, how both authors approach and emphasize the grief on which they have based their novels. Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which follows the complex interactions of the novel’s two main couples through many of the experiences involved in typical romantic relationships—introduction, falling in love, marriage, infidelity, and so on—depends on Kundera’s atypical fascination with exploring both these experiences, and the grief that inevitably coincides with them, in a nonlinear fashion to better grasp the full scope of the anguish that exists within these intimate attachments. To further establish the structure of his novel and the grief which it explores as cyclical, Kundera begins with a philosophical pondering of the concept of eternal return, stating, “The idea of eternal return is a mysterious one, and Nietzsche has often perplexed other philosophers with it: to think that everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs ad infinitum” (3). Kundera, according to his characteristic love of building on a theme—which, as described by John Barnard in his article, “*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: Repetition, Formal Structure, and Critique,” could be deemed analogous to the way in which a composer utilizes themes and motifs—manages to utilize the concept of eternal return in the way in which he compels each character to relive, repeat, and reevaluate (67). Nearly every event and experience in the novel is repeated and explored multiple times and through multiple perspectives, serving to not only emphasize the repetitive structure of the novel, but also to repeatedly—and often quite painfully—re-emphasize and reinforce the grief experienced by these characters.

Take, for example, Kundera's description of how Tomas and Tereza first met, which he explores initially through Tomas's perspective, and then again later through Tereza's. Mere moments after Tereza travels from her hometown of Zurich to find Tomas in Prague, the two make love, after which Tereza immediately falls ill. It is in this moment, after the physical fulfillment of their lust, that Tomas first begins to recognize his desire for Tereza as something more than physical; Tomas feels as if she had been sent to him, like a child in a "bulrush basket that had been daubed with pitch," and then, "all at once he fancied she had been with him for many years and was dying. He had a sudden clear feeling that he would not survive her death. He would lie down beside her and want to die with her" (Kundera 7). In both describing Tereza as a child in a "bulrush basket" and in illuminating Tomas's "feeling that he would not survive her death," Kundera has made it clear that grief existed—and was perhaps essential—even at the beginning of their union (7). Their relationship, born partially out of Tereza's desperation to escape the lonely life she lived with her mother, was cemented in the grief Tomas felt at the moment of their love's inception; Tomas, a man who had heretofore been engaged only in numerous contracts of "erotic friendship" felt the weight of that love, and of the inevitable and inescapable fact of his sudden understanding that, upon this woman's death, he would "want to die with her" (7). In this moment, we see perhaps the first tangible circumstance of Kundera's exploration of ideas of lightness and weight throughout the novel. Barnard expands on this idea, stating that Tomas "is burdened by heaviness through his compassionate ('co-feeling')⁶ love for Tereza" (66). For Tomas, his love for Tereza, inherently at odds with his previously attachment-

⁶ Kundera defines "compassion" or "co-feeling"—which he deems to be the more appropriate term for the concept—in the following way: "to have compassion (co-feeling) means not only to be able to live with the other's misfortune but also to feel with him any emotion—joy, anxiety, happiness, pain" (20).

less lifestyle, is an inevitable burden—or, as Kundera would term it, a weight—and consequently, a grief.

However, Kundera's explication of that initial, combined moment of love and grief does not stop with Tomas's understanding of it. In line with the assertions made by both Doctorow and Barnard, and as a means of establishing his novel as repetitive under the umbrella of Nietzsche's concept of eternal return, Kundera then explores the same moment from Tereza's perspective. Barnard notes the significance of this repetition, stating, "The resultant repetition of the same events differently perceived (the first night Tomas and Tereza spend together is described on at least three separate occasions) give them a thickness (indeed, weight) caused by re-imagining what had previously seemed the authoritative account" (68). Barnard's explication of Kundera's method of repeating the same events—and consequently, the same grief—further emphasizes Kundera's focus on the concept of eternal return and the way in which he is ultimately utilizing it as a basis for building the case of Tomas and Tereza's relational grief. Here again, that grief is present from the very beginning. It is necessary to mention, as Kundera does, that when Tereza came to meet Tomas in Prague, she was escaping a mother who, upon realizing that she was old and ugly, and having experienced several of her own failed romantic attachments, blamed "the only person who belonged to her and had no means of escape... Tereza" (Kundera 43). Part of this blame manifested itself in Tereza's mother's need to make all bodies equal; she often walked around the house naked and laughed at her daughter's discomfort, exclaiming, "Tereza can't reconcile herself to the idea that the human body pisses and farts" (45). Tereza's mother's efforts to force her daughter to remain with her in a world of immodesty, which discarded ideas of youth and beauty as meaningless and which, to Tereza, felt like "a vast concentration camp of bodies, one like the next, with souls invisible" was ultimately what drove

Tereza into the arms of the ambivalent Tomas. Keeping in line with the concepts of attachment theory and intimate equivalence, it was this world of familial blame and nearly constant shame which caused Tereza, impelled “by the birds of fortuity,” to take a week’s leave from work and book a one way ticket to Prague in the hopes of finding the charming doctor she had waited on in her tiny restaurant in Zurich (53).

It was in this moment, calling Tomas from the train station and subsequently arriving at his door, that Tereza briefly felt as if she had escaped the familial grief which had plagued her for the entirety of her young existence. But that grief starts anew the instant she and Tomas begin to make love:

It was like a ticket into Tomas’s world. She realized that she had nothing but that miserable ticket, and the thought brought her nearly to tears. To keep from crying, she talked too much and too loudly, and she laughed. And again he took her in his arms almost at once and they made love. She had entered a mist in which nothing could be seen and only her scream could be heard. (54)

In much the same way as Tomas, recognizing that he could not live without her, Tereza too experiences the full realization of her relational grief—her weight, her burden—at the moment they first begin to express their attraction and desire for one another. While Tereza may have escaped the “concentration camp of bodies” that was her mother’s house, she had managed only to buy a “miserable ticket” into a world where she could only express her passion in the markedly ominous form of a “scream” (54). Ultimately, Kundera allows us, by repeating the same critical moment in Tomas and Tereza’s history through either’s respective perspective, to more fully understand the connective grief which burdens them at precisely the same moment. This grief, iterated cyclically, serves not only as the foundation of the relational tension which these two

will continue to experience throughout the novel, but also proves emblematic of the way in which they experience their shared grief separately; Tomas attempts to sacrifice his natural inclinations toward polygamy for Tereza, all the while ultimately betraying and disappointing that attempt, while Tereza embraces the sacrifice of her bodily individuality, recognizing, as described by Joseph Mai in his article “Humanity’s ‘True Moral Test’: Shame, Idyll, and Animal Vulnerability in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*,” the “dysfunctional shame and disgust [which] lurk behind a great deal of the human interactions in Kundera’s novel” (104). Somewhere in the midst of her “mist” and her “scream,” Tereza subconsciously realizes that she has only transferred the shame and misery she had experienced in her mother’s house to her current relationship with Tomas, unknowingly forcing herself to continue the cycle of grief to which she has grown so accustomed.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* encompasses this cyclical structure—and grief structure—in much the same way as Kundera’s novel. Almost the entirety of the novel is based off the idea of a repetitive familial narrative and by explicating that narrative structure—and the way in which it inevitably influences the interactions between members of the Buendia clan—Garcia Marquez similarly perpetuates the Buendias’ cyclical grief. Here again it is necessary to refer back to Doctorow’s explication of the ability of either author “to get ahead of [the] story and circle back to it and run it through again with a different emphasis” (29). Rodica Grigore, author of “Truth, History, and Myth in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,” agrees with Doctorow, stating, “all characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tend to assert their reality (fictional or historic reality) by recurring to a prior fiction whose culmination they enact themselves” (54). Grigore’s analysis of Garcia Marquez’s novel is wholly indicative of the way in which the characters experience their grief throughout the text. The grief

is initially introduced obliquely and seemingly benignly, after which Garcia Marquez briefly abandons it, only to return to some pages later and continue to expand on it for the rest of the text. The novel opens with an example of Garcia Marquez's careful grief structure: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (1). This first sentence introduces one of Garcia Marquez's major characters and two separate plot-related events—both of which represent different strands of grief for Colonel Aureliano Buendia—which will not be fully explored until much later in the novel. This structure also sounds notably reminiscent of the way Kundera utilizes the concept of eternal return, a term that could be aptly applied to the way Garcia Marquez structures both his novel and the grief experienced by his characters.

Along those same lines, the stylistic method of subtly repeating references to certain events within the text is only one of the myriad ways in which Garcia Marquez manages to make the grief that is wholly pervasive within the novel feel even more persistent for his characters. Certainly, Garcia Marquez's choice to have the same names repeated over and over again for five generations of various family members—Jose Arcadio, Aureliano, Ursula, Remedios, Amaranta, and so on—further adds to the cyclicity of the grief within the Buendia narrative, especially as these characters continue to experience their very similar miseries. The struggles of Aureliano Segundo (one of a pair of twins born in the fourth generation of the Buendias), for example, and both his wife, Fernanda del Carpio, and his concubine lover, Petra Cotes, perfectly explicate a portion of the Buendias' cyclical, familial grief. Aureliano Segundo, perpetually revelling in the love of excess characteristic of nearly all the Aurelianos of the Buendia line, also echoes the misery of his predecessors through his relational grief. Aureliano's grief is repetitive partially because it is very similar to the misery experienced by a number of his family

members—the same fruitless ambition as his great-grandfather Jose Arcadio Buendia, the same ambivalent self-absorption as his great-aunt Amaranta—but also because of his own inability to learn from the griefs which he himself instills within his intimate relationships. Aureliano Segundo, in seeking to please both his austere, virginal wife and his passionate (albeit somewhat selfish) lover, inevitably fails to please either them or himself, ultimately enmeshing everyone involved into deeper intrapersonal isolation. The grief in these particular romantic attachments is reminiscent of that which arises in Kundera’s novel, with Tomas striving to please his devoted, monogamous wife, Tereza, while continually feeling the irrepressible need to sleep with other women. In much the same way, Aureliano Segundo does his best to satisfy the demanding Fernanda, even going so far as to engulf the whole town of Macondo in a “noisy celebration that lasted twenty days” upon their marriage. Petra Cotes, was a much more powerful force, however: “Aureliano Segundo went back to her house as soon as the honeymoon was over... At seven in the evening, still dressed as the queen, she received him in bed. He had been married scarcely two months, but she realized at once that things were not going well in the nuptial bed, and she had the delicious pleasure of vengeance fulfilled” (204). This quote evidences the fruitless grief-causing cycle in which these three have mired themselves: Fernanda is cold, severe, and unforgiving, Aureliano Segundo returns to Petra Cotes to fulfill his insatiable appetites (both physical and emotional), and when Aureliano Segundo is forsaken by Fernanda for his griefless promiscuity, he abandons Petra Cotes and promises faithfulness to his wife, only to once again break his promise within the week.

As with many members of the Buendia family, one of the major sources of intimate grief for these characters is an overt lack of communication. This is exactly the point which Jonathon Ryan emphasizes in his article “Problematic Communication and Theories of Language in *One*

Hundred Years of Solitude,” wherein he states three essential factors as being responsible for contributing to the “personal isolation” of each of Garcia Marquez’s characters: “Three recurring types of interaction problem are illustrated throughout the novel: the inability to communicate, the lack of will to communicate, and miscommunication” (94). The critical and seemingly insurmountable problems surrounding issues of communication—defined by Ryan as the attempt of it, the lack of skill for it, and the simple misunderstanding of it—serve as not only the fundamental basis for the cyclical grief which occurs between Aureliano Segundo, Fernanda, and Petra Cotes, but also for nearly the entirety of the Buendia family. Ursula Iguaran, though constantly trying to make peace with her notorious son Colonel Aureliano Buendia, the unsympathetic wager of thirty-two civil wars, always fails in the attempt to communicate effectively with him, even when encouraging him to do what she deems right. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia’s good friend, General José Raquel Moncada is sentenced to death, Ursula begs him to not to follow through, but the “Colonel Aureliano Buendía, in spite of the violent recriminations of Úrsula, refused to commute the sentence” (Garcia Marquez 158). This is only one example, of many, of the family’s stubborn communicational ineptitude. As the title of novel might suggest, each member of the Buendia clan, despite attempting intimacy in their strangely fluid sphere of platonic familial and romantic attachment, is wrapped up in their own, deeper sphere of more intense, intrapersonal isolation; each member of the family is continually separating themselves from one another, emphasized not only their complete and total lack of ability to communicate effectively, but also by the very cyclicity of their grief itself.

The structure of Garcia Marquez’s novel starkly defies the psychological boundaries, as set down by Kubler-Ross, for the experience of grief. In Macondo, there is no chance—in between the nearly constant deaths, the civil wars raged by Colonel Aureliano Buendia, the rains that

lasted “four years, eleven months, and two days”, and the perpetual, plaguing presence of the ghost of Melquiades—to process grief in Kubler-Ross’s prescribed stages (315). Rather, grief must be experienced repetitively—over and over again—as each member of the family, already burdened with the names and miseries of the family members that came before them, is continually bombarded with another incidence of hardship and anguish until it, at last, drives the Buendias into their apparent demise.

The same is true for the characters of Kundera’s novel, wrapped in an equivalent intrapersonal isolation and similarly plagued by an inability to communicate. For example, Sabina, rather than simply expressing her doubts and reservations to her lover, Franz, instead chooses—as is her nature—to betray him, by way of abandonment, in the same way she has betrayed nearly all of the close relationships in her life. When Sabina hears Franz’s soft words about love— that “love means renouncing strength”—she reacts the only way she knows how: “Sabina realized two things: first, that Franz’s words were noble and just; second, that they disqualified him from her love life” (Kundera 112). Not surprisingly, and quite fittingly, this quote comes from part three of the novel, “Words Misunderstood,” an allusion to Sabina and Franz’s dismal miscommunications. Sabina’s realization arises from a seemingly arbitrary discussion between her and Franz about the concept of strength—namely in relation to Franz’s impressive arm muscles. Sabina’s subsequent decision to betray Franz’s too-soft love—she gave two days notice to the owner of her flat and skipped town without a word—was actually part of a larger, repetitive pattern of relational betrayals which served as the impetus for nearly all of her relational grief and, in the words of Jonathon Ryan, personal isolation. Sabina’s betrayal of her devoted lover is only an extension of her earlier betrayal of her father, in which she renounced her childhood home to pursue a career painting like Picasso, an artist whom her father abhorred.

Sabina's inability to fully commit to any kind of intimate attachment—whether familial or romantic—speaks not only to the function of attachment theory within her own life (the mistakes she suffered with her father are the same mistakes she suffers with her lover), but also to the way in which her intimate grief has been building cyclically since youth. Sabina is caught in the continual cycle of her need to betray the people she loves, and is, in turn, caught in the cycle of her subconscious need to cause her own irreconcilable grief.

Tomas and Tereza have also wrapped themselves up in a seemingly unbreakable cycle of miscommunication and betrayal. Tereza's grief in this instance, as discussed previously, stems partially from her desire to escape the world she inhabited with her mother—a world where Tereza was forced to accept punishment for the life her mother felt she had lost. In her mother's world, Tereza had no possibility of escaping the grief that stemmed from her mother's own relational grief, and Tereza—never being given the chance to fulfill the role of devoted daughter—was relegated merely to the role of a lowly personification of “Guilt, with no possibility of redress” (44). And so when Tereza met Tomas, she had expected things to be different. She expected, transferring her need for intimacy from the mother who could never provide it to the husband she had obstinately decided would be able to, to be cherished in the way she had always so deeply desired. Tomas appeared wholly capable of doing so—until Tereza discovered a very recently dated letter from Sabina in his desk drawer, in which the libidinous painter declared that she wanted to make love to Tomas in her studio. Though Tomas did his best to convince Tereza that “his polygamous way of life did not in the least run counter to his love for her,” Tereza's need to be special—stemming from a childhood of feeling exactly the opposite—could not handle Tomas's very blatant infidelities (16).

It is this inconsistency—Tomas’s insistence of his ardent and all-consuming love for Tereza paired with his pathological need to sleep with other women (in fact, Tomas’s “epic” womanizing is, at one point, described as a “pursuit of knowledge”) which drives the bulk of Tereza’s intimate grief (201). It is this inconsistency which the pair continue to circle over and over again throughout the text, with Tomas desperate to prove his love, but unable to remain faithful, and Tereza continually insisting that she is used to it, despite the hard evidence of her anxiously shaking hands and her haunting, death-driven dreams. Here too, Kundera explores the discovery of Tomas’s infidelity through both the perspective of the unfaithful himself and his tormented wife. From the perspective of Tomas, though there is an undeniable sympathy for poor Tereza, the text is also filled with excuses, subtles instances of blame, and aversions to his infidelity as something which might actually cause grief in their relationship. However, when we experience this same revelation of betrayal from Tereza’s perspective, the true depth of Tereza’s grief is realized in the dreams which she continues to experience countless times throughout the text. One, in particular, involves Tereza as part of a large group of women marching naked around an indoor swimming pool. In the dream, Tomas stands in a basket hanging from the ceiling, holding a gun, shouting orders, and shooting any of the women who fail to follow them. Now for Tereza, this dream was horrifying not because of the element of death, but rather for the way in which it realized the grief with which Tereza had been burdened in all of her intimate relationships from childhood to her marriage:

She had come to him to escape her mother’s world, a world where all bodies were equal. She had come to him to make her body unique, irreplaceable. But he, too, had drawn an equal sign between her and the rest of them: he kissed them all alike, stroked them alike, made no, absolutely no distinction between Tereza’s body and the other bodies. He had

sent her back into the world she tried to escape, sent her to march naked with the other naked women. (58)

This quote determines the full extent of the grief which blooms between Tomas and Tereza upon her realization of his infidelity, and which continues to cycle between them for the entirety of the novel. This grief stems from both a disparaging error in communication—namely, Tereza’s continual inability to fully express the depth of her need to be treated as unique not only in emotional love, but also in physical love—as well as Tomas’s perpetual betrayal in promising to provide her with that preferential love, only to instead make “absolutely no distinction between Tereza’s body and all the other bodies” (58). Mai notes that, as a result of Tomas’s infidelity, Tereza is unable to “redeem her shame through love” in the way she, escaping from her mother’s world, had so desperately hoped (106). In Tereza’s mind, Tomas had instead cemented that shame; he relegates her to marching, soulless, with the other naked women, constituting a grief and a consequent bereavement which Tereza, unable to remove herself from Tomas’s world the same way she had removed herself from her mother’s, continues to experience repeatedly, every night painfully aware of “the aroma of a woman’s sex organs” radiating from the follicles of his hair (Kundera 131).

Philosophical Empiricism: The Narrator’s Role in Revealing Grief

Though the events and overarching cyclical structure of these novels are enough by themselves to emphasize the true depth the grief experienced by these characters, both Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Milan Kundera offer another means of emphasis in the form of a philosophizing, though sometimes questionably reliable, narrator. Ronan McFadden, in his article “The Reliability of the Narrator in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Gabriel

Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is quick to set down the established parameters for the credibility of the *One Hundred Years of Solitude*'s seemingly empirical narrator. McFadden notes, when speaking of Remedios the Beauty's ascent into heaven, the narrator's treatment of the event, stating, "the narrator's passive, matter-of-fact tone in the face of this magical event similarly leaves little room for initial doubt. By recounting this fantastic event calmly, taking no pause for reflection, the narrator dissuades the reader from taking time to analyse the event with an empirical eye" (1). And it is certainly true that, for the majority of the text, Garcia Marquez's narrator appears to maintain a objective recounting of the events of the novel, relating the exact, minute details as a scientist might during an observational study. Indeed, if we look back to the passage about Remedios the Beauty's tragic, yet strangely peaceful ascent into heaven, we can observe that the narrator provides a specific time for the event's occurrence—"as four o'clock in the afternoon came to an end"—as well as the specific details of Remedios's lace petticoats and the beetles and dahlias that constituted her environment, making it nearly impossible to question the narrator's reliability (McFadden 1, Garcia Marquez 236). And really, though McFadden would argue otherwise, it is not the narrator's reliability which should be examined in this instance, but rather how both the empiricity of Garcia Marquez's narrator, as well as the narrator's penchant for subtle speculations, adds to the repetitive grief already present within the intimate relationships of the novel's characters.

The narrator, in being responsible for recounting not only all of the details of each situation but also, in the case of the third person omniscient narrator which exists for both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and, as will be discussed later, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, accurately expressing the emotions of each of the characters, is ultimately the most intimate lens

through which the grief existing in these close relationships can be examined. And when the narrator offers further speculation or foreshadowing, as emphasized by Birute Ciplijauskaite in “Foreshadowing as Technique and Theme in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,” then not only is the depth of that grief realized, but also the full extent of its cyclicity. Ciplijauskaite notes that this is done partially through the use of certain motifs, often emphasized and re-emphasized by the narrator, that “reappear at certain intervals and unite various parts of the novel, thus reinforcing the feeling of circularity” (481). Garcia Marquez’s narrator achieves this in much the same way as Kundera’s, both drawing on themes that recur multiple times throughout the novel, emphasizing the cyclicity of the grief by helping to frame it within the relational narratives.

The misery experienced by nearly all of the members of the Buendia clan is revealed in the small, minute observations and speculations offered by Garcia Marquez’s quietly contemplative narrator. It could be argued that the way in which the narrator transmits the thoughts and emotions of the characters might, in fact, carry some hint of the narrator’s own philosophizing perspective. This is exemplified in how Amaranta, of the second generation of the Buendias, deals with the realization of her impending death: “The only thing that she did not keep in mind in her fearsome plan was that in spite of her pleas to God she might die before Rebeca. That was, in fact, what happened. At the final moment, however, Amaranta did not feel frustrated, but, on the contrary, free of all bitterness because death had awarded her the privilege of announcing itself several years ahead of time” (Garcia Marquez 278). As Amaranta comes to terms with the inevitability of her death, the narrator offers several subtle, simplistic speculations as to her comfort in its arrival. By carefully interweaving the long-standing narrative of familial tension which continually plagued the sisters—Amaranta, as noted above, would have much

preferred that Rebeca died first—the narrator offers a fuller picture of the intricacies of both Amaranta’s relational grief, as well as her much more personal isolation.

In addition to from drawing on past instances of relational grief, the narrator also often utilizes an inherent ability for foresight to briefly comment on and introduce upcoming events within the novel, which, when experienced more fully later on in the text—such as with Amaranta’s death—create yet another means of grievous cyclicity. The characters of Garcia Marquez’s epic narrative, trapped as they are within the confines of an unhealthy familial repetitiveness, are brought to the forefront again and again through the narrator’s meticulous recounting of the details of their grief. For instance, Ursula, the family matriarch, who lives almost long enough to see the gruesome demise of the family line, is forced to repeatedly recount the griefs she has experienced in trying to maintain some semblance of honor and compassion in the Buendia household—efforts which have, time and again, failed: “But the lucidity of her old age allowed her to see, and she said so many times, that the cries of children in their mothers’ wombs are not announcements of ventriloquism or a faculty for prophecy but an unmistakable sign of an incapacity for love” (249). By touching on the fact that Ursula had this realization only in “the lucidity of her old age,” the narrator suggests that she was previously blind to the failings of her family. The narrator’s insistence on his own ability for foresight, by tying together past events with their present revelations, forces Ursula to realize the depth of her own persistent misery and relive her family’s “incapacity for love” in her recognition of its truth (249).

In this way, Garcia Marquez’s narrator also passes subtle judgment on the characters personal actions, as well as their interactions with family members and lovers, further distinguishing each character’s interpersonal intimacy and the intrapersonal isolation. The narrator passes some such judgment on the state, in “old age”, of Colonel Gerineldo Marquez,

who, after having “escaped three attempts on his life, survived five wounds, and emerged unscathed from innumerable battles,” still “succumbed to that atrocious siege of waiting and sank into the miserable defeat of old age, thinking of Amaranta among the diamond-shaped patches of light in a borrowed house” (242). Colonel Gerineldo Marquez, a close friend and war comrade for Colonel Aureliano Buendia, of the second generation of the Buendia clan, was also the second suitor of the perpetually stoic Amaranta, Colonel Aureliano Buendia’s sister. The above quote, told in the format of a supposedly objective observation, actually reveals the subtlety of the judgments passed by Garcia Marquez’s narrator. In bringing to light the physical triumphs of Gerineldo’s past—he did, after all, survive three assassination attempts, five life-threatening wounds, and numerous battles—the narrator makes the Colonel’s descent into old age markedly more tragic. Furthermore, by mentioning how the Colonel’s thoughts wandered to Amaranta, who, a frame of intimate betrayal very similar to Kundera’s Sabina, rejected Gerineldo (without reason or explanation) after years of devoted courtship, the narrator is tying together Gerineldo’s long life span of personal triumphs and intimate failures in a way that ultimately expresses one final judgement: that Gerineldo is now alone, but still mired in the depths of relational grief.

The narrator of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is equally important to the realization of intimate grief for Kundera’s characters. In fact, the terms Mcfadden uses to describe Garcia Marquez’s narrator, as an “omniscient, third-person narrator with no apparent personal investment in the events,” could easily be applied to Kundera’s narrator (1). The sense of distance the narrator of Kundera’s novel maintains allows him to speculate in much the same way as Garcia Marquez’s narrator, touching on events and emotions multiple times in a way that further emphasizes the novel’s repetitiveness, while simultaneously passing judgment on the

character's actions. The way in which the narrator explores Tereza's attempts to understand the difference between "love and lovemaking"—Tomas fervently insists that there is, in fact, a difference—is indicative of the way the narrator treats many of the events in the novel: "What is flirtation? One might say that it is behavior leading another to believe that sexual intimacy is possible, while preventing that possibility from becoming a certainty. In other words, flirting is a promise of sexual intercourse without a guarantee" (Kundera 142). While Tereza struggles with her own personal isolation, trying to make sense of the intimate betrayal of Tomas's infidelity, the narrator wanders off from the main narrative, instead exploring, both empirically and philosophically, the concept of "flirtation" itself, so that we might be better equipped to understand Tereza's subsequent actions. In the bar where she works, Tereza exemplifies her misunderstandings of the concept of flirtation—so gracefully and clearly explained above by the narrator—by "[disturbing] the balance between promise and lack of guarantee... she promised too ardently, and without making it clear that the promise involved no guarantee on her part" (143). The narrator's careful dictation of the societal rules for interaction, explained with the same care and detail that the narrator of Garcia Marquez's novel takes in describing the Buendia narrative, serves to more fully illuminate Tereza's overwhelming ineptitude in these matters—an ineptitude that not only isolates her from comfortably interacting with the rest of society, but which most certainly causes her grief within the framework of her own relationship. Because Tereza cannot treat the concepts of flirtation and physical intimacy with the same unbothered lightness as her husband, she is doomed to a perpetual state of misery and grief within her own relationship; she must continually deal with the betrayal of Tomas's shared physical love, the shame she feels at not being enough—bodily or emotionally—to keep him from straying, and the burdensome sense of sacrificing her own need for monogamous devotion.

In both of these novels, the narrator acts as an omniscient, ever-present force, seeming to exist only to remind the characters of the constant grief that plagues them. The narrator is the force which brings this grief to life, explains it in detail, and puts it to rest—only for a moment—before digging it up again. The narrators present in both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* act as first-hand witnesses to the concentric spheres of isolation which these characters, in attempting to deal with and understand the grief that inevitably separates them from the people they love, continue to seclude themselves within.

Embracing the Surreal: Magical Realism as an Expression of Grief

The narrators in these two novels, apart from forcing the characters to more fully realize their grief, also play a critical role in helping to develop and maintain the often surreal elements that exist for the residents of Garcia Marquez's Macondo and Kundera's Prague. Excursions into the realm of magical realism seem to be, in many ways, the only means of both accepting their overwhelming grief and, perhaps for some, eventually coming to terms with it. Dorota Wodja, in her article "Bruno Schulz and the Magical Realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," states that "magical realism may be identified as a characteristic *mimesis*⁷ of difference," meaning that the use of magical realism can ultimately allow characters to attempt to reconcile the difference between their naive optimism in relational expectations and their anguished intimate reality (175). After all, how could such grief, especially in the supposedly sympathetic confines of the hallowed intimate attachments (which initially promised to bring pleasure, not pain) exist in the real world? Both Garcia Marquez and Kundera might argue that it

⁷ Wodja utilizes the term *mimesis* throughout her article not in the sense of "adequate representation," but rather as an "authothematic *mimesis* of process" (173). This makes sense when considering how, as we will see, the authors utilize magical realism as a method of further explicating their character's griefs.

cannot, and so the characters must inevitably accept the presence of the surreal within their everyday lives as a means of coming to terms with their relational grief.

Tereza, as noted by Barnard, “has surreal experiences, which may or may not be dreams” (68). These terrifyingly realistic dreams act as an expression of Tereza’s grief, which, isolated as she is from the man that she proclaims to love, cannot be realized in any other fashion. One of these dreams, in which Tereza is forced to march naked around a swimming pool with a horde of naked, soulless women, was explored earlier in the essay. While Kundera often strives to make it clear that these dreams are, in fact, dreams by allowing Tereza to wake from them and find (minimal) comfort in Tomas’s arms, he delves into the realm of magical realism in the case of Tereza’s “dream” about Petrin Hill, wherein the meek Tereza begs Tomas to help her rid herself of her persistent jealousy. Tomas then, taking on the tone of someone calming a petulant child, tells her that all she needs to do is climb to the top of Petrin Hill:

It would have been easy to say, "No, no! It wasn't my choice at all!" but she could not imagine disappointing Tomas. What excuse, what apology could she find for going back home? And so she said, "Yes, of course. It was my choice." The man with the rifle continued: "Let me explain why I wish to know. The only time we do this is when we are certain that the people who come to us have chosen to die of their own accord. We consider it a service.” (Kundera 148)

The terror of this moment feels like an utter impossibility. How could Tomas, the man she loved so dearly, the man for whom she embraced shame and sacrificed so much of herself, send her to her death? And yet, Tereza is paralyzed, utterly unable to “imagine disappointing Tomas” (148). In the next few paragraphs, Tereza nearly allows herself to be shot, confessing only at the last minute that it was not her choice. Kundera never states that Tereza’s near brush with death is a

dream, and so we are left wondering exactly what, out of this horrifying passage, is real and what isn't. Kundera's failure to acknowledge the moment as either reality or fiction might suggest that, either way, Tereza has accepted it as a circumstance of fact—a true, deeply disturbing realization of the state of grief which has engulfed her relationship with Tomas. He has already relegated her to the status of her greatest fear, that of a soulless, unimportant body—just one stroke among hundreds that he has given to women of all kinds—and now, in recognizing the true burden that her love and her despair has placed on Tomas, she also recognizes his unspoken desire to be rid of that burden—and perhaps, her desire to be rid of her own burden of a lopsided, unfulfilling intimate attachment.

Brushes with both death and the acceptable surreal are also an inevitability for the characters of Garcia Marquez's novel. These instances manifest themselves much in the same way as they do for Tereza—as an outward, physical expression of the deeply held griefs that plague the romantic and familial interconnections of the Buendia clan. Wodja articulates Garcia Marquez's use of magical realism as “a merger of separate worlds—real and fictional, regular and miraculous—matching the coexistence of those dimensions [that] takes place in reality” (174). Wodja's analysis indicates the use of magical realism as a method of merging the character's physical experience of grief with their emotional reaction to it. An overtly tangible example comes in the form of a swarm of yellow butterflies which constantly flutter about the head of Mauricio Babilonia, the secret love of Meme, the daughter of Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda del Carpio. When Meme realizes that these butterflies “preceded the appearances of Mauricio Babilonia,” she finds comfort in their presence, knowing that “she did not have to see him to know that he was there, because the butterflies were always there” (Garcia Marquez 286-287). Outwardly, these butterflies appear to be a happy instance of magical realism, epitomizing the

buoyancy of Meme and Mauricio's deeply-felt love. Eventually, however, these seemingly harmless butterflies function as the catalyst for the destruction of Meme's relationship with her family, as well as the permanent paralysis of Mauricio. In this sense, the butterflies, acting as prophets of the relational grief that Meme will inevitably endure, embody the role of intimate betrayal themselves, as well as indicate the sacrifice Meme will have to make in being forced by her unforgiving mother, Fernanda, to both give up her illegitimate son, Aureliano, and live out the rest of her life "behind the iron grating" of a secluded convent (298).

Perhaps one of the most striking and critical examples of the significance of Garcia Marquez's utilization of magical realism in the explication of intimate grief, however, is the child born out of the incestuous relationship between Amaranta Ursula and Aureliano, the last two members of the Buendia line. Though their relationship is full of passion, in unabashedly embracing that physical fervor they both betray others who had previously cared for them (such as Amaranta Ursula's first husband, Gaston) and they cut themselves off from pursuing anything else they had once perceived as meaningful in life, such as Aureliano's love of books and learning or Amaranta Ursula's previously driven ambition to revive the floundering town of Macondo. The tumbling, grievous unsustainability of their unhealthy, insulated relationship is physically manifested in the form of their child, born with the tail of a pig—an occurrence which Ursula Iguaran had feared since she married her own cousin, Jose Arcadio Buendia. At first, as the text states, "they were not alarmed. Aureliano and Amaranta Ursula were not aware of the family precedent, nor did they remember Ursula's frightening admonitions, and the midwife pacified them with the idea that the tail could be cut off when the child got his second teeth" (412). The couple embraces their surreal child with the same ignorance with which they embraced their mutually parasitic relationship, choosing to ignore the signs that they were

closely related in order to fully satisfy their physical lust for one another. This child is symbolic not only of the grief present in Amaranta Ursula and Aureliano's deeply incestuous relationship, but also, in finally realizing one of Ursula Iguaran's deepest fears, representative of the grief-driven narrative of the Buendia family as a whole.

Negativity as Positivity: Finding Contentment in Grief

In the context of the countless instances of disheartening, and often disturbing, grief experienced by the characters of these two novels, it is hard to believe that the characters, trapped as they are within the confines of their abysmal relational misery, could ever achieve any sense of hope, much less contentment. However, the grief explored in these novels—though certainly heartbreaking, depressing, and often destructive—does offer each of the characters some semblance of positivity. As Robert L. Woolfolk states in his essay, “The power of Negative Thinking: Truth, Melancholia, and the Tragic Sense of Life,” the negativity commonly associated with the concept of grief is not necessarily to be avoided. In fact, Woolfolk proposes that “negative thinking is not only valuable, but indispensable... we give much too little attention to acknowledging, confronting, accepting, and perhaps even embracing suffering and loss” (20). This idea of embracing grief is wholly different from the psychological understanding of how to deal with bereavement described by Granek and Kubler-Ross, who, as noted earlier in this essay, dictated that grief be processed once and then eradicated. However, it can be argued that Kundera and Garcia Marquez approach grief much more in line with Woolfolk's assertions, allowing it to act not only as a force of destruction and misery for their characters, but also prove itself to be a force of emotional productivity, relational growth, and even, in its own way, contentment.

Tomas and Tereza, despite their nearly constant struggle with relational grief, eventually come to a place of fairly mutual fulfillment. Growing tired of their life in Prague, the couple decide to move the country. Initially, struggling with the same relational tensions which plagued them for the entirety of their union, the pair was hesitant about the transition. Tomas knew that “he would have difficulty finding a new woman every week. It would mean an end to his erotic adventures,” and Tereza, sensing his reluctance to give up those adventures, worried that Tomas would quickly grow bored of her (Kundera 233). At first, the reasons behind this reluctance seem to prove true, and the two inevitably experience some new griefs in their country life—the death of their beloved dog, Karenin, for example—but as time passes, and as the couple settles into the comfortable routine that Tereza had always desired for them, happiness, peeking its way through the embedded structure of their symbiotic grief, appears: “[Tereza] was experiencing the same odd happiness and odd sadness as then. The sadness meant: we are at the last station. The happiness meant: we are together. The sadness was form, the happiness content. Happiness filled the space of sadness” (313). This quote reveals both the inevitable necessity of the grief through which they have long suffered, as well as how that grief eventually transpires into a means of contentment. The long cycle of misery and relational discomfort—the “form” as Kundera describes it here—which these two endure eventually gives Tereza the means to understanding the value of their union exactly as it is. Though new instances of grief would inevitably continue to arise, Tereza is finally able to accept Tomas’s insistence that he is happy with country life—he even goes so far as to exclaim “Haven’t you noticed I’ve been happy here, Tereza?” to his uncertain wife. Tereza, having lived in two separate worlds, first her mother’s and then Tomas’s, of intimate shame, betrayal, and sacrifice, is finally able to utilize those various griefs as an impetus for appreciating the happiness that they do have—namely that she and Tomas are

together—even if it must necessarily exist within the recognition of their continued grief (313). It is ultimately their critical, connective grief—Tomas and Tereza always grieved their relational isolation because of how much they wanted to be with one another—which allows them to recognize the surprising extent of their happiness.

Sabina and Franz, too, are also able to grasp some form of contentment resultant out of their own relational griefs. Though Franz does, in many ways, mourn and dwell on the loss of his relationship with Sabina, her betrayal is ultimately what allows him to grow as individual—to finally muster up the moxie to leave his condescending wife, to fully pursue his academic passions—and what allows him to achieve a deeper, more compassionate love with a modest, but devoted student. When he dies from injuries accrued during a fight at a march in Cambodia, Franz even more boldly feels the triumph of his life over his relational grief: “Sabina's eyes were still on him. She would never see him humiliate himself again! She would never see him retreat” (274). Though the phrase “Sabina’s eyes were still on him” signals that Franz was never able to truly let go of the despair he felt at Sabina’s betrayal, it was that grief which ultimately allowed him to feel triumphant—expounding upon what Sabina would “never see”—in his final moments. Meanwhile, Sabina moves to California, still running from the weight of the betrayals she had committed against all of the people she loved. Recognizing the repetitive weight of her life’s miseries, decides that she will be light in death, “[composing] a will in which she requested that her dead body be cremated and its ashes thrown to the winds... She wanted to die under the sign of lightness” (273). Here we again we see how the intimate grief experienced by an individual has turned into, in some form or another, a means of resolution and productivity. By allowing her to recognize the lack of control she has had over her burdensome life, Sabina’s grief empowers her to seek (a form of) happiness where she can most concretely achieve it—in death.

Admittedly, it is somewhat harder to make the case for contentment in the epically tragic tale of the Buendia family. The myriad of griefs they experience, wearing them down generation after generation, seems too overwhelming and too perpetual to offer a silver lining of any kind. But still, even as both the Buendias and their beloved town of Macondo rot away to ruination, condemned to what feels like an eternity of holistic misery, the moments of deeply felt passion which they experience in the midst of their grief cannot be denied. And even if the family as a whole did not come to a productive end quite in the same way as the character's of Kundera's novel, I believe the productivity of grief in this novel is established in the way in which this family persevered, clinging to the hopeful vestiges of the passion which was similarly ignited in each of them, until they met their timely end, just as Melquiades's scrolls as predicted. No character of this family exemplifies this strength of character, this model of utilizing grief as an impetus for determined and sustained living—similarly, perhaps, to the arguable heroine of Kundera's novel, Tereza—quite like the family matriarch, Ursula Iguaran. Ursula, who survived well past her prime and deep into the generations of the family she had begun, grasped the grief which drove itself in circles around her and determined to make use of it. “Although she was already a hundred years old and on the point of going blind from cataracts, she still had her physical dynamism, her integrity of character, and her mental balance intact. No one would be better able than she to shape the virtuous man who would restore the prestige of the family” (Garcia Marquez 188). This quote exemplifies the epic strength characteristic of Ursula, and really all of the Buendia's, even in the midst of their overwhelmingly tragic lives. Even when nearly at the point of death, and even when the family seemed condemned to anguish and perpetual dishonor, Ursula persevered, determined to utilize “her physical dynamism, her

integrity of character, and her mental balance” as the means to wading through the grief ever-present in the Buendia family (188).

These novels ultimately prove that grief, though it may be inescapable, is not necessarily all-consuming, and in some cases, it may even be necessary; as it is experienced by the characters of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, grief acts as a catalyst for perseverance. Though that perseverance may not always yield tangible results, as in the case of the Buendias, the simple fact of its existence is enough. For Tereza, perseverance through her relational shame and grief—which plagued her from childhood into old age—was a means to helping her find contentment in her most cherished and most grief-ridden relationship. For the Buendias, grief as a catalyst for perseverance gave them a tangible sense of hope. In thoroughly examining grief as a cyclical and seemingly perpetual force inherent in nearly every kind of intimate attachment, both Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez are making the case for grief’s necessity as a critical factor in human intimacy. Grief is, in actuality—and echoing the words of Kundera—among mankind’s deepest needs. Though it is a force of negativity which stems out of innumerable devastating tragedies, grief, as shown by the characters of either novel, is not an end in and of itself, but rather a means of making sense, finding unexpected contentment, and keeping life—and love—going.

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I, Emily Bonner, give Kirk Boyle and Merritt Moseley permission to use my thesis with my name as a model in future classes.