

Episode 2.18 – One Hundred Years of Wow-Factor with Kali (pt.2)

Angourie (host)

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello and welcome back to The Community Library, I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

This episode is part two of my discussion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez with my dear friend, Kali Shanthi. If you haven't listened to part one, you probably should, otherwise this episode won't really make sense. For those of you who have listened to part one, a reminder for where we left off. We had just talked about the whole Buendía line, right up until the last Buendía. When we resume our discussion, we're talking about some of the more specific plot points and themes of the book. Take it away!

Angourie (host)

Okay, so before we talk about the ending, can we circle back to talking about technology and the banana company?

Kali (guest)

Hell yeah we can. We have to address this hectic point in the book. So, our poor little babies in Macondo are going about their lives, living it up, having a gay old time, and then – I think it's Aureliano Triste, again, is the guy who brings the railroad to Macondo, and with it comes an influx of Americans, and people ready to exploit the town for its resources. Yeah, so it basically – it all starts with Mr. Herbert, a white man, American man, coming to the house that was, at that point, becoming kind of like a BnB, or like a landmark of the town where people were eating and sleeping and passing through constantly. And this man ate bananas at their house and basically was the beginning of a very colonial presence in the town that started this banana company and exploited the people, ending in a horrible, devastating massacre.

And also, I just wanted to quickly make a comment on – I did a little bit of research on that aspect of the story, and, well, it's real. It really happened. The banana massacre was the banana strike massacre in 1928 in Gabriel García Márquez's hometown, and it was by the United Fruit Company, which was known to, yeah, just totally exploit the people of Latin America. And that's where the phrase, like, Banana Republic comes from, the neo-colonialism that was going on in that era, where these outside forces, these private corporations were coming in and just totally exploiting and gentrifying these nations. Over to you.

Angourie

Over to me? Oh god! It's not an allegory or a metaphor, because this did happen, it's just a representation on a smaller scale, and we see how this affects this town of Macondo that the reader now knows and loves, and how they come in, and they colonise, and they gentrify everything, and then as soon as it all goes pear-shaped and it ends with this huge massacre, they leave and they gaslight a whole town. José Arcadio Segundo was there, and he's the only one who survives this massacre of the peaceful protesters who protested against the banana company.

Kali

Him and, um, a small child –

Angourie

Yes!

Kali

Who saw the whole thing.

Angourie

That's right!

Kali

When he's older – in his older years, is like recounting the story and everyone says that he's crazy. So, Gabriel García Márquez, I found that fascinating when he was talking about the child who remembered it. It could have been him, cos I think it happened when he was, like, six years old. Living with that – with the consequences of such a horrific thing, when history is trying to erase that narrative, it plays into the themes again in the book of like, how reliable is your memory and your nostalgia. Yeah, how you are able to differentiate between fact and fiction within your own memory. Continue, as you were saying.

Angourie

He wakes up on a train that's barrelling out of Macondo and it's filled with dead bodies, and he comes back to Macondo, and they say: "What – what banana company? No, no, no, all these – all these people left of their own accord, like it was – it was peaceful, nobody died, they all came home safe to their families." And so that's the story when he first comes back, is like: "No, nobody died, it was all peaceful, it was fine." And then, gradually as time goes on, all knowledge, all trace of the banana company is completely erased from the town, and they claim that it never existed there.

Kali

I kind of view it as a symmetrical kind of arc of before and after the banana company, and how we're seeing the town building up, and so much love and care has gone into it, and all these slowly evolving characteristics of the town, and all the characters, all the generations, and then the banana company arrives, there's this massive boom, all of these buildings popping up, all of these people coming into the town. I almost felt quite protective, like, hey, this isn't yours, go away! This belongs to the Buendías. And then the tragedy happens, all of these people are being wronged, the lines between truth and, like, fact and fiction and all of this, kind of, what was real, what was made up, was all blurred. Everything kind of goes to shit, and then the banana company is up and out of there, and that marks the beginning of the ruin of Macondo. I mean, this place has survived wars upon wars upon wars and managed to persevere, and after the craziness of the banana company,

there's four years of rain, and then the town just kind of never survives – it never, um, recovers. So, yeah, I think that's quite a remarkable comment on the impact of colonialism in Latin America and the world.

Yeah, I – I wanted to talk a bit about how the lawyers particularly are depicted. So, the lawyers are kind of described in a[n] almost mythical way. From the time of the war with Colonel Aureliano Buendía, they're described as, like, a flock of black-figured people, like, following Aureliano Buendía and trying to, like, distort the truth and manipulate his words, and they're brought back almost as a singular character when the banana company arrives, following Mr. Herbert and Mr. Brown and these figures of colonialism. And when the workers are saying they don't have access to healthcare and they don't have any rights, they're not being paid for their work and all of that, the lawyers basically tell them that they're making it up, and that none of it's real, and somehow distort the facts in a way where they can say that the workers aren't employed, and they workers don't even exist. And I found that so tragic, really, because, I mean, it was painted in this very mythical way of, like, these other-worldly creatures, these lawyers that are, like, somehow manipulating history, which is such a powerful statement about colonisation and gentrification and, I – yeah, I found it really heart-wrenching to read that, that they somehow managed to not only before the massacre but after the massacre, convince a whole town that this devastating thing, 3000 deaths, didn't happen, and it's all a figment of their imaginations. And that was never questioned, rather that people who actually remembered it, people that were actually there, were labelled as crazy, and completely discredited, and ostracised from the town.

Angourie

Yeah, also because the way that Márquez tells the story is that everything is fantastical, everything has a bit of magic to it, but then when you get to the stuff about the banana company, yeah, there's nothing magical about it. It's still told with that lyrical prose and in that poetic way, but it's so gritty and real. And the – the tone that I felt from the lawyers was that they were saying to the people of Macondo, everything – “Your whole history, everything you remember is dotted with figments of your imagination, like your sister ascending to heaven and blood trickling down the street. That – that could never happen, so if all those things are so integral to your culture and your storytelling, then who says that this massacre isn't also part of your imagination?” And it's kind of taking that thing that makes Macondo and these characters so special, and turning it against them, and saying “We can't trust your storytelling anymore.” Which is just the worst kind of torture and gaslighting to the people of Macondo, and to the Buendía family.

Kali

Yeah, and it's really a direct analogy to the history of colonisation and undermining cultures and, kind of like, the way that the West asserted dominance and asserted that their narratives and their ways of doing things were superior, it's totally undermining everything that came before, and what is so special about this book, I think, is that it tells a story of Latin America from the perspective of Latin America. The genre of magical realism is, in itself, subverting the power structures of colonialism, and challenging the conventions of Western storytelling and Western literature by integrating all of these elements of fantasy, and telling the story from the perspective of the inhabitants of the colonised land, rather than from the perspective of the colonisers. And the narrative doesn't abide by any of the laws of “traditional” – in quotation marks – literature that we've come to know. There's no classic exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, there's no linear time structure, and nothing is really chronological, and there's no certainty as well, of what's going to happen, of any of the characters, like, anything could happen at any point, and we're not

really sure what is reality and what is fantasy. And in that way, it's kind of the biggest comment on colonialism and the magic of storytelling from a cultural view point.

Angourie

Also talking about technology and the banana company, the train, which is a big symbol of “progress”, in quotation marks “progress”, and moving forward and technology and the industrial revolution and that train brings the banana company and it takes the banana company away. And that train is the first thing that connects Macondo – I think more than anything it brings – the train brings people into Macondo's solitude.

Kali

Also, something that I just thought of is it's interesting that, um, I think it was José Arcadio Segundo who tried to turn the river into a boat route, or tried to essentially do the same thing, but was unsuccessful. I mean, he did it, but it was like, this weird shoddy raft that, like, didn't really, like, do the job. And everyone was kind of like, “Why do we need this, it's not really relevant to us.” And then the railroad came, and it took off, it was like – the town was ready for it. Well, I don't know if they were ready for it, but it was like it was the right time in the narrative, or for whatever reason, and then it really took off. And just to – to talk about the solitude that you were – that you mentioned, all the people that came to Macondo were brought into its solitude rather than connecting it to the rest of the world, it's interesting that that's when the town became really divided. The different groups of people in Macondo were really delineated, like, and separated, which was really interesting, because we didn't really have that before. I mean, there was like, the Arabs who came and traded, but they were never, like treated as separate to the town of Macondo, and then suddenly the railroad came and cut up the town into all these different pieces and these people couldn't really connect anymore, which I guess is more solitude, even more solitude than there was before.

Angourie

It's almost like it's one hundred years of solitude!

Kali

A whole hundred years! Of just, solitude!

Angourie

Oh, my god!

Kali

And more solitude.

Angourie

Solitude!

Kali

Damn.

I wanted to touch on the idea, also, of memory, and nostalgia, and forgetfulness or amnesia, and how the characters are kind of warned against too much nostalgia of the past, and also too much forgetfulness or too much amnesia, and how nostalgia is a trap, and it prevents them from moving

forward, whereas the collective amnesia means that they're destined to make mistake – the same mistakes over and over again. And within that, I wanted to just mention how because there's all these characters and a[n] expansive time period, obviously people are dying off and being born, and the whole history isn't known to anyone except for maybe Úrsula, but history comes into doubt because people don't know the history of the past, and so the story changes as time passes, and you can see that in Colonel Aureliano Buendía, and how his little gold fishes that he makes are symbols of the war, they're actually used in the war to show allegiance, they have all of this meaning, but as time passes and history is forgotten or reinterpreted, they become relics of a figurehead of the war, and people even view him as a myth. They don't even know if he really existed because of how history has been twisted and kind of manipulated and changed by those who remember it.

Angourie

Yeah, it's like Márquez is saying that, no matter how hard you try to keep the stories going, or make to sure that the younger generations know what happened to the past – or in the past, the stories will always become twisted in one way or another. It's kinda like, um, like that game that kids play where someone starts with a phrase and whispers it to the next person, who whispers it to the next person, and like, when you get to the end of the line, the phrase has turned into something completely different. And I think we see that in Macondo, like you said, with Aureliano's little fishes. There's also a point very late on in the book where the second last Aureliano is chatting with his friends in a brothel, and he says that he's related to the great Colonel Aureliano Buendía, and the proprietress of the brothel says, and I quote: "Colonel Aureliano Buendia, of whom she had indeed heard speak at some time, was a figure invented by the government as a pretext for killing Liberals." End quote. I just – I thought that was so fascinating, because we can see that this phrase, this idea of Colonel Aureliano Buendía was once based in fact, but as it's been passed down, the meaning has twisted and changed.

Kali

And this also feeds into the other idea that I wanted to talk about, which is – is the fantasy of memory, and how description of the past and the future and the present all occur simultaneously. There's this fantastical element to remembering and how things can change into other things over time, and there's also – relating back to, kind of like, the credibility that's given to the Bible and supernatural myths. There's kind of this Biblical motif throughout the story. The similarity between José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula founding Macondo can kind of be viewed as Adam and Eve founding humanity, and then thus creating this massive web of complex beings, and all conveying different morals, and kind of like adages or the stories of the Bible, or any mythology – Greek mythology, or any kind of mythological or religious text that serves to teach a lesson, it's kind of what has happened here. You've got all of these incredibly flawed human beings trying to survive and, in turn, making many mistakes, and I guess they all serve the purpose of teaching us about the flaws of humankind, or the traps that we fall into.

Angourie

Just before we talk about the ending, because the theme of this month is translation, throughout the whole thing I was, like, really stupid, and then at the very end I was like, oh my gosh, this novel is about translation!

Kali

No, I had the exact same thing! I was like, oh, duh!

Angourie

So this novel is all about – it's all about stories, and histories, and storytelling, and passing things down from generation to generation. One of the very first scenes in the book is the gypsies coming through Macondo and one in particular is an Egyptian man called Melquíades, who strikes up a friendship with José Arcadio Buendía – if you remember, is the OG Arcadio, José Arcadio, like –

Kali

The real OG.

Angourie

The patriarch. And so José Arcadio and Melquíades are friends, and he shows him all of this stuff, and he brings him all these books, and in José Arcadio Buendía's study, he has all of the stuff that Melquíades has brought him. And then Melquíades leaves, and then the gypsies come back and they're like, "Oh, no, no, no, Melquíades died." But, plot twist! Melquíades comes back from the dead –

Kali

Legend.

Angourie

And he lives with them for however long. And then he really, truly dies, but then he comes back as a ghost. Plot twist. He is also a constant throughout the family in two lives and also death. Some of the men in each generation become obsessed with Melquíades' texts and the books that's left behind that are written in this language that nobody understands, and they're trying to solve it, basically, they're trying to understand it and translate it. At the very end, and this is where we – we bring in the final couple, Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano, the last – the second last Aureliano. At the very end, Amaranta Úrsula has died in childbirth and you've got the second last Aureliano, who is an adult, and has – who's been trying to decipher Melquíades' books for the whole of his life, and then you have his son, the baby Aureliano who has just been born. And he goes back to Melquíades' study, and he reads the books and he can finally understand them, and he realises that Melquíades has written the entire history of the Buendía family up until this moment. He's reading it, and he's reading it, and he's reading himself reading it, and it becomes this whole meta thing of, like, translation. I don't know what I'm saying anymore, please take over!

Kali

No, that's it, though! It's crazy, it's – yeah, the whole book tackles these ideas of, like, passing down knowledge, and exchange of knowledge and interpretation of knowledge. And then suddenly, Aureliano acts as the reader reading the book of his own life. It's almost too much to wrap your head around – or my head, anyway. There's a quote that I'll read, where the narrator describes what Aureliano is reading in these parchments, and he said it's: "not in the order of man's conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they co-existed in one instant." It took me a while to realise that that is literally the book that we have just read, which kind of blows my little mind. The parchments that Aureliano is reading of Melquíades' work is this translated, poetic, episodic, fantastical, prophetic work. I mean, it's even more incredible because we've just read a translated – like, we've read this book translated from Spanish

into English, so it's literally, like, we are Aureliano uncovering this massive history of the Buendía family. It's kind of a *Neverending Story* moment. Refer to episode one of the podcast.

Angourie

Oh my god! [laughing] Full circle!

Kali

I mean, what other book has the power to really capture that feeling, I don't know. I don't even know if I have the words to express it.

Angourie

I remember reading it and getting to the last, you know, I was reading an audiobook so I was getting into the last 40 minutes of this 14 hour audiobook, and I was thinking, how are they going to wrap this up? Márquez, how are you going to do it? How are you gonna do it in a way that's gonna satisfy me, because I've just gone through one hundred years of the Buendías' bullshit, and like, I want closure!

Kali

Yep, definitely.

Angourie

I had no idea how he was gonna do it, but I feel like it couldn't have ended any other way. Aureliano is reading it, and as he's reading it he realises that this is the end of not only the Buendías, but also of Macondo. And it describes the whole of Macondo is wiped out by this hurricane, and it's the end of the family, it's the end of the town, and we have witnessed the birth, the life and the death of Macondo and the Buendía family. And it had this incredible, like, almost abrupt ending, but I feel like it was – it couldn't have ended any other way, there is such a finality to it. And I feel like in a lot of literature, everything is wrapped up, but then we have this little, like, epilogue – it's not always, you know, explicitly stated as an epilogue, but everything wraps up, and then you've got a little, like, "where are they now?" paragraph of, like, "this person went on to do this, and this person was okay, and it's all fine." And we also have a hint that the story keeps going, that these characters will continue to exist off the page.

Kali

Márquez is like, "nah!"

Angourie

Nah! The Buendías are dead, Macondo is dead.

Kali

Everything that you've spent the last 400 pages getting invested in is over. Deal with it.

Angourie

It's gone. It's super heart-breaking, but I think it's fitting. Part of me thinks that maybe it suggests that someone else is gonna come along, another family is gonna come along to this barren land of the swamps, and start a town.

Kali

Exactly. Or, that that had already happened before José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula arrived.

Angourie

Yes!

Kali

Which, I think is very plausible in the world that Márquez is trying to paint of this never-ending cycle of time and history continuously repeating itself. There was a line that I wanted to talk about which sent shivers down my spine. Context: Aureliano is currently reading the parchments, this biblical wind is beginning to pick up and wipe out sections of the town, and it's all coming to a head. It's very dramatic and so much is happening. Here is goes:

“Only then did he discover that Amaranta Úrsula was not his sister but his aunt, and that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha only so that they could seek each other through the most intricate labyrinths of blood until they would engender the mythological animal that was to bring the line to an end.”

So, in the second chapter of the book, right at the beginning, there is mention of Sir Francis Drake the pirate, who was a real figure of history, who attacked the village of Riohacha, which is where José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula came from to get to Macondo, and there's like, just brief mention of Sir Francis Drake attacking Riohacha. And in this one sentence, Márquez wraps up the entire book. That everything that has happened up until this point, happened so that this could happen. It's just like, actually hard to comprehend.

Angourie

Wow. That is just, agh, incredible! And I didn't even realise that, like, I missed that. I think I'm just gonna have to read this book from beginning to end yet again, just to get all of those little meanings that I missed the first time. Can you, um, just read out the last sentence of the novel for the audience? Cos I feel like it's such a powerful last sentence, and I feel like Márquez wraps everything up so beautifully, way more eloquently than I could ever describe it!

Kali

Oof, okay.

“Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.”

Kali and Angourie

[indescribable guttural noises]

Kali

Oh, my god.

Angourie

So, with that line, though, he says you don't – they don't have a second opportunity, so it's kind of like Márquez saying, "No, no, no, there will be no sequel, there will be nothing else, this is it. This is the end of time." And it's like, okay!

Kali

Yeah! And it's like, you've only got one shot at living a life, but it's in our human nature to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors, and for our descendants to repeat our mistakes, and it's like this dichotomy, if you will –

Angourie

Oh, I will. You know I will.

Kali

Of trying to make the most of this fleeting life, but also falling into the same trap over and over again. Oh, it's like, wow.

Angourie.

Yeah. It's wow.

Kali

It's big wow.

Angourie

Finally, in conclusion. What do you rate this book?

Kali

Oh, my god. 10 out of 5. Like, 5 whole stars and then some. What say you?

Angourie

What say I? I say ... originally I gave it 4, cos I need to stew on things before I give it 5, cos 5 to me is, like, that's a really precious rating. I've given it a temporary 4, also I don't do half points anymore so 4 is, like, almost 5, but I'm still stewing with it. But I think after this episode, I'm – I'm gonna have to give it a 5, there's – it's so incredible. And we're not the first ones to say that. I mean, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature for it, so.

Kali

Yeah, it's like common knowledge that this is, like, an incredible book. We're just reiterating it for you!

Angourie

Yeah! Finally, do you have anything to plug?

Kali

Well, if you are interested in a bit of whimsy, I have been creating some very silly portraits on my Instagram during isolation.

Angourie

Ah, no, no, no, they are not silly, they are genius, they are high art, and they need to be, like, displayed in the Louvre –

Kali

Oh, my god!

Angourie

It's – it's insane.

Kali

Okay, well, that is, like, a lot to live up to! Um, take it with a pinch of salt, but if you wanna check out my Instagram, it is @kalishanthi and I ... this is how I've been keeping myself busy during this weird coronavirus times.

Angourie

Actually, both of us will be talking to you next week with a very special secret bonus episode. You know what it is.

Kali

Do I?

Angourie

Yeah.

Kali

Oh, I do! What the hell? [laughing] I was like, what? Is it a surprise to me as well? No, I do know what it is. Ha, ha, you guys don't, but I do.

Angourie

So far I've given one clue, and that has been APPLE, so do you wanna come up with another clue to give the audience, Kaliya?

Kali

Um ...

[thinking music]

Kali

The clue that I have come up with is ITALY. Have fun with that one, guys!

Angourie

We will be back! It'll be me, Kaliya and our good friend Maija, all discussing this very secret thing, and that episode will be out next week, on the 31st. You don't have to read anything for it, um, because I'm pretty sure it's gonna be a drunk giggle-fest. It'll be so much fun.

Kali

I cannot wait.

[theme music]

Angourie

Finally, thank you so much for listening. If you enjoyed it, you can subscribe on iTunes so you never miss an episode, you can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library, and use the hashtag #thecomcommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you so much for listening, thank you for hanging out with me, Kaliya, this is really nice!

Kali

This was the best, and I'm so glad that we got to do this! And thank you to everyone for listening to our crazy rambles on this amazing and complicated book. And, yeah, no, this is the best.

Angourie

We will talk to you next time! Thank you so much, bye!

Kali

Bye!

[theme music]

Kali

Oh, my god. I just realised I spelt "hundred" wrong in my notes! [laughing]

Angourie

How did you spell it?

Kali

H-U-N-R-E-D!

Angourie

Hunred! [laughing]

Kali

Stupid!

Kali

Like, it's just –

Angourie

Before we talk about – oh, sorry. Ooh –

The Community Library – Angourie Rice

Kali

Sorry, no, no, no, you go –

Angourie

No you go – no, you go –

Kali

No, you go, I don't have anything to say!