

## **The Merit of English Section**

### **Senior Division**

<b>Name of Winner</b>	<b>: Lin Hao</b>
<b>Name of School</b>	<b>: St. Joseph's College</b>
<b>Book Title</b>	<b>: One Hundred Years of Solitude</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>: Gabriel Garcia Marquez</b>
<b>Publisher</b>	<b>: Harper &amp; Row</b>

“My hero is truth,” claimed Leo Tolstoy, one of the greatest realistic novelists. The life portrayed in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* might sound unrealistic to readers: prophecy revealing the fate of a town; ghosts floating in air everywhere; massive loss of memory; generations of Oedipus Complex; forgotten massacre of three thousand workers; baby born with a pig’s tail; everything being wiped out in the wind. All these elements seem to be excellent ideas for a fantasy novel rather than a realistic one. However, they, as Tolstoy has claimed, are the truth. With detailed descriptions and intriguing symbols, Marquez narrated the mysterious history of the Buendia family of the village of Macondo, which resembled the history of human race. Starting from scratch,

Jose Arcadio Buendia and his wife Iguaran produced all the necessities and built a village. The very beginning of the book was already the representation of the Genesis. It was astonishing to find that civil wars in human history and the revolution initiated by their son Colonel Aureliano Buendia were so much alike. The prosperity of the fourth generation of the family symbolized the golden age of mankind. Lastly, the doomsday of Macondo gave us the feeling that it would be our final destiny.

The similarity between human and the book was illustrated not only by historical events but also by the different personalities of characters. The recurring use of names for both male and female characters showed the unchangeable characteristics of two sexes. Men were either impulsive and adventurous, demonstrated by those with the name Arcadio, or intellectual and taciturn, emphasized by the Aurelianos. On the other hand, women were subordinates to men. They maintained discipline and order when men got overwhelmed. The role of women was fully exposed to us through Iguaran, who lived for more than one hundred years. She tolerated the crazy experiments of her husband and made a living when all the men were gone. She tried to protect the family traditions from her great-granddaughter-in-law, who was young and energetic to force everyone to strictly follow

her rules. She foresaw the decline of the family and intended to provide proper education for the fifth generation. Through Marquez's narration, men, who competed and fought, were like spear, while women were like shield which gave shelter and protection. The significance of female could be regarded as Marquez's last ray of hope. He believed that after all the fuss made by men, humans must call for help of women, or the Mother Earth, so as to avoid the doomsday foretold in the book.

The main theme of the book, as its title implied, was solitude. In spite of the repetition of names, the protagonists represented a variety of solitude. The unbelievably long lifespan of Iguaran symbolized the solitude of old age. During the last few years of her life, Iguaran became much less important to the family, which was represented by her shrinking body size. Other members of the family basically forgot her existence and she passed away in sorrow. Solitude of wildness was expressed through Jose Arcadio. Despite his strength and masculinity, he was actually a good-for-nothing person. He appealed to violence to deal with every single problem and his brutal act led to villagers' contempt. Rebeca was a vivid illustration of solitude of sex. After her husband's death, Rebeca believed there were no other men who could satisfy her sexual demand. In

desperation, she isolated herself and attempted to suppress her carnal desires through eating mud. She was wiped out of people's memory and it was not until several decades later that they found her corpse.

Each member of the Buendia family suffered from the Ancestral sin of solitude. Through this, the author emphasized the inevitability of solitude in our life. One might be glorious like Colonel Buendia who had organized 32 armed risings, or as affluent as Aureliano Segundo whose herds bred endlessly. Yet all our efforts would be in vain. Marquez's narration might be slightly exaggerated but we should regard the message as an alarm. Even more than thirty years have passed since Marquez finished his work, there are still people tolerating all sorts of solitude. In China, it is not uncommon to see elderly living on their own. Their children have gone to work in cities and they are left alone in rural areas. Some of them have lost their spouse. They had to endure to the boring life as there was not much entertainment for them in the villages. The phenomenon of "empty-nested" elderly not only illustrates the solitude of ageing but also proves again that the book is the reflection of human history.

It seemed that our fate would be doomed with unbearable heaviness of the eternal return of

solitude. This idea became particularly explicit to us when we read the massacre of workers during Jose Arcadio Segundo's time. Three thousand workers of the Banana Company protested for better welfare in a train station and were killed by a troop of soldiers sent by the government. The corpses, carried by 200 train carriages, were thrown to the sea. Segundo witnessed the atrocity but no one believed him. In despair, he isolated himself from others and awaited his end.

This scene was shocking as it unveiled more than the cruelty and ruthlessness of a totalitarian state. It showed us directly the suppression of solitude. No matter how hard we try, like Segundo who participated in protests for many times, our effort will be in vain. Things that affect the outcome of our hard work are in fact not controlled by us. The same message is actually conveyed in many real life events. The Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong is generally regarded as great failure, in spite of the huge number of participants. The election method proposed by democrats is not adopted by the government. The Revolution reveals that Hong Kong people's effort is no match for the Central Government's decision. Despite the price Hongkongers being paid, there is literally no progress in Hong Kong's democratic development. Our fate is same as Sisyphus'. We cannot escape the punishment of rolling a great boulder up a hill

repetitively; instead what we get is only to watch it roll back down. Eventually our result will be nothing but immense solitude.

It is as if we had no hope at all. However, Marquez did give us a solution: seek help from nature. This concept was illustrated by Iguaran at first. She was the pillar of the family and slowed down the decline of the family. As long as she was alive, the family was still prosperous. The portrayal of Iguaran was the objectification of the Mother Earth, which both shared the quality of supportiveness and breeding. Apart from that, the idea of asking help from nature was shown through the description of the flood.

*“It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days. The sky crumbled in to as set of destructive storms and out of the north came hurricanes that scattered roofs about and knocked down walls and uprooted every last plant of the banana groves.”*

The flood resembled the one in the Bible. It served the same purpose of washing away all the sins, which were symbolized by the banana groves. The banana groves were the property of the Banana Company, which exploited the local and sped up the coming of Macondo’s doomsday. Objectifying abstract ideas was a unique feature in this book,

making it more magical while demonstrating the real world at the same time. Marquez tried to suggest that the nature had her limit of tolerance. She would cleanse the world if a balance was not maintained. And we could make peace with our solitude if, and only if, as ancient Chinese philosophers advocated, we were in harmony with the nature. When we act in accordance with the nature, we will see life from different perspectives and consider solitude enjoyment rather than torture. Henry Thoreau's hermetic life on the shore of Walden Pond was a realization of the peace-with-nature theory. During that period, he was never anxious about the isolation from civilized life. Instead, he immersed himself in nature and the solitude stimulated him to come up with great ideas, which were described in *Walden*. Thus, despite being immensely suppressive, we are still able to be with peace with our solitude. All we need to do is to live in accordance with nature and we can then see the beauty of life.

Races condemned to one hundred years of solitude might not have a second opportunity on earth. However, this book warned us that similar tragedy would definitely happen again because of mankind's inherited and inevitable weaknesses. In spite of all the difficulties and complexities suggested in the book, we should never lose hope. Make peace with the nature and there is still

pleasure of living, as things have a life of their own;  
it's simply a matter of waking up their souls.