

## Death and Metaphor in *Cien años de soledad*, *La casa de los espíritus* and *Paula*.

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**ABSTRACT:** This article briefly analyzes the representation of death and the dead body in *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez to pave the way for a comprehensive examination of Isabel Allende's novel *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) and her memoir *Paula* (1994), both of which draw from García Márquez's novel. Collectively, the texts underscore the frailty of human life but quickly mask death's threat by employing hyperbolic metaphors and analogies skewed in degrees that make characters' deaths implausible and unreal. That is, the literary descriptions of corpses, especially those of young female ones, frequently encourage readers to see the body through trope, as something other than death, in which the deceased turn into sleeping beauties or otherworldly celestial splendors all of which suppress death's ubiquitous and threatening presence. Because Allende and García Márquez more often describe female corpses than male ones, this article, in particular, analyzes the metaphoric language used to describe these female bodies, which are often transformed into mythic goddesses, sirens, or holy virgins, or transmogrified into foodstuffs or other non-human entities. The literary devices allow for the sublimation of death in Allende's texts as they do in *Cien años de soledad*.

**KEYWORDS:** Isabel Allende, Corpses, Death, Female body, Gabriel García Márquez, Grotesque, Magical Realism, Religion

*It's not easy to live every moment wholly aware of death  
It's like trying to stare the sun in the face:  
you can stand only so much of it.  
Because we cannot live frozen in fear,  
we generate methods to soften death's terror*

Irvin D. Yalom

At a wake or funeral, we might realize that our stay on earth is brief and thus minimize this threat by turning to other thoughts that suppress death's ubiquitous presence. To this point Ernest Becker, in *The Denial of Death*, deftly illustrates that "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else," and, therefore, we have created elaborate ways of making it illusory in order to avoid confronting our mortality (ix). In literature, authors, too, circumvent the terror of death and its accompanying corpse by using words to highlight the heroic or peaceful aspects of the character's end, or by employing euphemisms that invoke an affected beauty. Literary descriptions of corpses frequently encourage readers to see the body through trope, as something other than death, in which the deceased turn into mythic heroes, sleeping beauties, or otherworldly celestial splendors; all of this is to avoid the encounter with the corruption of the body and the abyss that death portends.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines notable representations of death and corpses in *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez to better understand how Isabel Allende iterates and reimagines similar experiences in *La casa de los espíritus* (1982) and her memoir *Paula* (1994). Collectively, the texts underscore the frailty of human

life but quickly mask death's threat by employing hyperbolic metaphors and analogies skewed to make characters' deaths implausible and unreal. In addition to the manipulation of euphemistic figurative language, the authors mitigate death's terror by incorporating death-denying episodes of ascensions or other miraculous happenings. They describe events that breach the barrier between life and death, allowing the specters of the deceased to co-exist and interact with the living. Comparing examples from García Márquez's novel with those in Allende's texts reveal how they both imagine remarkable, sometimes absurd, deaths and journeys to the after-life. Both authors present a continuum between life and death that makes passing away less finite, as characters can remain connected with the physical realm even in the hereafter.

Despite there being several fruitful studies that compare these critically acclaimed texts—Robert Antoni, Mario Rojas, for example—the language García Márquez and Allende use to describe death and corpses has not, as of yet, been fully explored. By reading the aforementioned texts in conjunction, we can see how the authors convert deaths and its accompanying corpses into an abstraction that mitigates death's terror. Allende's works, much like García Márquez's, deploy figurative language that speak of death in terms of alterity—that is, they each treat death as something beautiful, sacred, magical and/or unusual, and quite unlike the prosaic experience of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the language used in the texts—marked by hyperbole and excess—redirects the reader's focus from death to another order of being in the realm of heroic myth and the otherworldly images that transcend what is usually possible in the material world.

With respect to the nineteenth century, Philippe Ariès, in *The Hour of Our Death*, spotlights how artists often veil death with notions of beauty. Thus, the corpse no longer represents mortality or something to be feared, but instead is turned into an aestheticized illusion. As Ariès states, "Death is concealing itself under the mask of beauty" (473). The use of the corpse to denote art and beauty is not limited to the nineteenth century but continues to operate as a common and appealing trope across literary genres. In the texts examined here, the authors turn away from the corpse and the gloominess it might represent and evoke something other than death. García Márquez and Allende at times conceal death under a mask of beauty and wonder, but they also employ other literary devices that make death vanish from view. This rearticulating of death into realms inspired by legends, illusion and/or art, functions also to minimize death's terror and threat.

*Cien años de soledad* and *La casa de los espíritus* are similar in that wars, coups, and civil unrest play pivotal roles in the unfolding of the plot. Many die during the course of each novel. However, while the texts contain many corpses, they are discursively constructed in such a manner that softens death's terror by turning to myth, miracles, and even humor to impede death from disturbing life. This slight of hand arguably saves readers from being subsumed by the heaviness that mortality and its accompanying corpses brings.

García Márquez and Allende are drawn to death and corpses, but then attempt to confront mortality by creating moments that prevent the abysmal from eclipsing life. The authors employ death-denying events whereby the borders between life and death become blurred, thus making the end to life more illusive: In *Cien años de soledad*, the gypsy Melquiades returns from the dead, Prudencio's ghost visits the Buendías, while Remedios, *la bella* ascends to heaven. Yet these marvelous departures and deaths are not necessarily fear instilling, but rather humorous, absurd, or otherwise unreal, thus making deaths and corpses less daunting.

Remedios, *la bella*, who certainly has the youth and beauty that would provoke despair if she were to die an usual death, has an almost divine end, which is presented amusingly. García Márquez dedicates several pages and many hyperbolic words to describe her otherworldly beauty. While privately the Buendías see that Remedios is feeble minded, odd, and obsessed with her own feces, others perceive her as an angelic and ominous creature. We learn she is so beautiful that men lose all self-control, become crazed, and even plunge to their deaths after catching a glimpse of her lovely face. Yet the author does not destroy this extraordinary beauty by giving her a common death. García Márquez imagines her end in terms of alterity and the sacred: winds sweep her into heavens where she disappears, never to be seen again. And this marvelous departure from the earthly realm spares the young and most beautiful woman from experiencing bodily decay. In this way, this death is the maximum representation of the negation of death, because the young virgin does not actually die. Her physical body remains intact as she is swept into the heavens, to eternity.

Remedios, through various literary devices, is allowed to outshine death and avoid decay altogether. Her end parodies that of the biblical and traditional accounts of the prophet Elijah and the Assumption of Mary. Catholic tradition states that the Virgin Mary did not die but rather ascended to heaven. That is, the Virgin Mary's physical departure, or miraculous abduction, is not described in fatal terms at all. By evoking the Assumption of Mary, García Márquez implicitly likens Remedios to Catholicism's most venerated female figure, in which both live eternally. Her physical body and soul will live forever, unlike prosaic deaths, where the body decomposes. Yet this ascension is treated humorously as well, and hardly evokes a divine awakening or salvation as would be expected in a Christian version. Furthermore, there is no transformative moment experienced by the family or the town as a result of her magical ascension; events continue as if nothing happened. Most importantly, by comingling humor and the divine, Remedios's heavenly and absurd departure spares the reader from imagining real mortality. The female beauty is saved from becoming a cadaver, turning into dust, into nothing.

The descriptions of a character's final days are comical in other instances too, as in the case of Ursula, the metaphoric mother and Eve of the town of Macondo, in which *Cien años* takes place. Ursula is the vessel of the Buendía family history; she is the one who prays for her family, and the one who warns them of the curse—marrying within the familial bloodlines will produce children with pig's tails. Gene H. Bell-Villada suggests Ursula is an almost heroic figure whose "unflagging energy and 'invincible heart' help keep the family a going concern" (42-43). The loss of a woman of such status would seem significant, but as she reaches her final days, Ursula is described as less than human. García Márquez employs absurdity and humor that minimizes the tragic death of the matriarch. As Ursula's death approaches, she is described as a food-thing, a fetus, a doll, a mummy, a cherry raisin, a monkey, and even a cricket. The language transforms her from person into "thing" echoing what Henri Bergson's says in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of Comic*: "[W]e laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing" (58). The oxymoronic words in the following passage describe the transformation of Ursula's fading body:

Poco a poco se fue reduciendo, fetizándose, momificándose en vida, hasta el punto de que en sus últimos meses era una ciruela pasa perdida dentro del camisón, y el brazo siempre alzado terminó por parecer la pata de una marimonda. Parecía una anciana recién nacida. (463)

Little by little she was shrinking, turning into a fetus, becoming mummified in life to the point that in her last months she was a cherry raisin lost inside of her nightgown, and the arm that she always kept raised looked like the paw of a marimonda monkey.... She look[ed] like a newborn old woman. (348)

The narrator creates a confounding image of a shrinking and dehumanized body. Moreover, the people around her are amused, not despondent. Her great-grandchildren treat Ursula as a toy doll and hide her in a grain closet, where the rats might eat her (*Cien* 463). Since they can't hear her speak, they imagine that she has died just like a *grillito* or little cricket (463). What would normally be treated as a great loss to the family and its sacred connection to the past is presented as something completely absurd, unreal, and irreverent. Collectively the incongruous words both diminish Ursula's personhood and the threat embodied by death. The text suggests that she does not merit the sorrowful and despondent emotions bestowed upon those who die young. In other words, Ursula's death leaves a meaningful void in the family because she fulfilled a foundational role, but the narrator does not convey this loss.

The use of unusual adjectives to describe deaths and corpses happens throughout the novel. When Amaranta receives a visit from Death, the approach of her final days is described in the following passage: "[L]a muerte le deparó el privilegio de anunciarse con varios años de anticipación.... La muerte no le dijo cuándo se iba a morir ni si su hora estaba señalada antes que la de Rebeca, sino que le ordenó empezar a tejer su propia mortaja el próximo seis de abril (394). [“D]eath had awarded her the privilege of announcing itself several years ahead of time.... Death did not tell her when she was going to die or whether her hour was assigned before that of Rebeca, but ordered her to begin sewing her own shroud on the next sixth of April” (284)]. Amaranta not only has enough time to sew her own death shroud, she publicizes her departure to everyone in town. Her final days are, as Arnold Penuel describes, a “theatrically-presented death” (556); so, as the word *theatrical* suggests, marked by pretense. Amaranta not only performs a type of death spectacle, she also offers to carry messages and letters to the dead in the afterlife. In older traditions death was believed to announce its arrival (Ariès 6-7). This could mean that people received some sort of divine forewarning or supernatural premonition that informed them of their passing, thus situating their end in some type of divine order, suggesting that God had called upon her soul. In this way her death does not become a fearful or tragic event but an odd performance *and* anticipated transition from one life to another.

Unlike the more elaborate prose and vocabulary García Márquez employs throughout the novel, the language to describe Amaranta's corpse is brief and unceremonious. Amaranta is like Remedios, in that she departs this earth a virgin. However, Amaranta is different in that she is a woman who has aged and lost her youthful splendor as illustrated in the following passage:

Quando llegó a la casa, Aureliano Segundo tuvo que abrirse paso a empujones por entre la muchedumbre, para ver el cadáver de la anciana doncella, fea y de mal color, con la venda negra en la mano y envuelta en la mortaja primorosa. Estaba expuesto en la sala junto al cajón del correo. (398)

Aureliano Segundo had to push his way through the crowd to see the corpse of the aged virgin, ugly and discolored, with the black bandage on her hand and wrapped in the magnificent shroud. She was laid out in the parlor beside the box of letters. (288)

The language is plain, without the mournful tones of lengthy descriptions that might be evoked to describe the deaths of young, beautiful women in fiction. Unlike a romantic concept of death, there is no siren or holy virgin, but rather a swift acknowledgement of the body, the box of letters, and the “magnificent” shroud. The beautiful gown seems to be the only noteworthy art piece in this death scene.

The juxtaposition of incongruous adjectives transfigures deaths and corpses into something unfamiliar and strange, which happens throughout the novel. Like Amaranta, a single sentence is used to describe the first Remedios's death:

Una semana antes de la fecha fijada para la boda, la pequeña Remedios despertó a medianoche empapada en un caldo caliente que explotó en sus entrañas con una especie de eructo desgarrador, y murió tres días después envenenada por su propia sangre con un par de gemelos atravesados en el vientre. (183)

One week before the dates set for the wedding, little Remedios woke up in the middle of the night soaked in a hot broth which had exploded in her insides with a kind of tearing belch, and she died three days later, poisoned by her own blood, with a pair of twins crossed in her stomach. (89)

Mixing the comical with the morbid, her death seems to have been provoked by a tremendous belch. The commingling of the words *caldo*, *eructo*, and *explotó*, suggestive of a bad meal, describe a ridiculous and unbelievable end to life. Was this some sort of fatal indigestion or a pregnancy gone awry? Regardless, there is little poetic or melancholic treatment of her passing by the narrator and no other mention is made of her corpse in this passage. The narrator continues with the plot.<sup>3</sup>

Levity also informs José Arcadio Buendía's, Macondo's founder, superlative departure. In his old age he has lost his senses and is tied to a chestnut tree to live out his last days. This is hardly a humane manner to treat a mentally ill and ageing family member, yet the language employed to describe his final days converts his death into a less lonely and more magical transition. According to the narrator, José Arcadio Buendía is not alone under the tree. Prudencio's ghost, a man José Arcadio Buendía had killed years ago, accompanies him. Evidently, the two men, once foes, have made peace with the past and even make plans to raise roosters in the afterlife. When the patriarch Buendía finally dies, the descriptions

emphasize the magical falling flowers and the pungent perfume that fill the landscape. Hardly any mention is made of his body, thus illustrating how corpses, both female and male, are often eclipsed by other extraordinary happenings throughout the novel. Arguably, his death is remarkable in that he knew his end was near, he had time to prepare for it, and he even enjoyed the companionship of his former enemy, now friend, Prudencio. Additionally, the magic and humor employed to describe his final days erase the tragic feelings that would usually be associated with the death of a family patriarch. The narrator's description of deaths and corpses, reveal a certain level of coolness and detachment, thus recalling Seymour Menton's characterization of the magical realist mode. This detachment and objectivity also inform Allende's text; however, there are important differences too.

### Allende's Deaths

Critics have already noted that *Cien años de soledad* inspired Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*. Mario Rojas in "Un caleidoscopio de espejos deordenados," affirms that the "spirit" of *Cien años de soledad* consistently hovers over Allende's text and the constant mirroring of the previous text could best be described as an intratextual caleidoscope (217). That is, there is a mirroring, but also a distortion of a reflected pattern. P. Gabrielle Foreman in "Past-On Stories: History and the Magical Real, Morrison and Allende on Call," illustrates how, compared to García Márquez's text, Allende both feminizes and politicizes the magical mode. Robert Antoni in "Parody or Piracy: The Relationship of 'The House of the Spirits' to 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'" argues that through the conscious and/or unconscious parodying of García Márquez's novel, Allende discovers her own language, and focalizes female voices (18). Allende employs similar language already exploited by García Márquez, which is "hyperbolic," "oxymoronic," and "crowded with metaphor" or as Antoni states, the language of magical realism (17). The obvious echoing of García-Marquez's novel has also created unease among critics as Beth Jorgensen underscores when she states that it "hardly needs mentioning that the single most commonly—and hotly debated—question for about a decade was the relationship of *Casa* to Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*" (130). Given the various parallels established between the texts in terms of plot and style already, the argument here particularly focuses on how literary devices allow for the sublimation of death in Allende's texts as they do in *Cien años de soledad*.

*La casa de los espíritus* conveys the Del Valle-Trueba family saga that presumably unfolds in Chile during the emerging socialist movement of the twentieth century. Whereas the historical account of the patriarch, Esteban Trueba, is linear and authoritative, the female more intimate accounts allow for various, and even contradictory, representations. The novel underscores the impossibility of giving a totalizing and purely singular description of any object of study, especially as it relates to history, and also illustrates the un-

feasibility of fully and objectively articulating feelings of great loss without evoking metaphors of otherness.

García Márquez's Remedios, *la bella* is a clear model for Allende's young protagonist, Rosa, *la bella*. They are similar in that their remarkable beauty is described in detail and at length, yet their earthly departures differ. Here, the most beautiful woman in the novel *does* die and her corpse *is* poetically described at length. This is a noteworthy difference between the two works' rendering of analogous protagonists. García Márquez's text—which hardly treats corpses—mitigates death's terror mostly through humor and by maintaining a certain affective distance from the characters. Allende, too uses humor, but turns to metaphors of otherness to describe a young female corpse in a detailed and sustained way, that is also marked by melancholy. Unlike García Márquez's narrator, the voices here describe the death of a young heroine, Rosa, *la bella*, both as non-human object and with sober thoughtfulness that speaks to a female subjective presence.

The death of Rosa, *la bella*, Esteban Trueba's beloved, after drinking liquor laced with rat poison, conforms to the novel's complication of linear approaches to narrative. Different points of view describe the young woman's death, yet they are equally illusive. The various descriptions of the corpse, using opposing imagery, articulate the despondent feelings after a great loss, but also mask death's presence. Hyperbolic language filling several pages describes the postmortem preparation of the young heroine who has left the earthly realm tragically and too soon. The author deploys the usual repertoire of descriptions associated with female death, attributing to the corpse an otherworldly beauty, but also provides a contrasting, and seemingly more nightmarish and grotesque description. Allende converts Rosa's death into abstraction, whereby the figurative language transforms her into both a mythic goddess and dehumanized prey.

The contrasting versions of the autopsy have different moods. Whereas one purports to be objective, with erotic and melancholic undertones, the other presents a gruesome depiction of the post-mortem process in which a monstrous vampire dehumanizes its victim. Both versions, nevertheless, are illusory: one a chilling and repulsive nightmare, the other an illusive dream. The contrasting metaphors articulate the severity of Rosa's premature death, which happens in the first few pages of the novel. During the autopsy the narrator employs hyperbolic metaphors that articulate both the myth and horror of the post mortem process. The two starkly opposing interpretations of the same exact event transform the body in a way that makes her death unreal. To die while young, female, and beautiful could be considered the quintessential tragic death, one that usually calls for a more extended literary treatment, as is the case in Rosa's autopsy. The way Esteban Trueba imagines her body echoes the way in which the romantics beautified, exalted, and deified death (Ariès 582-83). Considering how to describe the death of a young woman also brings to mind Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition." Poe states that melancholy is the ideal poetic

tone, and the most melancholic moment is the death of a beautiful woman; "when it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (812). Poe's poems and short stories often focused on female death and corpses, evoking despondent feelings, terror, and melancholy associated with the death of the young woman as illustrated in his poems "Ulalume" and "Annabel Lee" and his short story "Ligeia," among others. Following a long tradition in which female corpses are transformed into poetic objects, Esteban Trueba assumes the position of bereaved lover, and he turns to poetic language to describe Rosa's body.

Rosa is the most beautiful women in the novel. In life her attributes were otherworldly: long, cascading green hair and yellow eyes. She was fairy-like. She moved as if she were flying (*La casa* 33). According to the third-person narrator, when she dies, she is more beautiful than ever (*La casa* 37). Young Esteban Trueba affirms this statement when he first sets eyes on his dead beloved. He recalls, "Allí estaba Rosa entre blancos pliegues de raso blanco en su blanco ataúd, que a los tres días de fallecida se conservaba intacta y era mil veces más bella de lo que recordaba, porque en la muerte se había transformado sutilmente en la sirena que siempre fue en secreto" (44). ["There was Rosa in the folds of the white satin lining of her white coffin still intact three days after she died, and a thousand times more beautiful than I remembered her, for in death Rosa had been subtly transformed into the mermaid she had always been in secret" (34)].<sup>4</sup> Instead of Rosa's body simply being a dead corpse, Esteban prefers to imagine her as a *sirena*, or siren—the charming and bewitching fabled virgin, such as those in the *Odyssey*. Assuming the position of bereaved lover, he turns to poetic language to describe Rosa. This is an example of how the narrator asks the reader to interpret Rosa's death figuratively. In other words, the narrator invites the reader to turn away from death and understand this event in terms of myth and poetry.

The third-person narrator's description of the postmortem examination by the doctor and his assistant reinforces the point that death increases Rosa's beauty. As the doctor prepares the body for examination, the narrator uses erotic terms, such as "Esplendorosa desnudez de sirena" (38) ["Splendid body of a mermaid" (27)]. Reference to sleep and the use of an ordinary kitchen table negate death: "Rosa durmiendo desnuda sobre el mesón de la cocina" (38) ["Rosa naked and asleep on the kitchen table" (28)], even as the reference to her nudity eroticizes her. Rosa's beauty and the beauty of death itself overwhelms the assistant: "El ayudante, demasiado emocionado por la hermosura de la muerta, no se resignaba a dejarla cosida como un saco y sugirió acomodarla un poco" (39) ["The assistant, overcome by the young girl's beauty, could not resign himself to leaving her sewn up like a jacket and suggested that they fix her up a bit" (29)]. According to the narrator, the assistant is careful to suture the body so she will look more human, rather than a sewn jacket or *saco*, which also means a 'sack' in Spanish. He dresses her

and fixes her hair with great care. At the end of the autopsy, which some have interpreted as a kind of symbolic rape, the assistant prepares her for the viewing:<sup>5</sup>

En la cocina quedó Rosa en manos del ayudante, que la lavó con una esponja, quitándole las manchas de sangre, le colocó su camisa bordada para tapar el costurón que tenía desde la garganta hasta el sexo y le acomodó el cabello. Después limpió los vestigios de su trabajo. (40)

[The Doctor] went out of the room and Rosa was left in the hands of the assistant, who wiped the bloodstains from her skin with a sponge, put her embroidered nightgown back over her chest to cover up the seam that ran from her throat all the way to her sex, and arranged her hair. Then he cleaned the mess that he and the doctor had made. (29)

The assistant covers up Rosa's corpse with an embroidered gown that hides the sewn-up destroyed body, which is another example of how beauty is used to mask death's presence. The broken corpse is reassembled, thus evoking a fantasy of wholeness and beauty. However, the narrator uses language that also undermines the female dead body trope.

Rosa's sister, Clara, experiences the autopsy in far different terms from those used by the omniscient narrator. On the night of the autopsy she sneaks out of her room and watches the process from outside through a window. To Clara the scene is nightmarish, horrific, and grotesque. When she sees her sister on the table, Clara begins to tremble from fright, underscoring the overwhelming scene. However, she also generates self-preserving language to address and subvert the terror that Rosa's corpse represents. The words used to describe what Clara sees convey distortion, the unreal, and the frightening, but as inspired by fiction. Instead of seeing this as a medical procedure or an "autopsy," she sees it as a disembowelment, as when she states that "la destriparon" (48). The ambience is "amenazante" (48), threatening, not somber as it was from the medical men's point of view. Furthermore, she describes how the family doctor "se había transformado en un vampiro gordo y oscuro como los de las ilustraciones de los libros de su tío Marcos" (49) [transformed into a dark, fat vampire just like the ones in her uncle Marcos's books (38)]. Clara filters her sister's death through the gothic images that she had previously seen in her uncle's books. Instead of the sweet and wonderful family doctor, she now imagines him as someone who is ghastly and monstrous.

Whereas the first description of the autopsy described Rosa as whole, a complete body, Clara can only see an incomplete image because the doctor's body obstructs her view: "[V]ió las piernas blanquísimas de su hermana y pies desnudos" (49) [She saw her sister's snow-white legs and naked feet (38)]. The incision also contributes to a sense of fragmentation:

En ese momento el doctor Cuevas se apartó y ella pudo ver el horrendo espectáculo de Rosa acostada sobre el mármol, abierta en canal por un tajo profundo, con los intestinos puestos en su lado, dentro de la fuente de la ensalada. (49)

At that moment Dr. Cuevas moved aside and she was able to see the dreadful spectacle of Rosa lying on her back on the marble slab, a deep gash forming a canal down the front of her body with her intestines beside her on the salad platter. (38)

Unlike the previous passage, there is no mention of Rosa's beauty. Rosa has been carved up, her insides placed on a platter, which further underscores the grotesque imagery. Her sister sees her as incomplete, disassociated from her former alive self. Furthermore, Clara describes her sister's head as being "torcida" (49) or twisted with the blood on her hair. Rosa's eyes are closed, but Clara imagines that they are open, and that she can see pleading in her sister's eyes. She also sees the autopsy as humiliating her sister. Clara imagines a chilling scene: a comingling of blood, innards, vampires, and agony.

Unlike the narrative descriptions that negate death by employing metaphors that connote desire, her descriptions reveal a fragmented non-body. The suturing, that the assistant saw as respectful, in Clara's eyes is dehumanizing. She observes that he uses a hooked needle, like those used to sew mattresses. Thus, while the assistant saw suturing as treating the body better than a jacket, to Clara it makes her sister a piece of furniture. For Clara, the nude, broken, dismembered body, is hardly human. She sees a horror fiction scene, not an erotic beauty.

Arguably, Rosa's death shocks and affects Clara profoundly because she identifies closely with her, suggesting that Rosa's death presents a real threat to her own existence. For Clara, Rosa's death is a life-changing event and she does not say a word for nine years afterwards. However, in watching the autopsy, Clara is able to save herself from being completely engulfed by evoking otherness. She creates a distance between her living, whole body and the corpse. Instead of seeing Rosa in terms of sameness, she transforms Rosa into a fragmented non-body and conjures unreal vampiric images she had seen in fiction to mitigate death's terror. Clara does not run away from the corpse immediately, but rather processes death more subjectively. Yet, in the end she turns to metaphors, albeit scary ones as found in fiction, and saves herself from being completely subsumed by death.

Allende deals with Rosa's corpse in a more sustained way as compared to García Márquez's death scenes, which avoid a prolonged engagement with corpses and the trauma they might represent. Furthermore, Allende makes use of different narrative voices, mostly female-centric ones, whereby she can treat Rosas death both objectively and subjectively. Through Clara, Allende demythol-

ogizes and de-eroticizes the image of the female corpse, so often roused from the male subject position, especially exploited by the romantics. Allende's treatment of the most beautiful women in her novel might also be explained by Elisabeth Bronfen's supposition on one of her chapters, expressing how "women writers install, comply with, critique and rewrite the cultural image repertoire that links the feminine subject position to a speaking through and out of death" (xiii). That is, when describing Rosas's death, the narrator does so subjectively, unlike García Márquez's treatment of Remedios, *la bella*. In this sense Allende's intervention challenges hegemonies, wherein women are often discursively treated as mere voiceless objects of beauty and contemplation. The female-centered voices then become "force-fields" that challenge patriarchy and other forms of repression (Foreman 294). The attack on patriarchy is unlike García Márquez's novel, whose text, according to John Deveny and Juan Manuel Marcos, "reinforce the patriarchal values" that are at times flagrant (85). Allende's treatment of Rosa undermines the male centered gaze which so often objectifies and aestheticizes female corpses.

### Other Literary Deaths

Yet not all female deaths in Allende's novel are treated in the same manner. While Allende treats the young heroine's body with more attention when compared to García Márquez's descriptions of Remedios, *la bella*, Allende describes life's end for the elderly in a jovial mode that lacks melancholic undertones, so akin to García Márquez's rendition. The many examples of literary deaths illustrate how both authors consistently and in varying degrees erase death via analogous figurative language.

In Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*, the matriarch, Nivea, experiences a ridiculous death. Clara presages that her parents will die, and Nivea responds, humorously, indicating their malfunctioning old car will be the cause. And indeed, the car, which always had unreliable brakes, runs over Nivea as she tries to stop it. A metal sheet, absurdly, strikes and decapitates her. The narrator's ensuing focus on the escapades surrounding Nivea's missing head makes this gruesome end comical. Convinced the community will criticize them for interring her without her head, the family holds a vigil with a closed casket. Clara later finds the head, which she comments is a serious problem since they do not know what to do with it exactly. She decides to store it in the basement, out of sight, where it is forgotten for many years. The head is later buried with Clara's body. Nivea's death is one that is humorous, absurd and grotesque, which is more akin to García Márquez's bizarre deaths.

Esteban Trueba's death also differs from the treatment of those who die young and female. Told from his granddaughter's point of view, his death has almost no mention of his body: "Yo me senté a su lado a esperar con él y la muerte no tardó en llegarle apaciblemente, sorprendiéndolo en el sueño.... Esteban Trueba pudo morir feliz murmurando su nombre, Clara, clarísima, clarividente" (452).

["I sat beside him to wait with him, and death was not long in coming, taking him by surprise as he lay sleeping peacefully.... Esteban Trueba was able to die happy, murmuring her name: Clara, clearest, clairvoyant" (431)]. Esteban dies peacefully and happily, his granddaughter, Alba, beside him, joining his wife's ghost. Suggesting that Clara will accompany him in the afterlife makes the finality less threatening, since the specter suggests a continuum and not an absolute rupture with the earthly realm. The description of Trueba's body is unlike that of Rosa's, whose body is described both as a non-human entity and a poetic object of contemplation.

The language used to describe bodies conjures a magical otherness that minimizes death's power. That is, the authors go to great lengths in tempering the characters' terrible ends by employing affected language, or other incongruous analogies that convert death into something extraordinary or unusual. Allende's memoir *Paula* employs the same device. *Paula* is a creative non-fiction piece, yet Allende evokes some of the same imagery found in *Cien años de Soledad* and *La casa de los espíritus* to speak of her daughter's premature death. Paula's porphyria-induced coma and passing, especially as narrated in the final pages of the book, is both tragic and imbued with magic and wonder, much like those of the young women in García Márquez's and Allende's fiction.

In *Paula* Allende performs the almost unbearable task of describing her own daughter's fading body by employing her art, writing, as a way to process such a loss. She uses metaphors that suggest beauty, bravery, and peace to soften the great suffering that a daughter's death embodies. This approach is not unlike fiction, whereby authors invite readers to understand death in terms of myth, poetry or anything else that is less death-like, as a means to ward off what this finality represents. In *Paula* her daughter's death is treated intimately and with great sadness that is more clearly linked to the divine, which echoes how the romantics deified death, whereby a loved one could be transformed into "an inseparable immortal" (Ariès 583). This conversion of the corpse into something that undermines material reality is the common thread that links *Cien años de soledad*, *La casa de los espíritus*, and *Paula*; however, in *Paula* Allende intensifies the melancholic language to speak of her daughter's death.

Critics have underscored that the memoir treats Paula's death "nominally" in favor of focusing on Allende's own story. As Linda Maier proposes, "Allende's impulse to take over the spotlight may here be attributed to her parental role and grief and to her quest for creative empowerment in the face of bereavement" (237). Maier writes that the memoir could easily have been titled *Isabel* (237). However, recalling Yalom's words, one can stare at death for only so long. Therefore, Allende's turn away from her dying daughter to focus on the world of the living, and on her life, in particular, is unsurprising. Especially when understanding that she wrote this while Paula—her other self—lay dying.

While most of the memoir centers on Allende's life, at the book's conclusion, the words focus on her daughter's diseased

body, death, and corpse. As Paula is fading into death, Allende describes her daughter in language that evokes the divine. Just like with Remedios and Rosa, a young woman is transformed into a religious icon.<sup>6</sup> Of her fading daughter Allende writes: "En su silla de ruedas, con los ojos vacíos, inmóvil y pálida, ella es un ángel que nos entreabre las puertas divinas para que nos asomemos a su inmensidad" (302) ["In her wheelchair, vacant-eyed, motionless, pale, she is an angel opening doors to the divine so we may glimpse its immensity" (318)]. She uses metaphors to soften the image of the sickly body, transforming it into a celestial image. Later, when she is within hours of passing, the narrator states: "A pesar de todo ha embellecido, las manos y tobillos más finos, el cuello más largo, las mejillas pálidas donde resaltan dramáticas sus largas pestañas negras, su rostro tiene una expresión angélica, como si por fin hubiera expiado las dudas y encontrado la fuente divina que tanto buscó (301-302)" ["But in spite of everything, she is more beautiful: her hands and ankles are finer, her neck longer, her pale cheeks dramatically emphasize her long black eyelashes. Her face has an angelic expression, as if finally she had obliterated all doubt and found the divine fount she had sought so resolutely" (320)]. Here she reverts to the language of serene beauty her omniscient narrator and Esteban Trueba used to describe Rosa's body.

During her coma, Allende imagines that Paula's spirit visits her during her dreams, telling her that Paula is ready to part from the earthly realm. By doing so she reveals a magical connection with her daughter. Paula, according to the narrator, has a serene death surrounded by her family and other loved ones and without pain. Figurative language further transforms Paula's death into a finality conjuring the divine. Paula is transformed into an aestheticized poetic object, yet the author clearly, as her heartbreaking language suggests, transforms Paula into an "inseparable immortal." Allende visualizes that she herself can travel and accompany Paula into the heavens and afterlife:

Comenzó a elevarse y yo subí también colgada de la tela de su vestido. Escuché de nuevo la voz de la Memé: *No puedes ir con ella, ha bebido la poción de la muerte.... pero me impulsé con mis últimas fuerzas y logré aferarme de su mano, dispuesta a no soltarla, y all llegar arriba vi abrirse el techo y salimos juntas.* (316)

She began to rise, and I with her, clinging to the cloth of her dress. Again I heard Memé's voice: No one can go with her, she has drunk the potion of death...But I pushed upward with my last strength and grasped her hand, determined not to let go, and when we reached the top of the tower I saw the roof open and we ascended together. (330)

Like Remedios, *la bella*, but without a tinge of comedy, Paula ascends to heaven; however, here Allende imagines that she can accompany her and even assume her identity. Together, mother and

daughter travel through the heavens, appreciating the earth one last time. During a type of lucid dream, Allende realizes that Paula has left her body to enter the spiritual and mythic world. During this travel their life energies coalesce. They both dissolve into one, into the magic of the universe. Ultimately, Paula continues to exist in the afterlife as a spirit *and* energy, still connected to the material world. She is part of the earth, sky, and wind, and Allende as well. The memoir ends with the following words "... soy Paula y también soy yo misma soy nada y todo lo demás es esta vida y en otras, inmortal" (316) ["I am Paula and I am also Isabel, I am nothing and all other things in this life and other lives, immortal" (330)]. Allende turns to otherworldly phenomena and the extraordinary, at times inspired by sacred belief systems, to come to terms with a great loss. Moreover, like the young women in her fiction, Allende returns to miracles, ghosts, and affected language in which Paula outshines death and decay. Through aesthetic language that suggests alterity, Allende tries again to rub out Death.<sup>7</sup>

Death is the loneliest event imaginable, in which we exit the world unaccompanied, lose our bodies, and forever part from the people we love in order to enter the vast unknown. The texts discussed here, whose pages are saturated with deathly themes and cadavers, present a marvelous world in which finalities become amusing events, unreal happenings, or are displaced by descriptions of otherworldly and remarkable dreams. García Márquez's and Allende's texts create fanciful situations that represent a less morbid form of departure from the world, mitigating the finality of death. The discussed literary deaths emphasize the ways wherein it is impossible to stare at Death too long: García Márquez's text uses humor and often converts corpses into thing-like objects. Allende too uses humor, but also turns to poetic metaphors that allow women to speak of death intimately and subjectively. Collectively the texts rely on metaphors that evoke otherness to "soften death's terror."

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* addresses the ubiquitous overrepresentation of the dead female body in art and literature, but also illustrates how figurative language sublimates death. Figurative language turns away from the corpse and the gloominess it might represent and evokes something other than death. However, this paper illustrates how otherness is employed to speak of both male and female corpses.

<sup>2</sup> See Sergey Zenkin, "Alterity and Sacrality in the Nineteenth Century."

See also Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, a Study in Religious Sociology*.

<sup>3</sup> As readers discover at the novel's conclusion, Melquiades is a "God-like, third-person-omniscient narrator" (Antoni 17-18).

<sup>4</sup> All translations are from *The House of the Spirits*.

<sup>5</sup> See Phillip Swanson, 163.

<sup>6</sup> This article is dedicated to my friend and mentor Maurice Westmoreland (1956 - 2018).

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