

Book Review

Ascent to Glory: How One Hundred Years of Solitude Was Written and Became a Global Classic

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Álvaro Santana-Acuña's *Ascent to Glory* is a careful and thoroughly researched analysis of how Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, first published in 1967, was imagined, became an international sensation, and, eventually, a classic text in the global literary canon. It therefore contributes to ongoing debates in the sociology of art and literature concerning the nature of cultural consecration and the role of networks in the processes of art production as well as reputation building. More than this, however, the book constitutes an enjoyable narrative that can be read by specialists and non-specialists alike. While the former group will find a detailed and theoretically nuanced analysis of a globally consecrated text, the latter will relish an account of how an artwork comes about and to be 'great'. Finally, there is a third group of readers to whom the book will appeal – hard core Márquez fans. They, however, might find the book upsetting, because it dispels some of the most beloved myths of Márquez's genius.

The book is organised into two fundamental parts and an appendix, which is meant for specialists. The first part, *From the Idea To the Book* analyses the structure of Gabriel García Márquez's literary imagination. Santana-Acuña explores how it was possible for Márquez to actually imagine a work of literature that came to be the *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The gist of the argument here is that although the novel famously, and demonstratively, thematises solitude, it was conceived and written in anything but seclusion. To the contrary, Márquez imagined and wrote it while participating in several exclusive networks of literary professionals in several countries across the globe who consistently gave him feedback and inspiration to write the novel, which was taking shape in his mind for more than two decades. At the same time, as Santana-Acuña explains, Márquez was lucky in terms of timing – his novel appeared just at the right moment, as the book market in Latin America became consolidated and the idea of Latin American literature was taking root in the global landscape of literary imagination.

The second part of the book, entitled *Becoming a Global Classic*, concerns the process by which Márquez's already bestselling book became disentangled or 'disembedded' from its local and temporal contexts and elevated into the global canon of literary classics. Santana-Acuña explores how, paradoxically, conflicts within the network that originally enabled Márquez to produce the novel, contributed to the novel's independence as a 'landmark... no longer controlled by a single publisher' (p. 199) or former collaborators who once co-created it. Moreover, Santana-Acuña investigates the role of myths to rise up around the production of the novel and its author, as well as the ways in which some key symbols of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* acquired a memetic quality – they became

'indexicals' in Santana-Acuña's parlance – and continue to be used relatively independently of the novel itself. It is worth noting that the chapter also contains a section on counterfactuals, or books which, compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, failed to make the canon and leave a mark as lasting as Márquez's novel. Santana-Acuña uses the example of these counterfactuals to demonstrate the strength of his approach.

Finally, the appendix *Why and How to Study Classics* clarifies the book's contribution to the sociology of literature. Santana-Acuña explains in detail the conceptual resources deployed in his research, such as 'imagination', 'niche', 'disembedding', 'indexicals', and 'counterfactual cases'. I think that, in particular, it is the foregrounding of the imaginative process, and the way in which imagination is shaped by collaborations within particular social niche/s, that will go on to be most influential in the sociology of literature, as well as in the sociology of knowledge more generally. Moreover, Santana-Acuña's method of researching impact and resonance of cultural objects through indexicals, which he has already explored in-depth in previous work (2014), is both sophisticated and analytically illuminating.

All in all, *Ascent to Glory* is a very solid contribution to the landscape of the sociology of literature. What stands out most about the book is the complexity with which the author addresses the conundrum of the global classic status of Márquez's novel. Santana-Acuña effectively dovetails different perspectives – from textual analysis of the novel and biographical exploration of the author's life to macro-level foci of institutions and the wider zeitgeist – to deliver a persuasive and highly readable account of literary consecration. Moreover, the author offers innovative theoretical and methodological resources that will be of great utility for future researchers of literary reputation and cultural objects.

The book is not entirely without issue, however. One concern that could be raised is the nature of a number of the 'counterfactuals', or books that failed to succeed on the scale of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Santana-Acuña's explanatory accounts of these counterfactuals are not always entirely persuasive – for example, in the case of Lezama Lima's *Paradiso*, the author notes that its 'innovative language and narrative style' (p. 266) precluded its success. But if language and complexity were an issue, how and why would stylistically complex, labyrinthine tomes such as Joyce's *Ulysses* achieve the status of classics? That said, there are few books that do not raise questions – and tend not to be very good. Álvaro Santana-Acuña's *Ascent to Glory* is the opposite case, and well-worth taking the time to read.

REFERENCES

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