

Elitelore and Folklore:
Theory and a Test Case in
One Hundred Years of Solitude

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Concepts of elitelore and folklore are developed here to advance theory about lore as it is reflected in the relationship between oral and written images.¹ Although lore of the folk (or people) has been the subject of theoretical analysis, it has been little examined in relation to its interaction with the lore of the elite.² We argue here that written and spoken forms of lore exist among the elite as well as among the folk and that the interaction of these forms shapes beliefs of elites and masses in ways that hitherto have not been explicitly addressed by social science.

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¹ For more on these concepts, see James W. Wilkie, *Elitelore* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1973). See also Maria Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Elitelore versus Folklore* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979); and James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, "Dimensions of Elitelore: An Oral History Questionnaire," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 1:1 (1975).79-101.

² For an important statement on the science of folklore and literature, see Munro S. Edmonson, *Lon* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). Advancing upon somewhat parallel lines to the work of James Wilkie, Edmonson relates patterns in lore of the the

Analysis in Part I concerns the theory of the relationship between elitelore and folklore. Part II involves the application of theory in a case study that examines meaning in Gabriel García Márquez's novel about village life in "Macondo." The anthropological study of village life in "Aritama" by Gerardo and Alicia, Reichel-Dolmatoff is used here to test García Márquez's view.³ Macondo and Aritama are pseudonyms for two

people (which he finds in preliterature, speech, plays, and style) to lore of-implicitly-the "elite" (which he finds.. great comparative literature). For an innovative approach to lore as seen in superstition, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1976). Weber uses lore (among other sources such as data on literacy, schools and schooling, military service, crime, taxation, elections, migration, road building, etc.) to show how the passing of traditional rites and popular culture gave rise to the modern French nation. According to Weber (p. 495): "From the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, high and low cultures agreed on the fundamental interpretation of the world and of life. Literacy or illiteracy made little difference to people's understanding of the condition of man, his purpose and his means. Knowledge varied in degree but not in kind. In the seventeenth century things changed. Natural science and rationalism with its particular logic created a separate culture of the literate, while the illiterate clung to the old days. The relative cultural unity of Western society ... as dissolved, and people henceforth lived in two different worlds of the mind. Coherent religious theories of life that had been accepted by most educated members of the community became, survivals-superstitions-no longer compatible with the scientific principles of the time. Correspondences and analogies that made sense in one system seemed childish and futile to the other. What had been common sense... as forsaken by those... ho pursued higher wisdom and became the province of those who regulated their existence by the seasons and the stars. Deprived of the support of elite thought, popular belief broke into a thousand subsystems unintegrated into a comprehensive view of the world. Popular wisdom was bitsy-a collection of recipes, ceremonies, rituals-and popular religion was little more. Yet both were crucial, providing believers with things people badly need: explanations, a sense of control, reassurance, a framework for individual and social activities. From the cultivated point of view, popular culture was a morass of deprivation and ignorance. So was it from the point of view of its own most gifted spirits, those who yearned in vain for truths this culture could not teach them. Much popular magic and religion-and some rejection of both-reflected a persistent quest for just such truths... When, after about 1800, the gap began to narrow, it was thanks in large part to the rural world's increasing intercourse with the urban world. But material circumstances were crucial: increasingly effective control of the environment opened the door to urban views suggested by like experience. The more sophisticated people of the city believed, and in time demonstrated to the satisfaction of more and more peasants, that the world could be explained without evoking magic or supernatural intervention. The rural convert to rationalism could throwaway his ragbag of traditional contrivances, dodges in an unequal battle just to stay alive, with the heady conviction that, far from being a helpless witness of natural processes, he was himself an agent of change."

³ See García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1967). translated in English as *One Hundred of Solitude*. by Gregory Rabassa (New York: Avon Books. 1971): and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff and Gerardo Reichel-Doimatoff. *The People of Aritama: The Cultural Personality of a Colombia" Mestizo Village* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1961).

villages in the same area of northeastern Colombia.⁴ The case study also shows that the literature and oral history of García Márquez can be tested against each other.⁵ The reader should note that because the case study presented in Part II comprises only one aspect of theory offered in Part I, some of the discussion in the latter does not apply specifically to the former.

In treating the interplay of written and oral images as involving the "lore" of the elite as well as the nonelite in society, it should be noted at the outset that the elite may be hostile to the concept of elitelore. The idea of elitelore suggests that leaders do not espouse truth (as they have generally thought); instead, leaders have their own lore (a lore not directly shared by the folk) that can be examined for self-myth, customs, accumulated "wisdom." Legend, and tradition which influence self-perception of past, present, and future—in short, lore that elites previously believed to exist only among popular sectors of society.

I. Theory

Definitions

Lore is defined as noninstitutionalized knowledge (seen in elitelore (found in conceptual and perceptual information and views manipulated by unique individuals to justify leadership wherein they retain or change the life situation of their followers) and folklore (found in its traditional or popular sense, especially to explain one's situation in life).

Elitelore involves the following elements which mayor may not coexist with each other: first, self-perception and self-deception to justify the role of leadership; second, incomplete information Systems based upon

⁴ Although Aritama and Macondo are not precisely the same place nor are they depicted at the same time, and although the Reichel-Dolmatoff's could not have set out to test ideas in García Márquez's book which had not yet been written, the two villages are close enough for comparison. What is important is that anthropological and novelistic views were selected by their authors to show life in an isolated village in the same area in Colombia's northeast region. Both villages lie under the Santa Marta mountain mass: Macondo borders the woods, fields, pastures, and marshlands of the Ciénega de Santa Marta Lagoon on one side of the 19,000-foot peaks and Aritama lies in a narrow, hidden valley fanned by a small affluent of one of the larger rivers whose headwaters are on another side of the mountains. Despite some difference in altitude and occupation between the villages under discussion here, we have been told by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff that the people of Macondo and Aritama are essentially the same, regional similarities tending to overcome local peculiarities.

⁵ Until recent years some of the scholarly elite rejected the idea that oral history could be classified as "history" because history could only involve written records. For an early attempt to overcome such a narrow view, see discussion in Caroline F. Ware, Ed., *The Cultural Approach to History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

