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Overview of "One Hundred Years of Solitude"

Critic: Carole Hamilton

Source: *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Vol. 2, The Gale Group, 2000.

Criticism about: Gabriel (Jose) Garcia Marquez (1928-),
also known as: Gabriel (Jose) Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Jose Garcia-Marquez

Genre(s): Short stories; Novels; Journalism; Historical fiction; Experimental fiction; Film scripts; Family sagas

García Márquez often wryly denies that his works are magical, fantastic, or surrealistic: "It always amuses me that the highest praise for my work comes for the imagination, while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality." Latin America generally and Colombia specifically are lands of myth and wonder, where true accounts are as bizarre as fiction. The craziness of the United Fruit Company banana strike, where the company circumvented the legal system by calling its workers "contractors," was a real event, based in history. The siring of seventeen Aurelianos by one man by seventeen different women

could be real--García Márquez himself had fifteen siblings. However, that each of the seventeen Aurelianos was physically marked with ash can only be true in the metaphoric sense, as marked for death.

The magic realism of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* consists in just such metaphoric devices. With first a look at the variety of ways that the magic realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been explained and analyzed, I will move on to describe how the magical or fantastic elements nearly always serve as "metaphors made real," as though García Márquez asked himself, "What if men really were 'marked for death'?" "What if men really lived for procreation, like the butterfly? Or, what if a woman really ascended to heaven? And what if her sacred quality was not religious and otherworldly, but its opposite--earthly, corporeal beauty?" These and questions like them seem to have driven García Márquez's creative project when he locked himself away for eighteen months, after having spent years preparing himself in the art of the novel by reading everything from the Bible to the latest modernist works for six years, and then dedicating himself to "inventing literature" anew. With the enthusiasm and idealism of the true novice, García Márquez became the "master of magic realism," generating his own brand of magical literature by pushing the limits of imagination to create metaphors made real.

Magic realism infuses reality with imagination, by erasing the lines between daily life and dreams, between mortality and myth, and between the world and wonder at the world.

George McMurray, writing in 1977, considered *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to be the best example of the Latin American phenomenon of "magic realism." Nearly every literary critic and scholar who has written about the novel is compelled to mention this aspect of it. Most often, they remark on what Gene Bell-Villada called the novel's "perfect integration of...unusual incidents into the everyday life represented in a text largely realistic." Writers like Raymond Williams note the deadpan manner in which marvelous events are narrated: "García Márquez prohibits [fantastic events] being fantastic by dealing with them as if they were commonplace." García Márquez himself explained that he wanted to write "with the same expression with which my grandmother told [stories of the supernatural]: with a brick face." Fellow author Mario Vargas Llosa attributes the "prodigious enrichment" of wonders to the author's discovery "that the novelist is God," that literature "has not limits and that all excesses are permissible to the creator if he has the sufficient

verbal power of persuasion to justify them." Magic realism infuses reality with imagination, by erasing the lines between daily life and dreams, between mortality and myth, and between the world and wonder at the world.

Critics and scholars also discuss the fittingness of the symbolism of García Márquez's fantastic events to the character associated with them. Gene Bell-Villada sees the swarm of butterflies surrounding Mauricio Babilonia as "representing a soft, 'poetic' side to his sensuality, making the apprentice auto mechanic more than just an aggressive stud, and thus more plausibly attractive to a girlish Meme Buendía." Morton P. Levitt points out that the "ship in the jungle serves as a metaphor of a way of life that will as suddenly appear and...as suddenly vanish, inexplicable, perhaps irrational, subject to the forces of nature if not to reason, at once beyond reason and thoroughly human, testimony both to the power of nature over history and to the regenerative power of men within nature." Certainly the magic realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* enhances the rich meaning of its complex story, in metaphors that reach beyond the conscious level to affect the reader's phenomenological experience of the text. Metaphors serve to organize perceptions by providing a kind of framework through which a text is understood. Thus, the connotation of butterflies may not even reach the conscious level, but nevertheless shape the reader's understanding of Mauricio as having a lover's spirit, despite his gruff demeanor.

García Márquez has often been asked by interviewers to identify the sources of his ideas. Summarizing the commentaries of two other Latin American critics, Gene Bell-Villada reports that Remedios the Beauty ostensibly came from an urban legend about a young lady who ran off with the proverbial traveling salesman, and her parents made up the ascension story to hide their embarrassment, saying "If the Virgin Mary could do it, so can our daughter." García Márquez added the bed sheets for additional credibility, he reports, after having seen a maid hanging up the wash. Fantastic stories, legends, myths, and exaggerations are commonplace in many areas of Latin America. In his preface to a recent anthology of criticism on García Márquez, Harold Bloom attests to the bizarre nature of Latin American life and politics, citing the example of Haiti's Papa Doc ordering all black dogs on the island destroyed because he feared that one of his enemies had "transformed himself into a black dog." With such superstitious behavior occurring naturally in Latin America, it is no wonder that García Márquez chose to incorporate it into his

stories, for these features are part of the texture of his culture. However, his artistic reworking of the metaphor, turning it so to speak on its end, is unique in literary history. It is the modernist parallel to allegory, the creation of characters and traits based on abstract ideas--metaphors made real.

One of the simplest embodiments of metaphor made real can be seen in Ursula's blindness. She is the living epitome of "blind faith." At the same time, she has, despite her physical blindness, acute vision into the hearts of others, seeing past superficialities to core truths. Nature gives her paths to follow, even before her loss of sight. When her son José Arcadio is killed, a path of blood leads her to her son's dead body, winding an impossible trail across the town. In old age, her vision into reality grows stronger while her sight grows weaker. It is "the lucidity of old age" that allows her to see that her son Aureliano has grown cold-hearted. She feels her way along the walls of her familiar home, "the spirit of her invincible heart guid[ing] her through the shadows, as she feels her way along raising her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and finally great-great-grandchildren, the last of whom she has to douse with perfume to track through the house. She is the only one in the family who sees the larger pattern of family fates. She notices that Aureliano Segundo is "just like Aureliano. It's as if the world were repeating itself." She is the blind soothsayer who interprets the world, as she tells her husband, tied to his chestnut tree, news of her family. On a metafictional level, she also serves as story interpreter to the reader, with her occasional comments on the shape of her unfolding family history serving as plot guideposts.

Looking at specific incidents of the fantastic, Humberto E. Robles proposes that the ascent of Remedios the Beauty is a parody of the Virgin Mary's Ascension. Roberto González Echevarría comes to the same conclusion but notes an element of kitsch in the bed sheets making her ascension suggestive "of the popular renditions of the event in religious prints." García Márquez's ascension comically juxtaposes the common bed sheets and everyday activity of folding clothes alongside the sacred. One can imagine García Márquez's imagination at work here, beginning with the ascension of a woman whose chief quality is not beatific, but its mundane cognate, the beautiful. García Márquez describes Remedios the Beauty using terms often used of saints: "Remedios the Beauty was not a creature of this world." Words like "miracle" and "magnificent" are used in conjunction with her; she bears "no cross on her back," yet she gives a "pitying smile" reminiscent of Christ or Mary just before her

ascent. Like a saint, she is indifferent to fashion, malice, and sexual attraction, but her indifference is so extreme that she is considered retarded. She eats with her hands and is "incapable of giving an answer that was not a miracle of simplemindedness." Nevertheless, as to a divinity, men sacrifice their lives, literally, to her. She herself is so unaware of her attractions that she cuts off her hair, a big inconvenience to her, ironically making herself all the more attractive. The cut tresses she uses "to make wigs for the saints." In other words, she rids herself of an earthly possession that is more useful to the saints than to herself, as though they have more vanity than she. It is her earthly beauty, with or without her hair, that makes her divine. She exudes a unique natural odor, "a tormenting breeze that was still perceptible several hours after she passed by." Taken altogether, the traits of Remedios the Beauty are those of a saint of beauty, an earthly saint whose palpable and sacred beauty emanates its own incense. Rather than just being described in metaphoric terms, Remedios the Beauty is the 'embodiment' of the metaphor of the idolized woman.

Rebeca is another metaphor made real: she is one of the living dead, a woman with a literal connection to the earth and to the grave. One connection is the sack of bones that go *clok-clok-clok*, her parents' bones. She cannot marry until they receive a proper burial--until they find their resting place in the earth. Another connection to the grave is Rebeca's favorite form of sustenance. While the first-generation José Arcadio and Aureliano nurse from their mother Ursula, their foster sister Rebeca eats dirt, physically nourished by it. Finally, she stays connected to death by living near the cemetery. When she and José Arcadio marry, they live across from the cemetery and wake the neighbors with their lovemaking as many as eight times a night. Rebeca is the embodiment of the human connection to the dead, and thus she can foresee, with an Aureliano-like prescience, that the shooting of Colonel Aureliano Buendía will take place against the cemetery wall. After the death of José Arcadio, Rebeca lives on in her home by the cemetery, completely forgotten by the family, as though she, too, is dead. Ursula in her blindness realizes how unfair they had been to reject her, since of them all, Rebeca alone "had the unbridled courage that Ursula had wanted for her line." Amaranta, her lifelong enemy, the one who killed her soul by plotting against her wedding with Pietro Crespi, does not repent. She sews Rebeca's funeral shroud, consoling herself with a fantasy of restoring Rebeca's dead damaged face with paraffin and decking her with the hair of the saints. When Aureliano Triste brings news of having seen Rebeca, alive but aged, his description matches Amaranta's fantasy exactly,

"an apparition with leathery skin and a few golden threads on her skull." For most of her life, Rebeca is a living corpse, in reality as well as in Amaranta's hopes. Her house is like a rotting casket, entombing her but also slowly being taken over by the earth: "the floor was broken by grass and wildflowers and in the cracks lizards and all manner of vermin had their nests, all of which confirmed that there had not been a human being there for at least half a century." Aureliano Triste easily pushes down the worm-eaten door. He finds Rebeca "alive and rotting in her wormhole," haunted by memories of José Arcadio that Aureliano Triste awakens. When she finally dies, her head is bald from ringworm, as though decomposition has had a head start on her. In life, the grave is a part of her, returning to her the earth to which she has always been connected.

García Márquez has said that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "is a metaphor for Latin America." In several ways, this is so. The metaphor of solitude aptly speaks to a nagging sense of disconnectedness from both the Indian cultures and the conquistadors of its past, a violent sense of divisiveness resulting from numerous civil wars, and an embarrassed sense of backwardness in technology and cultural growth. Colombia and the other Latin American nations fit this description of national solitude. However, the art that García Márquez has created in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* at the same time asserts a pride in solitude, which is a pride in a complex and deeply ingrained set of Latin American identities. These identities are represented by characters like Ursula, Remedios the Beauty, and Rebeca, among the more than fifty others in the novel. Many of them are more than characters, for they also serve to represent the uniquely complex Latin American worldview. García Márquez has created Macondo and its population not merely as abstract representations of Latin American reality, but also has succeeded in creating the mirror image of mere metaphor. In this novel, García Márquez creates characters, events, and places that are fictional, physical entities as representations of metaphorical notions. It is as though he began with the metaphors of abstract ideas--blindness that can see, a saint of beauty, a life of living death--and used these notions as blueprints to design a town, its people, and its history. Just as the patriarch José Arcadio created science in response to the puzzling and wondrous gifts of Melquíades, Latin America itself has had to create itself, turning metaphors into reality.

Source: Carole Hamilton, Overview of "One Hundred Years of Solitude," *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Vol. 2, The Gale Group, 2000.

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"One Hundred Years of Solitude" and New World Storytelling

Critic: Wayne Fields

Source: *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 27, January–June, 1986, pp. 73–88. Reprinted in *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Vol. 2.

Criticism about: Gabriel (Jose) Garcia Marquez (1928–), **also known as:** Gabriel (Jose) Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Jose Garcia-Marquez

Genre(s): Short stories; Novels; Journalism; Historical fiction; Experimental fiction; Film scripts; Family sagas

1.

Mircea Eliade begins *Cosmos and Chaos*, his study of archaic ontology, with a discussion of archetypes and repetition. Premodern societies, he claims, validate their own world and experience by seeing them as repeating elements consecrated by "gods, ancestors, or heroes" in some ancient past.

This is why, when possession is taken of a territory--that is, when its exploitation begins--rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.

The world that surrounds us, then, the world in which the presence and the work of man are felt--the mountains that he climbs, populated and cultivated regions, navigable rivers, cities, sanctuaries--all these have an extraterrestrial archetype, be it conceived as a plan, as a form, or purely and simply as a "double" existing on a higher cosmic level. But everything in the world that surrounds us does not have a prototype of this kind. For example desert regions inhabited by monsters, uncultivated lands, unknown seas on which no navigator has dared to venture, do not share with the city of Babylon, or the Egyptian nome, the privilege of a differentiated prototype. They correspond to a mythical model, but of another nature: all these wild, uncultivated regions and the like are assimilated to chaos; they still participate in the undifferentiated, formless modality of pre-Creation. This is why, when possession is taken of a territory--that is, when its exploitation begins--rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.

In other words, a place must first be made a *place* before it can be occupied, and that act of location is itself a calling out of chaos like the biblical creation. But for Americans, even late Twentieth century Americans, such views of the world and such founding rituals lie nearer at hand than ancient cultures. In a culture replete with "cosmicizing" efforts--rituals of opening shopping centers, dedicating public buildings, and ground breaking for future housing developments--we know "the innumerable gestures of consecration," and can affirm Eliade's conviction that, at the center of it all, lies the need for a center.

The act of centering has endless analogies in human experience, contemporary as well as ancient, but its fundamental value whether supplied by household gods or Mecca or political ideology is that it allows us to be someplace in a world of flux. It is that around which the cosmos radiates, assumes shape; it is the artifice which makes things meaningful. Even though in Eliade's schema each act of "consecration" declares, in one sense, another center, it more profoundly aligns this site with the *one* center that transcends space as ritual transcends time, affirming that all sacred space is central just as all sacred time is eternal.

Thus the reality and the enduringness of a construction are assured not only by the transformation of profane space into transcendent space (the center) but also by the transformation of concrete time into mythical time. Any ritual whatever...unfolds not only in a consecrated space (i.e., one different in essence from profane space) but also in "sacred time," "once upon a time" (*in illo tempore, ab origine*), that is,

when the ritual was performed for the first time by a god, an ancestor, or a hero.

This assumes validation from outside: human actions receive their meaning (and sacred in Eliade's construct implies meaningful while profane designates meaningless, like their companion terms cosmos and chaos) from the gods, and earthly locations become located by aligning them with transcendent geography. The consecrating priest declares the investment of meaning based on imitation and repetition. Authority lies behind that repetition in the god or hero who was its primary author.

2.

Few challenges are so great as that of being some place, being centered, in a new world. The inventiveness with which our European ancestors addressed this dilemma is at once the most impressive and the most outrageous aspect of the entire impressive and outrageous American experience. Having fallen off the edge of their maps, old explorers rarely admitted to being lost but instead found themselves in the most remarkable of non-places, or rather--to be more precise--on the road to these non-places. Defying both geography and cosmology they proudly declared themselves only so many days march from the Amazon women, or the cities of gold, or the fountain of youth, or the Northwest Passage, or the earthly paradise. As a general rule they died or returned home convinced that they had, in fact, approached that magical place which could locate them and their ambitions in a significant context. Thus were established two enduring patterns in new world behavior: the first, having gotten hopelessly lost--whether geographically or politically--to declare oneself only so many days from the place of the heart's desire; and the second locate oneself through narrative rather than surveying equipment. The old myths took on new possibilities here: the old epics, Israel's as well as Rome's, could be reenacted once more. The first instinct then was to declare this a new world and then center it in terms of the old. But the struggle to be somewhere in America, to find a center, has been and continues to be an issue of great import. Yet for a variety of complicated reasons, dislocation persists as a new world problem. Economic and political ideologues, religionists and believers in any number of truths, compete with the most enduring of the old myths, offering a variety of expressions of the sacred by which we may locate ourselves and our countries. There is no shortage of people willing to tell us not only *where* we are but *who* we are.

Early in the Nineteenth century, literary nationalists in the United States cried out for an American epic that would legitimize this small collection of people scattered along the Eastern seaboard of North America by portraying a heroic future for them. The United States was less than impressive in the years after revolution and independence, and the literary nationalists demanded a story which told where they were going, and that established their significance in terms of what lay ahead. But typically they insisted this be at once a uniquely American literary creation, and one that satisfied all the tastes and expectations of smug Europe: an *Aeneid*, preferably, with a Columbus, or perhaps even a Washington or a Jefferson as its hero (though Columbus was the early favorite). This new world Aeneas, or so the most enlightened of them thought, was to be directed by personal vision rather than manipulated blindly by gods and could thus reveal the history that lay ahead, could project the America which now awaited in time rather than geography. Ironically they longed for an epic with the future not the past as its subject matter. The appeal of the literary nationalists, while sometimes answered by poets, gained its most dramatic response from politicians all too eager to serve as national visionaries and to claim the destined American as the authority for their careers and as the answer to these persistent new world questions, where are we and who are we, the center being their political doctrine, their party or even their person. Too, there were increasingly the champions of the Self, the individual who as "the American, this new man," himself a liberated and liberating god, could act as his own center, ordering all that he surveyed. Daniel Boone, Cooper's Leatherstocking, and the transcendentalists "I" are all versions of this response.

But even as visionary politicians orated and Emerson lectured, another literature persisted in the United States, a literature rooted in the ironic distance separating the grandiose claims of American boosters and hucksters--starting with Columbus--and the everyday realities of life in this place. In this literature there was a good deal less certainty that a "center" was so close at hand, and, not surprisingly it was most prominent along the frontier where the discrepancy between a romantic view of America collided most violently with brutal facts of life at the edge of dislocation. When stories from this tradition began to appear in print, they were in many respects parodies of the more famous new world accounts which preceded them, and by the 1840s and the 1850s, they often presented full blown repudiations of orthodox renderings--political, philosophical, and literary--of the American experience. Two elements, apparently contradictory, thus provide essential ingredients for these stories: a sense of the outrageous and an

overriding emphasis on physical reality.

In its most extreme form this literature has often been labeled the tall tale, a designation encouraged by the matter of fact use of exaggeration. This "tallness" is directly related to the grandiose claims that have been made on America's behalf since the first voyages of discovery and serves two quite different ends. On the one hand, it mocks those boastful voices, the voices of new world enthusiasts, whether grandiloquent politicians, exuberant land developers, or romantic philosophers, and, on the other celebrates the capacity of a real frontier people to live with a minimum of illusion. The America of these stories is neither the new Eden nor the new Rome. It is a world stripped down to essentials, a world where the real with all its rough edges is not concealed, a world in which, apart from the conventions of polite society, people are tested by a radical disorder. In so much as these people prevail, it is not because they become nature's nobility, nor because they are so brutish as not to be troubled by the kind of world they live in or because they find some source of amusement, order, even redemption in this context.

The literary antecedents so influential on the work of Twain and Faulkner are the writings of a group of frontier circuit lawyers and newspaper editors usually identified as Southwestern humorists. The settings for their stories were backwoods Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, and their central characters were the confidence men and storytellers who plied their trade in the new settlements of those regions. In this landscape, the first wave of civilization fronts directly on the disorder of a wilderness--cosmos fronts against chaos--a wilderness that is both physical and psychological, and the literature of the Southwestern humorists gains its subject matter from that confrontation. The confidence man Simon Suggs--whose motto is "it's good to be sneaky in a new country"--and the trickster/storyteller Sut Lovingood (who, along with Suggs, provides the genealogy of Faulkner's Snopes tribe) lack all the illusions of genteel society and are themselves, at least in their social relationship, agents of disorder. They overcome the first tentative representatives of authority--judges, politicians, land developers, and ministers--manipulating the pretension of the lofty and undoing the very order those dignitaries were meant to affirm. As Kenneth Lynn has remarked in *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston, 1959): "...when we view men and events through the glittering eye of the confidence man, we are 'in his world,' where no moral reference point exists; seen through the glass of the Suggsian consciousness, humanity has not the slightest dignity, while such terms as harmony, unity, stability...are exposed as empty mockeries."

This is literature from the edge of the world, where no center has yet been discerned or imposed--American in the most radical application of that term. A promiscuous literature made up of persons, actions, even language that would be discarded or repressed in proper society, it flaunts rather than conceals the low whether in bodily functions or in social types. It strives to get to the bottom line, to burrow under everything, the politicians' smug words, the minister's abstract morality, and the women's skirts. Or to make quicker work of it all, the trickster of Southwestern humor doesn't burrow under but blows up and then watches as the world flies out from beneath its pretensions and reveals its truest nature.

The only principle of order that does not break down in the trickster's explosive presence is that of story itself, and it is significant that he is often (as in Lovingood's case) teller as well as trickster, holding in himself the violent tension that lies at the heart of new world experience. He is the fool killer as the American in one guise always claims to be destroying all that is grandiose and self-righteous in America itself. But at the same time he also suggests (but only suggests) the very fragile power of story to provide, in place of the false "truths" he exposes, some other basis for coherence, some other basis for community.

It is this possibility that Mark Twain expands in his best stories. In "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," for example, Twain combines the effort of the fool killer with a celebration of the storyteller's art, but in contrast with the creators of Lovingood and Suggs, with greater emphasis on the latter. The subjects of these tales are inevitably people who live without either grand illusions or despair. Typical is Miss Wagner, the old woman who we are told is missing an eye but who borrows her neighbor's glass substitute whenever she entertains. The glass eye is too small and so has to be packed in cotton when used for formal wear by Miss Wagner. And being blind on that side, she tends to get the eye in wrong side outward as often as not, presenting the green backside to the world. But even when she gets it in properly, because it is yellow, it never matches her own blue eye. As the storyteller continues describing Miss Wayne matter of factly--as though there were nothing unusual in any of this--he in turn informs us that she is also missing a leg and is forced to borrow the artificial limb of a much shorter neighbor, and is bald, relying on yet another neighbor

for the loan of a wig. If there are elements here of the grotesque that mark Southwestern humor's elaborate descriptions of physical infirmity, there is none of its mocking of the victims, none of the humiliation that serves as its primary goal. Rather, there is about Miss Wagner--and the many similar folk that move through Twain's best stories--an attractiveness, a nobility that is more impressive than the outrageous afflictions they have suffered. If under the clothing of the self-righteous minister or the pompous politician or the inflated banker there is a repulsive body, emblematic of a repulsive character, behind the false eye and beneath the borrowed wig, the mutilated Miss Wagner admirably endures, borrowing all those spare parts that she might continue to live as fully as possible. The outrageous fortune that has maimed her is absurd, but not Miss Wagner; it is fortune, or life itself, and not the old woman that is the butt of Twain's comedy.

In the other anecdotes that make up "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," only the undertaker, death's surrogate, is personally humiliated. The others--the man who rises up at his own funeral to complain about the coffin, Uncle Lem, on whom the Irish laborer falls, and the widow of the man nipped up by a carpet-making machine--these, like Miss Wagner, do the best they can in an outrageous world. The violence in their stories does not come from a fool killer, though it may in fact have killed many forms of foolishness, but from life, and the best of them respond by muddling through as well as they can rather than by surrendering. The widow, who buys the fourteen yards of three ply carpeting containing the mortal remains of her late husband, does so in an effort to prevent the indignity from going any farther, keeps the carpet from being cut and presents it for the funeral unfolded, unspindled and without further mutilation. If her effort to do the best she can by her husband only increases the absurdity, *she* nonetheless reclaims what she can from an absurd world.

The only heroic activity available to Twain's characters is to make do under the outrageous circumstances in which they find themselves. Inevitably, then, the only work of promise is that of making--and ultimately the making of stories--not for ethereal stuff, but from the awful and apparently insignificant matter that makes up real human life. Storytelling in this context takes on new significance and becomes a means of living without an absolute center, of living without the "sacred." Strange as it may seem for a teller of tall tales to speak indignantly against literary liars, when Twain levels his attacks, as he regularly does, against the Sir Walter Scotts and James Fenimore Coopers, he does so because he is convinced they have misrepresented the basic terms on which people must live, that they offer illusions of a world that intrinsically makes sense, when, for Twain, all sense is the hard won and transitory victory of craft, in particular, that of the storyteller. The teller he respects is the one who redeems something from life, much as Miss Wagner does, without misrepresenting it. The exaggerations of the tall tale, according to Twain, only confirms the basic absurdity of human experience whereas narratives in which righteousness is predictably victorious and wickedness predictably punished are offences against "real" life in the world. Jim Blaine, like Twain's other storytellers, manages to create memorable stories from characters who conventionally would be dismissed as insignificant, laughter out of what invites despair, and more remarkably, beauty from a language rejected by educated and polite society as vulgar and offensive. Denied the sacred he adopts the human and declares it sufficient to his own needs. This is the challenge to one line of new world act: denied the earthly paradise, the shining cities, to make something of what has in fact been found, all the corrupt, innocent, ugly, beautiful chaos of an uncentered new world.

3.

When, midway in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Aureliano Segundo searches for Fernanda, "it was," we are told, "an act of impossible fate, because in the confusion of her indignation, in the fury of her shame, she lied to him so that he would never know her real identity." Still he searches unceasingly, with the same unswerving zeal with which all generations of Buendias pursue their hearts' desires, their own "centers."

When he asked for the most beautiful woman who had even been seen on earth, all the women brought him their daughters. He became lost in misty byways, in times reserved for oblivion, in labyrinths of disappointment. He crossed a yellow plain where the echo repeated one's thought and where anxiety brought in premonitory mirages. After sterile weeks he came to an unknown city where all the bells were tolling a dirge. Although he had never seen them and no one had ever described them to him he immediately recognized the walls eaten away by bone salt, the broken down wooden balconies gutted by fungus, and nailed to the outside door, almost erased by rain, the saddest cardboard sign in the world: "Funeral Wreaths for Sale."

There he finds the object of his search, of his desire, and says the narrator, "For Aureliano Segundo it was almost simultaneously the beginning and the end of happiness."

It is striking how similar the journals of New World explorers are, and how completely the many quests and searches of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* evoke those older accounts that begin in exultant hope, proceed with almost inconceivable tenacity, and end in mourning. Pursuing the center which will at last prove definitive and absolute, which will finally free them, the explorers either stop short, still so many days march away, or, finding the center, as Aureliano Segundo does, discover it will not hold. These "labyrinths of disappointment" lie at the heart of new world experiences--not because disappointment is unique to this landscape, but because the American has carried all the old hope for a place beyond disappointment. Nor is it because there has been only disappointment here, but because when the old aspiration (one not altogether yielded even by the best of us) was for the earthly paradise, all else seems diminished by comparison. Columbus promised the Garden of Eden; it is hard to settle for Disneyland.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is at last the only appropriate response to that old plea for an American epic. It seems to be, even as the literary nationalists had hoped, a new world version of the *Aeneid*. It begins in an effort, familiar in our America, to undo history, to escape ghosts of past failure, to leave behind death, and to begin afresh, not merely in a new house or a new job but in a new age and as a new civilization--inevitably as a new world. So the party led by the original Jose Arcadio Buendia enters a terrain still in the throes of creation, a great swampy universe covered by "an eternal vegetable scum," a primordial world awaiting shape, the "uncosmocized" realm of Eliade's chaos. In this expedition Buendia's party passes through "enchanted" regions, "a universe of grief," a world of "eternal sadness" even as they seem both to escape from and to be captured by history. "The men on the expedition," the narrator tells us, "felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders." So many voices of other travelers echo through this passage, as throughout the whole novel, voices of the ancient voyagers as well as of the new world explorers who enter enchanted regions and found in them a paradise of despair. The lush promise of Columbus' Eden, the wonders of Montezuma's kingdom are present here but brilliantly combined with the threat of ultimate dislocation which haunts early accounts of America: Coronado contemplating the prairie, an environment in which men on horseback are quickly lost to one another except for shouts and the clatter of metal; or, even more appropriately, Cabeza de Vaca lamenting a Florida in which it is possible to be someplace only in death. The passage, too, recalls those individuals and families in Fenimore Cooper's stories, who seek a neutral territory, free from old constraints, and, even more poignantly, the long line of frontier mystics, like the mythologized Boone, who knew they were in Kentucky (or some other fabled place) only because they were no longer any place else. Note as well how similar the landscape here is to the place in which the hero of Faulkner's *The Bear* sees Old Ben for the first time. This is *terra incognita*. Having eluded at last the old (even original sin), the Buendia party finds itself in the oldest, the primal, as it cuts its way through flora and fauna of an unfallen world. And, of course, it is here that the Spanish galleon, freighted with flowers, appears: the ultimate icon of the new world. "When they woke up," and it is as though they have been born anew to enter the world Adam-like,

... with the sun high in the sky, they were speechless with fascination. Before them, surrounded by ferns and palm trees, white and powdery in the silent morning light, was an enormous Spanish galleon. Tilted slightly to the starboard, it had hanging from its intact masts the dirty rags of its sails in the midst of its rigging, which was adorned with orchids. The hull, covered with an armor of petrified barnacles and soft moss, was firmly fastened into a surface of stones. The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time and the habits of birds. Inside, where the expeditionaries explored with careful intent, there was nothing but a thick forest of flowers.

Beautiful and useless--it is four days removed from the sea--the galleon is set apart in "its own space" and removed from "the vices of time," is no more a part of America's world than of Europe's. It is vision brilliant and fragile, but one which cannot "center" us, for it only reminds us of how centerless everything in fact is. That it, itself, will be corrupted by discovery is verified when many years later, lying beside a "regular mail route," the ship is only a burned out frame in a field of poppies.

But these passages quoted from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* bear little stylistic resemblance to the writings either of Mark Twain or the Southwestern humorists. Rather the descriptions of the galleon and of the regions surrounding

Macondo are reminiscent of a much older form of storytelling, the fairy tale--a genre whose influence on García Márquez is abundantly clear in "**A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings**" and "**The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World.**" Like the Lovingood stories and "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," this is a tradition rooted in an oral folk culture, but unlike the latter it is primarily a literature of enchantment, indulging the regular cadences, the polished phrases, the hypnotizing tone which Twain and his predecessors regarded as dangerous, the romancer's seductive devices, too far removed from real talk and real life to be trusted. The angular dialect of a narrator like Jim Blaine, by conventional standards, is anti-literary, but the discursive, disjointed, and rough metered Southwestern humor consciously repudiates fairy stories--championing a new world, disenchanted in tongue as well as vision.

The great strength of Twain's stories comes from their preoccupation with particularity. Suspicious of all abstractions, their author focuses on the specific, the idiosyncratic both of character and dialect. Thus his finest creations, Huck Finn most of all, seem fully realized and unique. But at its extreme this preoccupation with the particular threatens any effort at coherence, wholeness, just as the trickster threatens all social and moral order. It regards anything large or epic with suspicion and whittles it down to less intimidating size. The most significant of Southwestern humor is, therefore, its ability to overturn presumption, to free us from the grandiose schemes to which Americans have always been dangerously susceptible. As a consequence, apart from his celebrations of the Mississippi River, Twain found it impossible to speak of any grandeur. That which was conventionally thought noble, he debunked--old world masters, the ruins of Rome, Shakespeare's plays, United States' foreign policy. Other Western travelers praised the grizzly bear and giant sequoias. Twain spoke for the jackass rabbit and sagebrush. Others praised Sir Walter Scott. Twain upheld the illiterate storytellers of Nevada mining camps.

But jackass rabbits and sagebrush are not golden salamanders and bleeding lilies. Nor is there anything else allowed in Twain's work which suggests the America of enticement, the America that has led so many so far. In part because that enticement--in some of its most corrupt and corrupting forms--had enormous power over his own life, Twain turned away from all grandeur, adhering to the principle proclaimed in *Roughing It* that nothing that glitters is gold, and fixed his eyes on the common as much for safety as for principle. In this way he refused to pander to the literary nationalists' call for an American epic that would declare us a new race creating a new history, but he also made it impossible to fully explore the new world experience by turning away from the visions and dreams which, though they may have lacked validity, have lacked neither power nor consequences.

The Columbiad that the first generation of United States intellectuals so desperately desired comes, ironically, from Columbia, but as the Buendiad, an epic that recreates the history of the new world in Macondo, a history that is a fiction, or rather an elaborate anthology of fictions, of endless recurrence in which the deepest and most impossible desires become obsessions of such all-consuming strength that everything else--including "reality"--becomes unreal. The world of the Buendiad is radically new, requiring the rediscovery of the earth's roundness, and the reinvention of time, and that one great Edenic task that Americans reenact with an apparently inexhaustible delight--naming things. This is a world owing as much to the alchemist's shop as to expeditions of discovery, and which, without the golden salamanders, the bleeding lilies, the clouds of butterflies, the dazzling birds, could never convincingly suggest all the yearnings that have called America into being. In this regard the Southwestern humorists and Twain can only make us seem petty and foolish in our corruption, but *One Hundred Years of Solitude* realizes the terrible depth of our longings and generates a profound and terrifying vision of our aspirations and of the folly to which they will lead.

With the Buendias we enter first a world of enchantment, for that is the true beginning of America, and it is precisely because this world is fully realized that we move painfully and wonderfully into the world of disenchantment (though these are not, finally, discrete or sequential movements).

The young man who watches Remedios the Beauty as she bathes illustrates the danger of enchantment, a danger that has not changed since the time when people lived in fairy tales. Having crawled out on the thinnest edge of his obsession, the young man falls, breaking his head on the reality of the bathroom floor. In a book which provides an endless succession of centers, a virtual catalogue of human aspirations, Remedios the Beauty's would-be lover is only one of the many who are entranced and undone, like the sailors ruined by those "soft-skinned cetaceans" with the heads and torsos of women. Many of these obsessions, dreams, visions, illusions--call them what you will--are familiar to students of the new world: a new city, gold, a technological breakthrough, reform, beauty, power--the promised rewards of conquistadores, political savants, land developers, romantic philosophers, even academic grant

seekers, all the visionaries who move through our past and our present, representing the truth that will set us free, the vision that will make all things clear. Only in the history of the new world offered in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, like that portrayed by Twain and his predecessors in the United States, all these betray us, the grandest of them, as well as the meanest. No progress is apparent. When Jose Arcadio, equipped with his new science, goes out to look for gold, he unearths the rusted armor of a Fifteenth-century gold seeker, and it rings most hollow when struck. At last the man who chases many dreams is tied to a tree, a grotesque parody of the centering act.

Every element of Southwestern humor's disenchantment is contained in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is made--incredibly--more outrageous, more inflated. In Macondo the flatulence is "flower withering," the vomit "leech filled," the fornication pursued with an energy beyond the wildest aspirations of a Lovingood. The insects and lizards that force the pompous out of their clothing in Sut's tricks here come in swarms undermining foundations and invading, not clothing alone, but flesh itself, and beyond that, the soul. Even the explosions of the earlier literature, the greatest accomplishment of the Southwestern fool-filler, cannot compare with Aureliano Segundo's slaughter yard--"an eternal execution ground of bones and innards, a mud pit of leftovers" where "they had to keep exploding dynamite bombs all the time so that the buzzards could not pluck out the guest's eyes." And of course Aureliano Segundo's efforts cannot compare with the obscene violence of economics and politics: the twice murdered 3000. When the machine guns open fire it seemed at first, we are told, "a farce."

It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen but not the slightest reactions was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. Suddenly, on one side of the station, a cry of death tore open the enchantment...

But in fact the enchantment is never broken and that is the genius of the book; just as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is simultaneously nearly every new world story, it is simultaneously enchanting and disenchanting. The cry of death, "Aaaagh, Mother," may for a moment cut through rhythms of enchantment just as the anti-poetic voice of a Lovingood or a Twain narrator does with its discordant sounds, the locating power of a particular voice, but the narration of the novel remains unchanged and the cry is swallowed up by the powerful, impersonal incantation of the enchanter/narrator. "A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential for expansion. Jose Arcadio Segundo barely had time to pick up the child while the mother with the other one was swallowed up by the crowd that swirled about in panic." So it is with Aureliano Babilonia who, reading what we are reading, is overwhelmed by the cries of disenchantment which run through the text but is, nonetheless, hopelessly enchanted by the gypsy's book.

We get in the letters of Columbus both the garden and the chains, but they come at different moments and in different contexts. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* they are contained in the same moment, every moment, the paradise always a "paradise of disaster." All the promises of the first New World explorers--the first of America's tall tale artists--are kept here, even the most incredible. This is Columbus' garden but its most Adam and Eve-like occupants are the incestuous aunt and nephew who appear at the end rather than the beginning and who recognize in themselves the cannibals Columbus in un-Edenic moments feared might inhabit these regions. Here too is Montezuma's wonderful palace, sometimes hinted at in the labyrinth of rooms in which the Buendias live, whose most remarkable feature, the chambers filled with birds and animals, are perpetuated in Macondo's zoological brothel.

Near the end, when what was future when the Spanish galleon first appeared has become the past, the burden becomes unbearable. For the last Aureliano what lies behind us in the book is a "past whose annihilation, consuming itself from within, ending at every moment but never ending its ending." All is at last being undone. The town deserted by the Catalan who dismisses his once-loved books as "all that shit" and abandons them, then by the others who gathered in the bookstore across from the house where dreams were interpreted when the town still held dreamers. Even as Macondo is depopulated, reports come from Alvaro of other Americas where people go on as though nothing were happening, like the girl in the red sweater sitting beside a lake in Michigan, waving "out of hope, because she did not know that she was watching a train with no return passing by"--not Alvaro's train alone but her own as well.

At last there is only the final Aureliano reading the Gypsy's book, the book which we are reading and in which he is a character, reading toward his own annihilation which only we can prevent by not reading on to the end. But we read

on--on through the final disillusionment, to the final line and ultimate dislocation.

Nothing is left. Not the Catalan's library, not the Buendia house, not friends, not ideologies or theologies or theories of history, all those familiar touchstones that can locate us somewhere and declare us someone. We are told "it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (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."




If *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is, as I have suggested, an epic of the new world, then it is an apocalyptic one, Macondo--America--destroyed by the absence of a center just as the cyclone, which has as its heart a vacuum, pulls everything apart. But this is, as we are reminded at every turn, a story and--like the other new world epic *Moby Dick* (which it resembles down to its cyclonic close)--more than that, a story built on innumerable other stories. Here the violence surpasses anything the Southwestern tricksters ever invented, and yet the story holds together, coheres as everything else unravels. Its echoes of fairy tales, the most obviously storied of all our fictions, its elaborate patterns that dance in intricate spirals from beginning to end, insist on an order even in apocalypse. Akin to Twain's stories, the demand in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is that we live without illusion. And, with Twain's stories, there is amusement and delight even as we approach the last terrible word. But here, where the news is worse than anything poor Miss Wagner ever confronted the crafting must be exquisite. Nothing here is real, nothing unreal. All is story.

How do we live in a world that is uncentered, that has no truth by which things may be ordered? We tell stories, just as new world people at their wisest and most desperate have done from the beginning. It would be, and has often been, a terrible mistake to believe our stories, to make them truths, but it would be equally mistaken to give them up. In contrast to myth as Eliade describes it, story comes in the absence of the sacred authenticating presence. When the gods have fallen silent and men no longer have a single other worldly truth to validate and locate them, then the storytelling begins, finding its authority in the human rather than the divine. In this act the teller becomes a center--not *the* center for if such a thing existed we would need only priests and not stories--his story radiating out from him, anchored in this world only by his human presence. In the same way his audience clusters around him, pulling those in the radius of his voice into a kind of temporary community, a temporary order. In contrast to myth, storytelling is a human activity that, as Walter Benjamin has suggested, gains its authority from the transient nature of human existence. The centering it offers may resemble that attributed by the ancients to their deities but the resemblance is only superficial since story finally celebrates human meanings rather than divine truths. Story is, as Twain understood, a way of making do in the absence of certainty; its center marks not the location of a divine action, but the artificial and arbitrary creation of a being always on the verge of dislocation, even extinction. It does not altogether assert cosmos, but nonetheless it is a calling out of chaos. It does not piously mark an already existing center, but creates one that did not previously exist, one that endures only so long as the story itself is being told.

The conclusion to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be read as the ultimate dislocation, the final outcome of living in a world that lacks a center. But the delight in shaping that informs every turn of the novel has not been a false pleasure. Nor has everything disappeared in the apocalypse, for the book remains, its ending no truer or more real than its beginning, though just as meaningful. The only reality is the teller's voice, the greatest affirmation the telling--the haunting voice of the gypsy alchemist who has at last found the gold in America. This is not the truth but an exquisite example of what honest tellers can make in a new world, a culmination of a long search carried on through an American literature and an American history.

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The uncertain old man whose
real existence was the simplest
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Biographical Sketch

Here is a biographical sketch and a simple timeline for Gabriel García Márquez. While the biography is fairly complete, the timeline focuses more on his early life and the publishing dates of his works. All quotes in the biography are the direct words of García Márquez.

Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel José García Márquez was born on March 6, 1928 in Aracataca, a town in Northern Colombia, where he was raised by his maternal grandparents in a house filled with countless aunts and the rumors of ghosts. But in order to get a better grasp on García Márquez's life, it helps to understand something first about both the history of Colombia and the unusual background of his family.

Colombia

Colombia won its independence from Spain in 1810, technically making it one of Latin America's oldest

democracies, but the sad fact is that this "democracy" has rarely known peace and justice.

In the beginning, there was of course Spain and the Indians, happily hating each other as the Spaniards tore the land up in quest for gold, El Dorado, religious converts, and political power. The English, too, played their part, with Drake attacking Riohachi in 1568 and the countless colonial squabbles of the next few centuries. Declaring itself independent from Spain when Napoleon ousted the Spanish King in 1810, the new country experienced a brief period of freedom and then was quickly reconquered in 1815 by the unpleasant and bloody campaigns of General Murillo. So much did their internal bickering allow their fledgling country to fall to the sword of Murillo, the period is immortalized in Colombia's history with the colorful name of *la Patria Boba*, or "The Booby Fatherland." Round two, however, fell to the Colombians, when Simón Bolívar reliberated the country in 1820 and became its very first president. In 1849, the country was sufficiently advanced to concretize their squabbling in the form of two political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, which exist to this day. These two parties form the political framework for much of García Márquez's fiction, and understanding their true natures is both a key to his writing and, unfortunately, an important insight to Latin American politics in general.

Although initially forming around the nucleus of two distinct and different ideologies, long years of bloody conflict have served to erode significantly the distinctions between the parties. The Conservatives and the Liberals are more like warring factions or clans than any parties with firmly established or radically opposing ideologies. Both tend to be repressive, both are corrupt, and both terribly abuse power when it falls into their hands; and throughout the sad history of Colombia, both parties have been more or less at war. It has often been said of Colombia's parties that you do not join them, you are born into them; and indeed they act more as territorial and familial units than as peacefully functioning parties with distinct political platforms. In addition, the country is split into two main regional groups -- the *costeños* of the coastal Caribbean, and the *cachacos* of the central highland. Both groups use those terms as pejorative of the other, and both occasionally view the other with disdain. The *costeños* tend to be more racially mixed, verbally outgoing, and superstitious. They are primarily the "descendants of

pirates and smugglers, with a mixture of black slaves," and as a whole are "dancers, adventurers, people full of gaiety." The *cachacos*, on the other hand, are more formal, aristocratic, and racially pure, who pride themselves on their advanced cities such as Bogotá and on their ability to speak excellent Spanish. Traditionally, the tropical Caribbean coast has been a Liberal bastion, and the cool mountains and valleys of the interior tend to the Conservative side. García Márquez has often remarked that he views himself as a *mestizo* and a *costeño*, both characteristics enabling his formation and development as a writer.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Colombia was wracked by rebellions, civil wars of both the local and national variety, and several *coups d'etat*. This century of bloodshed had its culmination in 1899, when the War of a Thousand Days began -- Colombia's most devastating civil war, a conflict that ended in late 1902 with the defeat of the Liberals. The war claimed the lives of over 100,000 people, primarily peasants and their sons. García Márquez's grandfather fought in that war, and many of its veterans would eventually find their way into immortalization as fictional characters in his work.

Another element that would influence his work was the Banana Strike Massacre of 1928. Although coffee is generally considered Colombia's main export, for the first few decades of the twentieth century, bananas were also of crucial importance to the economy. The banana trade had its principal manifestation in the United Fruit Company, an American outfit that had a virtual monopoly on the banana industry, which at the time was the only source of income for many of the *costeño* areas, including Aracataca. One of the more lamentable examples of Western Imperialism veiled as prosperity, the UFC had unlimited economic power and tremendous political clout, but it was a corrupt and amoral company that exploited its Colombian workers terribly. In October of 1928, over 32,000 native workers went on strike, demanding, among other such unreasonable things, hygienic working conditions, medical treatment, functioning toilets, and payment in cash rather than inflated company scrip. Indeed, the workers were denied their very existence as employees; although they labored seven days a week for little pay, they were defined as "subcontractors," and were therefore exempted from Colombian labor laws and safety regulations. The response of the Yankees was essentially to ignore their demands; shortly after the strike began, the

Colombian government occupied the banana zone and employed the military as strikebreakers. One night in December, a huge crowd gathered in Ciénaga (30 miles north of Aracataca) to hold a demonstration. In order to quell the incident, the Conservative government sent in the troops, who fired on the unarmed workers, killing hundreds. Over the next few months, more people simply vanished, and finally the whole incident was officially denied and struck from the history books. García Márquez would later incorporate the incident in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The next significant event that would eventually affect his writing was a period of time that he himself would live through, a horrible episode of Colombian history called *la violencia*, or "the Violence." The Violence had its roots in the banana massacre. At that time, one of the only politicians courageous enough to take a stand against government corruption was a man named Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a young Liberal member of congress who convened meetings to investigate the incident. Gaitán began to rise in prominence, a champion of the peasants and the poor, but an annoyance to the powerful members of both parties, who viewed him with something akin to fear and loathing. Using radio as his medium, he heralded a time of change, a time when the people would take part in a true democracy and corporations would be forced to act responsibly. By 1946, Gaitán was powerful enough to cause a split in his own party, which had been in power since 1930. The split caused a Conservative return to power and, fearing a reprisal, they began organizing paramilitary groups whose ultimate purpose was to terrorize Liberal voters; which they did admirably, killing thousands of them by the end of the year. In 1947 the Liberals gained control of the Congress, putting Gaitán in charge as party leader. (Despite the Conservative's efforts, the voter turnout was at a record high.) Tensions rose, and on April 9, 1948, Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá.

The city was convulsed by lethal riots for three days, a period called *el Bogotazo* and responsible for 2500 deaths. *La violencia* then shifted into an even more deadly phase. Guerrilla armies were organized by both parties, and terror swept through the land. Towns and villages were burned, thousands -- including women and children -- were brutally murdered, farms were confiscated, and over a million peasants emigrated to Venezuela. In 1949, Conservatives even gunned down a Liberal politician, in the middle of

giving a speech in the very halls of Congress! The Conservatives finally dissolved Congress, declared the country to be in a state of siege, and Liberals (now conveniently branded "communists") were hunted, persecuted, and murdered. The country was ripped apart; *la violencia* would claim the lives of some 150,000 Colombians by 1953. The Violence would later become the backdrop to several of García Márquez's novellas and stories, most notably *In Evil Hour*.

His Family

The most important relatives of García Márquez were undoubtedly his maternal grandfather and grandmother. His grandfather was Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía, a Liberal veteran of the War of a Thousand Days. He lived in Aracataca, a banana town by the Caribbean, a village which he helped found. The Colonel was something of a hero to the *costeños*, for among other things, he refused to stay silent about the banana massacres, delivering a searing denunciation of the murders to Congress in 1929. A very complex and interesting man, the Colonel was also an excellent storyteller who had lead quite an intriguing life -- when he was younger he shot and killed a man in a duel, and it is said that he had fathered over sixteen children. He would speak of his wartime exploits as if they were "almost pleasant experiences -- sort of youthful adventures with guns." The old Colonel taught the young Gabriel lessons from the dictionary, took him to the circus each year, and was the first one who introduced his grandson to ice -- a miracle to be found at the UFC company store. He also told his young grandson that there was no greater burden than to have killed a man, a lesson that García Márquez would later put into the mouths of his characters.

His grandmother was Tranquilina Iguarán Cotes, and would be no less an influence on the young García Márquez than her husband. She was impressively filled with superstitions and folk beliefs, as were her numerous sisters, and they filled the house with stories of ghosts and premonitions, omens and portents -- all of which were studiously ignored by her husband, who once said to young Gabriel, "Don't listen to that. Those are women's beliefs." And yet listen he did, for his grandmother had a unique way of telling stories. No matter how fantastic or improbable her statements, she always delivered them as if they were the

irrefutable truth. It was a deadpan style that, some thirty years later, her grandson would adopt for his greatest novel.

García Márquez's parents were more or less strangers to him for the first few years of his life, and the reason behind this is quite interesting. His mother, Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, was one of the two children born to the Colonel and his wife. A spirited girl, she unfortunately fell in love with a man named Gabriel Eligio García. "Unfortunately," for García was something of an anathema to her parents. For one thing, he was a Conservative as well as *la hojarasca*, a derogatory term applied to the recent residents of the town drawn by the banana trade. (*La hojarasca* means "dead leaf," as in something that descends in useless flurries and is best swept away.) García also had a reputation as a philanderer, the father of four illegitimate children. He was not exactly the man the Colonel had envisioned winning the heart of his daughter -- and yet he did, wooing her with violin serenades, love poems, countless letters -- and even telegraph messages. They tried all they could to get rid of the man, but he kept coming back, and it was obvious that their daughter was committed to him. Finally they surrendered to his Romantic tenacity, and the Colonel gave her hand in marriage to the former medical student. In order to ease relations, the newlyweds settled in the Colonel's old home town of Riohacha. (The tragicomic story of their courtship would later be adapted and recast as *Love in the Time of Cholera*.)

Early Life

Gabriel José García Márquez was born on March 6, 1928 in Aracataca, although his father contends that it was really 1927. Because his parents were still poor and struggling, his grandparents accepted the task of raising him, a common practice at the time. Unfortunately, 1928 was the last year of the banana boom in Aracataca. The strike and its brutal reprisal hit the town hard; over one hundred strikers were shot one night in Aracataca and dumped into a common grave. It was a sad start to his life, one that would later resurface in his writing.

Nicknamed Gabito, "little Gabriel" grew up as a quiet and shy lad, entranced by his grandfather's stories and his grandmother's superstitions. Aside from the Colonel and himself, it was a house of women, and García Márquez would later remark that their beliefs had him afraid to leave his

chair, half terrified of ghosts. And yet all the seeds of his future work were planted in that house -- stories of the civil war and the banana massacre, the courtship of his parents, the sturdy practicality of the superstitious matriarch, the comings and goings of aunts, great aunts, and his grandfather's illegitimate daughters.... Later García Márquez would write: "I feel that all my writing has been about the experiences of the time I spent with my grandparents."

His grandfather died when he was eight years old, and due to his grandmother's increasing blindness, he went to live with his parents in Sucre, where his father was working as a pharmacist. Soon after he arrived in Sucre, it was decided that he should begin his formal schooling. He was sent to a boarding school in Barranquilla, a port city at the mouth of the Magdalena River. There, he acquired a reputation as being a shy boy who wrote humorous poems and drew cartoons. So serious and non-athletic was he that he was nicknamed "the Old Man" by his classmates.

In 1940, when he was twelve, he was awarded a scholarship to a secondary school for gifted students, run by Jesuits. The school -- the Liceo Nacional -- was in Zipaquirá, a city 30 miles to the north of Bogotá. The journey would take a week, and in that time he came to the conclusion that he did not like Bogotá. Exposed to the capital city for the first time, he found it dismal and oppressive, and his experience helped confirm his identity as a *costeño*.

In school, he found himself growing quite stimulated by his studies, and in the evening, he often read books aloud to his companions in the dormitory. And much to his amusement, even though he had yet to write anything significant, his great love of literature and his cartoons and stories helped him acquire a reputation as a writer. Perhaps this reputation provided him with a star by which to steer the ship of his imagination; and he would need it, for after graduation in 1946, the eighteen year old "writer" followed his parents' wishes and enrolled in the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá as a law student rather than as a journalist.

It was during this time that García Márquez met his future wife. While visiting his parents, he was introduced to a 13 year old girl named Mercedes Barcha Pardo. Dark and silent, of Egyptian decent, she was "the most interesting person" he had ever met. After he graduated from the Liceo Nacional, he took a small vacation with his parents before leaving for the University. During that time, he proposed to her. Agreeing,

but first wishing to finish school, she put off the engagement. Although they wouldn't be married for another fourteen years, Mercedes promised to stay true to him.

The Hungry Years

Like many great writers attending college for a subject they despised, García Márquez found that he had absolutely no interest in his studies, and he became something of a consummate slacker. He began to skip classes and neglect both his studies and himself, electing to wander around Bogotá and ride the streetcars, reading poetry instead of law. He ate in cheap cafés, smoked cigarettes, and associated with all the usual suspects: literate socialists, starving artists, and budding journalists. One day, however, his life changed -- all from reading just a simple book. As if all the lines of fate suddenly converged in his hands, he was given a copy of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The book had a profound affect on García Márquez; making him aware that literature did not have to follow a straight narrative and unfold along a traditional plot. The effect was liberating: "I thought to myself that I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago." He also remarked that Kafka's "voice" had the same echoes as his grandmother's -- "that's how my grandmother used to tell stories, the wildest things with a completely natural tone of voice."

One of the first things he set out to do was "catch up" on all the literature he had been missing. He began reading voraciously, devouring everything he could get his hands on. He also began writing fiction, and to his surprise, his first story, "The Third Resignation," was published in 1946 by the Liberal Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador*. (The enthusiastic editor even hailed him as "the new genius of Colombian letters!") García Márquez entered a period of creativity, penning ten more stories for the newspaper over the next few years.

As a humanist from a Liberal family, the 1948 assassination of Gaitán had profound effect on García Márquez, and he even participated in the rioting of *el Bogotazo*, having his own quarters partially burned down. The Universidad Nacional was closed, precipitating his move to the more peaceful North, where he transferred to the Universidad de Cartagena. There he half-heartedly pursued

law while writing a daily column for *El Universal*, a Cartagenan newspaper. Deciding finally to abandon his attempts at law in 1950, he devoted himself to writing, moving to Barranquilla. Over the next few years, he began associating with a literary circle called *el grupo de Barranquilla*, and under their influence he began to read the work of Hemingway, Joyce, Woolf, and most importantly, Faulkner. He also embarked on a study of the classics, finding tremendous inspiration in the *Oedipus Rex* cycle by Sophocles.

Faulkner and Sophocles would become his two biggest influences throughout the late forties and early fifties. Faulkner amazed him with his ability to reformulate his childhood into a mythical past, inventing a town and a county in which to house his prose. In Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha, García Márquez found the seeds for Macondo; and from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* he found the ideas of a plot revolving around society and the abuses of power. García Márquez began to grow dissatisfied with his earlier stories, believing them to be too abstracted from his true experiences. They were "simply intellectual elaborations, nothing to do with my reality." Faulkner taught him that a writer should write about what is close to him; and for years García Márquez had been struggling with his muse - what did he really want to say?

These thoughts would find form when he returned with his mother to his grandfather's house in Aracataca. Preparing it for sale, they found the house in ill repair, and yet the "haunted house" evoked such a swirl of memories in his head that he was overwhelmed. Indeed, the whole town seemed dead, frozen in time. He had already been sketching out a story based on his experiences there, a tentative novel to be called *La casa*, and although he felt that he was not yet ready to perfect it, he had found part of what he was after -- the sense of place. Inspired by his visit, upon returning to Barranquilla he wrote his first novella, *Leaf Storm*. With a plot device adapted from *Antigone* and relocated to a mythical town, the book was completed in an energetic rush of inspiration. He bestowed the name of "Macondo" on his Latin American Yoknapatawpha, the name of a banana plantation near Aracataca that he used to explore as a child. (Macondo means "banana" in the Bantu language.) Unfortunately in 1952 it was rejected by the first publisher he sent it to, and seized by self-doubt and self-criticism, he tossed it in a

drawer. (In 1955, while García Márquez was in Eastern Europe, it was rescued from its hiding place in Bogotá by his friends and sent to a publisher. This time, it was published.)

Despite his rejection and his near poverty, however, he was essentially happy. Living in a brothel, he was surrounded by friends, and he had a steady job writing columns for *El Heraldo*. In the evening he worked on his fiction and talked with his companions over cigarettes and coffee. Then in 1953, he was seized by a sudden restlessness. Packing up and quitting his job, he set out to sell encyclopedias in La Guajira with a friend. He travelled around a bit, worked on some story ideas, and finally became formally engaged to Mercedes Barcha. In 1954, he moved back to Bogotá and accepted a job on the staff of *El Espectador* as a writer of stories and film reviews. There, he flirted with socialism, avoided the notice of the current dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, and pondered about his duty as a writer in the time of *la violencia*.

In 1955, an event occurred which would place him back on the path of literature and eventually lead to his temporary exile from Colombia. That year, the *Caldas*, a small Colombian destroyer, was swamped in high seas on its return to Cartagena. Several sailors were swept overboard, and all died except one remarkable man, Luis Alejandro Velasco, who managed to survive for ten days at sea by clinging to a life raft. When he was eventually washed ashore, he quickly became a national hero. Used as propaganda by the government, Velasco did everything from make speeches to advertise watches and shoes. Finally he decided to tell the truth -- the *Caldas* was carrying illegal cargo, and they were swept overboard because of their negligence and incompetence! Visiting the offices of *El Espectador*, Velasco offered them his story, and after some hesitation, they accepted. Velasco told his tale to García Márquez, who acted as a ghostwriter and recast it into prose. The story was serialized over two full weeks as "The Truth About My Adventure by Luis Alejandro Velasco," and it created quite a sensation. Extremely unhappy, the Government tossed Velasco out of the Navy. Worried that Pinilla might persecute García Márquez directly, his editors sent him on assignment to Italy to cover the imminent death of Pope Pius XII. When the pontiff's untimely survival made this assignment pointless, García Márquez arranged to wander around Europe as a correspondent. After studying film awhile in Rome, he embarked on a tour of the communist bloc; and later that year

his friends managed to get *Leaf Storm* finally published in Bogotá.

García Márquez travelled through Geneva, Rome, Poland and Hungary, finally settling in Paris where he found that he was out of a job -- the Pinilla government had shut down the presses of *El Espectador*. Settling in the Latin Quarter, he lived off credit, the kindness of his landlady, and money scraped up returning bottles for their deposits. There, influenced by the writings of Hemingway, he typed out eleven drafts of *No One Writes to the Colonel* and part of *Este pueblo de mierda* ("This Town of Shit"), the book that would later become *In Evil Hour*. After finishing *Colonel*, he travelled to London and finally returned to his home continent -- not to Colombia, but to Venezuela, the favored destination of Colombian refugees. There he finished *Este pueblo de mierda*, his work which most directly addresses *la violencia*. Even though it was obvious that he was developing his own unique style, he was still unsatisfied. His early stories were unemotional and abstract. *Leaf Storm* was too indebted to Faulkner, and *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *In Evil Hour* were too far away from his imagined goal, the image he had been developing for years. He knew his ultimate work would take place in the mythical town of Macondo, but he had yet to find the right tone in which to tell his tale; he had yet to discover his true voice.

In Venezuela he teamed up with an old friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, who was by then an editor with *Elite*, a Caracas newsweekly. Throughout the year of 1957, the pair toured the communist countries of Europe, searching for an answer to Colombia's ills, contributing articles to various Latin American publications. And while they saw something useful in socialism, García Márquez realized with a sense of depression that communism could be just as terrible as *la violencia*. After a brief stay in London again, García Márquez returned to Venezuela, where Mendoza was working for *Momento*, and offered his old friend another job. Then, in 1958, he risked a visit back to Colombia. Keeping a low profile, he slipped into his native country and married Mercedes Bacha, who had been awaiting him in Barranquilla for four long years. He and his new bride then slipped back to Caracas, which was having its own share of problems. After publishing pieces aimed at American perfidy and the abuses of tyrants, *Momento* succumbed to political pressure and took an apologist pro-USA stance after Nixon's disastrous visit in

May. Angered by their paper's capitulation, García Márquez and Mendoza resigned. Soon after leaving his position at *Momento*, García Márquez and his wife ended up in Havana, covering the Castro revolution. Inspired by the revolution, he helped form a Bogotá branch of Castro's news agency, *Prensa Latina*, and began a friendship with Castro that has lasted until this day.

In 1959 García Márquez's first son, Rodrigo, was born, and the family moved to New York City, where he supervised the North American branch of *Prensa Latina*. Laboring under death threats from angry Americans, García Márquez resigned his position after a year, becoming disillusioned by the ideological rifts occurring in Cuba's communist party. He moved his family to Mexico City, travelling through the South on a Faulknerian pilgrimage; he would be denied entrance into the USA again until 1971.

In Mexico City he wrote subtitles for films and worked on screenplays, and during this time he began to publish some of his fictional novellas. Rescued from moth-eaten oblivion by his friends, *No One Writes to the Colonel* was published in 1961, and then *Big Mama's Funeral* in 1962, the same year which saw the birth of his second son, Gonzalo. Finally his friends convinced him to enter the Colombian Esso literary contest in Bogotá; he revised *Este pueblo de mierda*, changing the title from "This Town of Shit" to *La mala hora*, or *In Evil Hour*. He submitted it, and it won. The sponsors of the prize sent the book to Madrid to be published, and it greeted the world in 1962 -- to his immense disappointment. The publication was a travesty; the Spanish publisher purged it of all Latin American slang and objectionable material, bowdlerizing it beyond recognition and making the characters speak precise, dictionary Spanish. Heartbroken, García Márquez was forced to repudiate it -- it would take nearly half a decade until the book would be published, restored to his satisfaction.

The next few years were a time of profound disappointment, producing nothing of much worth except a film script cowritten with Carlos Fuentes. His friends tried to cheer him up in whatever ways they could, but nevertheless, he began to feel like a failure. None of his works had sold over 700 copies. He had never received any royalties. And still, *and still*, the story of Macondo eluded his grasp.

Success

And then it happened: his epiphany. On January 1965 he and his family were driving to Acapulco for a vacation, when inspiration suddenly struck him: he had found his tone. For the first time in twenty years, a stroke of lightning clearly revealed the voice of Macondo. He would later write:

"All of a sudden -- I don't know why -- I had this illumination on how to write the book.... I had it so completely formed, that right there I could have dictated the first chapter word by word to a typist."

And later, regarding that illumination:

"The tone that I eventually used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was based on the way my grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness.... What was most important was the expression she had on her face. She did not change her expression at all when telling her stories and everyone was surprised. In previous attempts to write, I tried to tell the story without believing in it. I discovered that what I had to do was believe in them myself and write them with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face."

He turned the car immediately around and headed home. There, he put Mercedes in charge of the family, and he retired to his room to write.

And write he did. He wrote every day for eighteen months, consuming up to six packs of cigarettes a day. To provide for the family, the car was sold, and almost every household appliance was pawned so Mercedes could feed the family and keep him supplied with a constant river of paper and cigarettes. His friends started to call his smoke-filled room "the Cave of the Mafia," and after a while the whole community began helping out, as if they collectively understood that he was creating something remarkable. Credit was extended, appliances loaned, debts forgiven. After nearly a year of work, García Márquez sent the first three chapters to Carlos Fuentes, who publicly declared: "I have just read eighty pages from a master." Towards the end of the novel, as yet unnamed, anticipation grew, and the buzz of success was

in the air. As finishing touches, he placed himself, his wife, and his friends in the novel, and then discovered a name on the last page: *Cien años de soledad*. Finally he emerged from the Cave, grasping thirteen hundred pages in his hands, exhausted and almost poisoned from nicotine, over ten thousand dollars in debt, and perhaps only a few pages shy of a mental and physical breakdown. And yet, he was happy -- indeed, euphoric. In need of postage, he pawned a few more household implements and sent it off to the publisher in Buenos Aires.

One Hundred Years of Solitude was published in June 1967, and within a week all 8000 copies were gone. From that point on, success was assured, and the novel sold out a new printing each week, going on to sell half a million copies within three years. It was translated into over two dozen languages, and it won four international prizes. Success had come at last. Gabriel García Márquez was 39 years old when the world first learned his name.

Suddenly he was beset by fame. Fan mail, awards, interviews, appearances -- it was obvious that his life had changed. In 1969, the novel won the Chianciano Prize in Italy and was named the Best Foreign Book in France. In 1970, it was published in English and was chosen as one of the best twelve books of the year in the United States. Two years later he was awarded the Rómulo Gallegos Prize and the Neustadt Prize, and in 1971, a Peruvian writer named Mario Vargas Llosa even published a book about his life and work. To counter all this exposure, García Márquez simply returned to writing. Deciding that he would write about a dictator, he moved his family to Barcelona, Spain, which was spending its last years under the boot of Francisco Franco. There he labored on his next novel, creating a composite monster, a Caribbean dictator with Stalin's smooth hands and the solipsistic will of an archetypical Latin American tyrant. In the meantime, *Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories* was published in 1972, and in 1973 he put out a collection of his journalistic work from the late fifties, *Cuando era feliz e indocumentado*, or "When I Was Happy and Uninformed."

Autumn of the Patriarch was published in 1975, and it was a drastic departure from both the subject and tone of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A labyrinthine book with long, winding sentences, it was initially considered a disappointment by the critics, who were most likely expecting another Macondo. Opinion has changed over the years,

however, and many now consider this novel of shifting realities to be a minor masterpiece all on its own right.

Later Life

Living in a dictatorship and getting inside the mind of a tyrant took their emotional toll. By the end of the novel, García Márquez had decided that he would write no more fiction until the American-supported Pinochet stepped down from his control of Chile, a decision he would later rescind. Now a famous writer, he was becoming more aware of his own political power, and his increased clout and financial security enabled him to pursue his interests in political activism. Returning to Mexico City, he purchased a new house and stepped up his personal campaign to influence the world around him. Building on his actions of the last few years, he continued to funnel some of his money into political and social causes. Through his writings and donations, he supported leftist causes in Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Argentina, and Angola. He helped found and support HABEAS, an organization dedicated to correcting the abuses of Latin American power and freeing political prisoners, and he struck up friendships with such leaders as Omar Torrijos of Panama, and continued his relationship with Fidel Castro of Cuba. Needless to say, these activities did not endear him to the hearts of politicians in either the United States or Colombia; all his visits to the US were on a limited visa and had to be approved by the State Department. (This travel restriction was finally lifted by President Bill Clinton.) In 1977 he published *Operación Carlota*, a series of essays on Cuba's role in Africa. Ironically, although he claims to be quite good friends with Castro -- who even helped him edit *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* -- he spent the late seventies writing a "very harsh, very frank" book about the shortcomings of the Cuban Revolution and of life under Castro's regime. This book has not yet been published, and García Márquez claims that he is holding it until relations between Cuba and the United States are normalized.

In 1981, the year in which he was awarded the French Legion of Honor medal, he returned to Colombia from a visit with Castro, only to find himself once again in trouble. The Conservative Government was accusing him of financing the M-19, a Liberal group of guerrillas. Fleeing Colombia, he asked for and received political asylum in Mexico, where he

maintains a household to this day. Colombia would soon regret their anger at their famous son, however: in 1982 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Embarrassed, and having just elected a new President, Colombia invited him back, and President Betancur personally saw him off to Stockholm.

In 1982 he assisted a friend in publishing *El odor de la guayaba*, or "The Fragrance of Guava," a book of conversations with his long time colleague Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, and in the same year he wrote *Viva Sandino*, a screenplay about the Sandanistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution. Politics, however, would be far from his mind for his next work of fiction, which would be a love story. Turning again to his rich past for inspiration and material, he reworked his parent's strange courtship into the form of a decades-spanning narrative. The story would be about two frustrated lovers and the long time between their second courtship, and in 1986 *Love in the Time of Cholera* was unveiled to the anxiously waiting world. It was amazingly well received, even pulling Thomas Pynchon out of seclusion to write a review for the *New York Times*. There was no question that Gabriel García Márquez had become a writer with universal and lasting appeal.

By now one of the most famous writers in the world, he eased into a lifestyle of writing, teaching, and political activism. With residences in Mexico City, Cartagena, Cuernavaca, Paris, Barcelona, and Barranquilla, he finished the decade by publishing *The General in his Labyrinth* in 1990, and two years later *Strange Pilgrims* was born. In 1994 he published his most recent work of fiction, *Love and Other Demons*. This was followed in 1996 by *News of a Kidnapping*, a journalistic work detailing the atrocities of the Colombian drug trade. This return to journalism was emphasized in 1999, when he purchased a struggling Colombian news magazine, *Cambio*. With both a literary bent and a reputation for progressive politics, the newspaper was the perfect vehicle for García Márquez to return to his roots, and today the magazine is a thriving presence in Colombian letters.

El otoño del patriarca

Unfortunately, in 1999 García Márquez was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, and to this day he suffers under a

regimen of treatments, often taking him from Cartagena or Mexico City to clinics in Los Angeles, where his son, filmmaker Rodrigo García, lives.

Setting aside fiction for the time being, Gabo is concentrating on writing his memoirs, the first volume of which was published in 2001 as *Vivir para contarla*, or *To Live to Tell It*. Instantly selling out its first print run in Latin America, the volume quickly became the best selling book *ever* in the Spanish-speaking world. (It was recently published in the United States by Knopf, who will bring out an English translation sometime in late 2003.) The first of a promised set of three volumes, *Vivir para contarla* details Gabo's life up until 1955. He is currently at work on Volume II, which will focus on the writing and publication of his major works, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

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Additional Information

Timeline -- A brief timeline for García Márquez's life and works

--Allen B. Ruch
2 June 2003

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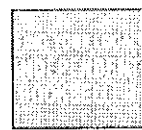
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One Hundred Years of Solitude

by Gabriel García Márquez

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About This Book

The mythic village of Macondo lies in northern Colombia, somewhere in the great swamps between the mountains and the coast. Founded by Jose Arcadio Buendia, his wife Ursula, and nineteen other families, "It was a truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died." At least initially. **One Hundred Years of Solitude** chronicles, through the course of a century, life in Macondo and the lives of six Buendia generations—from Jose Arcadio and Ursula, through their son, Colonel Aureliano Buendia (who commands numerous revolutions and fathers eighteen additional Aurelianos), through three additional Jose Arcadios, through Remedios the Beauty and Renata Remedios, to the final Aureliano, child of an incestuous union. As babies are born and the world's "great inventions" are introduced into Macondo, the village grows and becomes more and more subject to the workings of the outside world, to its politics and progress, and to history itself. And the Buendias and their fellow Macondons advance in years, experience, and wealth . . . until madness, corruption, and death enter their homes. From the gypsies who visit Macondo during its earliest years to the gringos who build the banana plantation, from the "enormous Spanish galleon" discovered far from the sea to the arrival of

the railroad, electricity, and the telephone, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's classic novel weaves a magical tapestry of the everyday and the fantastic, the humdrum and the miraculous, life and death, tragedy and comedy--a tapestry in which the noble, the ridiculous, the beautiful, and the tawdry all contribute to an astounding vision of human life and death, a full measure of humankind's inescapable potential and reality.

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Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of solitude occur in the novel (for example, solitude of pride, grief, power, love, or death), and with whom are they associated? What circumstances produce them? What similarities and differences are there among the various kinds of solitude?
2. What are the purposes and effects of the story's fantastic and magical elements? How does the fantastic operate in the characters' everyday lives and personalities? How is the magical interwoven with elements drawn from history, myth, and politics?
3. Why does Garcia Marquez make repeated use of the "Many years later" formula? In what ways does this establish a continuity among past, present, and future? What expectations does it provoke? How do linear time and cyclical time function in the novel?
4. To what extent is Macondo's founding, long isolation, and increasing links with the outside world an exodus from guilt and corruption to new life and innocence and, then, a reverse journey from innocence to decadence?
5. What varieties of love occur in the novel? Does any kind of love transcend or transform the ravages of everyday life, politics and warfare, history, and time itself?
6. What is the progression of visitors and newcomers to Macondo, beginning with the gypsies? How does each new individual and group affect the Buendias, the town, and the story?
7. What is the importance of the various inventions, gadgets, and technological wonders introduced into Macondo over the years? Is the sequence in which they are introduced significant?
8. What is Melquiades's role and that of his innovations, explorations, and parchments? What is the significance of the "fact" that Melquiades "really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude"? Who else returns, and why?
9. When and how do politics enter the life of Macondo? With what short-term and long-term consequences? Do the social-political aspects of life in

Macondo over the years parallel actual events and trends?

10. What types of women (from Ursula and Pilar to Meme and Amaranta Ursula) and what types of men (from Jose Arcadio to Aureliano Babilonia) are distinguishable? What characteristics do the men share? What characteristics do the women share?

11. What dreams, prophecies, and premonitions occur in the novel? With which specific characters and events are they associated, and what is their purpose?

12. When, how, and in what guises does death enter Macondo? With what consequences?

13. On the first page we are told that "The world was so recent that many things lacked names." What is the importance of names and of naming (of people, things, and events) in the novel?

14. How do geography and topography--mountains, swamps, river, sea, etc.--affect Macondo's history, its citizens' lives, and the novel's progression?

15. What aspects of the Buendia family dynamics are specific to Macondo? Which are reflective of family life everywhere and at any time? How do they relate to your experience and understanding of family life?

16. How does Garcia Marquez handle the issue and incidence of incest and its association with violence beginning with Jose Arcadio and Ursula's marriage and the shooting of Prudencio Aguilar? Is the sixth-generation incest of Aureliano Babilonia and Amaranta Ursula inevitable?

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Critical Praise


"**One Hundred Years of Solitude** is the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race. It takes up not long after Genesis left off and carries through to the air age, reporting on everything that happened in between with more lucidity, wit, wisdom, and poetry that is expected from 100 years of novelists, let alone one man...Mr. Garcia Marquez has done nothing less than to create in the reader a sense of all that is profound, meaningful, and meaningless in life. "

—**William Kennedy, *New York Times***

Book Review



" Fecund, savage, irresistible...in all their loves, madness, and wars, their alliances, compromises, dreams and deaths...The characters rear up large and rippling with life against the green pressure of nature itself.Wow! What a great book! It was really good! "


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"One Hundred Years of Solitude" and New World Storytelling

Critic: Wayne Fields

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Genre(s): Short stories; Novels; Journalism; Historical fiction; Experimental fiction; Film scripts; Family sagas

1.

Mircea Eliade begins *Cosmos and Chaos*, his study of archaic ontology, with a discussion of archetypes and repetition. Premodern societies, he claims, validate their own world and experience by seeing them as repeating elements consecrated by "gods, ancestors, or heroes" in some ancient past.

This is why, when possession is taken of a territory--that

is, when its exploitation begins--rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.

The world that surrounds us, then, the world in which the presence and the work of man are felt--the mountains that he climbs, populated and cultivated regions, navigable rivers, cities, sanctuaries--all these have an extraterrestrial archetype, be it conceived as a plan, as a form, or purely and simply as a "double" existing on a higher cosmic level. But everything in the world that surrounds us does not have a prototype of this kind. For example desert regions inhabited by monsters, uncultivated lands, unknown seas on which no navigator has dared to venture, do not share with the city of Babylon, or the Egyptian nome, the privilege of a differentiated prototype. They correspond to a mythical model, but of another nature: all these wild, uncultivated regions and the like are assimilated to chaos; they still participate in the undifferentiated, formless modality of pre-Creation. This is why, when possession is taken of a territory--that is, when its exploitation begins--rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.

In other words, a place must first be made a *place* before it can be occupied, and that act of location is itself a calling out of chaos like the biblical creation. But for Americans, even late Twentieth century Americans, such views of the world and such founding rituals lie nearer at hand than ancient cultures. In a culture replete with "cosmicizing" efforts--rituals of opening shopping centers, dedicating public buildings, and ground breaking for future housing developments--we know "the innumerable gestures of consecration," and can affirm Eliade's conviction that, at the center of it all, lies the need for a center.

The act of centering has endless analogies in human experience, contemporary as well as ancient, but its fundamental value whether supplied by household gods or Mecca or political ideology is that it allows us to be someplace in a world of flux. It is that around which the cosmos radiates, assumes shape; it is the artifice which makes things meaningful. Even though in Eliade's schema each act of "consecration" declares, in one sense, another center, it more profoundly aligns this site with the *one* center that transcends space

as ritual transcends time, affirming that all sacred space is central just as all sacred time is eternal.

Thus the reality and the enduringness of a construction are assured not only by the transformation of profane space into transcendent space (the center) but also by the transformation of concrete time into mythical time. Any ritual whatever...unfolds not only in a consecrated space (i.e., one different in essence from profane space) but also in "sacred time," "once upon a time" (*in illo tempore, ab origine*), that is, when the ritual was performed for the first time by a god, an ancestor, or a hero.

This assumes validation from outside: human actions receive their meaning (and sacred in Eliade's construct implies meaningful while profane designates meaningless, like their companion terms cosmos and chaos) from the gods, and earthly locations become located by aligning them with transcendent geography. The consecrating priest declares the investment of meaning based on imitation and repetition. Authority lies behind that repetition in the god or hero who was its primary author.

2.

Few challenges are so great as that of being some place, being centered, in a new world. The inventiveness with which our European ancestors addressed this dilemma is at once the most impressive and the most outrageous aspect of the entire impressive and outrageous American experience. Having fallen off the edge of their maps, old explorers rarely admitted to being lost but instead found themselves in the most remarkable of non-places, or rather--to be more precise--on the road to these non-places. Defying both geography and cosmology they proudly declared themselves only so many days march from the Amazon women, or the cities of gold, or the fountain of youth, or the Northwest Passage, or the earthly paradise. As a general rule they died or returned home convinced that they had, in fact, approached that magical place which could locate them and their ambitions in a significant context. Thus were established two enduring patterns in new world behavior: the first, having gotten hopelessly lost--whether geographically or politically--to declare oneself only so many days from the place of the heart's desire; and the second locate oneself through narrative rather than surveying equipment. The old myths took on new possibilities here: the old epics, Israel's as well as Rome's, could be reenacted once

more. The first instinct then was to declare this a new world and then center it in terms of the old. But the struggle to be somewhere in America, to find a center, has been and continues to be an issue of great import. Yet for a variety of complicated reasons, dislocation persists as a new world problem. Economic and political ideologies, religionists and believers in any number of truths, compete with the most enduring of the old myths, offering a variety of expressions of the sacred by which we may locate ourselves and our countries. There is no shortage of people willing to tell us not only *where* we are but *who* we are.

Early in the Nineteenth century, literary nationalists in the United States cried out for an American epic that would legitimize this small collection of people scattered along the Eastern seaboard of North America by portraying a heroic future for them. The United States was less than impressive in the years after revolution and independence, and the literary nationalists demanded a story which told where they were going, and that established their significance in terms of what lay ahead. But typically they insisted this be at once a uniquely American literary creation, and one that satisfied all the tastes and expectations of smug Europe: an *Aeneid*, preferably, with a Columbus, or perhaps even a Washington or a Jefferson as its hero (though Columbus was the early favorite). This new world Aeneas, or so the most enlightened of them thought, was to be directed by personal vision rather than manipulated blindly by gods and could thus reveal the history that lay ahead, could project the America which now awaited in time rather than geography. Ironically they longed for an epic with the future not the past as its subject matter. The appeal of the literary nationalists, while sometimes answered by poets, gained its most dramatic response from politicians all too eager to serve as national visionaries and to claim the destined American as the authority for their careers and as the answer to these persistent new world questions, where are we and who are we, the center being their political doctrine, their party or even their person. Too, there were increasingly the champions of the Self, the individual who as "the American, this new man," himself a liberated and liberating god, could act as his own center, ordering all that he surveyed. Daniel Boone, Cooper's Leatherstocking, and the transcendentalists "I" are all versions of this response.

But even as visionary politicians orated and Emerson lectured, another literature persisted in the United States, a literature rooted in the ironic distance separating the grandiose claims of American boosters and hucksters--starting with Columbus--and the everyday

realities of life in this place. In this literature there was a good deal less certainty that a "center" was so close at hand, and, not surprisingly it was most prominent along the frontier where the discrepancy between a romantic view of America collided most violently with brutal facts of life at the edge of dislocation. When stories from this tradition began to appear in print, they were in many respects parodies of the more famous new world accounts which preceded them, and by the 1840s and the 1850s, they often presented full blown repudiations of orthodox renderings--political, philosophical, and literary--of the American experience. Two elements, apparently contradictory, thus provide essential ingredients for these stories: a sense of the outrageous and an overriding emphasis on physical reality.

In its most extreme form this literature has often been labeled the tall tale, a designation encouraged by the matter of fact use of exaggeration. This "tallness" is directly related to the grandiose claims that have been made on America's behalf since the first voyages of discovery and serves two quite different ends. On the one hand, it mocks those boastful voices, the voices of new world enthusiasts, whether grandiloquent politicians, exuberant land developers, or romantic philosophers, and, on the other celebrates the capacity of a real frontier people to live with a minimum of illusion. The America of these stories is neither the new Eden nor the new Rome. It is a world stripped down to essentials, a world where the real with all its rough edges is not concealed, a world in which, apart from the conventions of polite society, people are tested by a radical disorder. In so much as these people prevail, it is not because they become nature's nobility, nor because they are so brutish as not to be troubled by the kind of world they live in or because they find some source of amusement, order, even redemption in this context.

The literary antecedents so influential on the work of Twain and Faulkner are the writings of a group of frontier circuit lawyers and newspaper editors usually identified as Southwestern humorists. The settings for their stories were backwoods Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas, and their central characters were the confidence men and storytellers who plied their trade in the new settlements of those regions. In this landscape, the first wave of civilization fronts directly on the disorder of a wilderness--cosmos fronts against chaos--a wilderness that is both physical and psychological, and the literature of the Southwestern humorists gains its subject matter from that confrontation. The confidence man Simon Suggs--whose motto is "it's good to be sneaky in a new

country"--and the trickster/storyteller Sut Lovingood (who, along with Suggs, provides the genealogy of Faulkner's Snopes tribe) lack all the illusions of genteel society and are themselves, at least in their social relationship, agents of disorder. They overcome the first tentative representatives of authority--judges, politicians, land developers, and ministers--manipulating the pretension of the lofty and undoing the very order those dignitaries were meant to affirm. As Kenneth Lynn has remarked in *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston, 1959): "...when we view men and events through the glittering eye of the confidence man, we are 'in his world,' where no moral reference point exists; seen through the glass of the Suggsian consciousness, humanity has not the slightest dignity, while such terms as harmony, unity, stability...are exposed as empty mockeries."

This is literature from the edge of the world, where no center has yet been discerned or imposed--American in the most radical application of that term. A promiscuous literature made up of persons, actions, even language that would be discarded or repressed in proper society, it flaunts rather than conceals the low whether in bodily functions or in social types. It strives to get to the bottom line, to burrow under everything, the politicians' smug words, the minister's abstract morality, and the women's skirts. Or to make quicker work of it all, the trickster of Southwestern humor doesn't burrow under but blows up and then watches as the world flies out from beneath its pretensions and reveals its truest nature.

The only principle of order that does not break down in the trickster's explosive presence is that of story itself, and it is significant that he is often (as in Lovingood's case) teller as well as trickster, holding in himself the violent tension that lies at the heart of new world experience. He is the fool killer as the American in one guise always claims to be destroying all that is grandiose and self-righteous in America itself. But at the same time he also suggests (but only suggests) the very fragile power of story to provide, in place of the false "truths" he exposes, some other basis for coherence, some other basis for community.

It is this possibility that Mark Twain expands in his best stories. In "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," for example, Twain combines the effort of the fool killer with a celebration of the storyteller's art, but in contrast with the creators of Lovingood and Suggs, with greater emphasis on the latter. The subjects of these tales are inevitably people who live without either grand illusions or despair. Typical is Miss Wagner, the old woman who we are told is missing

an eye but who borrows her neighbor's glass substitute whenever she entertains. The glass eye is too small and so has to be packed in cotton when used for formal wear by Miss Wagner. And being blind on that side, she tends to get the eye in wrong side outward as often as not, presenting the green backside to the world. But even when she gets it in properly, because it is yellow, it never matches her own blue eye. As the storyteller continues describing Miss Wayne matter of factly--as though there were nothing unusual in any of this--he in turn informs us that she is also missing a leg and is forced to borrow the artificial limb of a much shorter neighbor, and is bald, relying on yet another neighbor for the loan of a wig. If there are elements here of the grotesque that mark Southwestern humor's elaborate descriptions of physical infirmity, there is none of its mocking of the victims, none of the humiliation that serves as its primary goal. Rather, there is about Miss Wagner--and the many similar folk that move through Twain's best stories--an attractiveness, a nobility that is more impressive than the outrageous afflictions they have suffered. If under the clothing of the self-righteous minister or the pompous politician or the inflated banker there is a repulsive body, emblematic of a repulsive character, behind the false eye and beneath the borrowed wig, the mutilated Miss Wagner admirably endures, borrowing all those spare parts that she might continue to live as fully as possible. The outrageous fortune that has maimed her is absurd, but not Miss Wagner; it is fortune, or life itself, and not the old woman that is the butt of Twain's comedy.

In the other anecdotes that make up "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," only the undertaker, death's surrogate, is personally humiliated. The others--the man who rises up at his own funeral to complain about the coffin, Uncle Lem, on whom the Irish laborer falls, and the widow of the man nipped up by a carpet-making machine--these, like Miss Wagner, do the best they can in an outrageous world. The violence in their stories does not come from a fool killer, though it may in fact have killed many forms of foolishness, but from life, and the best of them respond by muddling through as well as they can rather than by surrendering. The widow, who buys the fourteen yards of three ply carpeting containing the mortal remains of her late husband, does so in an effort to prevent the indignity from going any farther, keeps the carpet from being cut and presents it for the funeral unfolded, unspindled and without further mutilation. If her effort to do the best she can by her husband only increases the absurdity, *she* nonetheless reclaims what she can from an absurd world.

The only heroic activity available to Twain's characters is to make do under the outrageous circumstances in which they find themselves. Inevitably, then, the only work of promise is that of making--and ultimately the making of stories--not for ethereal stuff, but from the awful and apparently insignificant matter that makes up real human life. Storytelling in this context takes on new significance and becomes a means of living without an absolute center, of living without the "sacred." Strange as it may seem for a teller of tall tales to speak indignantly against literary liars, when Twain levels his attacks, as he regularly does, against the Sir Walter Scotts and James Fenimore Coopers, he does so because he is convinced they have misrepresented the basic terms on which people must live, that they offer illusions of a world that intrinsically makes sense, when, for Twain, all sense is the hard won and transitory victory of craft, in particular, that of the storyteller. The teller he respects is the one who redeems something from life, much as Miss Wagner does, without misrepresenting it. The exaggerations of the tall tale, according to Twain, only confirms the basic absurdity of human experience whereas narratives in which righteousness is predictably victorious and wickedness predictably punished are offences against "real" life in the world. Jim Blaine, like Twain's other storytellers, manages to create memorable stories from characters who conventionally would be dismissed as insignificant, laughter out of what invites despair, and more remarkably, beauty from a language rejected by educated and polite society as vulgar and offensive. Denied the sacred he adopts the human and declares it sufficient to his own needs. This is the challenge to one line of new world act: denied the earthly paradise, the shining cities, to make something of what has in fact been found, all the corrupt, innocent, ugly, beautiful chaos of an uncentered new world.

3.

When, midway in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Aureliano Segundo searches for Fernanda, "it was," we are told, "an act of impossible fate, because in the confusion of her indignation, in the fury of her shame, she lied to him so that he would never know her real identity." Still he searches unceasingly, with the same unswerving zeal with which all generations of Buendias pursue their hearts' desires, their own "centers."

When he asked for the most beautiful woman who had even been seen on earth, all the women brought him their daughters. He became lost in misty byways, in times

reserved for oblivion, in labyrinths of disappointment. He crossed a yellow plain where the echo repeated one's thought and where anxiety brought in premonitory mirages. After sterile weeks he came to an unknown city where all the bells were tolling a dirge. Although he had never seen them and no one had ever described them to him he immediately recognized the walls eaten away by bone salt, the broken down wooden balconies gutted by fungus, and nailed to the outside door, almost erased by rain, the saddest cardboard sign in the world: "Funeral Wreaths for Sale."

There he finds the object of his search, of his desire, and says the narrator, "For Aureliano Segundo it was almost simultaneously the beginning and the end of happiness."

It is striking how similar the journals of New World explorers are, and how completely the many quests and searches of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* evoke those older accounts that begin in exultant hope, proceed with almost inconceivable tenacity, and end in mourning. Pursuing the center which will at last prove definitive and absolute, which will finally free them, the explorers either stop short, still so many days march away, or, finding the center, as Aureliano Segundo does, discover it will not hold. These "labyrinths of disappointment" lie at the heart of new world experiences--not because disappointment is unique to this landscape, but because the American has carried all the old hope for a place beyond disappointment. Nor is it because there has been only disappointment here, but because when the old aspiration (one not altogether yielded even by the best of us) was for the earthly paradise, all else seems diminished by comparison. Columbus promised the Garden of Eden; it is hard to settle for Disneyland.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is at last the only appropriate response to that old plea for an American epic. It seems to be, even as the literary nationalists had hoped, a new world version of the *Aeneid*. It begins in an effort, familiar in our America, to undo history, to escape ghosts of past failure, to leave behind death, and to begin afresh, not merely in a new house or a new job but in a new age and as a new civilization--inevitably as a new world. So the party led by the original Jose Arcadio Buendia enters a terrain still in the throes of creation, a great swampy universe covered by "an eternal vegetable scum," a primordial world awaiting shape, the "uncosmocized" realm of Eliade's chaos. In this expedition Buendia's

party passes through "enchanted" regions, "a universe of grief," a world of "eternal sadness" even as they seem both to escape from and to be captured by history. "The men on the expedition," the narrator tells us, "felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders." So many voices of other travelers echo through this passage, as throughout the whole novel, voices of the ancient voyagers as well as of the new world explorers who enter enchanted regions and found in them a paradise of despair. The lush promise of Columbus' Eden, the wonders of Montezuma's kingdom are present here but brilliantly combined with the threat of ultimate dislocation which haunts early accounts of America: Coronado contemplating the prairie, an environment in which men on horseback are quickly lost to one another except for shouts and the clatter of metal; or, even more appropriately, Cabeza de Vaca lamenting a Florida in which it is possible to be someplace only in death. The passage, too, recalls those individuals and families in Fenimore Cooper's stories, who seek a neutral territory, free from old constraints, and, even more poignantly, the long line of frontier mystics, like the mythologized Boone, who knew they were in Kentucky (or some other fabled place) only because they were no longer any place else. Note as well how similar the landscape here is to the place in which the hero of Faulkner's *The Bear* sees Old Ben for the first time. This is *terra incognita*. Having eluded at last the old (even original sin), the Buendia party finds itself in the oldest, the primal, as it cuts its way through flora and fauna of an unfallen world. And, of course, it is here that the Spanish galleon, freighted with flowers, appears: the ultimate icon of the new world. "When they woke up," and it is as though they have been born anew to enter the world Adam-like,

... with the sun high in the sky, they were speechless with fascination. Before them, surrounded by ferns and palm trees, white and powdery in the silent morning light, was an enormous Spanish galleon. Tilted slightly to the starboard, it had hanging from its intact masts the dirty rags of its sails in the midst of its rigging, which was adorned with orchids. The hull, covered with an armor of petrified barnacles and soft moss, was firmly fastened into a surface of stones. The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time and the habits of birds. Inside, where the expeditionaries explored with careful intent, there was

nothing but a thick forest of flowers.

Beautiful and useless--it is four days removed from the sea--the galleon is set apart in "its own space" and removed from "the vices of time," is no more a part of America's world than of Europe's. It is vision brilliant and fragile, but one which cannot "center" us, for it only reminds us of how centerless everything in fact is. That it, itself, will be corrupted by discovery is verified when many years later, lying beside a "regular mail route," the ship is only a burned out frame in a field of poppies.

But these passages quoted from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* bear little stylistic resemblance to the writings either of Mark Twain or the Southwestern humorists. Rather the descriptions of the galleon and of the regions surrounding Macondo are reminiscent of a much older form of storytelling, the fairy tale--a genre whose influence on García Márquez is abundantly clear in "**A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings**" and "**The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World.**" Like the Lovingood stories and "Jim Blaine's Grandfather's Old Ram," this is a tradition rooted in an oral folk culture, but unlike the latter it is primarily a literature of enchantment, indulging the regular cadences, the polished phrases, the hypnotizing tone which Twain and his predecessors regarded as dangerous, the romancer's seductive devices, too far removed from real talk and real life to be trusted. The angular dialect of a narrator like Jim Blaine, by conventional standards, is anti-literary, but the discursive, disjointed, and rough metered Southwestern humor consciously repudiates fairy stories--championing a new world, disenchanted in tongue as well as vision.

The great strength of Twain's stories comes from their preoccupation with particularity. Suspicious of all abstractions, their author focuses on the specific, the idiosyncratic both of character and dialect. Thus his finest creations, Huck Finn most of all, seem fully realized and unique. But at its extreme this preoccupation with the particular threatens any effort at coherence, wholeness, just as the trickster threatens all social and moral order. It regards anything large or epic with suspicion and whittles it down to less intimidating size. The most significant of Southwestern humor is, therefore, its ability to overturn presumption, to free us from the grandiose schemes to which Americans have always been dangerously susceptible. As a consequence, apart from his celebrations of the Mississippi River, Twain found it impossible to speak of any grandeur. That which was conventionally thought noble, he debunked--old world masters, the

ruins of Rome, Shakespeare's plays, United States' foreign policy. Other Western travelers praised the grizzly bear and giant sequoias. Twain spoke for the jackass rabbit and sagebrush. Others praised Sir Walter Scott. Twain upheld the illiterate storytellers of Nevada mining camps.

But jackass rabbits and sagebrush are not golden salamanders and bleeding lilies. Nor is there anything else allowed in Twain's work which suggests the America of enticement, the America that has led so many so far. In part because that enticement--in some of its most corrupt and corrupting forms--had enormous power over his own life, Twain turned away from all grandeur, adhering to the principle proclaimed in *Roughing It* that nothing that glitters is gold, and fixed his eyes on the common as much for safety as for principle. In this way he refused to pander to the literary nationalists' call for an American epic that would declare us a new race creating a new history, but he also made it impossible to fully explore the new world experience by turning away from the visions and dreams which, though they may have lacked validity, have lacked neither power nor consequences.

The Columbiad that the first generation of United States intellectuals so desperately desired comes, ironically, from Columbia, but as the Buendiad, an epic that recreates the history of the new world in Macondo, a history that is a fiction, or rather an elaborate anthology of fictions, of endless recurrence in which the deepest and most impossible desires become obsessions of such all-consuming strength that everything else--including "reality"--becomes unreal. The world of the Buendiad is radically new, requiring the rediscovery of the earth's roundness, and the reinvention of time, and that one great Edenic task that Americans reenact with an apparently inexhaustible delight--naming things. This is a world owing as much to the alchemist's shop as to expeditions of discovery, and which, without the golden salamanders, the bleeding lilies, the clouds of butterflies, the dazzling birds, could never convincingly suggest all the yearnings that have called America into being. In this regard the Southwestern humorists and Twain can only make us seem petty and foolish in our corruption, but *One Hundred Years of Solitude* realizes the terrible depth of our longings and generates a profound and terrifying vision of our aspirations and of the folly to which they will lead.

With the Buendias we enter first a world of enchantment, for that is the true beginning of America, and it is precisely because this world is fully realized that we move painfully and wonderfully into the

world of disenchantment (though these are not, finally, discrete or sequential movements).

The young man who watches Remedios the Beauty as she bathes illustrates the danger of enchantment, a danger that has not changed since the time when people lived in fairy tales. Having crawled out on the thinnest edge of his obsession, the young man falls, breaking his head on the reality of the bathroom floor. In a book which provides an endless succession of centers, a virtual catalogue of human aspirations, Remedios the Beauty's would-be lover is only one of the many who are entranced and undone, like the sailors ruined by those "soft-skinned cetaceans" with the heads and torsos of women. Many of these obsessions, dreams, visions, illusions--call them what you will--are familiar to students of the new world: a new city, gold, a technological breakthrough, reform, beauty, power--the promised rewards of conquistadores, political savants, land developers, romantic philosophers, even academic grant seekers, all the visionaries who move through our past and our present, representing the truth that will set us free, the vision that will make all things clear. Only in the history of the new world offered in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, like that portrayed by Twain and his predecessors in the United States, all these betray us, the grandest of them, as well as the meanest. No progress is apparent. When Jose Arcadio, equipped with his new science, goes out to look for gold, he unearths the rusted armor of a Fifteenth-century gold seeker, and it rings most hollow when struck. At last the man who chases many dreams is tied to a tree, a grotesque parody of the centering act.

Every element of Southwestern humor's disenchantment is contained in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is made--incredibly--more outrageous, more inflated. In Macondo the flatulence is "flower withering," the vomit "leech filled," the fornication pursued with an energy beyond the wildest aspirations of a Lovingood. The insects and lizards that force the pompous out of their clothing in Sut's tricks here come in swarms undermining foundations and invading, not clothing alone, but flesh itself, and beyond that, the soul. Even the explosions of the earlier literature, the greatest accomplishment of the Southwestern fool-filler, cannot compare with Aureliano Segundo's slaughter yard--"an eternal execution ground of bones and innards, a mud pit of leftovers" where "they had to keep exploding dynamite bombs all the time so that the buzzards could not pluck out the guest's eyes." And of course Aureliano Segundo's efforts cannot compare with the obscene violence of economics and politics: the twice murdered 3000. When the machine guns open fire it seemed at

first, we are told, "a farce."

It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen but not the slightest reactions was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. Suddenly, on one side of the station, a cry of death tore open the enchantment...

But in fact the enchantment is never broken and that is the genius of the book; just as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is simultaneously nearly every new world story, it is simultaneously enchanting and disenchanting. The cry of death, "Aaaagh, Mother," may for a moment cut through rhythms of enchantment just as the anti-poetic voice of a Lovingood or a Twain narrator does with its discordant sounds, the locating power of a particular voice, but the narration of the novel remains unchanged and the cry is swallowed up by the powerful, impersonal incantation of the enchanter/narrator. "A seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential for expansion. Jose Arcadio Segundo barely had time to pick up the child while the mother with the other one was swallowed up by the crowd that swirled about in panic." So it is with Aureliano Babilonia who, reading what we are reading, is overwhelmed by the cries of disenchantment which run through the text but is, nonetheless, hopelessly enchanted by the gypsy's book.

We get in the letters of Columbus both the garden and the chains, but they come at different moments and in different contexts. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* they are contained in the same moment, every moment, the paradise always a "paradise of disaster." All the promises of the first New World explorers--the first of America's tall tale artists--are kept here, even the most incredible. This is Columbus' garden but its most Adam and Eve-like occupants are the incestuous aunt and nephew who appear at the end rather than the beginning and who recognize in themselves the cannibals Columbus in un-Edenic moments feared might inhabit these regions. Here too is Montezuma's wonderful palace, sometimes hinted at in the labyrinth of rooms in which the Buendias live, whose most remarkable feature, the chambers filled with birds and animals, are perpetuated in Macondo's zoological brothel.

Near the end, when what was future when the Spanish galleon first

appeared has become the past, the burden becomes unbearable. For the last Aureliano what lies behind us in the book is a "past whose annihilation, consuming itself from within, ending at every moment but never ending its ending." All is at last being undone. The town deserted by the Catalonian who dismisses his once-loved books as "all that shit" and abandons them, then by the others who gathered in the bookstore across from the house where dreams were interpreted when the town still held dreamers. Even as Macondo is depopulated, reports come from Alvaro of other Americas where people go on as though nothing were happening, like the girl in the red sweater sitting beside a lake in Michigan, waving "out of hope, because she did not know that she was watching a train with no return passing by"--not Alvaro's train alone but her own as well.

At last there is only the final Aureliano reading the Gypsy's book, the book which we are reading and in which he is a character, reading toward his own annihilation which only we can prevent by not reading on to the end. But we read on--on through the final disillusionment, to the final line and ultimate dislocation.

Nothing is left. Not the Catalonian's library, not the Buendia house, not friends, not ideologies or theologies or theories of history, all those familiar touchstones that can locate us somewhere and declare us someone. We are told "it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (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."

If *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is, as I have suggested, an epic of the new world, then it is an apocalyptic one, Macondo--America--destroyed by the absence of a center just as the cyclone, which has as its heart a vacuum, pulls everything apart. But this is, as we are reminded at every turn, a story and--like the other new world epic *Moby Dick* (which it resembles down to its cyclonic close)--more than that, a story built on innumerable other stories. Here the violence surpasses anything the Southwestern tricksters ever invented, and yet the story holds together, coheres as everything else unravels. Its echoes of fairy tales, the most obviously storied of all our fictions, its elaborate patterns that dance in intricate spirals from beginning to end, insist on an order even in apocalypse. Akin to Twain's stories, the demand in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is

that we live without illusion. And, with Twain's stories, there is amusement and delight even as we approach the last terrible word. But here, where the news is worse than anything poor Miss Wagner ever confronted the crafting must be exquisite. Nothing here is real, nothing unreal. All is story.

How do we live in a world that is uncentered, that has no truth by which things may be ordered? We tell stories, just as new world people at their wisest and most desperate have done from the beginning. It would be, and has often been, a terrible mistake to believe our stories, to make them truths, but it would be equally mistaken to give them up. In contrast to myth as Eliade describes it, story comes in the absence of the sacred authenticating presence. When the gods have fallen silent and men no longer have a single other worldly truth to validate and locate them, then the storytelling begins, finding its authority in the human rather than the divine. In this act the teller becomes a center--not *the* center for if such a thing existed we would need only priests and not stories--his story radiating out from him, anchored in this world only by his human presence. In the same way his audience clusters around him, pulling those in the radius of his voice into a kind of temporary community, a temporary order. In contrast to myth, storytelling is a human activity that, as Walter Benjamin has suggested, gains its authority from the transient nature of human existence. The centering it offers may resemble that attributed by the ancients to their deities but the resemblance is only superficial since story finally celebrates human meanings rather than divine truths. Story is, as Twain understood, a way of making do in the absence of certainty; its center marks not the location of a divine action, but the artificial and arbitrary creation of a being always on the verge of dislocation, even extinction. It does not altogether assert cosmos, but nonetheless it is a calling out of chaos. It does not piously mark an already existing center, but creates one that did not previously exist, one that endures only so long as the story itself is being told.

The conclusion to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be read as the ultimate dislocation, the final outcome of living in a world that lacks a center. But the delight in shaping that informs every turn of the novel has not been a false pleasure. Nor has everything disappeared in the apocalypse, for the book remains, its ending no truer or more real than its beginning, though just as meaningful. The only reality is the teller's voice, the greatest affirmation the telling--the haunting voice of the gypsy alchemist who has at last found the gold in America. This is not the truth but an exquisite example of what


honest tellers can make in a new world, a culmination of a long search carried on through an American literature and an American history.

Source: Wayne Fields, "'One Hundred Years of Solitude' and New World Storytelling," in *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 27, January-June, 1986, pp. 73-88. Reprinted in *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Vol. 2.






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
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 Document 1 of 5 

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

1928-

Also known as: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gabriel Jose García Márquez, Gabriel García Márquez, Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez

Entry updated: 01/03/2007

Nationality: Colombian

Ethnicity: Hispanic

Birth Place: Aracataca, Colombia

Genre(s): Experimental fiction; Family sagas; Film scripts; Historical fiction; Journalism; Novels; Short stories

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Personal Information: Born March 6, 1928, in Aracataca, Colombia; son of Gabriel Eligio Garcia (a telegraph operator) and

Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguaran; married Mercedes Barcha, March, 1958; children: Rodrigo, Gonzalo. **Education:** Attended Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1947- 48, and Universidad de Cartagena, 1948-49. **Memberships:** American Academy of Arts and Letters (honorary fellow). **Addresses:** Home: P.O. Box 20736, Mexico City D.F., Mexico. Agent: Agencia Literaria Carmen Balcells, Diagonal 580, Barcelona 08021, Spain.

Career: Writer, editor, and publisher. Began career as a journalist, 1947; reporter for *Universal*, Cartagena, Colombia, late 1940s, *El heraldo*, Baranquilla, Colombia, 1950-52, and *El espectador*, Bogota, Colombia, until 1955; freelance journalist in Paris, France, London, England, and Caracas, Venezuela, 1956-58; worked for *Momento* magazine, Caracas, 1958-59; helped form Prensa Latina news agency, Bogota, 1959, and worked as its correspondent in Havana, Cuba, and New York, NY, 1961; writer, 1965--. Fundacion Habeas, founder, 1979, president, 1979--.

Awards: Colombian Association of Writers and Artists Award, 1954, for story "Un dia despues del sabado"; Premio Literario Esso (Colombia), 1961, for *La mala hora*; Chianciano Award (Italy), 1969, Prix de Meilleur Livre Etranger (France), 1969, and Romulo Gallegos prize (Venezuela), 1971, all for *Cien anos de soledad*; LL.D., Columbia University, 1971; Books Abroad/Neustadt International Prize for Literature, 1972; Nobel Prize for Literature, 1982; *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize nomination for fiction, 1983, for *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*; *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for fiction, 1988, for *Love in the Time of Cholera*; Serfin Prize, 1989; Ariels (Mexican equivalent of Oscars) for scriptwriting from La Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes Cinematograficas; Reconocimiento a las Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico, July 2003.

WRITINGS:

FICTION

- *L a hojarasca* (novella; title means "Leaf Storm"; also see below), Ediciones Sipa (Bogota, Colombia), 1955, reprinted, Bruguera (Barcelona, Spain), 1983.
- *El cor onel no tiene quien le escriba* (novella; title means "No One Writes to the Colonel"; also see below), Aguirre Editor (Medellin, Colombia), 1961, reprinted, Bruguera (Barcelona,

Spain), 1983.

- *L a mala hora* (novel; also see below), Talleres de Graficas "Luis Perez" (Madrid, Spain), 1961, reprinted, Bruguera (Barcelona, Spain), 1982 , English translation by Gregory Rabassa published as *In Evil Hour*, Harper (New York, NY), 1979.
- *L os funerales de la Mama Grande* (short stories; title means "Big Mama's Funeral"; also see below), Editorial Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico), 1962, reprinted, Bruguera (Barcelona, Spain), 1983.
- (With Carlos Fuentes) *El Gallo de Oro*, screenplay from novel by Juan Rulfo, made into a film, 1964.
- *C ien anos de soledad* (novel), Editorial Sudamericana (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1967, reprinted, Catedra, 1984, English translation by Gregory Rabassa published as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Harper (New York, NY), 1970, with a new foreword by Rabassa, Knopf (New York, NY), 1995.
- *I sabel viendo llover en Macondo* (novella; title means "Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo"; also see below), Editorial Estuario (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1967.
- *N o One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories* (includes "No One Writes to the Colonel," and stories from *Los Funerales de la Mama Grande*), translated by J.S. Bernstein, Harper (New York, NY), 1968.
- *La increible y triste historia de la candida Erendira y su abuela desal mada* (short stories; also see below), Barral Editores, 1972.
- *El n egro que hizo esperar a los angeles* (short stories), Ediciones Alfil (Montevideo, Uruguay), 1972.
- *Ojo s de perro azul* (short stories; also see below), Equisditorial (Argentina), 1972.
- *L eaf Storm and Other Stories* (includes "Leaf Storm," and "Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo"), translated by Gregory Rabassa, Harper (New York, NY), 1972.
- *El o tono del patriarca* (novel), Plaza and Janes Editores

(Barcelona, Spain), 1975, translation by Gregory Rabassa published as *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Harper (New York, NY), 1976, 1999.

- *Todos los cuentos de Gabriel García Márquez: 1947-1972* (title means "All the Stories of Gabriel García Márquez: 1947-1972"), Plaza y Janes Editores, 1975.
- *Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories* (includes "Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother" and stories from *Ojos de perro azul*), translated by Gregory Rabassa, Harper (New York, NY), 1978.
- *Dos novelas de Macondo* (contains *La hojarasca* and *La mala hora*), Casa de las Americas (Havana, Cuba), 1980.
- *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (novel), La Oveja Negra (Bogota, Colombia), 1981, translation by Gregory Rabassa published as *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, J. Cape (London, England), 1982, Knopf (New York, NY), 1983.
- *Viva Sandino* (play), Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1982, 2nd edition published as *El asalto: el operativo con que el FSLN se lanzó al mundo*, 1983.
- *El rastro de tu sangre en la nieve: El verano feliz de la señora Forbes*, W. Dampier Editores (Bogota, Colombia), 1982.
- *El secuestro: Guion cinematográfico* (unfilmed screenplay), Oveja Negra (Bogota, Colombia), 1982.
- *Eréndira* (filmscript; adapted from his novella *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada*), Les Films du Triangle, 1983.
- *Collected Stories*, translated by Gregory Rabassa and Bernstein, Harper (New York, NY), 1984, reprinted, Penguin (New York, NY), 1996.
- *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, Oveja Negra, 1985, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1988.
- *A Time to Die* (filmscript), ICA Cinema, 1988.

- *Dia tribe of Love against a Seated Man* (play; first produced at Cervantes Theater, Buenos Aires, 1988), Arango Editores (Santafe de Bogota, Colombia), 1994.
- *El g eneral en su labertino*, Mondadori (Madrid, Spain), 1989, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *The General in His Labyrinth*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1990.
- *C ollected Novellas*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Doce cuent os peregrinos*, Mondadori (Madrid, Spain), 1992, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *Strange Pilgrims: Twelve Stories*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1993.
- *T he Handsomest Drowned Man in the World: A Tale for Children*, translated by Gregory Rabassa, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1993.
- *Del am or y otros demonios*, Mondadori (Barcelona, Spain), 1994, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *Of Love and Other Demons*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Me moria de mis putas tristes*, (novella), Knopf (New York, NY), 2004, translation by Edith Grossman published as *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, 2005.

Also available are individually bound series of single stories, including *El verano feliz de la senora Forbes*, illustrated by Carmen Sole Vendrell, Grupo Editorial Norma (Bogota, Colombia), 1999; contributor to anthologies, including *The Picador Book of Latin American Stories*, Picador (New York, NY), 1998; and *Caliente!: The Best Erotic Writing in Latin American Fiction*, edited by J.H. Blair, Penguin/Putnam (New York, NY), 2002.

NONFICTION

- (With Mario Vargas Llosa) *La novela en America Latina: Dialogo*, Carlos Milla Batres (Lima, Peru), 1968.
- *Relat o de un naufrago* (journalistic pieces), Tusquets Editor (Barcelona, Spain), 1970, English translation by Randolph Hogan published as *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1986.
- *C uando era feliz e indocumentado* (journalistic pieces),

Ediciones El Ojo de Camello (Caracas, Venezuela), 1973.

- *Operación Carlota*, (essays) 1977.
- *Crónicas y reportajes* (journalistic pieces), Oveja Negra, 1978.
- *Periodismo militante* (journalistic pieces), Son de Maquina (Bogota, Colombia), 1978.
- *De viaje por los países socialistas: 90 días en la "Cortina de hierro"* (journalistic pieces), Ediciones Macondo (Colombia), 1978.
- (Contributor) *Los sandanistas*, Oveja Negra, 1979.
- (Contributor) Soledad Mendoza, editor, *Así es Caracas*, Editorial Ateneo de Caracas (Caracas, Venezuela), 1980.
- *Obras periodísticas* (journalistic pieces), edited by Jacques Gilard. Bruguera, Volume 1: *Textos constenidos*, 1981, Volumes 2-3: *Entre cachacos*, 1982, Volume 4: *De Europa y América (1955-1960)*, 1983.
- *El olor de la guayaba: Conversaciones con Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza* (interviews), Oveja Negra, 1982, English translation by Ann Wright published as *The Fragrance of Guava*, Verso (London, England), 1983.
- (With Guillermo Nolasco-Juarez) *Persecución y muerte de minorías: dos perspectivas*, Juarez Editor (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1984.
- (Contributor) *La Democracia y la paz en América Latina*, Editorial El Buho (Bogota, Colombia), 1986.
- *La aventura de Miguel Littin, clandestino en Chile: Un reportaje*, Editorial Sudamericana, 1986, English translation by Asa Zatz published as *Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littin*, Holt (New York, NY), 1987.
- *Primeros reportajes*, Consorcio de Ediciones Capriles (Caracas, Venezuela), 1990.
- (Author of introduction) Gianni Mina, *An Encounter with Fidel: An Interview*, translated by Mary Todd, Ocean Press

(Melbourne, Australia), 1991.

- *Notas de prensa, 1980-1984*, Mondadori (Madrid, Spain), 1991.
- *Elogio de la utopía: Una entrevista de Nahuel Maciel*, Cronista Ediciones (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1992.
- *News of a Kidnapping*, translated from the Spanish by Edith Grossman, Knopf (New York, NY), 1997.
- (With Reynaldo Gonzales) *Cubano 100%*, with photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni, Charta, 1998.
- *For the Sake of a Country Within Reach of the Children*, Villegas Editores, 1998.
- (Author of introduction), Fidel Castro, *My Early Years*, LPC Group, 1998.
- *Vivir Para Contarla* (title means "To Live to Tell It") (memoir), [Colombia], 2002, published as *Living to Tell the Tale*, Knopf (New York, NY), 2003.

Author of weekly syndicated column.

Media Adaptations: A play, *Blood and Champagne*, was based on García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; *Maria de me Corazon* film 1983; *I'm the One You're Looking For*, *Letters from the Park* (extracted from *Love in the Time of Cholera*), *Miracle in Rome*, *The Summer of Miss Forbes*, films 1988; *Nobody Writes to the Colonel*, adapted for film, 1999; an adaptation of the story "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings" by Nilo Cruz was put on the stage for children in Minneapolis, MN, September 2002; the novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* produced by Repertorio Espanol in New York, NY 1999-2003, and by the The National Theatre of Colombia, January 2003, in Sydney; the novella *Erendira and her Heartless Grandmother* was adapted for the stage in New York, NY, in March, 2003; film rights have been sold to producer Scot Steindorff at Stone Village Pictures for an adaptation of *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

"Sidelights"

Winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez is

widely considered one of the deans of Latin American writing. From his fabulous tales of rural Colombian life to his volumes of journalistic reportage, García Márquez has emerged as "one of the small number of contemporary writers from Latin America who have given to its literature a maturity and dignity it never had before," to quote John Sturrock in the *New York Times Book Review*. "More than any other writer in the world," declared David Streitfeld in the *Washington Post*, "Gabriel García Márquez combines both respect (bordering on adulation) and mass popularity (also bordering on adulation)." *Time* magazine correspondent R.Z. Sheppard simply deemed the author "one of the greatest living storytellers."

One Hundred Years of Solitude is perhaps García Márquez's best-known contribution to the awakening of interest in Latin American literature. It has sold more than twenty million copies and has been translated into over thirty languages. According to an *Antioch Review* contributor, the popularity and acclaim for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* signaled that "Latin American literature will change from being the exotic interest of a few to essential reading and that Latin America itself will be looked on less as a crazy subculture and more as a fruitful, alternative way of life." So great was the novel's initial popularity, noted Mario Vargas Llosa in *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio*, that not only was the first Spanish printing of the book sold out within one week, but for months afterwards Latin American readers alone exhausted each successive printing. Translations of the novel similarly elicited enthusiastic responses from critics and readers around the world.

In this outpouring of critical opinion, which *Books Abroad* contributor Klaus Muller-Bergh called "an earthquake, a maelstrom," various reviewers termed *One Hundred Years of Solitude* a masterpiece of modern fiction. For example, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, himself a Nobel laureate, was quoted in *Time* as calling the book "the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes." Similarly enthusiastic was William Kennedy, who wrote in the *National Observer* that "*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race." And Regina Janes, in her study *Gabriel García Márquez: Revolutions in Wonderland*, described the book as "a 'total novel' that [treats] Latin America socially, historically, politically, mythically, and epically," adding that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is also "at once accessible and intricate, lifelike and self-consciously, self-referentially fictive."

The novel is set in the imaginary community of Macondo, a village on the Colombian coast, and follows the lives of several generations of the Buendia family. Chief among these characters are Colonel Aureliano Buendia, perpetrator of thirty-two rebellions and father of seventeen illegitimate sons, and Ursula Buendia, the clan's matriarch and witness to its eventual decline. Besides following the complicated relationships of the Buendia family, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* also reflects the political, social, and economic troubles of South America. Many critics have found the novel, with its complex family relationships and extraordinary events, to be a microcosm of Latin America itself.

The mixture of historical and fictitious elements that appears in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* places the novel within that genre of Latin American fiction that critics have termed "magical realism." Janes attributed the birth of this style of writing to Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban novelist and short story writer, and concluded that García Márquez's fiction follows ideas originally formulated by the Cuban author. The critic noted that Carpentier "discovered the duplicities of history and elaborated the critical concept of 'lo maravilloso americano' the 'marvelous real,' arguing that geographically, historically, and essentially, Latin America was a space marvelous and fantastic ... and to render that reality was to render marvels." García Márquez presented a similar view of Latin America in his *Paris Review* interview with Peter H. Stone: "It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes for the imagination while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality." The author further explained in his *Playboy* interview with Claudia Dreifus: "Clearly, the Latin American environment is marvelous. Particularly the Caribbean." The author added: "The coastal people were descendants of pirates and smugglers, with a mixture of black slaves. To grow up in such an environment is to have fantastic resources for poetry. Also, in the Caribbean, we are capable of believing anything, because we have the influences of all those different cultures, mixed in with Catholicism and our own local beliefs. I think that gives us an open-mindedness to look beyond apparent reality."

However, along with the fantastic episodes in García Márquez's fiction appear the historical facts or places that inspired them. An episode involving a massacre of striking banana workers is based on a historical incident. In reality, García Márquez told Dreifus, "there were very few deaths ... [so] I made the death toll 3,000 because I was using certain proportions in my book." However, while *One*

Hundred Years of Solitude is the fictional account of the Buendia family, the novel is also, as John Leonard stated in the *New York Times*, "a recapitulation of our evolutionary and intellectual experience. Macondo is Latin America in microcosm." Robert G. Mead Jr. similarly observed in *Saturday Review* that "Macondo may be regarded as a microcosm of the development of much of the Latin American continent." Mead added: "Although [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] is first and always a story, the novel also has value as a social and historical document." García Márquez responded to these interpretations in his interview with Dreifus, commenting that his work "is not a history of Latin America, it is a *metaphor* for Latin America."

The "social and historical" elements of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reflect the journalistic influences at work in García Márquez's fiction. Although known as a novelist, the author began his writing career as a reporter and still considers himself to be one. In fact, in 1999, he used money from his Nobel prize to buy the then-failing *Cambio*, a weekly news magazine which employs some of Colombia's finest journalists, according to Frank Bajak in the *Melbourne Herald Sun*. As García Márquez remarked to Stone: "I've always been convinced that my true profession is that of a journalist." Janes asserted that the evolution of García Márquez's individual style is based on his experience as a correspondent. In addition, this same experience has led Janes and other critics to compare the Colombian to Ernest Hemingway. "[The] stylistic transformation between *Leaf Storm* and *No One Writes to the Colonel* was not exclusively an act of will," Janes claimed. "García Márquez had had six years of experience as a journalist between the two books, experience providing practice in the lessons of Hemingway, trained in the same school." George R. McMurray, in his book *Gabriel García Márquez*, maintained that Hemingway's themes and techniques have "left their mark" on the work of the Colombian writer.

García Márquez has been compared to another American Nobel-winner, William Faulkner, who also elaborated on facts to create his fiction. Faulkner based his fictional territory Yoknapatawpha County on memories of the region in northern Mississippi where he spent most of his life. García Márquez based Macondo, the town appearing throughout his fiction, on Aracataca, the coastal city of his birth. A *Time* contributor called Macondo "a kind of tropical Yoknapatawpha County." *Review* contributor Mary E. Davis pointed out further resemblances between the two authors: "García Márquez

concentrates on the specific personality of place in the manner of the Mississippian, and he develops even the most reprehensible of his characters as idiosyncratic enigmas." She noted: "García Márquez is as fascinated by the capacity of things, events, and characters for sudden metamorphosis as was Faulkner." Nevertheless, *Newsweek* writer Peter S. Prescott maintained that it was only after García Márquez shook off the influence of Faulkner that he was able to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Prescott argued that in this novel García Márquez's "imagination matured: no longer content to write dark and fatalistic stories about a Latin Yoknapatawpha County, he broke loose into exuberance, wit and laughter." Thor Vilhjalmsson similarly observed in *Books Abroad* that while "García Márquez does not fail to deal with the dark forces, or give the impression that the life of human beings, one by one, should be ultimately tragic, ... he also shows every moment pregnant with images and color and scent which ask to be arranged into patterns of meaning and significance while the moment lasts." While the Colombian has frequently referred to Faulkner as "my master," Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann added in their *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin-American Writers* that in his later stories, "the Faulknerian glare has been neutralized. It is not replaced by any other. From now on García Márquez is his own master."

The phenomenal worldwide success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has proven to be both boon and bane for its author. In *Contemporary Popular Writers*, Jack Shreve observed that with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez "emerged as the leading literary talent of the Spanish-speaking world ... and many began to speak of him as the greatest author in the Spanish language since Cervantes." The critic added: "But like Cervantes after writing *Don Quixote*, García Márquez has subsequently had to contend with critics who are disinclined to acknowledge that his masterpiece can ever be equaled or surpassed." Indeed, while all of García Márquez's subsequent writings have been praised by critics and bought in quantity by readers, none has elicited the outpouring of praise that attended--and still attends--*One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* García Márquez uses a more openly political tone in relating the story of a dictator who has reigned for so long that no one can remember any other ruler. Elaborating on the kind of solitude experienced by Colonel Aureliano Buendía in *One Hundred Years*, García Márquez explores the isolation of a political tyrant. "In this fabulous, dream-like account of the reign of a nameless dictator of a fantastic Caribbean realm, solitude is linked

with the possession of absolute power," described Ronald De Feo in the *National Review*. Rather than relating a straightforward account of the general's life, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* skips from one episode to another using detailed descriptions. *Times Literary Supplement* contributor John Sturrock found this approach appropriate to the author's subject, calling the work "the desperate, richly sustained hallucination of a man rightly bitter about the present state of so much of Latin America." Sturrock noted that "García Márquez's novel is sophisticated and its language is luxuriant to a degree. Style and subject are at odds because García Márquez is committed to showing that our first freedom--and one which all too many Latin American countries have lost--is of the full resources of our language." *Time* writer R.Z. Sheppard similarly commented on García Márquez's elaborate style, observing that "the theme is artfully insinuated, an atmosphere instantly evoked like a puff of stage smoke, and all conveyed in language that generates a charge of expectancy." The critic also wrote: "García Márquez writes with what could be called a stream-of-consciousness technique, but the result is much more like a whirlpool."

Some critics, however, found both the theme and technique of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* lacking. J.D. O'Hara, for example, wrote in the *Washington Post Book World* that for all his "magical realism," García Márquez "can only remind us of real-life parallels; he cannot exaggerate them." For the same reason, the critic added, "although he can turn into grisly cartoons the squalor and paranoia of actual dictatorships, he can scarcely parody them; reality has anticipated him again." *Newsweek* columnist Walter Clemons found the novel somewhat disappointing: "After the narrative vivacity and intricate characterization of the earlier book [*The Autumn of the Patriarch*] seems both oversumptuous and underpopulated. It is--deadliest of compliments--an extended piece of magnificent writing." Other critics believed that the author's skillful style enhances the novel. Referring to the novel's disjointed narrative style, Wendy McElroy commented in *World Research INK* that "this is the first time I have seen it handled properly. Gabriel García Márquez ignores many conventions of the English language which are meant to provide structure and coherence. But he is so skillful that his novel is not difficult to understand. It is bizarre; it is disorienting ... but it is not difficult. Moreover, it is appropriate to the chaos and decay of the general's mind and of his world." Similarly, De Feo maintained that "no summary or description of this book can really do it justice, for it is not only the author's surrealistic flights of imagination that make it such an exceptional work, but also his brilliant use of language, his

gift for phrasing and description." The critic noted: "Throughout this unique, remarkable novel, the tall tale is transformed into a true work of art."

"With its run-on, seemingly free-associative sentences, its constant flow of images and color, Gabriel García Márquez's last novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, was such a dazzling technical achievement that it left the pleurably exhausted reader wondering what the author would do next," commented De Feo in the *Nation*. The author's next work, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* "is, in miniature, a virtuoso performance," stated Jonathan Yardley in the *Washington Post Book World*. In contrast with the author's "two masterworks, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch*," continued the critic, "it is slight ... its action is tightly concentrated on a single event. But in this small space García Márquez works small miracles; *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is ingeniously, impeccably constructed, and it provides a sobering, devastating perspective on the system of male 'honor'." In the novella, described Douglas Hill in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, García Márquez "has cut out an apparently uncomplicated, larger-than-life jigsaw puzzle of passion and crime, then demonstrated, with laconic diligence and a sort of concerned amusement, how extraordinarily difficult the task of assembling the pieces can be." The story is based on a historical incident in which a young woman is returned after her wedding night for not being a virgin and her brothers set out to avenge the stain on the family honor by murdering the man she names as her "perpetrator." The death is "foretold" in that the brothers announce their intentions to the entire town, but circumstances conspire to keep Santiago Nasar, the condemned man, from this knowledge, and he is brutally murdered.

"In telling this story, which is as much about the townspeople and their reactions as it is about the key players, García Márquez might simply have remained omniscient," observed De Feo. The critic added that, instead, "he places himself in the action, assuming the role of a former citizen who returns home to reconstruct the events of the tragic day--a day he himself lived through." This narrative maneuvering, claimed the critic, "adds another layer to the book, for the narrator, who is visible one moment, invisible the next, could very well ask himself the same question he is intent on asking others, and his own role, his own failure to act in the affair contributes to the book's odd, haunting ambiguity." This recreation after the fact has an additional effect, as Gregory Rabassa noted in *World Literature Today*: "From the beginning we know that Santiago Nasar will be

and has been killed, depending on the time of the narrative thread that we happen to be following, but García Márquez does manage, in spite of the repeated foretelling of the event by the murderers and others, to maintain the suspense at a high level by never describing the actual murder until the very end." Rabassa explained: "Until then we have been following the chronicler as he puts the bits and pieces together ex post facto, but he has constructed things in such a way that we are still hoping for a reprieve even though we know better." "As more and more is revealed about the murder, less and less is known," wrote Leonard Michaels in the *New York Times Book Review*, "yet the style of the novel is always natural and unselfconscious, as if innocent of any paradoxical implication."

In approaching the story from this re-creative standpoint, García Márquez once again utilizes journalistic techniques. As *Chicago Tribune Books* editor John Blades maintained, "García Márquez tells this grisly little fable in what often appears to be a straight-faced parody of conventional journalism, with its dependence on 'he-she-they told me' narrative techniques, its reliance on the distorted, contradictory and dreamlike memories of 'eyewitnesses.'" Blades added, however, that "at the same time, this is precision-tooled fiction; the author subtly but skillfully manipulates his chronology for dramatic impact." *New York Times* correspondent Christopher Lehmann-Haupt similarly noted a departure from the author's previous style: "I cannot be absolutely certain whether in *Chronicle* Gabriel García Márquez has come closer to conventional storytelling than in his previous work, or whether I have simply grown accustomed to his imagination." The critic added that "whatever the case, I found *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by far the author's most absorbing work to date. I read it through in a flash, and it made the back of my neck prickle." "It is interesting," remarked *Times Literary Supplement* contributor Bill Buford, that García Márquez chose to handle "a fictional episode with the methods of a journalist. In doing so he has written an unusual and original work: a simple narrative so charged with irony that it has the authority of political fable." Buford noted: "If it is not an example of the socialist realism [García] Márquez may claim it to be elsewhere, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is in any case a mesmerizing work that clearly establishes [García] Márquez as one of the most accomplished, and the most 'magical' of political novelists writing today." In *Review*, Edith Grossman wrote: "Once again García Márquez is an ironic chronicler who dazzles the reader with uncommon blendings of fantasy, fable and fact."

Another blending of fable and fact, based in part on García Márquez's

recollections of his parents' marriage, *Love in the Time of Cholera* "is an amazing celebration of the many kinds of love between men and women," according to Elaine Feinstein of the London *Times*. "In part it is a brilliantly witty account of the tussles in a long marriage, whose details are curiously moving; elsewhere it is a fantastic tale of love finding erotic fulfillment in ageing bodies." The novel begins with the death of Dr. Juvenal Urbino, whose attempt to rescue a parrot from a tree leaves his wife of fifty years, Fermina Daza, a widow. Soon after Urbino's death, however, Florentino Ariza appears on Fermina Daza's doorstep. The rest of the novel recounts Florentino's determination to resume the passionate courtship of a woman who had given him up over half a century before. In relating both the story of Fermina Daza's marriage and her later courtship, *Love in the Time of Cholera* "is a novel about commitment and fidelity under circumstances which seem to render such virtues absurd," recounted *Times Literary Supplement* contributor S.M.J. Minta. "[It is] about a refusal to grow old gracefully and respectably, about the triumph sentiment can still win over reason, and above all, perhaps, about Latin America, about keeping faith with where, for better or worse, you started out from."

Although the basic plot of *Love in the Time of Cholera* is fairly simple, some critics have accused García Márquez of over-embellishing his story. Calling the plot a "boy-meets-girl" story, Chicago *Tribune Books* contributor Michael Dorris remarked that "it takes a while to realize this core [plot], for every aspect of the book is attenuated, exaggerated, overstated." The critic also argued that "while a Harlequin Romance might balk at stretching this plot for more than a year or two of fictional time, García Márquez nurses it over five decades," adding that the "prose [is] laden with hyperbolic excess." Some critics have claimed that instead of revealing the romantic side of love, *Love in the Time of Cholera* "seems to deal more with libido and self-deceit than with desire and mortality," as Angela Carter termed it in the *Washington Post Book World*. Dorris expressed a similar opinion, writing that while the novel's "first 50 pages are brilliant, provocative, ... they are [an] overture to a discordant symphony" which portrays an "anachronistic" world of machismo and misogyny. In contrast, Toronto *Globe and Mail* contributor Ronald Wright believed that the novel works as a satire of this same kind of "hypocrisy, provincialism and irresponsibility of the main characters' social milieu." Wright noted: "*Love in the Time of Cholera* is a complex and subtle book; its greatest achievement is not to tell a love story, but to meditate on the equivocal nature of romanticism and romantic love."

Other reviewers have agreed that although it contains elements of his other work, *Love in the Time of Cholera* is a development in a different direction for García Márquez. Author Thomas Pynchon, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, commented that "it would be presumptuous to speak of moving 'beyond' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but clearly García Márquez has moved somewhere else, not least into deeper awareness of the ways in which, as Florentino comes to learn, 'nobody teaches life anything.'" Countering criticisms that the work is overemotional, Minta claimed that "the triumph of the novel is that it uncovers the massive, submerged strength of the popular, the clichéd and the sentimental." While it "does not possess the fierce, visionary poetry of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or the feverish phantasmagoria of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*," as *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani described it, *Love in the Time of Cholera* "has revealed how the extraordinary is contained in the ordinary, how a couple of forgotten, even commonplace lives can encompass the heights and depths of grand and eternal passion." "The result," wrote the critic, "is a rich commodious novel, a novel whose narrative power is matched only by its generosity of vision." "The Garcimarkesian voice we have come to recognize from the other fiction has matured, found and developed new resources," asserted Pynchon, "[and] been brought to a level where it can at once be classical and familiar, opalescent and pure, able to praise and curse, laugh and cry, fabulate and sing and when called upon, take off and soar." Pynchon noted: "There is nothing I have read quite like [the] astonishing final chapter, symphonic, sure in its dynamics and tempo." Pynchon also wrote: "At the very best [this remembrance] results in works that can even return our worn souls to us, among which most certainly belongs *Love in the Time of Cholera*, this shining and heartbreaking novel."

For his next novel, *The General in His Labyrinth*, García Márquez chose another type of story. His protagonist, the General, is Simon Bolívar. Known as "the Liberator," Bolívar is remembered as a controversial and influential historical figure. His revolutionary activities during the early nineteenth century helped free South America from Spanish control. The labyrinth evoked in the title consists of what John Butt described in the *Times Literary Supplement* as "the web of slanders and intrigues that surrounded [Bolívar's] decline." The book focuses on Bolívar's last months, once the leader had renounced the Colombian presidency and embarked on a long journey that ended when he died near the Caribbean coast on December 17, 1830. Even as he neared death, Bolívar staged one

final, failed attempt to reassert leadership in the face of anarchy. In the *New York Times Book Review* author Margaret Atwood declared: "Had Bolivar not existed, Mr. García Márquez would have had to invent him." Atwood called the novel "a fascinating literary tour de force and a moving tribute to an extraordinary man," as well as "a sad commentary on the ruthlessness of the political process."

The political process is, indeed, an integral aspect of *The General in His Labyrinth*. "Latin American politicians and intellectuals have long relied on a more saintly image of Bolivar to make up for the region's often sordid history," Tim Padgett wrote in *Newsweek*. Although García Márquez presents a pro-Bolivar viewpoint in his novel, the book was greeted with controversy. Butt observed that García Márquez had "managed to offend all sides." Butt added: "From the point of view of some pious Latin Americans he blasphemes a local deity by having him utter the occasional obscenity and by showing him as a relentless womanizer, which he was. Others have detected the author's alleged 'Caribbean' tropical and lowland dislike of *cachacos* or upland and *bogotano* Colombians." The harshest criticism, Butt asserted, emanated from some Colombian historians "who claim that the novel impugns the basis of their country's independence by siding too openly with the Liberator" to the detriment of some of Bolivar's political contemporaries. García Márquez earned wide praise for the quality of documentary research that contributed to the novel, although Butt, for one, lamented that the book "leaves much unexplained about the mental processes of the Liberator." He elaborated: "We learn far more about Bolivar's appearance, sex-life, surroundings and public actions than about his thoughts and motives."

In the works, off and on, for nearly two decades, *Strange Pilgrims: Twelve Stories* marked García Márquez's return to the short story collection. García Márquez's pilgrims are Latin American characters placed in various European settings, many of them in southern Italy. "Thematically, these dozen stories explore familiar Marquesan territory: human solitude and quiet desperation, unexpected love (among older people, between generations), the bizarre turns of fate, the intertwining of passion and death," Michael Dirda asserted in the *Washington Post Book World*. At each story's core, however, "lies a variant of that great transatlantic theme--the failure of people of different cultures, ages or political convictions to communicate with each other." In *Strange Pilgrims*, Margaret Sayers Peden asserted in the *Chicago Tribune*, "Latins do not fare well in their separation from native soil." In "The Saint," for example, an old Colombian

man has brought the intact corpse of his young daughter to Rome. For decades he journeys through the Vatican bureaucracy, trying to get his child canonized. "Absurd and oddly serene," Richard Eder wrote in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, "[the story] says a great deal about Latin American boundlessness in a bounded Europe." In another story, "I Only Came to Use the Phone," a Mexican woman is mistakenly identified as a mental patient and is trapped in a Spanish insane asylum--no one heeds her cry that she only entered the building to place a telephone call.

"Rich with allusion and suggestion, colourful like a carnival," wrote Ian Thomson in *Spectator*, "these short stories nevertheless lack the graceful charm of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, say, or of other novels by [García] Márquez. There's a deadpan acceptance of the fantastic, though, which allows for a degree of comedy." In a similar vein, Dirda asserted: "Many of the stories in *Strange Pilgrims* might be classified as fantastic." Dirda added: "Still, none of them quite possesses the soul-stirring magic of García Márquez's earlier short fiction." He continued: "For all their smooth execution, [the stories] don't feel truly haunted, they seldom take us to fictive places we've never been before." Dirda continued: "And yet. And yet. One could hardly wish for more readable entertainments, or more wonderful detailing." Edward Waters Hood, however, declared in *World Literature Today* that these "interesting and innovative stories ... complement and add several new dimensions to Gabriel García Márquez's fictional world."

García Márquez returned to his Maconderos in his next novel, *Of Love and Other Demons*. The story stems from an event the author witnessed early in his journalistic career. As a reporter in Cartagena in 1949, he was assigned to watch while a convent's tomb was opened to transfer burial remains--the convent was being destroyed to clear space for a hotel. There soon emerged twenty-two meters of vibrant human hair, attached to the skull of a young girl who had been buried for two centuries. Remembering his grandparents' stories about a twelve-year-old aristocrat who had died of rabies, García Márquez began to reconstruct the life and death of a character named Sierva Maria. Jonathan Yardley remarked in the *Washington Post Book World* that the author's mood in this novel "is almost entirely melancholy and his manner is, by contrast with his characteristic ebullience, decidedly restrained." In the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Eder judged the novel to be "a good one though not quite among [García Márquez's] best."

As the daughter of wealthy but uninterested parents, Sierva Maria grows up with the African slaves on her family's plantation. When she is bitten by a rabid dog, a local bishop determines that she requires exorcism. The girl is taken to the Convent of Santa Clara, where the bishop's pious delegate, Father Cayetano Delaura, is charged with her case. But Delaura himself is soon possessed by the demon of love, his forbidden love for the young woman. Yardley wrote: "Here most certainly we are in the world of Gabriel García Márquez, where religious faith and human love collide in agony and passion." In *Time* magazine R. Z. Sheppard asserted that, in telling "a story of forbidden love," García Márquez "demonstrates once again the vigor of his own passion: the daring and irresistible coupling of history and imagination." Yardley warned, however, that "readers hoping to re-experience 'magical realism' at the level attained in the author's masterpieces will be disappointed." In the *Nation*, John Leonard stated: "My only complaint about this marvelous novella is its rush toward the end. Suddenly, [the author is] in a hurry ... when we want to spend more time" with his characters.

The origins behind *Of Love and Other Demons* emphasize once again the dual forces of journalism and fiction in García Márquez's oeuvre. The author elaborated in his interview with Dreifus: "I'm fascinated by the relationship between literature and *journalism*. I began my career as a journalist in Colombia, and a reporter is something I've never stopped being. When I'm not working on fiction, I'm running around the world, practicing my craft as a reporter." His work as a journalist has produced controversy, for in journalism García Márquez not only sees a chance to develop his "craft," but also an opportunity to become involved in political issues. His self-imposed exile from Colombia was prompted by a series of articles he wrote in 1955 about the sole survivor of a Colombian shipwreck, claiming that the government ship had capsized due to an overload of contraband. In 1986, García Márquez wrote *Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littin*, a work about an exile's return to the repressive Chile of General Augusto Pinochet. The political revelations of the book led to the burning of almost 15,000 copies by the Chilean government. In addition, García Márquez has maintained personal relationships with such political figures as Cuban President Fidel Castro, former French President Francois Mitterand, and the late Panamanian leader General Omar Torrijos.

Because of this history of political involvement, García Márquez has often been accused of allowing his politics to overshadow his work, and has also encountered problems entering the United States. When

asked by *New York Times Book Review* contributor Marlise Simons why he is so insistent on becoming involved in political issues, the author replied: "If I were not a Latin American, maybe I wouldn't [become involved]. But underdevelopment is total, integral, it affects every part of our lives. The problems of our societies are mainly political." The Colombian further explained that "the commitment of a writer is with the reality of all of society, not just with a small part of it. If not, he is as bad as the politicians who disregard a large part of our reality. That is why authors, painters, writers in Latin America get politically involved."

Perhaps not surprisingly, García Márquez's political involvement has led him to examine the role that drug cartels have played in destabilizing Colombian society. *News of a Kidnapping*, a nonfiction account of several audacious kidnappings engineered by the Medellín drug cartel, is written in a consciously even-handed journalistic style but nevertheless reflects the author's dismay not only with the native drug dealers but with the American government that seeks to extradite and punish them. In the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani wrote: " *News of a Kidnapping* not only provides a fascinating anatomy of 'one episode in the biblical holocaust that has been consuming Colombia for more than 20 years,' but also offers the reader new insights into the surreal history of Mr. García Márquez's native country. Indeed, the reader is reminded by this book that the magical realism employed by Mr. García Márquez and other Latin American novelists is in part a narrative strategy for grappling with a social reality so hallucinatory, so irrational that it defies ordinary naturalistic description."

Centered on the abduction of three prominent Colombian women, *News of a Kidnapping* describes the women's suffering as hostages of the drug lords as well as the negotiations to free them. "By now the world is well acquainted with hostage holding as a grotesque basis for personal relationships," noted R.Z. Sheppard. "But here the unusual experience of living in close quarters with your potential killers is intensified in prose as precise and deadpan as a coroner's report. And as he does so often, García Márquez makes the fantastic seem ordinary." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Robert Stone declared: "Mr. García Márquez is a former journalist, and *News of a Kidnapping* resembles newspaper journalism of the better sort, with a quick eye for the illuminating detail and a capacity for assembling fact. It will interest those who follow the details of the drug problem more than it will appeal to the literary following of Mr. García Márquez." Stone added: "Still, the horrors and the absurdities, the

touches of tender humanity and the stony cruelty that are part of this story--and of Colombia--all appear."

Despite the controversy that his politics and work have engendered, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is enough to ensure the author "a place in the ranks of twentieth century masters," claimed Curt Suplee in the *Washington Post*. The Nobel-winner's reputation, however, is grounded in more than this one masterpiece. The Swedish Academy's Nobel citation states, "Each new work of his is received by critics and readers as an event of world importance, is translated into many languages and published as quickly as possible in large editions." "At a time of dire predictions about the future of the novel," observed McMurray, García Márquez's "prodigious imagination, remarkable compositional precision, and wide popularity provide evidence that the genre is still thriving." Janes, in the *Reference Guide to World Literature*, noted: "Often humorous, at times bitterly ironic or grotesque, occasionally tinged with pathos, García Márquez's work possesses a rare power of invention. Deficient in the psychological and linguistic density characteristic of some modern writers, García Márquez at his best achieves continuous surprise in the elaboration of a rococo, tessellated prose surface that makes the reader aware of the simultaneous insistence and insufficiency of interpretation." *Tribune Books* contributor Harry Mark Petrakis described García Márquez as "a magician of vision and language who does astonishing things with time and reality. He blends legend and history in ways that make the legends seem truer than truth. His scenes and characters are humorous, tragic, mysterious and beset by ironies and fantasies. In his fictional world, anything is possible and everything is believable." The critic noted: "Mystical and magical, fully aware of the transiency of life, his stories fashion realms inhabited by ghosts and restless souls who return to those left behind through fantasies and dreams. The stories explore, with a deceptive simplicity, the miracles and mysteries of life."

García Márquez continues, too, to elude those who wish to pigeonhole him and to resist pressure to be "politically correct." He has continued to support the actions of Cuba's Fidel Castro against sometimes loud objections, while at the same time pointing out that he has helped many Cubans leave Cuba safely. He has returned to journalism in his later years, buying the failing newspaper *Cambio* in 1999 and writing regularly for it thereafter and increasing its sales five-fold. Of his (and other South American writers') early and continuing political involvement, Brooke Allen in the *New Leader*

wrote: "There is hardly an ivory tower litterateur among the bunch. Their vital engagement seems to derive from the continual political chaos in South and Central America. 'In both America and Latin America,' commented Manuel Puig, 'the young writer usually doesn't like the system, with a capital "S," in his country. But in Latin America the possibility exists of actually shaking that system, because Latin American systems are shaky. Young writers who don't like the American way of life feel impotent, because it's really tough to shake Wall Street. You may not like Wall Street, but it works somehow. ... Ironically, Latin American countries, in their instability, give writers and intellectuals the hope that they are needed. In Latin America there's the illusion that a writer can change something; of course, it's not that simple.' It is therefore not surprising that so many prominent Latin American writers have taken active political roles."

In 2002, the first volume of García Márquez's memoir, *Vivir Para Contarla*, which covers approximately the first thirty years of his life, was published. Two million copies were sold between late November and May 2003, not counting pirated copies that flooded the streets, prompting Knopf to publish the U.S. and Spanish versions a year ahead of their planned time. Elise Christensen of *Newsweek* recounted: "Photocopied versions have been peddled in Puerto Rico, and armed police guarded bookstores in Mexico in October after a delivery truck was reportedly hijacked in Colombia." According to Sandra Hernandez in a May, 2003, *Knight Ridder* report: "In an unprecedented move, major newspapers including the *Los Angeles Times* reviewed the Spanish language version rather than wait for the English edition due out in November together with the next volume in Spanish." Adriana Lopez reported in the *New York Times* that "for weeks, propelled by the buzz in the Latin American news media, Latino readers have been flocking to Little Colombia, where copies have found their way to street vendors and independently owned Latino bookstores. On Roosevelt Avenue, under the shadow of the elevated No. 7 train, street vendors like Ms. Luna do a brisk business hawking copies of the memoir, which they get from her buyers in South America and Spain, for up to \$40 apiece." Lopez added: "Some customers shy away from the street vendors in response to a Colombian news media campaign urging readers not to buy illegal copies of the book. Some pirated copies are said to be circulating clandestinely. But the majority of Little Colombia's street booksellers appear to be selling the real thing, a quality-bound edition whose cover bears a haunting sepia image of the author as a child. Mr. Ramirez's wife, Irma, recalls the day she realized how much the book was touching a nerve among her fellow Colombians. 'I saw a young

man sitting in Flushing Meadows Park reading a copy,' she said. 'And the tears were just running down his face.'" The English translation appeared in late 2003 as *Living to Tell the Tale*.

Caleb Bach, with his son Joel photographing, conducted an informal interview with García Márquez for the May-June 2003 *Americas*. They found him working six hours a day on the next volume of the memoir because as García Márquez told them: "If I don't write, I get bored," adding: "I keep writing so as not to die." He confided that he has a prodigious memory and uses no outside researchers: "I was a chain smoker for thirty years, but at age fifty abruptly I quit after a doctor in Barcelona told me my habit would cause memory loss." "If I can't remember something, it didn't happen," he said. Bach and his son found García Márquez to be a "kind, thoughtful, dignified man who has enriched the lives of so many people the world over never forgets his own humble origins and struggle to give purpose to his life. It is his nature to help others, especially young people, as they set out on their own journey." This impression was confirmed by an *Economist* contributor, who remarked: "Interestingly, his memoir reveals its author to be a man of few deep convictions, for whom friendship is far more important than politics."

Nicaraguan poet Gioconda Belli relished the memoir, saying that she ultimately realized that, hoping to find the boundary between García Márquez's fiction and reality: "This is a journey in which each family anecdote and tale brings us back to characters we've met in his books or reveals to us the promise of many stories yet to be written. Through it, we find the hidden genetic codes of the Buendias, of Remedios the Beauty and Petra Cotes, and we come to realize that we've penetrated the looking glass, thinking we would be able to separate fiction from reality only to discover that they're inseparable." She continued: "*Vivir para contarla* is, from the start, an empirical argument to demonstrate both the reality of magic and the magic of reality. García Márquez brings up the idea more than once in that playful way of his, so far removed from academic parsimony. Referring to *The Arabian Nights*, for example, he says: 'I even dared to think that the wonders Scheherazade told about had really happened in the daily life of her time and that they stopped happening because of the disbelief and cowardice of succeeding generations.'" She went on to note: "His talent to blend magic and reality relieves us from the rationalist Cartesian split--so unhealthy for the spirit--and presents an alternative, wholesome way to embrace both. This is precisely why his writings provoke such a sensual joy. They let our imagination roam free in our bodies and infuse us with

the magical powers inherent in the human condition. His writing shows us, Latin Americans, a credible version of our own history: not the academic vision of the history books that in no way resembles our experience but the version we learned by living in forsaken towns and in cities where lunatics and crocodiles roamed the streets and where dictators kept prisoners in cages alongside their pet lions and jaguars. In a world increasingly suffering the unreal, García Márquez has fooled reality once more, this time by remaining faithful to it." Belli also cited the memoir as explanation of the author's political development from the moment he was witness to the murder of presidential candidate, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a populist in whom many had hope for peace, in 1948.

Searching for those who did not relate positively to the memoir was a futile task, though the U.S. *Economist* writer did comment: "This memoir may not win over those who have resisted being persuaded that Mr. García Márquez is a great, rather than a very good, writer. His style is one of much poetry but sometimes less meaning than meets the eye: in a typical sentence, he says of his grandfather that 'I knew what he was thinking by the changes in his silence.' And fecund though it was, magical realism has much to answer for: Mr. García Márquez has rarely let historical fact get in the way of a good story, and Latin American journalism has suffered much from the blurring of its boundaries with fiction. But most readers will not mind. They will simply enjoy the anecdotes and the prose of a master of the narrative art and of the Spanish language." Given Latin American commentary on the different view taken of the seam between "cold" reality and "magic" in less rationalistic South American countries (as evidenced in Belli's review), even this slight denigration can be seen as a cultural misprision. Hopefully, there is rather something to be learned from the understanding that reality, imagination, magic, history are bound together in such a way they cannot be so easily separated and reduced. The first volume of the memoir, presenting García Márquez' early life, reveals in it the realities that appear as magic in the novels. As Lois Zamora commented in the *Houston Chronicle*, "García Márquez is often called a 'magical realist,' but when you finish this autobiography you will be convinced of what he has long insisted in repudiation of the term: that he is not a magical realist but a realist and has never written about anything that he hasn't seen himself or known someone who has."

García Márquez's novella *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, his first work of new fiction published in a decade, appeared in Spanish

in 2004 and in English the following year. The story revolves around the narrator, an unnamed newspaper columnist and music critic who purchases the right to visit a young adolescent virgin to celebrate his ninetieth birthday. The columnist has paid for every sexual encounter he has ever had and begins spending nights with the young girl by just admiring her but without sexual contact. Eventually, he finds that he despises his former life and is unaccountably happy in just observing the girl, who at first never wakes or speaks when he is there. The "relationship" is never consummated, and the author discovers that at the age of ninety he has met his first true love, whom he eventually begins to converse with and teach to read. Terrence Rafferty, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, commented: "The cunning of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* lies in the utter--and utterly unexpected--reliability of its narrator." In an essay in the *New Yorker*, John Updike commented on the book, noting: "His prose displays, in Edith Grossman's expert translation, the chiselled stateliness and colorful felicities that distinguish everything García Márquez composes. *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, reminiscent in its terseness of such stoic fellow-Latins as the Brazilian Machado de Assis and the Colombia-born Alvaro Mutis, is a velvety pleasure to read."

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