

# Gabriel

# García

# Márquez

LATER THIS YEAR, THE NOBEL PRIZE WINNER WILL PUBLISH THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF HIS MEMOIRS. IN ANTICIPATION, WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT A LIFE'S WORK.

BY JESSICA TEISCH

García Márquez is Latin America's preeminent man of letters. His international bestseller, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), an unforgettable family saga that mines Colombia's violent history, brought him universal acclaim, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. Yet "Gabo" is also something of a revolutionary: he is friends with Fidel Castro, criticizes American culture and its influence, and was involved in negotiations to end the civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Above all, García Márquez's work reflects Latin America's dark past. Yet his recurring themes of violence, solitude, and love transcend national borders.

## A POLITICAL KIND OF "MAGICAL REALISM"

García Márquez's political venom and trademark "magical realist" style, which weaves dreamlike elements into critiques of Latin American life, came from his upbringing. The eldest of twelve children, he was born in 1928 in the small, banana-growing town of Aracataca, Colombia. He was weaned on family myth and history. His grandmother told fairytales, and his grandfather recounted his days as a colonel in the War of a Thousand Days. García Márquez was particularly influenced by his grandfather's memories of Aracataca's violent

banana strike of '28, in which Colombian soldiers massacred hundreds of workers who demanded better conditions from the American-owned United Fruit Company. This incident inspired García Márquez's lasting hatred of Latin America's relationship with the U.S. "One of these days," Colonel Aureliano Buendía shouts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, "I'm going to arm my boys so we can get rid of these shitty gringos!" Aracataca also became the model for the magical town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Leaf Storm*, and other stories.

García Márquez's politics, too, were homegrown. He studied law at the National University in Bogotá, where he became steeped in Marxist literature. After political unrest closed the university in 1947, he turned to journalism and established his name at *El Espectador*. A year later civil war (La Violencia) broke out between Liberal and Conservative supporters. García Márquez joined the Communist Party of Colombia in 1950 and used its underground leaders as sources for stories. He also started writing fiction and spent several years abroad. His first novels, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Autumn of the Patriarch*, reflect Latin America's difficult, lonely path to modernity.

But García Márquez decorated this

## WHERE TO START

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE** is considered the reason Márquez won the Nobel Prize. The story of three generations of the Buendía family embodies Márquez's magical realist style. Also consider **LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA** or, for a taste of his non-fiction, **NEWS OF A KIDNAPPING**.



path with soothsayers, flying carpets, and beached Spanish galleons. The "magical realism" genre that Miguel Angel Asturias, the 1967 Nobel Laureate, popularized in Latin America in the 1960's soon marked his literary style. García Márquez says he based the tone in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on his grandmother's poker face. "She told things," he writes, "that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness." Yet when García Márquez first sat down to write, he discovered that he first had to convince himself of his own veracity before he could write stories "with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face."

García Márquez's harrowing tales of isolation, peasant violence, farcical politics, and unrequited love continue to spellbind readers. His recent life mirrors some of these themes. In 1981, a few years after founding a leftist newspaper and working with political prisoners, the Colombian military accused García Márquez of conspiring with the M19 guerrillas (now legal). He sought asylum in Mexico City, where he resides with his wife, Mercedes. He has just published *Living to Tell It*, the first of a projected three volume set of his memoirs. It is currently available only in Spanish and will be published in the United States by Random House in late 2003. In its first ten days, it sold over 300,000 copies in Spain.

## MAJOR WORKS

### One Hundred Years of Solitude/ Cien Años de Solidad (1967)

- ◆ Chianchiano Prize (Italy, 1969)
- ◆ Best Foreign Book (France, 1969)
- ◆ Honoris Causa (Colombia, 1971)
- ◆ Rómulo Gallegos Prize (1972)

**G**arcía Márquez wrote this novel in eighteen months of solitude. It has been translated into more than 30 languages and is considered the book that earned him the Nobel Prize.

**THE STORY:** García Márquez brings epic proportions of fantasy, love, adventure, and sorrow to the Buendía family, a clan living in the enchanted South American town of Macondo. The novel opens with an eccentric patriarch and matriarch, and follows their unique progeny through generations of love and loss, war and peace, and life and death.

**"[The book] is generally credited with inaugurating the genre of "magic realism" novels which combine the matter-of-fact narrative style of conventional realistic fiction with fantastic nonsense such as levitation and alchemy."**

Sunday Telegraph, 1999.

**"Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* struck with incalculable force. . . . More important, *Solitude* focused broader interest on Latin American fic-**

# AN OVERVIEW OF GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ'S WORK

\*Books are discussed in Major Works

## NOVELS

### Leaf Storm/La Hojarasca, 1955

García Márquez's first novella, influenced by William Faulkner, introduces Macondo, the mythical village that reappears throughout his work. The story: an honorable Colonel promises to bury the Doctor, a hated foreigner. A frighteningly humorous look at the town's past, present, and future ensues.

### No One Writes to the Colonel/El Coronel No Tiene Quien Le Escriba, 1961

García Márquez started this novel when he was in Paris, but published it years later. In a town near Macondo, the Colonel, a character loosely based on García Márquez's grandfather, unfailingly waits for pension checks that never arrive. Although poverty stricken, he does have one thing: a prize-winning fighting cock. But

to keep this rooster in shape for the next match, he must feed it—and starve himself.

### Big Mama's Funeral/Los Funerales de la Mamá Grande, 1962

García Márquez derived the themes for this collection of eight stories when he sold encyclopedias in 1853.

### In Evil Hour/La Mala Hora, 1962

A short novel originally titled "This Town of Shit." Influenced by Ernest Hemingway, this story revisits the town and characters in *No One Writes to the Colonel*. Yet this time, the townspeople are gossipy and malicious, and the country is falling apart. Scenes from this dark novel inspired *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

### \* One Hundred Years of Solitude/Cien Años de Solidad, 1967

### The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor/ Relato de un Naufrago, 1970

In 1955 a Colombian ship full of contraband sank at sea. One of the survivors told his story to García Márquez, who then serialized it in *El Espectador* (and later published it as a novel). The survivor's version was contrary to the government's, causing his own, and the newspaper's, spectacular downfall.

### \* The Autumn of the Patriarch/El Otoño del Patriarca, 1975

### Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories/ La Increíble y Triste Historia da la Cándida Eréndira, 1978

A young girl, Eréndira, accidentally sets fire to her grandmother's house, and her grandmother sells her into prostitution. The other eleven short stories, including

tion and led the way to the author's Nobel Prize."Time, 3/7/83.

"The narrative is a magician's trick in which memory and prophecy, illusion and reality are mixed and often made to look the same. It is, in short, very much like García Márquez's astonishing novel."

The New York Times, 3/8/70.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** García Márquez's undisputed masterpiece.

### The Autumn of the Patriarch/El Otoño del Patriarca (1975)

García Márquez called this satirical novel "a poem on the solitude of power." This portrait of tyranny, which the author wrote after spending a year studying in Francisco Franco's Spain, reverberates to this day.

**THE STORY:** A Caribbean dictator on his deathbed represents the worst traits of South America's autocrats: cruelty, brutality, oppression. Yet the dying tyrant is caught in the prison of his own dictatorship—he's a paranoid monster who scours his palace for assassins each night, can't hold onto women, and fears God.

"[García Márquez 's] wheezing tyrant, with his flat feet and his hernia, sloping through a decrepit presidential

palace littered with cows and lepers and concubines, losing an obsessively loved woman during an eclipse, instituting a campaign for the canonization of his mother the birdwoman, listening indefatigably to radio soap operas whose scripts have been rigged to please him, is a myth come alive." New York Review of Books, 12/9/76.

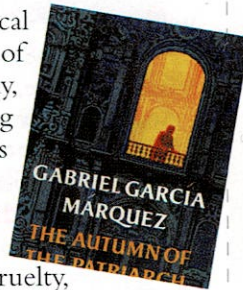
"As is to be expected from García Márquez, this novel about a Latin American dictator is mystical and surrealistic in its excesses, its distortions and its exotic language. It is a supreme polemic against any society that encourages or even permits the growth of such a dictator." The New York Times, Editors' Choice 1976.

**BOTTOM LINE:** García Márquez's most stylistically labyrinthine work, but rewarding in its stunning portrait of total-and flawed-power.

### Chronicle of a Death Foretold/ Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada (1983)

Fidel Castro helped proofread this novel, a Bogotá weekly was sued for 20 million pesos over it, and Rupert Everett starred in the movie.

**THE STORY:** García Márquez opens this novel with a marriage in a seaside Colombian town. On their wedding night, the husband inexplicably mistreats his new wife, who turns out to have certain skeletons in the closet. What ensues is a fatal-and inevitable-act of vengeance.



"Eyes of a Blue Dog" and "Eva Is Inside Her Cat," touch on themes of solitude and isolation.

\* **Chronicle of a Death Foretold/Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada, 1981**

\* **Love in the Time of Cholera/Amor en los Tiempos del Cólera, 1985**

**Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín/ La aventura de Miguel Littín Clandestino en Chile, 1986**

A journalistic account of Chilean film director Littín's filming of Chile's military dictatorship. García Márquez interviewed the filmmaker and then wrote a shocking account of military oppression.

\* **The General in His Labyrinth/El General en Su Labertino, 1989**

**Collected Stories Stories, 1990**  
A collection of 26 of García Márquez's stories found in three Spanish vol-

umes: *Eyes of a Blue Dog*, *Big Mama's Funeral*, and *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother*. The collection includes "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," which show the author's unsurpassed storytelling skill.

**Strange Pilgrims/Doce Cuentos Peregrinos, 1992**

A collection of twelve stories about Latin American ex-pats in Europe. Heralded as surreal and terrifying, these Twilight Zone-like stories-in which a wife unknowingly enters an insane asylum and a dog is trained to grieve for her owner-are among García Márquez's best.

**Of Love and Other Demons/ Del Amor y Otros Demonios, 1994**

The story of a doomed love affair between a 12-year old girl, Sierva María, and Father Cayetano, a 36-year old priest hired to exorcise the demons

she acquires from a rabid dog. This haunting novel, set in a colonial seaport in mythic South America, mirrors scenes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

**The Smell of the Guava Tree/Olor de la Guayaba, 1995**

A collection of articles from García Márquez's days as a journalist.

\* **News of a Kidnapping/Noticia de un Secuestro, 1996**

**For the Sake of a Country Within Reach of the Children, 1998**

García Márquez originally wrote this essay as a prologue to a "state of the nation" analysis published by a group of Colombian reformers. He paints an optimistic future of Colombia based on its human potential and national spirit.

**Collected Novellas, 1999**

Contains three novellas: *Leaf Storm*, *No One Writes to the Colonel*, and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

## GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ ON MODERNITY, AMERICAN-STYLE

García Márquez is not only extremely nationalistic, but anti-American as well. Officially, the feeling runs both ways. Despite his friendship with the Clintons, the U.S. is one of the few places that restricts the author's visa privileges. He worked in Cuba as a news reporter in 1959 and is chummy with Fidel Castro, whom he cites as "one of the greatest idealists of our time" (*The New Republic*, 8/25/97). García Márquez has this to say about the U.S.:

### ON DEMOCRACY

"Democracy in the developed countries is a product of their own development and not vice versa. To try to introduce it in a crude form into countries with other cultures-like those of Latin America-is as mechanical and unreal as to try to introduce the Soviet system." *The New Republic*, 8/25/97.

### IN DEFENSE OF PRESIDENTIAL SCANDALS

"It is one thing to lie in order to deceive; but it is quite another to conceal truths in order to protect that mythical dimension of human existence that is private life . . . Disastrously, with the same insistence with which he had denied blame, [Bill Clinton] later admitted [his affair with Monica Lewinsky] and went on admitting it over all the media, written, visual and spoken, to the point of humiliation-a fatal error in an uncertain lover, whose secret life will go into the history books not for having made love badly but for having made it a lot less glorious than it should be." *salon.com*, 8/19/02.

### ON CUBAN REFUGEES

"Nobody in Miami seems to care about the harm being done to [Elián González'] mental health by the cultural uprooting to which he is being subjected. At his 6th birthday party . . . his hosts took a picture of him wearing a combat helmet, surrounded by weapons and wrapped in the flag of the United States, just a short while before a boy of his age in Michigan shot a classmate to death with a handgun. In other words, the real shipwreck of Elián did not take place on the high seas, but when he set foot on American soil." *The New York Times*, 3/29/00.

"The book, as is to be expected from García Márquez, is mystical, surrealistic, Rabelaisian in its excesses, its distortions and its exotic language. But García Márquez's sense of life is that surreality is as much the norm as banality." *The New York Times*, 10/31/76.

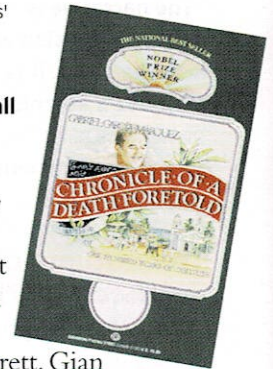
"[The novel] is a short, strange and ingeniously conceived metaphysical detective story in which the detective, García Márquez, reconstructs the events associated

with a murder that occurred in a Caribbean town 27 years before . . . This murder will stand among the many in modern literature as one of the most powerfully rendered." *The New York Times Book Review*, Editors' Choice 1983.

"*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a small book, hardly more than a novella (as Henry James would call it), but in no sense is it a minor work." *New York Review of Books*, 4/14/83.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A powerful novel that shows the power of fate over human will.

**MOVIE:** 1988, starring Rupert Everett, Gian Maria Volonte, and Ornella Muti and directed by Francesco Rosi.



## Love in the Time of Cholera/ El Amor en los Tiempos del Cólera (1985)

García Márquez based this tragicomic story of unrequited love on his parents' strange, but not as extraordinarily lengthy, courtship.

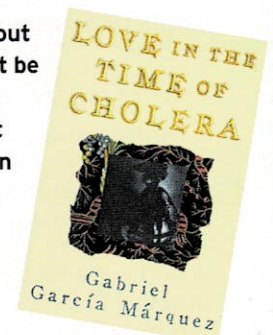
**STORY:** A vow of love takes 51 years, nine months, and four days to fulfill. The pathetic Florentino Ariza courts the youthful Fermina Daza, only to lose her to the wealthy Juneval Urbino. At the latter's funeral 51 years later, Ariza again declares his love to Fermina, precipitating a chain of events that reunites the couple near the end of their lives.

"Love's power to grow in such dark interstices, to transcend life's profanities yet remain elusively unscathed, to remain even sacred, is one of the most skillfully rendered themes of the novel." *Arete Magazine*, 12/88.

"This may be the only way to write about love; without the darkness there might be romance, erotica, social comedy, soap opera—all also present in this book—but not the Big L. . . . this novel can return our worn souls to us." *The New York Times*, Editors' Choice 1988.

"What distinguishes this novel from the sentimental work it continuously alludes to is not irony or distance but a certain persistent lucidity. This is not a tearful text; just scrupulously loyal to tearful stories." *New York Review of Books*, 4/28/88.

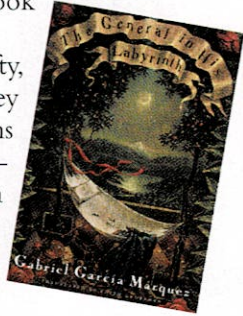
**THE BOTTOM LINE:** *The New York Times* says it best: "This shining and heartbreaking novel may be one of the greatest love stories ever told."



## The General in his Labyrinth/ El General en Su Labertino. (1990)

There is history in fiction, and fiction in history. Nowhere does García Márquez meld the two more tightly than in this look at Simón Bolívar's last years.

**THE STORY:** As Bolívar, age fifty, takes a seven month river journey from Bogotá to the sea, he remains caught in a past of his own making: the dream of South American liberation and his wars, loves, and transgressions. The once-fierce Liberator dies as the world he created dissolves around him.



**"Between them, Simon Bolivar and Gabriel García Márquez invented Latin America. That one of these continental dreamers should novelize the other isn't a surprise."** *The Nation*, 12/3/90.

**"One hardly expects a carefully realistic historical novel from an author as noted for imaginative ingenuity as is Mr. Márquez's, but such a novel is what he has chosen to write, and he has done it extremely well."** *The Atlantic*, Oct. 1990.

**"Gabriel García Márquez, with more than a few touches of his novelist's art, has improved on history."** *New York Review of Books*, 10/11/90.

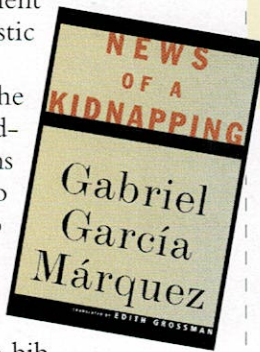
**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Tough, compassionate, hallucinatory. For those primarily interested in Bolívar's life.

## News of a Kidnapping (1997)

García Márquez claims that he is "really a journalist who just happens to write some fiction on the side" (*The New Yorker*, 9/27/99). This harrowing, insider account of Colombia's violent drug wars confirms that journalistic talent.

**THE STORY:** Set in Colombia in the early '90s, this story recalls the kidnappings of prominent Colombians by the agents of drug trafficker Pablo Escobar, who feared extradition to the U.S. Ten prominent Colombians were kidnapped and held hostage. Two died, the rest were released, and Escobar surrendered. But "the biblical holocaust that has been consuming Colombia for more than twenty years" has yet to end.

**"While the language in *News of a Kidnapping* is reportorial, even flat, a far cry indeed from the luxuriant prose of the author's novels, the narrative possesses all the drama and**



## THE NOBEL PRIZE

### THE LECTURE

"... Europeans of good will—and sometimes those of bad, as well—have been struck, with ever greater force, by the unearthly tidings of Latin America, that boundless realm of haunted men and historic women, whose unending obstinacy blurs into legend. We have not had a moment's rest... In spite of this, to oppression, plundering and abandonment, we respond with life. Neither floods nor plagues, famines nor cataclysms, nor even the eternal wars of century upon century, have been able to subdue the persistent advantage of life over death... [W]e, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth." *Gabriel García Márquez*, 12/8/82

### ... AND THE NOBLE DISSENTERS

**Not everyone agreed that García Márquez deserved the Nobel Prize.**

**JOHN UPDIKE**, author of 26 novels: "A fine choice, but... I'd rather have seen Borges get it; he's at the end of his career. Márquez is a writer of true significance, yet offhand, I can't think of anyone who has received the Nobel who has published less."

**Professor, novelist, and poet ROBERTO RUIZ:** "I do not grudge García Márquez the award... [But] there are at least a half-dozen Latin American writers more deserving of the Nobel Prize... If you consider the novel depends on fantasies, fine; but the philosophical depth of those older writers is absent, I'm sorry to say, in García Márquez"

**Novelist KURT VONNEGUT:** "No writer is going to object to the naming of García Márquez. Of course, you hear random rumors. I knew my name had come up. Usually, there aren't leaks like that. But what the hell."

**emotional resonance of García Márquez's most powerful fiction."** *The New York Times*, 6/19/97.

**"This surreal drama would seem like perfect raw material for García Márquez's fantastical talent, yet *News of a Kidnapping* is surprisingly flat and unsuspenseful."** *salon.com*, 7/2/97.

**"To give an intelligible account of the kidnappings and the negotiations, García Márquez has made use of all his storyteller's ingenuity."** *New York Review of Books*, 10/9/97.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** One of García Márquez's finest pieces of journalism. ■