CRITICAL COMPANIONS TO POPULAR CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

Gabriel García Márquez

A Critical Companion

RUBÉN PELAYO

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The Life of Gabriel García Márquez

The genius, popularity, and charisma of Gabriel García Márquez make him peerless among Spanish American writers of the second half of the twentieth century. The name Gabriel García Márquez is as synonymous with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as is the name of Spanish novelist, playwright, and poet Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616) with *Don Quixote*. Grouping the names of García Márquez and Cervantes is not as arbitrary as it may seem. In fact, most literary oriented people around the world have come to associate the name of each of these authors, directly or indirectly, with one particular work out of the many that they wrote. Though Gabriel García Márquez, to date, is an active and prolific writer, he continues to be primarily associated with his 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The life of García Márquez is filled with literary prizes, homages, honorary degrees, and friendship with world figures in literature, politics, and the Church. Among the list of friends most frequently mentioned by scholars are Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, British novelist Graham Greene, French President François Miterrand, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Panamanian nationalist General Omar Torrijos, and the Colombian priest Camilo Torres. Camilo Torres, a friend from García Márquez's years in college, became a priest; baptized García Márquez's first son, Gonzalo; and in the 1960s became a popular figure for turning priesthood into a form of rebellion (Liberation Theology). He was killed by the Colombian armed forces in 1966. Gabriel

García Márquez, now in his seventies, enjoys wealth and fame. Fame, he says, is great—but after all the fanfare associated with being famous is over, he adds humorously, the only real benefit is not having to stand in line (Lemus 272).

In August 1995, invited by the American author William Styron to a dinner party at Styron's summer home in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, García Márquez met U.S. President Bill Clinton. At the dinner party, where Mexican novelist, short-story writer, playwright, and critic Carlos Fuentes was also a guest, García Márquez reminded President Clinton that during his first campaign for the presidency, Clinton had said that his favorite book was *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, perhaps in an effort to win the Hispanic vote. Clinton replied that his comment regarding *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was a sincere one and recited the opening sentence: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." The dinner started at eight and ended around midnight. García Márquez wrote an article about it for the Argentine newspaper *Clarín Digital* (available through the Internet). But aside from being a friend of important people, who exactly is this man, whose works have been translated into all leading languages and who, in October 1982, was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature?

Gabriel García Márquez was born on March 6, 1928, in Aracataca, Colombia. "Aracataca is a small town in the foothills of a spur of the Andes, near the Atlantic coast. The town has a small railroad station, a river with clear water and large white boulders, a street of Turks, and a few African Colombians" (Janes 1991, 4). However, Colombia is larger "than Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana taken together" (McNerney 3). The town of Aracataca, where García Márquez was born, is hardly visible on most maps. However, it is now a common name for scholars and students of Spanish American letters. Aracataca is the geographical reference García Márquez uses to create the imaginary *Macondo*. Known the world over as Gabriel García Márquez but to his family and friends as *Gabo* or *Gabito*, García Márquez was baptized Gabriel José. He was the firstborn of twelve children, of whom seven were boys. He was named after his father, Gabriel Eligio García.

Gabriel Eligio García, of whom the author very seldom speaks, came to the small town of Aracataca looking for a better life as a telegraph operator after having dropped out of medical school at the University of Cartagena, Colombia. It was in Aracataca that Gabriel Eligio García met Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, the only child of Colonel Nicolás Márquez Iguarán and Tranquilina Iguarán Cotes. Although the town's telegraph operator eventually married the young, beautiful, and aristo-

cratic Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, her parents were against it. The Márquez Iguarán family was among the most prominent families of the town's aristocracy and did not want a poor outsider to marry their daughter (Vargas Llosa 14). As a condition to consenting to the young lovers' marriage, the bride's parents demanded that the newlyweds move away from the town. Consequently, the young couple moved to Ríohacha in 1927. (Ríohacha is a coastal town in the Guajira peninsula, facing the Caribbean.) These biographical details appear in such García Márquez's works as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera.*

García Márquez's maternal grandparents, Colonel Nicolás Márquez Iguarán and his wife, Tranquilina, came to Aracataca in the early 1900s. Aracataca, at that time, was little more than a village of a few families, where the colonel was greatly respected as a retired military man with liberal ideals. Colonel Nicolás Márquez Iguarán came to Aracataca after fighting in a war known to historians as La guerra de los mil días or the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902), which had left Colombia bankrupt. García Márquez's grandfather fought under the orders of the liberal general Rafael Uribe Uribe. Understanding the background of García Márquez's maternal grandparents and the War of a Thousand Days is important in appreciating the plot of most of García Márquez's works. In fact, most of his writings were both inspired by, and modeled after, his maternal grandparents, his parents, and the stories they told him when he was growing up. Either because his mother's parents did not want the young couple to live in the town of Aracataca or because it did not offer the upward mobility necessary for the young couple to prosper, García Márquez spent the first eight years of his life in the house and care of his maternal grandparents. Doña Tranquilina, his grandmother, seems to have been an example of the materfamilias (female head of the household); she was a matriarch, empress of the house, industrious and forceful, prolific, with great common sense, incorruptible in adversity, and iron-willed. She was the organizer of the life of a large family, for which she served as the head and the unifying force. She was one of García Márquez's literary pillars and also the model for a series of female characters that appear in his books (Vargas Llosa 24). Of his maternal grandparents, García Márquez pointed out that "they were descendants of Galicians, great yarn spinners remotely related to the Celts" (McNerney 7).

Nine months after García Márquez was born, another incident of major proportions took place in Colombia, which was to appear, in fictional form, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: "On 6 December, in the Ciénaga

train station, striking banana workers are fired on by troops from Antioquia. Casualty estimates range from 9 to 3,000 dead" (Janes 1991, ix). This incident, as conveyed through oral tradition (a story or incident passed on by word of mouth) and, later, by way of publications was to stay in the author's mind forever. In addition to its mention in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it also appears, as a reference, in *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985).

In 1940, when García Márquez was twelve, he obtained a scholarship to study at the Colegio Nacional (national secondary school) at Zapaquirá near Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. In 1946 he finished high school and entered the national university in Bogotá to study law. In 1947 he published his first short story, later translated as "The Third Resignation," in a liberal daily newspaper in Bogotá called *El Espectador* (The Spectator). A year later he began work as a journalist for the same newspaper. García Márquez's first publications were all short stories, which appeared from 1947 to 1952 in the newspapers *El Espectador* of Bogotá and *El Heraldo* (The Herald) of Barranquilla. During those years he published a total of fifteen short stories.

"The Third Resignation," as might be expected by most readers of García Márquez, deals with the theme of death. George McMurray, among many others, has emphasized that this and the other tales of these years were influenced by readings of the Czech-born German writer Franz Kafka. The other short stories McMurray mentions were translated as "The Other Side of Death," "Eva Is Inside Her Cat," and "Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses." McMurray also noted the influence of other authors in several of Márquez's other short stories, such as the influence of the American novelist and short story writer William Faulkner in "Nabo, the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait" and the influence of another American novelist and short story writer, Ernest Hemingway, in "The Woman Who Arrived at Six O'Clock" (McMurray 1977, 6). These suggested influences in Gabriel García Márquez's short stories, as well as in his novels, will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

By 1978, all the short stories except "Nabo, the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait" were published under the title *Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories*. In 1984, "Nabo, the Black Man Who Made the Angels Wait" and twenty-five other stories were published in one volume, *Collected Stories*, in the chronological order in which they appeared in Spanish (see Chapter 5).

During García Márquez's second year as a law student, Colombia was going through a period of civil unrest. On April 9, 1948, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a populist left-wing politician and presidential candidate, was

assassinated. (Populism is a political philosophy opposing the concentration of power in the hands of corporations, the government, and the rich.) The murder of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán unleashed what journalists and historians have called the Bogotazo, a "bloody uprising that raged for several days in the capital city" (McMurray 1977, 6).

The assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán is also remembered as the beginning of a savage, undeclared civil war between conservatives and liberals better known as La violencia (the Violence). In response, hundreds of people rushed onto the streets of Bogotá and the rest of the country to fight the people of the Conservative Party, who had killed their leader. Ironically, it was the elitist members of the Liberal Party, in conjunction with elitist Conservative members, who had actually killed Eliécer Gaitán. While the Bogotazo is supposed to have lasted for three days of constant gunfire, the period known as La violencia lasted well into the 1960s (roughly from 1948 to 1964), thus amounting to an unofficial civil war. This violent period of sixteen years in Colombian history, which pitted liberals against conservatives, took as many as 300,000 lives. The hatred of those years is clearly reflected in the main theme of García Márquez's *In Evil Hour* and plays an important role in his *No One Writes to the Colonel*.

In 1948, due to the unrest taking place in Bogotá, García Márquez, now twenty, moved to Cartagena, the coastal city where *Love in the Time of Cholera* takes place. When García Márquez was a youth of twenty, wrote Anderson, pictures showed him as skinny and badly dressed. He wanted to be a journalist and to write novels; he also wanted to do something to bring about a more just society. He continued to study law but spent most of his time writing for the local newspaper. By 1950, he gave up his aspirations of becoming a lawyer and left the city of Cartagena for Barranquilla. The newspaper *El Heraldo* gave him a column, for which he wrote under the pseudonym of Septimus (Latin for "seventh"). The young García Márquez took the pseudonym, points out Regina Janes, from a book by Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Janes 1991, 3). The newspaper column was known as "La Jirafa" (The Giraffe). Perhaps it was here, in the port city of Barranquilla on the Magdalena River, that García Márquez decided to become a writer. Now aged twenty-two, having left legal studies and formally writing a newspaper column, he joined an informal group of young, aspiring writers that revolved around Ramón Vinyes, an older Catalan refugee from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), whom García Márquez depicted as a fictional character, an old Catalan who owns a bookstore, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Among the group's members, most scholars mention Alvaro Cepeda Sa-

mudio, Germán Vargas, and Alfonso Fuenmayor, whom García Márquez depicted as secondary characters in *No One Writes to the Colonel* and as a mere reference in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Among the authors that the young group read, in translation, were Irish novelist James Joyce; American writers John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Edgar Allan Poe; British author Virginia Woolf; French novelist Marcel Proust; and French poet and adventurer Arthur Rimbaud. Although this group of non–Latin American writers is nearly always mentioned when describing what the group read, rarely is there any mention of the Latin American writers that also served García Márquez as models (see Chapter 2).

García Márquez continued to write for *El Heraldo* for four years and then, in 1954, returned to Bogotá. This time his work as a newspaper writer was not as a columnist, but as a reporter for *El Espectador*.

In 1955, a year after his return to Bogotá, García Márquez published short stories, including "One Day After Saturday" and "Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo," along with his first novella, *Leaf Storm* (see Chapter 3).

It was while García Márquez was working as a reporter of news and sports and writer of political commentaries that *El Espectador* sent him to Europe. He worked in Geneva, Switzerland, and Rome, Italy, as a foreign correspondent. In Rome he studied cinematography for several months but soon found himself unemployed: the dictator of Colombia, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, closed down *El Espectador* due to its liberal orientation. García Márquez's short stay in Rome did allow him to write his second novel, *In Evil Hour*, which was not published until years later. One of the reasons for postponing its publication until 1966 may have been the references to Rojas Pinilla's dictatorship. *In Evil Hour*, which serves as a sort of prelude to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, portrays the political tension and oppression in a rural town, whose inhabitants aspire to peace and justice but get neither. Triggered by mysteriously distributed lampoons, the townspeople end up killing each other.

After his stay in Rome, García Márquez moved to Paris in 1956. In Europe, he learned that he was indeed a Latin American writer. He realized, then, that he belonged to this group geographically, culturally, and emotionally. Besides being Colombian, he was Latin American; he could identify with the Latin American people he met in Paris, whether Argentines, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Bolivians, or Brazilians, yet not with the Europeans (Lemus 271).

In Paris, although broke and unemployed, he managed to survive. He cashed in his return ticket and was helped by the generosity of an un-

derstanding landlady, who waited patiently for the rent on the cheap hotel room where he stayed. Paris, nevertheless, inspired him to write *No One Writes to the Colonel*, which was published in 1958.

The previous year, in the company of Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, a friend from his college days, García Márquez traveled to what was then the Soviet Union and to other Eastern European nations. The following year, now aged thirty, he found himself once again working as a journalist. This time he was writing for two Venezuelan newspapers: *Venezuela gráfica* (Venezuelan Graphics) and *Elite*, both in the country's capital city, Caracas. In that same year (1958), there was "a major political event, which inspired one of his subsequent works, the downfall of the Venezuelan dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez" (McMurray 1977, 7). This event provided the seed for his work *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975). Among the many important events in the life of García Márquez, two occurred in 1958. One was his marriage to Mercedes Barcha, the striking daughter of an Egyptian emigrant; the other was the publication of *No One Writes to the Colonel* in Spanish.

No One Writes to the Colonel presents the reader with a simple story line: an impoverished, seventy-five-year-old colonel waits for his veteran's pension. In the meantime, the police kill his son, the town falls under martial law, and the pension never arrives. The colonel nonetheless has faith that his pension will come, but his wife, who is more realistic, does not. The tension, violence, and oppression of the fiction reflect the Colombia under the dictatorship of those times. As if explaining why García Márquez could not identify with Europeans, in *No One Writes to the Colonel* the narrator states: "To the Europeans, South America is a man with a mustache, a guitar, and a gun. . . . They don't understand the problem" (138).

In the next year, 1959, García Márquez's first son, Rodrigo, was born in Bogotá. (Rodrigo is now a movie director and lives in Los Angeles, California.) The same year, the Cuban *guerrilla* (an irregular military force; from the Spanish *guerra*, meaning "war") under Fidel Castro marched triumphantly into Havana, Cuba. Fidel Castro defeated the regime of General Fulgencio Batista. Batista (1901–1973) was twice president of Cuba, from 1940 to 1944 and 1952 to 1959. The overthrow of Fulgencio Batista brought changes in the minds of most Hispanic intellectuals, students of higher education, and the like. Gabriel García Márquez was no exception. He joined the Castro regime and became director of the "Castro government's news agency, *Prensa Latina* [Latin Press], first in Bogotá, then in Havana, and finally in New York. He resigned from this position in 1961" (McMurray 1977, 7). However, according to

a long article published in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1999, although García Márquez ran *Prensa Latina* in Bogotá, the head was actually Jorge Ricardo Masetti, a young Argentine journalist who was the protégé of the now-legendary Ernesto Guevara, better known as Che Guevara (Anderson 66). After his resignation from *Prensa Latina*, García Márquez traveled to Mexico City by bus, by way of the American Southeast. As many scholars have noted, he wanted to see the American South, which had inspired the writings of William Faulkner; and so he, his wife, Mercedes, and his two-year-old son, Rodrigo, traveled through Mississippi to New Orleans and then to Mexico City, where they settled.

In 1962, now living in Mexico City, García Márquez and Mercedes had a second son, Gonzalo. (Gonzalo, currently a graphic designer, still lives in Mexico City.) In that same year García Márquez published two books: *Big Mama's Funeral*, a collection of short stories, and the short novel *In Evil Hour*, for which Colombia awarded him the Esso Literary Prize. Most of the short stories discussed in Chapter 5 of this book come from the collection *Big Mama's Funeral*.

Life in Mexico City suited García Márquez, who wrote prolifically there. While working for the Walter Thompson advertising agency, he wrote a screenplay with the noted Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes. The screenplay, based on a short story by Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, was called *The Golden Cock* (El gallo de oro). Gabriel García Márquez's passion for cinematography influenced much of his writings and encouraged others to adapt some of his works for the big screen. Several of his works, both short stories and novels, have been presented as films and on television. The following list is available in videocassette format: *Maria My Dearest*, in Spanish, Mexico, 1979; *Eréndira*, in Spanish with subtitles, Mexico, 1983; *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, in Spanish with subtitles, 1987; *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, in Spanish with subtitles, Cuba, 1988. A year later, in 1989, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* became the title work of a collection of six short stories by García Márquez advertised in the United States as a "boxed set." The collection included the following stories in videocassette format: *Letters from the Park, Miracle in Rome, The Summer of Miss Forbes, I'm the One You're Looking For*, and *The Fable of the Beautiful Pigeon Fancier*. All six were filmed in Spanish, with English subtitles.

García Márquez has three other major screen plays: *Dangerous Game*, in Spanish, Mexico, 1966; *A Time to Die*, in Spanish, Mexico, 1985; and *Oedipus Mayor*, in Spanish, cowritten with Stella Malagón, Colombia, 1996. The most recent screenplay is *No One Writes to the Colonel*, in Span-

ish, Mexico, 1999. *No One Writes to the Colonel* was shown at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival.

According to several scholars, 1964 was a year of seclusion and of writer's block. García Márquez overcame his writer's block in January 1965 while driving to the Mexican tourist port of Acapulco. A novel that had been somehow appearing as if in segments—with the invention of Macondo and the character of Colonel Buendía, the use of a cyclical form of time and the repetitiveness of events, the image of identical twins, and other elements—seemed to come together, like pieces of a puzzle that suddenly fit perfectly. Gabriel García Márquez has said that he turned back, right there and then, and returned to his home studio to write. He did not want to miss the opportunity to put into writing this novel, which had been in gestation since he was in his early twenties. Back in Mexico City, in his house on the street of La Loma (The Hill), in the opulent neighborhood of *San Angel* (Saint Angel), he closed the doors of his studio—known to the García Márquez family and friends as "La Cueva de la Mafia" (the Mafia's cave)—for nearly a year and a half. As always, the superstitious García Márquez wrote with a yellow rose, for luck, on top of his desk. During those eighteen months, he worked for eight to ten hours each day.

In June 1967 his masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, was published in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The book became an immediate best-seller: "not since *Madame Bovary* [by French novelist Gustave Flaubert] has a work been received with the simultaneous popular success and critical acclaim that greeted *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" (Janes 1991, 13). *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in the original Spanish, was a great success, and

> the first edition sold out in a few days, as well as the second, and the third, and the ones thereafter. In three and a half years, the book sold almost half a million copies; and his previous four books were reprinted in large numbers in the Spanish speaking world. (Vargas Llosa 78)

The popularity of this book soon reached the interest of publishing houses the world over. Some of the first translations were also winners of honors: in 1969 in Italy, the book won the Premio Chianchiano (Chianchiano award); the same year in France, it won the Prix du meilleur livre étranger (Award for Best Foreign Book); in 1970 in the United States, it was selected as one of the best twelve books of the year by *Time* maga-

zine. As of 1997 *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has now been translated into more than thirty languages and has sold close to 30 million copies.

In 1967, for both personal and professional reasons, García Márquez moved to Barcelona, a port city on the Mediterranean in northeastern Spain. In 1970 the Colombian government offered him a consul post in Barcelona but he declined the offer. Although García Márquez never finished college, in 1971 Columbia University in New York City awarded him an honorary doctorate of letters. In 1972 he published a book of short stories, some of which were intended for children. The book holds the longest title of all his books: *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother*. In that same year, he also received, for his works to date, the literary Rómulo Gallegos Prize in Venezuela.

In 1974 García Márquez founded a left-wing magazine, *Alternativa* (Alternative), which ran through 1980. After eight years in Barcelona, Spain, he returned to Mexico. In 1975 he published a novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. The novel depicts a place in the Caribbean, never identified, where the protagonist is a general and a dictator. American critic Raymond Williams found it difficult to read. The plot, Williams wrote, is not developed in a consistent fashion; the anecdotes do not appear in chronological order, and, moreover, they sometimes include such gross anachronisms as the presence of Christopher Columbus and U.S. Marines in the same scene. Nonetheless, he considers it a major book for both García Márquez and the field of the contemporary Latin American novel (Williams 1989, 149, 147). The plot, although difficult to follow, traces the fight for absolute power and the exploitation that the Spanish Americas have gone through, from Christopher Columbus to the present (1975 in the novel). The basis for this novel is the Venezuelan government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez during the period when García Márquez worked as a journalist there. In Latin America there is a literary tradition called *novela de la dictadura* (dictatorship novel). *The Autumn of the Patriarch* serves to enrich this tradition.

Whether because, as García Márquez announced in 1975, he would not write any more fiction for as long as right-wing (conservative and reactionary) General Augusto Pinochet ruled Chile, or because he was so involved in the politics of the Third World, the second half of the 1970s came and went without any new published works. García Márquez's political ideas have a left-wing or socialist orientation (individuals on the left wing pursue liberal or egalitarian political goals). They became most obvious right after the assassination of Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973. The right-wing dictatorial regime of Augusto

Pinochet, which followed the assassination, continued in power through the 1980s. Gabriel García Márquez, however, broke his vow to publish no fiction during Augusto Pinochet's regime by publishing, in 1981, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. In the same year, García Márquez attended the inauguration of Socialist president François Miterrand in France, where he was awarded the Legion of Honor medal for his work as a writer and activist.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold presents the reader with a text that explores why an entire town allows a senseless murder to occur in the name of hypocritical honor codes (Alvarez-Borland 219). The action of the novel revolves around a matter of honor. Twin brothers, Pedro and Pablo, announce at the town's main plaza that they are going to kill Santiago Nasar. No one in the town does anything to stop the killing (hence, the death is foretold). The reason for the killing is to restore the family's honor—Santiago Nasar is supposed to have taken their sister's virginity. The story (made into a film in 1987) is based on an actual murder that occurred in Colombia in 1951 (Penuel 188).

Fifteen years after the great global success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez won the greatest recognition that can be bestowed on a writer. In 1982, in the city and port of Stockholm, Sweden, the Nobel Foundation awarded him the Nobel Prize in literature. The speech that he delivered, as his readers may imagine, was on "The Solitude of Latin America"; in fact, that was also the speech's title. Winning the Nobel Prize brought him fame and fortune, but his political orientation did not change. His work as a left-wing political activist is well known, and his newspaper columns, as well as his essays, short stories, and novels, often reflect his political interest in fighting for egalitarian goals.

In 1983 García Márquez started a Colombian newspaper, *El Otro* (The Other), for which he interviewed M-19 (a Colombian guerrilla movement) leader Jaime Bateman in an attempt to establish a dialogue between the guerrillas and the Colombian government. The guerrilla movement in Colombia has grown, and to date, the dialogue with the Colombian government has not made a difference in bringing peace.

In 1985 García Márquez appeared with Fidel Castro in Managua, Nicaragua, at the inauguration of president Daniel Ortega (McMurray 1977, 8). The same year, in Barcelona, Spain, he published a novel in the form of a nontraditional love story, *Love in the Times of Cholera*. It is nontraditional because the lovers find love in their "golden years"—in their seventies, when death is all around them (see Chapter 8).

Although Gabriel García Márquez is better known as a novelist and

short story writer, his work as a journalist has been documented in several volumes throughout the years. In 1981, García Márquez's journalistic work was published in book form in Barcelona, Spain, under the title *Obra periodística: Volume 1, Textos costeños* (Newspaper articles: Volume 1, Coastal texts). Volumes 2 and 3 were published the following year and share the title *Entre cachacos* (Among cachacos). To Colombians, the word *cachaco* functions to describe someone both elegant and courteous. More often than not, however, the word carries a pejorative meaning; coastal peoples of Colombia believe that *cachacos*, a term used to refer to those from the interior, are often not trustworthy. A fourth volume of journalism was published in 1983 under the title *De Europa y América (1955–1960)* (Of Europe and America, 1955–1960). Although, perhaps with false modesty, García Márquez calls himself primarily a journalist, critics seldom study his journalistic work.

One of García Márquez's most popular recent journalistic accounts is *The Adventure of Miguel Littín Underground in Chile*, first published in Madrid, Spain, in 1986. The book, which depicts the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, "went through three editions within a few months, helped, perhaps, by the burning of some 15,000 copies by supporters of Pinochet in Santiago [Chile's capital city] who felt threatened by such exposure" (McNerney 12).

By the end of the 1980s (1989, to be exact), García Márquez had published another novel about decay and death: *The General in His Labyrinth*. This time, as the author wrote in the acknowledgments, the idea was not his own. His friend, Colombian writer Alvaro Mutis, started the project and passed it on to García Márquez. To write this novel, which focuses on the last fourteen days of the life of the great South American liberator Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), García Márquez used historians, political figures, a linguist, a geographer, and an astronomer, among others, as consultants. His writing style, nevertheless, makes the historical events and the long list of biographical names and geographical places almost as accessible as his fictional works. One sees Simón Bolívar as a man with strengths and weaknesses, not a mythic historical hero.

In the 1990s, worldwide audiences enjoyed more of García Márquez's mastery of magic realism with the publication in 1992 of *Doce cuentos peregrinos (Strange Pilgrims)*. The book, as the title suggests in Spanish, contains twelve (*"doce"*) short stories, some of which, explains García Márquez in the prologue, were previously published. In *Strange Pilgrims*, "Márquez not only tells stories, he weaves spells" according to the *New York Daily News*; "García Márquez remains one of the most entertaining writers in the world, as well as one of the best," stated the *Washington Post*.

The success of *Strange Pilgrims* was followed by *Of Love and Other Demons* in 1994. *Of Love and Other Demons* is a complex novel of forbidden love between a priest and a twelve-year-old girl; the background of the novel is the city of Cartagena. This is where Gabriel García Márquez commissioned the Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona to build his house, which became known as "La Casa del Escritor" (The House of the Writer).

Theater is one of the genres that Gabriel García Márquez has explored the least. However, in 1994, he published his first play in book form, *Diatribe of Love against a Sitting Man*. The play was originally written and staged in 1987, first in Havana, Cuba, and later in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Graciela, an older woman, is the only character. She carries on a long monologue in front of her husband, who is played by a mannequin. The mannequin is seated in a chair throughout the whole play, with a newspaper in his hands, as if reading and ignoring what she says. The role of Graciela is strongly critical of the upper class in a Colombian coastal town. Graciela's experience, defying a patriarchal world, reflects a feminist approach.

In 1996 García Márquez published *News of a Kidnapping*. Combining the testimonial orientation of journalism and the author's own narrative style (humor included), the story depicts the huge wave of violence and kidnappings that Colombia continues to face. The book reports the news of ten kidnappings masterminded by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar of the Medellín drug cartel. It follows the government's response under President César Gaviria's term in office (1990–1994) and examines the psychology of the people involved: those kidnapped, their families and friends, and the nation at large. The book, explains García Márquez in the acknowledgments, took nearly three years to write and closely follows the account of the abduction of Maruja Pachón and her husband, Alberto. In an interview for *El Tiempo*, a Colombian newspaper in Bogotá, García Márquez told journalist Roberto Pombo that reality indeed surpasses fiction. *News of a Kidnapping* reads like fiction, but it is all news, reported as a journalist would report it. "Throughout the book I use not one single fact that is not truthful and documented, and the language that I use has not one single metaphor so as to keep the austerity of language in journalism" (Pombo 457).

In September 1999, American author Jon Lee Anderson published (in *The New Yorker*) a most revealing account of Gabriel García Márquez. Anderson had the opportunity to meet with the Colombian author and his wife, Mercedes, for several months at García Márquez's house in Bogotá. Anderson, who visited Aracataca, the town that inspired the

creation of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, focused on recent events in Colombia and the role that García Márquez has played as a mediator of peace. Anderson comments on the social and historical aspects that helped to shape the background of García Márquez's writing and remarks on some of García Márquez's books. His account recounts the facts of Gabriel García Márquez's life, as commonly known to scholars and documented in this chapter, and it also examines García Márquez's friendship with Fidel Castro.

According to Anderson, in 1999 García Márquez traveled in a midsize sedan with bullet-proof windows and a bomb-proof chassis, followed by secret-service agents. He describes the Colombian author as a short, deep-chested man with a careful, almost regal bearing. His curly hair is gray, and he has a white mustache and bushy eyebrows. García Márquez seems to be what Colombians call a *mamagallista* (a joker). The humor a reader often finds in García Márquez's writings is mirrored in the author's own life. For instance, minutes before receiving the prestigious Nobel Prize in literature, he jokingly posed for a photo in which he is shoeless and dressed in thermal underwear. His hand is resting on the arm of Colombian media director Alvaro Castaño Castillo, who is impeccably dressed in formal attire.

Sadly, at the time of this writing, García Márquez suffers from lymphatic cancer, for which he is receiving treatment. "He's essentially a Social Democrat, with a little Communist hidden in his heart" (Anderson 66). García Márquez's relationship with Fidel Castro continues to be questioned by his other friends. Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, one of García Márquez's life-long friends, compares Fidel Castro to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and was quoted as saying that when Castro dies, "we will hear about all the atrocities that happened during his [Fidel Castro's] rule. And I don't think it will help Gabo to have been such a friend of his" (Anderson 68). Several times García Márquez has been offered senior ministerial positions and ambassadorships in Colombia, but he has always refused (Anderson 70). As of this writing, this grandfather of four was working on three novels and two volumes of memoirs.

2

Literary Contexts

Gabriel García Márquez belongs in any list of great names in literature. He is probably the best-known Latin American writer of the twentieth century and a genius in his ability to touch people of all cultures and inspire many other writers. His name appears in all anthologies of Latin American Literature, as well as in the encyclopedias of world literature that are considered to represent the canon (an accepted standard). García Márquez is internationally recognized as a Latin American author of novels and short stories. He comments frequently, however, that he sees himself as a storyteller, first, and then as a journalist. García Márquez's career as a journalist began in 1948. Since then, he has written countless reports, essays, and documentaries. His work often starts as a journalistic piece. *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (1970), based on a true story, started as fourteen news articles he wrote for the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* (The Spectator). Also based on a true story and using a journalistic style of reporting, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was published in 1981. Another journalistic work in documentary form that enjoys large readership is *Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín* (1986). In this book, García Márquez retells the story Miguel Littín told to him: it serves as a depiction of Chile after twelve years of dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. In *News of a Kidnapping* (1996), García Márquez's journalistic reporting deals with a notorious drug lord, Pablo Escobar, and a wave of kidnappings. Among the kidnapped (ten in total) were important Colombian people from politics and the news media.

As a writer of fiction, however, García Márquez is always associated with magic realism. In fact, he is considered the central figure of magic realism. There is still some controversy over the term, probably because the Anglo reader, unfamiliar with the social and historical context of Latin America, seems to pay closer attention to the magic than the reality. In general terms, *magic realism* is nowadays used to describe fiction that juxtaposes the fantastic and the mythic with ordinary activities of daily life. The novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is especially regarded as a work of magic realism. However, this label sometimes limits the reception and understanding of Gabriel García Márquez's writing. Due to the common understanding of magic realism, the reader may fail to understand that behind the masterfully told stories lies a realistic universe where the individual and the community breathe, think, love, and live and die for ideals they consider just. García Márquez's fictional universe is the response to a Latin American literary tradition that can be traced as far back as 1492. García Márquez, for instance, considers *The Journal of Christopher Columbus* to be a work of fiction. The first masterwork of the literature of magic realism is the *Diary of Columbus*, he says (Palencia-Roth 251). However, from the end of the fifteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century, there are over 500 years of Latin American letters. Therefore, to place García Márquez within the literary milieu (environment) of his time, the reader should take into consideration the Latin American tradition to which he conforms.

It is commonplace in the United States to quickly associate the name of García Márquez with those of William Faulkner, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. For example, the English-speaking reader can find echoes of James Joyce and William Faulkner in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Autumn of the Patriarch, Leaf Storm*, or many of his other works. However, to stop there, without viewing García Márquez's works in light of a Latin American literary tradition, fails to pay tribute to the Spanish literary heritage that precedes him.

In 1967, the Argentine critic Ernesto Volkening discussed Gabriel García Márquez's literary models for the short story. Volkening mentioned James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner—but only to comment that such observed models by some critics are inspired by a desire to invent a venerable genealogical tree for García Márquez. Those inventions are not based on a true appreciation of García Márquez's own merit as a narrator (Volkening 23–42). The analogies made by most critics between Faulkner and García Márquez seldom go beyond the obvious invention of a physical space: Yoknapatawpha, for William Faulkner,

and Macondo, for Gabriel García Márquez. Both physical environments are dusty and seemingly forgotten by the outside world. Nothing seems to change because of a constant return to the same environment. However, beyond the invention of a physical space, there are other similarities between the writings of the two authors. The legendary character Colonel Aureliano Buendía can be said to find his alter ego (another side of oneself) in Faulkner's John Sartoris of *Sartoris* (1929). Another analogy mentioned by Volkening as a common trait cited by most English-speaking critics is the fact that both Yoknapatawpha and Macondo are viewed by their authors as the center of their fictionalized worlds. In effect, Volkening complains about a deep-rooted "colonizing" way of thinking, whereby the critic is prompt to judge, classify, and name the value of a writer based on supposed relationships with the literary movements of either Europe or the United States. Instead, he argues, a Latin American author such as García Márquez should be judged, first, in his individuality; second, in comparison with what the author has in common with other Latin American authors; and only then based on his possible affinities or similarities with authors in the rest of the world. To focus on the latter is a dangerous practice, "a delirium for relationships" to which critics and enthusiasts alike often succumb (Volkening 26). This simplification permits, whether intentionally or not, the creation of an artificial literary climate impregnated with secondhand experiences that do not converge with the author's own ideas as conveyed in his works (Volkening 26). As the reader of García Márquez may expect, Volkening finds similarities with other Latin American authors. Two of these are José Eustasio Rivera and Rómulo Gallegos, both known in literary circles and Latin American literature classes in the United States. However, says Volkening, García Márquez adds uniquely new ways of expressing life in the tropics.

From 1910 to 1950 most Latin American writers tried to describe their world in realistic fashion. To these realist writers, the problems they were faced with had a scientific explanation that could be documented, studied, and understood. The literature they produced was often schematic and sketchy. These novelists were interested in identifying a problem, finding its root, and then denouncing it. These often-didactic writers were interested in the portrayal of life with an emphasis on factualness, with no room for ambiguity, the supernatural, the world of dreams, or the absurd. This is the typical novel that preceded the writing of Gabriel García Márquez.

This type of literary realism is also often associated with *regionalism*. Regionalist novels put the emphasis, as did realism, on a faithful rep-

resentation of the region they depict. In that sense, regionalism and realism are one and the same. Regionalism, indeed, is the type of Latin American novel that first interested European and American readers. Some of these novels are nowadays considered Latin American classics. Among the most commonly known are *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos, *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes, and *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustasio Rivera. Rómulo Gallegos wrote of the Venezuelan prairies and the local folklore, Ricardo Güiraldes described the Argentine pampas, and José Eustasio Rivera wrote of the South American tropical jungle.

This phase in Latin American literature can be considered, as some literary critics do, a necessary step in the development of the novel and the short story. While the writers of realism and regionalism focused on plot, those who came after, like Gabriel García Márquez, began to focus more on technique. They were concerned with the style and the methods in which they told their stories. *Leaf Storm*, García Márquez's first novella, set a precedent for this literary emphasis for future Latin American writers. This emphasis has been as influential in Latin America as it had been in Europe and the United States. This literary style in Latin America, however, was already being used by writers such as the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges; the Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias, who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1967 (the same year García Márquez published *One Hundred Years of Solitude*); and the Cuban Alejo Carpentier; all of whom can be read in an English translation.

By the 1950s, critics were talking of the emergence of a "new Latin American novel," as if literary movements could begin and end abruptly rather than through gradual change or evolution. However, nothing could be further from the truth. While literary critics were debating about a "new Latin American novel" conforming to a style being used by Faulkner, Hemingway, Woolf, and Kafka's translations into English, García Márquez's writings, as well as those of Borges, Asturias, and Carpentier, were also being called "modernist." The term *modernism* (encompassing modernist authors) is often used in English to refer to the work of these Latin American authors, as well as to non–Latin American writers like James Joyce, Franz Kafka, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf. In fact, the term *modernist* has been applied to all authors who broke with established rules, traditions, and conventions and were experimental in form, style, and the use of language itself.

Readers of Latin American literature who are not careful may, unknowingly, confuse modernism with the term *modernismo*, although, indeed, the two terms have totally different meanings. (They are what

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 for his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez had already earned tremendous respect and popularity in the years leading up to that honor and remains, to date, an active and prolific writer. Readers are introduced to García Márquez with a vivid account of his fascinating life: from his friendships with poets and presidents, to his distinguished career as a journalist, novelist, and chronicler of the quintessential Latin American experience. This companion also helps students situate García Márquez within the canon of western literature, exploring his contributions to the modern novel in general, and his forging of literary techniques, particularly magic realism, that have come to distinguish Latin American fiction. Full literary analysis is given for six of García Márquez's novels and five of his best short stories. Students are given guidance in understanding the historical contexts, as well as the characters and themes that recur in these interrelated works. Narrative technique and alternative critical perspectives are also explored for each work, enabling readers to appreciate fully the literary accomplishments of Gabriel García Márquez.

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