

Love in the Time of Cholera

by Gabriel García Márquez

About the Book

In their youth, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza fall passionately in love. When Fermina eventually chooses to marry a wealthy, well-born doctor, Florentino is devastated, but he is a romantic. As he rises in his business career he whiles away the years in 622 affairs — yet he reserves his heart for Fermina. Her husband dies at last, and Florentino purposefully attends the funeral. Fifty-one years, nine months, and four days after he first declared his love for Fermina, he will do so again.

With humorous sagacity and consummate craft, García Márquez traces an exceptional half-century story of unrequited love. Though it seems never to be conveniently contained, love flows through the novel in many wonderful guises — joyful, melancholy, enriching, ever surprising.

Praise for the Book

“A rich, commodious novel whose narrative power is matched only by its generosity of vision.”

— *The New York Times*

“A love story of astonishing power and delicious comedy . . . humane, richly comic, almost unbearably touching and altogether extraordinary.”

— *Newsweek*

“The greatest luxury, as in all of García Márquez’s books, is the eerie, entirely convincing suspension of the laws of reality . . . the agelessness of the human story as told by one of this century’s most evocative writers.”

— *Anne Tyler, Chicago Sun-Times Book Week*

“Revolutionary in daring to suggest that vows of love made under a presumption of immortality — youthful idiocy, to some — may yet be honored, much later in life when we ought to know better, in the face of the undeniable. . . . A shining and heartbreaking book.”

— *Thomas Pynchon, The New York Times Book Review*

“A sumptuous book . . . [with] major themes of love, death, the torments of memory, the inexorability of old age.”

— *The Washington Post Book World*

Courtesy of Vintage

About the Author

Gabriel García Márquez

Colombian Novelist (1928–)

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Known As: García Márquez, Gabriel Jose; Márquez, Gabriel Jose García; García Márquez, Gabriel

Personal Information: Born March 6, 1928, in Aracataca, Colombia; son of Gabriel Eligio García (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

- *La hojarasca* (novella; title means “Leaf Storm”; also see below), Ediciones Sipa (Bogota, Colombia), 1955, reprinted, Bruguera (Barcelona, Spain), 1983.
- *El coronel 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.

- *La 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.
- *Los 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.
- *Cien años 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.
- *Isabel viendo llover en Macondo* (novella; title means “Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo”; also see below), Editorial Estuario (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1967.
- *No 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 increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada* (short stories; also see below), Barral Editores, 1972.
- *El negro que hizo esperar a los angeles* (short stories), Ediciones Alfíl (Montevideo, Uruguay), 1972.
- *Ojos de perro azul* (short stories; also see below), Equisditorial (Argentina), 1972.
- *Leaf Storm and Other Stories* (includes “Leaf Storm,” and “Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo”), translated by Gregory Rabassa, Harper (New York, NY), 1972.
- *El otoño 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.
- *Cronica 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.

- *Erendira* (filmscript; adapted from his novella *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Erendira 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.
- *Diatribes of Love against a Seated Man* (play; first produced at Cervantes Theater, Buenos Aires, 1988), Arango Editores (Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia), 1994.
- *El general en su laberinto*, Mondadori (Madrid, Spain), 1989, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *The General in His Labyrinth*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Collected Novellas*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Doce cuentos peregrinos*, Mondadori (Madrid, Spain), 1992, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *Strange Pilgrims: Twelve Stories*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1993.
- *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World: A Tale for Children*, translated by Gregory Rabassa, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1993.
- *Del amor y otros demonios*, Mondadori (Barcelona, Spain), 1994, English translation by Edith Grossman published as *Of Love and Other Demons*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Memoria 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 señora Forbes*, illustrated by Carmen Sole Vendrell, Grupo Editorial Norma (Bogotá, 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 América Latina: Diálogo*, Carlos Milla Batres (Lima, Peru), 1968.
- *Relato de un naufragio* (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.
- *Cuando era feliz e indocumentado* (journalistic pieces), Ediciones El Ojo de Camello (Caracas, Venezuela), 1973.
- *Operación Carlota*, (essays) 1977.
- *Cronicas y reportajes* (journalistic pieces), Oveja Negra, 1978.
- *Periodismo militante* (journalistic pieces), Son de Máquina (Bogotá, 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.
- *Obra periodística* (journalistic pieces), edited by Jacques Gilard, Bruguera, Volume 1: *Textos constenos*, 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*, Juárez Editor (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 1984.
- (Contributor) *La Democracia y la paz en América Latina*, Editorial El Búho (Bogotá, 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 mi Corazón* 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 Español 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; *Love in the Time of Cholera* was adapted by Ronald Harwood as a film of the same name, released by New Line Cinema, 2007.

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 Garcimarcuesian 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 Bolívar 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 Macondos 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 Medellin 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 Supplee 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.” The book also sparked controversy in 2007; Iranian officials banned it after the first edition in Iran was sold out.

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Author Interview
(February 21, 1988)

Gabriel García Márquez is about to publish “Love in the Time of Cholera,” a work he calls a novel of manners: the story of two people whose love, thwarted in their youth, finally flourishes when they are close to 80.

A Colombian by birth as well as by literary inspiration, he will soon be 60 and seems as busy, vigorous and playful as ever. After mediating in the early 1980’s between the Colombian Government and leftist guerrillas, he has not returned to Colombia because of widespread violence there. These days, he and his wife, Mercedes, divide their time between Mexico City, their permanent home for the last 25 years, and Havana, where he is organizing and directing the Foundation of New Latin American Cinema. Film is an old love of this Nobel laureate, and the dramatic possibilities of television also fascinate him.

Though widely viewed as a political activist of the left, to his friends he is simply unorthodox, a storyteller who objects to theorizing and generalizations and who likes to deal with life in the unexpected anecdotal way it comes. Over several afternoons in Mexico City recently, we talked about his interest in plagues, politics and cinema, as well as his latest book. I asked him to comment on his extraordinary productivity:

Q: You have just finished a play and are writing film scripts and directing a film institute. Are you changing your life?

Gabriel García Márquez: No, because I am writing a novel. And I am finishing this one so I can start another. But I have never had so many things going on at the same time. I think I have never before felt so fulfilled, so much in the prime of my life.

I’m writing. Six different stories are being filmed. I’m at the cinema foundation. And the play will be opening this year in Argentina and Brazil.

For a long time, of course, things did not work out for me — almost the first 40 years of my life. I had financial problems; I had work problems. I had not made it as a writer or as anything else. It was a difficult time emotionally and psychologically; I had the idea that I was like an extra, that I did not count anywhere. And then, with “One Hundred Years of Solitude,” things turned. Now all this is going on without my being dependent on anyone. Still, I have to do all sorts of things. I have to sit on a bicycle in the morning. I am on an eternal diet. Half my life I couldn’t eat what I wanted because I couldn’t afford to, the other half because I have to diet.

Q: And now, in your latest book, “Love in the Time of Cholera,” the theme and style seem very different. Why did you write a love story?

GGM: I think aging has made me realize that feelings and sentiments, what happens in the heart, are ultimately the most important. But in some way, all my books are about love. In “One Hundred Years” there is one love story after another. “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” is a terrible drama of love. I think there is love everywhere. This time love is more ardent. Because two loves join and go on.

I think, though, that I could not have written “Love in the Time of Cholera” when I was younger. It has practically a lifetime’s experience in it. And it includes many experiences, my own and other peoples’. Above all, there are points of view I didn’t have before. I’ll be 60 this year. At that age, one becomes more serene in everything.

Also more generous, perhaps. Because this is a tremendously generous book.

A Chilean priest told me it was the most Christian book he’d ever read.

Q: And the style? Do you see this as a departure from your earlier work?

GGM: In every book I try to take a different path and I think I did here. One doesn’t choose the style. You can investigate and try to discover what the best style would be for a theme. But the style is determined by the subject, by the mood of the times. If you try to use something that is not suitable, it just won’t work. Then the critics build theories around that and they see things I hadn’t seen. I only respond to our way of life, the life of the Caribbean. You can take my books and I can tell you line for line what part of reality or what episode it came from.

Q: There was an insomnia plague in “One Hundred Years of Solitude,” and in one of your stories a plague killed all the birds. Now there is the “Time of Cholera.” What is it that intrigues you so about plagues?

GGM: Cartagena really had a great plague at the end of the last century. And I’ve always been interested in plagues, beginning with “Oedipus Rex.” I’ve read a lot about them. “A Journal of the Plague Year” by Daniel Defoe is one of my favorite books. Plagues are like imponderable dangers that surprise people. They seem to have a quality of destiny. It’s the phenomenon of death on a mass scale. What I find curious is that the great plagues have always produced great excesses. They make people want to live more. It’s that almost metaphysical dimension that interests me.

I have used other literary references. “The Plague” of Camus. There is a plague in “The Betrothed” of Alessandro Manzoni. I’m always looking up books that deal with a theme I’m dealing with. I do it to make sure that mine is not alike. Not precisely to copy from them but to have the use of them somehow. I think all writers do that. Behind every idea there is a thousand years of literature. I think you have to know as much as possible of that to know where you are and how you are taking it further.

Q: What was the genesis of “Love in the Time of Cholera”?

GGM: It really sprang from two sources that came together. One was the love affair of my parents, which was identical to that of Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza in their youth. My father was the telegraph operator of Aracataca [Colombia]. He played the violin. She was the pretty girl from a well-to-do family. Her father was opposed because the boy was poor and he was a liberal. All that part of the story was my parents’ When she went to school, the letters, the poems, the violin serenades, her trip to the interior when her father tried to make her forget him, the way they communicated by telegram — all that is authentic. And when she returns, everyone thinks she has forgotten him. That too. It’s exactly the way my parents told it. The only difference is they married. And, as soon as they were married, they were no longer interesting as literary figures. And the other source? Many years ago, in Mexico, I read a story in a newspaper about the death of two old Americans — a man and a woman — who would meet every year in Acapulco, always going to the same hotel, the same restaurants, following the same routine as they had done for 40 years. They were almost 80 years old and kept coming. Then one day they went out in a boat and, in order to rob them, the boatman murdered them with his oars. Through their death, the story of their secret romance became known. I was fascinated by them. They were each married to other people.

I always thought I would write my parents’ story, but I didn’t know how. One day, through one of those absolutely incomprehensible things that happen in literary creation, the two stories came together in my mind. I had all the love of the young people from my parents and from the old couple I took the love of old people.

Q: You have said that your stories often come from a single image that strikes you.

GGM: Yes. In fact, I'm so fascinated by how to detect the birth of a story that I have a workshop at the cinema foundation called "How to Tell a Story." I bring together 10 students from different Latin American countries and we sit at a round table without interruption for four hours a day for six weeks and try to write a story from scratch. We start by going round and round. At first there are only differences. . . . The Venezuelan wants one thing, the Argentine another. Then suddenly an idea appears that grabs everyone and the story can be developed. We've done three so far. But, you know, we still don't know how the idea is born. It always catches us by surprise.

In my case, it always begins with an image, not an idea or a concept. With "Love in the Time of Cholera," the image was of two old people dancing on the deck of a boat, dancing a bolero. Once you have the image, then what happens? The image grows in my head until the whole story takes shape as it might in real life. The problem is that life isn't the same as literature, so then I have to ask myself the big question: How do I adapt this, what is the most appropriate structure for this book? I have always aspired to finding the perfect structure. One perfect structure in literature is that of Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex." Another is a short story, "Monkey's Paw," by an English writer, William Jacobs. When I have the story and the structure completely worked out, I can start — but only on condition that I find the right name for each character. If I don't have the name that exactly suits the character, it doesn't come alive. I don't see it.

Once I sit down to write, usually I no longer have any hesitations. I may take a few notes, a word or a phrase or something to help me the following morning, but I never work with a lot of notes. That's what I learned when I was young. I know writers who have books full of notes and they wind up thinking about their notes and never write their books.

Q: You've always said you still feel as much a journalist as a writer of fiction. Some writers think that in journalism the pleasure of discovery comes in the research, while in fiction the pleasure of discovery comes in the writing. Would you agree?

GGM: Certainly there are pleasures in both. To begin with, I consider journalism to be a literary genre. Intellectuals would not agree, but I believe it is. Without being fiction, it is a form, an instrument, for expressing reality.

The timing may be different but the experience is the same in literature and journalism. In fiction, if you feel you get a scoop, a scoop about life that fits into your writing, it's the same emotion as a journalist when he gets to the heart of a story. Those moments occur when you least expect them and they bring extraordinary happiness. Just as a journalist knows when he's got the story, a writer has a similar revelation. Of course, he still has to illustrate and enrich it, but he knows he's got it. It's almost an instinct. The journalist knows if he has news or not. The writer knows if it's literature or not, if it's poetry or not. After that, the writing is very much the same. Both use many of the same techniques. But your journalism is not exactly orthodox. Well, mine isn't informative, so I can follow my

own preferences and look for the same veins I look for in literature. But my misfortune is that people don't believe my journalism. They think I make it all up. But I promise you, I invent nothing either in journalism or fiction. In fiction, you manipulate reality because that's what fiction is for. In journalism, I can pick the subjects that suit my character because I no longer have the demands of a job.

Q: Do you remember any of your journalistic pieces with special affection?

GGM: There was one little one called "The Cemetery of Lost Letters," from the time I was working at El Espectador. I was sitting on a tram in Bogota. And I saw a sign that said: "House of Lost Letters." I rang the bell. They told me that all the letters that could not be delivered — with wrong addresses, whatever — were sent to that house. There was an old man in it who dedicated his life entirely to finding their destination. Sometimes it took him days. If it couldn't be found, the letter was burned but never opened. There was one addressed "To the woman who goes to the Church de Las Armas every Wednesday at 5 P.M." So the old man went there and found seven women and questioned each of them. When he had picked the right one, he needed a court order to open the letter to be sure. And he was right. I'll never forget that story. Journalism and literature were almost joined. I have never been able to completely separate them.

Q: What are you trying to achieve at the cinema foundation?

GGM: I'd like to see film-making as an artistic expression in Latin America valued the same way as our literature is now. We have very fine literature, but it has taken a long time to be recognized. It has been a very hard struggle. And sometimes it is still difficult.

The literature now seems to have a life of its own.

You know, this really started to happen when we conquered our own readers at home. When they started to read us in Latin America. We had always thought the opposite was important. When we published a book, we didn't care if it was sold here as long as we could get it translated. And yet we knew what would happen. It would be translated and get a few obligatory critical notes from the specialists. The book would stay within the Spanish Studies ghettos of the universities and never get out. When we started to be read in Latin America, everything opened up.

The same is beginning to happen with film. There are now good films being made in Latin America. And this is being done not through great productions with a lot of capital. It is done within our own means and with our own methods. And the films are appearing at the international festivals and are being nominated for prizes. But they still have to conquer their own audience here. The problem lies with the big distributors. They need to spend a lot of money to promote unknown films and then they get no returns. The day our films make money, the whole focus will change. We saw it in literature; we will see it in films in the years ahead.

Q: Politics is so important to you. But you don't use your books to promote your political ideas.

GGM: I don't think literature should be used as a firearm. But, even against your own will, your ideological positions are inevitably reflected in your writing and they influence readers. I think my books have had political impact in Latin America because they help to create a Latin American identity; they help Latin Americans to become more aware of their own culture.

An American asked me the other day what was the real political intention behind the cinema foundation. I said the issue is not what is behind it but what lies ahead of it. The idea is to stimulate awareness of the Latin American cinema, and that is fundamentally a political objective. Of course, the project is strictly about film-making but the results will be political. People often think that politics are elections, that politics are what governments do. But literature, cinema, painting and music are all essential to forging Latin America's identity. And that's what I mean by politics.

Q: Would you say that is different from placing artistic talent at the service of politics?

GGM: I would never do that. Well, let me be clearer. The arts are always at the service of politics, of some ideology, of the vision the writer or the artist has of the world. But the arts should never be at the service of a government.

Q: What is your vision for Latin America?

GGM: I want to see a Latin America that is united, autonomous and democratic.

Q: In the European sense?

GGM: In the sense that it should have common interests and approaches.

Q: Is that the reason you are now writing about Simon Bolivar?

GGM: Not really. I picked the theme of Bolivar because I was interested in his personality. No one knows what he was really like because Bolivar became enshrined as a hero. I see him as a Caribbean, influenced and formed by Romanticism. Just imagine what an explosive combination. . . .

But the ideas of Bolivar are very topical. He imagined Latin America as an autonomous and unified alliance, an alliance that he thought could become the largest and most powerful in the world. He had a very nice phrase for it. He said: "We are like a small

mankind of our own.” He was an extraordinary man, yet he got badly beaten and was ultimately defeated. And he was defeated by the same forces that are at work today — the feudal interests and traditional local power groups that protect their interests and privileges. They closed ranks against him and finished him off. But his dream remains valid — to have a united and autonomous Latin America.

You see, I’m looking for different words. I really detest political-speak. Words like “the people,” for example, have lost their meaning. We have to fight against fossilized language. Not only in the case of the Marxists, who have petrified the language most, but the liberals too. “Democracy” is another such word. The Soviets say they’re democratic; the Americans say they’re democratic; El Salvador does, and Mexico too. Everyone who can organize an election says he’s democratic. “Independence” is another one. These are words that have come to mean very little. They’re disconnected; they don’t describe the reality they represent. I’m always looking for words that aren’t exhausted. You know what my biggest failing in life has been? One that can no longer be remedied? It’s not being able to speak English perfectly as a second language. If only I had spoken English . . .

Q: Would you have written in English?

GGM: No, no. But after Latin America, my best audience is in the United States, and in the universities there. There’s a vast readership that interests me. But I could never become their friend because I don’t speak English. I have French and Italian. Of course, it’s also their failing for not speaking Spanish. But I think I’m more interested than they are.

Q: What was it like to write the play? Did that give you any trouble?

GGM: Well, it’s really a monologue that I wrote for Graciela Duffau, the Argentine actress. It’s called “Diatribes of Love Against a Seated Man.” An angry woman is telling her husband everything that passes through her head. It goes on for two hours. He is sitting in a chair reading a newspaper and doesn’t react at all. But a monologue isn’t entirely a play. That is, there are many rules and laws of the theater that don’t apply here.

Q: And what is your next writing project?

GGM: I’m going to finish “Bolivar.” I need a few more months. And I’m going to write my memoirs. Usually authors write their memoirs when they can no longer remember anything. I’m going to start slowly and write and write. They won’t be normal memoirs. Every time I have 400 pages ready, I’ll publish a volume and see. I could go up to six.

Gabriel García Márquez decided not to go to a meeting of Nobel Prize-winners in Paris last month. The reason:

GGM: “I try not to go to conferences. I don’t know what to do there. And I found this one very intimidating. President Mitterrand — as you know he’s a friend — personally invited me and I told him I would go. But then I looked at the agenda and at the 80 or so prize-winners and saw the French had drawn up subjects that were entirely abstract. ‘Culture and Society,’ for example. What would I do at a seminar with Claude Simon on culture and society? . . .

“I think a lot about culture, but about popular culture. And I’m the product of a culture of immediate and burning problems. The French move in the thoroughly glacial sphere of pure ideas. And they don’t succumb easily. They are brought up and formed in academic tournaments. I don’t like to theorize. I told Mitterrand that I considered myself culturally incompatible and that recognizing one’s own limitations is a privilege of age. Mitterrand, who is a man of culture, understood this very well.”

Courtesy of The New York Times, February 21, 1988

Discussion Questions

1. Why does García Márquez use similar terms to describe the effects of love and cholera?
2. Plagues figure prominently in many of García Márquez's novels. What literal and metaphoric functions does the cholera plague serve in this novel? What light does it shed on Latin American society of the nineteenth century? How does it change its characters' attitudes toward life? How are the symptoms of love equated in the novel with the symptoms of cholera?
3. What does the conflict between Dr. Juvenal Urbino and Florentino Ariza reveal about the customs of Europe and the ways of Caribbean life? How is Fermina Daza torn between the two?
4. Dr. Urbino reads only what is considered fine literature, while Fermina Daza immerses herself in contemporary romances or soap operas. What does this reveal about the author's attitude toward the distinction between "high" and "low" literature. Does his story line and style remind you more of a soap opera or a classical drama?
5. After rejecting Florentino's declaration of love following her husband's funeral, why is Fermina eventually won over by him?
6. Why does a change in Florentino's writing style make Fermina more receptive to him?
7. What does Florentino mean when he tells Fermina, before they make love for the first time, "I've remained a virgin for you" (p. 339)?
8. Why does Florentino tell each of his lovers that she is the only one he has had?
9. What does Florentino's uncle mean when he says, "without river navigation there is no love" (p. 168)?
10. Do Fermina and Dr. Urbino succeed at "inventing true love" (p. 159)?
11. Set against the backdrop of recurring civil wars and cholera epidemics, the novel explores death and decay, as well as love. How does Dr. Urbino's refusal to grow old gracefully affect the other two characters? What does it say about fulfillment and beauty in their society? Does the fear of aging or death change Florentino Ariza's feelings toward Fermina Daza?
12. Compare the suicide of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour at the beginning of the book with that of Florentino's former lover, América Vicuña at the end. How do their motives differ? Why does the author frame the book with these two events?

13. Why is Leona Cassiani “the true woman in [Florentino’s] life although neither of them ever knew it and they never made love” (p. 182)?
14. When Tránsito Ariza tells Florentino he looks as if he were going to a funeral when he is going to visit Fermina, why does he respond by saying, “It’s almost the same thing” (p. 65)?

Courtesy of Vintage