Modern Critical Views

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Edited and with an Introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM

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Editor's Note

This book gathers together a representative selection of the best criticism available in English on the fiction of Gabriel García Márquez. The critical essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publication. I am very grateful to Cesar Salgado who, with the assistance of Frank Menchaca, made the editing of this book his personal and creative obsession.

My introduction acknowledges the astonishing richness of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* while intimating that there are certain aesthetic limits to the novel's achievement. The chronological sequence of criticism necessarily begins with the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's somewhat biographical appreciation of García Márquez's development.

Floyd Merrell reads *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a scientific chronicle, while William Plummer and Harley D. Oberhelman explore the influence of Faulkner upon García Márquez. Coming between them, Lois Parkinson Zamora examines problems of temporality in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch.* John Gerlach applies the structuralist critic Todorov to García Márquez's use of "the endless resources of fantasy."

The anthropologist Mauss is employed by Eduardo González as an aid to reading García Márquez. The best interpretation to date of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is offered by Roberto González Echevarría, who emphasizes the influence of Borges.

Colombian politics is invoked as a crucial context by Regina Janes, and necessarily figures also in the account of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* by Raymond Williams. The cultural context of Afro-American literature centers the essay of Vera M. Kutzinski, while Humberto E. Robles compares the travel writings of Antonio Pigafetta to the "magic realism" of García Márquez.

Deconstruction is found prefigured in García Márquez by Patricia Tobin, after which Isabel Alvarez-Borland offers an exegesis of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The influence of Carpentier upon García Márquez is traced by Morton P. Levitt, after which Michael Palencia-Roth celebrates García Márquez as the Columbus of a new world of fictional consciousness.

An admirable analysis of the relation of writing to ritual in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Carlos J. Alonso is followed by this volume's concluding essay, in which Anibal González discusses the theme of translation in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Contents

Introduction

Macondo, according to Carlos Fuentes, "begins to proliferate with the richness of a Columbian Yoknapatawpha." Faulkner, crossed by Kafka, is at the literary origins of Gabriel García Márquez. So pervasive is the Faulknerian influence that at times one hears Joyce and Conrad, Faulkner's masters, echoed in García Márquez, yet almost always as mediated by Faulkner. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* may be too pervaded by Faulkner, but *One Hundred Years of Solitude* absorbs Faulkner, as it does all other influences, into a phantasmagoria so powerful and self-consistent that the reader never questions the authority of García Márquez. Perhaps, as Reinold Arenas suggested, Faulkner is replaced by Carpentier and Kafka by Borges in *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* so that the imagination of García Márquez domesticates itself within its own language. Macondo, visionary realm, is an Indian and Hispanic act of consciousness, very remote from Oxford, Mississippi, and from the Jewish cemetery in Prague. In his subsequent work, García Márquez went back to Faulkner and Kafka, but then *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a miracle and could happen only once, if only because it is less a novel than it is a Scripture, the Bible of Macondo. Melquíades the Magus, who writes in Sanskrit, may be more a mask for Borges than for the author himself, and yet the Gypsy storyteller also connects García Márquez to the archaic Hebrew storyteller, the Yahwist, at once the greatest of realists and the greatest of fantasists but above all the only true rival of Homer and Tolstoy as a storyteller.

My primary impression, in the act of rereading *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* is a kind of aesthetic battle fatigue, since every page is rammed full of life beyond the capacity of any single reader to absorb. Whether the impacted quality of this novel's texture is finally a virtue I am not sure, since sometimes I feel like a man invited to dinner who has been served

nothing but an enormous platter of Turkish Delight. Yet it is all story, where everything conceivable and inconceivable is happening at once, from creation to apocalypse, birth to death. Roberto González Echevarría has gone so far as to surmise that in some sense it is the reader who must die at the end of this story, and perhaps it is the sheer richness of the text that serves to destroy us. Joyce half-seriously envisioned an ideal reader cursed with insomnia who would spend her life in unpacking *Finnegans Wake*. The reader need not translate *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a novel that deserves its popularity as it has no surface difficulties whatsoever. And yet, a new dimension is added to reading by the book. Its ideal reader has to be like its most memorable personage, the sublimely outrageous Colonel Aureliano Buendía, who "had wept in his mother's womb and had been born with his eyes open." There are no wasted sentences, no mere transitions, in this novel, and so you must notice everything at the moment that you read it. It will all cohere, at least as myth and metaphor if not always as literary meaning.

In the presence of an extraordinary actuality, consciousness takes the place of imagination. That Emersonian maxim is Wallace Stevens's and is worthy of the visionary of *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* and *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*. Macondo is a supreme fiction, and there are no ordinary evenings within its boundaries. Satire, even parody, most fantasy—these are now scarcely possible in the United States. How can you satirize Ronald Reagan or Jerry Falwell? Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* ceases to seem fantasy whenever I visit Southern California, and a ride on the New York City subway tends to reduce all literary realism to an idealizing projection. Some aspects of Latin American existence transcend even the inventions of García Márquez. I am informed, on good authority, that the older of the Duvalier dictators of Haiti, the illustrious Papa Doc, commanded that all black dogs in his nation be destroyed when he came to believe that a principal enemy had transformed himself into a black dog. Much that is fantastic in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would be fantastic anywhere, but much that seems unlikely to a North American critic may well be a representation of reality.

Emir Monegal emphasized that García Márquez's masterwork was unique among Latin American novels, being radically different from the diverse achievements of Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Lezama Lima, Mario Vargas Llosa, Miguel Angel Asturias, Manuel Puig, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and so many more. The affinities to Borges and to Carpentier were noted by Monegal as by Arenas, but Monegal's dialectical point seemed to be that García Márquez was representative only by joining all his col-

leagues in not being representative. Yet it is now true that, for most North American readers, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes first to mind when they think of the Hispanic novel in America. Alejo Carpentier's *Explosion in a Cathedral* may be an even stronger book, but only Borges has dominated the North American literary imagination as García Márquez has with this grand fantasy. The paperback translation I have just reread is in its thirtieth printing, and the novel's popularity seems certain to be permanent. It is inevitable that we are fated to identify *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with an entire culture, almost as though it were a new *Don Quixote,* which it most definitely is not. Comparisons to Balzac and even to Faulkner are also not very fair to García Márquez. The titanic inventiveness of Balzac dwarfs the later visionary, and nothing even in Macondo is as much a negative Sublime as the fearsome quest of the Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying. One Hundred Years of Solitude* is more of the stature of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow,* latecomers' fantasies, strong inheritors of waning traditions.

Whatever its limitations may or may not be, García Márquez's major narrative now enjoys canonical status as well as a representative function. Its cultural status is likely to be enhanced by the end of this century, and it would be foolish to quarrel with so large a phenomenon. I wish to address myself only to the question of how seriously, as readers, we need to receive the book's scriptural aspect. The novel's third sentence is: "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point," and the third sentence from the end is the long and beautiful:

> Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchment, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror.

The time span between this Genesis and this Apocalypse is six generations, so that José Arcadio Buendía, the line's founder, is the grandfather of the last Aureliano's grandfather. The grandfather of Dante's grandfather, the crusader Cassaguida, tells his descendant Dante that the poet perceives the truth because he gazes into that mirror in which the great

and small of this life, before they think, behold their thought. Aureliano, at the end, reads the Sanskrit parchment of the gypsy, Borges-like Magus, and looks into a speaking mirror, beholding his thought before he thinks it. But does he, like Dante, behold the truth? Was Florence, like Macondo, a city of mirrors (or mirages), in contrast to the realities of the Inferno, the Purgatorio, the Paradiso? Is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* only a speaking mirror? Or does it contain, somehow within it, an Inferno, a Purgatorio, a Paradiso?

Only the experience and disciplined reflections of a great many more strong readers will serve to answer those questions with any conclusiveness. The final eminence of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for now remains undecided. What is clear to the book's contemporaries is that García Márquez has given contemporary culture, in North America and Europe, as much as in Latin America, one of its double handful of necessary narratives, without which we will understand neither one another nor our own selves.

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

García Márquez: From Aracataca to Macondo

In about the middle of 1967, the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published in Buenos Aires, provoking a literary earthquake throughout Latin America. The critics recognized the book as a masterpiece of the art of fiction and the public endorsed this opinion, systematically exhausting new editions, which, at one point, appeared at the astounding rate of one a week. Overnight, García Márquez became almost as famous as a great soccer player or an eminent singer of boleros. The first translations have received an equally enthusiastic response. But the reasons behind the popularity of a book are hard to detect and often extraliterary, and what is especially remarkable in the case of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is that its thundering fame should be due to virtues which can only be defined as artistic.

What then are the virtues of this book whose existence contradicts the gloomy assertions that the novel is an exhausted genre in the process of extinction? I wish to single out three. First, the fact that this is a "total" novel, in the tradition of those insanely ambitious creations which aspire to compete with reality on an equal basis, confronting it with an image and qualitatively matching it in vitality, vastness and complexity. In the second place, something that we could call its "plural" nature; that is, its capacity for being at one time things which were thought to be opposites: traditional and modern; regional and universal; imaginary and realistic. Yet perhaps the most mysterious of its virtues is the third: its unlimited accessibility; that is, its power to be within anyone's reach, with distinct

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but abundant rewards for everyone: for the intelligent reader and for the imbecile; for those with a complex mind and for those with a simple one; for the refined who relish prose, contemplate structure and decode the symbols of a story, and for the impatient, who only respond to a crude anecdote. The literary genius of our time is usually hermetical, minoritarian and oppressive; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is one of the rare instances among major, contemporary literary works that can be read, understood, and enjoyed by all.

The author of this narrative achievement, Gabriel García Márquez, was born in 1928 in a tiny Colombian town of the coastal region overlooking the Caribbean. The town's name is rather like a tongue twister: Aracataca. Founded around the end of the last century, between Barranquilla and Santa Marta, by people who apparently fled the civil wars which decimated Colombia, Aracataca had its golden era between 1915 and 1918, when the banana craze reached its acme, scattering plantations in the region and attracting many people who needed jobs.

United Fruit, an unfortunate famous North American company, established itself in that area and started with a single crop to exploit the land. Many fortunes grew under the shade of banana trees, and popular imagination would later maintain that in those days of prosperity "whores danced the *cumbia* in the nude before magnates who, for them, would use one hundred peso bills instead of candles, to light the candelabra." That was also an era of violent social conflicts: the government repressed a strike of farm workers with the use of machine guns which cut down the lives of hundreds; the bodies were thrown into the sea. At the end of World War I, the banana fever ended, and for Aracataca it was the beginning of an economic collapse, the exodus of its inhabitants, the slow and suffocating death of tropical villages. The town was assaulted by outlaws, decimated by epidemics, ravaged by deluges. At the time when García Márquez was born, however, all that had almost stopped: paradise and hell belonged to the past, and present reality consisted of a limbo made up of poverty, heat and routine. Yet that extinct reality remained alive in the memory and imagination of the people and it was their best weapon against the desolation and emptiness of their present reality. In want of anything better, Aracataca—like so many Latin American towns—lived on remembrances, myths, solitude and nostalgia. García Márquez's entire literary work is built with this material which fed him throughout childhood. When he was born, Aracataca lived off memories; his stories will take life from his memories of Aracataca.

In the neighborhood of the town there was a banana plantation,

which, as a child, García Márquez explored many times. It was called Macondo. This will be the name with which he will later baptize the imaginary land where almost all his stories take place, and the "history" of which he will tell, from beginning to end, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

García Márquez was not raised by his parents, but by his grandparents, who were, according to him, his most solid literary influences. They lived in a huge and awesome house, filled with spirits, they were both superstitious and credulous. From the lips of his grandmother, García Márquez heard the legends, fables and prestigious lies with which the popular imagination of Aracataca evoked the ancient splendor of the area, and sometimes he saw his grandmother chatting naturally with ghosts who came to visit her. The elderly woman was an implacable storyteller: she used to tiptoe into her grandson's room at night and wake him to tell stories. Last year, a journalist asked García Márquez about the origin of the fluid, transparent, vital style of his stories, and he answered: "It's my grandmother's." In a certain manner, his grandmother is also the prototype of a whole series of female characters from Macondo: those women who happily converse with dead people, like Ursula Buendía; or like Fernanda del Carpio de Buendía, who correspond with invisible doctors.

But still more decisive than his grandmother, was the influence exerted on García Márquez by his grandfather, whom García Márquez describes as "the most important figure in my life." The old man had participated in the civil wars, and it was from the memories of that veteran that the grandson relived the most explosive episodes of Colombian violence, as well as the frustration felt by these warriors in their old age, when they discovered that they had fought for nothing and that no one even bothered to remember them anymore. The grandfather had a devil who haunted him: he had once killed a man. He would take his grandson to the circus and, quite suddenly, he would stop in the street and exclaim: "Oh! You don't know how much a dead body weighs." In *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* the founding of Macondo will, to a certain extent, be the result of a similar remorse. The first José Arcadio Buendía, founder of the clan whose story intermingles with that of Macondo, kills a man, Prudencio Aguilar, the bloody corpse of the victim harasses him with visions until José Arcadio decides to abandon the heights of Riohacha, crosses the mountain range with twenty-one companions and finds Macondo. The grandfather of García Márquez used to sing: "Mambrú has gone to war / how painful / how painful / how sad." Years later, García Márquez would discover that this song was a Castilianized version of a

French song ("Marlborough s'en va-t-enguerre") and that "Mambrú" was in reality "Marlborough." Since the only wars his grandfather had known were the Colombian civil wars, García Márquez decided that a Duke of Marlborough had been a protagonist in the Colombian violence. Hence the phantasmagoric warrior who in five of García Márquez's books presents himself at the military camp of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, disguised in tiger furs, claws and teeth, turns out to be the Duke of Marlborough. The figure of the grandfather is another of the constant male models in the work of García Márquez: he appears in the first novel *La hojarasca* (*The Leafstorm*) in the person of the ancient Colonel who defies the wrath of Macondo when be buries the French doctor; he is the hero of García Márquez's second novel *No One Writes to the Colonel,* and appears doubly in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, magnified in the mythical personality of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, and in that of his friend and companion, Colonel Gerineldo Márques (this time with his own surname).

García Márquez's grandfather died when the writer was eight. "Since then nothing interesting has happened to me," the author asserts. Two books he read through the years contaminated the material he gathered from his grandparents: *The Thousand and One Nights* and *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* Traces of both will appear later in Macondo, not so much in the story, as in the style in which it was written: from the first episodical richness and proliferation as a narrative rule, and from the second, the vocation for excess and exaggeration. All the sources of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seem already assembled in the mind of García Márquez when he abandoned Aracataca in 1940 to study in a school run by Jesuits in Bogotá. However, many things would have to take place before he could definitely exorcise the devils of his childhood in one great verbal construction.

He claims that since he was eight years old nothing interesting has happened to him, but in reality, many things have. Like almost every Latin American writer, García Márquez undertook the intense study of law; at the end of his secondary education, and also, like most, he soon renounced it. He traded law for journalism. He was a journalist and a writer of editorials for *El Espectador*, a Bogotá paper, in whose literary page his first stories appeared in 1946. In 1950 he lived in Barranquilla, and there, in the café "Colombia," he used to meet Ramón Vinyes, a Catalonian bookseller, as well as three other friends, Alfonso Fuenmayor, Germán Vargas and Alvaro Cepeda, the latter of whom would become a novelist. These people, including Gabriel García Márquez himself, will appear transfigured in the last years of Macondo, when Aureliano Buendía, the