

LANDMARKS
OF WORLD LITERATURE

GARCIA MARQUEZ
100 YEARS
OF SOLITUDE

加西亚·马尔克斯
——《百年孤独》

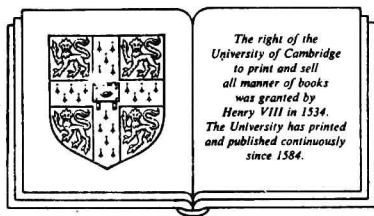
MICHAEL WOOD

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

One Hundred Years of Solitude

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Landmarks of world literature

Gabriel García Márquez

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

Landmarks of world literature

General Editor: J. P. Stern

- Dickens: *Bleak House* – Graham Storey
Homer: *The Iliad* – Michael Silk
Dante: *The Divine Comedy* – Robin Kirkpatrick
Rousseau: *Confessions* – Peter France
Goethe: *Faust. Part One* – Nicholas Boyle
Woolf: *The Waves* – Eric Warner
Goethe: *The Sorrows of Young Werther* – Martin Swales
Constant: *Adolphe* – Dennis Wood
Balzac: *Old Goriot* – David Bellos
Mann: *Buddenbrooks* – Hugh Ridley
Homer: *The Odyssey* – Jasper Griffin
Tolstoy: *Anna Karenina* – Anthony Thorlby
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Camus: *The Stranger* – Patrick McCarthy
Murasaki Shikibu: *The Tale of Genji* – Richard Bowring
Sterne: *Tristram Shandy* – Wolfgang Iser
Shakespeare: *Hamlet* – Paul A. Cantor
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Brontë: *Wuthering Heights* – U. C. Knoepfelmacher
Pasternak: *Doctor Zhivago* – Angela Livingstone
Proust: *Swann's Way* – Sheila Stern
Pound: *The Cantos* – George Kearns
Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* – Lawrence Graver
Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales* – Winthrop Wetherbee
Virgil: *The Aeneid* – K. W. Gransden
García Márquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
– Michael Wood
Cervantes: *Don Quixote* – A. J. Close
Céline: *Journey to the End of the Night* – John Sturrock

Chronology

García Márquez's life and works

Related historical and literary events

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1899 | United Fruit Company arrives in Colombia |
| 1899-1902 | Colombian civil wars of half a century culminate in the War of the Thousand Days. The Treaty of Neerlandia is signed. The only difference between the warring Liberals and Conservatives, Colonel Aureliano Buendía says at the end of his military and political career, is that the Liberals go to mass at 5 and the Conservatives go to mass at 8. |
| 1909-35 | Juan Vicente Gómez is dictator of Venezuela. |
| 1919 | Colombia signs contract with Tropical Oil Company. |
| 1922, 1935 | Colombia's border disputes with Venezuela and Peru settled. |
| 1924 | José Eustacio Rivera, <i>La Vordáine (The Vortex)</i> . |
| 1928 | Major strike of banana workers near Santa Marta, in northern Colombia, ending in a massacre. |

Gabriel José García Márquez born 6 March, in Aracataca, in tropical northern Colombia. This is the date usually given, and 6 March is certainly right. The author's father says the child was born a year earlier, and so reportedly do those who have seen the birth certificate.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1928-36 | Lives in Aracataca in the house of his maternal grandfather, Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía, surrounded by aunts and memories and the rumour of ghosts. Later in life he dreams repeatedly that he has never left this house. He says, 'Nothing has happened to me since'. An early draft of <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> was called <i>The House</i> . |
|---------|--|

1929

Rómulo Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara*.
Civil War in Spain.

1936-9

1936-46

Primary and secondary school in Baranquilla and then Zipaquirá, in the highlands of Colombia. At age 13 he sees the capital, Bogotá, for the first time, 'a distant, gloomy city where an unrelenting drizzle had been falling since the beginning of the sixteenth century . . . interminable funerals . . . and corpses from important families who thought they had invented death'.

1941

United Fruit Company leaves Colombia, or at least drastically reduces its presence.

1944

Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*.

1947-9

Studies law at the National University, Bogotá, and at the University of Cartagena. Publishes first stories in the Saturday supplement of a Bogotá newspaper, *El Espectador*. Writes a column for *El Universal*, of Cartagena.

1948-57

Profuse and continued violence in Colombia, generically known as La Violencia, following the assassination of the Liberal leader Jorge Gaitán. Different assessments put the number of people killed in these quarrels at 200,000 or more than 300,000.

1949

Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*).

1950

William Faulkner receives Nobel Prize.

1950-5

Gives up law studies and becomes a full-time journalist, working for *El Heraldo* and *El Nacional*, both Baranquilla papers, and for *El Espectador*. Publishes more stories, and a first novel, *Leaf Storm*, 1955.

1953

General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla seizes power in Colombia.

1954-8

Pérez Jiménez is dictator of Venezuela.

1955

Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*.

1955-7

In Europe as correspondent of *El Espectador*.

Takes a film-making course in Rome. Rojas Pinilla closes *El Espectador*, and the jobless and moneyless García Márquez stays in Paris, finishing and reworking *No one writes to the Colonel*, published 1961. He visits several socialist countries and writes 90 Days *Behind the Iron Curtain*.

1957

Rojas Pinilla resigns. A military junta announces elections, which are held in 1958. Coalition governments follow, but there is much unrest and guerilla activity.

1958

Marries Mercedes Barcha in Baranquilla, works in Caracas for the magazines *Momento*, *Elite* and *Venezuela gráfica*. Writes most of the stories to be published in *Big Mama's Funeral*, 1962.

1959

Alejo Carpentier, *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*). Fidel Castro's forces take Havana; President Batista resigns and flees.

1959-61

In Havana to report on the trials known as Operación Verdad. Starts office of Cuban press agency *Prensa Latina* in Bogotá; works for *Prensa Latina* in Havana and New York.

1961

Juan Carlos Onetti, *El astillero (The Shipyard)*.
Failed anti-Castrist invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

1961-7

Mexico City. Edits magazines *Sucesos* and *La Familia*. Works for an advertising agency and wins a Colombian prize for his novel *In Evil Hour*. 1962. Works on several film scripts. Writes and publishes *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967. Instant, overwhelming success. The book is translated into 27 languages, wins 4 international prizes, runs through hundreds of editions. It is said to be the most popular book in Spanish since *Don Quixote*. García Márquez had started and abandoned the book when he was 17 or 18, failing to find the right tone. 'I had to live for 20 years and write 4 books of apprenticeship to discover that . . . the story had to be told, simply, the way my grandparents told it'. 'I've never been really interested,' he said later, 'in any idea which can't withstand many years of neglect'. His ideas for *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* were respectively left to ripen for 17 and 30 years.

1962

International crisis concerning the installation of Soviet missile bases in Cuba.

1963

Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela (Hopscotch)*.

- 1965 Mario Vargas Llosa, *La casa verde (The Green House)*.
Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Tres tristes tigres (Three Sad Tigers)*.
- 1966 José Lezama Lima, *Paradiso*.
- 1967 Carlos Fuentes, *Cambio de piel (Change of Skin)*.
Che Guevara dies in Bolivia.
- 1967-75 Barcelona. Receives an honorary degree from Columbia University, New York. Publishes *Innocent Erendira*, 1972. Helps to found *Alternativa*, a Bogotá review dedicated to political opposition. Becomes a vice-president of the Russell Tribunal. Publishes *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 1975.
- 1970 José Donoso, *El obsceno pájaro de noche (The Obscene Bird of Night)*.
Salvador Allende elected president of Chile.
- 1973 Allende overthrown.
- 1974 Augusto Roa Bastos, *Yo el supremo (The Dictator)*.
- 1975 Franco dies.
- 1975-81 Mexico City and Bogotá. Works on several film scripts; visits and writes on Angola and Nicaragua. Energetic political activity. He is a founder member of the Colombian party *Firmes*; works on a UNESCO report on communications; forms HABEAS, an organization for the help of political prisoners. Publishes *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, 1981.
- 1977 The Somoza family, in power in Nicaragua since 1937, is ousted by the Sandinistas.

1981

Mario Vargas Llosa, *La guerra del fin del mundo (The War of the End of the World)*.
President Omar Torrijos of Panama dies in a plane crash.

1982
1983–

Nobel Prize.
Lives in Colombia and Mexico. Publishes
Love in the Time of Cholera, 1985.
Continues political activity.
Publishes *The General in his Labyrinth*, 1989.

A note on translation and quotations

I have used Gregory Rabassa's familiar and effective translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* whenever I could, which was most of the time. Where it wasn't accurate or didn't reflect the point I was after in the Spanish, I have either adapted it or offered my own wording entirely. Quotations are identified on the page, Spanish text first, e.g. [216:231]. References are to the readily available editions by Editorial Sudamericana, 1967 and Avon, 1971.

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Chapter 1

Contexts

We wish to learn from our critics, but it is hard for us even to recover from them. Randall Jarrell

The Boom

Latin American literature existed before the conquest of the continent, although it wasn't Latin and didn't call itself American. But it has a way of repeatedly seeming very recent, just discovered, and not only to outsiders. There are all kinds of gaps in its history, patches of darkness or stasis, and the Chilean José Donoso has suggested that the so-called Boom in contemporary Latin American fiction, the surge of vivid and challenging new writing which appeared some twenty years ago, was the product of authors who had grandfathers but no fathers. The literary tradition failed to offer an immediate example, a preferred path; but this failure, once absorbed, became a spectacular opportunity.

The Boom is identified by the English word in Spanish, which lends a slightly exotic flavour to the enterprise, and the hint of a drum-roll: *El 'Boom'*. The phenomenon has been much quarrelled about: seen as an invention of the media, the phantom child of French and American publishers; as the outlet of a literary mafia, a conspiracy of pals promoting each others' work; as the mark of a dazzling renaissance, or even just a naissance, the first arrival of this literature at independent life. The term itself has been found vulgar and inappropriate, an insult to art; yet it seems to me perfect if we don't take it too seriously. It evokes the clumsy excitement of the discovery of new writers, and it usefully implies that these writers had struck oil and got rich in the territory of the

imagination. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the chief and most enduring landmark in this Boom country.

The names most frequently associated with the Boom are those of Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, although plenty of other writers drop in and out of the company. The nationalities behind those names already tell an interesting story: an Argentinian, a Mexican, a Cuban, a Colombian, a Peruvian. There have been pan-continental literary movements before, but not many, and there is a clear sense of new allegiances here: not to individual countries but to Latin America, to the Spanish language, to modern literature, to certain views of the relation between fiction and the world. If we add that these fatherless figures had some distinguished and much-read foreign uncles – Joyce, Kafka, Hemingway, Faulkner – and that they seem to have spent their lives at the movies, an image begins to form. We need to think too of impressive native uncles like Borges and Carpentier and Onetti, although it would take a whole theory of literary history to say why they are uncles, not fathers; why they suggest chances but don't make a lineage.

The Boom was not big enough to be a renaissance, and wasn't a movement, if by a movement we mean a school with a concerted programme. But it was an occasion of some importance in Latin America, not a cultural confection or a freakish accident. It was an assertion of self-confident modernity, it put an end to provincialism and apologies, and it can quite properly be called a movement in another definition, since it reflected the meeting of particular forces at a particular time. The time was the 1960s – perhaps the last novel which really belongs to the Boom is Donoso's *Obscene Bird of Night*, 1970 – and the forces were chiefly literary impatience and political despair.

The impatience is clear. Foreign influences on these writers, the fantastic and sentimental ingredients of loved movies, the eerie and haunting provocations of Borges, Carpentier and Onetti all helped to provide a fund of story-telling techniques just waiting to be tried out; invited a mingling of irony

and affection; conjured up a deep suspicion of professed realism, both in and out of fiction. Carpentier spoke of the marvels of Latin American reality, 'lo real maravilloso', which a dutiful realism necessarily misses, and the critical catchphrase *magical realism*, although full of muddle, does suggest a significant shift in literary perspective. There are considerable philosophical and historical complications here, and perhaps it will be sufficient for the moment to say that the writers of the Boom discovered, as if for the first time and all at once, that the world is a fabrication and full of delirious improbabilities but, alas, still real enough; that the imagination is nearly always right, either because someone has already done what you have only imagined or because you have imagined a fitting metaphor for someone's need; and that fiction in these circumstances is both a playground and a battlefield, *the* place where a culture's central quarrels may be fought out and seen to be fought out.

In one sense this rich and rather nervous impatience is quite old. Skipping the gaps, going back even beyond the grandfathers, we can put together an intermittent Spanish American tradition – only retrospectively, it is true, but how else do we usually put traditions together? The baroque, for example, persisted in Latin America long after it had faded in Europe, and this curious fact points us very precisely to certain features of the writing of the Boom.

The persistence was not mere backwardness or underdevelopment – it can't have been in writers of the stature of Sor Juana and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón – but the reflection, I want to suggest, of a particular, ongoing intimacy with trickery and elaboration and bewilderment. One of Sor Juana's most famous poems begins 'Verde embeleso de la vida humana', which Samuel Beckett translates as 'Green enravishment of human life'. It is worth noting that *embeleso* means fascination and charm, and may be related to the English *embezzlement*. The poem ends with a grotesque and witty scheme for the avoidance of such green deceptions. The poet will take her two eyes into both hands, she says, and will not see anything unless she can touch it: 'solamente lo que