

## Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel José García Márquez was born on March 6, 1928 in Aracataca, a town in Northern Colombia, where he was raised by his maternal grandparents in a house filled with countless aunts and the rumors of ghosts. But in order to get a better grasp on García Márquez's life, it helps to understand something first about both the history of Colombia and the unusual background of his family.

### Colombia

Colombia won its independence from Spain in 1810, technically making it one of Latin America's oldest democracies, but the sad fact is that this "democracy" has rarely known peace and justice.

In the beginning, there was of course Spain and the Indians, happily hating each other as the Spaniards tore the land up in quest for gold, El Dorado, religious converts, and political power. The English, too, played their part, with Drake attacking Riohachi in 1568 and the countless colonial squabbles of the next few centuries. Declaring itself independent from Spain when Napoleon ousted the Spanish King in 1810, the new country experienced a brief period of freedom and then was quickly reconquered in 1815 by the unpleasant and bloody campaigns of General Murillo. So much did their internal bickering allow their fledgling country to fall to the sword of Murillo, the period is immortalized in Colombia's history with the colorful name of *la Patria Boba*, or "The Booby Fatherland." Round two, however, fell to the Colombians, when Simón Bolívar reliberated the country in 1820 and became its very first president. In 1849, the country was sufficiently advanced to concretize their squabbling in the form of two political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, which exist to this day. These two parties form the political framework for much of García Márquez's fiction, and understanding their true natures is both a key to his writing and, unfortunately, an important insight to Latin American politics in general.

Although initially forming around the nucleus of two distinct and different ideologies, long years of bloody conflict have served to erode significantly the distinctions between the parties. The Conservatives and the Liberals are more like warring factions or clans than any parties with firmly established or radically opposing ideologies. Both tend to be repressive, both are corrupt, and both terribly abuse power when it falls into their hands; and throughout the sad history of Colombia, both parties have been more or less at war. It has often been said of Colombia's parties that you do not join them, you are born into them; and indeed they act more as territorial and familial units than as peacefully functioning parties with distinct political platforms. In addition, the country is split into two main regional groups -- the *costeños* of the coastal Caribbean, and the *cachacos* of the central highland. Both groups use those terms as pejorative of the other, and both occasionally view the other with disdain. The *costeños* tend to be more racially mixed, verbally outgoing, and superstitious. They are primarily the "descendants of pirates and smugglers, with a mixture of black slaves," and as a whole are "dancers, adventurers, people full of gaiety." The *cachacos*, on the other hand, are more formal, aristocratic, and racially pure, who pride themselves on their advanced cities such as Bogotá and on their ability to speak excellent Spanish. Traditionally, the tropical Caribbean coast has been a Liberal bastion, and the cool mountains and valleys of the interior tend to the Conservative side. García Márquez has often remarked that he views himself as a *mestizo* and a *costeño*, both characteristics enabling his formation and development as a writer.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Colombia was wracked by rebellions, civil wars

of both the local and national variety, and several *coups d'etat*. This century of bloodshed had its culmination in 1899, when the War of a Thousand Days began -- Colombia's most devastating civil war, a conflict that ended in late 1902 with the defeat of the Liberals. The war claimed the lives of over 100,000 people, primarily peasants and their sons. García Márquez's grandfather fought in that war, and many of its veterans would eventually find their way into immortalization as fictional characters in his work.

Another element that would influence his work was the Banana Strike Massacre of 1928. Although coffee is generally considered Colombia's main export, for the first few decades of the twentieth century, bananas were also of crucial importance to the economy. The banana trade had its principal manifestation in the United Fruit Company, an American outfit that had a virtual monopoly on the banana industry, which at the time was the only source of income for many of the *costeño* areas, including Aracataca. One of the more lamentable examples of Western Imperialism veiled as prosperity, the UFC had unlimited economic power and tremendous political clout, but it was a corrupt and amoral company that exploited its Colombian workers terribly. In October of 1928, over 32,000 native workers went on strike, demanding, among other such unreasonable things, hygienic working conditions, medical treatment, functioning toilets, and payment in cash rather than inflated company scrip. Indeed, the workers were denied their very existence as employees; although they labored seven days a week for little pay, they were defined as "subcontractors," and were therefore exempted from Colombian labor laws and safety regulations. The response of the Yankees was essentially to ignore their demands; shortly after the strike began, the Colombian government occupied the banana zone and employed the military as strikebreakers. One night in December, a huge crowd gathered in Ciénaga (30 miles north of Aracataca) to hold a demonstration. In order to quell the incident, the Conservative government sent in the troops, who fired on the unarmed workers, killing hundreds. Over the next few months, more people simply vanished, and finally the whole incident was officially denied and struck from the history books. García Márquez would later incorporate the incident in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

The next significant event that would eventually affect his writing was a period of time that he himself would live through, a horrible episode of Colombian history called *la violencia*, or "the Violence." The Violence had its roots in the banana massacre. At that time, one of the only politicians courageous enough to take a stand against government corruption was a man named Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a young Liberal member of congress who convened meetings to investigate the incident. Gaitán began to rise in prominence, a champion of the peasants and the poor, but an annoyance to the powerful members of both parties, who viewed him with something akin to fear and loathing. Using radio as his medium, he heralded a time of change, a time when the people would take part in a true democracy and corporations would be forced to act responsibly. By 1946, Gaitán was powerful enough to cause a split in his own party, which had been in power since 1930. The split caused a Conservative return to power and, fearing a reprisal, they began organizing paramilitary groups whose ultimate purpose was to terrorize Liberal voters; which they did admirably, killing thousands of them by the end of the year. In 1947 the Liberals gained control of the Congress, putting Gaitán in charge as party leader. (Despite the Conservative's efforts, the voter turnout was at a record high.) Tensions rose, and on April 9, 1948, Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá.

The city was convulsed by lethal riots for three days, a period called *el Bogotazo* and responsible for 2500 deaths. *La violencia* then shifted into an even more deadly phase. Guerrilla armies were organized by both parties, and terror swept through the land.

Towns and villages were burned, thousands -- including women and children -- were brutally murdered, farms were confiscated, and over a million peasants emigrated to Venezuela. In 1949, Conservatives even gunned down a Liberal politician, in the middle of giving a speech in the very halls of Congress! The Conservatives finally dissolved Congress, declared the country to be in a state of siege, and Liberals (now conveniently branded "communists") were hunted, persecuted, and murdered. The country was ripped apart; *la violencia* would claim the lives of some 150,000 Colombians by 1953. The Violence would later become the backdrop to several of García Márquez's novellas and stories, most notably *In Evil Hour*.

## His Family

The most important relatives of García Márquez were undoubtedly his maternal grandfather and grandmother. His grandfather was Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía, a Liberal veteran of the War of a Thousand Days. He lived in Aracataca, a banana town by the Caribbean, a village which he helped found. The Colonel was something of a hero to the *costeños*, for among other things, he refused to stay silent about the banana massacres, delivering a searing denunciation of the murders to Congress in 1929. A very complex and interesting man, the Colonel was also an excellent storyteller who had lead quite an intriguing life -- when he was younger he shot and killed a man in a duel, and it is said that he had fathered over sixteen children. He would speak of his wartime exploits as if they were "almost pleasant experiences -- sort of youthful adventures with guns." The old Colonel taught the young Gabriel lessons from the dictionary, took him to the circus each year, and was the first one who introduced his grandson to ice -- a miracle to be found at the UFC company store. He also told his young grandson that there was no greater burden than to have killed a man, a lesson that García Márquez would later put into the mouths of his characters.

His grandmother was Tranquilina Iguarán Cotes, and would be no less an influence on the young García Márquez than her husband. She was impressively filled with superstitions and folk beliefs, as were her numerous sisters, and they filled the house with stories of ghosts and premonitions, omens and portents -- all of which were studiously ignored by her husband, who once said to young Gabriel, "Don't listen to that. Those are women's beliefs." And yet listen he did, for his grandmother had a unique way of telling stories. No matter how fantastic or improbable her statements, she always delivered them as if they were the irrefutable truth. It was a deadpan style that, some thirty years later, her grandson would adopt for his greatest novel.

García Márquez's parents were more or less strangers to him for the first few years of his life, and the reason behind this is quite interesting. His mother, Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, was one of the two children born to the Colonel and his wife. A spirited girl, she unfortunately fell in love with a man named Gabriel Eligio García. "Unfortunately," for García was something of an anathema to her parents. For one thing, he was a Conservative as well as *la hojarasca*, a derogatory term applied to the recent residents of the town drawn by the banana trade. (*La hojarasca* means "dead leaf," as in something that descends in useless flurries and is best swept away.) García also had a reputation as a philanderer, the father of four illegitimate children. He was not exactly the man the Colonel had envisioned winning the heart of his daughter -- and yet he did, wooing her with violin serenades, love poems, countless letters -- and even telegraph messages. They tried all they could to get rid of the man, but he kept coming back, and it was obvious that their daughter was committed to him. Finally they surrendered to his Romantic tenacity, and the Colonel gave her hand in marriage to the former medical

student. In order to ease relations, the newlyweds settled in the Colonel's old home town of Riohacha. (The tragicomic story of their courtship would later be adapted and recast as *Love in the Time of Cholera*.)

## Early Life

Gabriel José García Márquez was born on March 6, 1928 in Aracataca, although his father contends that it was really 1927. Because his parents were still poor and struggling, his grandparents accepted the task of raising him, a common practice at the time. Unfortunately, 1928 was the last year of the banana boom in Aracataca. The strike and its brutal reprisal hit the town hard; over one hundred strikers were shot one night in Aracataca and dumped into a common grave. It was a sad start to his life, one that would later resurface in his writing.

Nicknamed Gabito, "little Gabriel" grew up as a quiet and shy lad, entranced by his grandfather's stories and his grandmother's superstitions. Aside from the Colonel and himself, it was a house of women, and García Márquez would later remark that their beliefs had him afraid to leave his chair, half terrified of ghosts. And yet all the seeds of his future work were planted in that house -- stories of the civil war and the banana massacre, the courtship of his parents, the sturdy practicality of the superstitious matriarch, the comings and goings of aunts, great aunts, and his grandfather's illegitimate daughters.... Later García Márquez would write: "I feel that all my writing has been about the experiences of the time I spent with my grandparents."

His grandfather died when he was eight years old, and due to his grandmother's increasing blindness, he went to live with his parents in Sucre, where his father was working as a pharmacist. Soon after he arrived in Sucre, it was decided that he should begin his formal schooling. He was sent to a boarding school in Barranquilla, a port city at the mouth of the Magdalena River. There, he acquired a reputation as being a shy boy who wrote humorous poems and drew cartoons. So serious and non-athletic was he that he was nicknamed "the Old Man" by his classmates.

In 1940, when he was twelve, he was awarded a scholarship to a secondary school for gifted students, run by Jesuits. The school -- the Liceo Nacional -- was in Zipaquirá, a city 30 miles to the north of Bogotá. The journey would take a week, and in that time he came to the conclusion that he did not like Bogotá. Exposed to the capital city for the first time, he found it dismal and oppressive, and his experience helped confirm his identity as a *costeño*.

In school, he found himself growing quite stimulated by his studies, and in the evening, he often read books aloud to his companions in the dormitory. And much to his amusement, even though he had yet to write anything significant, his great love of literature and his cartoons and stories helped him acquire a reputation as a writer. Perhaps this reputation provided him with a star by which to steer the ship of his imagination; and he would need it, for after graduation in 1946, the eighteen year old "writer" followed his parents' wishes and enrolled in the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá as a law student rather than as a journalist.

It was during this time that García Márquez met his future wife. While visiting his parents, he was introduced to a 13 year old girl named Mercedes Barcha Pardo. Dark and silent, of Egyptian decent, she was "the most interesting person" he had ever met. After he graduated from the Liceo Nacional, he took a small vacation with his parents before leaving for the University. During that time, he proposed to her. Agreeing, but first wishing to finish school, she put off the engagement. Although they wouldn't be married for another fourteen years, Mercedes promised to stay true to him.

## The Hungry Years

Like many great writers attending college for a subject they despised, García Márquez found that he had absolutely no interest in his studies, and he became something of a consummate slacker. He began to skip classes and neglect both his studies and himself, electing to wander around Bogotá and ride the streetcars, reading poetry instead of law. He ate in cheap cafés, smoked cigarettes, and associated with all the usual suspects: literate socialists, starving artists, and budding journalists. One day, however, his life changed -- all from reading just a simple book. As if all the lines of fate suddenly converged in his hands, he was given a copy of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The book had a profound affect on García Márquez; making him aware that literature did not have to follow a straight narrative and unfold along a traditional plot. The effect was liberating: "I thought to myself that I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago." He also remarked that Kafka's "voice" had the same echoes as his grandmother's -- "that's how my grandmother used to tell stories, the wildest things with a completely natural tone of voice."

One of the first things he set out to do was "catch up" on all the literature he had been missing. He began reading voraciously, devouring everything he could get his hands on. He also began writing fiction, and to his surprise, his first story, "The Third Resignation," was published in 1946 by the Liberal Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador*. (The enthusiastic editor even hailed him as "the new genius of Colombian letters!") García Márquez entered a period of creativity, penning ten more stories for the newspaper over the next few years.

As a humanist from a Liberal family, the 1948 assassination of Gaitán had profound effect on García Márquez, and he even participated in the rioting of *el Bogotazo*, having his own quarters partially burned down. The Universidad Nacional was closed, precipitating his move to the more peaceful North, where he transferred to the Universidad de Cartagena. There he half-heartedly pursued law while writing a daily column for *El Universal*, a Cartagenan newspaper. Deciding finally to abandon his attempts at law in 1950, he devoted himself to writing, moving to Barranquilla. Over the next few years, he began associating with a literary circle called *el grupo de Barranquilla*, and under their influence he began to read the work of Hemingway, Joyce, Woolf, and most importantly, Faulkner. He also embarked on a study of the classics, finding tremendous inspiration in the *Oedipus Rex* cycle by Sophocles.

Faulkner and Sophocles would become his two biggest influences throughout the late forties and early fifties. Faulkner amazed him with his ability to reformulate his childhood into a mythical past, inventing a town and a county in which to house his prose. In Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha, García Márquez found the seeds for Macondo; and from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* he found the ideas of a plot revolving around society and the abuses of power. García Márquez began to grow dissatisfied with his earlier stories, believing them to be too abstracted from his true experiences. They were "simply intellectual elaborations, nothing to do with my reality." Faulkner taught him that a writer should write about what is close to him; and for years García Márquez had been struggling with his muse -- what did he really want to say?

These thoughts would find form when he returned with his mother to his grandfather's house in Aracataca. Preparing it for sale, they found the house in ill repair, and yet the "haunted house" evoked such a swirl of memories in his head that he was overwhelmed. Indeed, the whole town seemed dead, frozen in time. He had already

been sketching out a story based on his experiences there, a tentative novel to be called *La casa*, and although he felt that he was not yet ready to perfect it, he had found part of what he was after -- the sense of place. Inspired by his visit, upon returning to Barranquilla he wrote his first novella, *Leaf Storm*. With a plot device adapted from *Antigone* and relocated to a mythical town, the book was completed in an energetic rush of inspiration. He bestowed the name of "Macondo" on his Latin American Yoknapatawpha, the name of a banana plantation near Aracataca that he used to explore as a child. (Macondo means "banana" in the Bantu language.) Unfortunately in 1952 it was rejected by the first publisher he sent it to, and seized by self-doubt and self-criticism, he tossed it in a drawer. (In 1955, while García Márquez was in Eastern Europe, it was rescued from its hiding place in Bogotá by his friends and sent to a publisher. This time, it was published.)

Despite his rejection and his near poverty, however, he was essentially happy. Living in a brothel, he was surrounded by friends, and he had a steady job writing columns for *El Herald*. In the evening he worked on his fiction and talked with his companions over cigarettes and coffee. Then in 1953, he was seized by a sudden restlessness. Packing up and quitting his job, he set out to sell encyclopedias in La Guajira with a friend. He travelled around a bit, worked on some story ideas, and finally became formally engaged to Mercedes Barcha. In 1954, he moved back to Bogotá and accepted a job on the staff of *El Espectador* as a writer of stories and film reviews. There, he flirted with socialism, avoided the notice of the current dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, and pondered about his duty as a writer in the time of *la violencia*.

In 1955, an event occurred which would place him back on the path of literature and eventually lead to his temporary exile from Colombia. That year, the *Caldas*, a small Colombian destroyer, was swamped in high seas on its return to Cartagena. Several sailors were swept overboard, and all died except one remarkable man, Luis Alejandro Velasco, who managed to survive for ten days at sea by clinging to a life raft. When he was eventually washed ashore, he quickly became a national hero. Used as propaganda by the government, Velasco did everything from make speeches to advertise watches and shoes. Finally he decided to tell the truth -- the *Caldas* was carrying illegal cargo, and they were swept overboard because of their negligence and incompetence! Visiting the offices of *El Espectador*, Velasco offered them his story, and after some hesitation, they accepted. Velasco told his tale to García Márquez, who acted as a ghostwriter and recast it into prose. The story was serialized over two full weeks as "The Truth About My Adventure by Luis Alejandro Velasco," and it created quite a sensation. Extremely unhappy, the Government tossed Velasco out of the Navy. Worried that Pinilla might persecute García Márquez directly, his editors sent him on assignment to Italy to cover the imminent death of Pope Pius XII. When the pontiff's untimely survival made this assignment pointless, García Márquez arranged to wander around Europe as a correspondent. After studying film awhile in Rome, he embarked on a tour of the communist bloc; and later that year his friends managed to get *Leaf Storm* finally published in Bogotá.

García Márquez travelled through Geneva, Rome, Poland and Hungary, finally settling in Paris where he found that he was out of a job -- the Pinilla government had shut down the presses of *El Espectador*. Settling in the Latin Quarter, he lived off credit, the kindness of his landlady, and money scraped up returning bottles for their deposits. There, influenced by the writings of Hemingway, he typed out eleven drafts of *No One Writes to the Colonel* and part of *Este pueblo de mierda* ("This Town of Shit"), the book that would later become *In Evil Hour*. After finishing *Colonel*, he travelled to London and finally returned to his home continent -- not to Colombia, but to Venezuela,

the favored destination of Colombian refugees. There he finished *Este pueblo de mierda*, his work which most directly addresses *la violencia*. Even though it was obvious that he was developing his own unique style, he was still unsatisfied. His early stories were unemotional and abstract. *Leaf Storm* was too indebted to Faulkner, and *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *In Evil Hour* were too far away from his imagined goal, the image he had been developing for years. He knew his ultimate work would take place in the mythical town of Macondo, but he had yet to find the right tone in which to tell his tale; he had yet to discover his true voice.

In Venezuela he teamed up with an old friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, who was by then an editor with *Elite*, a Caracas newsweekly. Throughout the year of 1957, the pair toured the communist countries of Europe, searching for an answer to Colombia's ills, contributing articles to various Latin American publications. And while they saw something useful in socialism, García Márquez realized with a sense of depression that communism could be just as terrible as *la violencia*. After a brief stay in London again, García Márquez returned to Venezuela, where Mendoza was working for *Momento*, and offered his old friend another job. Then, in 1958, he risked a visit back to Colombia. Keeping a low profile, he slipped into his native country and married Mercedes Bacha, who had been awaiting him in Barranquilla for four long years. He and his new bride then slipped back to Caracas, which was having its own share of problems. After publishing pieces aimed at American perfidy and the abuses of tyrants, *Momento* succumbed to political pressure and took an apologist pro-USA stance after Nixon's disastrous visit in May. Angered by their paper's capitulation, García Márquez and Mendoza resigned. Soon after leaving his position at *Momento*, García Márquez and his wife ended up in Havana, covering the Castro revolution. Inspired by the revolution, he helped form a Bogotá branch of Castro's news agency, *Prensa Latina*, and began a friendship with Castro that has lasted until this day.

In 1959 García Márquez's first son, Rodrigo, was born, and the family moved to New York City, where he supervised the North American branch of *Prensa Latina*. Laboring under death threats from angry Americans, García Márquez resigned his position after a year, becoming disillusioned by the ideological rifts occurring in Cuba's communist party. He moved his family to Mexico City, travelling through the South on a Faulknerian pilgrimage; he would be denied entrance into the USA again until 1971.

In Mexico City he wrote subtitles for films and worked on screenplays, and during this time he began to publish some of his fictional novellas. Rescued from moth-eaten oblivion by his friends, *No One Writes to the Colonel* was published in 1961, and then *Big Mama's Funeral* in 1962, the same year which saw the birth of his second son, Gonzalo. Finally his friends convinced him to enter the Colombian Esso literary contest in Bogotá; he revised *Este pueblo de mierda*, changing the title from "This Town of Shit" to *La mala hora*, or *In Evil Hour*. He submitted it, and it won. The sponsors of the prize sent the book to Madrid to be published, and it greeted the world in 1962 -- to his immense disappointment. The publication was a travesty; the Spanish publisher purged it of all Latin American slang and objectionable material, bowdlerizing it beyond recognition and making the characters speak precise, dictionary Spanish. Heartbroken, García Márquez was forced to repudiate it -- it would take nearly half a decade until the book would be published, restored to his satisfaction.

The next few years were a time of profound disappointment, producing nothing of much worth except a film script cowritten with Carlos Fuentes. His friends tried to cheer him up in whatever ways they could, but nevertheless, he began to feel like a failure. None of his works had sold over 700 copies. He had never received any royalties. And still, *and still*, the story of Macondo eluded his grasp.

## Success

And then it happened: his epiphany. On January 1965 he and his family were driving to Acapulco for a vacation, when inspiration suddenly struck him: he had found his tone. For the first time in twenty years, a stroke of lightning clearly revealed the voice of Macondo. He would later write:

"All of a sudden -- I don't know why -- I had this illumination on how to write the book.... I had it so completely formed, that right there I could have dictated the first chapter word by word to a typist."

And later, regarding that illumination:

"The tone that I eventually used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was based on the way my grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness.... What was most important was the expression she had on her face. She did not change her expression at all when telling her stories and everyone was surprised. In previous attempts to write, I tried to tell the story without believing in it. I discovered that what I had to do was believe in them myself and write them with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face."

He turned the car immediately around and headed home. There, he put Mercedes in charge of the family, and he retired to his room to write.

And write he did. He wrote every day for eighteen months, consuming up to six packs of cigarettes a day. To provide for the family, the car was sold, and almost every household appliance was pawned so Mercedes could feed the family and keep him supplied with a constant river of paper and cigarettes. His friends started to call his smoke-filled room "the Cave of the Mafia," and after a while the whole community began helping out, as if they collectively understood that he was creating something remarkable. Credit was extended, appliances loaned, debts forgiven. After nearly a year of work, García Márquez sent the first three chapters to Carlos Fuentes, who publicly declared: "I have just read eighty pages from a master." Towards the end of the novel, as yet unnamed, anticipation grew, and the buzz of success was in the air. As finishing touches, he placed himself, his wife, and his friends in the novel, and then discovered a name on the last page: *Cien años de soledad*. Finally he emerged from the Cave, grasping thirteen hundred pages in his hands, exhausted and almost poisoned from nicotine, over ten thousand dollars in debt, and perhaps only a few pages shy of a mental and physical breakdown. And yet, he was happy -- indeed, euphoric. In need of postage, he pawned a few more household implements and sent it off to the publisher in Buenos Aires.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published in June 1967, and within a week all 8000 copies were gone. From that point on, success was assured, and the novel sold out a new printing each week, going on to sell half a million copies within three years. It was translated into over two dozen languages, and it won four international prizes. Success had come at last. Gabriel García Márquez was 39 years old when the world first learned his name.

Suddenly he was beset by fame. Fan mail, awards, interviews, appearances -- it was obvious that his life had changed. In 1969, the novel won the Chianciano Prize in Italy and was named the Best Foreign Book in France. In 1970, it was published in English

and was chosen as one of the best twelve books of the year in the United States. Two years later he was awarded the Rómulo Gallegos Prize and the Neustadt Prize, and in 1971, a Peruvian writer named Mario Vargas Llosa even published a book about his life and work. To counter all this exposure, García Márquez simply returned to writing. Deciding that he would write about a dictator, he moved his family to Barcelona, Spain, which was spending its last years under the boot of Francisco Franco. There he labored on his next novel, creating a composite monster, a Caribbean dictator with Stalin's smooth hands and the solipsistic will of an archetypical Latin American tyrant. In the meantime, *Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories* was published in 1972, and in 1973 he put out a collection of his journalistic work from the late fifties, *Cuando era feliz e indocumentado*, or "When I Was Happy and Uninformed."

*Autumn of the Patriarch* was published in 1975, and it was a drastic departure from both the subject and tone of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A labyrinthine book with long, winding sentences, it was initially considered a disappointment by the critics, who were most likely expecting another Macondo. Opinion has changed over the years, however, and many now consider this novel of shifting realities to be a minor masterpiece all on its own right.

## Later Life

Living in a dictatorship and getting inside the mind of a tyrant took their emotional toll. By the end of the novel, García Márquez had decided that he would write no more fiction until the American-supported Pinochet stepped down from his control of Chile, a decision he would later rescind. Now a famous writer, he was becoming more aware of his own political power, and his increased clout and financial security enabled him to pursue his interests in political activism. Returning to Mexico City, he purchased a new house and stepped up his personal campaign to influence the world around him. Building on his actions of the last few years, he continued to funnel some of his money into political and social causes. Through his writings and donations, he supported leftist causes in Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Argentina, and Angola. He helped found and support HABEAS, an organization dedicated to correcting the abuses of Latin American power and freeing political prisoners, and he struck up friendships with such leaders as Omar Torrijos of Panama, and continued his relationship with Fidel Castro of Cuba. Needless to say, these activities did not endear him to the hearts of politicians in either the United States or Colombia; all his visits to the US were on a limited visa and had to be approved by the State Department. (This travel restriction was finally lifted by President Bill Clinton.) In 1977 he published *Operación Carlota*, a series of essays on Cuba's role in Africa. Ironically, although he claims to be quite good friends with Castro -- who even helped him edit *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* -- he spent the late seventies writing a "very harsh, very frank" book about the shortcomings of the Cuban Revolution and of life under Castro's regime. This book has not yet been published, and García Márquez claims that he is holding it until relations between Cuba and the United States are normalized.

In 1981, the year in which he was awarded the French Legion of Honor medal, he returned to Colombia from a visit with Castro, only to find himself once again in trouble. The Conservative Government was accusing him of financing the M-19, a Liberal group of guerrillas. Fleeing Colombia, he asked for and received political asylum in Mexico, where he maintains a household to this day. Colombia would soon regret their anger at their famous son, however: in 1982 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Embarrassed, and having just elected a new President, Colombia invited

him back, and President Betancur personally saw him off to Stockholm.

In 1982 he assisted a friend in publishing *El odor de la guayaba*, or "The Fragrance of Guava," a book of conversations with his long time colleague Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, and in the same year he wrote *Viva Sandino*, a screenplay about the Sandanistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution. Politics, however, would be far from his mind for his next work of fiction, which would be a love story. Turning again to his rich past for inspiration and material, he reworked his parent's strange courtship into the form of a decades-spanning narrative. The story would be about two frustrated lovers and the long time between their second courtship, and in 1986 *Love in the Time of Cholera* was unveiled to the anxiously waiting world. It was amazingly well received, even pulling Thomas Pynchon out of seclusion to write a review for the *New York Times*. There was no question that Gabriel García Márquez had become a writer with universal and lasting appeal.

By now one of the most famous writers in the world, he eased into a lifestyle of writing, teaching, and political activism. With residences in Mexico City, Cartagena, Cuernavaca, Paris, Barcelona, and Barranquilla, he finished the decade by publishing *The General in his Labyrinth* in 1990, and two years later *Strange Pilgrims* was born. In 1994 he published his most recent work of fiction, *Love and Other Demons*. This was followed in 1996 by *News of a Kidnapping*, a journalistic work detailing the atrocities of the Colombian drug trade. This return to journalism was emphasized in 1999, when he purchased a struggling Colombian news magazine, *Cambio*. With both a literary bent and a reputation for progressive politics, the newspaper was the perfect vehicle for García Márquez to return to his roots, and today the magazine is a thriving presence in Colombian letters.

### El otoño del patriarca

Unfortunately, in 1999 García Márquez was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, and to this day he suffers under a regimen of treatments, often taking him from Cartagena or Mexico City to clinics in Los Angeles, where his son, filmmaker Rodrigo García, lives.

Setting aside fiction for the time being, Gabo is concentrating on writing his memoirs, the first volume of which was published in 2001 as *Vivir para contarla*, or *To Live to Tell It*. Instantly selling out its first print run in Latin America, the volume quickly became the best selling book *ever* in the Spanish-speaking world. (It was recently published in the United States by Knopf, who will bring out an English translation sometime in late 2003.) The first of a promised set of three volumes, *Vivir para contarla* details Gabo's life up until 1955. He is currently at work on Volume II, which will focus on the writing and publication of his major works, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.