

MICHAEL WOOD

Reading Dazzle

The most casual reader of García Márquez notes his fondness for numbers. There are one hundred years of solitude, and in the novel of that name the rain pours down on Macondo for exactly four years, eleven months, and two days. A traveler circles the earth sixty-five times. Gargantuan eaters consume for breakfast eight quarts of coffee, thirty rice eggs, and the juice of forty oranges. The numbers call up an air of legendary precision that mildly mocks the idea of precision. But numbers can also suggest patience, an intimacy with the slow seepage of time. Closer to the numerical flavor of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, the sad and long-suffering hero of *No One Writes to the Colonel* (*El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*) (1961) needs, we are told, every counted minute of the seventy-five years of his life to arrive at the simple word that summarizes both his defeats and his dignity: his refusal to accept the unacceptable. He is a courteous, old-fashioned man and has earlier rebuked a group of local youths for swearing. At last, however, nothing short of rude anger will do. The simple word is shit, *Mierda*.

Love in the Time of Cholera ends on a milder phrase, but one that has been similarly stored, one that similarly reflects an arithmetic of obstinacy and concentration. A captain asks how long he can be expected to keep his boat going up and down a tropical river, and the answer he receives has been

brewing for "fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights." It is an answer that looks forward as well as backward: "Forever" (*Toda la vida*).

It takes the reader some time to get here too, and on my first reading of this novel I found myself counting pages now and then, the way the characters count years and months. Good stories are best told slowly, Thomas Mann says, but it is possible to have too much of a good thing, and Mann may not be the ideal witness in such a cause. García Márquez really needs the snail's pace he sets, I think, but we need a little patience to understand his need. Or some of us do: the book's huge commercial success suggests that slow telling is making a comeback.

The book begins with a corpse, and the scent of almonds that indicates death by cyanide. "It was inevitable," the doctor thinks who is examining the body, "the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love." Inevitable, fate, love: we are reading the opening sentence of the book, and we seem already to be deep in an old-fashioned romantic novel. So we are, but we are also caught in the first of García Márquez's narrative lures. What is inevitable is not that deaths by cyanide should be those of lovers but that the doctor should think of such deaths. This one in fact is the first cyanide death he can recall that has nothing to do with love, unrequited or requited. It is not an exception that proves the rule but an unruly event that makes us wonder whether we know what the game is. The doctor himself unfortunately doesn't have much time to wonder, since he dies later the same day in a ridiculous accident, trying to recapture an escaped parrot. And this is the second narrative lure we have already stumbled into. The story we hear at length in the first part of the book is not that of the corpse, as the initial plot moves seem to promise, but that of the doctor and his city and his day. In the rest of the book we hear little more of the corpse or of its earlier life but a great deal more about the doctor, and his wife/widow, and the indefatigable, obsessive fellow who has been in love with her for the amount of time so carefully detailed before the pronouncement of the word "Forever." The corpse is that of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, an escaped convict turned photographer, who killed himself at the age of sixty because he had decided long ago that he did not want to live beyond that age. Sadly, at the end he found himself regretting his resolve but couldn't think of changing it—"as the date approached he had gradually succumbed to despair as if his death had been not his own decision but an inexorable destiny." This is an important phrase. *Love in the Time of Cholera*, like García Márquez's other novels, is an exploration of destiny, but of this kind of destiny: the kind we invent and displace and fear and desperately live up to or die for.

The setting of the novel is an ancient city on the Caribbean coast of Latin America, the former favorite residence of the viceroys of New

Granada. The city is not named but is a composite picture, García Márquez has said, of Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Baranquilla, places in Colombia where he spent much of his early life. It has a cathedral, a former slave quarter, and a grim colonial building that once housed the inquisition and now (a detail that perhaps nods toward the shade of Buñuel) is occupied by a severely Catholic girls' school. The place resembles Haiti and Cuba because of the sea and the heat and the tropic and the life of the port; it is connected to a colder, mountainous Latin America through its language and its history of empire and independence and civil war. There is much talk of river navigation, of manatees and caimans sporting on the muddy banks of the Magdalena, as well as of ships passing for New Orleans, and of fabulous galleons sunk by English pirates as late as the early eighteenth century. Joseph Conrad is mentioned as involved in an arms deal; the doctor studies in Paris with Dr. Adrien Proust, the father of the novelist. We hear of Dreyfus, the new waltzes of Johann Strauss, the premiere of *The Tales of Hoffman*, the screening of a film called *Cabiria*.

The country is not named either, but it has Colombia's Liberals and Conservatives (the only difference between a Liberal president and a Conservative president, a character says, sounding like Colonel Aureliano Buendía in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is that the Liberal is not as well dressed), its War of the Thousand Days, which took place in 1899–1902, and plenty of towns and rivers that would allow us to find our way on an actual map of Colombia. It even anticipates the terrible peacetime violence for which Colombia has become notorious since 1947, a chaotic, wholesale murdering by crooks and guerrillas and the police and the army, a butchery that lacks even the historical shape of a civil war but is none the less real for that. When the Violence (as it is simply, sparsely called) was taken to be more or less under control, in 1962 there were still some two hundred civilian deaths occurring each month. It appears here grimly, casually, almost silently, as it does in García Márquez's other books, this time in the shape of corpses floating down river toward the sea, a strange, unaccountable sight, "for there were no more wars or epidemics." Like many other words in this book, and in the historical Latin America it evokes, this clause is both true and deceptive. There are no more epidemics, and we are near the end of the novel. But cholera still exists, even if only endemically, so the time of cholera does continue. There is nothing going on that can really be called a war, unless we insist on the "larval wars that governments were bent on hiding with distracted decrees." But there is random killing, a plague as lethal as any other.

The time of the novel is the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. A recent event is a showing of the movie *All Quiet on the Western*

Front, which was released in 1939 but may have reached Latin America a little later. More precisely, the present of the novel is just under two years in the 1930s, when all the principal characters are quite old, a lot older than Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, and have no thought of taking his view of things; and there are extensive flashbacks that give us the youth and backgrounds and long lives of these people. The book has been compared to a Naturalist novel and to a photograph album. It's a lot more like the second than like the first, but we might like to pause over the idea of a sophisticated, affectionate Naturalist novel, an evocation of an old, grubby, rigid world for its own sad and charming sake and not for any grim demonstration it might permit. This is a place where an old-fashioned mother can castigate even the contents of her daughter-in-law's sleep: "A decent woman cannot have that kind of dream." The doctor, returning to the city from a long stay in Europe, can hate its filth and its rats and its disease and its backwardness but still love it enough to look at it straight:

"How noble this city must be," he would say, "for we have spent four hundred years trying to finish it off and we still have not succeeded."

From the paupers' cemetery, one can look down on

the entire historic city, the broken roofs and the decaying walls, the rubble of fortresses among the brambles, the trail of islands in the bay, the hovels of the poor around the swamps, the immense Caribbean.

This is not a romantic vision, but it is a way one might talk of home.

There is a variety of suspense García Márquez has very much made his own. It consists in giving away conclusions and leaving the reader to guess at how they are reached. The trick characteristically involves removing most of the plausible narrative props, making us dizzily wonder whether already reached conclusions actually can be reached. It is another way of playing with destiny. Liberty creeps into unlikely human spaces, even what has happened seems doubtful, and hindsight, surely the safest of all forms of prophecy, turns risky. Thus we know in this novel that the couple I have just evoked do not marry when young, since we first meet them at the ludicrous death of her husband, the doctor. The suitor is now seventy-six, the woman is seventy-two. He has been waiting, since she first turned him down, for "fifty-one years, nine months, and four days"—a little less than two years short of the final count we have already seen. We learn of their courtship, his numerous

affairs, her marriage to the doctor, the doctor's single, scared infidelity, the lovers' happy, belated, foolish reconciliation, old skeletons still able to dance and get frightened at their feelings—though then we are told, in a fine phrase, that they wonder what they are doing "so far from their youth," and that their relation is "beyond love," because it is "beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion"—*desengaño*, one of those great Spanish words we find both in Baroque poems and lingering as the names of modern streets and lanes, caught up again in an ancient rhetoric of suspicion of the world. What we can't picture, what we must follow page by page, is how any of this can actually come about, how obstacles are removed, how people can bring themselves to say and act as they must to ensure the named developments. García Márquez's formality is impeccable here, a slow joke in its own right. He almost always refers to the doctor by his full name and title, for example: Dr. Juvenal Urbino. His wife invariably appears under her Christian name and maiden name, Fermina Daza; her stubborn lover under his Christian and family name, Florentino Ariza. No modern intimacies of appellation.

The text is not solemn, there are sly gags, fantastic images, and abrupt violences: a group of brothers called after popes (Leon XII, Pius V, and so on); a baby carried around in a bird cage; a woman discovered in adultery and murdered by her husband without a word; a ghost who waves from the river bank; a black doll that silently, eerily grows, becoming too big for its dress and its shoes; a suicide for love (with laudanum, though, another blow to the doctor's theory). But the prose is unruffled, affects not to notice anything untoward. This is a stylistic act, of course, but the chief feature of the act is its discretion. Irony would be too strong a word for the almost invisible humor, the scent of skepticism in the following sentence: "He was a perfect husband: he never picked up anything from the floor, or turned out a light, or closed a door." Such a husband is perfect because there is no chink between him and the myth.

The time of cholera, which is over and not over, is the time of romantic love. Love is like cholera, we are told several times in the book—even its physical symptoms, dizziness, nausea, fever, and the rest, can be the same. Like cholera, love is mortal, exclusive (because it separates us from our world) and indiscriminating (because it doesn't care what kind of victims it gets). García Márquez is fond of telling interviewers that the book he took with him when he first left Colombia for Europe was Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*—a story that, apart from doubtless being true, suggests an interest in communities doomed to clinical isolation. The community here is the teeming Caribbean city, not the backland of Macondo, but it is also the community of all those, in Latin America and elsewhere, who are perhaps

too keen on morbid metaphors of love. Love is a disease in this book, and this is a romantic novel; but the disease is one of the self-deluding, stubborn will, a fruit of mythology and obstinacy rather than any fate beyond ourselves. Indeed the word itself becomes subject to a kind of creative disintegration or dissemination. At first and most prominently used to evoke the unique, histrionic, weepy passion, the endless topic of soap operas and their predecessors, the kind of the thing that drives people to death through cyanide, it gradually attaches itself to quite various human activities and affections: a long marriage, for example, begun without love, and then finding it and losing it and finding it; the “emergency love,” the “hurried love” peddled in brothels; the “loveless love” of desperate people; love for a city, as we have seen; the love of children, love of food, love for life. The first of Florentino Ariza’s many mistresses teaches him that “nothing one does in bed is immoral if it helps to perpetuate love.” Florentino Ariza himself thinks at one point, “My heart has more rooms than a warehouse,” a secular twist on the rumored many mansions of heaven. The heart: home of sentiment and dream and nostalgia, but also of more erratic, unpredictable emotions, the place where life itself can always turn up and surprise us. Love is the name for attractive and disreputable impulses as well as for all the noble enchantments and illusions, the *engaños* and *encantos* with which we garnish our insufficiently romantic times. If love were always and only a disease, it could only be because life is. Writers have suggested this, but García Márquez is not one of those writers.

In interviews García Márquez has described *Love in the Time of Cholera* not as like a bolero but as “practically a telenovela, a soap opera” and also as a nineteenth-century *feuilleton*, the serial novel that was the soap opera’s literary antecedent. It is important to see that García Márquez’s novel is not a pastiche of these genres, and still less a parody. It doesn’t criticize or condescend to the genres, it seeks, as Stephen Minta has very well said, for “the truths about emotional life which ... are ... solidly embedded in the language of the popular imagination.” And yet. The clichés are clichés, however much we may feel at home among them. What are we to do with a discourse that is certainly straight-faced but not entirely straight; something less than ironic; certainly not figurative, indeed devoted to the meticulous reconstruction of a historical world, but still not entirely literal?

There is an answer, I think, suggested chiefly by the behavior of the characters in the novel itself, but first we need to look a little more closely at the stealth of García Márquez’s style, and his relation to his soapy sources. There is much discussion of reading in the book, of the doctor’s European culture (he is a fan of Loti and Anatole France), of poetry competitions, and above all of the sentimental romances and poems through which so many

people conduct so much of their imaginative lives—*versos y folletines de lágrimas*, “verses and tearful serialized love stories.” Florentino Ariza immerses himself in books, reads everything from Homer to the louisiest local poets:

But he made no distinctions: he read whatever came his way, as if it had been ordained by fate, and despite his many years of reading he still could not judge what was good and what was not in all that he read. The only thing clear to him was that he preferred verse to prose, and in verse he preferred love poems.

García Márquez’s implication, I take it, is not exactly that this is an ideal reader, but that there are many worse, and that serious, critical readers are often the worst of all.

The language of the book itself, then, is that of fate and broken hearts and eternal passions; of “mists of grief” and the “quicksand” of old age; of a “private hell” and “the wasteland of ... insomnia”; of blood pounding in the veins and “night eternal over the dark sea.” Yet the effect, as I have suggested, is neither pastiche nor straight imitation but a form of homage to popular literature, a friendly glance at its often lurid prose. And the prose here is not itself lurid, in spite of the phrases I’ve just quoted; it is stately, a graceful orchestration of old verbal tunes. What distinguishes this novel from the sentimental work it continuously alludes to is not irony or distance but a certain persistent lucidity. This is not a tearful text; just scrupulously loyal to tearful stories, only occasionally murmuring words such as “fallacy” and “illusion.” If it moved faster it would have to judge summarily, settle issues, could hardly avoid the recourse to irony. As it is, time and our patience situate the events and the characters.

Fermina Daza when young, for example, is suddenly sure that what she thought was love is nothing of the kind. She looks at the suitor she has not seen for some time and feels not the passion she has been diligently nurturing but only an “abyss of disenchantment,” *desencanto*, another of those great Spanish names for cheated desire. Is she right, or is her disenchantment just ordinary disappointment, of the kind lovers often feel after absences? She is probably wrong, and the text, much later, hints that she is. For the moment, though, she is sure she is right, acts on her feeling, condemns her suitor to a lifetime’s despair; more, since she is not a person who can admit mistakes, she will in her own terms always have been right, whatever shifts of feeling may take place in what this novel calls her heart. When García Márquez writes of the “revelation” she experiences, and of the “correctness” of her decision, the words are simple and clear, but several meanings have

piled up in them. They point, among other things, to a conviction that alters reality and then takes that alteration as proof of the conviction's justice. A form of destiny. Conversely, Florentino Ariza thinks of himself as doggedly faithful to his one love, in spite of the fact that he has slept with hundreds of other women (he has a note of 622, but there are other affairs too casual to be registered) and even loved some of them. His fidelity is like her certainty, clear to its possessor, questionable to others. By fidelity he means being unable to forget or replace his first love and being able to ensure that news of his apparent infidelities doesn't reach her.

The characters in fact are better guides to meaning than the narrator; better readers of their world and better teachers of reading. Like the characters in García Márquez's earlier novels, indeed like all of us, they are subject to bad luck. We could any of us fall from a ladder and die while trying to rescue a parrot. But they are not, these characters, the victims of fate, prisoners of an author's plot. They write their own lines; they choose their own interpretations of the lines of others; and they are very skillful at both activities.

Florentino Ariza, as a young man of eighteen, brings his first love letter to Fermina Daza. She is sitting sewing outside her house, under the trees, and this is how the occasion is described:

He took the letter out of his inside jacket pocket and held it before the eyes of the troubled embroiderer, who had still not dared to look at him. She saw the blue envelope trembling in a hand petrified with terror, and she raised the embroidery frame so he could put the letter on it, for she could not admit that she had noticed the trembling of his fingers. Then it happened [*Entonces ocurrió*]: a bird shook himself among the leaves of the almond trees, and his droppings fell right on the embroidery. Fermina Daza moved the frame out of the way, hid it behind the chair so that he would not notice what had happened [*lo que había pasado*], and looked at him for the first time, her face aflame. Florentino Ariza was impassive as he held the letter in his hand and said, "It's good luck." She thanked him with her first smile and almost snatched the letter away from him.

If this had been a passage in Flaubert, the birdshit would have been a comment on life and love, a sort of visual epigram; if this had been a telenovela, the birdshit wouldn't have appeared at all, would have been edited out or simply not thought of. The interesting point is that Flaubert and the soap opera are in agreement about the incompatibility of birdshit and

romance, and García Márquez's narrator, with his ominous narrative signal ("Then it happened") seems ready to feel the same. Until the characters absorb the shit into the romance without breaking step; thereby teaching the narrator, and us, a needed lesson about compatibilities.

Throughout the book we are invited to read language (and the language of gestures) the way the characters do; but I don't know how well we do this. Florentino declares his love to Fermina—his "eternal fidelity and everlasting love," after a fifty-one-year wait—but before he speaks he places his hat over his heart, or more precisely, where his heart is, *en el sitio del corazón*. We can't laugh at the gesture, and we can't patronize him, call him quaint or cute; but we are aware that the gesture itself is empty, an ancient formality rendered moving by the crazy, formless passion that has borrowed its face. Florentino's whole appearance is like this:

He was what he seemed: a useful and serious old man. His body was bony and erect, his skin dark and clean-shaven, his eyes avid behind round spectacles in silver frames, and he wore a romantic, old fashioned [*un poco tardío para la época*] mustache with waxed tips. He combed the last tufts of his hair at his temples upward and plastered them with brilliantine to the middle of his shining skull as a solution to total baldness. His natural gallantry and languid manner were immediately charming, but they were also considered suspect virtues in a confirmed bachelor. He had spent a great deal of money, ingenuity, and willpower to disguise the seventy-six years he had completed in March, and he was convinced in the solitude of his soul that he had loved in silence for a much longer time than anyone else in this world ever had.

This paragraph ends in a swirl of clichés, which must represent (faithfully, the way Joyce represents Gertie MacDowell's consciousness in the thirteenth chapter of *Ulysses*) Florentino's view of himself. We have in our minds the belated moustache and the unequal fight against baldness. Is this what Romeo would have looked like, if he had lived to seventy-six and moved to Colombia? There is also the odd, uncompromising directness of the paragraph's first sentence: "He was what he seemed to be: a useful and serious old man," *un anciano servicial y serio*. What do we get when we put together the straight talk, the old-fashioned style, the romantic sense of self? Something rather grand, I think, but also something rather oblique, in spite of the direct start. Something like the absurd (but real) grandeur of his claim about being a virgin, which I shall discuss in a moment. We like his style but not on the terms on which that style offers itself. We accept him but not on

his valuation. And not, oddly, on the narrator's either, since the narrator's voice becomes a contribution not a summary. This fellow is an *anciano servicial y serio*, sure, but he's also more than that.

The characters take each other seriously but not always literally; they know what clichés mean but can't always say. When Florentino and Fermina get together, at the end of novel, she expresses her surprise that in all the years of their separation—fifty-three years, seven months, eleven days—he has not been known to have a woman, and this in a city where gossip knows everything “even before it's happened.” This is too good a chance to miss, a place for the bolero to blossom. “I've remained a virgin for you,” Florentino says, *Es que me he conservado virgen para ti*. The likely options for a writer here seem to be the soggy score, a prose of soaring violins, or a knowing wink to the reader: sentimentality or parody. What García Márquez gives us is the character's skepticism. And her belief. And invites in us at the same time a complex implied respect for both characters. Fermina doesn't think this absurd sentence is true, and we know it's not, since we have been told how many women Florentino has slept with, but she likes its style, “the spirited way in which he said it,” *el coraje con que lo dijo*.

Fermina is not moved by the thought or the sentiment of the florid claim, although she knows Florentino's emotion to be deep and genuine, in spite of the banality and untruth of the words. She likes the unashamed way in which he assumes the language of romance, the fiction no one believes in, no one needs to believe in, since its function is not to transmit a declared meaning but to allow certain feelings and prowesses to circulate. It is her sense of this function, indeed, which causes Fermina to doubt the truth of Florentino's claim—she doesn't have the information the reader has. “She would not have believed it in any event, even if it had been true, because his love letters were composed of similar phrases whose meaning mattered less than their brilliance,” *que no valían por su sentido sino por su poder de deslumbramiento*. Their dazzle. She isn't dazzled, but she likes the dazzle; she can read the dazzle. I think of a remark of Chomsky's in which he expresses surprise that linguists (or anyone) should think of conveying information as the characteristic business of language. “Human language can be used to inform or mislead, to clarify one's own thoughts or to display one's cleverness, or simply for play.” And for much else.

The implication here reverses one of modernism's major claims about language and replaces it with something a good deal more optimistic and democratic. Pound quite explicitly and most of the modernists implicitly associate debased or banal language with debased or banal thinking. The kindest option is a sort of uneasy sympathy. When we leaf through the sentimental prose of the Gertie Macdowell chapter of *Ulysses*, we may feel

sorry she has no better means of expressing her longings than the trashy idioms of what she reads, we hardly feel at all that she has expressed her longings, still less that these trashy idioms could in any way become an adequate or lively vehicle for them. Yet this is just what García Márquez is proposing, and the move, oddly, brings him close to Henry James, a writer he doesn't mention and perhaps hasn't read. James lends his intelligence to his characters in just the way García Márquez does; not because he has more intelligence but because his intelligence is different and will translate into a more discursive currency. He speaks the reader's language, while the characters speak only their own. Or to put that less obscurely, Fermina doesn't need fancy words, or any words, for her understanding of how language works—she merely needs to know how to act on her understanding. Her understanding is very subtle, however; and so, the suggestion goes, is the understanding of many apparently unsophisticated or unliterary people. The writer needs all the subtlety (and discretion) he/she can muster to get anywhere near it.

There are two kinds of time in García Márquez—at least two. There is the magical, stagnant, modernist time, which scarcely seems to pass; and there is the cumulative, devouring time, which is always passing. Both times are constantly in play—as we see in the famous image of the wheel and the axle in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the wheel turning in what looks like cyclical time while the axle wears away according to linear succession—but not always equally accented. We might contrast the time of the Buendias, for example, with the time of the Colonel to whom no one writes.

Love in the Time of Cholera inhabits the Colonel's time but without his despair and ultimate rage. We can't really say that time is accepted here, or that the characters are resigned to it. We have only to think of Florentino's hairdo; of Fermina's wrinkled shoulders, fallen breasts; of these two comically ancient lovers generally, baffled by their renewed romance. Their age is part of what makes them touching, not quite ridiculous but always on the edge of being so—as they themselves quite clearly know. Time is real and regrettable—but not a disaster. Time is the birdshit on the romance, but the romance can accommodate it. It has only to be treated the way many contemporary writers treat clichés—to be treated as the cliché it is. It is possible to make a style out of its banality rather than our despair. If the modernists had been able to do this, their ghosts—Quentin Compson's Southerners, the dictator who doesn't know, even too late, what he is missing, many more—would have been not laid to rest but freed, released from their narrow haunts. Paradise would have been neither lost nor regained but deserted, left to its own devices. It is precisely through this metaphor that Alan Wilde figures the shift from modernism to

postmodernism, the second moment releasing, as he puts it, the humanity of the first: "paradise, once lost, is now abandoned." That is, the pathos of loss is abandoned, we make peace with the losses (and gains) of everyday living. In such a view the modernists, staying on, surviving their old anguishes, would have learned the lesson that their anxiety about time hid so thoroughly from them: that we domesticate time, come to terms with it, not by mythifying it but by counting it; not by tearing the hands off our watches, as Quentin Compson does in *The Sound and the Fury*, but by looking steadily at the hands as they go round. And round.

Chronology

1928

Gabriel José García Márquez born on March 6 in Aracataca, Colombia. It is also the year of the banana company massacre, an event Márquez would dwell on at length. His parents are not a presence in his early life. He is reared in the home of his maternal grandfather, Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía. Gabriel García, García Márquez's father, was considered by the Colonel to be a philanderer, part of the rabble drawn to the banana industry, and of a political bent exactly the opposite of the Colonel. Gabriel García's persistence in the face of the Colonel's low opinion eventually resulted in his marriage to García Márquez's mother, Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, and the story of their courtship is the inspiration for *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Living in his grandfather's house, García Márquez is surrounded by his aunts. As he tells the literary scholar Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, the aunts' storytelling and love of the fantastic are shaping forces in García Márquez's writing.

1936

Grandfather dies. García Márquez's grandmother is going blind, so the young man goes to live with his parents in Sucre. His father has found work as a pharmacist. The family has sufficient finances then to send young Gabriel to Barranquilla for primary school.

- 1940 García Márquez awarded a scholarship to attend secondary school in Zipaquirá.
- 1946 Graduates secondary school. His first story, "The Third Resignation," published in *El Spectador*.
- 1947–1949 Studies law at the National University in Bogotá and at the University of Catagena, both in Colombia. Begins journalism career as a reporter for *El Spectador* in Bogotá. Also during this time, reads Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, translated by Jorge Luis Borges, and is "liberated" at the idea that writing need not follow linear narrative and familiar plots.
- 1947 Meets Mercedes Barcha Pardo and declares her "the most interesting person" he has ever met. They swear fealty to one another, but will not be married for years.
- 1950 Leaves law school to pursue journalism full time. Works as a freelancer for several different newspapers and some magazines. Lives in a brothel, begins a number of literary friendships.
- 1953 Restless and not confident in his writing, García Márquez sells encyclopedias for a short time.
- 1955 Writes serial installments about a Colombian sailor who survives ten days at sea, the source for what he would later publish as *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*.
- 1955 Sent to Eastern Europe on assignment. Associates of García Márquez send his first book to a publisher. The novella, *Leaf Storm*, is released; it is set in Macondo.
- 1956 Military shuts down the main paper that employs García Márquez, *El Spectador*. He is trapped in Europe, where he stays for a year. During that time, he writes *No One Writes to the Colonel*. He also tours socialist countries in Europe, intrigued by the possibilities socialism offers for political troubles in Colombia. He sends articles back to newspapers and magazines in Colombia, and also writes *90 Days Behind the Iron Curtain*.
- 1957 Military regime leaves power in Colombia and García Márquez returns home. He settles in Caracas and writes for *Momento*.
- 1958 Marries Mercedes Barcha in Barranquilla. He will dedicate the majority of his work to her.
- 1959 The couple's first son, Rodrigo, is born.

- 1959–1961 García Márquez works in Cuba, covering the political turmoil in Havana, and briefly in New York. When he moves his family to Mexico City, after resigning his post at *Prensa Latina*, he is denied entrance back into the United States until 1971.
- 1961 Friends arrange for publication of *No One Writes to the Colonel*.
- 1962 Friends arrange for publication of *Big Mama's Funeral*. Second son, Gonzalo, is born. *In Evil Hour* also published, but in a heavily edited form which García Márquez rejects. The corrected version will not be published for several years.
- 1965 Begins work on *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
- 1967 *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is published to instant international acclaim, numerous awards, and three years of selling out print runs.
- 1967 Moves to Barcelona during the last years of the Franco dictatorship.
- 1972 *Innocent Erendira* published.
- 1974 Founds *Alternativa*, a leftist newspaper in Bogotá.
- 1975 Publishes *Autumn of the Patriarch*.
- 1975–present Maintains residences in both Mexico City and Bogotá and is active in political causes while founding several civic and political organizations.
- 1977 Publishes *Operación Carlota*.
- 1981 Publishes *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Wins the French Legion of Honor award.
- 1982 Wins the Nobel Prize for Literature. Publishes *The Fragrance of Guava*, interviews with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza.
- 1985 Publishes *Love in the Time of Cholera*. The book is widely praised, and some critics consider it superior to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
- 1989 Publishes *The General in His Labyrinth*.
- 1992 Publishes *Strange Pilgrims*, short stories.
- 1994 Publishes *Love and Other Demons*.
- 1996 Publishes *News of a Kidnapping*.
- 2000 García Márquez publicly declares himself "retired."
- 2002 Publishes a memoir, *Living to Tell the Tale*.

Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations

Gabriel García Márquez's
Love in the Time of Cholera

Edited and with an introduction by
Harold Bloom
Sterling Professor of the Humanities
Yale University

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