



THE “BOOM” AND THE BANG

One Hundred Years of Solitude and
Forty Years of Mingling, or,
From “The Faulknerian Revolution”
to the *Lost Generation*

Gheorghita Tres

Historical literary movements and moments aside, the mere acknowledgement of the fact that Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez turned eighty last year has probably induced a considerable mass of *Weltliteratur*-minded individuals to come to terms one more time with the magical realism of melancholy. And that 2007 also brought about the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the profusely read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its author’s Nobel Prize for Literature (1982, the year after he had been awarded the Legion of Honor in France and political asylum in Mexico) added a distinct aura of labyrinthine overdeterminism (already enhanced, uncannily, by the title of his last novel, *Memoires of My Melancholy Whores* [2004]), and maybe even a syrupy drop of good old water-under-the-bridge ambiguous nostalgia.

Consequently, 2007, needless to say, was the round-up year for momentous festivities throughout the Hispanic world, and, as the bourse of literary values and metropolises goes, the ultimate celebratory homage seems to have consisted in an anniversary mass edition of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published by the Spanish Royal Academy in Madrid—a sound de-

cision for the Academy considering that the novel is now ranking thirty-second on the all-time best-seller list, headed by the *Holy Bible*, Chairman Mao's quotations, and the *Qu'ran*, in that order. Mere coincidence or not, it is also worth mentioning that Colombia's capital, Bogotá, had been designated the 2007 World Book Capital City by UNESCO.

Under the spell of nostalgia, inherent on such occasions, one cannot help groping for the memories of the heady times that García Márquez's novel was part of. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* not only came into the world in 1967, a year of many transformations, but was almost instantly translated into a vast number of languages and, "for a while, almost everyone on the globe seemed to be reading it" (Stavans). The author was hailed as the Cervantes of Latin America and still is occasionally packaged as such by what Theodore Adorno would call "the culture industry" (in 2004 *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was even added to the Oprah Winfrey Book Club!), which brings up the topic intended to be contemplated here: not the spectacular euphoria of aesthetic reminiscence, but the more cynically enjoyed acknowledgment of the endearing spectacularity of patriarchal autumnality (a compensatory paraphrase of another great, yet more controversial, García Márquez novel—*The Autumn of the Patriarch* [1975]).

Regarding the celebratory aspect, the standard reaction seems to have consisted, as expected, in a wealth of Plato-based idealistic, or idealizing, literary criticism dwelling on intrinsic value, masterpiece status, etc., like that of Ilan Stavans, already quoted above, who in the 15 June 2007 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* commemorated the occasion by stating that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "decodes the DNA of Hispanic civilization." Therefore "the 'total' novel, designed by a demiurge capable of creating a universe as comprehensive as ours." Stavans also explicitly places García Márquez at the top of the current literary-market hierarchy when he refers to "García Márquez's second rate successors, like Isabel Allende," or to "Salman Rushdie's baroque hodgepodge of dreams and nationalism [. . .] and Toni Morrison's phantasmagoric medita-

tion on slavery.” This echoes what had already been stated about the novel since its release and “the near rapture” that accompanied its arrival:

Chilean poet and Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda called it “the greatest revelation in the Spanish language since *Don Quixote* of Cervantes.” American novelist William Kennedy (in *The New York Times Book Review*) insisted that it was “the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race.” [. . .] And Klaus Muller-Bergh (in *Books Abroad*) saw the book as a natural phenomenon, “an earthquake, a maelstrom.” (Rabassa, 457)

One Hundred Years of Solitude came into the world as part of what Pascale Casanova, in *The World Republic of Letters*, calls “The Faulknerian Revolution” (as acknowledged by García Márquez himself, particularly when he named Faulkner “my master” in the closing paragraph of his Nobel lecture), whereby,

Faulkner [. . .] helped a primitive and rural world that until then had seemed to demand a codified and descriptive realism to achieve novelistic modernity: in his hands, a violent, tribal civilization, impressed with the mark of biblical mythologies, opposed in every respect to urban modernity (which was typically associated with the stylistic avant-garde), became the privileged object of one of the most daring exercises in style of the century. [. . .] all writers from the South, in the broad sense of the term, from the West Indies to Portugal and from South America to Africa, recognized that Faulkner had revealed to them a way of attaining the Greenwich meridian without in the least denying their cultural heritage. (337–338)

While Faulkner’s validity as an iconic model is uncontested, one cannot help noticing that the rise to world fame and impact of his bourgeois aesthetics of the rural coincided with the onset of the Northern, mostly American, campaigns towards the industrialist/bourgeois incorporation of the agrar-

ian multi-continental “South,” with the still feudal, oligarchic Latin America constituting the bulk of it. One cannot help, either, speculating about the compensatory effect promoted by the J.F.K.-initiated Alliance for Progress campaign in Latin America, meant to sustain the emerging local bourgeoisie in facing both the old latifundiary oligarchies and the rising revolutionary masses, not to mention their enforcing, socially-transgressive guerillas. This campaigning included the sponsoring of the literary magazines that were supporting the anticommunist agenda by promoting the Latinamerican literary “boom” (Montaldo, 267).

One irresistibly surreal phenomenon in this context, and very likely purely and ridiculously coincidental, would be the uncanny contribution to all this of the new genre of the television series, in the form of the far-fetched adaptation of Faulkner’s *The Hamlet* and other stories as it resulted in the world-wide smash hit “telenovela” *The Long Hot Summer*, starring Roy Thinnes. The most enticing detail here is the fact that it was released in 1965, the year when García Márquez, while on vacation in Acapulco, had “this illumination on how to write the book” (*One Hundred Years of Solitude* 452). But then again, the novel’s melodrama-like articulation has been acknowledged by the most devoted supporters, including Stavans: “it’s clearly first and foremost a melodrama, albeit a magisterial one, with syrupy scenes of unrequited love, sibling animosity, and domestic back-stabbing.”

1967 was also the year when David Rockefeller, the current family patriarch, established the successful Center for Inter-American Relations at 680 Park Avenue in New York, whose literature program was actually initiated with the sponsoring of the translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1970 and translated by Gregory Rabassa, one of the Center’s board members. The novel was gloriously promoted by reviewers and editors that were the Center’s protégés (with William Kennedy, mentioned above, among them). It has been argued by some authors, particularly by María Eugenia Mudrovic, in “Reading Latin American Literature Abroad:

Agency and Canon Formation in the Sixties and Seventies,” that “[t]he lobbying efforts of the Center for Inter-American Relations [...] gained Latin American literature entry into the New York establishment”; and that “[t]his success was not only due to its aesthetic value, as both Latin American and U.S. critics frequently maintain, but, more importantly, it was the result of the active promotion by formerly friendly critics, translators, and publishers” (130), like *The New York Times* and particularly Alfred Knopf, the Center’s preferred publisher. Mudrovcic also argues that the legitimization was also achieved through the use of “what Bourdieu calls ‘privileged references’,” i.e., the measuring up against writers like Joyce, Dos Passos, Sterne, and particularly Faulkner (137). However, these associations were also based on the preference given to Modernism (to which the Latin American “boom” belongs) in the effort to counteract the pan-American mid-century social realism. Modernist aesthetics was given preference because it “better suited the aesthetic dictates of the Cold War” with its “political apoliticism” (136).

Nevertheless, the spectacular melodrama would afterwards be enhanced by what has become the most discussed issue about García Márquez: his confessed awe of and close involvement with Fidel Castro, publicly declared years ago in an essay entitled “The Fidel Castro I Know,” which starts with “His fondness of words. His power of seduction.” He has also been consistently critical of U.S. foreign policy and has written in detail about international political situations, although in general preferring the momentous, profusely spectacular ones. Such was the case with his 1976 article, “Operation Carlotta,” about Henry Kissinger’s frustration with the Cuban intervention in the civil war that had started in Angola immediately after its declaration of independence from Portugal, and with a long series of articles and a film script about the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, published in the early 1980s. All this caused García Márquez to be denied entry into the U.S. during the 1980s and later would induce Christopher Hitchens to state in *Vanity Fair*, of course, that the writer had “prostituted

himself for Castro” (111). This would change with the Clinton administration, when the writer became an intensely photographed and joyful White House guest, and eventually would write, in 1998, “My Visit to the White House,” a very detailed account about the rewarding fulfillment of his mission to convey to the Clinton administration Castro’s friendly message/warning about foreign terrorism plans against the U.S. *The New York Times*, the cultural equivalent of *The Wall Street Journal*, has also given García Márquez broad coverage, as has *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, both presumably under the guidance of the current, ah-hoc guru of Hispanicity, the fair-haired Ilan Stavans (the Amherst College professor born Ilan Stavchansky Slomianski in Mexico City), whom *The New York Times* proclaimed “the czar of Latino literature and culture,” while admitting that “[t]o others, however, he is an ambitious interloper who is stealing attention from more deserving and seasoned scholars” (Richardson).

Although all rhetorically engaged manifestations, these situations appear strikingly inconsequential, i.e., unchallenging/merely seductive—as Jean Baudrillard would put it—, spectacular, and are somewhat redolent of self-promotion and power fetishism. In a 1999 article entitled “The power of Gabriel García Márquez,” published as a *New Yorker* “Profile,” Jon Lee Anderson states that the writer is known to like “diplomacy, not politics,” and quotes both the former Colombian president Belisario Betancur saying that he “likes to be near power,” and a close friend of García Márquez stating that “Gabo loves Presidents. My wife likes to tease him by saying that even a vice-minister gives him a hard-on.” Although he left Colombia fifty years ago, García Márquez has constantly participated in the country’s spectacular politics, with quite glamorous display:

When Gabriel García Márquez leaves his apartment in Bogotá, he travels in a customized metallic-gray 1992 Lancia Thema Turbo, a midsize sedan with bulletproof windows and a bombproof chassis. It is driven by Don Chepe, a stocky former guerrilla fighter who has worked for Gar-

cía Márquez for more than twenty years. Several secret-service agents, some times as many as six, follow them in an other vehicle.

He certainly is fascinated with the media and with celebrities, the main enforcers of political power in the society of the spectacle. The cinema has been one of the writer's passions, and he even founded a film school in Cuba, near Havana, but Hollywood consistently eluded him, although he resonantly made statements to the contrary, claiming that he had rejected Francis Ford Coppola's offer to put *One Hundred Years of Solitude* on screen, presumably because the film would have affected the readerly experience. However, several other texts of his were turned into films along the years, mostly in Mexico, and last year finally Hollywood, with *Love in the Time of Cholera*, which though still has Europe-issued main credits (i.e., it is directed by Briton Mike Newell and starring Spanish actor Javier Bardem).

One possible lyrical take on García Márquez's, and the "boom"'s, cultural impact and Modernist, language-centered echo, previously assessed as the strategic antidote to social realism, would be to read magical realism as the precursor to the current spectacular virtualization of all reality. This would include social life, which has also ascended to pure form, as a reality fetish, as illustrated, for example, by the media's talk-show and reality-show obsession and also by the sweeping autobiographical trend, to which García Márquez adhered by publishing his memoirs (*Living to Tell the Tale*, 2002). At some point he also admitted having used the Noble Prize money to purchase *Cambio*, mainly a life-style magazine, with "no discernibly consistent editorial position" (Anderson), and where, among other articles, he published one on fellow-Colombian pop star Shakira. As the bourse of cultural value goes these days, during a recent Columbian call-in radio program on the topic of the fortieth anniversary of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and its author's involvement with Colombia and its problems, some callers proclaimed Shakira and fellow singer Juanes as much

more charitable and more socially involved public figures than García Márquez.

And there is the Internet too, abuzz the previous year on another García Márquez anniversary: thirty years since, for still undisclosed personal reasons, he was punched in the face, after a film premiere in Mexico City, by Mario Vargas Llosa, the father of his godson and the Spanish Royal Academy's choice of distinction as author of the prologues to both the anniversary edition of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the centennial edition of *Don Quijote*.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Jon Lee. "The Power of Gabriel García Márquez." *The New Yorker* 27 Sept. 1999.

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.

García Márquez, Gabriel. "The Fidel Castro I Know." *Mostly Water*. 2 Aug. 2006. <<http://mostlywater.org/node/8918>>.

———. "My Visit to the Clinton White House." *CounterPunch* 21–22 May 2005. 31 Aug. 2007. <<http://www.counterpunch.org/marquez05212005.html>>.

———. "The Solitude of Latin America." *Nobel Lectures: Literature 1981–1990*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1993.

Hitchens, Christopher. "Havana Can Wait." *Vanity Fair*, March 2000: 104–11.

Montaldo, Graciela. "La expulsión de la república, la deserción del mundo." *América Latina en la "literatura mundial"*. Ed. Ignacio M. Sánchez-Prado. Biblioteca de América. Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, U of Pittsburgh, 2006.

Mudrovic, María Eugenia. "Reading Latin American Literature Abroad: Agency and Canon Formation in the Sixties and Seventies." *Voice-overs: Translation and Latin-American Literature*. Eds. Daniel Balderston and Marcy Schwartz. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2002.

Rabassa, Gregory, trans. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. By Gabriel García Márquez. New York: Harper & Row, 1998.

Richardson, Lynda. "How to Be Both an Outsider and an Insider." *The New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1999.

Stavans, Ilan. "García Márquez's 'Total' Novel." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 15, 2007, B9.