

## PODCAST – “LA BIBLIOTECA”

*An exploration of the Library’s collections that focus on the cultures of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Hispanic community in the US.*

---

## SEASON 1/Episode 8

### Listening to Gabriel García Márquez

Catalina: ¡Hola! and welcome to “La biblioteca” An exploration of the Library of Congress’ collections that focus on the cultures of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Hispanic community in the United States. I am Catalina Gómez, a librarian in the Hispanic Reading Room.

Talía: And I am Talía Guzmán González, also a librarian in the Hispanic Reading Room. ¡Hola Catalina!

**CG:** ¡Hola Talía! This is the last episode from this, our first season, which focused on some of our material from our Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, a collection of audio recordings of poets and writers from the Luso-Hispanic world reading from their works which has been curated here at the Library of Congress. We truly hope that you have enjoyed our conversations and that you have become more interested and curious about Luso-Hispanic literature and culture through listening to our episodes. Today, we will be discussing our 1977 recording with Colombian Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez, or Gabo, as some of us like to call him (which is how we Colombians like to call this monumental author).

**TGG:** We all like to call him *el Gabo*, in Latin America. He’s ours.

**CG:** So García Márquez was born in Aracataca, Colombia in 1928. He is the author of more than ten novels and novellas, including *Cien años de soledad*, *One Hundred Years of Solitud* from 1967, *El otoño del patriarca*, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, from 1975, and *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, *Love in the Time of Cholera* from 1985. He has also written volumes of articles, scripts and numerous short story collections, including *Los Funerales de la Mamá Grande*, *Big Mama’s Funerals* from 1962. His work has been widely translated. In 1982, García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Other of his honors include the Best Foreign Book Award in France, the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, and the Neustadt international Prize

for literature. He began his writing career as a journalist in the 1940s. He worked for newspapers like *El Universal*, *El Herald*, *El Espectador* and *Prensa Latina News Agency*. In the 1980s he became publicly involved in sociopolitical issues participating in international forums and tribunals. He published his memoirs, *Vivir para contarla*, *Live to Tell the Tale* in 2002. He died in Mexico City in 2014.

**TGG:** I believe Gabriel García Márquez was the first author of the Latin American Boom that I first read as a young girl, or I must have been a tween, probably. And I remember being at home and they were showing on TV a movie based on one of his short stories which is *La verdadera historia de la cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada*.

**CG:** That's great.

**TGG:** It's a great story. It's a fantastic movie. It was an introduction to me to magical realism. And then after watching that, I just wanted to read everything that this man wrote and it was a good introduction to literature and to Latin America, for sure. So I'm very excited that we're talking about Gabriel García Márquez today, in our last episode for the podcast, and to talk about the work of this giant of the Latin American boom, we invited Marie Arana, who is a writer and journalist. Just like Gabriel García Márquez.

Marie Arana is a Peruvian-American author of nonfiction and fiction. She is the senior advisor to the U.S. Librarian of Congress, director of the National Book Festival, the John W. Kluge Center's Chair of the Cultures of the Countries of the South, and a Writer at Large for the *Washington Post*. For many years, Marie Arana was editor-in-chief of the *Washington Post's* literary section, *Book World*. She has also written for the *New York Times*, the *National Geographic*, the *International Herald Tribune*, *El País* from Spain, *El Comercio* from Peru's, among many other publications. Her biography of Simón Bolívar won the 2014 Los Angeles Times Book Prize; her memoir, *American Chica*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. She has also written two novels, *Cellophane* and *Lima Nights*. Let's listen to our interview with Marie Arana.

### **[Interview with Marie Arana]**

**CG:** Marie, thank you so much for being here with us

**Marie Arana:** It's a pleasure.

**CG:** Today we're talking about Gabriel García Márquez, one of Latin America's most loved authors. What can you tell our listeners about Gabriel García Márquez?

**MA:** Well of course, as you say, he is not only one of the world's greatest writer, probably one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, let's say worldwide. But he also represents the heart and the mind of Latin America which I think is what is so extraordinary about him; a combination of a voice and a kind of history that he's able to tell. Perhaps because he was a journalist, to begin with, he has reality down – the reality about Latin America. Then because of his extraordinary imagination, having been fed these wonderful stories by his grandfather when he was growing up, he was able to combine reality and a kind of dramatic narrative. I think that is incomparable, really, in Latin America, and in the world of Letters.

**TGG:** In the recording that Gabriel García Márquez did for the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, which was done in the same studio where we are right now in 1975, he read an excerpt from *El otoño del patriarca*. Could you tell us a little bit about that book and then tell us what section of the novel you chose and why?

**MA:** Yes. Well I think, Gabriel García Márquez was always completely sort of obsessed by the story of the Latin American dictator and it was Juan Vicente Gómez, I think, who inspired him – the Venezuelan dictator. An extraordinary story of somebody who really ruled with an iron fist and had 84 children and up to ten mistresses, all of that; and he was inspired, I think, to write something about the Latin American dictator. He had... it was just about at that time, you know, '68/'69/'70/'71, that all of this was happening in Latin America and particularly in Venezuela, and he was inspired to write this extraordinary story, a very, very hard-fisted story about a Latin American dictatorship. And it's almost a combination of a hallucination and history because you feel that he is telling history, but at the same time it's... the whole book is almost like a very long dream sometimes weaving into nightmare and out.

**TGG:** Do you think that combination of a hallucinatory state mixed with history and reality is part of the aesthetic of the magical realism that was very pervasive at this time, and of which Gabriel García Márquez is probably the best example?

**MA:** No doubt about it. I think because of he was a journalist he has a combination of that voice and that mythological sort of imagination, but also a very sharp eye. And his books, especially this book, is filled with observations that are extraordinary; the visual images that he conjures up... So that combination of his journalistic eye and his very lively imagination, and then his control of the language, I think all of that comes to bear in this book.

**TGG:** So what passage did you choose for us today?

**MA:** Well I've chosen something that is probably more on the hallucinatory side. This is towards the end of the novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, and what's remarkable to me is that you say that García Márquez sat in this room and read this, all those many years ago because I will try

to do my best. Here we go.

- [Excerpt 1] Marie Arana reading from García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* translated to the English by Gregory Rabassa (1976).
- [Excerpt 2] Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez reading from *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1977)

**TGG:** What changes in your experience when you're reading Gabriel García Márquez versus listening to Gabriel García Márquez? I think I had a sound of his voice for many, many years when I read him, and then I listened to him and was like "oh, this is how he sounds."

**MA:** Well as you say, his voice is crisp and powerful and sort of energetic and vital; but the one thing I remember most when I hear him reading is that he always said, "I want to mesmerize my readers. I don't want them to breathe." And in fact, there are no paragraphs, there are no periods; it just goes on and on, and you can hear when he reads it exactly what he meant by "I will not stop, you will not breathe. I will be like the enchanter; you will be like the snake, absolutely stunned by my words." And that's how I feel when I listen to him as opposed to reading him.

**TGG:** That's excellent.

**CG:** I guess this next question touches a little bit on something we already discussed, but what makes García Márquez so appealing in a universal sense, when he can also be so Latin American and so Colombian? Like I'm from Colombia and we read all his novels in high school and it really is something you're supposed to read to understand Colombia. So what about García Márquez makes him so universal?

**MA:** Well a combination of things, I think. You know, he had read, he had grown up, and I think he had matured by the time he was in Barranquilla, he was working as a journalist. He was reading Faulkner, and so he understood that Faulkner, if there was anybody William Faulkner was the one who wrote about a single place but with such universal appeal, and with such universal, kind of, grounding. I think García Márquez quickly recognized that that was something that he wanted to do. He has every bit of the Cervantes in him, in that he's funny, he can be whimsical... he can be funny, he can be totally off the wall, in humor; but he can also get at the human animal that we are, and that's worldwide. You know? Our flaws, our obsessions, our sort of complete slavishness, I think, to however important we are, our...

**CG:** Our absurdities...

**MA:** Well we're all... he gets to a certain aspect, I think, of the human animal which is the fact that we are all frail, we are all very vulnerable and he can get to that in the same way that Faulkner did. That is his appeal, I think, a great appeal.

**TGG:** Even dictators are vulnerable...

**MA:** Even the dictators are vulnerable!

**CG:** Probably the most vulnerable, I think

**MA:** Even they worry, absolutely.

**TGG:** Because power can be so transitory; it's something that you can hold for a period of time but you can also lose it.

**CG:** Well I think the point he makes is that maybe dictators are the most vulnerable, like the most full of contradictions and weaknesses.

**MA:** And the most needy; absolutely the most needy, and he understood that about them.

**TGG:** I'm going to take advantage that you're here – that we have you sitting here with us – and knowing that you are an expert on another Boom writer Mario Vargas Llosa, we hosted him here last year and we have a podcast about him, also, in this series. And you were talking about that obsession with the Latin American dictator, which is also present in Vargas Llosa's work, but if I am remembering correctly, I'm thinking of *La fiesta del Chivo* specifically, right? And he presents a different kind of dictator than the one that we see in Gabriel García Márquez. I don't know if you can...

**MA:** Yes. It's very, very different in that Vargas Llosa really, really researched *The Feast of the Goat*, and in fact there's a lot of fact, there's a lot of history in that. Eventually García Márquez when he wrote *The General in His Labyrinth* also research that and sent it to historians to verify, but in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, it's very, very different than *The Feast of the Goat*, in that it's a much more fanciful book. Vargas Llosa was completely hewing to the facts of Trujillo and that dictatorship. They have so much in common, the two, that it's incredible really that the Latin American Boom happened when it did because it lifted these authors. It was Vargas Llosa and García Márquez and, to some extent, Cortázar. And these people were lifted by a Latin American Boom and so they're all comparable in a way because they lived at the same time, the obsessions are the same. We are as Latin Americans defined so much by history and history is the dictator, the strong arm, the tendency to be authoritarian, and they got it.

**TGG:** You're also a writer, right?

**MA:** Yes.

**TGG:** You have a biography of Simón Bolívar, and you have novels as well. So would you say this is true for contemporary writers, for yourself?

**MA:** Yes, absolutely. I think there is some key... in fact, the history that I'm trying to write now, and I'm trying to write about the Latin American character was something that García Márquez certainly understood, and Vargas Llosa understands, is that there are some key aspects to who we are, and they're very, very different from the North American variety which had a completely different culture and a completely different history; and the colonial past, the indigenous past, all of that defines us in very different ways. It's something that I think we're understanding more and more, in our literature, as well as in our history.

**TGG:** Thank you.

**CG:** What can you say Marie about the concept or the literary genre – if we want to call it that way – of magical realism? I have a feeling sometimes that it's a little bit misunderstood, that it is equated immediately with just imagination, with something that's not real. I always like to make the case that it's very much based in reality, and also, if you are from Latin America sometimes these things that sound absurd and insane, that's how they are and the colonial reality has sort of given birth to a society that sometimes these things are not like so outside of reality.

**MA:** Right

**CG:** So can you say something about that? About what magical realism is, and in Latin American terms, how does that play out?

**MA:** Absolutely, Catalina, you're so right. In fact, I have always been a little mythed by the term magical realism because people always assume it's a literary device. It's not a literary device, I think you know. And a lot of literary critics, especially in this country – I think it's more understood in Europe – sort of dismiss this as a kind of literary device that people jump into crazy scenes that are impossible. Well, in fact, I think it was the Mexican philosopher Juan [José] Vasconcelos who said "we are raised, and have been raised through our culture to see the most extraordinary things that challenge reality, and that challenge the imagination." We have seen it. We have seen heads rolling down the *campos*. We have seen blood trickle down the streets. We have seen all of these things; these are not invented. We have been told by our superstitious and religious backgrounds, too, that we fly into the sky like angels. The whole combination of spirituality, not only in the Catholic sense, but in the indigenous sense, and the actual horribleness of what... because there was nothing that has been more violent than Latin American history; starting with 1400 and before that really, in the pre-Columbian times. So

magical realism if it is anything, it is a kind of understanding, a metaphor for what is actually very, very real; it's the real with a twist.

**CG:** Thank you so much. Okay so I think to close, what is your favorite García Márquez work? What can you recommend to our listeners?

**MA:** You know, one of my favorites is one that's not known so well, it's *Of Love and Other Demons* and the reason I love it so much is because he begins the book as a journalist and it's trying to track down something that's absolutely a crazy, wild love affair that goes awry; that is everything no reporter would be chasing, a love affair. But the fact that he does, and he does it in a very... it's almost a novella, really, it's a very short novel; probably less than 200 pages. But I recommend it to readers if they're starting out with García Márquez, start with that because that's a very accessible, wonderful, imaginative, and yet essentially García Márquez in every way.

**TGG:** Excellent.

**CG:** Well Marie, thank you so much for joining us.

**MA:** Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

...

**TGG:** That was a very insightful conversation with Marie. Something remarkable about this recording with García Márquez is that in his introduction to the reading, he mentions that the actual date of the reading, of the recording, was September 7th, 1977, the day that the Torrijos-Carter Treatise was signed; and he says so, right? in the recording.

**CG:** Yeah, he does.

**TGG:** This was the treatise that guaranteed that Panama would gain control of the Panama Canal in 1999 ending the control that the United States exercised over the canal. It is those little details, those historical... those commentaries about history, about life, about culture that show up in these recordings that are part of the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, that make this collection so special and so fascinating and it adds yet another dimension, one more layer to a project like this one. You have to listen to the recordings, not only for the readings that the authors do, but those comments that are said spontaneously, at the moment, you know? *En el calor de la hora*. Those are wonderful moments in the recordings.

**CG:** Yes, I couldn't agree more with you. And I also love that Marie touches on another very important aspect of García Márquez's work, which is his strong relationship to the *crónica* and to journalism. Very few writers have had such an intimate and creative relationship with reality,

I think. But it's also important be mentioned that Colombia is a country where fiction and journalism have had a very symbiotic relationship.

**TGG:** And this has impacted young readers as well, which you're going to tell us about...

**CG:** Oh yes.

**TGG:** That funny story about your brother

**CG:** So I was earlier telling Talía this really charming story that actually involves one of García Márquez's crónicas, *Relato de un naufrago*, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, and my oldest brother. We grew up in Bogotá, Colombia, and as Colombian students in middle-school and high school years, we're supposed to read pretty much all of García Márquez's work; which is obviously wonderful. As Talía just explained earlier, it's a wonderful introduction to literature. In my brother's 7th grade class read *Relato de un naufrago*, which is a true story of a sailor who gets shipwrecked, and it's a really gripping story. And my brother who was a very determined young man, when he found out that this was a true story, he became obsessed with finding the actual sailor; his name was Luis Alejandro Velasco. Felipe, my oldest brother took the yellow pages, the book, the yellow pages book and started calling all the Luis Alejandro Velascos that lived in Bogota; and he was really just determined. So anyway it was just really incredible. He ends up finding the real man, and my brother invites him to come to his 7<sup>th</sup> grade class to speak to all the students. At first the teacher, of course, thought that he was crazy, and that he didn't find him. When she found out he was real, she was so excited, and obviously she opened the event to all middle school and high school students and it was just a very unforgettable moment.

**TGG:** That's a wonderful story, and it shows the power of literature, right? how literature opens a window into the world and it take us to other places. And it makes us want to know more about the world, about people, and you know, have an impact.

**CG:** And it shows how literature can of impact young audiences as well, since he was so taken by that story.

**TGG:** Yes, that's fantastic. Well this concludes our episode and our season. Thank you so much for listening, to all of you. This has been a great opportunity getting to talk with my colleague Catalina and working on all this process of recording, writing scripts, inviting people, and then editing. We have met and spoken with wonderful, wonderful collaborators. And also we have to thank our boss, Georgette Dorn, not only for allowing us the time to do this as part of our job, but also for being the person as the forefront of the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape for so many years. And also we cannot leave without saying thank you to Mike Turpin who has

been behind the booth recording all of this very patiently, and never complaining about all of our takes. So thank you so much Mike for doing this with us.

We hope you enjoyed the first season. Write to us; let us know what you like, what we can do in the future. And we hope to see you again in La biblioteca!

...

Thank you for tuning in! To listen to some of the recording from the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape go to [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov). You can find the project by clicking on our "Digital Collections" link on the homepage and selecting the "Audio Recording" collections category. You can also find it by going to the Library's Hispanic Division's website which is [www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic](http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic). ¡Hasta pronto!