

## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

*Flawed Marvels*

"How Good is Gabriel García Márquez?"  
by Joseph Epstein, in *Commentary* (May  
1983), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y.  
10022.

Last year, Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, won the Nobel Prize in literature at the youthful age of 54. Is he already a great writer, asks Epstein, editor of the *American Scholar*, or just a very talented one?

Since it first appeared in 1967, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a history of the fictional town of Macondo, has been translated into 30 languages and has sold more than six million copies. As literary critic Alastair Reid noted in 1976, most reviewers considered the novel "beyond criticism," a latter-day *Alice in Wonderland* or *Don Quixote*.

The novel's "magic realism," a blend of fantasy and reality, helps make it a "dazzling" book, says Epstein. In homely, decaying Macondo, rain lasts five years and an infant born with a pig's tail is carried off by ants. García Márquez again awed readers with *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), using a technique he calls "multiple monologue" in telling the story of a mythical dictator who lives for more than 200 years. Points of view shift several times within single sentences in this "relentlessly modernist" novel that, Epstein believes, rivals James Joyce's work in its attempt to capture "the whole of life."

In no sense is García Márquez an ordinary writer. The *New York Times* called him "the most active of the continent's writer-politicians." He frequently rubs elbows with world leaders. His good friend Fidel Castro reportedly called him "the most powerful man in Latin America." García Márquez himself makes no bones about his leftist politics. His own reading of *Solitude* is political: "I did want to give the idea that Latin American history had such an oppressive reality that it had to be changed—at all costs, at any price!"

Epstein argues that by embracing Latin revolutionary orthodoxies, the novelist blinds himself to the "agonies of moral turmoil" so vital to most great writing. García Márquez is nevertheless a "marvelous" writer, Epstein says. "The pity is that he is not better."

## OTHER NATIONS

*Khomeini Holds Out*

"Iran's Durable Revolution" by Elaine  
Sciolino, in *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1983),  
Reader Services, 58 East 68th St., New  
York, N.Y. 10021

The collapse of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolutionary government in Iran always seems imminent. In fact, contends Sciolino, a Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, the mullahs are

## OTHER NATIONS

securely in the driver's seat, and seem likely to remain in power.

During the past four years, Khomeini has weathered an inconclusive border war with Iraq, an exodus of middle-class technocrats, political factionalism, a stricken economy, and a terrorist campaign by the leftist Mujahedeen-al-Khalq that took the lives of several senior government officials.

Systematic repression of dissent—there have been 4,500 documented executions since Khomeini took power in 1979—has been vital to the regime's survival. Another key: effective "state-building." Khomeini quickly replaced the Shah's bureaucrats with loyalists; he established new quasi-governmental organizations, such as the 150,000-man Revolutionary Guards and thousands of neighborhood watch committees. His Islamic Republican Party controls the *Majlis* (parliament); the nation's network of 100,000 mullahs oversees everything from the revolutionary courts to the writing of school textbooks.

Now the regime is showing signs of pragmatism. Khomeini has promised to ease up on repression. His regime has abandoned its policy of slashing oil exports to reduce dependence on foreigners. Oil sales have more than tripled since last year; the economy is beginning to recover from 40 percent unemployment and 70 percent annual inflation.

Sciolino sees few threats to Khomeini's rule. Teheran's policy of "neither East nor West" has kept the superpowers at bay; trade with the Third World has increased. The war with Iraq seems to be turning in Iran's favor; it will shore up national unity as long as it lasts.

Even the death of the 83-year-old Khomeini probably will not topple the revolutionary regime. An heir-apparent, Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, has already been named, and a special council of mullahs will pick a replacement if Hussein's leadership falters. Sciolino adds that Westerners should not count on an early transition. Longevity is a family trait: The Ayatollah's older brother is 98.

## India's Sikhs

"Sikh Power" by Kushwant Singh, in *across the board* (June 1983), 845 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.

In October 1982, several thousand radical Sikhs stormed India's Parliament House in New Delhi, killing four policemen. That incident, writes Singh, former editor of the *Hindustan Times* and a Sikh himself, marks a dangerous escalation of a restive minority's quest for greater autonomy.

The Sikhs first flourished as a religious sect during the 15th century under the Guru Nanak, who offered a casteless, monotheistic alternative to Hinduism. By the 18th century, after long wars with the Moguls to their east, the Sikhs had carved out their own kingdom in the fertile Punjab region of northwest India. They enjoyed privileged status after 1849 under the British, who granted them a large measure of autonomy in return for military service. But the creation of Moslem Pakistan in 1947 split the Punjab in two, leaving one million Indians dead and