

Gabriel García Márquez. *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*. Trans. Edith Grossman. Knopf, 2005. 101 pp. \$20.

García Márquez fans will be delighted to see that, after years of non-fiction, he has a new novella out. It contains his trademark sensibility, quirks and extravagant touches. Built into the memoir of a minor columnist who has contemplated writing a book called *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* are disquisitions on mortality—familiar from *Love in the Time of Cholera*—and the shape of a life that has not achieved anything significant. The unnamed narrator says he once thought to write about “the miseries of my misguided life,” though such miseries are apparently confined to romance, for he has a modestly paying occupation, a fine house inherited from his parents, and rude good health at the age of ninety. It is on that birthday when the narrative starts. The whores are women who have possessed, fascinated, or confounded him, and it is a sign of the narrator’s unreflective nature, sometimes his denseness, that they have little individuality and that he is the melancholic, not them. Aphoristic on occasion—“love is not a condition of the spirit but a sign of the zodiac”—and almost humourless about himself, the narrator is a craftsman when it comes to words, but much less capable in real life. His memoir contains a love story about a particular woman, and as usual with García Marquez, there are mystical events—mysterious writing, visions of the dead, natural phenomena that reek of sulphur—yet those things are not strong enough, in themselves, to rouse the narrator to investigate their root causes. He is self-absorbed about their meaning and insufficiently curious about their occurrence. This habit of thought extends to the women he meets, who he fills with content often without understanding them. *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is minor García Marquez, but it is a fine case study of self-regard.