

A HISTORY OF COLOMBIAN LITERATURE

In recent decades, the international recognition of Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez has placed Colombian writing on the global literary map. *A History of Colombian Literature* explores the genealogy of Colombian poetry and prose from the colonial period to the present day. Beginning with a comprehensive introduction that charts the development of a national literary tradition, this History includes extensive essays that illuminate the cultural and political intricacies of Colombian literature. Organized thematically, these essays survey the multilayered verse and fiction of such diverse writers as José Eustacio Rivera, Tomás Carrasquilla, Alvaro Mutis, and Darío Jaramillo Agudelo. Written by a host of leading scholars, this History also devotes special attention to the lasting significance of colonialism and multiculturalism in Colombian literature. This book is of pivotal importance to the development of Colombian writing and will serve as an invaluable reference for specialists and students alike.

RAYMOND LESLIE WILLIAMS is Distinguished Professor of Spanish at the University of California, Riverside. His scholarly work has been recognized in Colombia with the Order of San Carlos. His books include *The Twentieth-Century Spanish American Novel*, *The Modern Latin American Novel*, and *The Colombian Novel, 1844–1987*.

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Preface

A century before Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez published his landmark novel *Cien años de soledad* (1967, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), the first history of Colombian literature, written by José María Vergara y Vergara, appeared in print under the title *Historia de la literatura en Nueva Granada* (1867, *History of literature in New Granada*). This first history of the literature of “New Granada,” a keystone in the nation-building process in Colombia, was mostly about the Colonial literary tradition in the region called New Granada at the time, and not truly about the literature of the new nation per se. In a newly founded nation without a clear sense of exactly what its national culture might be considered to be, Vergara y Vergara’s book was as much a proposal for a national literary tradition as it was a literary history.

By the end of the century, during a period identified in Colombia as the Regeneration (“La Regeneración,” 1886–1909), an insistence on the key place of national literature and national culture led Colombians to refer to their capital, Bogotá, as the “Athens of South America.” The efforts to consolidate the literature of this region into a national “Colombian” literature was highlighted by Daniel Samper Ortega’s massive project to anthologize and historicize all Colombian writing in his *Selección Samper Ortega de Literatura Colombiana* (1935–7). These multiple volumes of Colombian literature, consisting mostly of poetry and essays and which included many political speeches, were mostly a collection of writings from the Colonial period. Thus, the actual literature representing the new nation was minimal. The efforts in Colombia to construct a national literature were accompanied in Latin America in general by attempts to write the first histories of Latin American literature, as has been outlined by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*. They point out that the first history of Latin American literature was published in 1893 in the form of an anthology by Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo.

During the period of Ortega's anthology of national Colombian literature – the first three decades of the twentieth century – several histories of Colombian literature did appear in print. Thus, José Joaquín Ortega Torres published his *Historia de la literatura colombiana* in 1935, and later Antonio Gómez Restrepo came forth with his own authoritative *Historia de la literatura colombiana* in 1945. In the context of the genre of the novel, the most monumental of these histories was Antonio Curcio Altamar's encyclopedic study *Evolución de la novela en Colombia*, first published in 1957. Curcio Altamar was not versed in the skills of the New Criticism in vogue in the 1950s in the United States, nor had he learned how to carry out the French *analyse de texte*; he was not familiar with close reading. Nevertheless, he was a highly informed scholar, and this book was, by far, the most exhaustively researched and complete history of the Colombian novel yet to be seen. Since then, several histories of the Colombian novel have appeared in print, including Sebastián Pineda Buitrago's recent volume.

International reading of Colombian literature and the academic study of it had been focused, for more than a century, almost exclusively on the three canonical novels: Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867, *María, A South American Romance*), José Eustacio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924, *The Vortex*), and García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. A considerable amount of scholarly work on these three works has been published by scholars in Colombia, Latin America in general, Europe, and the United States. As Latin American literature became increasingly a subject of academic study after World War II, broader studies on Colombia began to appear in print. Two pioneer foreign scholars during the 1940s and 1950s were Gerald Wade ("An Introduction to the Colombian Novel," 1947) and Kurt Levy (with an early 1950s study offering new light on Tomás Carrasquilla in the prestigious and high-circulation *Publications of the Modern Language Association*). Several articles and a book on the Colombian novel written by Seymour Menton have also been foundational work on the Colombian novel. Since then, scholars such as Donald McGrady, Michael Palencia-Roth, David William Foster, Roberto González Echevarría, Héctor Orjuela, Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, Pablo Montoya, Malcom Deas, Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot, Juan José Hoyos, Betty Osorio, Karl Kahut, Alvaro Pineda Botero, Huberto Poppel, Fernando Ayala Poveda, Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez, Gerald Martin, Héctor Hoyos, James Alstrum, Raymond Souza, Jonathan Tittler, Luz Mery Giraldo, Isaias Peña, Gene Bell-Villada, and Ramón Illán Baca have contributed significantly to the study of different aspects of Colombian

literature. Noteworthy recent books on Colombian literature per se are Héctor H. Orjuela's *Historia crítica de la literatura colombiana: literatura colonial* (three volumes, 1992, Critical History of Colombian Literature), María Mercedes Jaramillo, Angela Inés Robledo, and Flor María Rodríguez Arenas's *¿Y las mujeres? Ensayos sobre literatura colombiana* (2001, And the women? Essays on Colombian Literature), and Sebastián Pineda Buitrago's *Breve historia de la narrativa colombiana: Siglos XVI–XX* (2012, Brief History of Colombian Narrative). In terms of more postcolonial approaches to culture and society in Colombia, recent important contributions have been Joana Rappaport's exploration of indigenous Colombian intellectuals, *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia* (2005), and Lesley Wylie's ground-breaking work *Forgotten Frontier: A Literary Geography of the Putumayo* (2013).

The region covered in this history, identified today as the Republic of Colombia, has undergone several name changes over the centuries. During the Colonial period it was identified as the Nuevo Reino de Granada (thus, "New Granada"), and in the republican period it was called Colombia (including Ecuador and Venezuela, 1819–30), Nueva Granada (1832–57), the Confederación Granadina (1857–63), Estados Unidos de Colombia (1863–86), and República de Colombia (1886 to present). For the sake of simplicity, in this volume we will tend to use "New Granada" for the Colonial period and "Colombia" since 1810. As one contemporary social scientist, Harvey Kline, has affirmed, perhaps more than any other country in Latin America, Colombia has frustrated outsiders who try to understand and explain it. In some ways, he notes, Colombia does not exist except in popular myth, academic reification, and the assemblies of international organizations.

I would like to extend a special thanks to the Fulbright Commission in Colombia, whose grants over the early years of my research on Colombian literature were key to my learning this field and about this nation, as well as my initial publications on the Colombian novel. More recently, the Faculty Senate from the University of California, Riverside, has provided supporting funds for my research in Colombia.

I would also like to thank individuals who, over the years, have contributed directly or indirectly to my understanding of Colombia. The list of individuals who have contributed to my understanding of Colombian literature would be too long to attempt to make here and would lead to inevitable oversights. A short version of this list would include John S. Brushwood (who introduced me to the Colombian novel in 1973),

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