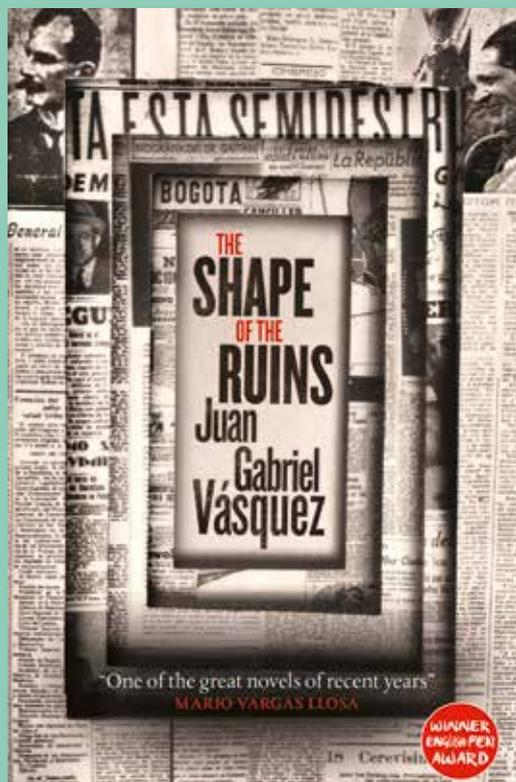




Reader's Guide



Other books by Juan Gabriel Vásquez
The Informers (2009)
The Secret History of Costaguana (2011)
The Sound of Things Falling (2013)
Lovers on All Saints' Day (2016)
Reputations (2017)

The Shape of the Ruins Juan Gabriel Vásquez

Translated by Anne McLean

MacLehose Press

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About the author	Juan Gabriel Vásquez was born in Bogotá, Colombia, in January 1973. He is the author of four previous novels, <i>The Informers</i> , <i>The Secret History of Costaguana</i> , <i>The Sound of Things Falling</i> and <i>Reputations</i> , as well as the story collection <i>The All Saints' Day Lovers</i> . He is the winner of many prizes including the 2014 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award for <i>The Sound of Things Falling</i> (jointly with his translator Anne McLean), the 2013 Gregor von Rezzori Prize and the 2011 Alfaguara Prize. He has translated works into Spanish and his own work has been translated into more than 20 languages. He lives in Bogotá.
About the translator	Anne McLean was born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in November 1962. She has translated Latin American and Spanish novels, stories, memoirs and other writings by many authors including Hector Abad, Javier Cercas, Julio Cortazar and Enrique Vila-Matas. She has won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize twice, for <i>Soldiers of Salamis</i> by Javier Cercas (2004) and for <i>The Armies</i> by Evelio Rosero (2009). In 2012 she was awarded the Spanish Cross of the Order of Civil Merit. She lives in Toronto.
About the book	Whilst pacing the dark and lonely corridors of a hospital in Bogotá during the premature birth of his twin daughters, Juan Gabriel Vásquez befriends a kindly physician, Doctor Benavides. Through the doctor, Vásquez meets Carlos Carballo. A middle-aged man, Carballo is consumed by a conspiracy theory about the assassination of an up and coming politician and JFK-like figure Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. He tries to persuade Vásquez to write a novel about the murder, but despite repeated refusals Vásquez is drawn deeper into the conspiracy when Gaitán's vertebrae, stored in a glass jar in a mutual friend's house, goes missing. Sparking a turn of events, Varquez opens up a second, even darker conspiracy about the assassination of another politician, Rafael Uribe Uribe, in 1914.
What the judges thought	'A harrowing immersion into the bottomless pit of conspiracy theories. Rooted in Colombian history, it speaks to a central question of our times.'
Discussion points	<p>What does the book tell you about the nature of truth?</p> <p>Why do you think the author uses himself as a character?</p> <p>Vásquez references the book as a 'reliquary', however includes an endnote as a reminder that the book is a novel and not a representation of true events. As the novel focuses on conspiracy theories, what impact does this conflation of fact and fiction have?</p> <p>What relevance does the title have when looking at historical events?</p>
Themed reading	<p><i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> by Gabriel García Márquez The story of seven generations of the Buendia family and of Macondo, the town they have built. A microcosm of Colombian life, its secrets life hidden, encoded in a book that only Aureliano Buendia can fathom its mysteries and reveal its shrouded destiny.</p> <p><i>Delirium</i> by Laura Restrepo A Colombian story of money power and corruption. Aguliar returns home from a business trip to find that his beloved wife has gone mad. Desperate to save her from her sudden devastating insanity, he delves back into her shadowy past.</p> <p><i>Oblivion: A Memoir</i> by Héctor Abad The narrator recounts the life of his father, a medical doctor,, scholar and social activist often at odds with the ruling class and the Catholic church of Colombia, especially during the turbulent decade of the 1980s and in opposite to all forms of oppression.</p> <p><i>The Plot Against America</i> by Philip Roth Roth imagines an alternate history where Roosevelt loses the 1940 presidential election to heroic aviator and rabid isolationist Charles A. Lindbergh. Upon taking office, he negotiates a cordial 'understanding' with Hitler, guaranteeing peaceful relations between the countries, but bringing fear to every Jewish household.</p>
Useful links	<p><i>The Shape of the Ruins</i> review in <i>The Guardian</i></p> <p><i>The Shape of the Ruins</i> review in <i>Prospect Magazine</i></p> <p><i>The Shape of the Ruins</i> review in <i>The New York Review of Books</i></p> <p>Much-disputed political assassinations form the framework of '<i>The Shape of Ruins</i>' review in <i>The Washington Post</i></p> <p>Reckoning with Colombia's Bloody, Conspiratorial History in Juan Gabriel Vásquez's <i>The Shape of Ruins</i> in the <i>Los Angeles Review of Books</i></p> <p><i>The Shape of the Ruins</i> review on NPR</p>