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Oblivion: A Memoir



Synopsis

"An irreplaceable testimony of the struggle for democracy and tolerance in Latin America."

El Pañador's Oblivion is a heartbreaking, exquisitely written memorial to the author's father, Hector Abad Gomez, whose criticism of the Colombian regime led to his murder by paramilitaries in 1987. Twenty years in the writing, it paints an unforgettable picture of a man who followed his conscience and paid for it with his life during one of the darkest periods in Latin America's recent history.

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Customer Reviews

"It is very difficult to summarize Oblivion without betraying it, because, like all great works, it is many things at once. To say that it is a heartrending memoir of the author's family and father--who was murdered by a hired assassin--is true, but paltry and infinitesimal, because the book is also a moving immersion into the inferno of Colombian political violence, into the life and soul of the city of Medellin, into the private life and public courage of a family, a true story that is also a superb fiction due to the way it is written and constructed, and one of the most eloquent arguments written in our time or any time against terror as an instrument of political action."• Mario Vargas Llosa "[Oblivion] emits a primal yet articulate howl . . . Mr. Abad's prose, in this translation by Anne McLean and Rosalind Harvey, is elastic and alive . . . In Spanish the verb 'to remember' is 'recordar,' the author reminds us, a word that derives from 'cor,' the Latin for heart. This memoir is extravagantly big-hearted. It will be stocked,

in good bookstores, in the nonfiction or belles-lettres sections. A wise owner might also place a copy under the sign that more simply reads: Parenting.

—Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* “[An] admirable effort at speaking the unspeakable, at verbalizing the pain accumulated over decades, is Hector Abad’s extraordinary memoir *Oblivion*. It’s been years since I read such a powerful meditation on loss . . . I confess not to have known of [Abad] before, even though this is his second book translated into English. This ignorance was actually beneficial, for it allowed me to submerge myself in the narrative without preconception. I emerged from that submersion hypnotized. *Oblivion* will remind you in equal measure of Vittorio de Sica’s Italian neo-Realist movie *The Bicycle Thief* and Elie Wiesel’s Holocaust novel *Night* . . . [Abad’s] desire to explore the echoes of memory with meticulous care, to touch the wound of the past through lucid prose, is an act of valor.”

—Ian Stavans, *San Francisco Chronicle* “A family memoir that deserves classic status . . . [Abad] not only pays radiant homage to a hero but champions the path of peaceful change he so steadfastly took.”

—Boyd Tonkin, *The Independent* “A tremendous and necessary book, devastatingly courageous and honest. At times I wondered how [Abad] was brave enough to write it.”

—Javier Cercas “A beautiful and profoundly moving work.”

—El País “[*Oblivion*] is a shattering chronicle of Colombia’s violence. But it is also an inspiring tribute to tolerance and paternal love.”

—Giles Tremlett, *The Guardian* “A beautiful, authentic, and moving book.”

—Rosa Montero “[A] great and deeply moving testament.”

—Kate Saunders, *The Times* (London) “An unbearably moving, eloquent tribute to the author’s father—who was murdered by Colombian paramilitaries in 1987—that is fit to burst with love and pride.”

—Holly Kyte, *The Telegraph* “I store up what I have read by Hector Abad like spherical, polished, luminous little balls of bread, ready for when I have to walk through a vast forest in the nighttime.”

—Manuel Rivas “Colombian author Abad dedicates this loving and sentimental memoir to his father, Hector Abad Gómez, a professor and doctor devoted to his family, “moved to tears by poetry and music,” and committed to a better Colombia. The latter aspiration cost him his life when he was assassinated in 1987, and his son began writing this book five years later. Abad spends much of the book expressing his love for his father, but it is his discussion of Gómez’s public health and human rights projects—such as founding “the Colombian Institute of Family Wellbeing, which built aqueducts and sewer systems in villages, rural districts, and cities”—that reveals what a remarkable educator, reformer, and activist the senior Abad was, and how his assassination was a tragedy for a family and a nation.”

HÃ©ctor Abad is one of Colombia's leading writers. Born in 1958, he grew up in MedellÃ­n, where he studied medicine, philosophy, and journalism. After being expelled from university for writing a defamatory text against the Pope, he moved to Italy before returning to his homeland in 1987.

This memoir is the fascinating, beautifully written coming of age story of Hector Abad, the son of Hector Abad Gomez. Gomez was no ordinary man; he was a towering presence in his son's life and throughout Colombia. He was a professor, a doctor, and an international health care advocate who worked tirelessly to help Colombia's poor. An enlightened man living in a not so enlightened time, he fought old world thinking while dodging Colombia's deadly warring political factions. Ultimately, he paid for his passions with his life. This book provided me a glimpse into Colombia, the real Colombia, which unfortunately has had a tendency to be reduced by the western media as a land of violent drug cartels and coffee beans. But there is a complicated and beautiful history contained in this book that was a pleasure (and a horror) to discover. I thoroughly enjoyed this immensely personal, bittersweet tale of a father's unconditional devotion to his son and would highly recommend it. It is often dark, and more often painful, but well worth the read.

Although titled *Oblivion: A Memoir*, this book is much more than just a son's reflections about his father. Through it, HÃ©ctor Abad Faciolince provides the reader with an intimate portrait of the human rights struggle in Colombia over his father's lifetime, as well as, a wake-up call to a world wracked by violence. Written some twenty years after his father's assassination on the streets of MedellÃ­n, Colombia, *Oblivion* is without a doubt one of the most transformative books that I have read in the past twenty years. Upon finishing it, I realized, perhaps for the first time in my life, that I have not done enough to ease the suffering of others. Truly, as I read the story of this positive, loving father, I was humbled not only by his unconditional love for his son, but for the people of Colombia and indeed the world. My full review is available on my blog at <https://readingwritingreacting.wordpress.com/2015/12/23/book-review-oblivion-by-hector-abad/>

I bought this book after reading a review of it in *The Nation Magazine* and was not disappointed.

Intrigued from page one, I couldn't put the book down, an unusual reaction to a story about someone else's family. This is no hazy set of photographs taken by a 6-year old with his or her first camera. None of the important parts are cut from the scenes; we can observe whole people and situations as if we were in the picture ourselves. Oblivion is compelling in many ways: it tells about the joys and tragedies of one family in a very relatable way; it introduces readers to a nation and a religion with all the warts and oozy sin pouring out; it reveals Columbia's chaos and the crises of a nation that creates hardship and genuine fears for those it purports to govern; it leads to an understanding of parental love and what that love can and cannot do for children. This makes Oblivion not only inspirational, but also, a history and basic psychology lesson. That's a lot for any author to do without intellectual pretensions or maudlin descriptions or self laudatory revelation. Mr. Abed can write. I liked this book so much I bought it for my own adult children. I want them to see that we're not the only family that travels together with bumps along the way, that good and bad blending into grey is a common occurrence, that none of us escape the pain that comes with loving others as well as the joy we can choose to develop regardless of that pain. I hope Mr. Abed will continue writing and that we Americans will be recipients of his words. We need to hear what it's like to live in places without democratic protections and so-called entitlements. We have no idea what it's like to live without any safety net. Before we vote this November on the future of our nation, we need more books like this one.

I truly enjoyed this book, not only a memoir, but also provided great insights on life, violence, social activism, and human rights struggles in Medellin, Colombia. Oblivion, really helped me reconnect with what's important in the world, which I sometimes lose sight of because of materialistic pleasures. Most importantly, it helped me understand the importance of really enjoying the experience of loved ones while they are still alive, because life is truly finite, and we only get one shot. Great read by a gifted Colombian writer.

Excellent novel giving one a glimpse of life in Colombia. This book is well written and would recommend to others.

Intimate and emotional without being corny. Also a document of the injustice that still prevails in my country Venezuela, great reading

I was afraid that this book would be dark, ominous, given the political reality of Colombia when

Hector Abad Gomez was murdered by members of death squads in 1987. While we encounter evil, Oblivion is the love story of a father for his son and family, the passion of a humanist for social justice, an oasis of beauty in the middle of chaos. Social justice seems to lose against the paramilitary forces, with so many people disappearing, being tortured and killed but we are left with hope for the future. A truly memorable book.

The important fact about this book is not what happens, which the reader knows from the beginning, but the style in which it's told. It is like a crescendo; from the naïve memories of the author's childhood, to the sophisticated analysis of Colombian politics, until his father's assassination in 1987. It took Hector Abad twenty years to write this book and it was worth the wait. No wonder that Abad says to prefer reality to fiction since its publication.

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