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Gabriel Garcia Marquez: The Novel Journalist

by

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In an interview with Playboy in 1983, Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez commented, "I'm fascinated by the relationship between literature and journalism. I began my career as a journalist in Colombia, and a reporter is something I've never stopped being. Journalism helped maintain contact with reality, which is essential to literature." As a graduate student in both literature and journalism, I share Garcia Marquez's interest in both disciplines. Nowhere else does the 67-year-old author attempt to blend both genres than in his 1981 novella, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, which he called "a perfect integration of journalism and literature" (McMurray 62).

This short story is based upon real-life drama that implicated some of Garcia Marquez's closest friends thirty years prior to the date of its publication.

This study explains the journalistic devices Garcia Marquez learned as a reporter and later employed in his fiction, with particular emphasis on Chronicle of a Death Foretold. In 1950, Garcia Marquez began his journalism career at the age of twenty in Baranquilla, where he wrote a column for El Heraldo. Four years later he moved to Bogota to develop his investigative reporting skills at El Espectador. As a reporter, Garcia Marquez was trained to adhere to journalistic practices, including creating the 'five W's' news lead, attributing information either directly or indirectly to a wealth of sources, and providing meticulous detail.

While Chronicle of a Death Foretold is, for the most part, an objective account of the murder of one of the author's close friends, the privileging of sources and the reporter/narrator's personal need to provide closure to the events and explain the 'why' that, in their leads, reporters are trained to answer, ultimately prove the impossibility of completely objective reporting.

This study of Chronicle of a Death Foretold concludes that, while a reporter's bias may not be intentional, it is inevitable, but through various journalistic techniques, Garcia Marquez is able to disguise such biases and produce a more authentic and credible work. In short, Chronicle of a Death Foretold draws upon journalism to create fictional reality.
Born in the small coastal town of Aracataca, Colombia in 1928, Gabriel Garcia Marquez began his writing career as a journalist in Cartagena and Barranquilla in the late forties. Today he considers himself a free-lance journalist. Garcia Marquez's career as a fiction writer is generally acknowledged to have begun in 1955 with his first novel, Leafstorm. However, with the publication of One Hundred Years of Solitude in 1967, the Colombian catapulted himself and the entire Latin American literary scene into the international limelight. This achievement is considered to mark the peak of the famous "boom" period—or "the explosion of first-rate novels published during the 1960s" (Williams 3). The "boom" in the Latin American novel is said to have been sparked by the Cuban revolution (Plimpton xvii). Out of this period grew the popularity of the term "magical realism"—a unique blending of fantasy and reality. Garcia Marquez is regarded as an exemplary writer of this fictional technique and his works reflect the influence of Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo of Mexico, and Alejo Carpentier of Cuba. In 1982, he received the Nobel Prize for literature for One Hundred Years of Solitude, a novel that, having sold ten million copies and having been translated into thirty languages,
is considered his most widely read work. John Sturrock, a book critic for the New York Times wrote that Garcia Marquez, then the most recent Nobel Prize winner "is one of the small number of contemporary writers from Latin America who have given to its literature a maturity and dignity it never had before" (December 5, 1982). Indeed, Garcia Marquez had become only the fourth Latin American writer to receive the prize, following Chile's Gabriela Mistral (1945), Guatemala's Miguel Angel Asturias (1967), and Chile's Pablo Neruda (1973). The Colombian often credits the works of modernist writers Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway as inspiring his writing techniques, and it is on the level of such writers that critics today invariably place Garcia Marquez's fiction.

Garcia Marquez is not the first novelist whose roots can be traced to journalism. In the mid-1960s, a hybridized form of writing, coined 'New Journalism' by former National News Council Chairman Norman Isaacs surfaced. New Journalism was characterized as the writer's use of dramatic, fictional literary techniques to enliven conventional reporting. 'New Journalists' like Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, and Gay Talese rejected conventional reporting forms like the standard news lead and the summary 'five W's' and admitted their biases. In Tom Wolfe's 'saturation reporting,'
intensive reportage replaced the extensive. Gay Talese developed 'interior monolog' to report on the thoughts of his subjects. Hunter Thompson used anti-journalistic scatology and injected himself into his reports. Capote claimed invention of the "non-fiction novel," In Cold Blood, and Mailer called his Armies of the Night "The Novel as History; History as the Novel" (Murphy 20). All sought to extend and blur the boundaries of conventional journalism. Consequently, the copy they produced was a "more literary" (Murphy 20) reportorial product. Explains Tom Wolfe in The New Journalism:

New journalism showed me the possibility of there being something 'new' in journalism. What interested me was not simply the discovery that it was possible to write accurate non-fiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories. It was that--plus. It was the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally (15).

These 'New Journalists' used the mechanics of fiction writing as well as their personal impressions of what they were reporting about to present closer versions of reality than they believed conventional reporting could.

In direct stylistic opposition to the 'New Journalists,' Garcia Marquez employs journalistic writing techniques in his fiction, and particularly in Chronicle of a Death Foretold in order to produce a seemingly more
authentic and credible work. While other writers may have been and perhaps are still using their journalistic backgrounds, the focus of this thesis will be on how Garcia Marquez uses journalism in his fiction. Garcia Marquez learned the techniques of journalism through his various ventures as a reporter.

In 1946, after graduating from a private Jesuit high school in Zipaquira, a town close to Bogota, Garcia Marquez enrolled in law school at the National University in Bogota. In 1948, the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a popular left-wing politician, sparked the beginning of "la violencia," a civil war between conservatives and liberals that lasted into the 1960s and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Colombians. It was soon after the violence broke out and the university closed that Garcia Marquez was forced to return to the coast to continue his law studies at the University of Cartagena. Shortly after abandoning school, the twenty-year-old moved to nearby Baranquilla, where he worked for El Heraldo from January 1950, to December 1952. The pieces he wrote during this period include some four hundred articles for his column, "La Jirafa" ("The Giraffe"). The only requirement aside from restricting the length of his work to a single column was that he "write well" (Sorela 28). He was also encouraged to write about "inconsequential events of regional, national and foreign origin, literary texts,
slices-of-life pieces, politics, violence, and the Coast
and its culture" (Sorela 29). Garcia Marquez would later
draw upon his knowledge of the Caribbean Coast to add detail
and precision to his works.

So committed was he to using journalistic details
in his work, that when he ran out of his own ideas, Garcia
Marquez selected cable text news items as topics for his
column. According to Pedro Sorela, who knew the young
journalist, "Garcia Marquez was particularly well situated
because in his position, not only as a columnist, but as
a 'copy editor,' he had to sort through all the news items
from the international news services and decide what to
publish and then headline it" (quoted in Sims, 68). The
column, while it did not force the author to adhere to
strict orthodox journalism standards, nevertheless did
require him to relate his works "to his personal experience
in his journalism, that is, costeno culture, and the
politics and history of Colombia" (Sims 107). Garcia
Marquez's earliest journalistic pieces, which mainly focused
on costeno culture, were the grounds upon which he would
later base the themes of his novels.

Between January 1953 and February 1954, Garcia Marquez
held several miscellaneous jobs, including a traveling
book salesman. After moving to Bogota in February 1954,
he took on the title of investigative reporter for El
Espectador, where he worked until July 1955. El Espectador
proved to be the training school for Garcia Marquez the journalist. For, as Sorela explains,

In his newspaper reporting at El Espectador Garcia Marquez found exactly what he needed, since what is a newspaper article but a narration, and even more, a narration based on a story. That is exactly what the Colombian writer's narrative style is. Like many other writers before him—such as Hemingway, one of his masters—Garcia Marquez discovered in newspaper articles not only an increased contact with the 'street'—and in many cases his articles were based on documentation and interviews—but also an area for narrative experimentation, honed by the requirements of mass communications, which would also serve him well in his stories and novels (78, emphasis mine).

The requirements of mass communications Sorela speaks of, including writing the typical who, what, why, where, how, and when news lead, supporting material through documents, and using direct and indirect quotes and attribution, are devices Garcia Marquez would learn to adhere to and would subsequently employ in his fiction.

Just as he was able to choose which stories on the news wire interested him while working for El Heraldo, he continued to practice such selective journalism while employed as a reporter at El Espectador. One of those stories that he chose to re-examine and which marked him as an investigative reporter appeared in 1955 in El Espectador. The original story focused on Luis Alejandro Velasco, a twenty-year-old sailor who became shipwrecked after the Colombian Navy ship "Caldas" capsized in February 1955. The cause of the wreck was said to have been a bad
storm. The sailor survived on a raft for ten days without food or water, and when he was finally rescued off the Atlantic coast of Colombia, he was welcomed in Bogota. Both he and the Navy were considered heroes.

But what reporters who interviewed the shipwrecked sailor failed to examine was the cause and circumstances surrounding the ship's capsizing. After interrogating Velasco for twenty sessions of six-hour interviews, Garcia Marquez said the sailor told him that the cause of the accident was actually a result of "the sliding boxes of contraband luxury items--refrigerators, washing machines and the like--on the deck of the destroyer, which pushed the other crew members overboard" (Pierce 69). The resulting fourteen-part series, "La verdad sobre mi aventura" ("The Truth About My Adventure") written by Garcia Marquez and appearing in the form of daily journalism created a fury in the Navy. The Colombian dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, then in power, retaliated by insisting that El Espectador send Garcia Marquez to Europe as a correspondent. Shortly after Garcia Marquez's departure to Europe, Pinilla closed the newspaper. Clearly, Garcia Marquez's articles relating the government ship's capsizing due to its overload of contraband from the United States directly led to his dismissal as a staff writer for El Espectador. The story appeared in book form in 1970 with the title, The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor.
In the preface to the 1970 edition, García Márquez describes his interviewing technique:

I interviewed Velasco for many hours. He would tell me his story and I would listen to him like a psychoanalyst. I knew that there were gaps in his story from a literary point of view. Based on all the notes that I made, I then reconstructed his adventure. Not a single sentence in The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor belongs to Velasco, but all the information comes from him. My task consisted of providing the literary framework for his story, of giving it the structure, touches and atmosphere that were necessary to interest the readers (Boncenne 57).

The narrator of Chronicle of a Death Foretold seeks to similarly investigate a wire story, and it is in this novella that García Márquez's journalistic training is most evident.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold was first published in Spanish in 1981. Based upon a real life tragedy, the novel seeks to "chronicle" a murder committed twenty-seven years past. Many journalistic techniques, such as the use of citing direct and indirect sources and the creation of a high level of interest from the first lines of text are ever-present in García Márquez's fiction. The novella, in fact, has generated much controversy among critics over whether it is a work of fiction or a modified piece of journalism.

After an extravagant wedding party, Bayardo San Roman --a quintessential macho--returns Angela Vicario (the bride) to her parents because she is not a virgin. The girl's
mother (Pura Vicario) beats the beautiful Angela and calls her sons. The twin brothers, Pedro and Pablo, demand that Angela give the name of her violator. She names Santiago Nasar, a handsome, rich, and likable young man in the small town. The Vicario twins had been out cavorting with Nasar and his friend, Cristo Bedoya, that very night. However, because of the strict code of honor in Latin American culture, the Vicario brothers are compelled to kill Nasar. Though they accept unequivocally that Nasar is guilty, there remains an ambiguity about Nasar's guilt in the "chronicle" which allows a suggestion of the possible innocence of Nasar. In any case, the twins venture forth to murder Nasar, but they appear less than eager to carry out their culturally prescribed duty; indeed, they make various efforts to encourage the outside intervention from townsfolk that would spare them from the task of murdering their friend. But despite the ample opportunity they give the community to stop them, no one does. The barbarous murder concludes the chronicle.

The narrator of Chronicle of a Death Foretold, like the author of Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor, devotes much time and energy to investigating the respective events. Garcia Maquez uses the investigative reporter skills he learned and developed while working for El Espectador. In an Interview with Magazine Litteraire in November, 1981, Garcia Marquez describes the sources he interviewed who
would supply the framework for this novella. In the search for the details of this sensationalistic murder-for-honor story, he says he visited the real-life couple who had reunited in Manaure, just northeast of Riohacha. Garcia Marquez states that he did find the couple and gives a description of the event in chapter four of the novella. In his interview with the French magazine, Garcia Marquez also comments on other elements of the story, including some of the sources quoted in Chronicle of a Death Foretold and a chance encounter he has with the priest who performed the mishandled autopsy. The priest Garcia Marquez interviewed in order to write the novella admits the autopsy was in fact "a massacre...half of the cranium had been destroyed by the trepanation" (Garcia Marquez 219) not only in the novella, but also in reality. Garcia Marquez does emphasize that, in reality, the couple—"Angela" and "Bayardo"—only re-established contact for a short time, and simply for the sake of propriety (Minta 125).

The posturing of text as "chronicle" beckons us to look at a central concern in most of Garcia Marquez's work—the relationship of fiction to reality. In particular, the journalist/narrator who claims to provide this objective "chronicle" warrants close examination. In this manner, it is likely we can reach an understanding of the text as both social commentary as well as Garcia Marquez's philosophical statement on the nature of truth and the
reporter's responsibility to record it. Since the title implies that *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* will be an objective, orderly and historical account, it may be useful to approach the text by measuring how close it comes to answering our expectations of a "chronicle."

The standard techniques a journalist must use in writing a story or 'chronicling' events are demonstrated from the very beginning of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The opening sentence, "On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at five-thirty in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on" (169) answers many of the 'five W's.' From the very beginning, readers know the who--the identity of the victim--Nasar (and shortly thereafter the identity of his murderers), the where, the when, and what transpired. The opening sentence and subsequently the whole novella cannot answer why, or under what circumstances a murder could have happened in broad daylight. Thus, Garcia Marquez invokes in the reader the desire to keep reading in order to discover the underlying cause/motive of the murder. Like a news article, whose first sentence should pique the reader's interest and work to sustain it through the length of the article, Garcia Marquez creates an intriguing plot which, along with him, his readers must wade through for the details. Indeed, the dramatic beginning of the novella resembles a sensational newspaper account.
If we compare Garcia Marquez's (who is, by admission, synonymous with the journalist/narrator of the novella) journalistic tenets to those adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, we can see surprisingly similar principles: that is, the ASNE Canon of Journalism states that

The primary function of newspapers is to communicate to the human race what its members do, feel, and think. Journalism, therefore, demands of its practitioners the widest range of intelligence, of knowledge, and of experience, as well as natural and trained powers of observation and reasoning. To its opportunities as a chronicle are indissolubly linked its obligations as teacher and interpreter (Mott 457, emphasis mine).

Certainly it can be said that the chronicler of Chronicle of a Death Foretold interviews and observes as many witnesses and investigates as many court documents as he can in order to communicate to his readers (who are also members of his community) what they 'feel' and 'think.' Furthermore, his 'chronicle,' which is pieced together using thirty-seven separate witnesses, is seemingly the society's (rather than the journalist's own) 'interpretation' of events. His attempt to make it their story is clear: "I had a very confused memory before I decided to rescue it piece by piece from the memory of others" (196).

In fact, the most obvious clue indicating the journalistic impulse behind Chronicle of a Death Foretold and Garcia Marquez's use of such reportorial techniques
is found in his use of witnesses and sources. The chronicler either directly or indirectly attributes nearly every nugget of information he reports to the three dozen witnesses he has interviewed. On any given page, the narrator quotes a source, and the witnesses' accounts are followed by 'he said,' 'he told me' or 'according to,' which makes the witness and his or her account credible. For example, in chapter four we read that Pedro Vicario told the narrator, "I was awake for eleven months," and the narrator adds, "And I knew him well enough to know that it was true" (221). The reader at least briefly considers the plausibility of the statement, because it is presented as verifiable fact, presented verbatim by the narrator.

Garcia Marquez's own explanation of the presentation of facts best describes his writing/reporting technique: "The tricks you need to transform something which appears fantastic, unbelievable into something plausible, credible, those I learned from journalism. The key is to tell it straight. It is done by reporters and country folk" (Simmons 111). Perhaps Pedro Vicario didn't remain awake for eleven months, but the straightforward, matter-of-fact manner in which his account is reported at least does not leave the reader questioning the narrator, but rather the source himself. While Vicario's words remain doubtful, the narrator retains his credibility.
The narrator also quotes participants in the murder directly from the 300-page brief of the Vicario twins' murder trial he located in the Palace of Justice in Riohacha. For instance, the narrator writes,

In the brief, they declared "She [Angela] told us about the miracle but not the saint." When the investigating magistrate asked her if she knew who the decedent Santiago Nasar was, she answered him impassively: "He was my perpetrator." That's the way she swears in the brief, but with no further precision of either how or where (235).

Garcia Marquez's narrator uses quotes, and, for the most part, refrains from interjecting personal commentary either to dismiss or promote his sources. Quoting sources without personal commentary gives newspapers, as it does the journalist/narrator of Chronicle of a Death Foretold, the appearance of objectivity, accuracy, and neutrality.

Another device that lends credibility to the narrator's role as journalist in Chronicle of a Death Foretold is his concern with and uncanny access to detail. With respect to the weather on the morning of Nasar's murder, the narrator discovers "Many people coincided in recalling that it was a radiant morning with a sea breeze. But most agreed that the weather was funereal" (170). The author includes conflicting versions of the state of the weather. Victoria Guzman, the cook, attests that the February sun "warmed things up" (173), but the narrator's sister, Margot, recalls "It was Christmas weather" (178). The
journalist/narrator knows he must use identifiable sources whose accounts can be reviewed or corroborated by other witnesses. By presenting more than one "version" of the story, the narrator's account aims toward maintaining objectivity.

Furthermore, the narrator's use of detail reinforces his careful, meticulous, 'observer' role and further strengthens his credibility as a reporter. For example, in chapter one we are told that prior to Santiago Nasar's death, the twenty-year-old kept a collection of guns. But they are not simply guns: they are "a Mannlicher Schoenauer .30-06 rifle, a .300 Holland & Holland Magnum rifle, and a .22 Hornet" (170). If the narrator can cite such exacting detail, then we are led to believe it must be true. Or, as Garcia Marquez called this 'journalistic trick' he applies to literature: "If you say that there are elephants flying in the sky, people are not going to believe you. But if you say that there are four hundred and twenty-five elephants in the sky, people will probably believe you" (Plimpton 324). The more detail the narrator gives, the more credible his account.

One element subversive to the supposed "chronicle" is the anachronistic movement of the narrative account. A chronicle implies an ordered, chronological history. However, while the novel begins in a straightforward, logical recount ("On the morning they were going to kill
him..."), we soon find ourselves jumping twenty-seven years forward. The novella's five chapters hardly fit the definition of a "chronicle," that is, a chronological record of historical events. The first chapter is devoted to the description of the morning of Nasar's assassination by the Vicario twins. In the second chapter, the narrator describes the background of the relationship of Bayardo San Roman to Angela Vicario and the wedding itself. In the third chapter, the night preceding Nasar's death, the eve of the wedding, is described. But in chapter four, Nasar's autopsy and Angela's life after her four-hour marriage are the focus. It is not until the last section that the chronology of events leading up to Nasar's murder are detailed. Nevertheless, like a reporter who hopes a reader will read his or her entire story (despite telling in the first graf who did it and what happened), the narrator is able to sustain the suspense of Nasar's murder until the end of the story. I suggest that the order in which the journalist presents his chronicle proves the reporter's ability to maintain the reader's interest and shows his objectivity. That is, Garcia Marquez's narrator does not privilege the 'facts' (which appear in the last chapter) over dreams, anecdotes, and commentary. For example, in the first chapter, he writes that Santiago Nasar's death could have been avoided had his mother interpreted his dreams correctly (169) or recognized his
poor sleep as "the omen" (169). The narrator is simply reporting his witnesses' recollections, and he does not privilege facts over unverifiable material, like dreams and premonitions. The narrator produces quotes that contain both fact and superstition, and in doing so he shows his objectivity in that he gives equal weight to each.

It should be noted that, far from being an entirely objective chronicler, our narrator is either directly or indirectly involved with the victim and his murderers. Also, at the time of Nasar's murder, he is "recovering from the wedding revels in the apostolic lap of Maria Alejandrina Cervantes," the local town prostitute (170). Rather than lending to his account a tone of authority, the narrator's association with the local prostitute certainly calls into question his objective perspective. Furthermore, we are informed somewhat offhandedly that the narrator is both cousin to Angela, the returned bride, and family friend to Nasar (his own mother is Nasar's godmother). How completely objective can this chronicle be?

When Mario Vargas Llosa, Peru's most famous prose writer, asked Garcia Marquez the same question--that of the writer's capability of maintaining objectivity--the Colombian responded:

> When I sit down to write a book it is because I am interested in telling a good story. One that will appeal. I also have an ideological position and if it is firm, if the writer is
sincere at the moment of telling his story, be it Red Riding Hood or one of guerrillas, to cite two extremes, if the writer, I repeat, has a firm ideological position, this position will nurture his tale and it is from this moment on that the story can have subversive force of which I speak. I do not think it is deliberate, but it is inevitable (Llosa 9).

Garcia Marquez may not believe the writer's bias or ideology is intentional, but it is inevitable and cannot be avoided. I suggest it is the narrator's (and hence Garcia Marquez's) 'ideological position' that offers a key to understanding the central concerns of Chronicle of a Death Foretold. For while it is true that the narrator does remain relatively objective in his appraisal of the possibility of Nasar's innocence (through his presentation of facts through a myriad of sources), as well as the Vicario twins' duty to reclaim their family honor, it becomes obvious that it is impossible for him to step outside his cultural perspective and provide a truly objective account. Evidence of the narrator's personal preferential treatment of his distant cousin, Angela Vicario is clear. For example, he writes, "When I saw her like that in the idyllic frame of the window, I refused to believe that the woman there was who I thought it was, because I couldn't bring myself to admit that life might end up resembling bad literature so much, But it was she: Angela Vicario" (227, emphasis mine). In this passage, the journalist/narrator refuses to accept the facts and hints at his own preferential treatment of his cousin and the woman scorned, Angela
Vicario. He apparently does not want to allow or is incapable of allowing his current vision of her to tarnish his former "idealized image" (227) of her.

In fact, of all his sources of information, Angela Vicario, the very woman under investigation, is interviewed at least twelve times by the narrator. Comparatively, witnesses of the murder itself, like Margot and Pablo Vicario, are each questioned and quoted seven times. Although the narrator literally pieces together this murder-for-honor story, he gives precedence to Angela Vicario's version. In his book, Between Fact and Fiction: The Problem of Journalism, Edward Jay Epstein cautions against this privileging of sources, of which Garcia Marquez is guilty. Epstein writes, "A reporter cannot simply give weight to the source that is most intimately involved with the issue since those closest to a dispute might have the greatest interest in distorting or neglecting aspects of it, and might well be the least impartial" (12).

Garcia Marquez further distorts the truth in his depiction of the wealthy playboy, Bayardo San Roman. According to a newspaper interview, the real-life person upon whom the character of 'Bayardo' in Chronicle of a Death Foretold was based was far from his princely, arrogant figure painted by the narrator. The actual 'Bayardo,' Miguel Reyes Palencia, was in fact "An insurance agent with twelve children" (Romero 37). Furthermore,
the newspaper's interview with Palencia credits him with saying he did pass out on his own wedding night, and that, unlike the relatively calm Bayardo in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the bridegroom admitted to verbally and physically abusing Margarita (the Angela Vicario of the Chronicle) before returning her to her parents.

Moreover, said Palencia, he did return a suitcase full of unopened letters to Margarita, but only agreed to meet with her to sign annulment papers and return the unopened letters (Romero 38). García Márquez's seemingly fairy tale ending in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* of Bayardo San Roman returning to Angela Vicario to make amends is not, in reality, what happened.

The impossibility of objective truth and the propensity to disavow social responsibility in favor of predetermination provide major philosophical and socio-political statements that complement García Márquez's previous work and are the central issues of this novel. The very fact that García Márquez waits for nearly three decades to pass before writing about the tragedy that occurred in Sucre in 1951 suggests his attempt to distance his personal views from influencing his *Chronicle of the murder*. But, as evidenced from his twisting of the 'ending' of the story, the passage of time between an event and the reporting of it does not produce an entirely objective account. Several critics examine this very dilemma.
Kathleen McNerney sees the relation between Garcia Marquez the novelist and Garcia Marquez the journalist as one of paramount importance in the text. She suggests that we see Garcia Marquez as the narrator, piecing together the story with the technique of an investigative reporter. However, as the novel closes in a manner different from what really happened (there is a reconciliation between Bayardo and Angela only in the novel), McNerney cites Garcia Marquez's insistence to "improve things for the sake of balance, harmony and his own version of the truth" (142). According to McNerney, the novel also has traits of the detective genre, and part of the story is the attempt to integrate different versions of what really occurred on that fateful Monday (138).

Likewise, Edith Grossman is interested in the manner in which Garcia Marquez has reshaped the reality of historical events. She discusses information from the "factual" account of the murder that occurred in Sucre in 1951 and upon which Garcia Marquez has based his "chronicle." She notes that, in comparison, "the fictional [version] expands, heightens and enlarges...so that potential legend seems to hover in the background" (64). Grossman and McNerney's points are well-taken, especially if we consider the original newspaper version of events that was reprinted in 1981 in Al Dia, a Colombian magazine:

In the municipality of Sucre (of the department of the same name), the elders recall with horror
the rainy morning of January 22, 1951, in which a young man from Sucre, Cayetano Gentile Chimento, twenty-two years old, medical student at the Javeriana University of Bogota and heir of the town's largest fortune, fell butchered by machete, innocent victim of a confused duel of honor, and without knowing for sure why he was dying. Cayetano was killed by Victor and Joaquin Chica Salas, whose sister Margarita, married the previous day with Miguel Reyes Palencia and returned to her family by her husband the same night of the marriage, accused Cayetano of being the author of the disgrace that had prevented her being a virgin at her marriage (Calderon and Roca 51).

Given the short account of the original murder-for-honor story, it is Garcia Marquez's project, Chronicle of a Death Foretold, to accumulate and gather the facts and interview as many witnesses as he can surrounding the murder of Cayetano Gentile Chimento, the 'Santiago Nasar' in reality, who was a good friend and drinking partner of the author's (Grossman 60). Thus, Garcia Marquez does not see himself as a mere conduit of information, reporting a news event, but he plays the role of the investigative reporter, seeking truth. Walter Lippmann, former journalist, media critic, and author, argued that there is a distinction between "news" and truth: "The function of news is to signalize an event; the function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act" (quoted in Epstein, 3). Despite the narrator's emulation of a journalist's writing techniques, it is his (and Garcia Marquez's) underlying 'ideological position' that he must
'bring to light' the hidden facts of his friend's murder that ultimately shapes his "chronicle." That is to say, the narrator hopes that the events--and the facts--will speak for themselves and yield their own objective truth. However, his investigation into Nasar's murder and his interviews with key witnesses yield no final answer. Angela Vicario's lack of explanation disturbs the narrator: "One item that would never be cleared up: who was the real cause of her damage, and how and why, because no one believed that it had really been Santiago Nasar" (228, emphasis mine). The who, what, where, and when can be ferreted out from the interviews, but the why--why Angela named Nasar--can never be explained, and thus the narrator feels obligated to solve this mystery himself. Since the facts cannot speak for themselves, the narrator feels compelled to attach blame to the real perpetrator, which he feels is the town itself. This guilt arises out of a collective adherence to a primitive and sexist code of honor. Writes Garcia Marquez, "But most of those who could have done something to prevent the crime and did not consoled themselves with the pretext that affairs of honor are sacred monopolies, giving access only to those who are part of the drama" (233). This code is so pervasive that it is even confirmed in the court which recognizes the murder as legal in "legitimate defense of honor" (200).

The barrage of facts are presented to us and considered
by the narrator as important because they serve to authenticate his objective journalist status, but also because they are used to cultivate a predetermined characterization of the murder: "No one could understand such fatal coincidences" (175). This attempt to portray the murder as predestined is orchestrated by the narrator early on in the chronicle. We are presented as important the augury-like dreams of Nasar, which his mother failed to recognize as clear omens (169). The inclination to conceive the murder as fated can be understood as functioning to alleviate the guilt felt by the town for letting the murder take place--it was fated. There is one brief, striking admission of this guilt with regard to Nasar's murder: "A death for which we all could have been to blame" (222). This oblique reference is quickly subsumed into the dominating rhetoric of the chronicle which maximizes the role of fate through the superfluous but exacting details.

Unconsciously, however, the narrator provides plenty of evidence that allows the reader to recognize the latent guilt of the town. For example, the narrator takes care to mention the health problems that the Vicario brothers have after the murder (221)(despite their claim that they would do it a thousand times over). Similarly, the author emphasizes the smell of Nasar that lingers throughout the town after his murder: "Everything continued smelling
of Santiago Nasar" (220). And perhaps, most notable is the need for the townspeople to understand their role in this "Horribly fated affair...For years we couldn't talk about anything else. Our daily conduct had suddenly begun to spin around a single common anxiety. The cocks of dawn would catch us trying to give order to the chain of many chance events. We weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but events...Because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate" (233). But, while we may discern the uneasy consciences of the townsfolk and their desire to ascribe the incident to fate, the narrator (and town) cannot. The mystery that the narrator desires to uncover is the culturally determined nature of the crime. However, since this would implicate the community in the murder, there is a covert tension and a degree of denial. Furthermore, it is unlikely that this tension could be deflated in a conscious manner by the narrator because he lacks the objectivity to understand the operative cultural codes. That task is left for the reader. This develops a complex complicity between the author and reader that transcends the narrator who is submerged in the culture he is describing. The underlying truth which the narrator and townsfolk cannot come to terms with is that, by not intervening, the entire community approved of the barbarous act. It is the underlying 'why' that, while most news
stories can answer based on the facts presented, eludes the narrator and causes him to formulate his own answer to the question of why the murder was never prevented. Since the facts aren't altogether clear, the narrator feels that, as a journalist, he must come as close to answering 'why' as he can.

When Gabriel Garcia Marquez commented about his fascination of the relationship between journalism and literature, he was most likely not referring to a comparison of the straightforward, simple-sentenced writing style of a journalist to the predominantly dissimilar style of a literary writer. His own style is unquestionably literary--his writing is embellished with metaphors and similes, and is replete with a wealth of adjectives and other parts of speech that are a journalist's anathema. Garcia Marquez's interest in the relationship between journalism and literature rests in his curiosity of the purpose of each. If, as Walter Lippmann said, "Journalists should provoke feeling in the reader, of inducing him to feel a sense of personal identification with the stories he is reading. The audience must participate in the news, much as it participates in the drama, by personal identification" (Lippmann 76), then Garcia Marquez has achieved this purpose. The sources Garcia Marquez painstakingly interviewed in order to compile this chronicle are direct participants in the news, as well as in the
drama in the novella. The line between journalism and literature is merely divided by the fine line of truth. Many writers and reporters like Garcia Marquez have recognized the tenuous relationship of the two genres. This notion is best expressed by noted novelist John Hersey, whose following excerpt appeared in the *Yale Review*.

As to journalism, we may as well grant right away that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity. It is impossible to present in words "the truth" or "the whole story." The minute a writer offers nine hundred ninety-nine out of a thousand facts, the worm of bias has begun to wriggle. The vision of each witness is particular. Still and all, I will assert that there is one sacred rule of journalism. The writer must not invent. The ethics of journalism, if we can be allowed such a boon, must be based on the simple truth that every journalist knows the difference between the distortion that comes from subtracting observed data and distortion that comes from adding invented data (Hersey 2).

While the author of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* does 'distort' several facts (names, ages of victims, and the outcome of the real-life drama) concerning the real-life murder of Cayetano Gentile Chimento, he does not 'invent' sources or facts. The chronicle of events simply expands upon the skeletal facts presented in the original newspaper report. The duty of the reporter to report an event and avoid leaving holes or gaps in the story is the very problem that the narrator of this novella encounters. Since his main source, Angela Vicario, never explains why she named Nasar, of all the men in town, as her perpetrator, the
reporter is left to speculate or draw inferences about why the murder was ever allowed to take place.

Garcia Marquez has said in several interviews that he believes journalists can learn from writers, and writers from journalists (Playboy, February, 1983). What the Colombian writer means but does not clarify is that the standard writing techniques common to journalism, can, when exercised by a fiction writer, give verisimilitude to his or her writing, and thus enable the writer to reach perhaps the most sought-after goal all writers have.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


