**Critical Essay #1**

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*Lilburn, a graduate student at McGill University, is the author of a study guide on Margaret At-wood's* The Edible Woman *and of numerous educational essays. In the following essay, he discusses the narrator's attempt to construct a chronicle that recaptures the past.*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a seemingly simple story about the murder of a young man in a small Colombian town. Written in a factual, journalistic style, the novel is told by an unnamed narrator who returns to his hometown twenty-seven years after the crime to "put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards." Assuming the role of detective, or investigative reporter, the narrator compiles and reports the information that he collects from the memories of the townspeople he interviews. What he finds, however, is a town full of people with varying and often conflicting memories of the events he is investigating. Consequently, what begins as an attempt to fill the gaps, to find out once and for all what really happened that dark and drizzly morning--or was it bright and sunny?--becomes instead a parody of any attempt to recapture and reconstruct the past.

At first glance, the narrator does what appears to be a very thorough job of finding and compiling information relating to the crime. He speaks to a great many people who knew Santiago Nasar, who were present on the evening of the wedding celebrations, and who were out to greet the bishop on the morning of the murder. Still, new information contradicts and undermines more often than it clarifies. Throughout the narrator's chronicle, for example, we hear varying accounts of the weather on the morning of the crime. According to some, it was a beautiful sunny morning; to others, the weather was drizzly and funereal. To the individuals reporting this information, the memory of that morning's weather is a fact--it is the reality they remember Or it may simply be the reality they choose to report at that time since facts, or the reporting of facts, change over time. Victoria Guzman, for example, initially reports that neither she nor her daughter knew that the Vicario brothers were waiting to kill Santiago, yet "in the course of her years" admits that both of them did, in fact, know about the twins' plans.

Memories are problematized further by the fact that the entire town was, on the night before the murder, celebrating Angela Vicario and Bayardo San Roman's wedding. To begin, the narrator, before deciding to "rescue" the events of the festival "piece by piece from the memory of others," has "a very confused memory" of those events. Yet there is no indication that the memories of the individuals on whom the narrator relies to construct his narrative are any more reliable than his own. On the contrary, most of the townspeople seem equally confused. The narrator's brother, for example, who returns home in the early hours of the morning and falls asleep sitting on the toilet, also has "confused" memories of an encounter he has with the Vicario brothers on his way home. Similarly, the narrator's "sister the nun" has an "eighty-proof hangover" on the morning of the crime and doesn't even bother to go out to greet the bishop. These fuzzy, alcohol-drenched memories of events that happened twenty-seven years earlier not only help explain the varying reports about the weather, but they cast doubt on the entire narrative that uses these memories as its foundation.

According to Mary G. Berg, the narrator's failed attempt to find consensus among the varied accounts of the past reveals both the subjectivity of memory and the "inherent fallibility of journalistic report or written history." In short, it demonstrates the "insufficiency of words to depict (or reflect) human experience." It also, as John S. Christie writes, undermines the notion of a single narrative authority, since the ambiguity that results from the multiple perceptions and points of view reveals that no one version of the truth exists. Within the world represented in the novel, however, ambiguities and uncertainties are not so closely scrutinized. Santiago Nasar is murdered not because it is proven beyond a reasonable doubt that he was the man responsible for stealing Angela Vicario's honor, but because he is accused of doing so. It is the telling, Christie argues, that "creates the reality " The same might be said about the narrator's chronicle- by telling the story, by selecting and carefully arranging the conflicting versions of events into a highly structured narrative, the narrator creates the illusion that his version of the events succeeds in recapturing the reality of the past.

It is, however, only a temporary illusion. The narrator himself suggests that written reports can conceal more than they reveal when he mentions that the original report prepared by the investigating magistrate left out certain key facts. The fact that the twins started looking for Santiago at Maria Alejandrina Cervantes' house, for example, where they and Santiago had been just a short time earlier, is not reported in the brief. If this event is not reported, one must therefore ask what other information was also left out. Similarly, information that could significantly alter how events are understood and interpreted is also missing from the narrator's chronicle; he was only able to salvage "some 322 from the more than 500" pages of the original, incomplete brief from the flooded floor of the Palace of Justice in Riohacha. Moreover, some of the people whose testimony might have proven enlightening either refused to talk about the past, as did Angela's mother, or were unable to do so because they were dead, namely officer Leandro Pornoy.

The narrator's chronicle is complicated even more by the fact that he was himself a resident of the town. He grew up with Santiago and, in later years, they along with other friends spent their vacation time together. Moreover, he was with Santiago on the evening before his murder and, at the moment the crime was committed, was in the arms of Maria Alejandrina Cervantes, a woman with whom Santiago was once obsessed and whom the narrator was seeing without Santiago's knowledge. What's more, the narrator is related to Angela Vicario. According to Carlos Alonso, these ties between the narrator and the community put "in check the objectivity that his rhetorical posturing demands" and may even serve to "nurture the secret at the core of the events." At the very least, they add yet another layer of uncertainty to an already questionable narrative.

Central to an investigation of the events surrounding the crime is the code of honor which leads the Vicario brothers to arm themselves with pig-killing knives and take the life of a man with whom they were drinking and singing just a few short hours before. The code of honor is one which, Christie explains, derives from a paternal authority associated with the "mythic past of some religious or moral order which has now dissipated." Still, the code remains sufficiently relevant in the community that an entire town stands by and watches as Pedro and Pablo brutally kill Santiago Nasar in the street. Years later, the townspeople who could have done something but didn't turn to the code for consolation, believing that "affairs of honor are sacred monopolies, giving access only to those who are part of the drama." The comment made by Prudencia Cotes, Pablo Vicano's fiancee, is also suggestive of the pressure the Vicario brothers were under as a result of the code: "I knew what [Pablo and Pedro] were up to and I didn't only agree, I never would have married [Pablo] if he hadn't done what a man should do."

The structure of the narrative seemingly supports this code by giving the impression that Santiago's death was inevitable. His imminent demise is announced on the very first page of the novel and is announced several times again throughout the chronicle. Even the Vicario brothers are said to think of the murder "as if [it had] already happened." Yet opportunities to prevent the crime are plentiful By die time Santiago reaches the pier to greet the bishop, for example, very few of the townspeople do not know that the Vicario brothers are waiting for him to kill him. Even the town's mayor and priest are aware of the twins' intentions and do nothing. In the end, William H. Gass writes, "one man is dead, and hundreds have murdered him." And indeed, everyone who knew of the twins' intentions and did nothing to stop them shares responsibility for the crime.

One of the few characters who does try to intervene and prevent the twins from carrying out the duty that has befallen them is Clotilde Armenia. That she fails in her attempt, Mark Millington writes, emphasizes the difficulty that female characters have in trying to move out of the passivity enforced by the male-dominated society. Indeed, the community is very much one characterized by a gender divide. In Angela Vicario's family, for example, boys are "brought up to be men" and girls are "reared to get married." Of her daughters, Angela's mother says that any man would be happy with them because "they've been raised to suffer." Moreover, it is not Angela who chooses to marry Bayardo San Roman but rather her family who, like the widower Xius, falls prey to Bayardo's charm and money and obliges Angela to marry him.

Millington argues that the murder of Santiago Nasar encapsulates much of the structure of power in the town. The murder, he writes, involves only male characters who act in defense of an honor code that "safeguards the dominant position of male characters " Female characters, Millington continues, are "peripheral to the main actions of the narrative just as they are peripheral to the structures of power in the society represented." Yet Millington offers a reading of the novel that focuses on what he describes as "the untold story," namely that of the marginalized and powerless Angela Vicario. Her story, Millington contends, would trace her relationship with Bayardo and culminate with their reconciliation--a reconciliation that undermines the dominant system by annulling their separation. Millington's reading not only draws attention (once again) to the selective nature of the information used to construct the chronicle (the narrator chooses to focus on Santiago's story, rather than Angela's), but also to the multiple truths lurking behind and within it. This reading also highlights the subversive power implied by Angela's refusal to feign her virginity on her wedding night. To do so, Millington explains, would have acknowledged the importance of the honor code.

More importantly, Angela's refusal to feign her virginity provides her with a way out of an arranged marriage to a man that she does not love and eventually allows her to break free of the authority that forced her into the marriage. Later, when Angela discovers that she does indeed have feelings for Bayardo, she begins to write him letters and discovers that she has become "mistress of her fate for the first time." In the version of events constructed by the narrator, however, the details of her story remain largely untold. Trapped and represented in another's chronicle, she is once again subjected to male authority by a narrator who uses pieces of her story to tell the inevitable-seeming story of a death foretold.

Source: Jeffrey M Lilburn, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000

**Critical Essay #2**

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*According to Gass,* "Chronicle of a Death Foretold, *like Faulkner's* Sanctuary, *is about the impotent revenges of the impotent.*

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* does not tell, but literally pieces together, the torn-apart body of a story: that of the multiple murder of a young, handsome, wealthy, womanizing Arab, Santiago Nasar, who lived in the town where Gabriel Garcia Marquez grew up. The novel is not, however, the chronicle of a young and vain man's death, for that event is fed to us in the bits it comes in. It is instead the chronicle of the author's discovery and determination of the story and simultaneously a rather gruesome catalogue of the many deaths--in dream, in allegory, and by actual count--that Santiago Nasar is compelled to suffer. Had he had a cat's lives, it would not have saved him.

It is his author who kills him first, foretelling his death in the first (and in that sense final) sentence of the novel: "On the day they were going to kill him ..." We are reminded immediately of Garcia Marquez's habit of beginning his books in an arresting way, perhaps a by-product of his long journalistic practice. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad ..." *One Hundred Years of Solitude* commences, and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is no less redolent with death or its threats. "Over the weekend the vultures got into the presidential palace by pecking through the screens on the balcony windows." Santiago Nasar's death is first foretold in the way any fictional fact is, for the fact, of whatever kind, is already there in the ensuing pages, awaiting our arrival like a bus station.

Santiago Nasar also dies in his dreams-- dreams that could have been seen to foretell it, had not his mother, an accomplished seer of such things, unaccountably missed "the ominous augury." Before the day is out, his mother will murder him again. Unwittingly, and with the easy fatality we associate with Greek tragedy, Santiago dons a sacrificial suit of unstarched white linen, believing that he is putting it on to honor the visit of a bishop, just as he has celebrated the day before, along with the entire town, the wedding that will be his undoing. So attired, he stands before his mother with glass and aspirin and tells her of the dreams she will misunderstand. Santiago Nasar is then symbolically slain and gutted by the cook as he takes a cup of coffee in her kitchen and has another aspirin for his hangover. His father has mounted this woman, and she is remembering Santiago's father as she disembowels two rabbits (foretelling his disembowelment) and feeds their guts, still steaming, to the dogs.

The cook's daughter does not tell Santiago that she has heard a rumor that two men are looking to kill him, for he continually manhandles her, and she wishes him dead; the town, it seems, knows too, and participates in the foretelling. Attempts to warn Santiago are halfhearted: People pretend that the threats are empty; that the twin brothers bent on his death are drunk, incapable, unwilling; that it is all a joke. But Orpheus has his enemies in every age. Dionysus was also torn to pieces once, Osiris as well. The women whose bodies Santiago Nasar has abused (the metaphor that follows him throughout, and that appears just following the title page, is that of the falcon or sparrow hawk) await their moment. They will use the duplicities of the male code to entrap him. The girl whose wedding has just been celebrated goes to her bridegroom with a punctured maidenhead, and he sends her home in disgrace, where she is beaten until she confesses (although we don't know what the real truth is) that Santiago Nasar was her "perpetrator." And had not her twin brothers believed that the honor of their family required revenge, Nasar would not have been stabbed fatally, not once but seven times, at the front door of his house, a door his mother, believing him already inside, had barred.

The coroner is out of town, but the law requires an autopsy--the blood has begun to smell--so Santiago Nasar is butchered again, this time while dead The intestines he held so tenderly in his hands as he walked almost primly around his house to find a back door he might enter in order to complete the symbolism of his life by dying in the kitchen he had his morning aspirin in--those insides of the self of which the phallus is only an outer tip--are tossed into a trash can; the dogs who wanted them, and would have enjoyed them, are now dead, too.

Santiago Nasar's mother's last sight of her son, which she says was of him standing in her bedroom doorway, water glass in hand and the first aspirin to his lips, is not, we learn, her last Her final vision, which she has on the balcony of her bedroom, is of her son "face down in the dust, trying to rise up out of his own blood."

One man is dead, and hundreds have murdered him. The consequences of the crime spread like a disease through the village. Or, rather, the crime is simply a late symptom of an illness that had already wasted everyone Now houses will decay, too, in sympathy. Those people--lovers, enemies, friends, family--who were unable to act now act with bitter, impulsive, self-punishing foolishness, becoming old maids and worn whores, alcoholics and stupid recruits, not quite indiscriminately. The inertias of custom, the cruelties of a decaying society, daily indignities, hourly poverty, animosities so ancient they seem to have been put in our private parts during a prehistoric time, the sullen passivity of the powerless, the feckless behavior of the ignorant, the uselessness of beliefs, all these combine in this remarkable, graphic, and grisly fable to create a kind of slow and creeping fate--not glacial, for that would not do for these regions, but more, perhaps, like the almost imperceptible flow of molasses, sticky, insistent, sweet, and bearing everywhere it goes the sick, digested color of the bowel....

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* like Faulkner's *Sanctuary,* is about the impotent revenges of the impotent; it is about misdirected rage; it is about the heart blowing to bits from the burden of its own beat; yet the author, Santiago Nasar's first murderer, goes patiently about his business, too, putting the pieces back together, restoring, through his magnificent art, his own anger and compassion, this forlorn, unevil, little vegetation god, to a new and brilliant life.

Source: William H Gass, "More Deaths Than One 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold,'" in *New York,* Vol 16, No 15, 1983, pp 83-84

**Critical Essay #3**

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*In the following excerpt, Epstein examines if Garcia Marquez is as talented as popular opinion seems to think he is.*

How good is Gabriel Garcia Marquez? "Define your terms," I can hear some wise undergraduate reply. "What do you mean by *is?"* Yet I ask the question in earnest. Over the past weeks I have been reading Garcia Marquez1 s four novels and three collections of stories--all of his work available in English translation--and I am still not certain how good he is. If I were to be asked how talented, I have a ready answer: pound for pound, as they used to put it in *Ring* magazine, Gabriel Garcia Marquez may be the most talented writer at work in the world today. But talent is one thing; goodness, or greatness, quite another.

Valery says somewhere that there ought to be a word to describe the literary condition between talent and genius. In writing about Garcia Marquez, most contemporary American literary critics have not searched very hard for that word. Instead they have settled on calling him a genius and knocked off for the day...

In sum, no novelist now writing has a more enviable reputation. His is of course an international, a worldwide reputation--one capped by the Nobel Prize, won in 1982 at the age of fifty-four The Nobel Prize can sometimes sink a writer, make him seem, even in his lifetime, a bit posthumous. But with Garcia Marquez it appears to have had quite the reverse effect, making him seem more central, more prominent, more of a force....

In Latin America, Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been a household name and face since 1967, when his famous novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was first published in Buenos Aires. This novel is said to have sold more than six million copies and to have been translated into more than thirty languages.... I thought it quite brilliant and stopped reading it at page 98 (of 383 pages in the paperback edition). A number of intelligent people I know have gone through a similar experience in reading the book. All thought it brilliant, but felt that anywhere from between eighteen to fifty-one years of solitude was sufficient, thank you very much. I shall return to what I think are the reasons for this..

Short of going to Latin American countries on extended visits, how does one find out anything about them? Whom does one trust? New York *Times* reporters capable of prattling on about fifty new poetry workshops in Nicaragua? American novelists--Robert Stone, Joan Didion--who have put in cameo appearances in one or another Latin American country and then returned to write about it? Academic experts, the kernels of whose true information are not easily freed of their ideological husks? Perhaps native writers? On this last count, I have recently read a most charming novel set in Lima, Peru, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter,* by Mario Vargas Llosa, which gives us a portrait of daily life--corrupt, incompetent, sadly provincial though it is--very different from that which Gabriel Garcia Marquez supplies. Whom is one to believe?

So many oddities crop up. How, for example, explain that Garcia Marquez had his famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* a book that he has claimed is an argument for change in Latin America, published in Argentina, universally regarded-- to hear Jacobo Timerman tell it--as the most repressive of Latin American countries? How for that matter explain the emergence of Latin American literature to a place very near contemporary preeminence? How does one reconcile these various paradoxes, contradictions, confusions? It may be that finally, in reading about Latin America, one has to settle for the virtue which Sir Lewis Namier once said was conferred by sound historical training--a fairly good sense of how things did *not* happen.

Such a sense becomes especially useful in reading a writer like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is continually telling us how things did happen. What he is saying is not very new. He speaks of the depredations upon the poor by the rich, upon the pure by the corrupt, upon the indigenous by the colonial--standard stuff, for the most part. But how he says it is new and can be very potent indeed. So much so that Fidel Castro is supposed to have remarked of him, "Garcia Marquez is the most powerful man in Latin America." ...

None of this power would exist, of course, if Garcia Marquez were not a considerable artist. Literary artists make us see things, and differently from the way we have ever seen them before; they make us see things *their* way. We agree to this willingly because in the first place they make things interesting, charming, seductive, and in the second place they hold out the promise of telling us important secrets that we would be fools not to want to know....

Sweep and power are readily available to Garcia Marquez; so, too, are what seem like endless lovely touches, such as a man described as "lame in body and sound in conscience." In *"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,"* a charming tale about a time when people had hearts capacious enough for the poetic, the way is prepared for a man "to sink easily into the deepest waves, where fish are blind and divers die of nostalgia." The movements of a woman in the story " *There Are No Thieves in This Town"* have "the gentle efficiency of people who are used to reality." A man in the story *"One Day After Saturday"* is caught at an instant when "he was aware of his entire weight: the weight of his body, his sins, and his age altogether." Garcia Marquez's stories are studded with such charming bits: a woman with "passionate health," a man with a "mentholated voice," a town "where the goats committed suicide from desolation," another man with "a pair of lukewarm languid hands that always looked as if they'd just been shaved." Garcia Marquez, as Milton Berle used to say of himself, has a million of them.

This fecundity of phrase was not always so readily available to Garcia Marquez. Today his fame is such that his very earliest works are being reprinted and translated--most of them are in the collection *Innocent Erendira and Other Stories*-- and these early stories are dreary in the extreme: dryly abstract, bleak, cut-rate Kafka, without the Kafkaesque edge or the humor. As a novelist, Garcia Marquez seems to have come alive when he began to write about the coastal town he calls Ma-condo and--the two events seem to have taken place simultaneously--when, by adding the vinegar of politics to his writing, he gave it a certain literary tartness.

Garcia Marquez has claimed William Faulkner as a literary mentor, and the two do have much in common. Each has staked out a territory of his own--Yoknapatawpha County for Faulkner, Ma-condo and its environs for Garcia Marquez; each deals lengthily with the past and its generations; and finally, each relies on certain prelapsarian myths (Southern grandeur before the American Civil War, Latin American poetic serenity before the advent of modernity and foreign intervention) to bind his work together. There is, though, this decisive difference between the two writers: Faulkner's fiction is almost wholly taken up with the past, while that of Garcia Marquez, as befits a politically minded writer, generally keeps an eye out for the future.

Immersion in the work of such writers provides one of those experiences--perhaps it might be called moral tourism--exclusive to literature. By reading a good deal about a place rendered by a powerful writer, in time one comes to feel one has walked its streets, knows its history and geography, the rhythms of its daily life. Only certain writers can convey this experience through the page: Balzac did it both for Paris and French provincial towns; Faulkner did it; Isaac Bashevis Singer does it for Jewish Poland; and Garcia Marquez does it, too.

Viewed in retrospect, the Macondo stories-- they are found in *Leaf Storm and Other Stories* and *No One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories,* and the town is also the setting for the novel *In Evil Hour*--appear to be an elaborate warm-up for the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* They seem to be sketches, trial runs, dress rehearsals for the big novel ahead. In these stories names will appear in passing--like Colonel Aureliano Buendia, one of the heroes of *One Hundred Years*--almost as if they were coming attractions. Then, working the other way around, incidents occur in *One Hundred Years* that have been the subjects of whole stones in the earlier volumes. To know fully what is going on in Garcia Marquez one has to have read the author in his entirety. In these stories the stages in Garcia Marquez's literary development are on display, rather like specimens inside formaldehyde-filled jars showing progress from zygote to fully formed human. One reads these stories and witnesses his talent growing, his political ardor increasing. In these stories, too, Garcia Marquez shows his taste for that blend of fantasy and hyperbole, exhibited in a context of reality, that is known as magic realism....

"What I like about you," says one character to another in the Garcfa Marquez story *"The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother"* "is the serious way you make up nonsense." Serious nonsense might stand as a blurb line for *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* E. M. Forster remarked that at a certain age one loses interest in the development of writers and wants to know only about the creation of masterpieces. Certainly *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has everywhere been so acclaimed. The novel is a chronicle of six generations of the Buendia family, founders of the village of Macondo. It recounts such extraordinary happenings as Macondo's insomnia plague, its thirty-two civil wars, banana fever, revolution, strikes, a rain that lasts five years, marriages, intermarriages, madness, and the eventual extinction of the Buendia line with the birth of an infant who has a pig's tail and who is eventually carried off by ants.

*"One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not a history of Latin America," Garcia Marquez has said, "it is a *metaphor* for Latin America." With that quotation we are already in trouble. What can it mean to say that a novel is a metaphor for a continent? Before attempting to ascertain what it might mean, tribute must be paid to the sheer brimming brilliance of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* "Dazzling" does not seem to me in any way an imprecise word to describe the style of this novel, nor "epic" any less imprecise a word to describe its ambitions. Its contents cannot be recapitulated, for in its pages fireworks of one kind or another are always shooting off. Disquisitions on history, memory, time wind in and out of the plot. Yellow flowers fall from the sky marking a man's death; a heart-meltingly beautiful girl ascends to heaven while folding a sheet, a girl whose very smell "kept on torturing men beyond death, right down to the dust of their bones." Everything is grand, poetic, funny, often at once. A man suffers "flatulence that withered the flowers"; a woman has "a generous heart and a magnificent vocation for love." ...

And yet--why do so many readers seem to bog down in this glittering work? Part of the difficulty seems to me technical, part psychological. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is peculiarly a novel without pace; it is, for its nearly four-hundred pages, all high notes, service aces, twenty-one-gun salutes. In a novel, such nonstop virtuosity tends to pall. To use a simile to describe a novel that its author describes as a metaphor, reading *One Hundred Years* is like watching a circus artist on the trampoline who does only quadruple back somersaults At first you are amazed to see him do it; then you are astonished that he can keep it up for so long; then you begin to wonder when he is going to be done, frankly you'd like to see something less spectacular, like a heavy-legged woman on an aged elephant.

Unless, that is, you sense a deeper meaning beneath all this virtuosity. And here it must be said that there has been no shortage of deep readings of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* a novel which, if critics are to be consulted, has more levels than a ziggurat. There are those who think that the true meaning of the novel is solitude, or, as Alastair Reid puts it, "We all live alone on this earth in our own glass bubbles." There are those who think that the novel is about writing itself... There are those who are fascinated with the book's allusiveness.... There are those who believe that the stuff of myth ought not to be looked at too closely.... Then there is Garcia Marquez himself, who has given a clear political reading to his own novel, commenting, in an interview, "I did want to give the idea that Latin American history had such an oppressive reality that it had to be changed--at all costs, at any pricel" ...

Along with magic realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez has given us another new literary-critical label, "political realism," which, in its own way, is itself quite magical.

If *One Hundred Years of Solitude* leaves any doubt about the political intent of Garcia Marquez' s mature work, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* wipes that doubt away. When Garcia Marquez says that *One Hundred Years* is a metaphor for Latin America, he is of course putting a political interpretation on his own novel. But *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is neither metaphor nor symbol but a direct representation of a strong political point of view....

The dictator in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* lives for more than two hundred years, his demise, *a la* Mark Twain, being often reported but much exaggerated. He has been in power--he has been *the* power--longer than anyone can remember, and his is the greatest solitude of all: that of the unloved dictator perpetuating his unearned power. This man, who himself can neither read nor write, is described, examined, and prosecuted with the aid of a novelistic technique as relentlessly modernist as any in contemporary fiction.

*The Autumn of the Patriarch* is divided into six chapters, but that is the only division in the novel, and the only concession to the reader's convenience. The book has no paragraphs, and while the punctuation mark known as the period may show up from time to time, the novel's sentences are not what one normally thinks of as sentences at all. A sentence might begin from one point of view, and before it is finished include three or four others.

One of the small shocks of this novel is to see the most complex modernist techniques put to the most patent political purposes. Now it must be said that Garcia Marquez did not invent the Latin American dictator. Trujillo, Batista, Peron, Hernandez Martinez, Duvalier (dare one add the name Fidel Castro?)--one could put together a pretty fair All Star team, though these boys are bush league compared with what Europe and Asia in this century have been able to produce.

Garcia Marquez's portrait of the dictator in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is an amalgam of Latin America's dictators, minus ... Fidel and with a touch or two of Franco added. As a picture of squalor, rot, and bestiality, it is devastating. The devastation is in the details, of which the endlessly inventive Garcia Marquez is never in short supply....

*The Autumn of the Patriarch* is about more than politics alone--time and the nature of illusion are motifs played upon artfully throughout--but politics give the novel its impetus and are finally its chief subject. These politics are highly selective, predictable, more than a trifle cliche'd Octavio Paz has said that Garcia Marquez, as a political thinker, "repeats slogans." As a novelist, he can make these slogans vivid, even funny, but they remain slogans. For example, the attacks on the United States in this novel come through the dictator's continuous dealings with a stream of U.S. ambassadors of perfectly Waspish and quite forgettable names--Warren, Thompson, Evans, Wilson--who in the end succeed in swindling him out of the very sea. Americans, the Catholic Church, politicians, all, in the mind and in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, are swindlers. Liberals or conservatives, it does not matter which, they are crooks, every one of them. Which leaves--doesn't it?--only one solution: revolution.

So talented a writer is Garcia Marquez that he can sustain a longish tale on sheer storytelling power alone, as he does in his most recent book, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold.* It has been said of Garcia Marquez that he combines the two powerful traditions of Latin American writing, the left-wing engage" tradition of the Communist poet Pablo Neruda and the modernist mandarin tradition of Jorge Luis Borges. In this slender novel it is the Borges side that predominates. The book is about a plot on the part of twin brothers who are out to avenge their family's honor against a young man who they mistakenly believe has deflowered their sister, thus causing her husband to return her in shame to her family the morning after the wedding night...

The tale is told with such subtle organization and such complete fluency that Garcia Marquez can insert anything he wishes into it; and indeed the narrator does insert mention of his marriage proposal to his own wife and a brief account of his youthful dalliances with prostitutes Such is the easy mastery of this novel that the reader is likely to forget that he never does learn who actually did deflower the virgin *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a handsomely written and inconsequential book of a kind that offers ample leeway for deep readings, and one that could have been composed only by a hugely gifted writer. "Intellectuals consider themselves to be the moral conscience of society," Garcia Marquez is quoted as saying in the New York *Times Magazine,* "so their analyses invariably follow moral rather than political channels. In this sense, I think I am the most politicized of them all." Yet, oddly, in Garcia Marquez's fiction morality is rarely an issue; Garcia Marquez himself seems little interested in moral questions, or in the conflicts, gradations, and agonies of moral turmoil. The reason for this, I suspect, is that for him the moral universe is already set--for him, as for so many revolutionary intellectuals, there are the moral grievances of the past, the moral hypocrisies of the present, and, waiting over the horizon, the glories of the future, when moral complexity will be abolished. The moral question is, for Garcia Marquez, ultimately a political question. Outside of his politics, Garcia Marquez's stones and novels have no moral center; they inhabit no moral universe. They are passionate chiefly when they are political; and when they are political, so strong is the nature of their political bias that they are, however dazzling, flawed.

Thus, to return to where I set out, a short answer to my question--how good is Gabriel Garcia Marquez"--is that he is, in the strict sense of the word, marvelous. The pity is that he is not better.

Source: Joseph Epstein, "How Good is Gabriel Garcia Mar-quez?," in *Commentary,* Vol. 75, No 5, May, 1983, pp. 59-65

**Critical Essay #4**

**Critical Essay #4**

*In this brief excerpt, Burgess addresses the problems of reading a translation, and of expressing an opinion different from "a world consensus." In this second situation, "dare one (the reviewer, in this case] be wholly frank?"*

I have two problems in assessing this brief work *[Chronicle of a Death Foretold]* by the latest Nobel Prizeman. The first relates to the fact that I've read it in translation, and any judgment on the quality of Garcia Marquez's writing that I would wish to make is necessarily limited. Mr. Rabassa's rendering is smooth and strong with an inevitable North American flavor, but it is English, and Garcia Marquez writes in a very pungent and individual Spanish. The second problem is the one that always comes up when a writer has received the final international accolade: dare one be wholly frank. Dare one set one's critical judgment up against what, though it is really only the verdict of a committee of literati in Stockholm, is accepted as a world consensus? I note, in [the publisher's] publicity handout, that we are to regard Garcia Marquez as "South America's pre-eminent writer"--a view I cannot give accord to so long as Jorge Luis Borges is alive I think, as is often the case with officially acclaimed writers of fiction, that the imputation of greatness has more to do with content--especially when it is social or political-- than with aesthetic values. *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* a book which impressed me rather less than it seems to have impressed others, has undoubted power, but its power is nothing compared with the genuinely literary explorations of men like Borges and Nabokov. Now here is a new brief novel that is decent, assured, strong, but indubitably minor. I am not seduced by Garcia Marquez's reputation ... into thinking it anything more.

The minimal distinction of the novella lies in the exactness with which its author has recorded the mores of a community in which machismo is the basic ethos. The bishop is coming on a river boat to give his blessing, and sacks of cockscombs await him to make his favorite soup The town swelters in morning heat and hangover. Sex is a weapon, not a gesture of tenderness. The atmosphere is visceral. Rabbits are being gutted by the beginning of the story; at the end the dying Santiago Nasar enters his house "soaked in blood and carrying the roots of his entrails in his hands." There is also an element of debased hidalgo refinement.

Before we get to the end, which is less an end than an initial theme to be embroidered with the views of citizens locked in a tradition that they see no reason to break, we are given a sufficient anthropological survey of a society that has never known the benefits of aspirant Protestant materialism and ambiguous matriarchy. It is the world of *Martin Ferrol,* the Argentine epic that glorified machismo and helped to keep South American literature out of the real world. The little novel is an honest record, cunningly contrived, but it seems to abet a complacent debasement of morality rather than to open up larger vistas. It is, in a word, claustrophobic. It does not induce a view, as better fiction does, of human possibilities striving to rise out of a morass of conservative stupidity. The heart never lifts. All that is left is a plain narrative style and an orthodox narrative technique managed with extreme competence. Perhaps one is wrong to expect more from a Nobel Prizeman.

Source: Anthony Burgess, "Macho in Minor Key," in *New Republic,* Vol. 188, No. 17, May 2,1983, p 36.

**Critical Essay #5**

**Critical Essay #5**

*In the following passage, Rodman looks at Garcia Marquez's message in* Chronicle of a Death Foretold.

In much of his work [Gabriel Garcia Marquez] has turned his hometown into a dream kingdom of shattered expectations built on nostalgia; Macondo is bereft of idealism, visions of a better world, calls to arms. These attitudes are seen as part of an old order that must be stripped away to get at the long-concealed truth....

Before *[Chronicle of a Death Foretold]* came *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* a monologue of a dying tyrant based on the life of Juan Vicente Gomez of Venezuela, whose crimes had been magnified into myth in the mouths of refugees to Aracataca during the novelist's childhood. The book's highly praised style was baroque and convoluted. Garcia Marquez implausibly defends his method by citing the supposed unreadability of *Ulysses* when it first came out, and claiming that "today children read it." Although an intellectual tour de force, *Autumn* lacks the endearing magic of the author at his best.

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* fortunately, brings Garcia Marquez back on track. The setting is Macondo again, with many of the old faces reappearing in minor roles, including the author himself, his family and his wife. The mood is somber and tragic, for this is an account of a horrifyingly brutal and senseless crime....

Part morality tale, part fairy tale, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* unfolds like a Greek tragedy. We know everything essential to the plot from the opening page, and yet Garcia Marquez fills in the details with such masterful skill that we hang on breathlessly to the final paragraph, where the murder is described. As in all this writer's strongest work, the writing is lucid, factual, almost literary except for an occasional word or phrase in the vernacular ("rotgut," "eighty-proof hangover") to remind us that this is our world.

What is Garcia Marquez trying to say in his books? I can hear him answer, amiably or scornfully depending on his mood, that he isn't trying to say anything, that he writes because he must, that the words come out this way, virtually trancelike, dictated by his memory and edited by the sum of his parts. Which would be the truth.

Still, one searches for *some* connection between the public man and the artist. A typical Latin American liberal, the public man supports all Leftist causes, while shying away from justifying the Soviet Union's domestic atrocities and its more barefaced sandbagging of its weak neighbors. He hates Augusto Pinochet and reveres the memory of Salvador Allende, regardless of what Allende did in Chile during his reign. Garcia Marquez excuses Latin America's political infantilism on the grounds that democratic institutions did not have centuries to mature as in Europe--ignoring the United States, which broke away from colonialism at the same time....

As for the artist, Octavio Paz once tried to persuade me that Garcia Marquez has not changed the language the way Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo and Jorge Luis Borges have. "They started a new tradition, he comes at the end of an old one--the rural, epic and magic tradition of Ricardo Guiraldes, Horacio Quiroga, Jose Eustacio Rivera." I disagreed, comparing the Colombian Rivera's horrendous penetration of Amazonia with his successor's recreations of the past. One emerges from Rivera's desperate journey in *The Vortex* with a sense of suffocating depression, from Garcia Marquez' strolls through Macondo with a reassuring conviction that a world so full of lusty adventurers, irrepressible louts and unconscious poets cannot be as bad as he says it is. The artist triumphs over the public man, over the sociologist.

In other words, whereas Rivera, the conscious artist, succeeded at what he set out to do--horrifying his readers--Garcia Marquez, the unconscious artist and the better one, creates a realm that gives delight. His characters have lives of their own and they refuse to be manipulated They may fulfill their tragic destiny, but they behave with so much spontaneity and good humor that we remember them as the better parts of ourselves and accept their world of irrational "happenings" as the real one.

**Source:** Selden Rodman, "Triumph of the Artist," in *New Leader,* Vol. LXVI, No 10, May 16, 1983, pp. 16-17

**Critical Essay #6**

**Critical Essay #6**

*Mono discusses the problems he found with* Chronicle of a Death Foretold.

*[Chronicle of a Death Foretold ]* is, at one level, a simile for the fiction-making process. Here we are given events that, in some genuine sense, exist--lie formed by history--*before* they occur And a townful of people--through their action, thought, custom, laziness, pride, willful negligence, through their unconscious art--create this plot-which-was-real. The irony is: that having created it, they cannot avert it. No second draft is possible: even in art, where free will would seem to be most free, a determinism, a manifest destiny, still presides....

A nameless narrator has come back. (Some 27 years, mind you, after Santiago Nasar was turned to human piecework.) Neither he nor the town can stop riding this hobbyhorse.

For years we couldn't talk about anything else Our daily conduct, dominated then by so many linear habits, 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 that had made absurdity possible, and it was obvious that we weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate

Now that formulation, with all respect to Garcia Marquez, is somewhat self-propelled. I don't believe it. No matter what the event, populations don't he awake for a quarter-century grave-robbing their moral reminiscence. The linear habit will reassert itself. Garcia Marquez's narrator--who previously has employed splendid sparse, aromatic, and elliptical prose--is indulging himself here. For one moment at least Garcia Marquez doesn't trust the event, its portentousness or imagic value.

Otherwise his attack is stark and, given Garcia Marquez's purpose, proper enough. Because the narrator is examining an essentially novelistic occurrence, he has been sequestered as a juror might be. He cannot comment,or probe: and this rather kiln-dries the novel. Angela, Bayardo, Santiago are left without development or chiaroscuro. They seem cryptic and surfacehard: film characters really And there must be no surprise--art here lies in the event itself. That, to start with, is Garcia Marquez's conceit. Angela, we don't know, might have taken her own virginity. Nor will we ever understand why rich Bayardo came to this unmarked burial of a town. *Chronicle* has become myth: as you don't ask for the psychohistory of Parsifal or Gawain, you must accept Angela, Bayardo, Santiago But beyond Garcia Marquez's glass-brick-hard style (redone brilliantly, as usual, by Greg Rabassa in English), beyond a Warren Report-meticulous detective reconstruction, it is hard to care much for these people. Emotion, you see, might skew our clarity. No character--even when he or she is presumed real--should elude an author's control.

The trial record will be introduced An investigating judge "never thought it legitimate that life should make use of so many coincidences forbidden literature, so that there should be the untrammeled fulfillment of a death so clearly foretold."

Garcia Marquez, I think, is over-indicating here. The events, though pretty sensational, aren't full of unbelievable coincidence. Life often has taken greater poetic license. What will distinguish this happening is the intensity of examination both by his townspeople and by his narrator. Intensity that seems somewhat forced. At one point the narrator, obsessive, will claim that he must put a "broken mirror of memory back together again from so many shards." But memory doesn't just reflect. In general, I wish Garcia Marquez hadn't surrendered so many of the devices and perquisites that belong to fiction: subjectivity, shifting POV, omniscience, judgment, plot surprise. Form is, of course, an artistic choice. Garcia Marquez has given his choice excellent service. But more might have been essayed. After all every death is, to some degree, foretold.

Source: D. Keith Mano, "A Death Foretold," in *National Review,* Vol. XXXV, No. 11, June 10, 1983, pp 699-700.

**Critical Essay #7**

**Critical Essay #7**

*In the following essay, Rabassa looks at the structure* of Chronicle of a Death Foretold.

When Gabriel Garcia Marquez announced that he was abandoning literature for journalism until the Pinochet dictatorship disappeared from Chile, people expected him to keep his word, and many were surprised when he published *Cronica de una muerte anunciada (Chronicle of a Death Foretold).* He was not really breaking his pledge, however, as can be seen from what he said in an interview with Rosa E. Pelaez and Cino Colina published in *Granma* (Havana) and reprinted in *Excelsior* of Mexico City (31 December 1977). In the interview he is asked what aspect of journalism he likes best, and his answer is reporting. He is subsequently asked about the *cronica* genre and answers that it is all a matter of definition, that he can see little difference between reporting and the writing of chronicles. He goes on to say that one of his ultimate aims is to combine journalism and fiction in such a way that when the news item becomes boring he will embellish it and improve upon it with inventions of his own. So when he wrote this latest book of his, a short, tight novella, by his lights he was not returning to fiction but carrying on journalism as usual, even though his uncramped definitions could well apply to everything that he had written previously and supposedly had put in abeyance.

The chronicle has long been the primitive method of recording events and people and passing them on into history. Most of what we know about medieval Europe has come from chronicles, and in Africa history has been kept through the oral chronicles of the griots. In Latin America, Brazil in particular, the "chronicle" is a recognized and broadly practiced form, offspring of the more ancient variety, that lies somewhere between journalism and "literature." In the United States certain newspaper columns of a more subjective and personal nature correspond to the Latin American chronicle, which almost inevitably makes its first appearance in the press before going into book form. Therefore Garcia Marquez is correct when he says that it is all a matter of definition in the question of whether or not he has abandoned literature and whether or not he has returned

This new book shows many aspects of life and literature and how one is essentially the same as the other; life imitates art. It starts off in good journalistic style with the "when" and the "what."

On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at 5:30 in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on....

This use of the temporal to begin the narration reminds one immediately of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* which begins in a similar if not identical vein and sets the stage for the necessary retrospect... . The difference is that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* begins in medias res, in good epic fashion, while this "chronicle" opens almost at the end of the action, not quite so far as the end of life as in *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* but close to it. This might well show the influence of journalism in the direction that Garcia Marquez's style has been taking through these last three longer works. The first is more legendary and historical as it develops toward its inevitable and fated climax, while the last two depend on journalistic investigation for their development.

Julio Cortazar has spoken about that nightmare for authors (and typesetters) in Spanish: *casuali-dad/causalidad* (chance/causality). There is no need to worry about such a slip in the interpretation of this story, as the two elements coincide quite neatly. It is known from the beginning of the tale that the Vicario twins are planning to kill Santiago Nasar for having deflowered their sister Angela, thus ruining her marriage to the strange but wealthy newcomer Bayardo San Roman, Many people in the town are aware of the Vicarios' intentions, but through a concatenation of quite normal, even banal, bits of happenstance, nothing is ultimately done to stop them. Indeed, one gathers that even they have little heart for the dirty job that honor is forcing them to do and are only waiting for the authorities or someone to prevent them from bringing it off, since they are prevented by the code from backing down themselves. The title is quite fitting, therefore, in that the death in question has been announced and is foretold Garcfa MaYquez has managed to keep the shock and horror of surprise, however, by seeing to it also that the one person who is blithely unaware of what has been ordained, almost until the moment of the act itself, is Santiago Nasar. In the end chance has become the cause of the inexorable deed: *casualidad/causalidad.*

The format used for the narration of the tale is quite journalistic The narrator, Garcia Marquez himself, perhaps genuine, perhaps embellished, as he mentioned in the interview cited above, is investigating the murder some twenty years later in order to ascertain how such a thing could have happened, how in the end no one was in a position to stop what nobody, including the perpetrators, wanted to happen. The matter of imperfect memory (there are great discrepancies as to the weather) helps lend uncertainty to a tale or event that had become certain because of uncertainty itself. The narrator also relies upon his own memory; he was home from school at the time of the killing and was a friend and contemporary of Santiago Nasar, having caroused with him the night before the murder. In addition, he interviews the participants and several observers, tracking some of them down to more remote places. The narration is a kind of complicated act of turning something inside-out and right-side-out again in that it resembles the application of fictive techniques to the narration of true events in the manner of Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, but here fiction is treated like fact treated like fiction. This swallowing of his own tale by the snake gives a very strong feeling of authenticity to the story....

Instead of giving us a linear narration of the episodes leading up to the final tragedy, Garcia Marquez divides the novella into chapters, each of which follows the trajectory from a slightly different angle and involves a different combination of characters. The fictive structure is therefore a web of crisscrossed story lines, and in the center (or on the bias) is the hole of solitude and impotence where the killing takes place, uncrossed by any of the lines that would have plugged it and prevented the tragedy. This reminds one of the suicide attempt by Colonel Aureliano Buendia in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* when, in emulation of the poet Jose" Asuncion Silva, he asks his doctor friend to make a dot on his shirt where his heart is. We later find that the wily physician, on to the colonel's intentions, has designated the one spot in the area of the heart where a bullet can pass without being fatal. As in so many other aspects of this book when compared to the others, and as Garcia Marquez does so many times with a technique that links all of his tales but at the same time differentiates among them, we have mirror images, reverse and obverse.

There is a richness of characters, as one would expect from this author. While he borrows some from his other books, as is his wont, he invents new ones that have great possibilities for expansion into tales of their own, the same as innocent Erendira and her heartless grandmother, conceived in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and developed at length in their own novella. As it is, Garcia Marquez is adept at weaving different and seemingly unconnected stories together in order to make the webbing of his complete tale, and any of the tangents that he uses to devise the whole chronicle could be followed off into a separate narrative. There are also intriguing characters on the fringes that we hope to see more of. The wedding and the murder coincide with the bishop's passage up the river (there are always rivers in Garcia Marquez). This episcopal worthy was passing through early in the morning on the day after the abortive wedding and on the day of the killing. The atmosphere, rather than being tetric in advance of the slaughter (the brothers were butchers and killed him with their pig-sticking knives), is ludicrous, for it seems that the bishop's favorite dish is cockscomb soup, and the townspeople have gathered together hundreds of caged roosters as an offering to his grace. At dawn a cacophony ensues as the captive creatures begin to crow and are answered by all the cocks in town. As it so happened, and as predicted by Santiago Nasar's mother, the bishop did not even deign to stop, and his paddlewheeler passed by as he stood on the bridge and dispensed mechanical blessings to the sound of the congregated roosters. This was the comic atmosphere that would surround the death foretold.

What unites so much of Garcia Marquez's writing is the sense of inexorability, of fatefulness.

Things often come to an end that has been there all the while, in spite of what might have been done to avoid it, and often mysteriously and inexplicably, as with the death of Jose Arcadio, the son, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Here the hand of doom is unavoidable, but the path is tortuous, as it would logically appear that there were ever so many chances to halt the assassination. There is a ouch of mystery too, however, in the fact that the narrator-investigator was never able to find out if Angela Vicario and Santiago Nasar had been lovers. All evidence and logic said that the dashing young rancher, already betrothed to the daughter of one of his Arab father's compatriots, could not possibly have been interested in a brown bird like Angela Vicario. She had her own mystery, however, because in the end, years later, she and Bayardo San Roman come back together again as strangely as they had been joined the first time. He appears one day at her new home in "exile" beyond Riohacha with a suitcase full of the letters she had been writing him--all unopened.

From the beginning we know that Santiago Nasar will be and has been killed, depending on the time of the narrative thread that we happen to be following, but Garcia Marquez does manage, in spite of the repeated retelling of the event by the murderers and others, to maintain the suspense at a high level by never describing the actual murder until the very end. Until then we have been following the chronicler as he puts the bits and pieces together ex post facto, but he has constructed things in such a way that we are still hoping for a reprieve even though we know better. It is a feeling that makes us understand why *King Lear* was altered in the nineteenth century in order to spare those sentimental audiences the ultimate agony of Cordelia's execution. Garcia Marquez has put the tale together in the down-to-earth manner of Euripides, but in the final pathos he comes close to the effects of Aeschylus.

The little slips of fate that seem so unimportant until they end in tragedy are the blocks that he builds with. Coincidence or lack of it is not so patently contrived as in Mario Vargas Llosa' s novel *The Green House,* where we have the same characters wearing different masks on different stages. Instead, the epiphanies mount up and reveal the characters and the circumstances (never completely; there is always something unknown) by a succession of banal delights and contretemps....

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* might well be the book that Garcia Marquez was projecting in his Havana interview when he said that he wanted to write the false memoirs of his own life. He is not the protagonist of the story, but he is not only the author; he is the narrator. He even tells how he first proposed marriage to his wife and mentions her by name. In this way he is following the tradition of Cervantes, who mingled the real and the fictional to the degree that all levels came together in a time that only Proust could understand, and he is also very close to what Borges is up to in his story 'The Other Borges." When Gabriel Garcia Marquez said that he was abandoning literature for journalism, he probably did not realize the ambiguity of his statement, and since then, as he has done in his reportage, he has come to the conclusion that in technique at least--and possibly in many other ways as well--they are the same.

Source: Gregory Rabassa, "Garcia Marquez's New Book. Literatureof Journalism'," in *World Literature Today,* 1982, Vol., 1982, No. 1, Winter, pp. 48-51.

**Critical Essay #8**

**Critical Essay #8**

*In the following review, Salman Rushdie discusses Garcia Marquez's works; the opening sentence of Rushdie's essay purposely imitates Garcia Marquez's writing style.*

We had suspected for a long time that the man Gabriel was capable of miracles, because for many years he had talked too much about angels for someone who had no wings, so that when the miracle of the printing presses occurred we nodded our heads knowingly, but of course the foreknowledge of his sorcery did not release us from its power, and under the spell of that nostalgic witchcraft we arose from our wooden benches and garden swings and ran without once drawing breath to the place where the demented printing presses were breeding books faster than fruitflies, and the books leapt into our hands without our even having to stretch out our arms, the flood of books spilled out of the print room and knocked down the first arrivals at the presses, who succumbed deliriously to that terrible deluge of narrative as it covered the streets and the sidewalks and rose lap-high in the ground-floor rooms of all the houses for miles around, so that there was no one who could escape from that story, if you were blind or shut your eyes it did you no good because there were always voices reading aloud within earshot, we had all been ravished like willing virgins by that tale, which had the quality of convincing each reader that it was his personal autobiography; and then the book filled up our country and headed out to sea, and we understood in the insanity of our possession that the phenomenon would not cease until the entire surface of the globe had been covered, until seas, mountains, underground railways and deserts had been completely clogged up by the endless copies emerging from the bewitched printing press, with the exception, as Melquiades the gypsy told us, of a single northern country called Britain whose inhabitants had long ago become immune to the book disease, no matter how virulent the strain....

It is now 15 years since Gabriel Garcia Mar-quez first published *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* During that time it has sold over four million copies in the Spanish language alone, and I don't know how many millions more in translation. The news of a new Marquez book takes over the front pages of Spanish American dailies. Barrow-boys hawk copies in the streets. Critics commit suicide for lack of fresh superlatives. His latest book, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* had a first printing in Spanish of considerably more than one million copies. Not the least extraordinary aspect of the work of 'Angel Gabriel' is its ability to make the real world behave in precisely the improbably hyperbolic fashion of a Marquez story.

In Britain, nothing so outrageous has yet taken place. Marquez gets the raves but the person on the South London public conveyance remains unimpressed. It can't be that the British distrust fantasists. Think of Tolkien. (Maybe they just don't like good fantasy.) My own theory is that for most Britons South America has just been discovered. A Task Force may succeed where reviewers have failed: that great comma of a continent may have become commercial at last, thus enabling Marquez and all the other members of 'El Boom', the great explosion of brilliance in contemporary Spanish American literature, finally to reach the enormous audiences they deserve....

It seems that the greatest force at work on the imagination of Marquez ... is the memory of his grandmother. Many, more formal antecedents have been suggested for his art: he has himself admitted the influence of Faulkner, and the world of his fabulous Macondo is at least partly Yoknapatawpha County transported into the Colombian jungles. Then there's Borges, and behind Borges *the fons* and *origo* of it all, Machado de Assis, whose three great novels, *Epitaph of a Small Winner, Quincas Borba* and *Dom Casmurro,* were so far ahead of their times (1880, 1892, and 1900), so light in touch, so clearly the product of a fantasticating imagination (see, for example, the use Machado makes of an 'anti-melancholy plaster' in *Epitaph),*as to make one suspect that he had descended into the South American literary wilderness of that period from some Danikenian chariot of gods. And Garcia Marquez's genius for the unforgettable visual hyperbole--for instance, the Americans forcing a Latin dictator to give them the sea in payment of his debts, in *The Autumn of the Patriarch:* 'they took away the Caribbean in April, Ambassador Ewing's nautical engineers carried it off in numbered pieces to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of Arizona'--may well have been sharpened by his years of writing for the movies. But the grandmother is more important than any of these. She is Gabriel Garcia Marquez's voice.

In an interview with Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Marquez says clearly that his language is his grandmother's. 'She spoke that way. "She was a great storyteller.' Anita Desai has said of Indian households that the women are the keepers of the tales, and the same appears to be the case in South America. Marquez was raised by his grandparents, meeting his mother for the first time when he was seven or eight years old... From the memory of [their] house, and using his grandmother's narrative voice as his own linguistic lodestone, Marquez began the building of Macondo.

But of course there is more to him than his granny. He left his childhood village of Aracataca when still very young, and found himself in an urban world whose definitions of reality were so different from those prevalent in the jungle as to be virtually incompatible In *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* the assumption into heaven of Remedios the Beauty, the loveliest girl in the world, is treated as a completely expected occurrence, but the arrival of the first railway train to reach Macondo sends a woman screaming down the high street. 'It's coming,' she cries. 'Something frightful, like a kitchen dragging a village behind it.' Needless to say, the reactions of city folk to these two events would be exactly reversed Garcia Marquez decided that reality in South America had literally ceased to exist: this is the source of his fabulism.

The damage to reality was--is--at least as much political as cultural. In Marquez's experience, truth has been controlled to the point at which it has ceased to be possible to find out what it is. The only truth is that you are being lied to all the time. Garcia Marquez (whose support of the Castro Government in Cuba may prevent him from getting his Nobel) has always been an intensely political creature: but his books are only obliquely to do with politics, dealing with public affairs only in terms of grand metaphors like Colonel Aureliano Buendia's military career, or the colossally overblown figure of the Patriarch, who has one of his rivals served up as the main course at a banquet, and who, having overslept one day, decides that the afternoon is really the morning, so that people have to stand outside his windows at night holding up cardboard cut-outs of the sun.

*El realismo magical,* 'magic realism', at least as practised by Garcia Marquez, is a development of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely 'Third World' consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called 'half-made' societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called 'North', where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on. In the work of Garcia Marquez, as in the world he describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun. It would be a mistake to think of Marquez's literary universe as an invented, self-referential, closed system. He is not writing about Middle Earth, but about the one we all inhabit. Macondo exists. That is its magic.

It sometimes seems, however, that Marquez is consciously trying to foster the myth of 'Garcia-land'. Compare the first sentence of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with the first sentence of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold:* 'Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice' *(One Hundred Years).* And: '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' *(Chronicle).* Both books begin by first invoking a violent death in the future and then retreating to consider an earlier, extraordinary event. *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* too, begins with a death and then circles back and around a life. It's as though Marquez is asking us to link the books. This suggestion is underlined by his use of certain types of stock character, the old soldier, the loose woman, the matriarch, the compromised priest, the anguished doctor. The plot of *In Evil Hour,* in which a town allows one person to become the scapegoat for what is in fact a crime committed by many hands--the fly-posting of satiric lampoons during the nights--is echoed in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* in which the citizens of another town, caught in the grip of a terrible disbelieving inertia, once again fail to prevent a killing, even though it has been endlessly 'announced' or 'foretold'. These assonances in the Marquez oeuvre are so pronounced that it's easy to let them overpower the considerable differences of intent and achievement in his books.

For not only is Marquez bigger than his grandmother: he is also bigger than Macondo. The early writings look, in retrospect, like preparations for the great flight of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* but even in those days Marquez was writing about two towns: Macondo and another, nameless one, which is more than just a sort of not-Macondo, but a much less mythologised place, a more 'naturalistic' one, insofar as anything is naturalistic in Marquez. This is the town of *Los Funerales de la Mama Grande* (the English title, *Big Mama's Funeral,* makes it sound like something out of Damon Run-yon), and many of the stories in this collection, with the exception of the title story, in which the Pope comes to the funeral, are closer in feeling to early Hemingway than to later Marquez. And ever since his great book, Marquez has been making a huge effort to get away from his mesmeric jungle settlement, to *continue.*

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* he found a miraculous method for dealing with the notion of a dictatorship so oppressive that all change, all possibility of development, is stifled: the power of the patriarch stops time, and the text is thereby enabled to swirl, to eddy around the stones of his reign, creating by its non-linear form an exact analogy for the feeling of endless stasis. And in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* which looks at first sight like a reversion to the manner of his earlier days, he is in fact innovating again. The *Chronicle* is about honour and about its opposite-rthat is to say, dishonour, shame. ..

The manner in which this story is revealed is something new for Garcia Marquez. He uses the device of an unnamed, shadowy narrator visiting the scene of the killing many years later, and beginning an investigation into the past. This narrator, the text hints, is Garcia Marquez himself--at least, he has an aunt with that surname. And the town has many echoes of Macondo: Gerineldo Marquez makes a guest appearance, and one of the characters has the evocative name, for fans of the earlier book, of Cotes. But whether it be Macondo or no, Marquez is writing, in these pages, at a greater distance from his material than ever before. The book and its narrator probe slowly, painfully, through the mists of half-accurate memories, equivocations, contradictory versions, trying to establish what happened and why; and achieve only provisional answers. The effect of this retrospective method is to make the *Chronicle* strangely elegiac in tone, as if Garcia Marquez feels that he has drifted away from his roots, and can only write about them now through veils of formal difficulty. Where all his previous books exude an air of absolute authority over the material, this one reeks of doubt. And the triumph of the book is that this new hesitancy, this abdication of Olympus, is turned to such excellent account, and becomes a source of strength: *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* with its uncertainties, with its case-history format, is as haunting, as lovely and as true as anything Garcia Marquez has written before.

Source: Salman Rushdie, "Angel Gabriel," in *London Review of Books,* September 16 to October 6, 1982, pp 3-4

**Critical Essay #9**

**Critical Essay #9**

*In the following essay, Buford focuses on Garcia Marquez's "demythologizing of romantic love" related to the murder and murderer as well as on the "unabsolved guilt" of the community that allowed the murder*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez has repeatedly expressed his surprise at being so insistently regarded as a writer of fantastic fiction. That exotic or "magical" element so characteristic of his work is, by his account, not really his own achievement. It is merely the reality of Latin America, which he has faithfully transcribed in more or less the same way that he might write about it in, say, an ordinary article written for a daily newspaper. On a number of occasions, in fact, Marquez has said that for him there is no real difference between the writing of journalism and the writing of fiction--both are committed to the rigours of realistic representation--and his own ideal of the novel involves as much reportage as imagination. Viewed in this way, Marquez can be seen as an inspired tropical reporter for whom the strange Columbian world--with its prescient prostitutes, benevolent ghosts, and an eccentric magician who refuses to die--is just his everyday journalist's "beat". The image is not entirely fanciful. In an interview published in last winter's *Pans Review,* for example, he says that the non-fiction account of contemporary Cuba that he is currently writing will prove to his critics "with historical facts that the real world in the Caribbean is just as fantastic as the stories in *One Hundred Years of Solitude. "* What he is really writing, he says, is good old-fashioned "socialist realism".

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is very close to Marquez's ideal fiction. Written in the manner of investigative journalism and in a conspicuously flattened, unadorned prose, the novel sets out to reconstruct a murder that occurred twenty-seven years before.

From the outset of Marquez's chronicle, everybody---including the reader--knows that the Vic-ario brothers intend to kill Santiago Nasar Everybody knows how they mean to do it--with a pair of butcher's knives--and why And they know so much because the brothers are dedicated to telling their plans to everyone they meet. The original Spanish title, lost in English translation, is important here. In *Una cronica de una mueine anunci-ada, anunaada* signifies not so much "foretold" as "announced" or "advertised" or "broadcast"--none of which, admittedly, makes for a very poetic title. The idea of an announced or broadcast death, however, is crucial. The brothers are committed to a course of action that has been determined for them--honour can only be redeemed publicly by their killing of Santiago--and they can only be relieved of their duty by the people around them. Once they have broadcast their intentions to the whole community, everyone, to some extent, by failing to stop them, participates in the crime....

It is ... obvious that this murder, for all the simplicity with which it is narrated, is no simple crime. Part of its significance is evident in the way it is understood by those of Santiago Nasar's generation, for whom the murder seems to mark the end of their youth and render illusory so much that was once meaningful. Flora Miguel, Santiago Nasar's fiancee, for example, runs away immediately after the crime with a lieutenant from the border patrol who then prostitutes her among the rubber workers in a nearby town Divina Flor--the servant meant for Santiago's furtive bed--is now fat, faded, and surrounded by the children of other loves. And, finally, after more than twenty years, Angela Vicario is reunited with the husband whose affronted masculine pride was the cause of the crime. Overweight, perspiring and bald, he arrives still carrying the same silver saddlebags that now serve merely as pathetic reminders of his ostentatious youth. Marquez's chronicle moves backwards and forwards in time, and views the participants in a senseless murder long after the passion that contributed to it has died. In many ways, then, the novel offers itself as an icy demythologizing of both romantic love and the romantic folly it inspires; it is a debunking of dream and sentiment hinted at by the book's epigraph, "the hunt for love is haughty falconry".

But the real significance of the murder is much greater, and is felt by the entire community whose uncritical faith in its own codes of justice and spectacle is responsible for the crime. The weight of this responsibility is felt most, though, by the unnamed narrator, he returns because he is bothered not by an unsolved mystery but an unabsolved guilt, and the chronicle he produces is a document charting the psychology of mass complicity It is interesting that Marquez, in developing a simple tale fraught with obvious political implications, chose not to fictionalize an actual political event-- Latin America provides more than enough material--but to treat instead a fictional episode with the methods of a journalist. In so doing he has written an unusual and original work: a simple narrative so charged with irony that it has the authority of political fable. If not an example of the socialist realism Marquez may claim it to be elsewhere, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is in any case a mesmerizing work that clearly establishes Marquez as one of the most accomplished, and the most "magical" of political novelists writing today.

Source: Bill Buford, "Haughty Falconry and Collective Guilt," in *Times Literary Supplement,* No 4145, September 10, 1982, p. 965.

**Critical Essay #10**

**Critical Essay #10**

*In the following excerpt, Hughes praises the accuracy of Garcia Marquez's description of details as well as his originality for implicating the whole community in the murder through their foreknowledge of the murder plan.*

One hundred pages of quality make *[Chronicle of a Death Foretold]* a fiction that reverberates far beyond its modest length. The story is a mere incident. In a waterfront town on the Caribbean a self-contained youth called Santiago Nasar will be, was, and indeed is being, stabbed to death with meat knives. This event takes place in gory detail on the last few pages. It is the sole preoccupation of the pages in between. And on the first we more or less know that it has already happened. So the suspense is not acute....

Not so much marching forward as marking time, the narrative continuum continually drifts more back than forth, rescuing the story piece by piece from the memory of policemen, gossips, of ficials, shopkeepers, whores, whose 'numerous marginal experiences' are humanly unreliable. They can't even agree about the weather when the blows were struck. And that is the element that melts this strictly factual document (as it pretends to be) into delicious fiction: everyone in town regards his or her personal evidence as fact, whatever the contradictions. By exploiting the fallibility of his characters Marquez arrives at nothing but the truth.

The book's original touch is that these townspeople, deftly sketched without a word or image wasted, know before Santiago does, but without warning him, that he is on the point of being murdered. All have ostensibly cast-iron excuses, loss of nerve, forgetfulness, failing to take the threat seriously, not wishing to become involved.  In their variety of selfish responses to foreknowledge, they bring on Santiago's death, as if secretly savouring it in prospect and relishing its aftermath. We are all to blame, mutters Marquez with good humour, because we all brainlessly share the eccentricity of common human feeling.

The book vindicates its brevity by an exactitude of detail that snaps a character to life without recourse to long or even direct description To visualise a visiting bishop, all we need to be told is that his favourite dish--he discards the rest of the fowl--is coxcomb soup. The mayor's character is purely and simply conveyed when we are casually informed that a policeman is collecting from the shop the pound of liver he eats for breakfast. In these two images all authority, religious and civil, is nicely confounded, just because no heavy weather is made of confounding them. The reader is paid the compliment of being asked to respond imaginatively to the most delicate of hints and indeed to make his own moral structure from the ins and outs of the lack of narrative: to decide for instance, who is lying for good reasons, who being honest for bad.

One of the book's great virtues is self-containment. It presents a large world *in parvo,* without being self-consciously a microcosm, framed in noble if miniature proportions, viewed by an aristocrat of letters whose attitude to the human lot mingles contempt and compassion in a witty blend Nobody shows up either well or badly under the microscope. People are seen as wayward but pitiable cells in the body politic, preventing it from functioning properly but at the same time breathing an outrageous life into it.

Some days after reading this novella I am still in several minds as to what it is about. Just a faithful picture of a community living off shopsoiled machismo? An author's obsession with the dramatics of sudden death9 The last drop of blood squeezed out of material better suited to a thriller? A neurotic treatise on the erotic corollaries of murder? Any or all of these perhaps--and more. And that's a healthy feeling of perplexity. If good books do furnish the imagination, they also echo on and on in its rooms.

**Source:** David Hughes, "Murder," in *Spectator,* Vol 249, No 8044, September 11, 1982, p. 24.