FATHERS AND VIRGINS: GARCIA MARQUEZ'S FAULKNERIAN *CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD*

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It might seem risky to attempt to piece together a puzzle embedded in a novel's plot when so much critical focus celebrates that novel's fragmentation, its indecipherable artifice, and its purely textual, metafictional focus. Although, as is said of one of its characters, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* tends "to conceal rather than reveal" its secrets, this in no way implies that answers to the novel's mysteries cannot be found or that such an exploration is without reward in understanding the work beyond the level of story line. Gabriel García Márquez's technique of dissociating biblical and mythical allusions from their referents (Penuel 188), his patterns of undisclosed information, and the general unreliability of his detective narrator all contribute to critics' hesitation to draw conclusions concerning the central mystery of the story. Yet the existence in the novel of narrative ambiguities, such as the frequently cited detail that no two characters agree about the weather on the day of Santiago Nasar's murder, is insufficient reason for the reader to abandon investigation into the central narrative questions: who is really responsible for Angela's loss of virginity and why does she blame Santiago?

Just as García Márquez's political satire tends to be underestimated by critics who are overly fascinated by his magical realism, so the clues to his mystery/detective story are usually de-emphasized in favor of interpretation of his narrative technique. Setting aside for a moment the novel's "generic ambiguity and intractability" (Alonso 155), we recognize that the novel also stresses the townspeople's inability to transcend the mystery of Santiago's murder, the "single common anxiety." At the same time the intensity of the narrator's interest seems to encourage the reader to "give order to the chain of events that makes absurdity possible" (*Chronicle* 133). Like the narrator wading through flooded offices, retrieving partial records of a twenty-seven year old crime, and searching through a "lagoon of lost causes" (*Chronicle* 116), readers need to reconstruct the motives of the murder, and like the narrator's mother, can, I think, "through superfluous detail...get to the heart of the matter" (*Chronicle* 29).

The beginning of such an investigation lies outside the novel itself, within

certain aspects of William Faulkner's influence upon García Márquez. My purpose here is not to trace that influence, nor to document the source of the Colombian writer's literary technique; neither do I wish to duplicate what has been discussed in essays by critics such as Escobar, Snell, or Oberhelmann. Rather, I am searching for particular clues to the single undisclosed mystery in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* — and I believe a look at Faulkner will help.

Much of the Faulkner/García Márquez comparative work seems to concern itself with two large areas of interest: Faulkner's stylistic or narrative influence upon García Márquez and the similarities between the social and historical worlds of decay and corruption with which the two writers concern themselves. The combination of these large patterns of similarity is particularly useful in examining *Chronicle of Death Foretold* since both writers break down narrative authority through innovative use of multiple perspectives, and each describes an atmosphere of deterioration in the crippled societies of post-civil war south or coastal Colombia after United Fruit (see Escobar). The events of the major works occur within places of heat and dust and the vanishing traditions of a people locked into a lost past.

The work most easily connected to *Chronicle* might well be Faulkner's *Light in August*. Both tales are told almost entirely through the words of individual characters, and in neither does the authority of the author assert itself. Both novels depict a murder in a small-town (saturated with gossip, tradition, and custom), and focus upon a victim who is strangely removed from the reality of his own world, who has obvious Christ-like characteristics, and who is judged by others to be foreign. Santiago Nasar walks through his labyrinthine *pueblo* with the same oblivious attitude that Joe Christmas demonstrates as he runs in circles through Jefferson. The murders are equally ritualistic: Christmas escapes from the central square and a crowd of people, while Santiago is surrounded by people who have brought chairs to the plaza to watch the event. The latter scene recalls Hightower's misadventure with the townspeople who seem to him to be "performing a play," acting out the roles of their society's codes (*Light* 67). Both murders are gory, and both victims seek out in vain a "sanctuary" from the crowd: Christmas runs to Hightower's house and Santiago to his own home and his mother. Further comparison shows that Lucas Burch is actually guilty of committing the same dishonorable crime for which Santiago is murdered, and there is something of Lena Grove, removed, silent, and somehow responsible for events, in the character of Angela Vicario.

In both novels, the power of the spoken word carries such weight that each man is "nailed to the wall" (*Chronicle* 53), not because he is unquestionably guilty, but because he has been accused. Christmas is labeled a "nigger" by Lucas Burch and Santiago is accused of rape by Angela. Once the word is spoken, the facts become secondary; the telling creates the reality. In *Light in August*, Mrs. Hines learns of her own story as she tells it to Hightower (*Light* 422). The tendency for a town to collectively manipulate fact is of particular interest to both writers. In Faulkner's story "Dry September" the town predeter-

mines the guilt of the black man (another innocent Christ figure, a "black son") in much the same way that Jefferson condemns Christmas, and the town in *Chronicle* allows (and is responsible for) the murder of Santiago.

Small towns where "men [not women] folks...take talking seriously" (*Light* 397) can breed prejudice and gossip, that "single idle word blown from mind to mind" (*Light* 65) in a small town where evil is invented. The Colombian *pueblo* condemns the "Turk" Santiago (*Chronicle* 120) while Jefferson condemns the "nigger" Christmas (*Light* 91). The southern town forgives the murderous Hines for "that which in a young man it would have crucified" (*Light* 323), just as the Colombian town crucifies Santiago for sexual behavior that it forgives in his father Ibrahim. The customs of both communities tend, as Byron Bunch remarks of all habits, to "get a right good distance from truth and fact" (*Light* 69). Thus we find that Pedro and Pablo Vicario are as locked into their ritualistic revenge as they are to their "duty" of shaving, even when the rest of their appearance, after "hours of bad living," would seem to make such an act pointless (*Chronicle* 16). This kind of small-town concern for reputation and tradition leaves Angela terribly afraid of being jilted while dressed in a wedding gown. The final ritual of a town full of people watching a murder like spectators at a bullfight is the gruesome extension of a small community's obsession with public honor and social codes.

In *Absalom, Absalom*, where the events are never verifiable since they are only filtered down through various narrators (one of whom — Shreve — could never really have known the true events to begin with), Faulkner's narrative control is intentionally relinquished. García Márquez is equally concerned with denying narrative authority since the natural extension of multiple perception, multiple point of view in these works is the notion that no one truth exists, that all fact is relative. Those characters who latch on to a single idea become one-dimensional zombies: Percy Grimms or the Vicario brothers.

The question of authority is essential for both writers. It is perhaps not so vital for understanding the female characters who either abandon themselves to male authority, live beyond it, or rebel against it, as it is for comprehending the men — specifically, the fathers. A full study of fathers in Faulkner is beyond the range of this essay, but briefly, one notes the presence of Jason Compson and his drunken advice to his son Quentin, Temple Drake's inadequate father/judge, Lena's father whose law she must escape, the pathetic and lazy Anse Bundren, and the dictatorial, fanatical stepfathers of Joe Christmas. These are authority figures subjected to implicit and explicit ridicule.

Central, paternal, authoritative rule is associated with the authority of a past, the mythic past of some religious or moral order which has now dissipated and which controls only those characters who remain secluded in a lonely "backwater" (to borrow the word García Márquez often borrows from Faulkner), isolated from reality, fixated upon an illusory past. The reader may recall Emily Grierson in ghe Faulkner story; the unnamed woman in García Márquez's "Bitterness for Three Strangers"; the doomed Joanna Burden; Hightower

himself; Rebecca in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; the dying dictator in *Autumn of the Patriarch*. In reality, no authority holds a central truth. The father figure, once the focal point of honor, power, and truth, becomes inadequate.

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Keeping in mind these large parallels between the two writers, we can now go beyond descriptions of influence to focus upon how the problem of paternal authority relates to the unanswered questions in the plot of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. To begin examining the question of paternal authority, the reader must first recall the wedding night festival which the narrator attempts to "rescue piece by piece from the memories of others" (Chronicle 48). In this carnivalesque scene of reversal where a drunken nun dances the *merengue*, García Márquez goes out of his way to deflate the lofty position of the father figure. A character appropriately named Dionisio Iguaran (which is not just incidentally the last name of Ursula — the supreme matriarch — in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) plans his escape from the Bishop (a religious father), who is to arrive the following day. Military authority is often undercut in the book, and, during this scene, the women's velvet dresses attract more attention and therefore supersede the "plumed hat and row of medals worn by [the] father of the groom" (*Chronicle* 49). The reader recalls that earlier in the book, in an image that could allude to Faulkner's military heroes Sutpen or Sartoris, Bayardo's father's medals are covered with dust upon his arrival (*Chronicle* 37), that Pedro's military experience has left him with the clap, and that he will later die in guerrilla territory singing whorehouse songs (*Chronicle* 96). During this festival, the narrator's own father becomes a child and takes up the violin (*Chronicle* 48). More importantly, in the center of this chaotic, indecorous festival of people "cast adrift over an abyss of uncertainty" (*Chronicle* 49-50) is the narrator's own "most intense image" of the blind father of the bride (Angela) sitting uselessly on a stool: "they had placed him there thinking perhaps that it was the seat of honor...happy in his circle of oblivion" (*Chronicle* 49). Readers of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* will recall the figure of José Arcadio Buendía, the founding father of Macondo, "the first of the line" (*Solitude* 420) tied to a chestnut tree in the rain and "sunk in an abyss of unawareness" (*Solitude* 109), isolated and alienated. Since the narrator of *Chronicle* can hardly remember the events of the night to begin with, we need to take note of the vivid image this decrepit figure makes for him. Directly following this festival, two pages later, Angela Vicario names Santiago Nasar as the man responsible for her deflowering.

If the carnival world can be used to highlight and mirror the institutions and laws, the codes and restrictions of the "real" world, then what is happening here is no less than an undermining of the authority of certain traditions within small-town Colombian life. The father figure is the custodian of family reputation and honor. This is why Pura Vicario and "el padre ciego la acompañaron para custodiarle la honra" (*Crónica* 52) which becomes a sort of pun in English: "she

and the blind father accompanied her [Angela] to *watch* over her honor" (*Chronicle* 41). The religious precepts, so strenuously observed by (at least outside the home), are here abandoned. The novel debunks the rigidity of organized religion by the narrator's sarcastic criticism throughout. This is why the Bishop never comes ashore, and why his blessing is a "fleeting illusion" and why his boat spews out a baptismal steam upon those waiting on the dock with their offerings (*Chronicle* 19). Similarly, a bullet from Santiago's gun, accidentally fired, goes through a wall or two and winds up destroying a statue of a saint. The murderers flee the scene of butchering to the church and ironically state: "We killed him openly...but we're innocent" (*Chronicle* 55). Finally, Father Amador, a less sympathetic Hightower figure who, like Hightower, has an opportunity to alter events by warning Santiago, leaves that responsibility to the authorities, ultimately claiming that all he can do is "save his [Santiago Nasar's] soul" (*Chronicle* 127). Symbolically, Father Amador becomes the medical examiner in place of Dionisio — religious authority being closer to death than is Dionysian instinct.

Meanwhile, the authorities to whom Father Amador decides to relegate responsibility are equally deflated by the text in García Márquez's sarcastic ridicule. Colonel Lazarus Aponte, the "barbarian" mayor (*Chronicle* 83) who gets his "spiritual practices...through the mails" (*Chronicle* 66), is more concerned about the date of his domino game than he is about the brothers (*Chronicle* 130). His punishment for this neglect is to have liver for breakfast and then, upon seeing the disemboweled corpse (sliced up like liver) of Santiago Nasar, become a vegetarian (*Chronicle* 88). The unnamed magistrate is young and inexperienced; the judge is also unnamed and prone to "lyrical distractions that run contrary to the rigor of his profession" (*Chronicle* 116). The authority of Law, like that of religion and the military is undercut.

Circling back to Angela's father, then, we perhaps come to the answer to the novel's central question: who, if not Santiago, is responsible for Angela's loss of virginity? Perhaps it is not entirely true that "the novel constantly thwarts all expectations of revelation" concerning this mystery (Alonso 152). Obviously, the general authoritarian institutions, the morality connected to these paternal rules and regulations as well as traditional ethnocentric hatred are all to blame. But more interestingly, a case can be made that Angela's biological father is the offender: a case of incest. Although one critic excludes Angela's father from a short list of possible culprits, he gives us no reason why we should do so (Díaz-Migoyo 81). Another, citing a connection between Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* and *Chronicle*, argues that the narrator himself is the culprit (Rama 15-18). The Oedipal story, however, serves as a *secreta guía* for García Márquez (Rama 10) not only because of its narrative structure, but also because of its emphasis upon the taboo of incest. Several critics (Levine, McMurray on García Márquez and Hall on Faulkner) have noted, in both writers, the use of incest as a metaphor for original sin, the final degradation of a sordid society, whether filled with amoral Snopeses or children with the tails of pigs. Oedipus, according to Hall

"the great tragedy from which the bulk of literary treatments of incest descends"(Hall 8), is also a story of "alienation and isolation" symbolized by this particular taboo (Hall 8). A more recent influence however would be *La Casa Grande*, a novel written in 1962 by García Márquez's literary companion Alvaro Cepeda Samudio which in addition to containing the obvious parallels to García Márquez in dealing with the famed Banana workers' strike of 1928 also demonstrates Faulknerian influences and explicitly revolves around paternal incest, paternal authority, gossip, and the guilt (the "wide and everlasting wound") (*Casa* 57) of an entire town.

The biblical names in the novel are not gratuitous. The name Poncio alludes to Pontius Pilate and thus suggests the father's washing of his hands of the matter, his forsaking Christ (Santiago, dressed in white, crucified against the door, trying to "rise up out of his own blood" (*Chronicle* 141) in his "bewilderment of innocence" (*Chronicle* 118), and his moral responsibility to save an innocent man. When Poncio dies, according to Angela, who as victim of incest would be the one to know, he is "carr[ied] off" by "his moral pain"(*Chronicle* 96). He has lost his sight doing fine work in gold in order "to maintain the honor of the house" (*Chronicle* 33) as the incestuous Oedipus will lose his eyesight for the same reason. Poncio's state is indicative of the total depravity of fallen man. The reader wonders further why one Vicario daughter has "died of nighttime fevers" (*Chronicle* 33), and is mourned only outside the home (*Chronicle* 34), or why the two older daughters are "predisposed to find hidden intentions in the designs of men" (*Chronicle* 34). It is clear throughout that Angela, the prettiest of the daughters, has had no boyfriends and has been raised "under the rigor of a mother of iron" (*Chronicle* 41) in the strictest fashion. Moreover, we recall that the father of another fiancé, Flora Miguel, enters the locked bedroom of his own daughter, as well as the parallel scene in which Cristo Bedoya enters the bedroom of Plácida Linero which at least one critic suggests carries intimations of "sexual taboos" (Boschetto 127). According to Hall, father/daughter incest may indicate the man's need to "exercise his authority" (Hall 4) which is interesting language when we remember that the drunken narrator of the novel is "most impressed" by the "immense" Nahir Miguel's "glow of authority" as he commands his daughter to open her door (*Chronicle* 134).

Angela's mother, having failed to convince Angela that "love can be learned," takes her anger out on her disgraced daughter, and then tries to bury her alive in the upper Guajira (*Chronicle* 101). Aware of her husband's behavior, perhaps she is a mother trying to maintain the true "honor" of the family by guarding the secret. Pura Vicario (the pure vicar, or religious deputy of the house), is a woman whom Angela, at the moment of her epiphanic "rebirth," recognizes as "a poor woman devoted to the cult of her defects" (107). It is important then that, as Boschetto points out, the narrator often repeats the words "secret," "secrecy," and "secretly" (*Chronicle* 129) when referring to certain women, especially when the reader recalls that Pura Vicario goes "to her grave with her secret" about what exactly happens the night Angela is returned to her

family. If public disgrace were Pura Vicario's only concern, then why the intensity of her private beating of Angela with such "rage" and "such stealth that her husband and her older daughters" do not hear it (*Chronicle* 52). Pura Vicario, who has a darker secret to conceal, becomes the most blatant example of what happens when one's individual will, like Pedro's or Pablo's (and finally unlike Angela's) bows to the codes of authority at the expense of human emotion.

Angela cannot reveal the identity of the man responsible, because that revelation would entirely destroy her family's honor. Acting as all the townspeople do, basing her actions upon gossip and prejudice (she is not above a bit of anti-Semitism, see *Chronicle* 132), she pins the blame on a man with a reputation as a rich playboy. Santiago is first seen grabbing for the girl named "Divina Flor"[Divine Flower]. Like Fuasta López, Angela resorts to the stereotype that all Turks are alike (120) and symbolically strikes out with her "well-aimed dart" (53) at all men and at society's control over her.

The reader has trouble seeing Angela Vicario as heroine, even though, like Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, Angela rebels against the male authority of her father, and by implication, against organized religion, the honor of the military and the authority of the texts of doctors and scholars and lawyers and judges. The reader is all the more aware of Angela's being "reborn"(108) when she discovers that she loves Bayardo truly, and, becoming "mistress of her own free will" (like no one else in the novel), finally recognizes "no other authority than her own" (109). She rejects the rules of paternal domination, as Flora Miguel cannot, and it is because she can escape both the traditions of her culture and the authority of her own father that she can love and be "reborn." She rejects both the custom of faking her virginity and of fleeing to the widower's house, which might trap her as a southern mansion often traps Faulkner's southern belles. Like the Benjy-type figure of the girl in García Márquez's short story "Nabo," Angela Vicario refuses to live the socially restrictive life of her male counterparts and masters. The problem here is that her rebellion, like that of Joe Christmas, provokes the murder of an innocent person. No matter how justified Angela may be, her accusation perpetuates a negative form of "feminine macho" (Boschetto 133).

The importance of the novel's deflating of authority in general brings the reader back to the central metaphor of the book, the image of Poncio at the wedding party (usually the crowning moment for the father of the bride), blind and powerless, deprived of all his control and influence, in a false seat of honor, confused with other people, stumbled over, responding to gestures made for others, and humiliated during this carnival of anti-authority. This image of the decrepit father figure is not uncommon in the writings of García Márquez. There is also the dying father of Prospero Arango, whose need for care distracts Cristo Bedoya from warning Santiago, and the pitiful widower (a male counterpart to Faulkner's Emily) who dies from "tears bubbling inside his heart"(*Chronicle* 41) because he has given in to his own greed and sold his precious house to Bayardo San Roman. Seen metaphorically, Poncio the fallen father, suggests both the corruption of the society's institutions of authority as well as the

impossibility of an authoritative narrative truth. Where Faulkner has undermined the authority of a central voice in his narratives, García Márquez has done so on the literal level of plot by questioning the truth of the central voices. *Light in August* duplicates the story-telling narrative structure, but raises fewer questions concerning the reliability of the speakers. The limited perspective of this kind of "panoptical" narration (where the teller has access to only one individual at a time, where characters have limited knowledge of each other and where no attempt is made by the author to step back and view character relationships as part of a whole) (Rodríguez 263) is one of the most important similarities between Faulkner and García Márquez. It goes beyond what Karl claims is Faulkner's "disregard" for facts (Karl 738) because the implications are (as the tall-tales of Faulkner's late works make clear), that no truth exists beyond the perception of individuals and that all is mere storytelling. Like Santiago, the reader of these works is left confused by "so many voices at the same time" (*Chronicle* 136).

I would argue, furthermore, that neither Faulkner nor García Márquez has a specific interest in creating Metafiction, because no matter how complicated and intricate the narrative strategy becomes, there are sophisticated patterns of imagery, of allusion, and of hidden information which point eventually to some basic concern of the writer. In this particular case, the decay and fragmentation of society falls under what Hall claims is often the symbolic meaning of the incest metaphor in Faulkner: the "tyranny of authority"(8). For García Márquez, "tyranny of authority" manifests itself in one instance of paternal incest, and in the traditions and customs that maintain its secrecy.

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