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TRANSPARENCY AND ILLUSION IN GARCIA MARQUEZ' *CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD*

RANDOLPH D. POPE

At first reading, this novella of 1981 by the Nobel Prize winner seems straightforward, self-evident, transparent, and a distinguished Puerto Rican author, Rosario Ferré, has qualified it as a literary fraud.[1] Clearly, the reader does not feel an immediate impulse to turn to an expert nor does the critic believe he must go into overdrive and engage in deep hermeneutics. The specter arises of a text that needs no commentary, that can be left at the closing in contemplative silence. We do not find the roughness, the resistance, that justifies the carping and proliferation of criticism. It is easy to read, interesting, apparently trivial local lore. The narrative line is never obscured, even if at times it is briefly diverted. Our academic torches, almost exhausted by the obscurity of Borges, Goytisolo, Lezama Lima and Fuentes, are not needed here. One critic has expressed his amazement in these words: "In García Márquez, all of the labyrinth is flooded with light."[2] On second thought, this is precisely what needs explanation: a well lit labyrinth is perversely more unsettling than a well wrought urn, especially when at its center we find a brutal murder. (The title only speaks of a foretold *death*: this disparity, murder/death, should already have awakened our suspicion.)

The anecdote is indeed simple: Santiago Nasar, a young, handsome, Colombian of Arab descent, beloved by most, resented by some as the rich boy in town, is butchered by twins because they must avenge the loss of their sister's honor. She was returned home on the wedding night because the groom, Bayardo San Román, discovered that she was not a virgin. She blamed Nasar. Everyone in town knows that Santiago is about to be murdered, but they stand aside, with few, ineffetive, exceptions, and let the tragedy take place. The twins are pardoned at their trial, and the groom returns to live with the rejected bride, some seventeen years later.

A wèll lit labyrinth can easily be missed. The relief to the eyes makes the question of choices and pattern even more bewildering to the mind. No clues in the polished surface. It just looks as a page of new journalism, a clean window on a troubled town, replacing in words what took place near the river. This text can be assigned to the category of *trompe l'oeil*, an art

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which has experienced an ambiguous reception. If it is to be successful, the art of the painter of a *trompe l'oeil* must first be missed, and we must see only a pile of books, a used pipe, a violin hanging from a rusty nail, a few letters and coins on the wall. William M. Harnett's or Peto's deceptive realism was slighted by the established critics (even if bought at high prices by delighted clients), until it was discovered even by the academics, protruding from the frame, invading reality, as the large trumpeter swan painted by Pope, uncomfortable masterpieces that created the illusion of transparency and in so doing cancelled the consecrated conventions of art, that which made it artful, and hid in modesty the work of the artist, his style, cleansing the canvas even of itself, leaving no traces except the plentitude of the recreated object.

García Márquez' novella disguises its craft in a similar way by claiming from the title to be something else: a chronicle. This statement constitutes an instruction for reading the work as if it were a chronicle, while we suspect and hear from other orienting voices (such as publicity), that it is a novel. These perplexing instructions for reading are further complicated by the fact that two meanings of the word come into play: historical descriptions and journalistic reports.

Let us consider first the historical description of events in a chronological order. Strictly, this procedure is not followed in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, since in each of the five divisions of the text we approach, reach, or surpass the murder itself, so that we have read about it many times before it is fully brought into the open in all its gruesome details. With more latitude in the definition, it is almost impossible not to remember that the chronicles of the Indies constitute the bases of Latin American writing and have been read, especially lately and even without the impulse of White or Danto, as the literary place where experience, desire, imagination, invention, recycled ideas and cunning met the unchartered reality of the New World, narrating the previously unseen in terms of the European known, introducing a wedge of incalculable consequences. Our Latin American history does not exist at its origin but as a chronicle, a seamless web of truth and fiction tied together by a slender and incoherent lace of interpretation. They are texts not to be trusted, many of them born out of the urge of correcting previous mendacious versions. Those who died in search of El Dorado, the Fountain of Youth, or the Seven Golden Cities found out that some texts map only the illusions of a crazed or desperate conquistador, even if they may sound like information that can be safely followed and confirmed by an expedition. In this morass, numbers confer

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a saving grace, an orientation in nowhere, an assurance that even if we do not know towards where, at least we are sure we are moving forward. Here lies the central importance of time in ordering the narrative of all chronicles and of García Márquez' *Chronicle*, but with an added dimension. The chronic seal frames the individual and underlines that he lives in a shared human system. Characters are dispersed in a town that has only one common certainty: time, and even this will soon fade in the memory of the interviewed witnesses. García Márquez' Spanish text of the *Chronicle* stresses this nature of time, since all numbers stand out among the letters with the clarity of their cyclic nature from 1 to 12. The English translator has felt free to transform them into words: for example, "6.05" (10) becomes "five minutes past six"(10), "3.20"(83) remains as "3:20" in the first edition in English (on p. 152 of the March 1983 issue of *Vanity Fair*), but is mellowed to "three-twenty")(58) in the Ballantine Books edition of 1984.[3] This is probably a wise editorial decision, but as usual with translations, a significant iconographic interplay is lost.

At this point I must make a brief excursus and mention that the translation is in general brilliant in recreating the tone of the original, but it contains numerous mistakes. I will give only a few of many possible examples that may prove important to the correct understanding of the text. Divina Flor's "el hombre que nunca había de ser suyo"(26), the man who would never be hers because he would soon die, becomes "the man who had never been hers" (15), obliterating the omen; Luisa Santiaga's "un nudo cifrado"(39), an encoded tangle clear to her because she knew all the secrets that an outsider could never guess, it reduced to "a knotty problem"(25). Since in the novel the role of women is of great importance, the following error could result in misguided inferences: "My mother paid no attention to them [her children]; for once in her life she didn't even pay any attention to her husband"(25), but the Spanish text tells us that for once in her life she did not take care *of her children*: "Mi madre no les hizo caso, por una vez en la vida, ni le prestó atención a su esposo"(40). Of graver consequences is the disfiguration of the narrator's reaction towards Bayardo San Román: "Lo conocí poco después que ella [la madre del narrador], cuando vine a las vacaciones de Navidad y no lo encontré tan raro como decían"(46). He does *not* find him as strange as other people had said he was. Rabassa translates: "I met him a short while after she did, when I came home for Christmas vacation, and I found him just as strange as they had said"(30). In a sentence, Angela's mother becomes Angela (51). "Hondo desaliento"(76), a complete discouragement, flattens out to a

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"deep, dejected voice" (52). The "fiestas patronales" (87) are amplified to "national holidays" (61), "lo dibujó" (95) (He drew it, the knife), is duplicated into "the investigator had made sketches of them" (67). The fear of loneliness is lost, when "No tuve valor para dormir solo" (124) is translated as "I didn't have the courage to sleep" (88). In the English version Pedro Vicario usurps the words spoken by Pablo Vicario in the original Spanish (92 and 129, respectively). "Y con el cuchillo bastó que él mismo había fabricado con una hoja de segueta" (172) [with the coarse knife he himself had forged out of the blade of a sickle], is abridged to "with the naked knife in his hand" (128). Victoria Guzmán "mintió a conciencia" (185) [she knew she was lying], becomes in English "she lied honestly" (137). There were two knives, one straight, the other curved, and the narrator remarks that one of the twins used the straight one, the "cuchillo recto" (187), prompting the translator to the complicated "with the knife pointed straight in" (139), and later, when the Spanish reads "estaba a la izquierda con el cuchillo curvo" (188), this is sliced into "was on his left" (139). A whole sentence is simply left out near the end: "Santiago Nasar la reconoció" (192), informing us that the mortally wounded Nasar still could recognize the narrator's aunt Wenefrida at the other side of the river and had the civility to reply to her greeting with "They've killed me, Wene child" (143). Much is lost in transit.

Back to time: in the Spanish text numbers stick out as incrustations, as uncontrollable common delimitations. García Márquez brings out time in many of the titles of his works: *The Bad Hours, One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Autumn of the Patriarch, Love in the Time of the Cholera,* "Baltazar's Prodigious Afternoon," "Tuesday's Siesta," etc.

But the wisdom of "Time will tell" does not apply here. The opposite is true; time will reduce to silence. The narrator's efforts are to rescue an event from the leanness it has acquired in memory, as he tries to flesh out the details of a story that is starting to evaporate, to rot, with water invading the town archives, and with language and memory still circling like scavengers over a death that remains inexplicable, even if many times foretold and retold.

The second meaning of "chronicle" is the journalistic report, in this case, the chronicle of an education in the tropics. It is a well known fact that García Márquez is a professional journalist and he insists that the facts of his novella are historical. In an article published in 1979, he even conceded that "reality is a better writer than we are," and affirmed that there is no line in any of his books that does not have its origin in something that

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really happened.[4] Recent investigations have shown the very close similarities between some articles he wrote on the visit of Pope Pius XII and others on the murder of Wilma Montesi and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.[5] But the connections are not evident, even for an experienced reader: we are not invited to a proliferating reading of the text. The Pope is reduced to a Bishop, the case of the murdered girl has left here only the trace of an ultimate mystery. What should be asked is how the connection was interrupted, cleared away, so that the reader does not escape the narrative world in search of infinite connections. This aspect, García Márquez' creation of an event more than a myth, of a trace that connects to what we experience more than with what we have read, is peculiar to his literature and in an oblique way explains the rather frequent and bewildering conflations he has made of journalism and literature. In an interview published in *Diario 16* (April 28, 1981, p. 72), he claims that in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, for the first time, he has accomplished the perfect confluence of journalism and literature, something he aims at because journalism, according to him, helps to keep in contact with reality, essential to the work of literature. Rabassa, in an article of 1982, assures us that García Márquez "has come to the conclusion that in technique at least—and possibly in many other ways as well—they [literature and journalism] are the same."[6] Rabassa assesses correctly the effect of this journalistic technique in most readers, who will report "a very strong feeling of authenticity"(49).[7]

But when real journalists investigated García Márquez' claims, they came up with mixed results, as Edith Grossman reveals in her article of *Review*, "Truth is Stranger than Fact."[8] According to her and some Colombian journalists, the crime that involved García Márquez in his youth took place in Sucre and the victim was a certain Cayetano Gentile Chimento, not of Arab stock. The romantic outsider, Bayardo San Román, was in reality Miguel Reyes Palencia, born in Sucre, a friend of Cayetano and Gabriel García Márquez, now an insurance agent with 12 children from another wife, and who has seen Margarita Chica, the woman who became Angela Vicario, only twice since their separation. Margarita Chica's brothers were called Víctor Manuel and José Joaquín, and they were not twins. The murder was committed by only one of them. García Márquez' insistence on the underlying historical bases for his narrative is a ruse that intensifies the transparency effect. The reader does not need to constantly question why the author gave such a character such a name, placed him in

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such a situation: it just is so because it was so and there is no need for futher elucidation. Reading a book, as Philippe Lejeune has clearly shown for autobiographies, establishes a pact between the narrator/author and the reader as to the level of truth that will be granted to the story.[9] In terms of Foucault, as readers we establish as soon as possible the sort of statement we are confronted with and proceed accordingly.[10] In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the reader is led up the garden path, but then, once he or she discovers that the text is not a true chronicle, the situation acquires a viscosity between the solid facts of history and the free flow of fiction. So much *is* referring to well known aspects of reality: the name of the narrator and his wife, the general outline of the case. The journalistic chronicle has been adulterated, shot through by literature, and in the many perforations where the artist carved his own modifications to the event is where the critic comes into action, made cautious by the scattered remnants of what still looks like an empty pipe, a recently played flute, burnt matches: but *this is not a pipe.*

There are examples of the difficulty of reading in the novella itself: the interpretations of dreams and omens. At the very beginning we read that Santiago has seen himself going through a grove of timber trees, and he was happy while he dreamed, but when he awoke he felt spattered with bird shit. Santiago's mother, who is famous in town as an interpretor of dreams, misinterprets this crucial one. The omen is not understood. We, the readers, are told that Santiago's subconscious is warning him of the danger. But in order for the dream to become an omen it must be missed, just as the painted nail seen protruding from the wall is successful only if first someone tries to hang a hat from it. The present is visited in prophetic dreams by the future, but the future is in disguise. The complexity of the language of premonition lies in the fact that if the dream is a warning of something that may be avoided, and it is avoided, then it will prove to be false. If it is not clearly understood, or not acted upon, only the murder of the young man, the drop of the hat to the floor, will prove the truth of the matter, the exact relation of things. Once the tragedy happens, the dream is reviewed as a dark mirror, but with a duplication bordering in duplicity, which hides its true meaning in order that it be confirmed. The Other I, the deeper writing knows, the narrator knows and we get to know. Life is written, but in a language of displacement, and the surface of these premonitions is constantly misunderstood by the characters. We are told that Plácida Linero "never forgave herself for having mixed up the magnificant augury of trees with the unlucky one of birds"(115). It claimed

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that Santiago had inherited a sixth sense from his mother (6), but he attaches no significance to the "sediment of copper stirrup on his palate"(2), the penetrated, useless stirrup of red copper. Mother and son fail as readers. Also the narrator's mother, Luisa Santiaga, is not up to the task: "she didn't feel the throbs of the tragedy" (129). There are warnings in the text that we as readers may miss a first time around: "until he was carved up like a pig"(2) will be a much more literal statement than what our training would lead us to expect. We may or may not miss other omens: "the baptistery smell"(5), the rabbits' innards thrown to the dogs, the many roosters crowing. In short: there is a writing in this event that foretells its culmination, but it is a scribbling hard to unscramble, and it actually demands the complicity of human blindness in order to reach its own fulfillment. Reality is definitely not transparent for the characters, even if it is foretold. Ironically, Santiago Nasar ascertains that Bayardo San Román's prediction was correct, inasmuch as it referred to the cost *in money* of his wedding. Blindness and insight, as two directions in the well lit labyrinth.

The investigating magistrate, a reader of Nietzsche and given to marginal notes in the incessant quest for origins and motives, has a right to be "perplexed by the enigma that fate had touched him with"(116), since the most frequent supernatural writing is missing: the brand of the perpetrator. Much will become more or less clear, "except for one item that would never be cleared up: who was the real cause of her damage, and how and why, because no one believed that it had really been Santiago Nasar" (103). This does not mean, of course, that we may safely infer from the text that Nasar *was* innocent, as has been proclaimed by several reviewers.[11] In fact, when the narrator visits Angela many years later she insists that "He was the one"(104). When the magistrate asked her if she knew who Santiago Nasar was, Angela answers: "Fue mi autor"(160); this in English appears as "He was my perpetrator"(117). We have here an extremely unlikely expression, one we could also translate as "He was my author." (The expression comes probably from "he was the author of the crime", "el autor del crimen," but "*my* author"? Can we find here an allusion to the fact that perhaps Gabriel himself was to blame for the fateful deflowering, or that Santiago Nasar "c'est moi"?)

The frame of time and the tug between the writing of fate and human blindness, stubbornness and misinterpretations, creates a world where the difference between foretelling and happening is insignificant, leaving therefore no space for liberty. Once we open up the text to the many codes

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where the action is registered, more overdeterminations spring up. The honor code is one of the engraved crossroads: to comply with it is bloody and cruel, but not to follow its demands would mean ostracism and contempt. No one is able to "spare those poor boys from the horrible duty that's fallen on them"(65). There are also several literary paradigms and references which indicate that this event only repeats something that has happened before. From Greek tragedy (and the frightened Hector running around Troy wishing to escape from Achilles), to the passion of Christ.[12] But, as Arnold Penuel has put it in his model article of reconstructing all possible intertextual mechanisms, García Márquez keeps the bullet away from the gun. This is my central thesis and my reading is opposite but complementary to that of Penuel: Sophocles, Petronius, and St. John are suffocated in the tropical word of García Márquez, invited to the symposium and then rejected as insignificant, just as Borges arrives with his mirrors and labyrinths and *hypallage adiectivi* only to be hidden under the apostolical dress of María Alejandra Cervantes. This is the secret of the two possible readings that have divided critics, sometimes against themselves. On the one side, repetition abounds in García Márquez, as evidenced by his insistence that in Latin America everything arrives late: ice, the discovery of the roundness of the earth, genesis. It is a mistake to qualify *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a foundational myth, because the book is not about origin but about repetition and postponement. From the very beginning of this book that duplicates itself, we are told that there was a precedent of incest in the Buendía family, and that the result also then had been a child with a pig's tail. A lucid critic Josefina Ludmer, writes: "Lo primordial se muestra como posibilidad de retroceso indefinido: el origen no es un verdadero origen, es repetición, el narrador lo toma en un momento en que ya repite algo" ["The primordial is shown as the possibility of unending regression: origin is not a true origin, it is repretition, the narrator takes over already to tell us that something is repeating itself"].[13] The sweep of Time, the subconscious or supernational, honor codes, literary paradigms, all affect the characters, reducing their originality, their choice of how to exist. They are reduced to sentences already written. Vividly, Nasar's death (as the man of Nazareth's), is frozen in a word by Angela: "She nailed it [Santiago's name] to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written"(53). One of the twins ponders: "There is no way out of this ... It's as if it had already happened"(70). Indeed, in the cover flap of the Bruguera Spanish edition, the reader is informed that "Tema central en la

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narrativa de García Márquez, la fatalidad aparece aquí finalmente como protagonista indiscutida, como metáfora suprema de la insensata y desdichada vida de los hombres" ["The central theme in García Márquez' narrative, fatality appears here at last as the indisputable main protagonist, as supreme metaphor of the foolish and unhappy lives of human beings"]. Are we then confronted by the paradigmatic (cryptic ominous archetypal) writing followed by its foretold event that then fades into the pages of journalistic of artistic writing? Is this the cyclic world of underdevelopment described by Maldonado Denis speaking of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*?: "Una de las más persistentes lacras del subdesarrollo: el carácter estancado, cíclico, de la historia de los pueblo que lo padecen" ["One of the most persistent shameful characteristics of underdevelopment is this: the stagnant, cyclic nature of the history of those countries that suffer under it"].[14] Does this justify Cornejo Polar's conclusion in his review of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, to the effect that it is a relatively superfluous work, written just in ludic superficiality since—he goes on—we, Latinamericans, have known for a long time that Destiny is nothing else than the ideologization of power?[15] Can we see, with Hernán Vidal, that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* represents the failure of the liberal capitalist political project, or detect in all of García Márquez' works the pessimism well brought out by Rodríguez Luis?[16] I wrote myself, in 1975, that openness to a true future had to be the test for novels that claimed to be grounded in a revolutionary ideology, and that repetition and the abolition of time reflected only the partial experience of some classes and countries in Latin America, falsely postulated as "lo latinoamericano."[17] Does García Márquez fail the test? Do we have to focus on a greater human tragedy, being played out at a continental level, as it has been described by Angel Rama?: "Vemos la presencia sutil, soterrada, contradictoria, hasta equívoca, de las grandes fuerzas que están moviendo la historia de un determinado tiempo" ["We witness the subtle presence, hidden, contradictory, even ambiguous, of the great forces that move history at a determined time"].[18] But, how is this presence made manifest, and how is it contradictory? If their Parnassian activity is a tug-of-war among the desacralized gods, what does a character have left to say (even at the left)? Or, finally, do we reach for a more saussurean type of determination, such as this one proposed by Culler explaining deconstruction?:

> Mimetic relations can be regarded as intertextual: relations between one representation and another rather than between a

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> textual imitation and a nontextual original. Texts that assert the plenitude of an origin, the uniqueness of an original, the dependency of a manifestation or derivation of an imitation, may reveal that the original is already an imitation and that everything begins with reproduction.[19]

But were all of this true, that in García Márquez we find only repetition, then there would be an obstruction of a true *novum*, the pristine future that Ernst Bloch recognized as our true home, and this would be a curious attitude for García Márquez, the close friend of Torrijos, a believer in transformation and political change, a writer who selected Fidel Castro as the first reader of the manuscript of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* ... There could be a gap between the artist's declaration and his writing, since many critics find in reiteration and stagnation the clue to García Márquez' world. Alfred MacAdam writes about *One Hundred Years of Solitude* : "Why begin and end the history of Macondo with an act of incest? The answer may lie in the relationship between repetition and difference. In a world, and García Márquez seems to envision the world he represents in this way, in which repetition is the only mode of being, life cannot develop because it has no place to grow."[20] And Josefina Ludmer, one of the most brilliant critics of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* writes: "En *Cien años de soledad* todas las supersticiones y creencias populares se transforman en realidad; todas las predicciones se cumplen" ["In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* all popular superstitions and beliefs become reality; all predictions come to pass"].[21] But just as MacAdam is such a keen critic that he budges a definite assertation by intercalating signs of his lack of certainty ("the answer *may* lie", "García Márquez *seems* to envision"), Josefina Ludmer goes on to contradict herself on the same page: "El narrador de *Cien años* juega constantemente con este tipo de posibilidades; las muertes anunciadas no ocurren, acaecen las inesperadas; los niños son maduros, los locos lúcidos; los hechos esperados no acontecen; los objetos buscados no se encuentran" ["The narrator of *One Hundred Years* plays constantly with this sort of possibilities; foretold deaths do not happen, unexpected ones do; children are mature, madmen lucid; expected events do not take place; the objects searched after never appear"]. These are not isolated instances. Carmen Arnau goes as far as to state that "García Márquez cree firmemente en la predestinación de todos los hombres en todas las partes del mundo" ["García Márquez believes firmly in the predestination of all human beings everywhere in the world"], even if she is forced later in her book to

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acknowledge that "para los hombres esta novela parece ser el Universo de la posibilidad, todo parece posible, no hay ningún camino preestablecido, cada cual se hace el suyo propio a medida de sus deseos, no hay ningún condicionamiento" ["for men this novel seems to be the Universe of possibility, anything seems possible, there is no fixed road, each one makes his own according to the measure of his desires, there is no conditioning"].[22] These critics reflect a radical ambiguity in García Márquez' texts that we have explored up to now in the hesitation between novel and chronicle, between fiction and history. Ambiguity, of course, is at the antipodes of repetition, since it is at once two but never any one of the two.

The least ambiguous character of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is Angela: she does not hide the truth, with unfortunate consequences. She does not pretend; her virginity is lost, the hymen is broken. She could easily have counterfeited the missing quality, but she is probably resentful at having been handed over as merchandise to the best bidder. What she lacks is the ultimate *artículo de consumo*, there only to be taken and shining in all its value at the moment of its destruction; but the absence is telling, since the vacant space intolerably re-remembers the lover. Bayardo does not make a mistake on his wedding night, or at least not in the facts. He must proceed from what is given and not given. And all seems then to march down the last one-lane stretch of the labyrinth.

There may be an opening. While the mistakes of the characters seem to represent what the writing has rehearsed, the language of the narration is studded by unexpected creative jumps that sparkle in a characteristic and disturbing García Márquez style. One way to define a metaphor is as an evident misnomer that forces the reader to change register and read otherwise, to engage in interpretation. And they are unnecessary, unpredictable, unforetold, at least in *Chronicle*. Here we have, for example, Divina Flor's vision: "through the half-open door she saw the almond trees on the square, snowy [*nevados*] in the light of the dawn" (14), a wonderfully incorrect perception in the tropics. The rigor of logic would object to the following sentence: Santiago's "skin was so delicate that it couldn't stand the noise of starch" (5). Let me insist: this is more than a question of style, it is the half-open door of the unpredictable that, I will show, is essential in García Márquez' creative world. Pity, then, when it is lost in the translation, when someone visits Bayardo's house and the rooms "were lighted by the traces of the eclipse" (97), when the Spanish text reads: "los cuartos iluminados por los rescoldos del eclipse" (135), lit by

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the last embers of the eclipse. These embers are the brand of the perpetrator, of the author enjoying his freedom from the sun of logic, the generation of the new by his sidestepping from the well lit labyrinth.

García Márquez has stressed repeatedly the importance imagination has in transforming the world: "Acuérdate que la gran mayoría de las cosas de este mundo, desde las cucharas hasta los transplantes del corazón, estuvieron en la imaginación de los hombres antes de estar en la realidad. El socialismo estuvo en la imaginación de Carlos Marx antes de estar en la Unión Soviética ... tarde o temprano, la realidad termina por darle la razón a la imaginación" ["Remember that the great majority of things in this world, from spoons to heart transplants, were first in the imagination of human beings then in reality. Socialism was first imagined by Karl Marx before it appeared in the Soviet Union ... sooner or later, reality ends up by agreeing with imagination"].[23] This is our first important discovery: for García Márquez, freedom is found in imagination, because there the human being can go beyond history and literature, *anticipating* it, since eventually whatever is new will end up swallowed up by the discourses of the experienced and the imagined.

We must complicate matters further by investigating a problem at the anecdotal level of *Chronicle*, concerning letters. One letter, predicting in detail Santiago's death, is left unopened and unread until after the crime; the thousands of letters written by Angela to Bayardo are never opened. The first one is traditional, literary, but the latter surprise the reader. In search for clues one can read an article published in *Magazine Litteraire* that has to be considered a fabrication disguised as candid revelations.[24] García Márquez affirms here that he had not been able to write *Chronicle* because he had not been able to invent a convincing and appropriate end. If we look at the text, the end appears to be Santiago's falling dead on the kitchen floor where the rabbits' innards had been eaten by the dogs only a few hours before: thus all predictions, omens, and codes would be fulfilled. But García Márquez writes in *Magazine Litteraire* that what he considers the end was penned by reality: a friend of his reported to him that Santiago Nasar had returned to live with Angela. (This appears to be pure invention, according to the *Review* article.) This alleged event made him understand, he claims, that this is a story of love, and that the marginal return of Santiago to Angela would be the real center of the story.

Let us follow this lead for a moment, but noting first the extreme care that García Márquez has taken to root his love story in an event and not in a bookish tradition. In fact, in *Chronicle* we are told that "for the immense

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majority of people there was only one victim: Bayardo San Román. They took it for granted that the other actors in the tragedy had been fufilling with dignity, and even with a certain grandeur, their part of the destiny that life had assigned them"(96). San Román (the pilgrim to Rome?) is the outsider (much as Melquíades was in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*): he does not have an assigned part, and he does not fit easily into the town stereotypes since from the beginning his sexual identity is questioned. One reviewer reaches the following unfounded deduction: "It is licit to infer from reading the novel that he returned his wife on the wedding night not so much because he did not find her a virgin, but more because his own sexual preferences had other inclinations ... We find a character who is of the opinion that Bayardo 'seemed gay' and who seems one is one, as the Spanish saying goes."[25] Of course, this is not a licit inference, and Angela kept burning and pleasing memories of Bayardo's performance on the wedding night, but the snide remark of the critic and the gossip in town are fitting, since Bayardo is the man without a role, forgotten by everyone on the day of the crime, so it is only days later that they think of looking him up. In a book so burdened down by the sentencing of fate, Bayardo is the odd man out, the dweller of the margin.

From this standpoint, from this apparent afterthought of placing Bayardo and Angela at the center of the narration, and from his *trompe l'oeil* affirmation that this episode is there only because it happened, we must reexamine García Márquez' fascination with the odd, the unexpected, the strange, and the unique. In his speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize, he underscored the many instances in which Latin America is unbelievable, for it is unprecedented.[26] This uniqueness should not be explained away by applying the tired cliché of magical realism or *lo real maravilloso*. This is not an exotic fringe, but the center itself where the unexpected is possible, where previous writing collapses, gaping for a word as yet inexistent. This is the space of liberty. (I wonder if, because of this, the circus is for García Márquez a symbol of rebellion and life: a form of art that is transient, that aims to amaze and fire the imagination with facts and not with writing.) So the unexpected must become a fact, and this telling, straight and with no exclamation marks, that reports what people believe has happened, he has learned from journalism.[27] What must be shortcircuited is the intertextual proliferation that will always keep us with our minds fixed in what has been put into sentences, while the uniqueness of the life sparkling the connections is ignored or abstracted. (We are still concerned about why

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Bayardo never opened those letters, but the offered solution must be delayed.)

These considerations bring us to an unexpected conclusion: García Márquez is a man against books, just as Cervantes could have been termed a man against books, because they obscure the present event with formulations from the past. Time does exist. The investigating magistrate "was a man burning with the fever of literature" (116) and could, therefore, understand little of what he had to witness. His theories, as his improper clothes, do not fit the life of the town. In this sense, Marlise Simons has seen correctly when she called García Márquez an "anti-intellectual . . . he looks on theory as an enemy."[28] It is precisely reading a book, deciphering hastily Melquíades' writing, that brings about the destruction of Macondo. In García Márquez' own works no one praises books or makes a great ado about literature. If one compares him with the palimpsests written by Borges, Cortázar, Carpentier, and Fuentes, the difference is clear and stunning. In an interview for *El País*, the startled conclusion of the interviewers was that what least interested García Márquez was literature?[29] Intellectuals are not frequent characters in his books, and in his latest novel, *Love in the Time of the Cholera*, a doctor seeped in European culture and who appears to want to take over as the main character gets brushed off soon enough when he dies after falling while trying to bring down from a tree his best companion, a parrot he has taught how to speak French. The investigating judge in *Chroncle* is dumbfounded because he fails to admit that there may be in life a residual element of absurdity: "No one could understand such fatal coincidences. The investigating judge who came from Riohacha must have sensed them without daring to admit it, for his impulse to give them a rational explanation was obvious in his report"(11). But he relegates to the margins of his brief exasperated notes and the drawing of a heart pierced by an arrow, cutting into the consistency of the report and showing how incomplete and unsatisfactory it is.

The narrator himself has become a book-pusher, a seller of encyclopedias, where supposedly all information in the world can be found. Nevertheless, "in the course of the investigations for this chronicle he [Gabriel] recovered numerous marginal experiences"(48). The intromission of this inexplicable marginal element that proves central is seen in other quotes: if Santiago "left by the door on the square . . . it was for such an unforeseen reason that the investigator who drew up the brief never did understand it"(57). Only García Márquez and Rulfo are not proliferators of literary allusions among the writers of the "boom." But while Rulfo is

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removed from literature to the point of silence and death, García Márquez reveals a deep anxiety, a fear of writing that leads him to cover up all the clues that may make him guilty of flagrant intertextuality. Orginality and true life is impossible when it is only a repetition of the past, of a past that must be left behind. If memory of other masterpieces is unavoidable, then he will rescue characters from his friends' books and show them "alive" in his narrative world. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* characters from novels by Fuentes, Carpentier, and Cortázar are debooked and roam the same world as the Buendías. This would also explain why Bayardo does not open the letters, because he is gained over by the vigorous action of Angela's writing, and not by reasoning or purple prose. The impulse to return and forgive (and accept to be forgiven) stems from an unpredictable, flawed, absurb, but still magnificently human impulse, love, that is told precisely because it can never be foretold. She has restored her own virginity by her writing, and he respects that seal. She has broken away from her mother, and not repeated her mistakes: with her pen and her sewing machine she has created her own self, an absurd result perhaps to the townsfolk, but an important step forward in the liberation of women and men in Latin America. The friends of the narrator keep on talking about the mystery, "trying to give order to the chain of many chance events that had made absurdity possible," precisely because "none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate" (113). At the margin, then, the central character and event: Angela Vicario, "mistress of her fate for the first time"(108), after over 2,000 unopened letters.

García Márquez' narrative voice stretches over the disquiet of falling into books, struggling to remain a voice, a chronicle in time, refusing the immortality of literature. This is not a dream, told to the psychiatrist for his interpretation, it is a story townfolk recognize as their own: it is not Bosch or Dalí, but Harnett and Chagall. This does not mean that his work is a celebration of the naive or the irrational: the irrational can be as written, as prescribed, as the rational, and the naive as repeated as the sophisticated. But it is a writing to perplex a judge, a critic, created to destroy the "dime-novel title" the judge attaches to the door to the square: "The Fatal Door"(11). It is intended to push reality out from under the weight of words, to bring the picture out of the frame, to give us a *trompe l'oeil*. It is a celebration of what is absurd and unique in life, requiring a burst of creative energy, a capacity for pleasure, and courage.

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He will not, of course, produce a literature that escapes precedence, but in the effort to block intertextuality by constant reference to true reportable events, he inscribes in his texts the will to be a voice devoid of letters. The reader, if he is not to be torn by hesitation, must adopt a listener's attitude, not a reader's, and accept for an instant the illusion of a world that is voiced and emerging in a jubilant affirmation of the human voice and ear, of the presence of the speaker and the listener, not the eye/I of print, but the we, the use of the gossipy storyteller's circle. A circle, nevertheless, that is conscious of its imminent fragmentation and dispersal, as soon as yesterday's news grow stale and today's heading claims our attention with the surprising fact that true history goes on and does exist.

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NOTES

1 Ferré's opinion is quoted by Carmen Rabell in *Periodismo y ficción en "Crónica de una muerte anunciada* " (Santiago: Monografías del Maitén, 1985), p. 13. As will be seen by the reader who finishes this study, I believe Ferré may be, only in a certain way, right. It should be clear from the start that I consider *Crónica* a masterpiece, and the term "fraud" is accepted only devoid of its usual negative connotations.

2 Cristóbal Sarrias, "García Márquez, Premio Nobel," *Razón y Fe*, 206, Nr. 1013 (December 1982), p. 456, my translation. He goes on to say that this narrative transparency is the most important quality in García Márquez' work, p. 457.

3 The editions I will be quoting from are the following: for the Spanish original, Barcelona: Bruguera, 1981; for the English translation by Gregory Rabassa, New York: Ballantine Books, 1984. The *Vanity Fair* edition is illustrated brilliantly by Fernando Botero. The Ballantine Books edition has some drawings by Paul Giovanopoulos.

4 Gabriel García Márquez, "Fantasía y creación artística en America Latina y el Caribe," *Texto Crítico*, 14 (1979), 3-8, quote in p. 8.

5 See Rabell, pp. 17-21.

6 Gregory Rabassa, "García Márquez' New Book: Literature or Journalism," *WLT*, 56, 1 (1982), 48-51, quote on page 51. He then goes on to the mystifying formula "Here fiction is treated like fact treated like fiction"(49), that I suspect—if I do understand him correctly—is very perceptive.

7 Another reviewer confesses that the impression she had when she read the narration was that the events had taken place. See Adelaida López de Martínez' review of *Crónica* in *Chasqui*, 10 (1981), p. 72. Victoria F. Chase analyses another "chronicle" in "(De)mitificación en *Los funerales de la Mama*

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Grande," *Texto Crítico*, 16-17 (1980), 233-247, and also arrives to a paradoxical formula: "Una historia verdadera de una (aparente) mentira" (233).

8 *Review*, 30 (September-December 1981), 71-73. See also, for complementary information, Rabell, pp. 67-68.

9 Philippe Lejeune in his *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Colin, 1971), and later in *Le Pacte Autobiographique*.

10 Most of *L'Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 19679), is dedicated to exploring the mechanisms that are active in discourse and allow a delimitation of how a reader confers and excludes meaning.

11 Adelaida López de Martínez in *Chasqui* writes: "It takes more courage and a stronger mettle to defy social pressures than to kill a man. The event is worse in this case, because it is evident that the sacrificed victim was innocent and that the killers knew it." Albert Bensoussans affirms in "Le yeux du mage," *Magazine Litteraire*, No. 178 (November 1981), p. 32, that the novel is about "L'ineluctable destin accable des les premieres pages un beau jeune homme innocent promis a la mort sur la denonciation fallacieuse d'une femme repudiee au soir de ses noces." Paul Alexandreu Georgescu, in "García Márquez y la metamorfosis de la novela," *Correo de los Andes* (Bogotá), 13 (January-February 1982), 30-32, believes that the crime took place in Macondo and that the guilt is "inexistente"(32).

12 These are references to two of the best studies about the novella: Angel Rama, "García Márquez entre la tragedia y la policial o crónica y pesquisa de *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*," *Sin Nombre* , 13 (1982), 1-27, and the superb article by Arnold M. Penuel, "The Sleep of Vital Reason in García Márquez' *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*," *Hispania*, 68 (December 1985), 753-766.

13 Ludmer, *Cien años de soledad: Una interpretación* (Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1972), p. 42.

14 "La violencia del subdesarrollo y el subdesarrollo de la violencia: un análisis de *El otoño del patriarca* de Gabriel García Márquez," *CASA*, 16, No. 98 (1976), 24-35, quote on page 24.

15 *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, 7, No. 13 (1981), 140-142.

16 Julio Rodríguez Luis, *La literatura hispanoamericana: Entre compromiso y experimento* (Madrid: Espiral, 1984), dedicates a whole chapter to this aspect, "García Márquez: compromiso y alienación," 201-231, where he expands, correctly to my mind, on Vidal's limited, but perceptive, opinion.

17 "La apertura al futuro: Una categoría para el análisis de la novela hispanoamericana contemporánea," *RI*, 41, No. 90 (1975), 15-28.

18 *Diez problemas para el novelista latinoamericana* (Caracas: Síntesis Dosmil, 1972), p. 68. This essay was previously published in *CASA*, No. 26 (October-November 1964).

19 Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 187.

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[20] *Modern Latin American Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 86.

[21] Ludmer, 106-107.

[22] *El mundo mítico de Gabriel García Márquez* (Barcelona: Península, 1975), pp. 20 and 121.

[23] Armando Durán, "Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez," in *Sobre García Márquez,* selection by Pedro Simón Martínez (Montevideo: Marcha, 1971), 31-31, quote on page 38. This is an interview made in Barcelona in 1968.

[24] Gabriel García Márquez, "Le recit du recit," *ML*, 178 (November 1981), 33-35.

[25] Adelaida López Martínez, p. 71.

[26] For an English version of the speech, see *The New York Times,* Sunday, February 6, 1983.

[27] This is what García Márquez tells Marlise Simons in "A Talk with Gabriel García Márquez," *The New York Times Book Review* (December 5, 1982), p. 60: "I read a lot from James Joyce and Erskine Caldwell and of course from Hemingway. But the tricks you need to transform something which appears fantastic, unbelievable into something plausible, credible, those I learned from journalism ... The key is to tell it straight. It is done by reporters and by country folk."

[28] In the interview quoted in the previous note, p. 61.

[29] "Rosas para todos," *El País Semanal*, Nr. 137 (November 25, 1979), p. 17.

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