Chronicle of a Death Foretold

Geographical, Biographical, Political and Literary Backdrop
Colombia’s Geographical Split

- **Costeños**
  - Coastal Caribbean
  - Racially mixed: descendents of pirates, black slaves, smugglers.
  - Reputation: people are outgoing, superstitious, dancers, adventurous.

- **Cachacos**
  - Central Highland
  - Racially “pure”
  - Formal, aristocratic, speak excellent Spanish, proud of advanced cities (Bogotá)

- **Márquez**
  - Considers himself a *mestizo costeño*
Colombia’s Political Split

**Background**
- Two political parties emerged after independence from Spain in 1810.
- Neither possess firmly established ideologies and beliefs; are equally corrupt, abuse power, and are constantly at war with each other.
- It is said that Colombians don’t choose a party, *they are born into one.*
- Act as territorial and familial units.

**Liberals (Partido Liberal)**
- Primarily Coastal Caribbean *Costeños*

**Conservatives (Partido Conservador)**
- Primarily Central Highland *Cachacos*

**Márquez**
- Liberal
- Parties form the political framework of much of his fiction.
Three historical events influenced Márquez and are evident in his fiction.

• **War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902)**
  - Civil war between Liberals and Conservatives
  - 100,000 civilian casualties. Most were Liberal, costeño peasants.

• **Banana Strike Massacre (1928)**
  - Bananas the largest Colombian export in early 1900’s and primary income source for most costeños. United Fruit Company, American-owned, operated as monopoly with immense political and economic power.
  - 32,000 workers went on strike for basic rights. UFC ignored demands, Conservative Government used military as strikebreakers.
  - Hundreds gunned down and many more vanished in subsequent months.

• **La Violencia (1940’s-1950’s)**
  - Bipartisan confrontation began after assassination of popular Liberal candidate.
  - Created political division with Liberal party, allowing Conservatives to gain power.
  - Conservatives feared reprisal, used military to terrorize Liberal voters.
  - Both parties formed guerilla armies, burned villages, killed men, women, children.
  - By 1953, 150,000 Colombians were murdered, and 1 million fled to Venezuela.

• **García Márquez**
  - Often represents Liberal, costeño perspective through characters.
  - Born same year as Banana Strike Massacre, which devastated his small town. Conscious of his life’s sad beginning.
  - Wove veterans of War of a Thousand Days into fiction, immortalizing their bravery.
  - Banana Strike Massacre written into *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
  - *La Violencia* is written into the backdrop of many stories, most notably *In Evil Hour*. 
Author Study – Biographical Context
(b. March 6, 1928 in Aracataca, a town in Northern Colombia)

- **Familial Influences**
  - Spent first eight years of life in his grandparents home.
  - Grandmother – superstitious, held folk beliefs, spoke of ghosts, omens, premonitions. Several of her sisters lived with them and shared her views. *No matter how fantastic or improbable, grandmother and aunts always spoke and told stories as if they were the truth.*
  - Grandfather – Liberal war hero, openly spoke out about Banana Strike Massacre in congress, helped found Aracataca, excellent storyteller, taught Márquez lessons from dictionary.
  - Parents – mother married a Conservative that her parents disapproved of. Were poor and struggling, moved away and left Garcia Márquez with grandparents.
  - Has said that all of the material for his work comes from that home: civil wars, parent’s courtships, practicality of superstitions, sense of place.

- **Literary Influences**
  - Greek Classics – Society and abuses of power.
  - Kafka – *Metamorphosis* changed beliefs in literature as traditional and linear.
  - Faulkner – Idea of a mythical past and childhood, the power of writing about true experiences tied to life rather than abstractions. Márquez returned to Aracataca to sell grandparents home in 1965 and had swirl of memories but town seemed frozen and dead. Found his own sense of place tied to childhood, created *Macondo*, the mythical town in many fictional works.
Magical realism is a literary style that generally describes works that combine fantasy with reality to create a mythical occurrence. Magical realism is often described as a unique product of Latin America, but German Franz Roh is actually credited for its inception. “Roh introduced it into artistic discourse in the mid-1920s through the German phrase *Magischer Realismus*” (Simpkins 141). Latin American authors were drawn to Roh’s literary concept because it proved to be “a suitable means to express the ‘marvelous reality’ unique to their own culture” (141). Garcia Marquez employs this technique throughout his novel in such a way that the mythical occurrences do not seem odd to the characters at all. The characters accept the supernatural incidents as a part of everyday life.
Frame or surface of the work may be conventionally realistic, but contrasting elements invade the realism and change the whole basis of the art.

– Supernatural
– Myth
– Dream
– Fantasy
Popularity in many parts of the world just after WWII

- Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina, South America)
- Gabriel García Márquez (Columbia, South America)
- Isabel Allende (Chile, South America)
- Günter Grass (Germany)
- Italo Calvino (Italy)
- Umberto Eco (Italy)
• The question of what is *real* is at the heart of magical realism.

• Implies that our notions of reality are too limited—that reality includes magic, miracles and monsters.

• By making things happen in his fictional world of *Macondo* that do not happen in most novels (or in most readers' experiences either), Garcia Marquez asks us to question our assumptions about our world, and to examine our certainties about ourselves and our community.

• Because the magical events in *Macondo* are presented matter-of-factly, our own sense of what is possible is amplified and enriched. Ordinary objects and events are enchanted.
• Suggests that cultures and countries differ in what they call "real."

• It is here that magical realism serves its most important function, because it facilitates the inclusion of alternative belief systems.

• It is no coincidence that magical realism is flourishing in cultures such as Mexico and Colombia, where European and indigenous cultures have mixed, with the result that ancient myths are often just beneath the surface of modernity.
Crucial difference between magical realism and science fiction/fantasy is that magical realism sets magical events in realistic contexts, thus requiring us to question what is "real," and how we can tell.
Magical Realism in Art

Rob Gonzalves
Magical Realism in Film

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon
How does Garcia Marquez use of the technique in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* affect the novel?
**Important Terms**

- **Metafiction (or “surfiction”)**: “an overall term for a growing class of novels which depart from realism and foreground the role of the author and reader in inventing and receiving the fiction.” (Abrams 1999, p. 196, emphasis mine)

- **Fabulation**: “Fabulative novels violate, in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic...experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish...” (Abrams 1999, p. 196, emphasis mine)

- **Realism**: “written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen.” (Abrams 1999, p. 260)

- **Surrealism**: a style of art and literature developed principally in the 20th century, stressing the subconscious or nonrational significance of imagery arrived at by automatism or the exploitation of chance effects, unexpected juxtapositions, etc.
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. He’d dreamed he was going through a grove of timber trees where a gentle drizzle was falling, and for an instant he was happy in his dream, but when he awoke he felt completely spattered with bird shit. “He was always dreaming about trees,” Placida Linero, his mother, told me twenty-seven years later, recalling the details of that distressing Monday. “The week before, he’d dreamed that he was alone in a tinfoil airplane and flying through the almond trees without bumping into anything,” she said to me. She had a well-earned reputation as an accurate interpreter of other people’s dreams, provided they were told her before eating, but she hadn’t noticed any ominous augury in those two dreams of her son’s, or in the other dreams of trees he’d described to her on the mornings preceding his death.