

Fact, Fiction and Memory

If the primary drama of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is the murder of Santiago Nasar, the secondary drama is the Narrator's work of researching, recollecting, and representing the murder. His narrative style is journalistic: after many years, the narrator is attempting to put together a comprehensive account of Santiago Nasar's murder. Structurally the novel resembles a documentary film: a dramatization or reconstruction of the murder is framed and informed by a huge number of witness testimonials, which are presented to the reader as direct quotes, or "talking heads."

Though the narrator casts a wide net of discovery, he struggles at times to pin down the facts of the case—no two witnesses can agree on every single detail. A haze hovers over the events of the murder, partly because so many years have passed, and partly because everyone in town was exceedingly drunk on the night of the wedding. Instead of representing only those facts that strike him as true, the Narrator presents as many accounts of the fateful morning as he can, and refuses to polish over the contradictions they pose. Through these many contradicting accounts—one notable example being the widespread uncertainty about the weather on the day of the murder—the narrative demonstrates that memory is fallible, and that sometimes remembering is more like fiction-making than fact-finding. Most facts are lost to the past, and memory is just a story we tell ourselves.

Furthermore, while memory can make fiction out of facts, sometimes the facts themselves can seem stranger than fiction. The uncertain border between fact and fiction is explicitly remarked upon by the Narrator and a number of the characters, most notably in the final third of the novel, when the Magistrate investigating the case becomes increasingly perplexed by the idea that "life should make use of so many coincidences forbidden literature." This observation that life sometimes reads as bad fiction takes on a new complexity when one considers that a) the murder of Santiago Nasar is of course fictional—this is a novel!—and b) the novel is based loosely on true events.

Overall, Márquez seems to suggest throughout his novel that the border between fact and fiction cannot so easily be drawn—experience, especially traumatic experience, and especially traumatic experience seen through the lens of memory, is as much experienced as it is constructed.