

### **Contextualizing *Chronicle of a Death Foretold***

The impact of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is further heightened by our knowledge that the narrative is based in part on some true events close to the author. The original crime occurred on Monday, 22 January 1951, in the town of Sucre, where García Márquez's family had been living for ten years. Here is a rudimentary summary of the real-life incidents.

After a year's romantic involvement, Miguel Reyes Palencia, twenty-nine, the scion of a landowning family, married a local schoolteacher named Margarita Chica Salas, twenty-two, on Saturday the twentieth at 7:00 A.M. He loved her, but had also been pressured into marriage by threats from Margarita's older brothers (not twins) José Joaquín and Víctor Manuel, commercial fishermen, who had heard slanderous rumors about the young couple. At the wedding night Miguel got completely drunk, then slept the entire day and night following the festivities. Early on Sunday the twenty-first he awoke in a bedroom at the Chica household, saw Margarita naked at his side, and found out she was not a virgin. He beat her, demanding her deflowerer's name, but she refused. He then returned her to Mrs. Chica, who, on her knees, implored him to wait a few weeks in order to avert scandal. Margarita's brother Victor now showed up and asked; she named Cayetano Gentile and burst into tears.

Cayetano, twenty-four, tall, elegant, and good-looking, the son of successful Italian immigrants, was a third-year medical student. He and Margarita had been engaged once in the past, though this had not prevented him and Miguel Reyes Palencia from being drinking partners and close friends. On the morning he was to die, Cayetano went down to the river port to see Miguel and Margarita off on their honeymoon trip, but the couple, strangely, had never showed up. There he also posted a letter to García Márquez's father Eligio in Cartagena, and ran into [García Márquez's] brother Luis and sister Margot, who invited him over for breakfast. Cayetano graciously declined the offer, he being due at the family farm *El Verdún* that same day. He then went by to see his sweetheart Nydia Naser, not yet aware that José and Víctor Chica were at the general store across from his two-story house, waiting to hack him to death.

A crowd was gathering near Cayetano's home. His mother Julieta was inside, having been warned about the death threat by a little boy she knew. Seeing one of the Chica brothers running toward the house, but not her son approaching rapidly from the opposite corner, she slammed shut and locked both doors. Cayetano arrived at the front door and started banging and screaming. Julieta, thinking it the pursuers, scurried inside for protection. Cayetano now fled, curiously bypassing the hotel next door (where there was a policeman), and dashed into the following house, but Victor reached his prey and knifed him fourteen times. The victim managed to rise up and walk home, his entrails dangling out. He died there amid relatives, saying "I'm innocent." The Chica brothers turned themselves in immediately, spent a year in jail, and were finally acquitted. Meanwhile the Chica family moved away, and Margarita, feeling disgraced, did not venture out for two years. Miguel in turn remarried, became an insurance agent, fathered twelve children, and nourished no regrets on the matter. Thereafter he saw Margarita just twice, first for the annulment, and years later on some obscure financial question. [Margarita remained unmarried and living alone.] The townsfolk mostly thought Cayetano guiltless.

The crime would have a lasting impact on young Gabo, who was in Cartagena at the time. He knew all of the parties involved; Cayetano had been a friend since childhood, and Julieta was godmother to one of Gabo's younger brothers.

From *García Márquez: The Man and His Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2010) by Gene H. Bell-Vilada, p. 206-7

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* reconstructs an actual murder that took place in Sucre, Colombia, in 1951. In an interview for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* (The Nation), García Márquez declared that Cayetano Gentile Chimento—Santiago Nasar in the novel—had been one of his childhood friends.... Similarly to the way the murder takes place in the novel, in broad daylight, the two brothers knifed Cayetano to death in the town's plaza. In spite of the parallels, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, uses an anonymous town and fictional names for the characters. In this sense, the narrative is not a chronicle. García Márquez did not talk to any of the witnesses, nor did he use the real names and places as a chronicle would when recounting past events.

From *Gabriel García Márquez: A Critical Companion* (2001) by Ruben Peláyo, p. 111-12