
Humanist Journalism in the short story ‘*And of Clay Are We All Created*’ by Isabel Allende

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Abstract

The present paper explores the concept of ‘humanist journalism’ as depicted in Isabel Allende’s short story *And of Clay Are We All Created*. Drawing on a real-life tragedy; the 1985 Nevado del Ruiz volcanic eruption in Colombia. Allende digs into the emotional and ethical dimensions of reporting human suffering. Through the character of Rolf Carlé, a journalist who becomes personally involved in the plight of a young girl; Azucena trapped in a mudslide, the story focuses on the transformative power of empathy, personal engagement, and ethical responsibility in journalism. Allende weaves a fictional story around this catastrophic event, yet her tale touches upon universal truths about the role of journalists in moments of crisis. The paper argues that Allende’s narrative transcends conventional journalism by highlighting the limitations of objectivity and detachment, offering instead a model of humanist journalism that prioritizes compassion, individual stories, and the interconnectedness of human experience. The concept of ‘humanist journalism’ emerges in the story as an alternative to the traditional model of journalistic objectivity. The story transcends the norms of journalism by suggesting that objectivity can sometimes be an obstacle to understanding the full scope of human suffering. The present research paper is an attempt to study the story of Allende against the concept of humanist journalism that aims to foster deeper understanding of the subject under question with deep empathy and interconnectedness.

Keywords: Humanism, Journalism, Empathy, Engagement, Universalism.

Journalism is a way of telling stories that often deals with real events, sharing facts, insights, and emotions from the scene. When viewed through a humanist perspective, journalism goes beyond just reporting the news. It creates stories that focus on the shared human experience, ethics, and the dignity of those affected. Isabel Allende’s short story *And of Clay Are We All Created* is a powerful example of this. The story moves away from the technical details of disaster reporting and instead highlights the emotional and ethical aspects of human suffering and strength. The

story takes place during a volcanic eruption and mudslide, showing the deeper emotional layers of humanist journalism.

Humanist journalism focuses on the ethical and emotional aspects of storytelling. This type of journalism often involves getting closer to the people being covered, emphasizing themes like empathy, dignity, and shared human values, rather than sticking to cold, fact-based reporting. Unlike sensationalist journalism, which can exploit tragedy, humanist journalism treats its subjects with humanity and respect. According to Martin Conboy (2013), humanist journalism involves "an empathetic connection between the journalist and those being reported on, focusing not just on the event but on the emotional and human experience" (Conboy, *Journalism Studies*, p. 89). Journalists working in this way aim to show how people are connected, helping the audience feel more empathy for those in the story. Humanist journalism rejects the idea that journalists should stay emotionally distant from their subjects and instead encourages a more compassionate and involved approach to telling stories.

The story *And of Clay Are We All Created* is based on a real event: the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Colombia in 1985, which caused a deadly mudslide and the tragic death of a young girl named Omayra Sánchez. In the story, Allende changes the real event slightly by introducing a girl named Azucena, who is trapped in the mudslide. A journalist named Rolf Carlé comes to cover the disaster but ends up becoming emotionally involved as he tries to save Azucena. Over three days, he forms a deep connection with her, though he is unable to rescue her, and she becomes a symbol of shared human suffering. As Rolf tries to help Azucena, he is also forced to face his own hidden emotional wounds. The story shows how tragedy affects not just the victims, but also those who witness it, highlighting how deeply connected human experiences are. It also illustrates how journalism can move from simply reporting events to feeling deep empathy, as Rolf's relationship with Azucena becomes personal rather than just professional.

Empathy Over Objectivity: Rolf Carlé is first sent to the disaster scene to report on it in a neutral, objective way. However, he quickly becomes emotionally involved when he meets Azucena. His role as a professional journalist fades as he connects with her, showing the idea of humanist journalism, where empathy is more important than staying detached. Instead of just watching from the sidelines, Rolf becomes Azucena's supporter and caregiver, showing how humanist journalism pushes journalists to actively engage with the suffering they report on. Rolf changes from being just a journalist to a person facing both his own and shared trauma, blurring the line between reporting and getting personally involved. His inability to save Azucena represents the limits of traditional journalism, which often doesn't deal with the deep

emotional and ethical aspects of the stories. Humanist journalism, on the other hand, encourages journalists to embrace the emotional complexity of their subjects, turning them into empathetic storytellers who aim to show the full range of human experience.

Ethical Responsibility: Humanist journalism believes that journalists have a duty not just to report facts but also to act ethically toward the people they report on. Rolf's growing desperation to save Azucena shows this responsibility. His frustration with the slow and ineffective response from authorities highlights the societal problems that humanist journalism often points out. Through Rolf's inner struggle, Allende raises an important ethical question: Whether journalists are only professional and not human, who can at times get emotionally involved with their subjects undertaken?

Traditional journalism usually focuses on the event itself, but humanist journalism looks at the personal stories behind those events. In *And of Clay Are We All Created*, the disaster is not the main focus. Instead, the story centers on Azucena's struggle and Rolf's emotional journey. Allende in this story shifts attention away from the disaster as a whole and towards the shared human experiences within it. This shows how humanist journalism aims to make large tragedies feel personal and relatable.

Humanist journalism doesn't avoid showing trauma but does so thoughtfully, aiming to create understanding instead of just stirring up emotions. Rolf's deepening bond with Azucena makes him face his own past traumas. This layered way of showing trauma—both personal and shared—highlights the complicated emotions that journalists deal with when covering human tragedies. Allende's story shows how reporting on disasters can trigger strong feelings in journalists, challenging the idea that they should remain completely neutral.

Humanist journalism, the story is more than just a way to share information; it's a powerful tool for creating emotional connections. Allende's rich and personal writing style helps readers feel the weight of the tragedy, creating a strong link between them and both Rolf and Azucena. The story reminds us that humanist journalism is not just about the facts reported, but also about how those facts are presented. The narrative should connect with the audience's feelings and encourage them to think about shared human experiences like fear, hope, and suffering.

As John Pilger (2001) notes, humanist journalists often find themselves questioning the power structures that lead to human suffering. Their close connections with the people they report on help them see the bigger social issues

behind the events they cover. In Allende's story, Rolf's growing disappointment with the world shows this questioning. He realizes that no matter how hard he tries, he cannot save Azucena. This highlights the important responsibility that humanist journalism gives to reporters: not just to report on suffering but also to challenge the social conditions that allow that suffering to happen.

One of the main ideas of humanist journalism is to focus on individual stories instead of just the bigger picture of disasters or conflicts. Allende's choice to highlight the relationship between Rolf and Azucena, rather than the larger disaster, shows this approach. By concentrating on personal experiences, *And of Clay Are We All Created* reveals the true human cost of tragedy, going beyond the usual focus on numbers and casualty counts. As discussed by Anthony Feinstein (2006), humanist journalism often "elevates the personal narrative as a way to highlight the universal nature of human suffering, offering readers a chance to engage more deeply with the story" (Feinstein, *Journalists Under Fire*, p. 93). Azucena's story is a great example of this approach. Her personal suffering represents the larger human experience, making both readers and Rolf think about how fragile life is and how we all share in human suffering. Through this perspective, Allende's story fits well with the goals of humanist journalism, which aims to make big tragedies feel more relatable by focusing on the individual stories within them.

Conclusion:

Isabel Allende's "*And of Clay Are We All Created*" stands as a powerful example of humanist journalism, where the human condition, rather than the catastrophe itself, is at the forefront. Through Rolf Carlé's journey, the story examines the ethical dilemmas and emotional toll faced by journalists who encounter human suffering up close. By prioritizing empathy, ethical responsibility, and personal stories, Allende's narrative showcases the potential of journalism to not only inform but also deepen our understanding of shared humanity.

In a world where news can often feel impersonal and detached, "*And of Clay Are We All Created*" is a poignant reminder of the importance of compassion in journalism. It calls upon journalists to not only report events but to connect with the people behind them, fostering a more empathetic and humane approach to storytelling.

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