

## Reflective Statement

The interactive orals have significantly developed my cultural and contextual understanding of Gabriel García Márquez's '*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*'. Initially, the cultural consideration of how the virginity of unmarried females are regarded as their utmost important "asset", and how machismo is regarded as an indispensable male attribute in traditional Hispanic customs enabled me to comprehend the Vicario twins' extreme actions in the novel. The fact that ritualistic honor killings fueled by machismo still happen today in Latin America has made me realize that *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* provides an exposition and criticism of the Hispanic machismo tradition.

Furthermore, I learned through the interactive orals that the novel is based on a real incident, where the character Santiago Nasar in the novel is based on Márquez's childhood friend, Cayetano Gentile, who was killed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1951 by Victor Manuel and Jose Joaquin Chica Salas for taking the virginity of their sister Margarita Chica before marriage. Márquez as a journalist did personally interview those who witnessed the murder, but was frustrated by the obscurity of the responses he obtained, which eventually inspired him to write '*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*' as a tribute to Cayetano's death. The fact that most characters in the novel are based on Márquez's interviewees in reality provided the insight that the unnamed narrator of the novel acts as the surrogate of Márquez himself, which explains why the narrator so relentlessly tries to find out what happened to Santiago Nasar on the day of his murder.

Moreover, the interactive orals have also provided crucial biographical information on Gabriel García Márquez that enhanced my understanding of the text. Although Márquez stated during an interview that journalism has allowed him to maintain contact with reality, he was critical of the ability of journalism to tell the full story. He suggested in one of his published articles on journalism, that the voice of the interviewee is not necessarily the voice of truth, which justifies why Márquez refuses to follow an exclusively journalistic narrative in '*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*'. The interactive orals also mentioned that Márquez was a committed leftist who had an intimate friendship with Fidel Castro. Hints of his socialist belief could be seen in many of his works including '*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*', in which he criticizes the traditional Hispanic machismo culture that the more conservative Colombians prides themselves in.

Word Count: 397

## **How and to what end has Gabriel García Márquez subverted the traditional narrative structure and style in ‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’?**

An unconventional method of narration can sometimes more effectively uncover an evasive and uncomfortable truth. Throughout the novel, *‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’*, Gabriel García Márquez has intentionally subverted the traditional linear narrative structure and style to indict a rural Colombian town’s collective inaction during a publicized murder. Not only does the novel’s fragmentary narrative reveal the townsfolks’ attempt to hide their guilt for Santiago Nasar’s death through the obscurity of memory, but the circular plot of the novel also alludes to the town society’s entrapment in a ritualistic communal mindset that religiously promotes masculine honor. Together with Márquez’s choice of varied stylistic narrative-approaches to emphasize the overarching absurdity and brutality of Santiago Nasar’s death, the untraditional narrative structure and style of *‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’* impose a moral discomfort that haunts the readers beyond the last line of the novel.

Initially, the strong sense of discontinuity introduced by the novel’s fragmentary narrative reveals that each character remembers different versions of reality to justify their roles as spectators during the murder. This implies that the town society is in denial of the complicit roles they played in Santiago Nasar’s murder. The disparity between individual fragments of narration in the novel is prominently manifested through how several characters remember strikingly different weathers on the day Santiago Nasar was murdered. For instance, Colonel Aponte claims that he remembers “*with certainty*” (Márquez, 56) that it began to rain at five o’clock on the day of the murder, but the Vicario twins on the other hand insist that it was not raining and could vividly recall “*there*

*was a sea wind and you could still count the stars with your fingers*” (Márquez, 62). This shows that memory is shaped by each characters’ individual perspective and motivation on the day of the murder. For Colonel Aponte, the rain would better vindicate him for visiting the local pub, instead of warning Santiago Nasar as he ought to, after he thought he had deterred the Vicario twins’ murder attempt. For the Vicario twins on the other hand, clear weather would serve as a more appropriate setting than a rainy one for their self-perceived heroic defense of their family’s honor. As the fragmentary narrative exposes that the townsfolks cannot even ascertain the weather on the day Santiago Nasar was murdered, the readers will inevitably begin to doubt how the townsfolks all coincided in suggesting with a startling sense of clarity that they could not have saved Santiago Nasar from murder on that day. This firmly propounds the notion that Santiago Nasar’s murder was the result of the town’s collective apathy and inaction, which their attempt to deny so by justifying their spectatorship with different versions of reality makes it ever more apparent.

Correspondingly, the fragmentary narrative also allows Santiago Nasar’s murder to be examined from a multiplicity of different perspectives, which further exposes how multiple characters attempt to vindicate their unjustified spectatorship of the murder with absurd but unfalsifiable memory claims. The townsfolks’ exploitation of the inherent unreliability of memory to avoid culpability for the murder is most notably exemplified by how Hortensia Baute, who could have directly prevented the murder when the Vicario twins passed her on their way to kill Santiago Nasar, attributes her inaction during the murder to a hallucinatory vision that the Vicario twins’ knives were already “*dripping blood*” (Márquez, 62) before the murder was even committed. Such instances invariably highlight the extent to which the townsfolks’ memories are distorted in order to fabricate a narrative in which they are not guilty for Santiago Nasar’s death, which conversely

makes the narrator's seemingly futile effort to reassemble the past from individual fragments of incongruous narration and distorted memory an accurate reflection of the townfolks' overt unwillingness to accept their responsibility for Santiago Nasar's death. The fragmentary narrative thus positions the readers as jury members to judge the townfolk, where each fragment of narration in the novel serves as a distinct piece of incriminating evidence that facilitates the townfolks' moral indictment.

Furthermore, Santiago Nasar's death is repeatedly re-enacted within the circular plot of the novel. This further indicts the townfolk's inaction when being aware of an imminent murder by alluding to it their cult-like ritualistic mindset that revolves around masculine honor, or machismo. The circular plot of the novel subtly but firmly establishes the idea that machismo has become the religion of the town by highlighting a series of eerie similarities between Santiago Nasar's death and Mayan human sacrifices through every cycle of events preceding and following the murder. For instance, the way that a feast celebrating the Mayan religion always precedes a human sacrifice is strikingly mirrored by how Santiago Nasar is killed almost immediately after Bayardo's lavish wedding party as a communal celebration of machismo. The iconic disembowelment of the victim in the Mayan sacrificial ritual is also imitated in the novel by the botched autopsy performed on Santiago Nasar's corpse, where the former takes place in a temple and the latter ironically took place in the town's church. Not only does this reveal the primitive barbarity that lurks beneath the town's façade of civilization, it also progressively instills the horror of collective violence.

Simultaneously as the circular plot repeatedly retraces the townfolks' both active and passive participation in the communal ritual to kill Santiago Nasar, it also implies that such repulsive

violence becomes inevitable when honor is valued over life in a society that is so religiously influenced by machismo. The circular plot makes this most evident by recurrently drawing attention to the immense social pressure that was on the Vicario twins to kill Santiago Nasar, as evidenced by the chilling statement made by Pablo Vicario's fiancé that she never would have married Pablo "*if he hadn't done what a man should do*" (Márquez, 63), and how Clotilde Armenta refers to the murder as a "*horrible duty*" (Márquez, 57) that has fallen upon the twins. Not only do these recurring details suggest that Santiago Nasar's murder was much anticipated by the townsfolk, but they also further show that machismo has deformed the town's morals to the extent that public scrutiny became a catalyst instead of deterrent for murder. Thus, the circular plot of the novel in conjunction with the fragmentary narrative very successfully strengthens Márquez's moral indictment of the town by cultivating a sense of genuine revulsion against the townsfolks among the readers.

Moreover, Márquez's moral censure of the town is further extended by the multiplicity of stylistic narrative-approaches used in the novel, which very effectively highlights the sheer absurdity and brutality of Santiago Nasar's death. For instance, highly scientific language such as "*four incisions in the stomach...six lesser perforations in the transverse colon and multiple wounds in the small intestine*" and "*The abdominal cavity was filled with large clots of blood... The thoracic cavity showed two perforations...*" (Márquez, 75) is used by the narrator when describing the state of Santiago Nasar's corpse during the autopsy. While this graphically reflects the savageness of the murder, the narrator's extensive use of esoteric nouns and numbers as if in a post-mortem report is highly satirical given the situational irony that the autopsy had no legal standing, whereby making the mindlessness of the town under the influence of their ritualistic

mindset preposterous. A similar sense of satire arises when elements of magical realism, such as how Bayardo carried “*almost two thousand letters*” (Márquez, 96) from Angela Vicario in his suitcase upon his return, are narrated in a journalistic tone. The striking incongruity between magical realism and the seriousness and factual nature of journalism further mocks the ridiculousness of the exaggerated and distorted versions of reality remembered by the townsfolk.

When the novel approaches its end, however, the first-person journalistic narration that was consistent throughout the novel is distinctively replaced by a third-person omniscient narration which is more stylistically akin to fictional writing, exemplified by lines such as: “...*Santiago Nasar wasn't falling ... he saw his own viscera in the sunlight, clean and blue ... he fell on his knees...*” (Márquez, 120-121). In contrast to the satirically objective journalistic narrative-approach that focuses on exposing the townsfolks’ ritualistic mindset, the brutally descriptive fictional narrative-approach specifically aims to capture every graphical detail of how Santiago Nasar was savagely murdered, whereby it tells perhaps the most significant and undisputable truth of what happened that day — the horror of Santiago Nasar’s death. With the lack of resolution in the novel’s abrupt ending, this horror is arguably the ultimate indictment of the town, as it evokes a visceral moral discomfort that lingers beyond the last line of the novel. Thus using a multiplicity of stylistic narrative-approaches has allowed Márquez to tell the multi-layered truth about the simultaneously absurd and brutal death of Santiago Nasar, which together with the novel’s fragmentary narrative and circular plot makes the townsfolks’ moral indictment inescapable.

Conclusively, Márquez’s deliberate subversion of the traditional linear narrative structure and style in ‘*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*’ has achieved the unequivocal moral indictment of a

society's collective violence against a possibly innocent man through a framework of fragmentary narrative, circular plot, and diverse writing styles.

Word Count: 1499

### **Works Cited**

Márquez Gabriel García. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Penguin Books, 1996.