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

An unconventional method of narration is sometimes required to uncover the uncomfortable truth. Throughout the novel, *‘Chronicle of a Death Foretold’*, Gabriel García Márquez has intentionally subverted the traditional linear narrative structure to indict a rural Colombian town’s inaction during a publicized murder. Not only does the novel’s fragmentary narrative reveal the town’s ignorance towards their collective responsibility for Santiago Nasar’s death, the circular plot of the novel also alludes to the society’s entrapment a ritualistic communal mindset that religiously revolves around masculine honor. Each of the many narrative approaches taken by Márquez in the novel also emphasizes the overarching absurdity of Santiago Nasar’s death, while inflicting a moral discomfort that haunts the readers beyond the last line of the novel.

Initially, the fragmentary narrative of the novel introduces a strong sense of discontinuity, which propounds the notion that each character in the novel remembers different versions of reality to justify their role as spectators during the murder and builds an overt impression that the town society is in total denial of the obvious roles they played in Santiago Nasar’s murder. The incongruity between individual fragments of narration is most evidently manifested by how several characters remember strikingly different weathers on the day of the. For instance, while Colonel Aponte claims that he remembers “*with certainty*” thatit began to rain at five o’clock on the day of the murder, the Vicario twins insist that it was not raining and could vividly recall that “*there was a sea wind and you could still count the stars with your fingers*”. This clearly shows that memory is shaped by the need of the subject, especially after twenty-seven years have elapsed. 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, a clear weather would serve as a more appropriate setting than a rainy one for their self-perceived heroic defense of their family’s honor. This inevitably casts doubt over how the rest of the characters remember the precise reasons why each of them could not save Santiago Nasar on the day he was murdered, which strongly suggests that Santiago Nasar is a victim of the society’s collective apathy instead of a victim of fate suggested by the characters in the novel. As the fragmentary narrative allows Santiago Nasar’s murder to be examined from a multiplicity of different perspectives, the town’s exploitation of the unreliability of memory to evade their responsibility is made very evident by the extensive emphasis that each character places on the reason why they are justified to be a spectator during Santiago Nasar’s brutal murder. One of the most preposterous examples is how Hortensia Baute attributes her inaction during the murder to the belief that she saw the Vicario brother’s knives “dripping blood” before Santiago Nasar was killed. Although the truth becomes more and more obscure as individual fragments of distorted memory pieces the entire narrative together, the town’s total lack of remorse for their inaction during the murder is made ever more apparent each time the characters try to justify their role as a spectator during Santiago Nasar’s murder. Márquez ultimately expects the readers to act as the jury and interpret each fragment of narration as distinct pieces of evidence that eventually leads to the town’s moral indictment.

Furthermore, Santiago Nasar’s death is repeatedly re-enacted by the circular plot of the novel to further indict the town for their inaction in the face of an imminent murder by alluding to its cult-like ritualistic mindset that revolves around masculine honor, or machismo. The circular plot subtlely but firmly establishes the metaphor that machismo is the religion of the town by highlighting 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 takes 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 disseminates the horror of collective violence that will inevitably disturb the readers. As the circular plot provides progressively further insight into the town’s religious obsession with machismo, the town’s entrapment in a ritualistic mindset is clearly exposed by how the Vicario twins were arguably left with no choice but to complete their honor killing; While the way that the deflowered Angela Vicario is essentially excommunicated by the town implies that the Vicario twins would also become outcasts of the town society should they fail to defend their honor, the most chilling evidence is how Prudencia Cotes, Pablo Vicario’s fiancé, states that she would not have married Pablo if he had not killed Santiago Nasar. Considering that the Vicario twins only received three years in prison for premeditated murder, it is apparent that even the town’s justice system is built upon the cult-like worship of machismo, where honor is valued over life. The narrator, as a member of the town society, also fails to escape the town’s ritualistic mindset despite his evident disapproval of Santiago Nasar’s death. The way that the novel’s circular mode of narration repetitively and almost obsessively revolves around the investigation of how Santiago Nasar’s died but forgoes a formal conclusion at the end essentially makes the entire novel a pointless ritual re-enacting Santiago Nasar’s absurd death from the biased memories of the town. This causes the already oppressive sense of entrapment in ritual to be even more suffocating, which firmly asserts Márquez’s moral indictment of the town by making them seem almost irredeemable in the eyes of the readers.

Moreover, Márquez’s definitive moral stance against the town is further solidified by the multiplicity of narrative approaches used in the novel, which very effectively underlines the sheer absurdity and brutality of Santiago Nasar’s death. When the narrator describes the state of Santiago Nasar’s corpse during the autopsy, highly scientific language, such as “*He had 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…*” is used. 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, which makes the mindlessness of the town under the influence of their ritualistic mindset eminently preposterous. A similar sense of satire permeates the entire novel, where magical realism, such as how Plácida Linero – Santiago Nasar’s mother – “*hadn’t noticed any ominous augury*” in Santiago Nasar’ dreams preceding his death, is narrated through a journalistic tone.The striking incongruity between magical realism and rigorous journalism further propounds the preposterousness of the town’s collective believe of superstition along with their collective ritualistic behavior to reinforce Márquez’s moral stance against the town. During the final re-enactment of Santiago Nasar’s murder at the end of the novel, a third-person omniscient narrative that is typically found in fictions distinctively replaces the novel’s first person journalistic narration where Márquez writes:

“*…Santiago Nasar wasn't falling because they [the Vicario twins] themselves were holding him up with stabs against the door. Desperate, Pablo Vicario gave him a horizontal slash on the stomach, and all his intestines exploded out. Pedro Vicario was about to do the same, but his wrist twisted with horror and he gave him a... wild cut on the thigh. Santiago Nasar was still for an instant, leaning against the door, until he saw his own viscera in the sunlight, clean and blue, and he fell on his knees…*”.

While the journalistic narrative approach has allowed the town’s biased and obscure accounts of the day to monopolize the description of Santiago Nasar’s murder throughout the novel, the fictional narrative approach exemplified by the excerpt finally enables the readers to directly witness every graphical detail of how Santiago Nasar was brutally murdered. With the anticlimactic lack of resolution at the end, the visceral moral discomfort evoked by both the absurdity and brutality of Santiago Nasar’s death will inevitably linger beyond the last lines of the novel.

In conclusion, Márquez’s deliberate subversion of the traditional linear narrative structure in ‘*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*’ establishes a framework of fragmented narrative, circular plot and a multiplicity of narrative approaches to achieve the unequivocal moral indictment of the town society in the novel for the collective violence they unleashed upon the potentially innocent Santiago Nasar.

1499 words

**Works Cited**

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