**How and to what end has Gabriel García Márquez subverted the traditional linear 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, the circular plot of the novel also alludes to the town society’s entrapment a ritualistic communal mindset that religiously revolves around masculine honor. Each of the different stylistic narrative approaches taken by Márquez in the novel also emphasizes the overarching absurdity and brutality of Santiago Nasar’s death, while inflicting 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 puts forward the notion that each character in the novel remembers different versions of reality to justify their roles as spectators during the murder, which builds an impression that the town society is in total denial of the passively complicit roles they played in Santiago Nasar’s murder. The disparity between individual fragments of narration in the novel is first 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*” (56) thatit 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 that “*there was a sea wind and you could still count the stars with your fingers*” (62). This clearly shows that memory is shaped by each characters’ individual perspective and motivation on the day of the murder, 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, 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 shows that the townsfolk cannot even agree on the weather on the day of the murder, it inevitably casts doubt over how each of the characters in the novel all coincided in suggesting with a startling sense of clarity that they could not have saved Santiago Nasar on that day. This subsequently propounds the notion that Santiago Nasar’s murder was the result of the town’s collective apathy and inaction. Meanwhile as the fragmentary narrative of the novel also steadily compiles a multiplicity of different perspectives to examine Santiago Nasar’s murder, the townsfolks’ exploitation of the inherent unreliability of memory to avoid culpability is further demonstrated by how several characters attempt to vindicate their unjustified spectatorship of the murder with nonsensical but unfalsifiable memory claims. This 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 to a hallucinatory vision that the Vicario twins’ knives were already “*dripping blood*” (62) before the murder was even committed, which particularly highlights the extent to which the townsfolks are willing to distort their own memory in order to not feel guilty. Ultimately, the narrator’s seemingly futile effort to reassemble the past from individual fragments of incongruous narration and distorted memory has made the townsfolks’ overt unwillingness to accept their responsibility for Santiago Nasar’s death ever more apparent. Márquez has thus employed the fragmentary narrative of the novel to position the readers in a jury against the town, where each fragment of narration in the novel serves as a distinct piece of evidence for the town’s lack of remorse for Santiago Nasar’s death, which very effectively facilitates the town’s moral indictment.

Furthermore, Santiago Nasar’s death is repeatedly re-enacted within the circular plot of the novel. This further indicts the townsfolk for their inaction when being aware of an imminent murder by alluding to its cult-like ritualistic mindset that revolves around masculine honor, or machismo. The circular plot of the novel first 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 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 continuously instills the horror of collective violence. While the circular plot of the novel repeatedly retraces the townsfolks’ both active and passive communal participation in the ritual to kill Santiago Nasar, it also clearly illustrates how their religious worship of machismo makes repulsive violence such as Santiago Nasar’s murder inevitable. The most illustrious example of this is how the circular plot of the novel recurrently draws attention to the immense social pressure that was on the Vicario twins to kill Santiago Nasar, such as how Clotilde Armenta regards the murder as a “*horrible duty*” (57) fallen upon the twins, and 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*” (63). Thus, the circular plot of the novel distinctively underlines how collective violence is facilitated by the townsfolks’ ritualistic mindset under their cult-like worship of machismo that values honor over life. This in conjunction with the fragmentary narrative of the novel very effectively strengthens Márquez’s moral indictment of the town by cultivating a sense of genuine revulsion against the town among the readers.

Moreover, Márquez’s moral censure 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…*” (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 eminently preposterous. A similar sense of satire permeates the entire novel, when elements magical realism such as how Santiago Nasar’s mother Plácida Linero “*hadn’t noticed any ominous augury*” (2) in Santiago Nasar’ dreams preceding his death, is narrated in a journalistic tone.The striking incongruity between magical realism and rigorous journalism further mocks the ridiculousness of the town’s superstitious beliefs along with their collective ritualistic behavior to reinforce Márquez’s indictment of 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 that is more stylistically akin to fiction, exemplified by lines such as: “*…Santiago Nasar wasn't falling ... he saw his own viscera in the sunlight, clean and blue, and he fell on his knees…*” (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 anticlimactic lack of resolution in the novel’s abrupt ending, this horror is arguably the ultimate indictment of the town, which it evokes a visceral moral discomfort that linger beyond the last lines 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 town’s moral indictment undisputable.

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 and circular plot, along with a multiplicity of stylistic narrative approaches.

Word Count: 1497

**Works Cited**

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