
Chronicle of a Death Foretold Themes Essay: Honor and Religion

Principles are an imperative component of any community. They mould the identity of a culture and help to shape the identity of each individual in that society. Sometimes these deeply ingrained values have a great amount of power. Gabriel García Márquez shows the power of the value of honor in his book, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. In García Márquez's writing, the theme of honor has a great influence on most of the characters and its plot.

Honor was a key element leading to the murder of Santiago Nasar. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the theme of honor is one that presents itself throughout the novel by having a significant role in the plot. The writer portrays an unnamed small town in Colombia where the most vicious crimes can be committed in the name of honor. In the book Angela Vicario, a young bride, is returned to her family for not having her virginity intact. When her twin brothers find out about their sister's dishonorable actions, they intend to murder the man who they believe did this, Santiago Nasar. This event shapes the plot of the book as the book is surrounded around this main event, this event devises the following sequences of events to take place which ultimately causes Santiago Nasar to get brutally butchered by the twins and it is portrayed as the reason for Santiago Nasar's unfortunate homicide. This series of events shows any steps could be taken to preserve someone's honor in this unnamed town and Santiago was portrayed as a victim of this all of the characters in the novel are influenced by this powerful construction of honor. The defense of this ideal is directly responsible for Santiago Nasar's murder. The Vicario brothers kill Santiago in order to restore the honor of their sister, the Vicario siblings slaughter Santiago so as to reestablish the respect of their sister, as indicated by her siblings, so as to demonstrate her innocence and clear the name of the family.

'I felt that I was the one who was going to die,' my sister said. 'But no matter how much they tossed the story back and forth, no one could explain to me how poor Santiago Nasar ended up being involved in such a mix-up.' The only thing they knew for sure was that Angela Vicario's brothers were waiting for him to kill him.

Throughout the novel, many characters demonstrate the pressure honor holds as a value in the town's culture by failing to inform Santiago Nasar of Pedro and Pablo Vicario's plan., this shows their idea that honor must be sustained within a family. Though a few people in the community, like Clotilde Armenta and Yamil Shaium, try to prevent the death from occurring, most people turned a cold shoulder, because they believed that the severity of the crime deserved a cruel punishment. The fact that death was considered a reasonable retribution for the crime of taking a girl's virginity indicates how awful it was to sleep with an unmarried woman; doing so ruined her chances of marrying well, and marriage was women's one way to advance in the world. This fact is the driving factor of the plot of the book and is the heart of the plot which causes the death of Santiago in an indirect manner, and is a clear example of how the usage of honor is the driving contributor to the events of the plot.

Honor is what drove the people to undermine the murder and show the prevailment of injustice in the town. As I mentioned earlier this was a main indicator that nobody in the novel prevents the murder of Santiago Nasar, but instead they condemn him to death for his immoral deed.

This fundamental moral trait which is vital to keeping society on the path of righteousness is portrayed to be what the plot is dependent on. Furthermore, the Vicario twins are given a reprieve after three years. When the twin brothers proceed to speak to the priest, they say that they have committed murder, but that there is no crime. In court, “the lawyer stood by the thesis of homicide in legitimate defense of honor” (Garcia Marquez 55). It is shown the confession of the brothers to Father Carmen Amador subsequently after the murder of Santiago. The conversation goes as follows:

‘We killed him openly,’ Pedro Vicario said, ‘But we’re innocent. ‘Perhaps before God,’ said Father Amador. ‘Before God and before men,’ Pablo Vicario said. ‘It was a matter of honor” (Garcia Márquez 39). In this quotation, the brothers confess to the reverend of what they have done and why they have committed the crime. They give their claim in a way to show that they only did what they did because Santiago took the decency of their sister therefore taking away and staining her and her family's honour and name. The fact that the town upholds the murder as being legitimate that death was considered a reasonable retribution for the crime was driving the plot. Honor plays a driving role to draw the reader that injustice was prevailing in the town and drove the plot forward.

Honor acted as an imposed burden on the characters of the book. In addition, in the case of Santiago's fiancée, instead of warning her soon to be husband, she only thinks about herself and her own honor; “she went through a crisis of humiliation” (Garcia Marquez 133), ashamed, thinking that Santiago must marry Angela to uphold Angela's and the Vicario family's honor because he had taken her virginity. Clear example of how honor is what everything revolved around. Instead of thinking about Santiago, the fiance thinks about how her honor would be stained, despite that fact that that he is the love of her life she still wants to protect her name from stains and this is a heavy burden that not only lies on her shoulder but also on the majority of the townspeople.

Now they haven't got anything to kill anybody with,' he said. 'That's not why,' said Clotilde Armenta. 'It's to spare those poor boys from the horrible duty that's fallen on them'.

In this quotation Marquez lashed upon the absurdity of cultural and societal aspects of the town and talked about how many forgot the meaning of honor, here the character Clotilde Armenta implies it is easy to forget that Santiago and Angela are not the only victims here. Pablo and Pedro are also victims of honor codes, they distorted what religion preaches according to what suited them as per their convenience and their account of honor killing. The author is questioning importance of honor and can it justify killing of a fellow man. Honor means a great deal to Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The town and the townspeople is a reflection of the author's feelings about one's honor and it is what propels the plot bit by bit.

Maintaining honor codes was almost obligatory. Likewise, this feeling of obligation that comes from maintaining honor is supported by the pressure of those in the community who also uphold the value. Pablo's wife, Prudencia Cotes, shows the pressures of maintaining the construct of honor codes the boys were under by saying, 'I never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do" (Garcia Marquez 72), when referring to Santiago Nasar's death. Honor is so deep rooted in the society Prudencia says she would marry Pablo only if he murders Santiago as one is supposed to avenge the wrong doings to one's honor. 'I can imagine, my sons... honor doesn't wait' (Garcia Marquez 62) When a family's honor had been stained as it had been in the Vicario brothers' case, the males of that family were obligated to clear the family

name. Not only does this propel the plot forward, this also talks about societal behaviour and how as mentioned earlier all societal events are based on two things Religious and Honor, and Marquez talks about how they discarded their religion and also considered it the most important factor in their lives. But however at same time gambling and alcohol flourish in the town, which are forbidden by the church, the religion appears to be just of namesake and is preached according to the convenience of people and is sold in the name of honor codes in the town.

Honor serves as a driving force for the plot and the main events which occur in this book by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The author uses theme to drive this book forward and highlight societal flaws and aspects which causes key events of the book to take place. The usage of this theme also gives us an accurate cultural representation of the times the book was set in and in the manner it served them as a burden and it revolved around the characters and their lives and actions.

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