

## The Role of Religion in Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

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**Abstract:** *Magical realism is an essential tool in the author's arsenal of literary element that implements the use of fairy tale like diction underlining dialogue or scenes. This literary device molds the character of any novel by instilling the reader into a realm where they can question practicality. Magical realism plays a vital role in the translated works of Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Gabriel García Marquez. Humanity has built grand and wondrous cultures and societies, for the better of mankind people have devoted themselves to a functional structured society. But have these creations become merely fabrications that hinder one's true beliefs? Throughout the novel Chronicle of a Death Foretold, author Gabriel Garcia Marquez gives insight into Colombian society. As the story of a murder unravels Marquez projects the themes of honor and fate cautiously, using the town's hesitation to prevent Santiago's murder despite "foretold" warnings to portray how they flaw Columbian culture. By doing so Marquez effectively creates a fictional situation that highlights how the deeply rooted philosophies of these two themes can danger society. Marquez portrays the theme of honor as a fundamental value in Columbia which everyone must respect, such that it leads to a situation that binds the characters, restraining them from doing the right thing - or anything at all - to prevent the murder of Santiago Nasar. This respect can be clearly seen in the town's reaction to the murder, where they turn away from their actual morals and beliefs in the face of the unspoken law of another's honor.*

**Key words:** *The significance of the church, Demonstration of strong Catholicism, Columbian culture, honor and fate, code of honor*

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### I. Introduction

Gabriel José García Márquez (born March 6, 1928), is a major Colombian novelist and short-story writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982. His masterpiece, 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' (1967; Eng. trans., 1970), is a family saga that mirrors the history of Colombia. Like many of his works, it is set in the fictional town of Macondo, a place much like García Márquez's native Aracataca. Mixing realism and fantasy, the novel is both the story of the decay of the town and an ironic epic of human experience.

García Márquez began his career as a reporter for *El Espectador*, for which he wrote (1955) a series of articles exposing the facts behind a Colombian naval disaster. These articles won him fame and were published in book form as 'Relato de un naufrago' (The Account of a Shipwrecked Person, 1970).

García Márquez's novel 'The Autumn of the Patriarch' (1975; Eng. trans., 1976) again explores the theme of decay, this time by depicting with typical exaggeration and ironic humor the barbarism, squalor, and corruption that prevail during the reign of a Latin American military dictator. Other works include three collections of short stories 'No One Writes to the Colonel', Eng. (trans., 1968; Leaf Storm, Eng. trans., 1972;) and 'Innocent Erendira', (Eng. trans., 1978), the novel 'In Evil Hour' (1968; Eng. trans., 1979), the novella 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold' (1981; Eng. trans., 1983), and the novel 'Love in the Time of Cholera' (Eng. trans. 1988).

In Gabriel García Márquez's novel Chronicle of a Death Foretold, the unnamed narrator sets out in a pursuit to compile the remaining pieces of truth surrounding the murder of

Santiago Nasar, twenty-seven years after the event. As the narrator recounts a series of facts relating to Santiago's death, however, the reader becomes aware of the futility of this effort, as the collection of past information cannot encompass or recreate the experience itself. Evaluating both the narrator's desire to revisit the past and the foretold events leading up to Santiago's death, the narrative explores the ways in which the past and the future impose upon present existence and assign meaning to the individual's experience. In addition, as the narrator uses the form of a chronicle to organize time into a confined segment, he engages in an historical inquiry of both the murder of Santiago and the nature of time itself. Through the chronicle's limited ability to account for the impositions of past and future, time emerges as an entity that resists and calls into question this linear segmentation constructed by human beings. However, where some critics might interpret this imposition of the past and future to be an indication of predetermination, García Márquez's Chronicle maintains the notion

of personal agency through its depiction of Angela's letter-writing, which affirms the authority of the present and reassigns meaning to the past and future in the same non-linear fashion.

Humanity has built grand and wondrous cultures and societies, for the better of mankind people have devoted themselves to a functional structured society. But have these creations become merely fabrications that hinder one's true beliefs? Throughout the novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, author Gabriel Garcia Marquez gives insight into Colombian society. As the story of a murder unravels Marquez projects the themes of honor and fate cautiously, using the town's hesitation to prevent Santiago's murder despite "foretold" warnings to portray how they flaw Columbian culture. By doing so Marquez effectively creates a fictional situation that highlights how the deeply rooted philosophies of these two themes can danger society.

Marquez portrays the theme of honor as a fundamental value in Columbia which everyone must respect, such that it leads to a situation that binds the characters, restraining them from doing the right thing - or anything at all - to prevent the murder of Santiago Nasar. This respect can be clearly seen in the town's reaction to the murder, where they turn away from their actual morals and beliefs in the face of the unspoken law of another's honor.

The role of religion in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez plays an integral part in the main event of the novel. The society featured in this novel has close ties to the Catholic religion. An important part of the Catholic religion is the belief that a woman's virginity should be kept preserved until she is married. The significance of the church is greatly stressed in the novel, as it is an important part of many Latin American communities. This is shown in the excessive preparations they made for the bishop's visit to the town. It was ironic how they thought the bishop was going to get off the boat this year, when he didn't even get off his boat the previous years. The obvious demonstration of strong Catholicism would be when Angela Vicarios secret that she wasn't a virgin when she was married was discovered, the Vicario brothers actually decided they were going to kill a man. Their decision to kill Santiago Nasar, who allegedly took Angela Vicarios virginity, arrived generally from societal pressures because that was what was expected of them. It appears that the characters lack individuality and communal values run through the towns peoples thoughts.

Religion in this novel appears to take a big role; however, it is a big role in a negative way. The town is still revolving around communal values set hundreds of years ago, while lacking the strength to overcome these values and adjust to the present day societal values. This is further shown when the characters in the novel only watch what happens but never try to stop it. They thought that nothing could happen when the bishop was coming to their town; therefore, they never believed all the threats that were made towards Santiago Nasar. The communal values evolve around religious events, having family honor and virginity. Although the church's betrayal is versatile, the bishop's arrival symbolizes its failure most clearly. Everyone, including the priest did not prevent the murder because they were distracted by the bishop. It seems that they did a lot of preparations, trying to please the bishop, to free themselves from the sin that was about to happen later. The people's superstition matches that of the bishops as he passes by without stopping, and this is shown in the line it was a fleeting illusion: the bishop began to make a sign of the cross in the air opposite the crowd on the pier, and he kept doing it mechanically, without malice or inspiration, until the boat was out of sight. There is no explanation for why the bishop dislikes the town, but if he does, as passing by reveals such indifference, such attitude goes against the Catholic doctrine of love and forgiveness.

Religion is supposed to be a positive center, but instead is something they are hypocritical about. The bishop destroys all their hope of happiness and does not follow his religion, which requires love and forgiveness. Instead, he shows that he dislikes the town; therefore by fate the town becomes evil with one murder. Santiago Nasar's murder resembles the crucifixion of Christ, and this is shown in the line it looks like a stigma of the crucified Christ. This detail fits with the impression that they create momentarily during their attack, when they were nailing Santiago to the wooden door. The circumstances that Santiago was murdered in relate closely to Christ's story. Santiago was murdered for someone else's evil act. In other words, he was a sacrifice for the town's sins. No one does anything to prevent the murder despite the widespread knowledge of the Vicario brothers' intention. Instead, virtually the whole town witnessed the gory, gruesome event. Also, the way Santiago was stabbed seven times shows the hostility of the body and his life. During the autopsy, they did not even have the courtesy to have a doctor look at the body, but instead, had Father Carmen, who had no knowledge whatsoever on the

matter. Father Carmen had demolished the body altogether, up to the point where it became unrecognizable. He should be repentant to call himself a Catholic, as disrespecting a human corpse in such a manner is utterly distasteful. Moreover, he continued to be a hypocrite to his religion by treating Santiago's body like unworthy property, and this is shown when he pulls out his intestines and throws it to the dogs. All of this certainly shows the amount of respect the Church has upon a body and its soul. As weak as their traditional values are, they do provide standards to live by, but forces for change and renewal are even weaker.

Their conduct is based on taboo morality, and they have neither positive center nor positive leadership.

Therefore, unable to act, they can only react to events. The town does not have a true leader to guide them in a positive direction, but instead follows its old values set by the past and a hypocritical church. The town does not do anything to prevent evil, but rather waits for evil to occur then react to it. The code of honor is a very important principle that the town lives by and this code of honor is the basis of this murder. The twins felt that they had done nothing wrong because they were just trying to keep their family honor, and this is shown in the line showing no remorse or repentance, the twins tell Father Amador that they killed Santiago deliberately, but claim innocence because it was a matter of honor. Santiagos name means Saint James, and the meaning of his best friends name is Christ, which tells readers that this novel has close ties to Catholicism. Similar to Christ, Santiago was apparently innocent but had to die as a sacrificial offering to bring about change in this town so accustomed in its ways. During the aftermath of the murder, the town is forced to confront their own entrenched ways. Some points in the novel seem parallel to Christs story as told in the bible such as the cocks that began to crow in their baskets. This is similar to the cocks which crowed three times before Jesus death. Although the town people pay a huge deal of attention to their religion, hypocrisy seems to be prevailing throughout the town. One prime example of this hypocrisy is Santiago Nasar , as he spent the night of the wedding having fun at Maria Cervantes house, which would not be an act approved by Catholicism. It seems as though religion is a façade behind which they hide all other indecent activities.

Religion in this novel appears to be hypocritical, starting with the act of the bishop letting the people of the community down by not stopping by to bless them. Santiago Nasar was murdered for someone else's evil act, much like being murdered for the town's sins. Furthermore, they had Father Carmen perform the autopsy, when he is clearly not the best person to do the job. Thus, he disrespected the corpse by mutilating the body. Treating the body with disrespect does not coincide with religion; therefore Father Carmens ways could be questioned.

Religion in this novel appears to take a big role; however, it is a big role in a negative way. The town is still entrenched around communal values brought about hundreds of years ago, and they lack the strength to overcome these values and adjust to present day customs.