

He loves me...he
loves me not



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At the crux of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a love story. The story itself is quite simple but in reality is dominated by the elusiveness of love and filled with cultural customs, clashes, illusions, and ambivalence. The conception of love in the novel is bleak; Santiago's parents marry out of convenience "without a single moment of happiness" (García Márquez 6), and her mother must "console herself for her solitude" (10-11). Indeed, the thin line between love and duty and love and matrimony becomes completely blurred. Considering the lack of love in the novel coupled with its superficiality and manipulation, love is negatively and pessimistically presented. García Márquez's choice to preface the novel with "the pursuit of love / is like falconry" (Preface), immediately establishes the connection between love and sport, with a winner and a loser, powerful and weak. This aspect is culturally related. Boys are brought up to be "men" while girls are brought up to be suitable for marriage. The fact that women must be virgins upon marriage whereas the men can engage in premarital sex immediately places women and men at different standings in society and in relationships. If fidelity has anything to do with love, then an entire generation of young men have already been corrupted to believe that flesh takes the place of love as a permanent entity. In addition, the marriages in the novel are not consummated out of love but because of accompanied benefits. The entire courting process reeks of familial agreements and the sharing of reputation, affluence, power, and honor. Love does not play a role at any point. Angela's mother mentions, in fact, that "love can be learned too" (38). Already love fails to be a human emotion; it becomes, rather, a lesson, much like the process of learning how to make artificial flowers and candy. There is a conception in the novel of the perfect "package" of a woman as servile and

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sacrificial, but nowhere is love inserted into the prototypical woman nor the marriage. The matter of “training” or “taming” the woman is a consequence of women’s worthlessness in Colombian society outside marital realm. The manner in which Angela’s mother “trains” her daughters, preparing them for the sole purpose of winning a reputable marriage by learning screen embroidery, sewing, weaving, washing, and ironing, manifests this point. The notion of love is so taboo that Angela “only dared hint at the inconvenience of a lack of love” (38), as if the word “love” itself fails to exist and carries no meaning in the society. Furthermore, San Román’s pursuit of Angela drives the beginning action of the book, without the slightest indication of love. Having noticed Angela once in the street, he is able to judge that she will be his wife, almost implying a random choice of prey amongst a town of strangers. He is so nonchalant about his pick that he tells the landlady to remind him after he awakes from his nap that “I’m going to marry her” (31), not because of her personality or her character, but because of her stature and because “she’s well-named” (31). The courting that follows is really a negotiation between San Román and Angela’s family and does not involve her at all. No love nor even infatuation is seen; the couple barely speaks to one another. Likewise, Angela’s family views the marriage with San Román as a good financial “catch,” mentioning that “a family dignified by modest means had no right to disdain that prize of destiny” (38). Yet by paralleling matrimony with “destiny,” García Márquez immediately casts a shadow on love: just as fate destroys Santiago, matrimony ruled by destiny and not love brings disaster to the couple. Akin to the perilous game of falconry performed out of training and habit, love brings its own dangers, anguish, and battles when the prey is chosen

unwisely. From the beginning, the reader is prepared for a tale of romantic chase, along with a chronicle of human sentiments of power, pride, and desire that accompany the game. Santiago, a falconry expert, is interestingly depicted as a “ butcher hawk” (14), and a “ sparrow hawk” (104), who tames not only falcons but also women. Interestingly, his pursuit of women is like that of prey—he handles them roughly and chases them randomly with no deep emotional connection, much less love. Just as he exploits his birds, he exploits his sexual power as a wealthy man among these girls. He views women the same way he views the training of his falcons. Grabbing Divina Flor by the wrist, he says to her, “ The time has come for you to be tamed” (8). Already, he has debased the girl to that of the animal, and the usual equal footing between a man and woman in love is lost. Falconry can be viewed in four stages: first the training process, then the pursuit, third the battle, and finally the return. Similarly, the love story runs like the game: first Angela is trained for the “ pursuit” of a good marriage, estrangement occurs, and, when San Román returns to Angela in the end of the novel, the return is reconciled. Yet, when the couple is reunited at the end of the novel, the supposed love between the couple arises not from affection but from time and ritual. Angela’s two thousand letters are nothing but symbols of commitment. It is hard to believe she truly loves a man whom she has been “ married” to for less than six hours. Besides, San Román never ventures to open any of the letters, demonstrating that he does not care about the content of the amorous messages, only their number and frequency. The closest thing to love in the novel, strangely enough, is this commitment, and even it is viewed pessimistically and as difficult to come by; it takes Angela and San Román seventeen years to find each other. García Márquez’s

message regarding love is stark and lucid. Santiago dies an excruciating death, butchered like an animal. Yet he has come full circle, for his unwise choice of prey has come back to haunt him. This twist of fate occurs in the middle of the book, when the narrator warns, “ ‘ A falcon who chases a warlike crane can only hope for a life of pain’ ”(74-75), and, because of his falconry, Santiago is predestined to suffer the ultimate pain in the form of a young death. The quote itself reveals another facet of love: it is full of conflict and woe, and again Marquez’s bleak view of love seeps through. As viewed by the narrator’s mother, “ Honor is love” (114), and since the Vicario brothers performed their deed to uphold honor, they possess at least the supposed equivalent of love. Despite Santiago’s power as a falcon, his relentless pursuit of “ prey” without love or an equivalent destroys him.

Works Cited
García Márquez, Gabriel. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Ballantine Books, 1982.