

The issue of morality

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



The issue of morality is blatantly presented in the novels *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *Therese Raquin* by Emile Zola. Marquez's novel is set in a world where morality is inextricably linked to religion and honour to such an extent that the community's behaviour and actions are driven by these rather than legal concerns. Zola's novel explores the effect on individuals of individuals and their resulting unravelling after an immoral deed. In the name of honour, the murder of Santiago Nasar was committed "before God" (Marquez, G. 2003, p. 49; subsequent citations refer to this edition and appear in the text) according to the controversial religious standards of society. Blinded by this religious conscription, the Vicario brothers' moral beliefs are significantly influenced to accept murder when dealing with a "matter of honour" (p. 49). This in effect shocks and surprises the reader as Marquez is able to expose the hypocrisies of the "unforgiving bloodthirstiness" (p. 49) that is murder. Through this he subtly reveals his antagonistic view to the reader of such immoral deeds integrated into society. Marquez also addresses the moral ambiguity of the brothers' actions during their trial; he mocks the law and its concord with religion. Because "the lawyer stood by the thesis of homicide in legitimate defence of honour" (p. 48), the brothers are excused of their sins after they "surrender" (p. 49) to the priest. This revelation is frowned upon by Marquez as he reveals the irony to the reader of such forgiveness in "reality" (p. 49). In this Latin American society the values and ideals of moral conduct that coincidentally shape the minds of the people are determined by a dominant machismo mentality as demonstrated through the characters of Pablo and Pedro Vicario where the "brothers were brought up to be men" (p. 31). By no

means did the brothers have to embrace this behaviour but it is because of a bestowment of religion from birth that such moral values are assimilated in them and often used in the novel to justify the brutal murder of Santiago Nasar, "legitimate... honour" (p. 48). Marquez also points out that the brothers never showed "any indication of remorse" (p. 49) to emphasise that they had no contemplation of questioning this lubricous logic. No moral injustice had been done according to them, "God and... men" (p. 49). This lucidly highlights the hypocritical nature of the machismo element in the makeup of men in such a religious social construct. Furthermore the alliteration of "never noticed" (p. 49) instils an abrupt 'n' sound that creates an ironic tone through the writer's disagreement with such zealous support for murder. In addition, Marquez interjects the narrative voice in this instance and hints to the reader his personal judgement when claiming "in reality... the Vicario brothers had done nothing right" (p. 49). This break in the journalistic tone applied throughout the novel expresses his clarification of dissent with the idea that such a mindset can corrupt true morality and the real depiction of right and wrong when it comes to murder. Marquez draws attention to moral misconduct also through the exploration of premarital sex and the different consequences to men compared with women in society. He identifies that a woman's reputation is dependent on "... what [the men] see on the sheet" (p. 38) and he is critical of how this "stain of honour" (p. 38) although it was something "all women lost... in childhood" (p. 38) would determine the tragic fate of Angela Vicario taking a chastise "beating" (p. 46) from her mother. This highly sexist immoral code of conduct as supported by the people of the Columbian society is vividly

portrayed to show a lack of proper equality between men and women. The writer is contemptuous of this absence of moral justice and is scathing of how men, possibly in their transformation into manhood, attain a social acceptance of premarital sex as Santiago Nasar and the narrator did when Maria Alejandrina Cervantes "did away with my generation's virginity" (p. 64-65). Also, the harsh punishment involved for women who break this code is gruelling and undignified as Pura Vicario was "holding me by the hair... with such rage" (p. 46). The horrific and wholesomely real nature of a mother having a need to almost "kill" (p. 46) to ensure a severe punishment is endured by her daughter is quite outrageous and grossly immoral to show the dangerous values such a society lives by. The repeated presumption by the townspeople of Santiago Nasar's death being inevitable and unavoidable is criticised by Marquez as he 'charges' the society for his murder. The unjust proclamation of the death of Santiago Nasar being his fate is an excuse of society attempting to justify and reconcile their guilt. "No one even wondered whether Santiago Nasar had been warned, because it seemed impossible to all that he hadn't." (p. 20). The lack of a collective guilt felt by society is a clear indication of their pre-emptive attempt to retain their innocence. Father Amador also tries to make the narrator "understand" his 'situation', that the coming of the Bishop was time-constraining, and thus "he'd forgotten completely" (p. 70). The absence of his guilt underlines the effect of religion that causes the townspeople not to be constrained by moral values as the reader would be but instead to unconsciously accept such an immoral act that "wasn't any of their business" (p. 70). Where Marquez is concentrated on the displacement of morality by honour and religion in

society, Zola focuses on "temperament" (Zola, E. 2004, p. 4; subsequent citations refer to this edition and appear in the text) rather than "character" (p. 4) as he points out in the novel's preface. As a naturalist writer reacting to 19th century romanticism, he wishes to record human behaviour when people are put in particular circumstances just as the "nervous" (p. 4) Therese and "sanguine" (p. 4) Laurent were. However, even though it is not part of Zola's specific reasons for writing the novel, morality is exerted as a secondary exploration that allows him to set across his opinion of the 'recorded actions' of the protagonists to the reader. Through this naturalist approach, Zola conveys his view that after the murder, Therese's "nervous crisis" (p. 64) bounds her to her moral conscience and exemplifies the fact that she is helpless to her state of mind. He inevitably wants to extend this idea to the reader and allow them to ponder over the significance of morality in our lives, how we must undeniably follow it to avoid a similar predicament. Zola explores moral issues through the guilt Laurent and Therese feel about the murder of Camille. He reveals that their guilty consciences are unavoidable and that guilt can have a tangible manifestation as shown through "Therese, feeling weak and cowardly" (p. 67). The incident evidently exposes the restlessness and uneasiness of their relationship and how this division between them creates their inevitable separation. By linking morality to mindset and physiology, Zola is able to convey how them being constantly reminded of the murder during their intimate attempts to make love provokes a deterioration in their relationship as they are restricted into following their moral values. In the novel, Zola closely examines Laurent's temperament at the Morgue giving the reader a vivid visualisation of the

scene and allowing the audience to interpret for themselves how the guilt Laurent feels stems from morality. Guilt in itself does not show what is right and what wrong but instead Zola conveys it to be a consequence of immoral deeds and behaviour, namely murder. Laurent goes to the Morgue to confirm his murderous deed although is surprised by the revelation of his unsuppressed guilt as he is " overcome with cowardice when he thought he... saw [Camille's body] in front of him" (p. 72) subsequently signifying his true, fearful temperament. Also, the repetition of the physical " burning sensation on his neck" (p. 70) and " in his heart" (p. 72) implies to the reader that Laurent is eternally scarred by this immoral act. Moreover, in the phrase " daily dose of suffering and disgust" (p. 74), the diction of " dose" (p. 74) is a reference to narcotics that suggests Laurent has developed an addiction to deathly corpses in visiting the Morgue and that his visits are having a mutilating impact on his mind - similar to a harmful drug would. Zola explores the consequence of moral injustice also through the physical resemblance of guilt in the symbol of the cat that represents Camille. Laurent is lost into believing that "'Camille has entered into the cat'" (p. 121) which leads him to feel very " afraid" (p. 121) from Francois's " hard, cruel stare" (p. 121). This ghostly presence of Camille created in Laurent's mind acts as an inescapable reminder of guilt that he tries to excuse by making absurd remarks like "... It looks human." (p. 121). Here Zola is highlighting the " fear and anguish" (p. 121) of Laurent's clouded mind and how, to the reader, we cannot surpass our moral values that control our thought. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* Gabriel Garcia Marquez tellingly reveals that the social-hierarchy determines what is right and what wrong in such an

instance of murder. He critically examines the extent to which morality is perverted by honour and religion. In *Therese Raquin* Emile Zola's record of human behaviour surpasses moral limits so as to expose where these boundaries stand through a naturalistic approach and subjective reasoning. Both writers comprehensively express how guilt and even remorse is inevitable and solemnly inescapable in the presence of immorality.