

Characters of
chronicles of a death
foretold – gabriel
garcia marquez
essay sampl...



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“ Violence has been a prominent social response to the application of structural adjustment policies throughout Latin America. There are societies in which, things fall apart; the center cannot hold. Violence is a shared disease that seems to arise in all societies where there are profound social differences and exploitation...Many Latin American societies are condemned to bloodletting by the precedents of violence and gross injustice that characterize their culture and their history.” – LeMoyne James, ‘ Children of Cain’ 1991

Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s text depicts the cultural life and setting of Latin America. His inclusion of conventional values portrayed in the novel such as pride and honor influences specific characters such as Pedro and Pablo Vicario, two “ boys who were raised up to be men.” His ability to interweave these values in his narrative show his deep understanding and perhaps even condolence towards these Latin Americans compelled to follow these archaic tendencies, corrupted by centuries of political extortion and civil violence which has made violence a social norm.

The setting of Chronicle of a Death Foretold is a small Colombian coastal town in the 1950’s. The fictitious setting of this novella, although based on an actual location in Colombia, gives Marquez the opportunity to use his imagination to create the events that happen in Chronicle of a Death Foretold and relate them to cultural life in Latin America at that time. Latin America was the first location of colonial conquest and expansion and still remains in the hands of neo-colonialist governments; the use of economic, political, and cultural forces or pressures to influence or control a country.

Neo-colonialism is what makes countries dependent on their relationships with other countries, leaves the country in disarray after being used, and leaves it buried in debt and contracts to other more powerful countries. The Columbian people have seen many civilian casualties all due to guerrilla warfare, repression and poverty. Violence has been an eminent figure in social response to the structural policies throughout Latin America and this is what influences the character's actions in Chronicle of a Death Foretold and how the nature of violence functions in the daily lives of the community. The author's understanding of violence is extended beyond the text and into the political history of Latin America, full of neo-colonial repression, racial discrimination and struggles.

Taking the location of the story into consideration we are able to understand that it is set in a small, isolated, confined community that is somewhat abandoned by the outside world. It is understandable that this isolation of the community has allowed it to maintain obsolete traditions which remain implanted in their society. Traditions such as the "honor killing" of Santiago Nasar or the "cult of death," that the Vicario daughters practiced, as well as the custom of superstition and of course the essential concept of pride and honor.

The traditions in Chronicle of a Death Foretold are revealed to be very important in this Latin American society. From arranged marriages, to greeting the bishop, we see tradition affecting the lives of many of the people in the river village. However we can also see this through the roles of women in this society. Purisima del Carmen, Angela Vicario's mother, has raised her four fine daughters to be good wives. The girls do not marry until <https://assignbuster.com/characters-of-chronicles-of-a-death-foretold-gabriel-garcia-marquez-essay-sample/>

later in their lives, and only seldom socialize beyond the confinements of their home. The women spend their time doing “ screen embroidery, sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron, and make artificial flowers.” The women were taught to do household chores, and their mother always told them that “ any man will be happy with them because they’ve been raised to suffer” since their marriages were based on appearances, beauty, the ability to do chores for the men, and not so much on love. The women’s lives are bounded by the confinements of their own home, or rather, the cultural values of tradition. Women were forced to marry not based on love, but the family’s own benefit from the marriage.

The men on the other hand, Purisima del Carmen’s sons, are “ raised to be men”. They serve in the war, take over their father’s business when he goes blind, drink and carouse along the streets until hours after dark. According to them, or how they were raised, when the family insists on Angela getting married with Bayardo, a man she’s only had a glimpse at, the twins stay out of it because to them it looked like “ woman problems,” and “ woman problems” become “ men’s problems” when the family calls the twins home due to Angela’s rejection from Bayardo. The twins take matters into their own hands, as the family and many in the village expects them to do, to regain the honor of their family. The whole motive for the murder of Santiago Nasar is based on this tradition of honor. After Angela says that Santiago Nasar was the reason for Angela’s humiliated return from her marriage bed, the twins immediately know that they must defend their sister’s honor. The twins’ attorney views the act as a “ homicide in legitimate defense of honor,” which is upheld by the court.

Even the priest calls the twins' gruesome murder as " an act of great dignity," and when the twins claim their innocence, the priest says that they may be so before God, while Pablo Vicario says, " before God and before men. It was a matter of honor." Fueled by passion and violent rage, an unreasonable amount of revenge becomes imminent and is played on those people who are ' responsible' for demeaning the family honor of the Vicario brothers. The Vicario brother's gruesome act in the murder of their friend Santiago Nasar occurred not solely by harmful intent but was forced onto them based on their cultural values in society. The Vicario twins Pablo and Pedro, as well as Angela Vicario's chief role in the novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, is to portray themselves as characters that have been influenced by their society's cultural values that force them to commit a murderous act, or stay confined in their cultural traditions and expectations.

" Faustino Santos was the only one who perceived a glimmer of truth...he asked him jokingly why they had to kill Santiago Nasar...'Santiago Nasar knows why,' Pedro Vicario answered him." (52) The irony portrayed not only shows that the Vicario twins were illogical and reckless in their judgements, but in their drunken state it is perceived that the brothers don't really want to kill Santiago Nasar; a good friend who used to carouse through the streets at night with them. The purpose of telling everyone in the village that " we're going to kill Santiago Nasar," all morning they go around the town loudly saying their intention to kill Santiago so that word would go back to him, is that he might have the chance to flee or that they might be stopped by the authorities. It was " certain that the Vicario brothers were not as eager to

carry out the sentence as to find someone who would do them the favor of stopping them.” (57)

Pablo and Pedro Vicario were solely upholding their cultural traditions and the cultural terms of “ honor killing,” and “ unwritten laws” was believed to justify the murder. In fact, Pablo Vicario’s fiancé, Prudencia Cotes states that she “ knew what they were up to, and I didn’t only agree, I never would have married him if he hadn’t done what a man should do.” (62) Of course, the horrifying acts of the Vicario brothers were not justified, even if they are regarding to the “ unwritten laws” of honor and the consequent strict upholding of “ tradition”. This leads to the case of how potentially negative the upholding of traditions can be, in Santiago Nasar’s case, his own gruesome death. The murder happens on the streets for the entire town to see, with everyone calling out the Santiago from different directions adding more commotion and confusion to the situation. How Santiago was murdered by the Vicario twins was barbaric and insane, as they continue stabbing Santiago Nasar’s body long after he ever has the hope to survive.

Marquez brings into life the social aspect of Santiago Nasar’s situation and the narrator’s home town in Columbia, allows the reader to gain an insight into the complexities of the nature of a society where violence plays itself out as a daily social reality. At the same time he also develops the concept of violence and the traditions to surround the social and historical discrepancies of current Latin American life. Marquez completes Chronicle of a Death Foretold with a background of desolation and brutality including the accepted values of pride and honor which influences specific characters such as Pedro and Pablo Vicario. These characters aid to help the readers

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understand the process of the internal and social authorization of violence on the helpless and innocent due to socio-cultural traditions such as honor, pride, and machismo.