

---

## The use of contrasts and tensions to bring out the theme in *Chronicle of a death foretold*

Countless acclaimed novels attain prestige through their esteemed authors' tendency to critique their culture and time period; among these belongs *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Garcia Marquez. Garcia Marquez critiques the Colombian culture through an investigative depiction of the events leading to a fellow citizen's death in a small town in Colombia. Marquez incorporates tensions and contrasts in the first chapter with the purpose of illustrating the flaws in the Colombian culture, specifically through the relationship between Santiago and his servants, the role of the Vicario twins, and the community's relationship with the bishop.

Firstly, Marquez generates tension between Santiago Nasar, the protagonist who is brutally murdered, and his servant, Victoria Guzman. On the morning of Santiago's death, an altercation between Victoria Guzman and Santiago ensued because Santiago believed he was entitled to "having" Victoria's daughter, Divina Flor. Santiago "grabbed [Divina] by the wrist" (Marquez, 8) and concluded that the "time [had] come for [her] to be tamed" (8). This presumption was commonplace during that age in Colombia due to the adamant machismo, which is the masculine pride of men. However, Victoria thwarted Santiago's demand, "showed him the bloody knife" (8), and asserted that he would never have Divina "as long as [she was] alive" (8). The tension between them is clearly discernable, and since Santiago is a male and her employer, Victoria's actions are very alarming. "In spite of her age" (7) and gender, Victoria is the only female in this novel characterized as obstinate and resolute. Additionally, Victoria is the only citizen who confronts the prevailing social norms and does not accept the illusion of machismo or the corresponding values of their culture and traditions. Victoria attempts to break the cycle in which "she'd been seduced by Ibrahim Nasar" (8), Santiago's father, so that Divina need not be "destined for Santiago Nasar's furtive bed" (8). Marquez criticizes this society's blind acceptance of traditions and cultures through Victoria's disparate perspective and prowess. Moreover, Victoria's ability to stand up against the "inevitable cycle" indicates that Santiago's death may not have been inevitable, which further incriminates this town. Similarly, Victoria is the only citizen whose reason for not warning Santiago is unambiguous, because "in the depths of her heart she wanted them to kill him" (11). Victoria's distaste and lack of "affection" (7) for Santiago may have indirectly caused his death, since she could have easily warned him and prevented his brutal death. Nevertheless, Victoria is neither the antagonist of this novel, nor is she blamed for her decision not to warn him, since she hated him for his machismo. The tension created between Victoria and Santiago is a vital element used by Marquez to criticize machismo and the entitlement and superiority of men.

---

### Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

---

Additionally, Marquez criticizes the society's unwavering faith in their traditions and religion, even though they have failed them on multiple occasions, through the contrasts within the town's relationship with the bishop. The town had prepared dozens of "gifts for the bishop" (15), roared in "jubilation" (12), woken up early, and accumulated at the docks to wait for the bishop. Juxtaposed to the town's enthusiasm are the bishop's "mechanical" movements, "without [...] inspiration" (16). This contrast illustrates how rituals and traditions are embedded in the community's nature, since the town repeatedly bestows faith in the bishop, even though he never even "get[s] off his boat" (15). Marquez conveys how delusional the town behaves, since they follow their traditions and beliefs so rigorously, even though their faith has continuously failed them. For example, even the bishop, who embodies their religion, has failed them because he is not passionate about his role in Catholicism and executes his obligations "mechanically". However, the town continues to follow their traditions and beliefs without hesitation to the point that an innocent man is murdered. Moreover, Marquez conveys how preposterous the town's conduct and attitude is through the irony that Santiago died because of the town was too preoccupied with their religious beliefs and "the bishop's visit to worry about any other news" (20). Similarly, the contrast between the towns infatuation of the bishop and the bishop's "hat[red] [of their] town" (6) highlights how nonsensical this community is. Additionally, the bishop's hatred of the town could be construed as an abhorrence of its immoral and corrupt nature. Through the contrast between the town's reaction to the bishop and the bishop's reaction to the town, Marquez criticizes the town's faith in rituals and traditions and lack of consideration for the dire consequences these traditions bring about.

Furthermore, Marquez critiques the contradictory and unethical expectations of society through the role of the Vicario twins and the contrasting claims that describe them. Firstly, Pablo and Pedro Vicario are depicted as "hard-looking but of a good sort" (14), symbolizing their internal conflict on whether or not to murder Santiago for their family's honor. Being described as "hard-looking" illustrates the expectations for men to be tough and masculine due to machismo, indicating that they are obligated to restore their family's honor. However, the juxtaposition of the previous description with "of a good sort", highlights that they did not reach their decision based on malicious intent, but truly believe their actions were justified. Similarly, they are firstly described as "devastated by so many hours of bad living" (14), which implies their internal conflict on whether or not they should kill Santiago, and in contrast, described as diligent and still executing "their duty and shav[ing]" (14), which suggests their acceptance of their obligation to kill Santiago. Marquez criticizes the expectations and beliefs that arise in this society due to machismo by equating murder and shaving, since they are both expectations of the community. The contradicting descriptions portray the Vicario twins' dilemma and create ambiguity around whether or not they are immoral. Their reluctance is further substantiated as they "looked at [Santiago] more with pity" (15) than with rage or hatred, and easily abided by Clotilde's request that they "leave him for later" (14). Moreover, Marquez's choice of twins as the murderers is significant because they act similar to a person with a split personality, since

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

**GET HELP**

---

they never arrive at a definite decision, which epitomizes their internal struggle. This illuminates the flaws of a patriarchal community, since their machismo forced them to commit this crime. The twins are conflicted between what the community and the church expects of them, to such an extent, that their internal sense of right and wrong is blurred. Indeed, the twins embody the entire town, because everyone in the town is complicit in this crime since they were aware of the twins' motives and decided not to warn Santiago. More specifically, the twin's internal conflict is mirrored in the town, as they were all aware of the wrongdoing of the twins, and yet did not want to be responsible for preventing the Vicario's from regaining their honor. Marquez introduces this ambiguity around the morality of the decision to murder very early on in the novel through the contrasting descriptions of the twins, which illustrate their--and the town's--internal conflicts.

Marquez is able to underscore his critique on Colombian beliefs and communities through his incorporation of contrasts and tension so early on in the novel. The first chapter introduces the flaws of the society, particularly machismo and the community's eager acceptance of traditions, which are two of the main reasons Santiago is never warned, and thus, murdered. Machismo is one of the most alarming concepts in the novel, since such behavior nowadays is considered sexism, and is widely disputed. However, machismo is actually more extreme than sexism, since it not only degrades women but also victimizes men, as seen with the Vicario twins' dilemma.

---

## Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)