
A look at human's dual nature in *Chronicle of a death foretold*

In the novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a narrator chronicles the events leading up to a murder and explores the mystery surrounding the victim's innocence or guilt. In the book, Bayardo San Roman, a wealthy foreigner, returns Angela Vicario to her parents just a few hours after marrying her because she is not a virgin. After Angela names Santiago Nasar as her first lover, her identical twin brothers decide to murder Santiago. Through imagery of Santiago as an innocent victim and as a perpetrator, imagery of Angela as both pure and culpable, the role of Victoria Guzman as a protector and avenger, and the role of the narrator as Santiago's friend, Garcia Marquez leaves Santiago's innocence or guilt unclear in order to convey the two-sided nature of individuals. This novella thus makes it difficult to establish the truth in individual and collective memory in order to serve complete justice.

The identity of Angela's perpetrator is difficult to establish due to the privacy of sexual relationships and the duality of human nature. Angela is a paradigm of the complex human nature surrounding the events leading up to the murder. When she is found to be non-virginal and returned, she is forced to reveal the name of her first lover, and "[finds]" Santiago's name "among the . . . many easily confused names" and nails the name "with her well-aimed dart"(47). Without giving Santiago any chance to defend himself, Angela's mentality at that moment seals his fate. On one hand, she could have resolved to tell her family the truth. Her conscience is aroused by memories of Bayardo's love after being subject to severe physical punishment from her mother. She regrets letting Bayardo down and "[becomes] a virgin again just for him"(93). The soothing nature of gentleness manifests its power when one is subject to intense physical trauma. Her awakened "pure decency"(91) motivates her to take responsibility for her own actions and to confess the identity of her perpetrator. Through confessing to her sin, she can relieve the burden of guilt and put the past behind her. On the other hand, she could have been lying about the identity of her perpetrator. Angela may have been acting selfishly in choosing Santiago as a scapegoat in order to "[protect] someone who really [loves] her"(90). Under the combined stress of bringing shame on her family and being beaten, she loses her strength of will and picks a scapegoat to leave behind the disaster and to prevent her lover from suffering as she did. Knowing that Santiago is wealthy and that "her brothers would never dare go up against him"(90) gives her an excuse for and makes herself feel less guilty about her deceit. It is inevitable that Santiago's innocence or guilt is destined to be an unsolved mystery since it is affected by the mixed character of people.

Santiago's conflicting character descriptions blurs the truth of his role in tarnishing Angela's

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honor even further. On one hand, Santiago could simply have been a victim of Angela's whim. He is nailed by Angela "like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written"(47). Santiago never gets the chance to defend himself like a mute, weak butterfly and the twins never bother to find out if Angela's accusation is true. Before his death, Santiago has the "bewilderment of innocence" written on his face. When a person is about to die his or her true feelings are often revealed since worldly desires and consequences no longer matter at that point. He knows inside that he is innocent, so he is confused why anyone would want to murder him, and this bewilderment manifests on his face. On the other hand, Santiago has a sinful side to him that implies he would likely seduce Angela. Santiago is a man obsessed with women who "[nips] the bud of any wayward virgin who . . . [shows] up"(90) and loves a prostitute to the point of being his "mistress of tears"(65). His sexual desire is so strong that he, an upper-class engaged man, can attempt to have sexual relationships with any kind of women. Santiago must be very skilled at manipulating women since he has had so much experience with them, so it is conceivable that he can target and manipulate a beautiful, naive woman like Angela into having an affair with him. Marquez uses contradicting imagery surrounding his death—he dies wearing white, symbolizing purity, but dies in the kitchen, where he tries to seduce a young servant, symbolizing his lust—to illustrate the idea that truth is questionable.

Bystanders' prejudices further complicate the investigation. Victoria Guzman, the Nasar family cook, is portrayed as both a protector of her daughter and an agent of vengeance. She tries her best to protect her daughter from being subject to sexual harassment. She waves a "bloody knife"(9) at Santiago to stop him from harassing her daughter. Her actions reflect her hostility toward Santiago to the point that deep inside, "she [wants] them to kill him"(13). Guzman decides that Santiago is guilty because of her bias; if Santiago sexually desires her daughter, he would do the same with Angela. The narrator, in contrast, a friend of Santiago's, cites that "no one [has] ever seen them together"(89) as evidence that Santiago is innocent, as well as the fact that "Santiago Nasar [is] too haughty to have noticed her"(90). He describes Santiago as "merry and peaceful, and openhearted"(8). As a friend of the victim, the narrator will pick up evidence that supports Santiago's innocence. It is human nature to remember the good sides of people they like, and it is always heartbreaking to say that their friend died because of his own mistakes. Therefore, these hints at Santiago's innocence from the narrator are emotionally biased and obscure the truth even further.

Angela's honesty or deceit, Santiago's kind but unchaste nature, Victoria Guzman's vengeful prejudice towards Santiago, and the narrator's friendship for Santiago becloud proper justice in Santiago's murder. Marquez purposely never establishes a true villain or a true victim in order to suggest that there is no such thing as complete truth or complete justice in collective memory or even in individual memory. Just as most people cannot tell the identical twin murderers apart, it is difficult to separate righteousness from evil in people.

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