

## Concept of Ritual

So much of daily life in the Narrator's community is governed by ritual and routine. In a simple sense, the population consists mostly of tradespeople, whose lives consist of repetitious tasks: Clotilde Armante sells milk to the same people every morning; Pablo and Pedro Vicario raise and slaughter their pigs. Time has a cyclical, repetitive quality in the town: every day, the same steamboats pass on their way upriver.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the townsfolk depend on ritualized behavior to express their hopes and despairs, to make their private lives visible to the wider community: feelings of love, spiritual devotion, and anger are all mediated through public ritual. In many cases, it is not the sincerity of the ritual that matters to the townspeople, it is the ritual itself—its mere gesture. In the years before Angela Vicario's engagement to Bayardo San Román, the Vicario women dress only in black, "observing a mourning that was relaxed inside the house but rigorous on the street" (the middle daughter has died). Santiago Nasar wakes up early for the Bishop not out of any spiritual conviction but because he enjoys the "pomp" of Catholic ritual. Indeed, there is something clearly detached about the Bishop's visit—he never sets foot in the town. Angela Vicario's friends reassure her that the expectation that she'll still be a virgin on her wedding night is mostly empty talk, and that the common ritual of publically displaying the newlyweds' bloodied sheets is often faked.

The murder of Santiago Nasar is an extension—and a perversion—of this culture of ritual. Pedro and Pablo Vicario's vow to kill Santiago is an empty gesture that suddenly becomes all too real. It seems that no one, not even the brothers themselves, believe they will actually follow through their plan—until, of course, it is too late. The Vicario brothers' pronouncements and showy knife-sharpening have the quality of performance. They are, in a sense, "faking it"—but somehow, in faking it, they find it within themselves to kill, or, to put it another way, they find themselves forced to follow through with the role they've taken on.

At last, there is something ritualistic about the Narrator's engagement with his story. His efforts to ascertain the facts of the murder so many years after it transpired have a mournful and obsessive character: it seems his determination to tell the story is above all an act of remembrance, of devotion. His nonlinear account of the murder make it so events play and replay before the reader, as if in an endless loop. Ritual, then, serves as both a protection and a trap, as something comfortable that structures daily life, but also as something that has more

power than those acting it out perhaps realize, until they find themselves within a ritual they can't escape.