

Violence, Trauma and Community

Violence, of course, is a persistent theme throughout this crime story. The violence that Santiago Nasar suffers is—for Márquez and his characters—both familiar and entirely alien. The Narrator, and through him Márquez, asks dogged questions pertaining to violence: What does violence do to its victim? What does violence do to its perpetrator? More pressingly, what is the place of violence within a community? How can a community knowingly allow violence to occur, and, further, treat it as a public spectacle?

The apparent incompetence and, worse, the complacency of his community in the face of impending violence haunts the Narrator throughout his investigation of the crime. By the time Santiago Nasar is pinned to his own front door and stabbed before a crowd of spectators, nearly the entire town knows what's coming. Pablo and Pedro Vicario have announced their plans to all who will listen. Some people, like Cristo Bedoya and Clotilde Armante, try but fail to warn Santiago. Others, like Divina Flor and Indalecio Pardo, have the opportunity but are too frightened to do so. Others still, like Victoria Guzmán, refuse to warn him out of spite. However, the vast majority of the townsfolk—including Colonel Lázaro Aponte, who of all people wields the authority to prevent the murder—simply don't take seriously the Vicario twins' threat, chalking it up to hyperbole, or just the ravings of a couple of drunks. Márquez thus demonstrates that violence, even while it is considered by most to be beyond the pale, is never very far off. The barrier between everyday life and the most unimaginable bloodshed is delicate, and in fact easily overcome. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* thus demonstrates how the possibility of violence can become—suddenly, shockingly—permissible.

And despite the ease with which violence is committed, violence is also utterly transformative, for all parties involved. Márquez lingers gruesomely on the transformation of Santiago Nasar from a walking, talking, smiling citizen to a confused, helpless animal, and finally to a piece of dead meat indistinguishable from the rabbits that Victoria Guzmán spends the morning disemboweling. The violence is also transformative for its perpetrators, Pablo and Pedro Vicario, who are in some ways left traumatized by their own crime. This trauma manifests itself physically: in jail they both become entirely sleepless, Pedro's venereal disease worsens, and Pablo falls deathly ill. After Santiago's death, Angela Vicario finds herself mysteriously falling in love with Bayardo San Román, whom she had all but hated before. Santiago's death is transformative, at last, for the community at large, which is left frozen and traumatized after witnessing their collective crime.

Chronicle of Death Foretold demonstrates that the conditions within a community that allow violence to occur are not so difficult to meet—they arise almost spontaneously—and yet the fallout following a public murder is immense. Violence is easily committed and its effects are irreversible. Only vigilance and moral courage can prevent it.