

Fate vs. Free Will

The concept of fate is embedded in the very title of the novel, and introduced again in its first sentence: "On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at 5.30 in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on." Santiago Nasar's death is "foretold" in two senses. First, Pablo and Pedro Vicario announce their intentions - literally "foretelling" the death - to anyone who will listen, and soon nearly everyone in the village knows that Santiago is doomed. Second, in another, more cosmic sense, Santiago's death seems predestined from the start, the result of a tragic alignment of chance occurrences.

Looked at one way, Santiago's murder is a clearly intentional act, committed (and enabled) by people in the world. Certainly the Vicario twins choose to kill him, one can argue. Further, many characters—such as Victoria Guzmán, Santiago's cook, and her daughter, Divina Flor—have the chance to warn Santiago but choose not to, either not understanding the seriousness of the threat or actively wanting Santiago dead. To put it simply: the Vicario twins and their enablers act with free will. Indeed, some of the Narrator's language supports this interpretation of the tragedy, notably his insistence on calling the murder a "crime." At other points he even suggests that the entire community, not just the Vicario twins, is culpable.

However, looked at another way, Santiago's death can be explained only if it is understood as predestined. As the narrator collects the testimonies of the townspeople, he perpetually is mystified by the incredible number of chance occurrences that, in total, created the perfect conditions for Santiago's murder. The examples are nearly countless, but some of the most prominent include the anonymous note of warning that Santiago fails to notice, Cristo Bedoya's difficulty finding Santiago, and Plácida Linero's locking the front door of her house in fright. Further, it becomes clear that the Vicario twins, while acting of their own free will, were also not entirely enthusiastic about killing Santiago, and in some ways tried to be stopped. Then there's the ultimate mystery: why Angela Vicario offered up Santiago's name, when all of the available evidence suggests she had nothing to do with him. Some of the narration supports this interpretation of the tragedy as predestined, such as the narrator's interest in establishing possible portents of the crime—the weather, or Santiago's dream the night of the wedding. (Perhaps tellingly, these attempts fail.) More explicitly, the narrator throws around words like "destiny," "fate," and "sentence," just about as much as he does "crime." Finally, the structure of the novel, which announces the death of the main character in its very first

sentence, does not allow the reader to imagine any outcome other than the one described at the start.

This coexistence of divine fate and earthly free will is an ancient paradox, central both to Greek tragedy and, more recently and relevantly, the Catholic faith. Is free will just an illusion? If one's fate is sealed from birth, how is it that a person can act with free will? How can one be held morally accountable for her actions if her future is always already determined? Márquez—operating very much within Catholic modes of thought—seems to answer that fate and free will are somehow, mysteriously, not mutually exclusive. So long as we feel that we have free will, we must bring ourselves to act morally.