

E-Content

POSTCOLONIAL & NEW WRITINGS

Semester: III

Lecture 18

Prepared by:

Dr. Apeksha

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UNIVERSITY**

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COURSE CONTENT UNIT-III

Chronicles of a Death Foretold by Gabriel García Márquez- Play

Introduction

Lecture 18

Topics to be Covered

- *Introduction of the Play*
- *Plot Overview*
- *About The Book*
- *Plot Summary*
- *Chapter 1, 2,3,4,5*

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To Revise

Gabriel García Márquez Biography

- Gabriel García Márquez (nicknames: Gabo, Gabito) was born March 6, 1928. Like the strange banana town of Macondo in *100 Hundred Years of Solitude*, his home was a tiny Colombian village called Aracataca, near the Caribbean coast. He seems not to have known his father and did not meet his mother until he was almost eight years old.
- He was raised by his grandparents, who, in his words, were "the most decisive literary influence for me. After the death of my grandfather [when García Márquez was eight years old], nothing really happened to me any more." When a reporter once asked him where he got his rich, yet pungent style, he replied: "It's the style of my grandmother."
- The author's grandfather, who became the model for "the Colonel" in the novel and the short stories, had participated in the civil war known as "The War of a Thousand Days." It was a traumatic event in Colombia's historical consciousness. Following the signing of the peace treaty, a revolution suddenly erupted and the country lost its Panama territory, the canal zone. A United States-backed republic arose in its place.
- Before this time, the village of Aracataca had vegetated along in almost total isolation from the world. Like the fictional Macondo, the village of Aracataca had been founded by Colombian civil war refugees, and when the United Fruit Company established a banana headquarters there, Aracataca became the scene of many labor protests and massacres.
- Eventually the banana company was forced to leave. All this becomes material for the action in the author's fiction.

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Chronicle of a Death Foretold Gabriel García Márquez – Introduction of the Play

- *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, which literary critic Ruben Pelayo called a combination of journalism, realism and detective story, is based on a real-life murder that took place in Sucre, Colombia in 1951. The character of Santiago Nasar is based on a good friend from García Márquez's childhood, Cayetano Gentile Chimento.
- The plot of the novel revolves around Santiago Nasar's murder. The narrator acts as a detective, uncovering the events of the murder as the novel proceeds. Pelayo notes that the story "unfolds in an inverted fashion. Instead of moving forward... the plot moves backward."
- *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was published in 1981, the year before García Márquez was awarded the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel was also adapted into a film by Italian director Francesco Rosi in 1987.
- There never was a novella more foretold. Well, except for *Love in the Time of Cholera*, or *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, or *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*. Okay, so maybe there were a lot of works by Marquez that were more anticipated and got a lot more critical acclaim, but *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* still holds its own.

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- This story of a potentially innocent man who is murdered for the honor of a woman who lost her virginity is the fourth major work by Marquez. It was written in 1981, after Marquez gained fame for writing 100 Years of Solitude, and just one year before he won the Nobel Prize for the same novel. Even though Chronicle of a Death Foretold has been made into a Broadway play and a feature film starring Rupert Everett, it just hasn't garnered the same critical acclaim of Marquez's more famous works—but don't ask us why; it's one of our personal favorites.
- Even though many of the hallmarks of Marquez's Nobel Prize winning One Hundred Years of Solitude are present here—like magical realism, sensuality, social commentary, and unusual narrative styles—this book is a little different. Towns don't get completely covered in butterflies and there aren't epic wars that tear apart nations. Instead, we have a pretty sad and depressing story about the absurdity of human nature. A man dies for no real reason. Marquez confronts us with the worst parts of society, the parts capable of murder, and doesn't pretty it up with magical and dazzling imagery. We guess that might be too much of a downer for some critics.
- In many ways, Chronicle of a Death Foretold is much more conventional than Marquez's more famous works. Some critics might say that's a disappointment. We say that makes it a perfect starter novel for someone who wants to get to know Colombia's Gabo.

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Plot Overview

- The narrative outlines the events surrounding the murder of Santiago Nasar, a young man who is thought to have taken the virginity of Angela Vicario. On her wedding night, after discovering that she was not a virgin, Angela's husband, Bayardo San Roman, returns her to her house. Angela's twin brothers, Pedro Vicario and Pablo Vicario, ask her who took her virginity, and she tells them that Santiago Nasar did. The brothers find Santiago and kill him.
- The narrative is non-linear. The narrator begins the story by telling us about Santiago Nasar's household the morning he was murdered. In the course of the chapter, we learn that Santiago lived with his mother, Placida Linero; their cook, Victoria Guzman; and her daughter, Divina Flor. Santiago's father, Ibrahim Nasar, has died three years previously. After his father died, Santiago took over the family ranch, which has been very successful; the Nasars are wealthy in their community.
- The day that Santiago is murdered was a significant day in town because the Bishop was coming by boat to bless the marriage of Angela Vicario and Bayardo San Roman. Many people were heading over to the dock to see the boats. Pedro and Pablo Vicario were sitting in the local milk-shop, which was en route to the dock, so that they could see Santiago Nasar either going or returning in order to track him down and kill him. The narrator's sister learns that Angela Vicario was returned home on the night of her wedding.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

- The central action which shapes and informs every page of Chronicle of a Death Foretold is the murder of the twenty-one-year-old aristocrat, Santiago Nasar, by the Vicario brothers in a “legitimate defense” of their sister’s honor.
- The novel consists of a detailed history of the circumstances of the murder taken by the narrator, a journalist and former friend of the victim, twenty-seven years after the incident in question. The long range effects of this murder on the citizens of the small unnamed Latin American town in which it occurs, and their tacit complicity in the crime itself, are revealed in the course of the narrator’s history.
- In the end, the question of whether Santiago Nasar actually deserved his fate remains unanswered. Why he was killed, how his death could have been prevented, the moment-by-moment events leading up to the crime, and the final brutal act are meticulously set down but, finally, the narrator is unable to come to any conclusions despite all the evidence he has amassed.
- When Angela Vicario’s husband discovers his bride’s lost virtue the night of their wedding, he returns her to the house of her mother, as is his right. She is “damaged goods,” a disgrace to her family’s name, and so her mother beats her for hours. When questioned, Angela Vicario names Santiago Nasar as “my perpetrator.”
- Her twin brothers, pig butchers by trade, pick up their tools and set out to revenge their sister’s lost honor in the accepted manner. Drunk from the wedding festivities, and announcing their intentions all over town, the sleepless pair at last meet up with Nasar in the early morning hours.
- In attempting to explain Nasar’s apparent ignorance of what is about to occur, the villagers speculate that he is either innocent of the deed, too haughty to expect punishment for it, or simply resigned to his fate. In any case, Nasar seems unable to protect himself from attack. With the local bishop’s boat passing by in the background, against an ominous chorus of crowing cocks and barking dogs, in the blinding white light of day, the murderers move in on their victim.

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- Chance also contributes to the outcome of events. A warning note slipped under Nasar's door is not discovered until after he is killed. Cristo Bedoya, Nasar's close friend, goes to Nasar's home, finds the Vicario brothers waiting there, takes a gun, but does not know how to use it, and sets out to intercept his friend whom he cannot find. At last, Nasar walks unarmed into his courtyard, sees the Vicario brothers, pounds desperately on the door his own mother has bolted against the killers, believing that her son is already inside.
- In a society of rigid hierarchies and strict codes of behavior such as the one García Márquez examines in this novel, deeper motivations can be seen to have been at work in influencing the actions of the townspeople. Economic and social inequities make Santiago Nasar a target of hatred even as he is an object of admiration. "Handsome, a man of his word, and with a fortune at twenty-one," Nasar moves freely through the town in a privileged existence, afforded by money and maleness. When the butcher, Faustino Santos, perceives "a glimmer of truth in Pablo Vicario's threat," he asks, "Why they had to kill Santiago Nasar since there were so many other rich people who deserved dying first."
- In this culture, the question of honor is deeply tied to the position of women who are divided into categories of saint and whore according to economic class. We see Nasar's formal politeness with his fiancée who lives closely guarded under her father's roof; and we see Nasar's crude physicality with the daughter of his cook. The reader learns how much Victoria Guzmán hates her employer just as she hated his father before him. Having been sexually abused by the father, she watches Nasar begin to take advantage of her daughter in the same way his father had taken advantage of her. Thus, the daughter, Divina Flor, confesses to the narrator after her mother dies, "In the depths of her heart she wanted to kill him." It was the real reason she hadn't said anything to warn Santiago Nasar on the morning of his murder

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After Nasar is killed, the mayor orders an autopsy which the village priest must perform since the local doctor is out of town and he had once studied medicine. “It was a massacre,” the narrator reports, and begins to catalogue the wounds made by the Vicario brothers alongside the further damage done by the autopsy, a “second assault.” Nasar’s face becomes unrecognizable, his body, an empty shell which the priest stuffs with rags and quicklime. The stench is overpowering; it engulfs the town.

In contrast to the brutality of real life—the hacked body of Nasar; the sweating crowds; the raw descriptions of physical ailments which plague the Vicario twins; the depiction of animal butchery; the odors and cries of animals and humans—there is an otherworldly surreal quality which characterizes Nasar before his murder. Clothed in white, seen by various characters as “already dead,” shining like aluminum, having the green color of dreams, Nasar appears as a vision in his last hours. Even the Vicario brothers partake of this surreal quality as they move in on Nasar. With their incongruous heavy black suits they bear themselves through the town almost mechanically under a two-day drunken stupor like “insomniac sleepwalkers.” To some they are simply will-less agents of fate carrying out the role that has been assigned them.

In a chronicle abounding with ironies from the initial misinterpretation Nasar’s mother makes of her son’s dream at the beginning of the novel, to the bizarre vision of Nasar seen by Divina Flor at the end, the narrator finds the ultimate irony in the eventual reconciliation of Angela Vicario and her husband, Bayardo San Román. Exiled with her family in a faraway Indian village, Angela Vicario is middle-aged, her yellow hair grey. Her life passes in a kind of half-mourning—a rejected wife who spends the hours at her embroidery. Still, that is only the appearance of Angela Vicario’s life. When the narrator interviews her twenty years after the murder, he finds in her a woman so mature and witty that he cannot believe she is the same person. She has come to understand her own life, as well as the life of her mother, “a poor woman devoted to the cult of her defects.” Although she addresses “letters with no future” to her lost husband, year after year she receives no reply. One day, after twenty-seven years, San Román appears at her door, a fat man who is losing his hair. Lest the reader think that the outpourings of love these letters contain have at last succeeded in reconciling the estranged couple, García Márquez makes sure to report that the two thousand letters Román has brought with him have never been opened.

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- As simply and inevitably as the story of Nasar's death unfolds, and as plainly and powerfully as it is told, Chronicle of a Death Foretold is not a novel which gives rise to simple explanations of human behavior. It comes face to face with an action which has far reaching effects on an entire community and shows how the complexity of the forces that not only bring about the murder of Santiago Nasar, but that influence the behavior of all those who are involved in the tenuous network of the society in which it occurs.
- If there is brutal, sometimes shocking language used to relate this history, there is no question that the language is sparsely and aptly employed and that its intent is to mirror the shock of the speaker. In contrast, there is in the luminous language a veritable canvas of light and dark, of red and white and gold and black.
- It is a novel to be studied for the depiction of character, for the beauty and skill of its language, for its power and complexity, and above all, for its relentless searching after the meaning of experience.

Plot Summary

- Chronicle of a Death Foretold relates the events leading up to and, to a lesser degree, those that follow the murder of Santiago Nasar, a twenty-one year old Colombian of Arab descent. He is killed by the Vicario brothers to avenge the loss of their sister's honor. Told twenty-seven years after the crime by an unnamed narrator (arguably Gar-cía Márquez himself) who returns to the village where he once lived to put back together "the broken mirror of memory," the story is constructed from the fragmented and often conflicting versions of events as they are remembered by the townspeople and by the narrator himself.

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To Conclude

Chapter 1

- On the morning after the wedding celebrations for Angela Vicario and Bayardo San Román, Santiago Nasar, son of Plácida Linero and the late Ibrahim Nasar, wakes to greet the bishop who is arriving by boat early that morning. When he enters the kitchen, both the cook, Victoria Guzmán, and her daughter, Divina Flora, know what Santiago Nasar will not learn for some time—that two men are waiting outside the house to kill him. They, like many others Santiago will cross in the short time before his death, do not warn him.
- When Santiago leaves the house, he passes the milk shop owned by Clotilde Armenta where the twins, Pedro and Pablo Vicario, are waiting to kill him. It is Clotilde Armenta's plea to "leave him for later, if only out of respect for his grace the bishop" that keeps the twins from killing him immediately. The bishop, however, never gets off his boat and departs after drifting past the crowd gathered on the pier. Santiago then joins Margot, the narrator's sister, and their friend Cristo Bedoya, two of the only people who still do not know about the twins' intentions. Santiago accepts an invitation to breakfast with Margot but wishes first to return home and change.
- Meanwhile, Margot learns that Angela Vicario has been returned to her parents by her husband because he discovered that she wasn't a virgin. She does not know how Santiago is involved, only that two men are waiting for him to kill him. When Margot's (and the narrator's) mother hears the news, she immediately sets out to warn Plácida Linero that her son is in danger, but is stopped in the street and told that "they've already killed him."

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Chapter 2

- Bayardo San Román arrived in the town for the first time in August of the year before looking for someone to marry. According to the narrator, it was never well established how he and Angela Vicario met. One version has Bayardo deciding to marry Angela after first seeing her pass by his boarding house; another has the pair meeting for the first time on the national holiday in October.
- According to the latter version, Bayardo wins a music box which he has gift-wrapped and delivered to Angela's home. He soon wins the family with his charms and, despite Angela's protests, succeeds in making her his fiancée.
- Prior to the wedding, Angela comes close to telling her mother that she isn't a virgin but is dissuaded from her good intentions and follows the advice of two confidantes who teach her how "to feign her lost possession" so that, on her first morning as a newlywed, she can display the sheet with the stain of honor.
- When her wedding night arrives, however, she is unable to carry out the "dirty" trick and is returned to her parents' house by her husband. At home, Angela is beaten by her mother and is confronted by her brothers, to whom she reveals the name of the man responsible: Santiago Nasar.

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Chapter 3

- After completing their gruesome task, the Vicario brothers surrender themselves to their church and announce that although they killed Santiago Nasar openly, they are innocent because it was a matter of honor. Despite their lack of remorse, the narrator tries to demonstrate that the twins did all they could to have someone stop them.
- In the meat market where the twins go to sharpen their knives, Pedro and Pablo take every opportunity to announce their intentions. "We're going to kill Santiago Nasar," they say repeatedly. Later, at Clotilde Armenta's, they even reveal their plans to a policeman who passes on the information to the mayor. The latter takes away the twins' knives, but Clotilde Armenta believes the twins should be detained to spare them "from the horrible duty that's fallen on them." She says this knowing that the Vicario brothers are "not as eager to carry out the sentence as to find someone who would do them the favor of stopping them."
- Although Pedro thinks his and his brother's duty fulfilled when the mayor disarms them, Pablo insists they carry out their deed. "There's no way out of this," Pablo tells his brother, "it's as if it had already happened." They return to Clotilde Armenta's with a new set of knives and wait while "fake customers" come in to see whether what they have heard is true.

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Chapter 4

- Following Santiago Nasar's death, an autopsy is performed and determines that the cause of death was a massive hemorrhage brought on by any one of seven major wounds. The autopsy, a "massacre" performed by Father Amador in the absence of Dr. Dionosio Iguarán, makes it impossible to preserve the body and Santiago is buried hurriedly at dawn the next day.
- On that day too the entire Vicario family, except the imprisoned twins, leaves town "until spirits cool off." They never return. The twins remain imprisoned for three years awaiting their trial but are eventually absolved of the crime. Pablo then marries his longtime fiancée and Pedro re-enlists in the armed forces and disappears in guerrilla territory.
- For many, the only real victim in this tragedy is Bayardo San Román. He is found in his home on the Saturday following the crime, unconscious and in the last stages of ethylic intoxication. He recovers and is later taken away by his family. Angela, for her part, goes "crazy" for her husband following her rejection on her wedding night.
- For years she writes him a weekly letter until, one day, he shows up at her door, fat and balding, but wearing the same belt and saddlebags he wore in his youth. He carries with him a suitcase with clothing in order to stay and another filled with the almost two thousand unopened letters that she'd written him.

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Chapter 5

- According to the narrator, Santiago Nasar dies without understanding his death. It is only after parting from Margot and Cristo Bedoya, when Santiago enters the home of his fiancée, Flora Miguel, that he is finally told that the Vicario brothers are waiting for him to kill him. Flora Miguel has heard the news and, fearing that Santiago will be forced to marry Angela Vicario to give her back her honor, returns to him his letters, crying, "I hope they kill you."
- When Santiago leaves his fiancée's house, confused and disoriented, he finds himself amid crowds of people stationed on the square as they do on parade days. He begins to walk towards his house and is spotted by the twins. Clotilde Armenta yells to Santiago to run, but Santiago's mother, believing that her son is already up in his room, locks the door seconds before he would have reached safety.
- Instead, the twins catch up to him and carve him with their knives. The watching crowd shouts, "frightened by its own crime." When the twins are done, Santiago is left "holding his hanging intestines in his hands," walks more than a hundred yards to the back door of his house and falls on his face in the kitchen.

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