

Comparing *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* to *The Kiss of a Spider Woman*

Settings

The settings in the narrative *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* are based on a true story event that Marquez read about. The story unfolds where the young medical student living in Colombia and heir of the large fortune were killed brutally with machete outside his front door. This young man was killed by two brothers of the lady who was returned to her family after the husband discovered that she was not a virgin when he married her. Therefore, when she accused the medical student for taking her virginity, the two brothers killed him (Marquez, 2008, p. 15). *The Kiss of a Spider Woman* also represents true narrative since the setting of take place in an Argentine prison cell. The novel gives us extensive reports on homosexuality in prison and the boredom of prison life. It also concentrates on several conversations between two characters, Valentin and Molina. The two characters tried to put their relationship on formal basis, distancing from each other to avoid any intimate relationships that could ruin their dedication of overthrowing the government. Molina, however, favors the romantic relationship without caring for its political consequences (Puig, 1993).

The settings in the novel *The Kiss of a Spider Woman* were set in a Latin American country but are shot through with the political climate of Puig's native Argentina in 1970. During that time, thousands of people were imprisoned and even killed at the hands of government for any suspicion of political entanglements. The fiction character Valentin represents such government actions against Argentine citizens. He was beaten up and tortured by prison wardens soon after his friend, Molina left prison. He was tortured and imprisoned because of his revolutionary activities (Puig, 1993).

Theme: Romantic Entanglements

In *The Kiss of a Spider Woman*, the narrator uses the theme of romantic entanglement as depicted in Molina's films. The characters are also caught in a web of passion they cannot move away from like that of Molina and Valentin. Molina is like a spider woman character from a movie when he starts fighting for his love. This is evident where he persuaded Valentin to kiss him. On the other hand, Valentin is acting like a woman as we see him seduced by Molina and later promises to deliver a message to Valentin's political allies soon he's released from prison.

The relationships between art and politics in this novel are very complex. First, movies claim a powerful form of human emotions as many people try to live their lives as the characters portrayed in the films. In the beginning of the novel, we see Valentin rejecting the devotion to art. He does not want to believe in art. He believes that art will distance his values far from reality that Valentin tries to study and change. He also does not want to believe that women should obey men as the motion pictures portrayed (Piug, 1993).

Valentin also tries to repress his romantic tendencies. He acts pompous and sometimes abrupt to Molina and constantly fights to retain rigid control over his feelings. Valentin nurtures for Molina like a mother would do, which makes him embarrassed as it shows Valentin his physical and mental weakness. At certain point, Molina's homosexuality is evident by the way he treats Valentin. This has caused the romantic tension between Molina and Valentin, and as the film goes on, many other kinds of forbidden love are portrayed. Valentin is held back as he believes that this is the way a civilization is built, while Molina reacts against this repression (Piug, 1993).

Romantic entanglements are depicted in *Chronicle of Death Foretold* where the narrator tells us the story of Bayardo San Roman, Angela Vicario bridegroom. Angela and Bayardo engagement only lasted four months before it broke up since only one of them was interested in marrying the other, but they married anyway. Bayardo then offered to buy Angela a house that belonged to the widower Xius in the windswept hill. Angela is not a virgin as the bridegroom thought, their friends and relatives throw then a huge wedding with extravagant gifts with nights of dancing and revelry. None of the Angela's friends and family knew the little secret, although they grew up together. Afterwards, the bride and the groom drove to the new house. Vicario brothers also followed the new weds to their new house singing and drinking. Pura Vicario is awoken by a knock on the door at eleven o'clock in the night. She goes on to open the door and meets Angela and Bayardo standing there. They both enter the house and Bayardo pushes his wife away and pushes Pura on the cheek, thanking her for everything. Afterwards, Pura holds Angela's hair and beats her quietly not to wake his family demanding to know why she is not a virgin anymore. She had confessed that her first lover was Santiago Nasar, who was later killed by two brothers (Marquez, 2008, p. 53).

With this story, the brutality of the social conceptions surrounding women is very evident. Upon realization that Angela was not a virgin, his husband abandoned her and she got beaten up by her mother. The double standards of the society are evident since Cristo, Luis Enrique and Santiago act as they please. They go on having premarital sex, even if they are engaged to other women and the society does nothing about it. In that aspect of romantic entanglement, the ritual courtship is also very evident in the novel. Bayardo does whatever it takes to win the love of Angela by showering her with gifts. Bayardo does not take his time to get to know

the woman behind the name. He takes short cuts by demonstrating the amount of money he will be willing to spend on her. He demonstrates that he will get her music box and buy her the widower's house. He uses his money to show the bride and her parents that he has the power of taking care of her. Another ritual was performed where the families of each spouse were asked to meet before the match was approved. The culture requires understanding bridegroom's family so that the girl does not get to marry someone from a questionable family with no money (Marquez, 2008, p. 57).

In *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the author used fantasy and escapism themes. The theme of escapism is portrayed through the fantasy where Molina uses his memory of classic movies as a means of escape. He is drawn to melodramatic movies to escape from reality with a strong romantic theme. In another incident, he retells the movies to Valentin to escape the oppression of boredom of prison life. He uses the movies as a form of entertainment to keep herself and friends entertained. Molina uses the movies to escape from social oppression as continues to suffer homosexuality. Molina identifies with all the female characters in his movies that help them escape oppressed life (Piug, 1993).

Characters

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the narrator uses different characters to develop the story of the novel. Santiago is used as a protagonist in the story and is killed after discovering that he took Angela Vicario's virginity. Angela Vicario dishonored his bride and presented cultural imbalance. Pedro Vicario brings the idea of killing Santiago Nasar for taking Angela's virginity. He had spent his time in the army before and after he was released from prison, whereas his twin, Pablo Vicario, who went along with the crime-married Prudencia Cotes, soon released from jail.

Bayardo San Roman, the man who married Angela, portrays wealth and brutality of what a culture requires men to be (Marquez, 2008, p. 54).

In *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Valentin Arregui Paz is used as a Marxist revolutionary imprisoned from his political activism. Molina, on the other hand, portrays homosexual characters with no political interest. At first, Valentin does not approve Molina's homosexuality but his willing to listen to his movie narratives in order to pass time. Valentin unconsciously gets emotionally attached to Molina after he selflessly cares for him when he gets sick and he eventually becomes his lover. When Molina is released from prison, Valentin asks him to pass an important message to his political allies. Soon after Valentine leaves prison, Valentin gets brutally beaten up by prison officials, who tortured him by inflicting third-degree burns on his body and groin (Puig, 1993).

Narration

The Kiss of the Spider Woman has no narrator in the novel. Molina and Valentin story is revealed in the manageable dialogue. Each chapter picks up a dialogue between the two men. The exchanges between Molina and Valentin strengthen their friendship while in prison. It then comes to our shock that Molina was practically used by prison wardens to extract information Valentin. It becomes clear that Molina is torn between preserving friendship with the cellmate and giving up the information. They keep their intimacy in secret from the prison wardens. Molina's obsession with motion pictures plots the novel while prisoners' lives can be transformed into scenarios. A dialogue is also used where Molina uses movies to tell stories to Valentin. This brings them close and Molina reveals the love of his life. Molina identifies with cinemas and knows the difference between life and art. Molina

remarks that films help them escape from reality that makes prison life bearable for both of them (Puig, 1993).

Chronicle of a Death Foretold uses non-linear narrative. At the beginning of the novel, a narrator appears to tell us about Santiago Nasar's death. As the story unwinds, we learn that Santiago lived with his mother, Placida Linero, Victoria Guzman, their cook, and her daughter Divina Flor. Ibrahim, Santiago's father, died three years previously. Then Santiago took over the family ranch ownership, which became very successful. When he was murdered for taking virginity of Angela, Bishop was coming to town the very day to bless the marriage of Bayardo San Roman and Vicario Angela (Marquez, 2008).

Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Garcia uses surreal details to explain ordinary events. In his description of the local brothel that makes the reader have trouble with understanding of what exactly Maria Alejandria does. Although she is a whore, the author describes the house so beautifully that if the readers had to dwell on the description, they might perceive the house as an elegant domicile. Moreover, Marquez uses magical realism to explain the anecdotal digression and to give a detailed analysis of characters that are not important to the plot although they are interesting. The narrator discusses Santiago Nasar's dream before his death as a magical realism. As Marquez (2008) explained, "He'd dreamed he was going through a grove of timber trees where a gentle drizzle was falling, and for an instance he was happy in his dream, but when he was awoke he felt completely spattered with bird shit" (p. 169). This detailed description style of the narrative makes it hard for readers to determine whether the narrative is a reality or a fiction (Marquez, 2008).

Rituals versus Civilization

In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the author uses ritual as an ancient custom of the historical days. The courtship of Angela by Bayardo demonstrates ritualism of Latin American marriage culture. Bayardo brings her gifts and money and obtains everything his future bride asks. The purpose of this ritual of money showering is to demonstrate the man's influence in the culture and money. The personality of the bride does not matter, rather, their family and wealth do. Although *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* portrays homosexuality between the two cell mates, Molina and Valentin are not merely outcasts, but the rebels who show civilization the way it is, with no disguise.

Reference List

Marquez, G. G. (2008). *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Puig, M. (1993). *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.