

Under the Knife: a study of the author's use of medical procedures to dissect characters and develop themes in Marquez's 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold' and Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary.'

The autopsy of Santiago Nassar's body in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, Chronicle of a Death Foretold and the operation on Hippolyte's foot in Gustave Flaubert's novel, Madame Bovary, are medical procedures used to highlight the inabilities of Father Amador and Dr. Charles Bovary and undermine their characters and authority within their societies. The unsuccessful operations are tied in with many recurrent themes of the novels and are crucial in the development of both plot and characterisation, affecting the portrayal of Amador and Bovary and their significance in the stories.

Comment [KH1]: Clear introduction with a precise statement of the candidate's thesis or main argument. Admittedly this is a slightly long sentence, but the candidate has constructed it well

After Santiago's death in Chronicle of a Death Foretold, the local priest, Father Amador, is ordered to perform an autopsy on the body as part of the investigation into his murder. "The damage from the knives was only the beginning for the inclement autopsy that Father Carmen Amador found himself obliged to do in Dr. Dionisio Iguaran's absence." Father Amador's limited medical knowledge and evident lack of skill lead to a gruesome and damaging procedure, dehumanising Santiago and essentially killing him a second time. Ironically, Father Amador, the village's representative of the Roman Catholic Church, is the one who is forced to perform the autopsy, a procedure, that goes against Catholic tradition of leaving corpses untouched after death. This mocks the priest's responsibility to uphold the traditions of the Catholic Church, which is usually a highly revered profession in Latin American societies, and demonstrates the insignificance of Amador's status, and indeed the church, in the village. Another facet of irony surrounding the procedure is the equipment used, consisting of "a few instruments for minor surgery . . . and the rest were craftsmen's tools." These 'craftsmen's tools' are reminiscent of the pig slaughtering knives used by the Vicario brothers to murder Santiago in the first place and reinforce the idea that his autopsy is like a second murder: "It was a massacre, performed at the public school."

Comment [KH2]: Slightly vague outline of the areas that are going to be explored but this is acceptable as long as they are introduced and explored with clarity later on

Comment [KH3]: Quotation from the text is nicely embedded but there is some sense of storytelling here

Comment [KH4]: Clear reference to cultural context

Comment [KH5]: However, the candidate does not stop at just making a cultural point. They go on to explore the effect that this has on the novel, in particular the effect it has on the characterisation of Father Amador and our judgment of him

Comment [KH6]: Good awareness of the effect ... although the candidate could have gone on to explore exactly what effect Marquez might have been trying to create by ironically echoing the original murder in this way

Throughout the autopsy, Santiago's wounds are detailed with exact descriptions recorded by Father Amador. The descriptions systematically examine the body's injuries, detaching focus from Santiago as a character and focusing on his lifeless corpse instead: "He had six other lesser perforations in the transverse colon and multiple wounds in the small intestine." The report goes on to describe, "a deep stab in the right hand," which is likened to "a stigma of the crucified Christ." This correlation between Santiago and Jesus Christ is one that is explored at many points in the novel through Biblical links and the portrayal of Santiago as an Innocent man who is killed almost as a sacrifice, much like Christ's crucifixion for the sins of others.

Comment [KH7]: Smooth use of quotations

Comment [KH8]: Clear exploration of the link between Nasar and Christ although again the candidate could have gone on to explain exactly why the author might be trying to create the impression that Nasar was a sacrifice. A sacrifice to what?

Despite his extensive findings, Father Amador concludes his report in an attempt at self-justification for not being able to prevent the murder, "a hypertrophy of the liver that he attributed to a poorly cured case of hepatitis... he only had a few years or life left to him in any case." This theme of self justification is applicable not only to the priest, but to the rest of the town as well, which could have done more to prevent Santiago's murder. Dr. Iguaran later on comments on Amador's theory saying, 'Only a priest could be so dumb.' This undermines Amador's medical knowledge, which is already known to be limited, and makes his statement even more of an obvious attempt to escape blame for his limited action to prevent the murder.

Comment [KH9]: At this point, however, the candidate does a good job of explaining how the ideas raised in this scene echo other important moments throughout the text and the themes as a whole.

By the end of the autopsy, Santiago's body is left completely destroyed by the amateur operation. "They gave us back a completely different body ... and the ladykiller face that had been preserved ended up losing its identity." Santiago is reduced to a lifeless corpse, a haunting symbol of the town's lack of resolve to stop his murder and their pitiful attempts to justify their futile actions. "The empty shell, stuffed with rags and quicklime and sewed up rudely with coarse twine and baling needles ..." The messy and disfiguring procedure ends on a note of frustration and senselessness, leaving Santiago's death as an ambiguous and prying event in the town's history.

Comment [KH10]: A lovely point – clearly and concisely put

Comment [KH11]: The incorrect word choice really stands out here and ultimately suggests that the candidate is not quite in control of their language. Again this idea could have been explained a little more. Ambiguous in what way? Why has Marquez left it that way?

Medical procedure is used similarly in Madame Bovary to demonstrate the incompetence of Dr. Charles Bovary, confirming his lack of skill and demonstrating the pressures put on him throughout the novel to provide a grand lifestyle for his wife Emma. Emma's romantic illusions of passion and grandeur remain in her mind throughout her miserable marriage to the dull and inept Charles Bovary. Homais, the bourgeois apothecary, introduces Emma to a newly developed procedure to cure club foot, hoping that the prospect of increased fame and wealth will entice Emma to drive Charles to perform the operation on a local peasant, Hippolyte. Homais hopes that a successful operation will not only increase Bovary's wealth and status, but that his involvement in the operation will benefit his own business and importance in the town. Charles willingly accepts Emma's suggestion, seeing it as the perfect opportunity to please his beloved wife

Comment [KH12]: Clear comparison between the two texts – although the structure is very simple, it does enable the candidate to make meaningful comparisons without the essay becoming a confusing mess that jumps back and forth between texts

Comment [KH13]: The candidate does sometimes indulge in too much story-telling

While preparing for the procedure, Charles reads instructions for the operation which are written with medical terms and scientific jargon, "the equines, the varus and valgus, which is to say, catatalies, endotalipes, an exotalipes." These terms are followed in the narrative with simplified definitions between parenthesis, "(or, rather, the various deviations of the fool, whether downwards, inwards or outwards)." This mockingly undermines Charles and his ability to such technical terms, making him seem more like the blundering schoolboy from the beginning of the novel than a grownup doctor preparing for surgery. As he begins the operation itself, Charles' lack of confidence in his own ability is used to again undermine his skill: "He was in fact already trembling for fear of injuring, ignorantly, some vital part." This indication of fear also suggests a reluctance that is overpowered by Emma's persuasion and Bovary's aspirations to please her. This is similar to Father Amador, who is unable to prevent his involvement in the autopsy, both men's lack of influence and willpower, allowing for their destructive failures. In essence, Father Amador and Dr. Bovary are the tools with which Santiago and Hippolyte are victimized by their societies, the first by his pointless and unskilled autopsy forced by the town's mayor and the latter by Emma and Homais who want to benefit from the surgery. Charles in particular is susceptible to this use as a result of his painful lack of awareness.

Comment [KH14]: Clear analysis of the effect on the reader

Comment [KH15]: A clear attempt to compare the texts ... although it is not quite convincing here because Father Amador's failure is not destructive, at least not in the same way as Bovary's

Even after his obvious failure, Charles' incompetence is emphasized in his inability to remedy the situation. Unable to cope with the worsening condition of his patient, Charles agrees with 'a nod of his head.' to call for a more experienced doctor to care for the suffering man. The arrival of Dr. Canivet puts Bovary in painful contrast to the "doctor of medicine, fifty years old, enjoying a good practice and a certain self-assurance," making his insufficiency glaringly obvious: "This colleague gave a bluntly disdainful laugh when he uncovered the leg, now gangrened as high as the knee." Dr. Canivet's contemptuous attitude ridicules Dr. Bovary's and adds to the disdain of his character. This is similar to Dr. Iguaran's comment on Father Amador's theory, which is also used to reconfirm the priest's ineptitude through a more expert opinion. As Charles later paces the room thinking about his failed attempt, he suddenly says, "Well perhaps it was the valgus after all?" This comment not only upsets Emma, but puts Charles in an absurd light of unfeeling ignorance, which is how Emma sees him through most of the novel. His opportunity to enlarge his medical practice is wasted and his business destroyed, pushing Emma even further away and making him more loathsome in her eyes. "Everything about him irritated her now ... his whole person, his very existence." Bovary's opportunity for medical success becomes his ruin and demonstrates his inability to control his own fate because of his highest aspiration of making Emma happy and how blinded he is by this unattainable goal.

Comment [KH16]: Detailed development of points – this clearly follows a sensible train of thought leading from the previous paragraph

Comment [KH17]: Despite the story-telling at points, there are some moments of very clear and concise analysis where the effect on the reader is clearly and convincingly explored

Comment [KH18]: Again, not quite the right phrase

Comment [KH19]: A further clear comparison drawn between the two texts

Santiago's autopsy in Chronicle of a Death Foretold is the culmination of many significant themes in the novel. Father Amador's weak position in the village is underlined by his powerlessness to prevent Santiago's murder which is relived through the autopsy as if the priest had killed Santiago with his own hands by failing in his efforts to stop the murder. Similarly, Charles Bovary is cast under a critical light as he fails perpetually to escape the lack of prosperity that Emma is so desperate to break away from. The ease with which he is convinced and his oblivious execution of the operation leave him ruined and detested, with Hippolyte wandering around Yonville on a wooden leg as a constant reminder of his failure. Both men are marked by weakness and inability, with Santiago's autopsy and Hippolyte's surgery as crucial episodes in their pitiful portrayal.

Comment [KH20]: Clear analysis of the effect of Charles' failure ... note the candidate is treating this whole event as a literary feature that is intended to have an effect on the reader, which is perfectly acceptable.

Comment [KH21]: Again, slightly unconvincing as part of Marquez's point in the novel is that everyone actually has the power to stop the murder, it's just that no-one has the courage to do so

Comment [KH22]: Clear comparisons

Marks Awarded:

Selection of Aspect	4	The aspect selected is a good one – the focus on the medical procedures performed in the two texts enables the candidate to explore very specific / limited parts of the two texts in depth and do justice to them within 1500 words. The ideas treated are relevant ... but not always pushed the final step required for full marks. Why, for example, has the death of Nasar been left ambiguous
Knowledge and Understanding	4	Although there is a good understanding of the text the candidate's failure to realise that Father Amador is not criticised to anything like the extent that Charles Bovary is in the text suggests a knowledge of the text which is lacking in some degree. Hence the 4.
Presentation	4	There is a clear structure here but the overly simple text 1, text 2 structure rather than an alternation between them will also stop the candidate from gaining full marks here.
Language	4	Most of the language is great but there are a few errors that really stand out – the misuse of 'prying' for example (which perhaps should have been revealing) and the odd phrase 'adds to the disdain of his character' (which should have been something like 'intensifies the disdain that we feel towards his character) result in a 4 here.
	16	Level 6