

Homer Simpson

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AP English Literature

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Literary Device Project: Allusion

In Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *The Sound of Things Falling*, Ricardo Laverde, a recently released prisoner, asks his new friend Antonio Yammara for help locating a cassette tape player, so Yammara takes him to the Casa de Poesía, a cultural center housed in "the former residence of the poet José Asunción Silva." Coincidentally, the city of Bogotá is commemorating Silva's work. There, Laverde listens to his tape, as Yammara listens to Silva's poem "Nocturne." Juan Gabriel Vásquez uses this allusion to "Nocturne" to characterize the novel's characters and foreshadow death.

For Laverde, "Nocturne" reflects his hollow existence. His cassette tape contains the black box recording of a crashed plane, the very plane his wife was on when she died. As Laverde listens to the sounds accompanying his wife's death, Silva's words become infused with Yammara's narration:

I noticed that Ricardo Laverde was crying. [. . .] [Laverde] wiped the back of his hand across his eyes, then his sleeve, *with murmurs and music of wings* [. . .] [he] brought his hands together like someone praying. *And your shadow, lean and languid.* (Vásquez 38)

In Silva's "Nocturne," the speaker copes with the death of his lover, the very same thing Laverde does. Although, in the above quote, the "shadow" refers to the speaker's lover, it also describes Laverde at the moment. He has become a hollow shell of a man, a "shadow" filled with grief, as

he listens to the “music of [mechanical] wings” coming undone, the sound of his wife’s death (Vásquez 38). Someone is taunting Laverde with this cassette, and he has no idea why. But what is clear is how powerless he is. He cannot stop the forces of fate—or even man. He really is just a shadow, the corporeal form of nothing.

In “Nocturne” the speaker says:

And your shadow
 Languid, delicate;
 And my shadow,
 Sketched by the white moonlight's ray
 Upon the solemn sands
 Of the path, were joined together, (Silva 11-16)

In these lines, the speaker’s shadow merges with his lover’s. It’s a romantic image, suggestive of two souls reuniting; however, in *The Sound of Things Falling*, it foreshadows Laverde’s death. When he leaves the Casa de Poesía, an unknown man on a motorcycle shoots and kills him. At this point, Laverde literally becomes nothing. Vásquez’s allusion to “Nocturne” helps the reader understand the depth of Laverde’s sadness and grief. It also undercuts the slightest bit of hope “Nocturne” affords the reader, which may be Vásquez’s purpose: to highlight the utter bleakness of life, that all around us are *The Sound of Things Falling*.

Works Cited

Silva, José Asunción. "Nocturne." *Poetry Archive*. Web. 11 Mar. 2014.

Vásquez, Juan Gabriel. *The Sound of Things Falling*. New York: Riverhead, 2013. Print.