Gender Roles In Chronicle Of A Death Foretold

In Marquez's novella "Chronicle of a Death Foretold", the various roles that men and women play in this 1950s Colombian society are prominently depicted by the various characters present. In the novella, it is seen that men were expected to be 'macho men'-and protect the family dignity and honour and take care of the family- while women were meant to be the perfect wives- caregivers and maintain the household.

In the novella, the men are expected to uphold the honour of the family. With this in mind, the Vicario twins (the brothers of Angela) come into existence. While the two are twins who were raised the same way in the same society, they both have different opinions on how to bring back honour to their family. To expand, on one hand, they believe killing Santiago Nasar is necessary to redeem the family's honour but on the other, the Vicario brothers do not really wish to murder Santiago however the intensity of the situation (which was determined by the cultural norms at the time) almost forces them to do so.

The brother's role here is to uphold the family honour, and are not expected to display any remorse (or any 'feminine' (or in a different sense, emotions that gave way to not being macho men) emotions at all as they are macho men- and macho men are expected to be strong, dominant, and want only few things in life, such as sex, protecting their family and honour, and display aggressive/violent behaviour), however Marquez displays their emotional state through Clotilde Armenta- and her being certain that the "Vicario brothers were not as eager to carry out the sentence as to find someone who would do them the favour of stopping them"- and one can see this as the brothers attempt to avoid killing Santiago on numerous occasions- by first announcing at the market that they were actually going to perform the murder (a scheme that could have led to the murder's prevention) and conveniently telling around twenty two people about their plan. Furthermore, Pedro Vicario, "the more forceful of the brothers", almost refuses to go through with the plan to kill Santiago however Pablo(surprisingly), steps up to the plate and convinces his brother to go along with the plan- and Pedro refused to go through with it because the mayor took away their first set of knives with which they had planned to kill Nasar with, and to him, that was a sign that they no longer needed to go with the plan. Despite their inner struggles, upholding their sister's honour was important, and it was not even seen as a 'murder' by them, for after killing Nasar, they immediately went to church to confess, and believed that they were innocent "before God and before men" as the murder had been a "matter of honour" .The Vicarios are mostly concerned with matters of family reputation, while Pablo's fiancée and the other members of the community were concerned with being associated with them, which shows that cultural norms came before the emotional welfare of the twins, and Prudencia Cotes (Pablo's fiancée) even states that she "never would have married him if he hadn't done what a man should do", for after all it was their role to bring honour to the family.

Thus, by using the twins, Marquez demonstrates how one of the roles that was forced upon men was how they were expected to uphold their (and their family's) honour in society, no matter the cost.

Marquez employs various other male characters to demonstrate another role present

throughout the novella- how men were more dominant than women and were expected to keep them ‘in place’. A character that demonstrates this is none other than Santiago Nasar, the man who was killed for supposedly deflowering a girl before her marriage. While it is never revealed whether Nasar truly is guilty of deflowering Angela, his reputation around town does not help his case- he is known for making sexual passes at young women, including Divina Flor, a daughter of Victoria Guzmán (his servant). Divina’s name is symbolic for her ‘purity’, juxtaposing against Santiago Nasar’s aggressive sexuality, and one may say that Santiago Nasar embraces the sexual aggressiveness that was expected to be displayed by the men at that time, as they were expected to be macho men- and it also demonstrates two different roles of men and women in society: how men were almost expected to use women as objects, and how the women were then meant to be submissive in nature, and take it all with a smile and more.

Another important male character that depicts this role of men is Bayardo San Roman- Bayardo practically forces Angela to marry him when the two don’t even know each other, and he decides to marry her only based on how she looks, and the two haven’t even spoken to one another. Many believe that he buys her love through the expensive things he gets her, however, he buys the family’s love and adoration, while she believes he is ‘too much of a man’ for her. He does not take the time to truly appreciate her (as herself) and believes his money and good looks will be enough for her, however this in reality shows how men expected women would only wish to marry them because of wealth and looks, and this brings out a role that was expected of women- marriage.

Women were expected to marry and leave their jobs after getting married (Angela’s mother is a prime example of this- she left her job as school teacher right after she got married), as in this society, it was a woman’s role to be a caregiver and be the best possible wife. Moreover, marriage was held to such a high regard that if a woman was not married (or did not want to get married), something was seen to be ’wrong’ with her- and love was not a factor in marriage as ‘love can be learnt’, as Pura Vicario states. Marriage was a job, and it gave people status- and women were expected to be virgins to show their supposed purity- and the richer you married, the higher up the social hierarchy you went. Women were expected to be virgins and ‘pure’ while men were expected to be experienced which brings up the paradox of how exactly the men were meant to get any ‘experience’.

This relationship between sexual expectations of men and women brings up gender roles as a whole that the Vicario family was used to exhibit- namely how Angela Vicario demonstrates the expectations (and roles) placed on women in the community. Her name quite literally translates to ‘angel’- a fact ironic in her situation- however while her real name may be a contradiction to her ‘true’ self (as many argue that she is the one who sent Santiago Nasar to his death, and whether he deserved it or not is up for debate to this date) , it is a reflection of the expectations of the people around her. The community believes Angela to be pure and ‘angelic’- a virgin, as one of the important values in this community was virginity (at least for women), and Angela’s name in a way symbolizes the gender role placed on the young women in this society. Women were expected to remain virgins till marriage and this idea held a crucial place in everyone’s minds in this town. A major example of the importance of virginity was when Marquez reveals to the reader how many women knew how to fake it- after all, a man ‘only believes what he sees on the sheet’, and some of Angela’s closest companions gave her tips on how to fake it- and since this was such an open secret between women, one may state that virginity was forced upon women to give them the role of purity, and also links back to how women were seen as property, as after a husband takes his wife’s virginity, she would only belong to her husband.

Marquez also uses Pura Vicario (Angela’s mother) to develop the importance of virginity as Pura has a social obligation to ‘look after’ her daughters and make sure that her household follows the rules placed on them by the patriarchy- how they were to be perfect wives, and of course, virgins. Furthermore, her name translates to “pure”, so Pura’s frustration and anger towards Angela could be based upon the importance of purity (or loss of it, in this case).