Chronicle Of A Death Foretold: Patriarchal Determinism

García Márquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981) is a subtle criticism of patriarchalism. The novella's representation of gender relations closely reflects Latin American patriarchal history, underlying the socioeconomic and familial structure (Ortega, 2014). Patriarchy is a hierarchical, inherently misogynist system which legitimises male domination of women, sexual objectification and discrimination (Schoberth, 2011). In this essay, I will evaluate the significance of machismo as it influences the characters in the novella. I will explore the role of women and the concept of virginity, through the lens of the women in society. Finally, I will analyse fate and religion as central motifs underpinning the course of the novella's development. Márquez's purposeful reconciling of these elements in Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981) evidence that the actions of the brother assassins were predetermined by the values of patriarchalism.

Machismo is a cultural expression of male power popularised in Latin America and rooted fundamentally in patriarchy. It is predicated on this idea of masculinity that men must suppress all forms of fear and anxiety as it demonstrates weakness and inadequacy (Anderson, 2017). According to Raewyn Connell (1987), this social process "necessitated the commotional stoicism, willingness to accept and inflict violence on other men, and participation in masculinized endeavours like sport, the military and other fraternal organisations." The values of machismo essentially 'justify' the stereotypical behaviour and role of men in society and necessarily influence gender relations. Machismo not only emphasises manliness, but also regards women as the possession of their fathers, husbands and brothers (Farahmandian, 2012). In Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981), machismo is most clearly identified in Angela Vicario's brothers' reaction to the accusation made against Santiago Nasar. She confesses to her brothers that she lost her virginity to Nasar before marrying Bayardo San Roman (Márquez, 1981, p.47). Immediately, their outrage translates into a plot to kill Nasar in order to defend and restore her honour. Contrary to what might be expected, the murder of Nasar is condoned by the entire community, and no one prevents the tragedy from occurring despite full disclosure and forewarning about the two brothers' intentions (Márquez, 1981, p.88). His death is justified by everyone as an honour killing; moreover, the brothers are deemed victims as much as Nasar in the culmination of this tragedy.

Notable is the drive to avenge Angela's stolen honour—a noble responsibility which befalls the male members of society and a duty strongly upheld by many of the women. Prudencia Cotes, for example, expresses that she would not have married Pablo Vicario had he not "been a man" and killed Nasar (Márquez, 1981, p.44). For most sane people, murder would be an irreconcilable act that breaks the trust of marriage, however, the gender roles are so heavily entrenched in this society that Prudencia implies she would have rejected Pablo if it were not for his resolve. Clothilde Armenta, the owner of the milk shop that the Vicario brothers frequent, alludes to the fact that Pablo and Pedro are victims of the cult of machismo, stating that "they haven't got anything to kill anybody with… it's to spare those poor boys from the horrible duty that's fallen on them (Márquez, 1981, p.30)." In Márquez's patriarchal society, honour killing as retribution for wrongdoing is seen as praiseworthy over inaction; shirking that kind of responsibility would be seriously emasculating, dishonourable and cowardly.

The novella utilizes magical realism to set up a surreal world that reflects our own society in

many ways, in which women and children alike ‘need protection’ and men must be strong enough to defend the vulnerable in society. Out of these patriarchal values arise a sense of duty to ‘prove masculinity’, thereby necessitating violence against offenders and often circumventing proper judicial process. When the brothers demand that Angela reveal who took her virginity, she responds in a way that mirrors the escapist ambiguity of Márquez’s writing style throughout the novella.

“She looked for it in the shadows, she found it at first sight among the many, many easily confused names from this world and the other, and she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written. 'Santiago Nasar,' she said (Márquez, 1981, p.47).”

The surreal image of a butterfly pinned to a wall is deeply symbolic of both Angela Vicario and Santiago Nasar’s tragic lots in life assigned to them by fate (Márquez, 1981, p.97). The revelation of Nasar’s name is presented almost as if it causes Angela’s resurrection from the dead, “the drowsiness of death had finally been lifted from me (Márquez, 1981, p.47).” Once Santiago is exposed as the one who took her virginity, he is pinned down by the cultural customs and vengeance is sought by the Vicario brothers. Likewise, as Angela ‘pins’ Santiago’s fate through her words, she herself is ‘pinned’ by the sexism of the culture. This use of magical realism in the fantastical description of the butterfly floating like the names in Angela’s mind cleverly belies the journalistic style of the novella. The reader is left in the dark about whether or not Angela is actually telling the truth. After killing Nasar, the brothers were “comforted by the honour of having done their duty, and the only thing that worried them was the persistence of the smell (Márquez, 1981, p.11),” reinforcing the notion that honour was worth more than any consequences that might come from achieving it. García Márquez skilfully ties these concepts of machismo and honour together to facilitate a meaningful dialogue on how a system like patriarchalism, wherein gender roles are so rigidly fixed and unchallenged, can be dangerous (Chiyedza, 2012).

Women in patriarchal societies are essentially considered the property of their parents until they are ‘given away’ in marriage. This is conveyed in the novella as Angela has no say on the issue when Bayardo San Roman asks her parents for her hand in marriage. Her parents insist that by becoming his wife, she will elevate the status of their family in the community. Márquez conveys how honour in the patriarchal view is more important than one’s happiness and presents her parents’ argument that “a family dignified by modest means had no right to disdain that prize of destiny (Márquez, 1981, pp.34-35).” Angela’s parents were overprotective of their daughter, refusing to allow Angela and Bayardo to spend time alone together throughout their engagement. Parents overseeing their children’s relationships is actually a common practice of courtship in many traditional societies, that continues even today (Lloyd, 1991). The narrator states that Pura Vicario and “the blind father accompanied her to watch over her honour (Márquez, 1981, p.38).” Interestingly, the idea that Angela’s blind father is responsible for watching “over her honour” demonstrates that the concern lies more on maintaining a good reputation than ensuring that she remains chaste until her wedding day. While men are more or less exempt from sexual constraints, women’s purity is so highly regarded in patriarchal societies that it is inextricably tied with honour, status and familial reputation.

In Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981), women’s perception of themselves and the social construct of virginity is majorly central to the plot. After Flora Miguel, Santiago Nasar’s fiancée, hears news of the Vicario brothers’ intentions to murder Santiago, it appears she is less

concerned with the fate of her fiancée and more concerned with whether the Vicario brothers will force Santiago to marry Angela to validate their previous sexual encounter (Márquez, 1981, p. 112). For Flora, restoring the appearance of Angela's honour seemed completely natural and desirable, even though in reality it would not alter the fact Angela allegedly slept with Santiago out of wedlock. Restoring honour was arguably the most crucial virtue in a patriarchal society, so anything done to accomplish this was justified in the community's mind.

The narrator describes the lives of women in Colombian culture to highlight how gender delineates the boundaries of one's experience. The upbringing of Angela Vicario in contrast to her brothers is significant, as women were bounded by strict social conventions and were not permitted to follow their own desires.

Márquez states, "the brothers were brought up to be men. The girls were brought up to be married. They knew how to do screen embroidery, sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron, make artificial flowers and fancy candy, and write engagement announcements… my mother thought there were no better-reared daughters. 'They're perfect,' she was frequently heard to say. 'Any man will be happy with them because they've been raised to suffer (Márquez, 1981, p.31).'"

A woman's worth was measured by arbitrary beauty standards and her ability to gracefully manage household duties. Unlike in today's Western culture, marriage in Spanish culture was not based on love but on family honour. Most importantly, women did not enter marriage expecting to be satisfied or to fall in love with the man they would marry, but to suffer.

Angela's experiences as a woman were constrained by the patriarchal values which subconsciously shaped her worldview and prevented her from exercising real autonomy over her will and future. It was considered a dishonour for brides to wear their wedding dress and be rejected on their wedding day. Submitting to patriarchal ritual, Angela refuses to dress and is deeply embarrassed as Bayardo San Roman arrives two hours late to the wedding; "her caution seemed natural, because there was no public misfortune more shameful than for a woman to be jilted in her bridal gown (Márquez, 1981, p.43)." In many ways however, Angela defied the gender boundaries of her position as a woman. The narrator explains that her daring to wear "the veil and the orange blossoms without being a virgin would be interpreted afterwards as a profanation of the symbols of purity (Márquez, 1981, p.41)." Angela also secretly discusses her fears with her friends that San Roman may discover she is not a virgin and "they assured her that almost all women lost their virginity in childhood accidents… they taught her old wives' tricks to feign her lost possession (Márquez, 1981, p.38)." Deceitful relationships pervade the novella, and the fact that so many women knew how to deceive their husbands on the first night of their wedding indicate that they had discovered ways to overcome the unfair limits imposed upon them by their society. Angela maintains that she did not listen to her friends' advice to lie on her wedding night due to "pure decency" that her mother instilled in her (Márquez, 1981, p.91). However, throughout their engagement she had been lying by omission, and the narrator asserts that she may also be lying about the identity of the man who took her virginity. The deceit running throughout the community undoubtedly contributes to the death of an innocent man. San Roman does not forgive Angela for her deceit and she is returned to the house of her parents (Márquez, 1981, p.47). Toward the end of the novella, it seems Angela accepts her fate of rejection, speaking of her misfortunes without shame and proclaiming, "hate and love are reciprocal passions (Márquez, 1981, p.94)." Angela obsessively takes up writing love letters to Bayardo San Roman, whom never opens them. Nevertheless,

her incessant writing without interest in the content echoes the novella's overall disinterest in pinpointing truth, as the truth surrounding the murder remains ambiguous. This back and forth non-meaningful exchange highlight the Colombian concept of love as mechanical actions between two lovers, rather than real understanding between them. Love, according to Márquez's patriarchal society, is defined by ritual.

García Márquez incorporates female characters in the novella who challenge the patriarchal narrative on gender roles through their interactions and/ or characteristics. Maria Alejandrina Cervantes, while a prostitute, is described in positive light in terms of her beauty and profession, countering the normative cultural view that would typically shame a woman with such a dirty profession and censor women's sexuality (Márquez, 1981, p.47). Another woman who has an unconventional view of gender power relations is Clothilde. Upon hearing of the brothers' intentions to kill Nasar, she attempts to get them drunk to foil their plans. Clothilde believes only women are able to protect men from themselves, stating "I realised just how alone we women are in the world! (Márquez, 1981, p.38)" Still, she is unable to prevent the brothers from carrying out the murder. It is clear that women in the novella have the choice to accept the strict social codes that govern gender relations and sexuality in Colombian culture or to entirely reject them, and García Márquez purposefully sets up this contrast.

A major motif in Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981) is fate. The novella is filled with "chance events that made absurdity possible (Márquez, 1981, p.97)," which appear to result from the social determinism associated with the patriarchal system. The entire community is complicit in the murder of Santiago Nasar in failing to warn him of the assassination plot, for the most part due to their blind conformity to the system. The town is described as an open wound by the narrator as the system itself is hurting its people (Márquez, 1981, p.88). While each individual was partially responsible for his death, the blame is placed on something more ethereal and uncontrollable such as fate. Santiago's mother had powers of divination, interpreting Santiago's dreams as good omens and "never forgave herself for having mixed up the magnificent augury of trees with the unlucky one of birds… (Márquez, 1981, p.99)" Her failure to sufficiently warn him that he is in danger is just one example of the many oversights of the community. The investigating judge for example, tries to rationalise the coincidences pertaining to his death by mentioning the "fatal door (Márquez, 1981, p.118)." Referencing the title, the narrator repeatedly states that there had never been a death more foretold in that the assassins announced the place, motive and precise details of their plot, and yet no one did anything because of their subconscious orthodoxy (Márquez, 1981, p.50).

Religious beliefs in Latin America also dominated life and informed many patriarchal customs. The concepts of the sanctity of marriage and purity are perhaps intimately linked to the Virgin Mary in Catholicism. Faith in God was the shared identity of the community, so these virtues were not only embedded in the patriarchal structure but assigned as sacred ideals. Accordingly, the murder is justified by Pedro Vicario and Father Amador, as they genuinely believe they are innocent "before God and men (Márquez, 1981, p.2)." Despite the irony of murder being a grave sin against God, preserving honour is considered more important to the community because the patriarchal worldview clouds their judgement.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981) is a unique tragedy, in that everyone in the community knew what would happen to Santiago except Santiago himself; he is an innocent victim however everyone involved is absolved of their hand in the crime as they are really only serving the oppressive structure to which they were born. Men were subconsciously arrested by machismo

values and women were oppressed by subjective standards of purity and honour. García Márquez critiques the deterministic gender relations in the novella, making a profound statement that the death of one innocent man is the collective responsibility and guilt of a town so engrossed in their patriarchal culture.