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Tradition Versus Modernity in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

The women in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez each represent different common stereotypes of female figures in media- the temptress, the matriarch, the virgin, etc.- but the depth of each of their personalities adds new meaning to these common tropes. The best examples of Márquez's expansion of typical archetypes are the characters Úrsula Iguarán and Pilar Ternera, two diametrically opposed women. Úrsula is meant to be the virtuous matriarch who stands in direct contrast to the wild temptress Pilar. Throughout his novel, Márquez consistently challenges and expands the archetypal boxes in which these characters were originally placed. Through these characters, Márquez makes a nuanced commentary on the importance of accepting modernity.

Márquez expands the idea of the matriarchal archetype with the character Úrsula. Úrsula doesn't just lead her family but comes to represent the concepts of family and tradition in the novel. Her health and feelings are directly linked to the wellness of those concepts within Macondo. She is the lone character in the novel who tries to keep traditional ways intact as the town rapidly approaches modernity. During her children's upbringings, she is in constant conflict with her husband, José Arcadio, because she doesn't want him to "try to put your gypsy ideas into the heads of the children" (Márquez 6). He is obsessed with modern inventions brought by the gypsies. To Úrsula, these new inventions represent modernity. For Úrsula, maintaining tradition is synchronous to maintaining morality. Therefore, in her eyes, if she were to allow modernity into her home she would be letting go of not only her traditions but also her morals. She is so driven to maintain morality within her family because she herself sinned when she committed incest with José Arcadio. She believes that her actions have inflicted a curse on the family, physically represented by the pigtail. She admonishes family members when they make morally questionable decisions, stating, "It's the same as if you'd been born with the tail of a pig" (Márquez 169). The pig's tail is representative of that person becoming wild and animalistic, entirely without morality from that point on. Úrsula believes that because of her decisions her offspring already possess a predetermined tilt towards immorality. In her words, "Children inherit their parents' madness" (Márquez 40). If she can't stave off that inclination through her parenting then her family will have no hope of maintaining any kind of morality, a fate that would be partially due to her sins. Úrsula is not only the matriarch of the Buendía family but also their moral compass, pointing them towards tradition and away from modernity.

Pilar Ternera has the opposite characterization as Úrsula. Pilar is meant to be the stereotypical temptress, the vixen who lures Úrsula's moral sons into sinning. She is a sex worker, she never marries and has several children out of wedlock, and she allows others to participate in sex work in her house. Pilar is the embodiment of the themes of sexuality and chaos within the novel. She is described as having an "explosive laugh" which "frightened off the doves" (Márquez 28). Even her physical characteristics are described as disorderly and uncontained. While Úrsula tries desperately to keep her family in line, Pilar lives her life according to fate and what the cards tell her. In most literature, Pilar would have been

painted as the villainous temptress and that would have been the end of her characterization. However, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Márquez transforms Pilar into a morally ambiguous character and gives her a vital role in Macondo's community. Similar to Úrsula, Pilar becomes a leader in Macondo. But while Úrsula tries to guide the community backward towards traditional morality, Pilar lets them embrace their inner wildness. For example, she even guards the entrance to a zoological brothel in her old age. Their opposing lifestyles, as well as Pilar's unmarried impregnation by her son, lead Úrsula to hold a long-lasting hatred for Pilar. Unlike her archetype would lead you to believe, Pilar's sexuality doesn't make her automatically immoral. Márquez spins this stereotype on its head by making it so that she never mistreats anybody in the novel. Often, Pilar is the one being mistreated by members of the Buendía family. José Arcadio gets her pregnant and then abandons her, Aureliano is in love with Remedios when he sleeps with her, and Arcadio tells her that, "everybody knows that you're a whore." (Márquez 112) when she refuses to sleep with him. In return, Pilar gives the family love advice until her old age and pays Sofía de la Piedad and her family her life savings to avoid sleeping with her son. Although Pilar allows for chaos and the erotic in her life, she has clear moral boundaries. She lives her life based on kindness and moral rules (such as refraining from incest) that adhere to the modern world, unlike Úrsula. Through Pilar, Márquez makes the argument that being a part of a nuclear family doesn't make you virtuous just as not following tradition doesn't automatically make you immoral.

The deaths of these two women are very telling as to how Márquez views the trajectory of modernity. Both live to impossibly old ages, meant to represent the longevity of both the concepts of chaos and tradition. However, Pilar far outlives Úrsula, to the point where "she had given up the pernicious custom of keeping track of her age and she went on living in the static and marginal times of memories." (Márquez 395) During her old age, Pilar lives in a peaceful liminal space while Úrsula spends her last years being tormented by her descendants and continuing the strenuous act of hiding her blindness from everyone. Because Pilar accepts imperfection and uncertainty she ends her life in peace, while Úrsula continues to be taunted by her expectations of herself until she eventually becomes senile. Pilar outliving Úrsula is meant to suggest that even after family and tradition, represented by Úrsula, dies, human connection, represented by Pilar's zoological brothel, lives on. It is only when Pilar, symbolic of that last connection, dies, that "among the psalms and cheap whore jewelry, the ruins of the past would rot" (Márquez 399) and Macondo finally perishes for good. Pilar is buried sitting in a wicker rocking chair and put "into a huge hole dug in the center of the dance floor." (Márquez 399). The wicker chair is meant to represent the comforts that one experiences when they don't hold onto grand expectations of maintaining tradition. The dance floor represents the importance of allowing for fun and wildness. Through the lives and deaths of Úrsula and Pilar, Márquez explains to the reader that while tradition and family are important, human connection and freedom will outlast everything else.

Works Cited

Garcia Marquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa, Penguin Classics, 2000.