Reading Angela’s Scarlet Letters

One of the most common motifs in literature is the coming of age journey. It usually goes something like this: the young protagonist sets out on an adventure and, as time goes on, he or she encounters numerous obstacles and grows into a both morally and mentally mature adult. However, while Angela Vicario certainly does undergo drastic character change throughout *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Gabriel García Márquez does not make it just another generic coming of age story. Angela’s character development is unique because the motivation behind much of her thoughts, feelings, and actions are shrouded by layers of external factors.. From her submissiveness to her mother, to her inexplicable infatuation with Bayardo San Roman, to her own maturity, Angela’s character is influenced by a world of machismo, gender roles, and blatant sexism. What’s more, Márquez creates a coming of age character who is greatly influenced by the elusive concept of love. As a teenage girl still finding her way through the world around her, Angela Vicario’s underlying quest to discover and understand love is what makes her development further shrouds her character within additional layers of complexity. It’s also what makes her progression from a compliant daughter, to a crazed outcast, to finally, her own independent woman, one that is especially original than the generic coming of age story. .

Angela Vicario starts out as an obedient girl. Her mother, Pura Vicario, teaches Angela to be subservient while preparing her for marriage. After learning that Bayardo San Roman, a wealthy, handsome, and powerful man, is planning on courting Angela, Pura decides that “a family dignified by modest means had no right to disdain that prize of destiny” (34). Angela, however, hates the idea of marrying someone she barely knows but ultimately complies with her mother’s wishes. The question here is why, exactly, does she comply? Angela’s submissiveness to her mother maymake sense since she lives in a world where machismo and the caste system heavily influences society. However, Angela admits that she “detested conceited men” (29) like Bayardo, and as readers delve deeper into the text, they realize that Angela’s priority isn’t to follow societal expectations of machismo and caste, but rather,to please her mother. Márquez’s development of Angela is unique because he incorporates Angela’s search for not just romantic love, but maternal love. . Like any child, Angela strives for praise from her parents, most notably from her mother. However, instead of offering Angela love, Pura beats fear into her. In this hostile family environment, Angela “had a helpless air and a poverty of spirit… she seemed more destitute in the window of her house… making cloth flowers and singing songs about single women” (32). Yes, Angela could have been influenced somewhat by machismo and wealth, but her compliance to Pura is mostly expected because Angela will do anything if it means her mother will be pleased. As she strives for acceptance within her family and her mother’s eyes, Angela is ever the obedient and quiet daughter. The absence of maternal love and her hopefulness for that love are her biggest motivators. Therefore, when Pura dismisses Angela’s meek complaints with a cold “‘love can be learned’” (35), she simply obeys. Maybe Pura will love her for marrying Bayardo because of his machismo, wealth, and status; the things that are worthless to Angela, but priceless to Pura.

Bayardo soon discovers that Angela’s not a virgin, and the disgraced ex-bride becomes an outcast. He returns her back home and for the next ten years after the incident, Angela Vicario “spoke about her misfortune without any shame in order to cover up… the real one, that was burning her insides… that Bayardo San Roman had been in her life forever from the moment he brought her back home” (91). The most inexplicable aspect of Angela’s character during this time of her immense shame is her sudden obsession over Bayardo. If Bayardo’s exaggerated masculinity and his brash behavior repulses Angela, then how can she fall for him the minute he returns her home? Perhaps it’s the fact that humans always desire what they can’t have. Angela realizes that Bayardo was the ‘what could be’ and the ‘what could’ve been’ in her life. Because of that, after she sees him leave the hotel for good, “she was reborn. ‘I went crazy over him… Out of my mind’… Unable to get a moment’s rest, she wrote him the first letter” (92-93). Angela’s love letters to Bayardo exemplify her insanity. Her letters show how he is simultaneously both the bane of Angela’s existence and the great love of her life. Márquez uses these letters to develop her character from the submissive daughter to a rejected degenerate, not just casted out of society, but out of her family. Angela also begins to realize that her mother for had stolen her free will and had hindered her quest for love by forcing her to marry Bayardo in the first place. In fact, as Angela’s “life as a rejected wife continued on… When her mother went to bed she would stay in the room until dawn writing letters with no future” (93). Regardless of why she suddenly falls for Bayardo and writes the letters, what’s important here is ultimately the fact that Angela wrote them. She wasn’t forced to, but she chose to. She is starting to experiment with her newfound freedom, no matter how crazy and how shameful and she’s breaking out of her cage and transforming into her own woman.

Angela’s final transition from her passionate insanity into her firm independence is one that happens in the midst of an avalanche of feelings and emotions. During her last stage, she begins slip into insanity, writing impassioned letters to Bayardo. Márquez actually also uses the same letters as a segway into Angela’s gradual maturation. The narrator describes Angela as “so mature and witty that it was difficult to believe that she was the same person… She had nothing in common with the person who’d been obliged to marry without love at the age of twenty” (89). However, ow does she get to such a peaceful point in her life? As Márquez continues to write, readers discover that out of Angela’s insanity, a new woman is born, hardened and purified by the furnace of her past. As Angela’s letters grows more and more crazy, fueling her transformation into a “mistress of her own free will, and she became a virgin again just for [Bayardo], and she recognized no other authority than her own nor any other service than that of her obsession” (93). While Angela’s insanity is evident here, it’s important to note that she finally recognizes herself as a “mistress of her own free will” (93). Soon after that, Angela writes Bayardo “a feverish letter, twenty pages long, in which without shame she let out the bitter truths that she had carried… From then on she was no longer conscious of what she wrote nor to whom she was really writing” (94-95). This is the moment that Angela finally matured. She’s no longer writing to Bayardo, she’s writing to herself. She’s done chasing after the love of her mother, after the “learned” (35) love of her fiance. She’s now chasing after a love of herself: the independent, grown, free woman who stands in front of her. Angela writes Bayardo those love letters in an attempt to reach him, but instead she’s really looking for herself. The letters which began as a madness eventually brought Angela closure, finally helping complete her evolution into an independent woman.

Angela Vicario’s dynamic character throughout *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is one that is confusing at times. While her general change in character,is easy to spot, it’s difficult to analyze the external influences that ignited such change . However, despite the twists and turns that Márquez includes , Angela Vicario is arguably the most identifiable character in the novel, but how does that make sense? Angela is an enigma. From her compliance with her mother, to her inexplicable infatuation with Bayardo, to her sudden independence, Angela’s motivations seems temperamental and even random. However, that’s exactly why she’s such an accurate reflection of a real coming of age story. A linear, straightforward path of growing up is unrealistic. Humans are influenced by underlying factors like their emotions, similar to Angela’s quest for love. At the end of the novel, readers realize that Angela is just growing up and experiencing love, society, and life for the first time. Therefore, Angela’s turbulent character is exactly what makes her so uniquely understandable. She’s identifiable because so many watching her grow can’t truly relate to her pain, suffering, and innermost thoughts. And that is the ultimate tragedy of humanity, reflected by Angela Vicario and all her scarlet letters.

Works Cited

Márquez, Gabriel. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. 1982. Random House, Inc. New York

Rewrite Summary:

This rewrite was focused on word choice and logic. I think my main issue with my original essay was that I deviated from my thesis by adding in small tangents that blurred the logic. For instance, my incorporation of Angela’s quest for love and Marquez’s usage of “magical realism” was brief and unorganized. Therefore, I cut out some sentences and words that were confusing. I made changes in the entire essay, but the most important ones were in the introduction and the conclusion. I honed in on my main point and made my introduction a little more specific. I also fixed a few places throughout the essay where my tone was off. For word choice, a lot of the words I used were vague. It sounded like I was just using words just for the sake of using them, so in my rewrite, I tried to use words or phrases that were more detailed or further supported my main points. I also fixed my usage of the word “relatable” in my conclusion paragraph. I originally used it because I misunderstood the actual meaning. I had wanted to highlight how readers are able to identify with Angela’s character development, even if her development was confusing and inexplicable at times. Therefore, I used the word “identifiable” instead.