

The Irony of Love-Sickness and Symbolic Cholera

Posted on January 10, 2020

Introduction

Love in the Time of Cholera was written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez – a Columbian author. It was originally published in Spanish in the year 1985. Later, Alfred A. Knopf translated and published it in English in 1998. The novel was also adapted as an English film of the same title in 2007. The novel is unique and personally related to the life, experiences and family bonding that Marquez has experienced in his early life. The novel is inspired by the story of the mother and father of Marquez. The character of Florentino Ariza precisely depicts the life and personality of Marquez's father. Therefore, it can be said that the novel is a symbolic and literary reflection of the life, experiences and historical events that have shaped up the life and psychology of Marquez (Fiddian 2009).

Critical Reception

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was born on 6th March 1928. He was acclaimed as one of the finest, emotionally appealing Latin American writers. He grew up with his grandparents as his parents had surrendered him after his birth. Growing up in the Caribbean with his grandfather, he became accustomed to the times of war and battlefields (Bloom 2009). His grandfather was a retired colonel and a liberal veteran during the times of War of a Thousand Days. His stories of battlefields always inspired Marquez.

This is one of the main reasons that he often used these instances in his novels too (Bloom 2009). For example, in his novel “Love in The Time of Cholera” he compared strength for love to the courage of a soldier by stating that “She reminded him that the weak would never enter the kingdom of love, which is a harsh and ungenerous kingdom, and that women give themselves only to men of resolute spirit, who provide the security they need in order to face life” (2.34).

His novels are known for the vivacity of style, symbolic emotions and metaphorical irony that plainly separates them from the cynicism frequently used in the literature of his time, yet his characters' intense affectability to the progression of time obviously demonstrates the impact of one of the best American authors named William Faulkner. Marquez was specifically impressed by Faulkner's writing style (Bloom 2009).

The novel is concerned most by and large with love, time, and death, and it is impacted by the oral conventions of story-telling and also by the otherworldly authenticity that Marquez characterized in

One Hundred Years of Solitude (Buehrer 20). Love in the Time of Cholera is written not at all like any customary portrayal of love. However, it is not just in this aspect that it influenced the twentieth-century novels to take after. Its unconventional structure and its combination of a more European-style authenticity with its utilization of story-telling customs check a move in the opposite direction of the customary novel style; the novel likewise shuns any fixation on the everyday.

Therefore, it can be said that the novel is a literary amalgamation of both custom and of its own time (Morana 5). This is because it offers a conventional love story of two parted lovers who overcame deadly hurdles and challenges to be united. Secondly, the novel also narrates the criticalness of the historical Cholera outbreak that metaphorically addresses the subject of time and the related dread of death in a universe in which God's presence no longer appears to be guaranteed (Fiddian 2009). Precisely, the novel emphasizes the author's reaction to the thought that death is unpreventable and last. García Márquez utilizes a confined plot, the relationship, and symbolism to affirm that enthusiastic love can rise above time and death.

Other than love, death is also a primary and contrasting theme of the novel. It emphasizes the unavoidability of death. Even though the readers and critics often do not notice it, the purpose of Garcia was probably to explain how the uncertainty of death is comparable to the uncertainty of love. Also, eventually, love and death have to knot down as the relationship between Fermina and Florentino eventually dies once they are united. To signify the importance of death, Márquez starts the novel with the death of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, who had committed suicide. Secondly, Márquez narrated the death of Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Therefore, it can be observed that Marquez has interwoven the incidents involving death and the struggle for love to create a unique pattern and intense feeling for the readers.

Literary Structure of the Novel

The fundamental topics and themes in the novel are integrative and repeated, as if in a loop. The three protagonists battle with the indignity of maturing and the dread of death; cholera, choleric symptoms, and cholera scourges come all through the novel, and love is, obviously, the one thing that ties every last bit of it together. With these reiterations comes a more profound significance for each of the topics; for instance, Marquez clarifies that there is no meaning of love but rather numerous kinds, all complicated and all capricious (Morana 5). Additionally, while the deaths of each of the three protagonists are unavoidable, the finish of the novel complicates the meaning of death and surely clarifies that age and, in this manner, time don't put a conclusion to love.

All through the novel, consistent references to cholera remind the characters and the reader of death. Notwithstanding Urbino's endeavors to find a cure for cholera, the malady stays untreated. As Florentino is infected with cholera, it symbolizes and reverberates the traditions and social values that had become weakened.

The novel does not advance in a linear and direct manner. Instead, Márquez begins us off entirely close to the end of the lives of the protagonists. However, the remaining parts of the novel describe and evaluate the historical, personal, social and metaphorical background of the two lovers. The reader is left with the inclination and an intriguing feeling this is all being described from some inaccessible point later on by someone who continues getting diverted in front of himself or recollecting a vital piece that he forgot a couple of sections back (Palencia 55). The outcome is a style that is round, regularly tedious, and complex.

The storyteller's propensity to lose track of what is most important likewise regularly abandons us with a feeling of premonition, particularly because the vast majority of the things that the indications will occur later on include death and obliteration. He is continually sneaking little expressions in, as "until the day of his death" (3.56). Therefore, this clearly reminds us that the characters are mortal, as well as that he knows the correct conditions of how they will meet their end. On the off chance that we focus, he will disclose to all of us about it.

Personal Contextual Inspiration for the Novel

The history and experiences of their father and mother provide Marquez with a foundation for his story, which is still considered one of the most appreciated love stories (Fiddian 2009). The character of Florentino Ariza is inspired by Marquez's father Gabriel Eligio Gracia. Gracia was popularly known in his community as a philanderer who was accused of having four children out of wedlock. He had a bad reputation in his locality. However, he fell in love with Marquez's mother, Luisa Santiaga Marquez Iguaran. However, the father of Iguaran was not happy with this relationship because of the bad and tarnished reputation of Gracia. From the perspective of Fermina,

"He was not the kind of man she would have chosen. His foundling's eyeglasses, his clerical garb, his mysterious resources had awakened in her curiosity that was difficult to resist, but she had never imagined that curiosity was one of the many masks of love" (2.40).

Still, Gracia managed to woo Iguaran with his romance and violin compositions, love poems, letters, etc. This personal story of Garcia is similar to the characters of Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza. They both fell in love in the same way with the opposition of Lorenzo Daza.

The personal experiences of Marquez have also inspired certain aspects and characters of the novel. In other words, Marquez integrated his love story with the love story and experience of his parents to develop an even more intriguing, captivating and romantic love story (Booker 3). For example, the relationship aspect when Fermina Daza asked Florentino to wait till her graduation was inspired by the love interest of Marquez.

Also, the chapters where Florentino and Fermina were forced to be separated for fourteen years when only their promise of love kept them from being deviant and deterred from their love relationship were also inspired by the real-life events of Marquez and his future wife. The instance of love at first

sight for Fermina and Florentino was also similar to that of Marquez and his wife as he described it: "The lesson was not interrupted, but the girl raised her eyes to see who was passing by the window, and that casual glance was the beginning of a cataclysm of love that still had not ended half a century later" (2.5).

Critically evaluating the similarity between the protagonists of the novel and the parents and wife of Marquez is a reflection of the quality of social and personal relationships of Latin people.

Symbolism in "Cholera" and Love Sickness

When critically analyzing the title and the genre of the novel, an interesting irony can be identified, i.e., between the possible relatedness of cholera and the love story. There is a historical context behind this title (Fiddian 2009). First of all, it is the setting of the novel. The period in which the novel is set was when the Cholera had become an epidemic. It broke out and became a periodic threat to the survival of the majority of the population. It caused exodus and immigration. As Marquez commented, "It was the year they fell into devastating love. Neither one could do anything except think about the other, dream about the other, and wait for letters with the same impatience they felt when they answered them. Never in that delirious spring, or in the following year, did they have the opportunity to speak to each other" (2.45).

This was also one of the reasons for the separation between Fermina and Florentino. Fermina's family moved out to avoid the threats and risks of being contaminated with the contagious cholera epidemic. Cholera is also further symbolized as a social fear, threat, and risk. It is used as a cause of separation and social anxiety. In other words, it is also used as an anti-hero and villain of the love story. Therefore, the term cholera was used in a historic and symbolic manner (Fiddian 2009). Florentino, therefore, commented, "Symptoms of love are the same as those of cholera" (2.25).

In the novel, Marquez describes love as a strict torment, as he concludes the last section of the novel in which Florentino orders the Captain to report, dishonestly and falsely, that there is no less than one traveler on board the ship who has been contaminated with cholera. To some degree, this lie is valid and justified as Florentino has been infused and psychologically captured by a relentless energy for Fermina since the day she left him. Symbolically and metaphorically, his love-sickness has held on much as a deadly disease of cholera since Florentino is truly tormented by love (Columbus 90).

Florentino's love, passion, and intensity for Fermina are symbolically related to a devouring ailment like cholera, which completely depletes the victim (Palencia 55). Florentino is love-sickened, and practically every activity he makes goes to conveying him nearer to Fermina (Palencia 55).

Furthermore, the yellow cholera flag that is raised on the ship by the end of the novel is also symbolic. This is because Fermina and Florentino are at last together. Florentino lets go of himself for Fermina and her love. Therefore, it can be said that the flag is a symbol of letting something else take over you, whether it is love or illness, energetically or unwillingly.

Therefore, it is evident that he is suffering from lovesickness, having the similar ill effects of cholera that are consuming both his physical and emotional capabilities. Eventually, when the Captain proclaims that there is cholera on board and raises the yellow flag to report the flare-up, his activity is symbolic of Florentino's complete surrender to his sickness for Fermina and her love.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be stated that the novel is a romance genre in which lovers meet, are then brutally separated, and several years later, they fall with one another, re-lighting the fire that destiny stole away from them. At this stage, they both are consumed by the intoxicating effect of love. Here, love is symbolically described as a sickness and a contagious disease that consumes life, just like Cholera. The lie of love that Florentino has felt is nothing less than the rotting ailment that is wrecking his physical and mental stability.

When Florentino visits Fermina, he observes the wrecked condition of her life and her house as he describes it as being "half in ruins" and "weeds in the flowerpots and a stone fountain with no water" (54). This was possibly the symbolic description of a sickened woman who was contagious enough to infect Florentino as well. Flowers all through whatever remains of the novel take the impression of the love between Florentino and Fermina, yet to miss the setting of the initial meeting of the two lovers is to misjudge the sum of the novel (Jones 1169).

The love story is as fake and deceptive as the "weeds." It was worthless and of no greater value that develops on the developed ground by the fountain by and by represents the vacancy of their love. Furthermore, the aroma of almonds is the fragrance "of the fate of unrequited love" (2), the aroma that is related to Jeremiah de Saint Amour's death, and the aroma of Fermina Daza. Furthermore, the suicide of Saint-Amour also sets up the anticipation of his love and its consequences.

"They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life, beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion: beyond love. For they had lived together long enough to know that love always loved, anytime and anyplace, but it was more solid the closer it came to death". (6.221)

This quote clearly reflects that as the novel finishes, the love and intimacy of Florentino and Fermina become even more intense, complex and disturbing. By this stage, the love had struck Florentino in a similar way as Cholera, i.e., life-threatening, emotionally draining and physically exhausting (Hellie 245).

Florentino genuinely goes up against the sickness of love, just as she had contaminated him with the contagious and epidemic Cholera. The way that he benefits as much as possible from his suffering points out the reality of his affection for her, that he loves her, and that he is in love with the anguish made by the idea of loving her.

Marquez expels their deceptive, false love in the midst of the last pages of the book. He outlines a spurned nation on the stream where they float down. Furthermore, the monomaniac idealism drives him to take away everything in his life (336) stream, which is his relationship. In spite of the way that he conquers each one of the “wars” and “epidemics” (336), remembering the ultimate objective to accomplish her, there are still cadavers that float by, the bodies of deception and past lovers.

The inconceivability at first look shows up as the ideal way to deal with the end of a wistful novel. The wood that is required to fuel the ship has been depleted to none as a result of his bungling of the stream organization since his mind just understood the lie of her love. Over the long haul, the elderly couple ought to come to comprehend the difficulty of their love and ultimately realize that “It’s dead”(340), just as cholera would have done to them.

“when he began to wait for the answer to his first letter, his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit; he became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera... he has the weak pulse, the hoarse breathing, and the pale perspiration of a dying man. But his examination revealed that he has no fever, no pain anywhere and that his only concrete feeling was an urgent desire to die” (61-62).

Conclusively, it can be stated that the love story of Florentino and Fermina is much more than only an intense love story with tragedy and separation. Instead, it also symbolizes the historical clash of modernism and tradition as well as the turbulent definition of being in love. The primary theme, i.e., the turbulence of love, is ironically and symbolically related to cholera having deadly effects, such as this contagious disease that had wiped out a significant population at that time. Secondly, it is the clash of tradition and modernism, as their co-existence is almost impossible. And eventually, one has to give up. Florentino’s intoxication with Cholera symbolized traditional values being rotten and devalued, which eventually died, giving space to modernism, i.e., more deception and fake as the love of Fermina.

Work Cited

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Gabriel García Márquez*. Infobase Publishing, 2009.

Booker, M. Keith. “The Dangers of Gullible Reading: Narrative as Seduction in García Márquez’Love in the Time of Cholera.” *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 17.2 (1993): 3.

Buehrer, David. “A Second Chance on Earth”: The Postmodern and the Post-Apocalyptic in García Márquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32.1 (1990): 15-26.

Columbus, Claudette Kemper. “Faint echoes and faded reflections: love and justice in the time of cholera.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 38.1 (1992): 89-100.

Fiddian, Robin. “A prospective post-script: apropos of Love in the Times of Cholera.” *Gabriel García*

Márquez (2009).

Hellie, Benj. "Love in the time of cholera." *Does Perception Have Content* (2014): 241-261.

Jones, Ann Hudson. "Literature and medicine: Garcia Marquez'Love in the Time of Cholera." *The Lancet* 350.9085 (1997): 1169.

Márquez, Gabriel García. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Penguin UK, 2014.

Moraña, Mabel. "Modernity and Marginality in Love in the Time of Cholera." *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 14.1 (1990): 5.

Palencia-Roth, Michael. "Gabriel García Márquez: Labyrinths of Love and History." *World Literature Today* 65.1 (1991): 54-58.