

The beautiful agony in love in the time of cholera



An imminent era of lovesickness persuades the course of Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza's love affair; it is this pending ailment – as Gabriel Garcia Marquez' title *Love in the Time of Cholera* suggests – that fuels the lovers' final movement away from “ the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion,” (345) and “ straight to the heart of love” (345). Although the love between Fermina and Florentino is born out of a certain “ senseless” and youthful passion, it is a passion nonetheless perpetuated by the suffering of each; while Florentino wallows in “ a pool of fragrant vomit” (65) for his love, Fermina is “ dying of fatigue and loose bowels” (85). In light of the torment that this love's survival demands, years roll by in the favor of an affair that will one day be consummated, but only at a moment in time that is undeniably terminal, at an age where physical corrosion harmonizes with emotional strife, and when their self-inflicted passions become, finally, a compassion that cannot logically be disentangled from the slow dying that infiltrates each of their lives. Time, in the novel, passes as mercilessly as the two aging lovers are stubborn, for only when the hour is right – and in that sacred hour of sickness – will Fermina and Florentino finally escape together in their decrepitude.

Marquez presents an onslaught of emotional turmoil that is ostensibly incurable, extending for half a century; the reader's consolation is a final reunion between Florentino and Fermina that comes neither too late nor too soon – and yet alarmingly near what would seem to be their physical ends. Only when Fermina is in her seventies can she actualize her love for Florentino, confident that it is not frivolous, “ For... love was always love, anytime and anyplace, but it was more solid the closer it came to death”

(345). Age thus finds Florentino and Fermina “less like belated lovers” (345), but right on time, “like an old married couple wary of life” (345), such that the thread of suffering born originally out of their unsubstantiated fervor leads them to find each other beneath the physical and emotional ruins of the years gone by – years sustained by the turmoil of distance, a severed relation needed to provoke the affliction that constitutes their love. The proximity of death, an imminence of calamity in a time of cholera, a gradual suffering, and not an instantaneous fatality, defines the stuff of Fermina’s and Florentino’s love when they are twenty and when they are eighty. The author of *Love in the Time of Cholera* dares to suggest that this affair, albeit consummated late, will not end by the strong hand of death or by any other force of time as we understand it; as the reader knows that Florentino has “never said anything [he] did not mean” (348), much less when “illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit” (348), he speaks: They will keep “coming and going” (348), along a river that teems with dead bodies ravaged by the violence of life; Fermina and Florentino wave the flag of cholera and set out to keep on “forever” (348) in that peaceful limbo between life and death, together wary of “the horror of real life” (348) and immersed in the ever-present prospect of a long and tortuous end.

Marquez’ two lovers come together in the midst of a wasteland, a river of extinction. As the mother of Florentino foreshadows early on that “women give themselves only to men of resolute spirit” (65), it is, in fact, the fundamental passage of time (and thus, civilization’s advances in technology) that allow Florentino to end feverishness and express his thoughts in a typewritten letter for the one woman who demands the

exactitude of such an instrument. And only as the remnants of an elapsed era could these lovers unite – they are the “ poor old couple” (334), waiting impatiently, fearing, to be “ beaten to death in the boat” (334). In a final clear-sighted moment on the water, Florentino and Fermina find their everlasting grace; the lovers persist from where they began in their youth – undertaking, as they always have, a sacramental practice in anguish. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they will delight in eternal crucifixion.