

Love in the time of cholera by gabriel garcía márquez: comprehensive analysis

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Gabriel García Márquez has written many novels, short stories, and scripts, but he is most famous for his novels: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Many of his early works convey the reality of life in Colombia and are undoubtedly influenced by Márquez's life. *Love in the Time of Cholera* is a prime example.

Gabriel García Márquez was born on March 6, 1927. For the first eight years of his life, Márquez lived with his maternal grandparents (Fishman). During his early years, his grandmother told him stories of local myths and legends (Fulton). She told these tales with naturalness and nonchalance (Fishman). Although he was young upon hearing these stories, they have greatly influenced Márquez's writing style.

Love in the Time of Cholera reads like a nineteenth century novel in the narrative tradition. Unlike his other works, it follows a simple chronological order, except for a brief description of an event in the beginning of the novel. It intertwines reality and fantasy. This is called magical realism and was often used by Márquez in his works (Fulton). For example, in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Márquez writes:

“ This was also how he learned that four nautical leagues to the north of the Sotavento Archipelago, a Spanish galleon had been lying under water since the eighteenth century with its cargo of more than five hundred billion pesos in pure gold and precious stones. The story astounded him, but awakened in him an overwhelming desire to salvage the sunken treasure so that Fermina Daza could bathe in showers of gold” (64).

In this passage, Márquez describes an old myth of a sunken Spanish galleon that Florentino Ariza wants to salvage. Florentino pictures a fantasy of Fermina Daza with the treasures.

Although Márquez is considered a master of magical realism, this concept evolved from his experiences of reading different works of literature (Rahman). During an interview for *The Paris Review* by Peter H. Stone, Márquez recounts a night when his roommate in college lent him a book of short stories by Franz Kafka:

“ I went back to the pension where I was staying and began to read *The Metamorphosis*. The first line almost knocked me off my bed. I was so surprised. The first line reads, ‘ As Gregor Samsa awoke that morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect...’ When I read the line I thought to myself that I didn’t know anybody was allowed to write like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago.”

When Márquez was a college student at the University of Bogotá, Kafka’s works influenced him greatly. A monumental discovery had been made; he realized his passion to become a writer. In addition, it was through Kafka’s works that Márquez drew upon the concept of magical realism (Rahman).

Gabriel Gacía Márquez was born in Aracataca, Columbia. As a retired colonel, his grandfather instilled in him a history of the area, especially the Columbian civil wars (Fulton). Colonel Nicolás Ricardo Márquez Mejía was a

veteran of the War of a Thousand Days which was a civil war fought within the newly formed republic of Columbia (Masters).

After his grandfather passed, Márquez studied at the National University of Columbia (Fulton). In 1948, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who was a liberal populist candidate for the Columbian presidency, was assassinated (Fishman). This was marked by the conflict between the conservatives and the liberals and eventually started a decade a civil bloodshed (Swanson). After this, Márquez moved back to the coast in Cartagena where he wrote *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Fishman).

Love in the Time of Cholera is set between the late 1870s and early 1930s- the time in which Columbia transitions from the colonial to modern era. The setting is modeled after Cartagena, Columbia and is in a state of decay (Fulton). This state of decay is caused by civil unrest and a fight for independence from Spain (Masters). Dr. Urbino, an aristocrat in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, notes of the horrifying conditions of the city:

“ For the city, his city, stood unchanging on the edge of time: the same burning dry city of his nocturnal terrors and the solitary pleasure of puberty, where flowers rusted and salt corroded, where nothing happened for four centuries except a slow aging among withered laurels and putrefying swamps. In winter sudden devastating downpours flooded the latrines and turned the streets into sickening bogs” (Márquez 16).

Márquez claims to be a socialist and believes in a socialist revolution since it would be the best course for Latin America. He also believes that the region

not have other methods or ways of life imposed on it, but be left alone to evolve by itself (Estorino). This is shown through the character of Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Dr. Urbino is constantly trying to modernize the technology in his city by using Paris as his standard (“ Love in the Time of Cholera: Essay Questions”). Márquez writes: “ They spent their lives claiming their proud origins, the historic merits of the city, the value of the relics, its heroism, its beauty, but they were blind to the decay of the years. Dr. Juvenal Urbino, on the other hand, loved it enough to see it with the eyes of truth” (111).

When Dr. Urbino comes back to his city from studying at a medical school in Paris, he is shocked at the state of the city and begins his modernization. Dr. Urbino ultimately fails his dream of modernization. This goes along with Márquez’s view of leaving Latin America alone without any outside systems alone to evolve (“ Love in the Time of Cholera: Essay Questions”)

In addition to having many political connections to the story, Márquez’s life at the time of his study in Bogotá also influenced his connection to Florentino Ariza in Love in the Time of Cholera (Márquez 1988). In the story, Florentino Ariza took many trips by boat and became familiar with river navigation: “ Florentino Ariza was named manager and President of the Board of Directors and General Manager of the company (River Company of the Caribbean)” (Márquez 268). Similarly, Márquez traveled by boat from Baranquilla to La Dorada and then back to Bogotá. He also began becoming familiar with boats at the age of twelve (Márquez 1988).

Márquez recounts his experiences between his first and last boat trips saying, “ I saw the decay in the river that appears in the book” (Márquez 1988). Towards the end of the novel, Márquez describes the horrific image of the river:

“ The river became muddy and narrow, and instead of the tangle of colossal trees that had astonished Florentino Ariza on his first voyage, there were calcinated flatlands stripped of entire forests that had been devoured by the boilers of the riverboats and the debris of god-forsaken villages whose streets remained flooded even in the cruelest droughts...For there were no more wars or epidemics, but the swollen bodies still floated by” (336)

Márquez paints a picture of “ how the river changed from a fresh and thriving stream and fell into decadence” (Márquez 1988).

In addition, Márquez relates his personal experience to the plot line of *Love in the Time of Cholera* by following the events of his parents’ life. Márquez’s parents were Luisa Santiago Márquez and Gabriel Eligo García (Masters). Luisa Santiago Márquez was the daughter of Tranquilina Iguaran and Colonel Márquez (Estorino). When Márquez’s parents fell desperately in love, Colonel Márquez immediately tried to dissuade the couple. Eligo García was not the man he had envisioned for his daughter, for he had a reputation for being a womanizer and already had four illegitimate children (Masters). Although his love for Luisa Santiago Márquez was met with much resentment, Eligo García pursued her with violin serenades, love poems, countless letters, and

telegraph messages (“ Gabriel García Márquez”). The couple finally married (Masters).

Similarly, In Love in the Time of Cholera, Florentino Ariza fell madly in love with Fermina Daza when “ his innocence came to an end” (Márquez 54). After confessing his love to her through a letter, Fermina Daza accepts and soon writes love letters back to him (Márquez 68). Márquez describes their undying love through serenades, letters, and telegraph messages sent back to each other. For example, Márquez writes: “ One night, without any warning, Fermina Daza awoke with a start: a solo violin was serenading her, playing the same waltz over and over again” (70). When Lorenzo Daza, the father of Fermina Daza, discovers of their relationship he visits Florentino Ariza delivering a harsh message: ““ Don’t force me to shoot you,’ he (Lorenzo Daza) said... ‘ Shoot me,’ he (Florentino Ariza) said, with his hand on his chest. ‘ There is no greater glory than to die for love’” (Márquez 82). Throughout the book, Márquez draws many parallels to his parents’ life as a young couple.

In conclusion, Gabriel García Márquez draws many connections from his personal life into his works of literature, especially Love in the Time of Cholera. By focusing on what he knows best, Márquez painted a vivid picture of the reality of the Columbian people.