CHAPTER III

The Chimera of Love

The theme of love is like a predominant string running through all Marquez's novels but the treatment he accords to this theme, differs from novel to novel. In some books, the themes of power and solitude are predominant and the theme of love recedes in the background while in some books it is love that is the predominant motif. Although all major works of Marquez deal with the theme of love in some way or the other but in *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *Of Love and Other Demons* he adds a new dimensions to the meaning of love. Marquez's perception of love is very different from that of any other author and the two novels mentioned above are in themselves very varied from each other. *Love in the Time of Cholera* was the first novel to be published after the Nobel Prize award for literature was given to Marquez. The book in substance and style is not as fantastical or as mythologizing as his other works.

*Love in the Time of Cholera* deals with an erotic passion between septuagenarians, while *Of Love and Other Demons* is about an adolescent love with political overtones. In both the books love is pure and passionate. In the first book it is
consummated after a wait of a lifetime and in the second book love is platonic and like the Petrachan sonnets that the lovers recite, it is unconsummated and a bookish affair.

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, García Márquez’s focus on solitude as depicted in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is set-aside for an exploration of the depths and limits of passion and the intricacies of the human heart. Love that is only suggested in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is here given profound importance. Writing about *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Paul Bailey says.

> Love in all its varied manifestations is celebrated and lamented in this eventful novel: platonic love; loveless love; the love that suddenly grows between two people who have lived together without it; maniacal love, and that love which—as the title indicates—is like a sickness unto death.

This chapter examines how love, power and solitude are dealt at various levels in the novel, inexorably intertwined with the characters and narration. The novel’s protagonist grows from young to old age physically; their minds keep reverting to a particular experience in there past and remain fixated on it.
Love in the Time of Cholera begins like Marquez’s earlier books and is written in the form of typical romance, a love triangle between Dr. Juvenal Urbino, Fermina Daza and the lover Florentino Ariza. It is a postponed love affair which lasts for more than half a century and it is after all this time that Florentino Ariza, the lover confesses his love. He loves Fermina in his youth, watches her from a distance, worships her, sees her getting married and then again courts her after her husband’s death. In fact, he confesses his love to his beloved Fermina on the first day of her widowhood. The novel then retraces the story of their love and separation. Florentino courts Fermina in her youth, her father is against the love affair and takes her away, they carry on a monumental correspondence through paper and their love is kept ablaze by the love letters. It is only when Fermina returns from her trip that she realizes that she does not love Florentino, she spurns him and marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino, the well to do doctor. Florentino remains faithful to Fermina and has undying love for her. He follows Fermina’s married life and in parallel to it is his own life, full of numerous liaisons and alliances, indulging in myriad affairs with a wide variety of women, loving without any depth of feeling, having only casual affairs with them for in his heart Florentino only loves Fermina. Ferminas husband Dr. Urbino dies in an accident at the age of eighty-two and then Florentino decides to woo Fermina again,
she opposes but finally relents and their love is consummated in the end on a boat. They hide their love from the world by proclaiming that there is cholera on board. Fermina and Florentino remain isolated from the coarser elements of life by allowing their love to be disguised as cholera. This in short is the broad framework of the story.

Florentino’s appearance, his actions and beliefs are in stark contrast to any other lover of the nineteenth century. The protagonist at the time of the fulfillment of his love has defective eyesight, is prone to constipation, is bald as well as aging. He has become a pathetic character with time that females regard as a solitary person in need of love and affection.

As the title of the novel suggests love blossoms amidst widespread decay, destruction and death. It is strange that love should flourish so profusely during a period when people are dying of cholera but the protagonists fall victim to a disease that is considered to be more dreaded than cholera - love. The symptoms are more extreme than that of a cholera patient. In the beginning others think that Florentino and Fermina are afflicted by cholera, but it turns out to be love. The cholera epidemic is a recurring trouble and just as the disease frequently attacks the population of the town, in the same manner Florentino repeatedly shows symptoms similar to that of cholera everytime
he is overwhelmed by the memory of Fermina. Ironically it is the ‘love’ – ‘madness’ that lasts a lifetime. He nurtures this ‘love’ in his solitude of fifty years, nine months and four days. Time tested, this love survives against all odds and emerges victorious. This enduring love forms the crux of the novel. Love gives him the power to transcend time. We see a love that is fixated and intense, the fascination is compelling and compulsive and is described as the deadly disease cholera. Love becomes destructive, self-consumptive, and a disease as the novel progress and is akin to cholera because as soon as Florentino falls in love, “his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit, he become disoriented and suffered from fainting spell’s and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera.” The symptoms of love are the same as that of cholera; physically the characters suffer from fever, dizziness, cramps and heartburn. Dr. Urbino when he met Fermina Daza for the first time thought of her as a young woman who had contacted cholera when actually she had not. Symbolically, the young woman had succumbed to cholera a little while ago because she had met Florentino a few days prior to her meeting Dr. Urbino so the symptoms were manifest in her.
Love in Marquez's novels is outside rational control, and is disorderly. In *Love in the Time of Cholera* where structures of organization are dissolved by love, it leads to unproductive desire. In the novel there are various loves. There is first the 'pure' love as considered by Florentino, the love between him and Fermina that for more than their entire life is unconsummated and there are the other loves like the consummating, sexual love between varying individuals. Love is also equated with death and in this book love and death or love and sickness is synonymous. Every time there is mention of love; there is the shadow of death lurking behind.

Marquez said in an interview.

*What interests me most in the novel is the analysis it conducts of love at all ages.*

Florentino is haunted by the idea that death would steal Fermina from him or he would die before Fermina and that is why the stress and importance on physical agility and his health. He is “shaken by a thunderbolt of panic that death, that son of a bitch, would win an irreparable victory in his fierce war of love.” The love between Fermina and Dr Urbino ends when Dr. Juvenal is killed while trying to recapture his parrot. Dr. Juvenal Urbino has only one affair throughout his married life. The woman who
attracts him is Barbara Lynch and the result of their affair is that
Fermina leaves him and goes away for two years. Thus the love
results in marital disharmony and though love does not end in
death it ends in disaster.

The friend and family photographer of the Urbino family,
Jeremiah de Saint-Amour also dies of love “It was inevitable the
scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of
unrequited love.” Love of various types unrequited, requited,
possessive, clinging, aloof keeps on occurring in the ‘past’ and
the ‘present’ of the novel. The beloved of Jeremiah de Saint-
Amour also “lived with a devotion and submissive tenderness
that bore too close a resemblance to love” All love is
materialistic, imaginary, self-deceptive and self absorbed. The
love between Olimpia Zulete and Florentino ends in her murder
when her jealous husband comes to know of Olimpia’s infidelity.
The widow Nazaret also makes love to Florentino after her
husband’s death.

The death of America Vicuna hits us hard because here
was a young girl, all but fourteen years of age, come to study
under the guardianship of Florentino. Florentino however leads
her “by the hand, with the gentle astuteness of a kind
grandfather towards his secret slaughter house”. Florentino
initiates her in matters of sex, makes her fall in love with him
and then after showing her the promises of love, Florentino withdraws from her. When America comes to know that Florentino has left her for Fermina, a woman of seventy-two years, she is shocked and humiliated and as a result she kills herself. The news of her death reaches Florentino and Fermina on their 'honeymoon' and in a way it just foreshadows their own death. They are two people with "the smell of human fermentation"8, when they consummate their love under the shadow of death after more than half a century. The very fact that they are quarantined on the ship shows that love, like cholera is a disease that can end only in quarantine, alienation and death.

Love is a cataclysm, martyrdom, an instance of madness, a pain in the heart, a rebirth, a fever, a disease, an attack of cholera9.

Florentino is lovesick throughout the book; he never forgets Fermina and always believes that his love will be reciprocated. Fermina for him is a goddess and all the other women are whores. Fermina's presence in Florentino's life is a necessity for him. Physically he wait in parks for ages just to get a glimpse of Fermina, he shadows her, follows her and keeps track of her. Emotionally, she is always in his imagination. Florentino's fantasies are all around Fermina. When he sees her
reflection in the mirror, he purchases the mirror so that the mirror that held her reflection could be his. She haunts him and without her, he feels incomplete. Thus the book is a compelling exploration of the depth and limits of passionate obsessive love, a man's lifelong effort to possess his love. The book is not just a crepuscular love affair. It also has humor, wit, compassion and understanding of human behavior which is reflected in the understanding of the three main protagonists, Florentino, Fermina and Dr. Juvenal Urbino.

Florentino is told by his mother to take advantage of his sickness “while you are young, and suffer all you can, because these things don’t last your whole life”¹⁰ but how wrong she could be! Florentino is lovesick all his life and yet is an impertinent and bizarre womanizer. Fidelity in the book means being unable to forget or replace his first love and in this Florentino owes fidelity to Fermina, though he himself has made a list of six hundred and twenty-two affairs yet we believe his statement to Fermina of “eternal fidelity and everlasting love”¹¹.

Florentino is a self made man born in poverty. He rises to be the president of the River Company that he joined through the rank. He rises to social prominence to woo Fermina, “Love is the only thing that interests me”¹² he says to his uncle, then the president of the company. His uncle advises him that the trouble
is “that without river navigation there is no love”\textsuperscript{13}. Florentino becomes a successful businessman and continues to love Fermina. “He loved from one century to the next without a sigh of disenchantment”\textsuperscript{14}. Florentino is taught by his mistress that “nothing one does in bed is immoral if it helps to perpetuate love”\textsuperscript{15}. Florentino thus plays around like a rooster but his heart and soul belongs to only Fermina Daza. He learns to wait and he does with patience and passion. In the meantime he looks after himself, his health, his physical appearance till the appropriate time.

Fermina also lives a double life - she loves both the men, sometimes she loves Florentino and sometimes she doesn’t, while in her marriage to Dr. Urbino she is sometimes happy and sometimes marriage is for her sterile captivity and nothing more than servitude and yet she feels that “they are happiest in old age, when together they had overcome the daily incomprehension, the instantaneous hatred, the reciprocal nastiness and fabulous flashes of glory in the conjugal conspiracy”\textsuperscript{16}. Dr. Juvenal Urbino, the husband of Fermina is a doctor who dedicates himself to his patients and helps to eradicate the periodic outbreaks of cholera epidemic.

S.M.J. Minta says
Love in the Time of Cholera is a vast celebration of all that Urbino is not: it is a novel in praise of spontaneity, sexual; passion, disorder and vitality, a triumph of the uncertain, sprawling confusion of life over the comforting dull precision of authority, a victory of the indigenous over the imported, old age over death, the popular over the learned.

But Dr. Urbino is relatively a good husband and except for one or two major fights and his one extramarital affair they lead a self-satisfied contended life.

Bathos, ridicule, irony, satire all are used by Marquez in Love in the Time of Cholera and the novel also registers the principal social developments which shape the life of the community during the period concerned, and surveys the political history of Colombia since the country achieved independence in 1819. The precise enumeration of years, months and days is a typical Marquezian trademark and through this we realize the solitude of a person in love. In this novel we are made aware of the intermingling of love and solitude by the detailed descriptions of events taking place in the lives of the protagonists. The protagonist meet after certain intervals and
their perception of physical change in one another enables them
and through them it reaches the reader who realizes the passage
of time in a moment of epiphany.

Cholera is a metaphor for a diseased society, for social
irresponsibility and for relationships that are akin to 'love'.
Marquez in an interview prior to the publication of Love in the
Time of Cholera said his book would deal with “old age, love
and death”\(^{18}\). The monumental correspondence that is carried on
between Fermina and Florentino is responsible for reawakening
love in Fermina. Florentinos letters are “a mediation on life,
love, old age, death: ideas that had often fluttered around her
head like nocturnal birds but dissolved into a trickle of feathers
when she tried to catch hold of them”\(^{19}\). The book focuses on
Marquez’s most enduring theme – love and explores various
manifestations of love and themes related to age, death and
decay. Love and life are allowed to transcend and triumph over
time and death, however transient the victory might be. The
captain of the ship in which Florentino and Fermina are traveling
looks at Florentino, “his invincible power, his intrepid love, and
he was over whelmed by the suspicion that it is life more than
death that has no limits”\(^{20}\).

Love in the Time of Cholera thus
Is a wonderful study of love in its different guises and disguises – love of self and other adolescent and middle-age love, elderly love, romantic love married love, normal and pathological love.21

The protagonists transport themselves into the happy moment of their past and this gives them the power to go on. It seems that Florentino experiences a kind of ‘love daze’ that has him fixated on Fermina. He refuses to take cognizance of the fact that both are subject to laws of temporality and change. Fermina too realizes through solitude of her love or rather the lack of love that “instead of the commotion of love, she felt an abyss of disenchantment”22. Solitude not only of the heart but also the solitude of that new place makes it possible for Fermina to realize that love has flown and she rejects Florentino.

In moments of mental dissatisfaction with her marriage, Fermina is confronted by a strange solitude that leaves her empty and desolate. This state of depression drives her to her past “The house left by her father gave Fermina Daza a refuge from the asphyxiation of the family palace”23. In a typical scene remarkable of Marquez’s skill we see even the solitude of the landscape reaching out to Fermina as she floated over the Colombian landscape with her husband in a hot air balloon.
Marquez’s skill lies in the empathy of nature with the individual where even the natural solitude seems one with life. In solitude we also see the remarkable example of synesthesia -the sound of thunder which Fermina associates in her mind with Florentino. It revives memories in her heart “It was the incurable wound of solitary, stony, punctual thunder that would sound every afternoon in October at three o’ clock in the Sierra Villanueva, a memory that was becoming more vivid as the years went by”.

As she advances in her years she is all the more induced to take refuge in her memories, in her solitude. In Fermina there is an inward turning of mind. Her trouble lies in fighting the ghost of Florentino’s love. When she had refused Florentino, she had no idea that the memory of love would prove to be so potent. After the death of her husband, she finds herself powerless to stop the resurgence of her memories. Love is so strong and enduring that the memories of love are beyond the control of time and place. It cannot be induced by forceful recollection nor can it be driven away once it occurs. Florentino also has a similar experience. The present Fermina acts as a catalyst to bring back a host of memories to Florentino, this is probably the reason why he cannot forget her. By remembering her as she was during his love affairs, he waits in anticipation for the day when he will be united with her.
The lovers are destined to enjoy the voyage, their honeymoon as they board the “New Fidelity,” the name itself is symbolic of the lovers vow to each other. On the way back to Cartagena, they decide to fly the quarantine flag so as to keep away passengers or cargo and be alone, but the authorities in Cartagena do not let the ship dock. It is a journey without an end, as the boat cannot land because of the cholera flag. They float safe and free under the duplicitous yellow flag of cholera as they ply up and down the river. “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.”

They wait in the estuary till Florentino answers ‘Forever’ to the captain’s questions as to how long they could continue their journey. It is Florentio’s quest of a lifetime to gain his woman’s love and in Florentino’s assent to the eternity of the sailing riverboat, it is an endeavor on his part to bring ordinary time to a stop. Privacy is further sustained in this idyllic honeymoon by hosting the quarantine flag and claiming there is cholera aboard. They have insured that they will remain isolated, their love has gone beyond love itself, they have willingly secluded themselves from everyone by allowing their love to be disguised as cholera.
The novel celebrates, the vitality possible in old age, love over despair, health over sickness, life over death. It is a positive and optimistic attitude where love continues long after the bodies are weak and passions have died. "Her shoulder were wrinkled, her breasts sagged, her ribs were covered by a flabby skin as pale and cold as a frog," and yet Fermina enjoys a kind of ecstasy she has never known before.

Marquez in an interview with Marlise Simon has commented on *Love in the Time of Cholera*:

In some ways, all my books are about love. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there is one love story after another. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a terrible drama of love. I think there is love everywhere. This time love is more ardent, because two loves join and go on.

Thus *Love in the Time of Cholera* is about zest for life and loving, and is an affirmation of hope, life, love and health. The love affair between Florentino and Fermina is a circle that starts when they are adolescents and is fulfilled after more than half a century later. From the time when Fermina marries the
most eligible bachelor and rejects Florentino because she feels she is more in love with the idea of love rather than actually being in love with Florentino. He is then condemned to solitude and we the reader are not given a hint of the outcome of the affair, whether Florentino and Fermina will reconcile or continue in their affair or separate paths to the end when the reader finds out the fate of the two lovers.

The lovers once more enact the same ritual of courtship all over again because that is the only way known to them. Florentino insists on the propriety and dignity of love in old age, a belief shared by Fermina's daughter-in-law who counters the puritanical intolerance of Ofelia, Fermina's daughter who says "Love is ridiculous at our age but at theirs it is revolting." They are united in the end amidst decadence and destruction. The wheel of time unites them against all odds - Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza at seventy-six and seventy-two belong to a present. They evoke the memory of their adolescent love and see the image of themselves as the grandchildren that they never had. Time and love are suspended forever in that very instant.

Elizabeth A Beverly says:

Florentino learns that longing can never be satisfied, but it can be shared.
Fermina learns what longing really is. They are able to learn at all because of their patience. And of course, it is the virtue of patience and that suffering of patience that allows us to recognize and accept love, time and even cholera.\textsuperscript{32}

The final consummation of love leaves us with the upsurge of hope; the rekindling of love in our heart though we know it may not last very long. The two lovers travel down the Magdalena River, which is full of the image of rubbish, filth and squalor, oblivious to the banalities of life. The book is indeed a triumph in the face of hopeless odds Roberto Gonzalez Echeverria says

\textit{It is not a great book but one of the few optimistic ones to have come in many years.}\textsuperscript{33}

His next novel \textit{Of Love and Other Demons} is unfortunately not such an optimistic book. While \textit{Love in the Time of Cholera} is about love in old age, this book is about a young girl, aged twelve called Sierva Maria de Todos Los Angeles and the love the young priest Father Cayetano Delaura has for her.

Marquez says,
I have never felt so uncertain about any of my books as I do about this novel.\textsuperscript{34}

The story takes place in Cartageno, Colombia in the eighteenth century Sierva Maria is the only child of Marquis de Casalduero and his wife. The husband is a lazy man full of sloth and spends his time in the hammock. The wife is a cocaine addict and a neurotic person. The black servants bring up little Sierva and ignored by both her parents she speaks the servant’s language and is familiar with their rites and rituals rather than with Catholicism.

One day Sierva is bitten by a rabid dog and her family believes that she has contacted rabies but rumors fly that she is bewitched and then begins her sufferings. Though she shows no symptoms yet her father becomes greatly concerned and takes her to all the quacks doctors who cannot provide any definite remedy and drive her to the brink of madness. The Bishop is also consulted and he suggests that she is possessed by the devil and should be sent to the dreaded and dreadful convent of Santa Clara where her future is destined to be doomed.

The child who was so far ignored now becomes the focus of her parent’s attention and her behavior seems strange and irrational to them. Sierva Maria is neither strange nor a witch,
nor has she shown any sign of being infected by rabies or by
demons. She is simply punished for being different. Having
stayed with slaves she speaks the African dialects, wears their
Santeria necklaces and paints her face black. Her way of life is
different from other people as she has been living with the
servants. In the convent of Santa Clara when she rebels against
the nun’s authoritarian regime, her rebellion is interpreted as
evidence that evil spirits have inhabited her soul.

The Bishop sends his prize pupil, Father Cayetano Delaura
to exorcise the devil. Father Delaura is fascinated by the twelve-
year-old girl and falls in love with her. The emotion is so strange
for him and the passion so new and unknown to him that he
punishes himself by working with lepers, flagellates himself to
get rid of Sierva Maria’s image but all he can do is exclaim,
“It’s the demon father; the most terrible one of all.”35 He does
realize that Sierva Maria is not demonic and her strange ways
have only come to be noticed because it is thought that she has
contacted rabies. She is not evil but simply terrified. He tells the
Bishop, “I don’t believe the child is possessed. I believe she is
only terrified.”36 The Bishop however is adamant in his belief
and cannot bring himself to accept Father Delaura’s statement.
He thinks that the girl is possessed and is determined to find the
Sierva Maria accepts Father Delaura’s declarations of love and they are for a while indifferent to the Bishop and the Convent. They revel in their newfound love and exchange proof of love. “They never tired of talking about the sorrows of love. They exhausted themselves in kisses, they wept burning tears as they declaimed lovers verses, they sang into each other’s ear, they writhed in quicksand’s of desire to the very limit of their strength: spent but virgin.”

The lovers think of marriage and of freedom of being husband and wife but we know that it can never be so. Father Delaura woos her by reciting Petrachan sonnets, which the two lovers adapt to suit themselves, but we know that Petrachan love is always unconsummated. In fact their love though pure and passionate is rather bookish. The priest is firm in his belief that she is terrified after being “interred alive” among the superstitious nuns but even he can do nothing to save her from the determined clutches of the church. “You feel emerged and defeated and so do I because I cannot help you” he said “but God will reward us on the day of ressurrection”. In fact once the new viceroy comes and shows keen interest in the case we know the fate of the lovers and their plan to escape will be doomed.
Father Delaura tries to save Sierva but to no avail, he is disgusted by the Church. Abrenuncio tries to dissuade him that "love was an emotion contra natura that condemned two strangers to a base and unhealthy dependence, and the more intense it was, the more ephemeral. But Cayetano did not hear him. He was obsessed with fleeing as far as possible from the oppression of the Christian world." 40

Sierva Maria is the one who is however a victim, first of her parents negligence and later of the church and then of love. Father Delaura arouses feelings in her which will prove for her as damaging as any disease or demon. The lovers’ fate is sealed when the bishop who signifies religion and the viceroy who signifies political authority interfere and impose their will. The book is thus also about cultural clash and religious passion. Like some other novels of Marquez, Of Love and Other Demons deals primarily with the theme of love but the political implication inherent in the novel is never far behind from his mind. Rabies and Demons become intricate metaphors for the Spanish possession of the New World. The title is thus ironic as its about the decaying Spanish control in a Latin American Colony. The European Americans around Sierva say she is not of this world, and the only reason she is punished is because all pretend to be blind to reality. The Church as well as society is to be blamed.
Where are the demons? And where do they exist? In Sierva Maria the demon is never found despite the various methods of exorcism. In Father Delaura, love is considered to be the biggest demon. In Abrenuncio, the demon exists in his thirst for more knowledge and thus he cannot understand. Father Delaura's statement, "I am dying of love for her" and attributes these to extremes of lunacy. Then the demon can only be said to lie with the church

If the church, an institution grounded in miracle and mystery, cannot find a way of tolerating what it does not immediately understand, how is society as a whole to cope with that distinctness which is the only mark of a living humanity? If Christianity, its central tenet's of love and forgiveness, is unable to distinguish world and flesh from devil, how is life to continue except in hypocrisy?

The gruesome end shows how blind society, church and politics is to situations depicted in the novel. Rabies the dreaded disease seems to be an indication of disease of body and soul and the church and the politics, the Bishop and the Viceroy are rabid and not Sierva Maria.
Marquez has thus given us a tale written in succinct, condensed and crystallized prose. A tale of love, that is an attack on society, religion and culture simultaneously.
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