

## **Celebrating or Mourning Patriarchal Love: The Case of Curious Courtships in Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera***

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### **Introduction**

The present study investigates if the traditional concept of love presented in Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* has to be celebrated as Freud justifies or mourned as rebutted by Freidan from the gender perspective and highlighted in the close reading of the text. The Freudian perspective on the structured sexuality and normalization of debased love can help the readers understand why the patriarchal version of love has been normalized in the text which may be questioned in view of the structured violence it has rendered on the debased women, and Friedan's challenges to Freud's theory of femininity based on his study of sexual repression in women. Florentino's sexual life has been a curious case of courtships with numerous women who have remained shadowy in the contemporary scholarship. The research essay foregrounds the relegated women in the Marquez's narrativized attempt to glorify Fermina-Florentino's affair.

### **Review of Literature**

Generally, there are numerous sociological and feminist researches that investigate historically the theory of attraction, affiliation, attachment and union between a woman and a man. The feminist scholar Beauvoir (1956) talks about the initiation of a girl into heterosexual life and observes that the first copulation as an erotic experience is associated with male's "pleasure" but "violence" for a girl to qualify for womanhood (p. 367). The sociologist Bernard (1973) quotes the US health statistics and reports that married women are mentally and emotionally more unstable and challenged than married men and single women (pp. 27-28). The psychoanalyst Symonds (1974) writes how a woman surrenders her desire to be independent and self-sufficient once she is married and experiences "*constriction of the self*" (p. 288). Millet (1977) reads how the emotional bondage compromises

female status and makes a woman economically dependent (p. 37). Foucault (1978) critiques the “repressive hypothesis” that in my study has regulated and disciplined the women for their “desire” to the extent that no one is allowed to talk of sex and one should observe “muteness,” “silence,” and “censorship” (p. 17) and transformed sexuality into discourse (p. 20). Firestone (1979) criticizes the notion of love as pathological “cultural tool” that bars women from “knowing their conditions” (p. 139) and a woman is doomed in such a relationship because uneven love is a “holocaust” and “real love” is not possible in an “unequal power context” (p. 127) and, to add to it, the “women are not creating culture because they are preoccupied with love” (p. 121). The patriarchal concept of love makes women sacrificial, evasive and compromising to their rights, identities and selves. Smith (1990) analyses how teen romances construct a plot that makes love transformative for a weak woman to secured and mature woman. Romantic fiction has been interpreted as a patriarchal enterprise that has legitimized women’s “oppression” and exploitation (Jackson, 1993, pp. 204-5). Averill (1985) associates the construction of romantic love with modern western culture. Other scholars (Hatfield and Rapson, 1987; Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Mellen, 1981; Rizely, 1980) find biological reasons for the attachment. *The Song of Solomon* has been interpreted as human sexual love in addition to the traditional religious interpretations (Murphy, 1989). Freud (1930) holds that in love “the boundary between the ego and object” diminishes and the partners declare contrary to the reason that “ ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one” (p. 66). Kaplan (1977) claims that eroticism is associated with love, care and intimacy. The desire may lead one into wayward relationship with strangers, prostitutes, cruel and indifferent persons and even with those who hate one (p.7).

With specific reference to Marquez’s novel, *Love in the time of cholera*, the critics and reviewers have generally explored love in the context of biological instincts and sentimental desires while acknowledging the elements of patriarchal eroticism and burning passion of adolescent love decaying into sickness. The world for the characters of *Love in the time of cholera* is too much “oppressive” (Pelayo, 2001, p. 156). Love in the novel is governed by the biological and social laws (p. 155). The novel explores the “existential anguish” of solitude (p. 136). The element of patriarchal humanism in the text makes it attractive for the “egalitarian and radical feminists alike” (Bloom, 2007, p. 177). Marquez’s writing is an instance of “all-consuming love” ranging from the beginning of love to its fulfillment (Swanson, 2010, p. 126). Love in the sentimental narrative has been sometimes presented as “sickness” (González, 2010, p. 68). Florentino has been found in opportunistic, shameful and scandalous sexual liaisons (Martin, 2012, p. 98). Robinson (2013) draws a parallel between the symptoms of love and cholera and finds them “akin” (p. 76). Though the above cited critics have more or less eulogized Florentino-

Femina love story and escapade at the expense of female erotica and hypersexuality yet failed to respond effectively to the suffering women relegated into the shadow of the narrative.

### **The debased sexual bodies in patriarchal love**

The narrative of the novel under study has transferred the focus on women from Florentino and visualizes them as loci of desire and passion, and exonerates the protagonist by minimalizing his role merely of an entertainer and a facilitator who reconciles with the hypersexualized female body. Still he claims that he is a “virgin” for Fermina (p. 339) despite having recorded “some twenty-five notebooks, with six hundred twenty-two entries of long-term liaisons, apart from the countless fleeting adventures that did not even deserve a charitable note” (p. 152) before his beloved Fermina Daza got freed after the death of her husband from her “sacramental sentence” that is marriage with Dr. Urbino (p. 152). His extraordinary desire for Fermina Daza can be understood in the light of Freud’s (1977) argument that the intensiveness of sensuality correlates with the degree of “psychical valuation of the object” (p. 250). Florentino has realized his passion for numerous women, and it does not fulfill his desire for Fermina since he could not lay hands on the “original object” and has only the substitutes (p. 258). However, his inaccessibility to Fermina’s body because of her “sacramental sentence” intensifies his psychical valuation for her. Freidan (1974) criticizes Freud whose ideas misinterpreted women and “trapped” them in age old prejudices (p. 95). She exposes Freud’s contradictory position of men and women. His concept of superego is liberatory only for men as patriarchal “shoulds,” “chains women to an old image, prohibits choice and growth, and denies them individual identity” (p. 96).

The study finds problem with hypersexuality and aberrational sexual life of the protagonist Florentino and other men that may be viewed as free love by an unnamed beloved, extramarital affair, initiation into sexual life by rape by a mysterious woman, first bedroom love by Widow Nazaret supervised and arranged by Florentino’s mother, Transito Ariza, love with free birds, love with widows like Ausencia Santander and Olimpia Zuleta and rapes of minors like América Vicuña and Leona Cassiani. The desire is the “difference” between “the demand of love” and “appetite of satisfaction” (Lacan, 1977, p. 287) and absolute desire knows no law (p. 311). Freud (1977) tries to justify and appropriate extramarital relations, Florentino’s and Dr. Urbino’s in the present study, on the excuse that a man cannot realize his full sexual potency with his partner out of restrictive “respect” for his

wife and can only find full expression to his desire in his engagement with “a debased sexual object.” The prostitutes in the novel are presented as debased and inferior sexual objects who cannot replace the desire for “higher kind,” Fermina Daza in the novel (p. 254). Here women are divided along the lines of “higher” kind reserved for love and respect and “debased” for the complete sexual satisfaction. Freidan (1974) objects to women’s identity as “sex creatures” who are shown to complain against their unsatiated sexual hunger (p. 24). Freidan finds Freud’s personality to be paradoxical since he himself practiced “violent passions of love and hate” in his personal life with his fiancée Martha (p. 103). He wants her to be a “docile” enough to be a “comrade at arms” (p. 103).

The novel opens with Jeremiah’s unrequited love (p.3) with an unnamed beloved. One kind of relationship exemplified in Jeremiah’s case is a secretive cryptic affair based on devotion and submissive love (p.13). Dr. Urbino meets Jeremiah’s partner after his death and shares with the readers that it is a story of two free human beings who did not care for the narrow-minded society and preferred to embrace the “hazards of illicit love” (p.14). Jeremiah and his unnamed beloved is an episode of bonding between two “free adults” engaged in “illicit love” that is the product of devotion and care. The narrator’s critique of Jeremiah’s love story is that it is an example of “unrequited love” (p.3) in the sense that the lovers, though constant, did not consummate their love into the structured marriage bond. His name Jeremiah de Saint Amour, Jeremiah of holy love is suggestive. The “holy” love in his case has been with an unnamed keep. Both were honest and cherished their relationship as he explains that only God knows his love for her and she reflects his wish to “remember me with a rose” (p.16). Dr. Urbino as representative of normative society deconstructs this “holy” alliance and finds it an abomination of love. He has also revised the idea of marriage and a normative widow. He describes her as “a river idol” with “serpent’s eyes” (p.15). The unnamed beloved has challenged the idea of widowhood and traditional marriage by refusing to symbolically bury herself (p. 16). Since their affair violates the institution of marriage, she is not bound to live like a widow. Still “the rose behind her ear” and her “black dress” reveal that she highly values her lover and the relationship. The associated images of “river idol,” and “serpent’s eyes” and her undauntedness challenge Dr. Urbino’s expectations as an internal audience who does not find her weeping and talking about living locked. She fails to understand why Dr. Urbino thinks keeping and having “a woman in secret” an “abomination.” For her, even being an accomplice in a willful suicide is out of love (p.32). However, Dr. Urbino tries to moralize love by expecting from the woman that she should not have helped Jeremiah in committing the egoistic suicide while living at the fringes of society. Jeremiah’s love episode reconciles with the Cartesian duality between body and mind and engages the partners into a love relationship that joins their body and mind, and

psyche and sensuality (Belsey, 1994, p. 11). It is in marked contrast with Florentino-Fermina Daza affair where the lover has sensual pleasure with various women yet his mind and psyche yearns for union with Fermina.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino would reflect on the acrimony that developed in their matrimonial life out of his wife's habit of smelling dirty laundry (p. 236). She is reported to have searched her lost three-year-old son like a "tracking mastiff" in an armoire by sniffing "the smell of caca" arousing form the body (p. 236). Fermina breaks open the secret of her husband's liaison with the twenty seven years old woman, Miss Barbara Lynch, Doctor of Theology and a beautiful divorced mulatto, who, quite paradoxically, denies the Doctor to take her clothes off while allows him to touch her erogenous parts and satisfy his desire during routine medical checkup. Fermina Daza sniffs the "disturbing sensation" in his nothing and body (p. 237). The narrator gives a description of her "endless" beauty and details the features of her astonishing thighs, skin, breasts, and gums (p. 242). The narrator zooms in, uses hyperbolic images, makes the pictorial sight exotic and invokes out of proportion visuals. Dr. Urbino's examination of her "twisted colons," is highly seductive as he felt her visceral organs to amuse himself with the beauty inside (p. 243). His "ethical violations" of her body under the garb of a doctor are justified by his argument that doctors are not made out of wood (p. 243). From Freudian perspective, it is sexual "perversion" (Freud, 1953, p. 150).

"The woman who cleaned the rooms" of the lovers' vomits, excrements, condoms and other leftovers in the hotel is pictured in an attempt to seduce Florentino Ariza in the narrative. The cleaning woman is shown as an active agent in seduction who caresses his body and unbuttons his trousers. She presumable introduces him to heterosexual bonding. However, he makes allowance for feeling "warm and tender" touches but is finally shown resistant to physical engagement by showing the will to "move his body out of the way," that may have arisen out of the fear of initiation into sexual life. The woman has deconstructed the traditional concept of prostitution by attaching with not "going to bed for money but going to bed with a stranger." She also defamiliarizes marriage, personal and commercial love as her children were born of "different" fathers chosen by her freewill (p. 77).

Transito Ariza, Florentino's mother, is another important figure who acts as a *deus ex machina*, accomplice and guide to her son, 'green' in the matters of love. She is quite experienced in the matters of patriarchal love. She acts as a mentor who guides her son as to how to successfully entice Fermina Daza. Her suggested steps to win a girl include firstly, revelation of interest; secondly, winning over the chaperon, and withholding outbursts of emotions by not delivering the frightening "lyrical sheaf of papers" with inscribed emotional

outburst (p. 57). In comparison with Transit Ariza, Aunt Escolástica acts as a chaperon to her niece and looks through Florentino Ariza's love sickness. She is quite seasoned and also forewarns about the capricious nature of man and suggests that shifting commitments is the safest way to engage in a forbidden love—a love that has not sought father's approval yet—is to be communicated in sign language. Florentino's frequent presence, firstly, a simple diversion changes into a preoccupation and fixation as now "her blood frothed with the need to see him" (p. 58). Fermina refuses to accept Florentino Ariza's letter on the grounds that she needs "father's permission" (p. 60) while later on she accepts but refuses the camellia that symbolizes "flower of promises" (p. 61). From Freudian perspective, she becomes a "higher" object of sexuality since she submits to the patriarchal Law and binds herself to what Lacan (1977) interprets as the signifier of Father (p. 199). The narrator equates the anguish in love with choleric symptoms and Florentino's mother diagnoses choleric symptoms in him (p. 61). Love and cholera both have been used interchangeably in this text. Aunt Escolástica and Transit Ariza are the two chaperons who initiate the two adults, Florentino and Fermina Daza into the normative sexual life.

Rosalba, the mysterious woman who keeps her child in a bird cage, takes Florentino's virginity away forcibly. She is shown as hawkish in thrusting him into a cabin. He could not know her nakedness in the darkness and can only feel her hot body soaked and hear her heavy breathing. She stripped him naked and claimed his virginity without "glory" (p. 142). Unlike the mythical rape stories like "Leda and the Swan," the role of the rapist has inverted and shifted to a female from the male. The rapist is hawkish. Her unrecognizable naked body has been draped by the darkness with the wordiness of sensuality as the images of "soaked," unbuckled belt, unbuttoned trousers and horseback riding suggest. However, there are not any emotional and physical hazards shown by the raped as associated with distressed raped and the followed trauma.

Florentino Ariza's first bedroom love was assisted and planned out by his mother. Transit Ariza sends the "the celebrated" and homeless Widow Nazaretto share her son's room and bed to live in. She believes that Nazaret's love can heal the love scars of her son. Nazaret speaks of her "inconsolable grief for the husband" and throws all her clothes on the floor. She learned to be an active partner in love during the matrimonial devotion with "no help from anyone" (p. 149). When "no help" reveals that her husband was not used to foreplay and it was passive in the engagement between the partners. Her out of marriage love with Ariza ends with her mourning for her dead husband and commencement of a new life in which she shared her body men of her choice without charging. She believes that it is she who takes men not they, and it makes her the "only free woman in the province" (p.

150). She refuses to “find fulfillment only in sexual passivity” (Friedan, 1971, p. 37). In Ariza’s case, she defamiliarizes the role of a woman as submissive sex partner. She prostitutes men of her choice and out of her free will instead. By denying money from men, she introduces a new concept of sexual freedom. Florentino Ariza teaches her that trying different sex positions is exciting and convinces her to leave the missionary position and try “the bicycle on the sea, or the chicken on the grill, or the drawn and-quartered angel” (p. 151). She always adored him for making her a “whore” (p. 151). Widow Nazaret has given new dimensions of virginity that are congenital, matrimonial and widowed. In congenital and widowed virginity, the woman is to stick to complete denial of love and sex while the matrimonial virginity is remaining true to the husband by only engaging with him. Florentino takes away her widowed virginity in his first bedtime love and make her a whore that for Nazaret is a woman tries to “perpetuate” moral love in her bed with variety of sex partners (p. 151).

After the theft event, Florentino relies on “birds” and “street love” (p. 174). He has evolved his theory of correlation between a woman’s desire and physique. He dislikes the sensual type who proves to be the most “passive” kind in bed. The neglected “skinny” birds are found very active and assertive (p. 175). He meets an escaped bird from the insane asylum who has recently decapitated a guard, dances with her at the carnival and finally is left alone when the guards and a nurse seize her. Florentino Ariza asks for her company and she warns him that she is “crazy” (p. 181). He gives the chocolates he brought for the girl to a child reflecting since his expected love has gone to “hell” (p. 182). He in his old age assaults one of the maids, leaves her in “a family way,” and promises to give her a “furnished house” in exchange if his name is not revealed (p. 316).

Florentino identifies that his determined role is “make a widow happy,” as the widows of his acquaintance like Widow Nazaret are not wailing or mourning women but “the world was full of happy widows” since they have reconciled themselves to live a life with “renewed vitality” (p. 202). However, his narrative reduces these women to living a life controlled and directed by their “body’s bidding” that liberates them from the “indecency of official love” (p. 203). He finds widows happy after the death of their husbands (p. 203). His liaison with the Widow Nazaret remained for almost thirty years on the principle “*Unfaithful but not disloyal*” (p. 269). The other widows include Prudencia Pitre, the Widow Arellano, Josefa, the Widow Zúñiga who was “ready to cut off his penis” to rule out the chance of infidelity (p. 270), and Ángeles Alfaro, a music instructor made him realize that it is possible to be in relationship with many partners without betraying any of them. He describes his heart as a place that has “more rooms than a warehouse” (p. 270). Andrea Varón is the only woman who uses her body for

earning by offering maximum pleasure to her clients (p. 271). Sara Noriega, a woman in the Divine Shepherdess Asylum, recites verses of “outrageous obscenity.” Finally, he finds the newly widowed Fermina Daza.

Rosendo de la Rosa, a riverboat captain, introduces Florentino Ariza to Ausencia Santander, a woman almost fifty years who receives the captain in the middle of the night (p. 176). She has been presented as a hypersexualized body who would only receive “undressed” since a clothed man invites bad luck (p. 177). During their sexual engagement, Florentino Ariza feels himself being used as an “instrument of pleasure” and “just anybody” (p. 178). One Sunday, she took off his glasses and kissed him that signaled that she had begun to love him. However, their love is cut short when they are watched over by a burglar who breaks in and takes away all the belongings of her house leaving a painted message on the wall: “*This is what you get for fucking around*” (p.179).

Olimpia Zuleta is given the image of a “wasp” for the visualized semblance in her physical features with her “high buttocks” and “meager bosom.” He found her “more witty than attractive” (p. 215). When her husband is noticed leaving for a voyage, he tries to trap the lady, a pigeons keeper. Both use a carrier pigeon as messenger who carries declaration of love, denials, *anonymous letters*, and the signed letters. The pigeon who keeps on telling that she is *not one of “those women”* (p.216) finally meets him in a cabin on a riverboat to have the “joyous love.” Florentino Ariza paints an arrow on the pubis and writes on her belly, “*This pussy is mine*” (p. 217). When her husband finds out that another man has claimed his territory, he slits her throat in a single slash of razor. Florentino is not in mourning over his lost fortune. Rather, he is afraid of scandalous talk that may expose his infidelity to Fermina Daza. Freud (1977) notes that extramarital affair for a woman is an alternative experience for a woman, “unfaithful to their husband, they are able to keep a second order of faith with their lover” (p. 255). However, in contrast with Dr. Urbino, Jeremiah and Florentino, second order of faith though a parallel recourse to sacramental love for a woman yet is prohibited and is met with death once it is known.

Florentino at the Festival is condoled for his mother’s death by Sara Noriega, a woman with “pearl” whiteness, and “immense soprano’s bosom”(p. 195). The narrator’s description of a woman is physical and sensual throughout the text since his protagonist’s view of a woman is highly sexualized. The narrator has given a standardized and idealized physical contours and features of a woman. The pink magnolia flower on her bosom symbolizes youth, joy, feminine sweetness and beauty (Bhaloo, 2012, p. 25), while in Noriega’s case the flower is artificial that exposes the shallowness and transitoriness of expected relation between the couple.



Florentino Ariza invites her with “his instincts of a nocturnal hunter” (p. 195) to a place. Their intense “wallowing” with “sweated bodies” infuriates the cat. The scene gives a comic relief to the “disastrous” love and deconstructs the sobriety and seriousness of lovemaking (p. 196). Sara had several lovers but no one was ready to marry her. She exemplifies those demented “abandoned brides” who passionately loved in youth, got betrothed but were left alone by the partner before marriage. Her worldview of man-woman relationship changed to the conviction that life is only livable with a partner in bed (p. 197). She devoted her “entire body” to please him (p. 198). She got “declamatory” in the expression of her passionate turbulent love to the extent of shouting that would make Florentino Ariza insert a ‘pacifier into her mouth” (p. 199). She theorized love as “everything they did naked” and categorized it into spiritual love “from the waist up” and physical love “from the waist down” (p. 199). She considers Fermina Daza a “whore” who has conspired against her winning the prize for her poem (p. 200). Noreiga’s concept of a whore is interventionist as she takes Fermina, a married woman with no economic aspirations from the partner, is the “lowest kind of whore” (p. 200). When she becomes “yesterday’s flower” due to aging, they stop seeing each other (p. 200).

América Vicuña, his blood relative and a child, was entrusted by her family to Florentino Ariza’s guardianship. He took her into confidence and through his “affection” drove her to his “secret slaughterhouse” to “burst (her) into flower” (p. 272).

Florentino meets Leona Cassiani, a beautiful black young woman, and mistakes her for a whore but the woman is looking for employment and not for sex. He feels ashamed at his mistake and gets her the lowest-level job at the River Company. Cassiani deconstructs the patriarchal megalomaniac ideology that maintains that a woman is for sex. The patriarchal lens is deterministic as Florentino takes Cassiani “black, young, pretty, but a whore beyond the shadow of a doubt” (p. 182). She rules out the possibility of liaison with Florentino and challenges his belief by revealing to him that she is a woman not looking for fornication but for job. The narrator seems to be the mouth piece of patriarchy as it in its third person narration uses patriarchal lens for description and nowhere challenges Florentino’s beliefs. It is only woman’s first person narration that contradicts/deconstructs Florentino’s, narrator’s as well as a reader’s ideology and representation. His experiences with ‘loose woman’ in transient hotel change his views of woman who “use sex as if it were a bandit’s knife” (p. 182). Cassiani expresses “a diabolical talent for handling secrets” as she can see through Florentino’s thought when he says “I do not do that,” and she reads his face and tells the audience that she belongs to that category of woman “who do not screw.” Cassiani’s physiognomic analysis proves true after

ten years of her initial interactions when he tries to dote on her and lovingly names her “lion lady of my soul.” It took him a whole decade to understand that one may befriend a woman without taking her to bed (p. 188). Florentino Ariza wants to have the black woman Leona Cassiani who is shown to long for her rapist since her girlhood when, “a strong, able man” got hold of her torn her clothes and made “frenetic love.” Her bruised body “wanted that man to stay forever” (p. 259). Finn (1985) also argues that male subjectivity makes itself superior and creates an inferior Other (p. 91). Rape has been appropriated by the male subjectivity as a form of love adorable for the victim. Florentino is quite relieved to know that she is not asking him for a life-long relationship.

### Conclusion

The love in the novel is a desire that is restricted to sensual and sexual aspect experiencing Cartesian duality, Freudian split between the higher and inferior kind of women to Freidan’s contention. The patriarchal concept of love that is purely sensual and asks for full gratification has been appropriated in the novel and normalized at the cost of debasement of women as an object of desire. However, certain concepts like “illicit love” in Jeremiah’s affair, “virginity” in Florentino’s case “prostitution,” in the cleaning woman’s life, “widowhood” and “whore” in case of Widow Nazaret, Ausencia Santander, Olimpia Zuleta and Jeremiah’s beloved and “rape,” in Cassiani’s life and child abuse in América Vicuña’s example have been problematized and defamiliarized in the narrative.

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## Summary

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The present study on the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* is a critique of idealized patriarchal concept of love divided into higher and debased love by Freud. Love in the novel is predominantly physical and sexual in nature that involves the politics of body and eroticism by creating what Freidan calls feminine mystique. Love, omnipotent in the novel, is choleric in nature showing multi-facets of structured sexuality ranging from extramarital violations to child abuse. The novel projects intensive display of genderism and patriarchal sexual fetishes that gratify whatever masculinity can possibly imagine. There is noticeable narrative indifference towards the women presented as weaklings fallible to commercialized sex, pretty fit in their gender role exhibiting internalized sexual oppression and violence. Florentino has been promoted as an indefatigable stud and celebrated macho with magically exaggerated virility and inexhaustible libido. He has deconstructed the concept of virginity where one may have many partners but still is a virgin as one could not conquer the desired womb. The multifarious sexual violations of women, celebrated as debased love in the text, is to be mourned in the world where textualization of amour is all about sexualisation and sensationalization of female bodies resulting into exclusion of authentic female images except the character of Leona Cassiani who resists patriarchal assumptions.

**Key words:** Love, Politics of body, Eroticism, Sexuality, Violence, Oppression