

Marquez and Magical Realism

To what extent does Marquez employ authorial reticence to justify Florentino's idealized love?

Love in the Time of Cholera, Gabriel Garcia Marquez

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***Love in the time of Cholera* Reflection: Marquez and Magical Realism**

Elements of surrealism permeate our everyday lives, but they seldom appear right in front of us. They are invisible: the millions of rods and cones in our eyes sending action potentials at the speed of light; the very energy that runs through our light bulbs; the way guitar strings produce melodic scores by simply vibrating, and finally, the way you can hear a voice of a relative on another continent just by dialing a phone. Forever vibrating and forever buzzing about untethered to any earthly thing, the magical current of surrealism is an undulating river of light that exists everywhere at once and lives in harmony with reality. That is why, whenever we discuss realism and realistic happenings, it is implied that the surreal is at play. For example, in their most surreal presentation, the group raised the question: when do elements of surrealism appear in our everyday lives? The brief discussion that followed, however, did not touch a core aspect of the question in that it did not discuss surrealism within the established constructs of a typical, mundane day. In that context, the omnipresence of surrealism would be emphasized more strongly by stating: the educational institution is surreal in and of itself. Every day, children of societies make the grand procession of going to school, sitting in a classroom full of people they might call “friends” and flexing their creative minds to learn about the real world. School is *not* the real world, however close it may come, and learning how to be a student is a much more surrealistic task than learning how to be a human being. In school, we *model* the real world in classroom English presentations, in school laboratory experiments, especially in the drama room, and literally in clubs such as Model UN or Debate. In school, there is no shortage of imaginative fuel for students to create their own idealized fantasies and innovate to reinvigorate their mundane lives. We create our own surrealism so that our lives may one day be brilliant and dazzling. This is the essence of magical

realism that Marquez was hoping to portray in his novel, and romantic heroes such as Florentino exemplify this greatly.

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In the aftermath of any revolution, culture, ideas, and traditions become lost outdated. From the Middle Ages to The Renaissance; from Monarchial France to the Republic; from Feudal to Modern Japan; what is buried in the past cannot be retrieved. What is truly tragic is the loss of traditional cultural practices, values, principles of living, and worldviews. Literature laments the loss of these sacred traditions and worldviews swept away by the tide of change and forced onto the shores of an unfamiliar island. For example, during the Latin American Boom, authors of the romantic genre like Gabriel Garcia Marquez lamented the transition from Romanticism to Modernism, where the age-old archetype of fantastical love was cast aside for its unrealistic depictions of handsome white knights riding glamorously to victory, fateful romances consummated by greater forces and happenstances of nature that always manage to create romantic settings. What was once considered the loveable ideal was then considered fictitious and contrived. Modern skepticism had rendered fairytales and fantasies phony and unrealistic, favoring instead the more economic and logical stance on love. This shift was most prevalent during the introductory stages of the Latin American boom, where depictions of existential pessimism, and more realistic characters lamenting their destinies dominated narratives. Today, the regimenting and equalizing forces of postmodern society have further destroyed the romantic ideal. What was once a pure and innocent love has been tainted by a bought and commissioned love, and the passionate pursuit of a romantic ideal has been replaced by another ideal: one that weighs economic gain over emotional fulfilment. However, in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Gabriel Garcia spitefully insists that there doesn't have to be a loss, instead, like Florentino, we should fight the change.

At the beginning of the novel, Florentino plays both the romantic connoisseur and the romantic fool. Like a hopeless romantic, he makes every effort to gain Fermina Daza's love, telling the late Urbino's son to reschedule the funeral for a more romantic setting, and playing the helpful man at Urbino's funeral all to confess his undying love for Fermina after over 50 years of stagnation: "Fermina I have waited for this opportunity for more than half a century, to repeat to you my vow of eternal fidelity and everlasting love" (Marquez, Page 50). As a result, the audience initially judges Florentino to be a desperate fool. However, as Marquez brings us 50 years into the past to a sentimental teenager who works a socially in-tune job, the audience begins to see the side of Florentino that is justified in his pursuit of Fermina. The first initiation of romance, when Florentino sends the telegraph to Lorenzo, the days of fawning over the love in his sights, and finally his working up the courage to send Fermina a letter which turns out to be 60 pages, all of these meaningful acts of love paint Florentino as the portrait of a redeemed romantic. Then, like with all tragic romances, the picture perfect portrait breaks into a thousand pieces. Despite being the romantic connoisseur, Florentino is rejected by Fermina Daza, who marries Urbino. Through this rejection, Marquez is hinting at the societal undercurrents that are corrosive to true love. Because of pressures from her family duties such as taking care of children and the overwhelming expectations of Lorenzo Daza, Fermina is forced to adopt a rational distaste for the portrait of ideal romance painted by Florentino. The catalysts for this emotional barrier she constructs are none other than the pressures of society itself, including gender roles of the Marianismo, the expectations of marital success, and least of all her father, who out of fatherly protection threatens to shoot Florentino, even sending his own daughter out of the country to take care of family duties. The only remaining ideal left for Fermina to pursue then is the rational ideal; in other words, the man with the most decorated career who is also financially capable, and has ample life experience.

In spite of this rejection, Marquez still manages to justify Florentino's worldview. His pure dedication in his romantic craft of writing, his self-restraint even when a hotel worker urges him on, and his everlasting passion as an idealist and an adventurer, paints him as the opposite of a hopeless romantic. When the audience realizes this, they begin to understand that Florentino is the only pure soul in this world who is true to the ideal he holds himself up to be.

Throughout the novel, Marquez continuously tries to preserve the romantic ideal in Florentino and justify his worldview. To achieve this, Marquez creates an altered reality, a marvelous reality in which elements of the miraculous could appear without seeming forced and unnatural. Within the slim boundaries of this reality, it becomes easier to accept the supernatural as mundane, and the magical as real. As a result, Marquez's morbid message: it is better not to be exposed to the corrosive truth and the crippling realities of political change, rings out true to the audience. It is better for the author to be reticent, in order to purposefully withhold information explaining the logic and reasoning behind the supernatural. The supernatural is not questionable, as the: "simple act of explaining the supernatural would eradicate its position of equality regarding a person's conventional view of reality" (Chanady, Page 24). With this, a technique known as authorial reticence, the supernatural is accepted as a part of everyday life by the characters in the story, the indifferent narrator and in effect the audience. The first instances of authorial reticence are notable at the beginning of the novel when the author sets up a non-linear narration, two plot progressions that recounts both the events leading up to Florentino's proposal to Fermina, and the events continuing from Urbino's death. Disoriented by the sheer simultaneity of the plot progressions, the audience anticipates that the obscurity in narrative structure means there are hidden mysteries that the author will reveal. The fact that so little of the story is predictable to begin with is due to the narrator withholding explanatory information which is evidence that the

narrator is indifferent, a force of pure plot progression that will withhold information continuously through this unique narrative structure in order to further the surreal atmosphere and setting of the novel where anything supernatural may occur without explanation. Moreover, as the story progresses, authorial reticence becomes more and more evident in each character's unusual or abnormal reactions to death, such as when Florentino completely neglects the morbid atmosphere at Urbino's funeral and rashly proposes to Fermina, or when Florentino nonchalantly dismisses his mother's death. All of this is pervaded by the Marquez's blurring of the boundary between the physical and the psychological, such as when Florentino falls sick due to Cholera, but eventually wills this into a mental love-sickness for Fermina. Contrary to its purpose in the novel, one result of Authorial Reticence is that Characters express a lack of clear opinions about the accuracy of events and the credibility of the world views, exemplified by the fantastical and almost delusional lens with which Florentino views his love for Fermina. However, with the brutal and militaristic methods Lorenzo employs to try and correct the character's worldviews, the novel still paints the romantic ideal in a heroic light such as when Florentino says: "Shoot me ... There is no greater glory than to die for love" (Marquez Page 82).

At the end of the story, Marquez manages to protect the romantic ideal, forever perpetuated by Florentino's dedication as a lover. This love is no longer innocent or perfect, but at least it is built on trust and passion between the now liberated Fermina and the hopeful Florentino. Reflecting on Florentino and Fermina's journey, they too suffered a great loss, lamented, but eventually mustered up the courage to withstand society's antagonizing blows. They held on to the tiny sliver of hope called true love and never let go, and their burning romantic passion which enkindled the small flame of rebellion within their souls was undeniably bright, brilliant, and beautiful.

References

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