

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

THE GENDER ROLE AND CULTURAL EXCEPTION IN LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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Samar Zehra, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Bhatti. The Gender Role And Cultural Exception In Love In The Time Of Cholera: A Feminist Analysis -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(2), 1513-1523. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Gender Role, Cultural Exception, Patriarchal Attitudes, Feminism,

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to examine gender role and cultural exceptions in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* by using feminism as key theoretical framework. The novel is a captivating exploration of love and human emotions in a South American society, delving into the theme of gender roles and cultural norms. The story of the novel revolves around the protagonist, Florentino Ariza, who embodies patriarchal attitudes as he relentlessly pursues Fermina Daza, disregarding her autonomy. However, Fermina challenges societal expectations and asserts her independence, representing feminine agency in the face of traditional constraints. The novel artfully intertwines cultural exceptions with gender dynamics, highlighting the influence of societal norms on the characters' choices and behaviors. Using qualitative research method, the research concludes that Marquez's literary masterpiece serves as a poignant commentary on the complexities of gender representation, offering a thought-provoking canvas to explore individual agency and the evolution of gender roles amidst changing times. Further, the research aims to contribute to feminist literary criticism and gender studies.

INTRODUCTION

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a celebrated Colombian author, was born in Colombia in 1927. Regarded as a pioneer of magical realism, his childhood was shaped by imaginative tales shared by his maternal grandmother, fostering a strong sense of imagination. As he embarked on a career in journalism both in Colombia and Europe, he gained a deep understanding of societal complexities, leading him to write about political and social issues prevalent in

his society. One of his most renowned works, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, exemplifies his masterful incorporation of magical realism, blending fantastical elements with reality to explore profound truths about human nature and society. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's impact as a writer extended beyond literary achievements. He was also an influential political activist, advocating for societal change and challenging prevailing norms. His profound storytelling resonated with readers worldwide, earning him the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature, a rare distinction for a select few. The novel, first published in 1985 and later translated into English in 1988, garnered international recognition, and its themes of enduring love and human attachment continue to inspire various art forms, including stage productions, films, and music.

The novel's classic romantic essence revolves around the intertwined lives of Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza, whose love spans several decades despite being unable to be together. Marquez crafts characters that are deeply developed and remarkably lifelike, employing surreal and magical elements to amplify themes of time, love, and social experiences. Central to this exploration is the character of Fermina Daza, depicted as a figure of ethereal beauty, seemingly possessed by mythical attractiveness that captivates those around her. Florentino Ariza, on the other hand, embodies an undying love that transcends time and reason, symbolized by the presence of yellow butterflies signifying love and heightened emotions.

The title of the novel reflects the backdrop of a cholera epidemic, symbolizing the magical quality that both threatens human lives and disrupts their existence. The cholera epidemic serves as a metaphor for the bitter realities and challenges people face in their lives. The novel deftly delves into the rigid class divisions present in society, as Florentino belongs to a middle-class family while Fermina hails from a more affluent background. These status differences significantly influence their love, with Fermina's father expressing disapproval of Florentino based on class distinctions, fearing a negative impact on their family reputation and societal standing. Arranged marriages and the consideration of economic factors play a complex role in love and relationships within this conservative society. Familial approval is sought before marriages, and the patriarchy heavily influences gender roles, with societal expectations demanding women to be submissive while men assert control. Cultural traditions dictate that lovers cannot marry unless they share the same social status, and religion, particularly from a Catholic perspective, imposes restrictions on the perception of love.

Throughout the narrative, the cultural backdrop of the Caribbean seaport between 1880 and 1930 provides a rich tapestry against which relationships flourish, face challenges, undergo transformations, and eventually find resolution. Marquez skillfully employs literary motifs and themes that express essential truths within the novel. The author's descriptive and richly prose style, coupled with the seamless blending of magical elements, makes the novel a timeless gem.

Research Questions

1. How does Marquez portray and challenge traditional gender roles in a South American society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries?
2. What are the key manifestations of feminine agency in the novel, and how do female characters like Fermina challenge patriarchal norms and assert their independence?
3. How does the cultural context of South America in the novel impact the representation of gender dynamics, and what role do cultural exceptions play in influencing the characters' behaviors and choices?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the portrayal of gender roles and their evolution in Marquez's novel with a focus on the dynamics between male and female characters and their societal expectations.
2. To analyze the representation of feminine agency and resistance to patriarchal norms in the novel, exploring how female characters like Fermina challenge traditional gender roles and assert their independence.
3. To investigate the impact of cultural exceptions on the characters' behaviors and choices in the context of the South American society depicted in the novel, elucidating how cultural norms shape gender dynamics and individual freedom, influencing the development of the storyline.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist theory, like other sociological theories, offers a conceptual framework for understanding societal realities by abstracting patterns of experience from individual lives. It critiques traditional gender roles that perpetuate conventional norms and constrain individuals based on perceived gender identity. Emphasizing inclusivity, feminist theory advocates for a more equitable society, recognizing the centrality of gender in shaping human experiences. Scholars continuously engage in scholarly discourse, refining and expanding these theories to comprehend the complexities surrounding gender roles and their implications on society. By challenging existing paradigms, feminist theory seeks to liberate individuals from gender constraints, promoting a more diverse and equitable future.

Eberhard (2017) in his research "Gendered representations through speech: The case of the *Harry Potter series*" sheds light on how gendered representations are conveyed through speech in the context of the Harry Potter series, highlighting the significance of such literary portrayals in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. This literature review examines the portrayal of gender in the Harry Potter novels, specifically focusing on the characters Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley as sidekicks. The study analyzes their direct speech throughout the series, using a wide-lens perspective to observe commonalities in verbs used for both characters. However, a more detailed investigation uncovers patterns of asymmetry that perpetuate broader cultural ideologies surrounding gender. These portrayals reinforce stereotypical views regarding perceived 'essential' differences

between females and males, potentially influencing the vast audience of readers consuming these fictional works.

Khalil, Khan, and Awan(2018) explore gender roles and identities in *The Golden Notebook* through a feminist lens. The research critically analyzes Doris Lessing's novel, delving into the portrayal of gender constructs and the characters' identities. Through a feminist perspective, the study examines how the novel addresses societal norms, power dynamics, and the representation of male and female characters. The authors provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of gender roles, shedding light on the broader implications for understanding gender dynamics and feminist themes within literary works. Lange (2008) in her research "Men and women writing women: The female perspective and feminism in US novels and African novels in French by male and female authors" investigates the belief that male and female authors may depict women differently due to their distinct life experiences. Critics argue that male authors might struggle to accurately portray the female perspective or feminist ideals as they haven't lived as women. While female authors often depict women's experiences, some male authors have also attempted the female perspective. Through a thorough analysis of primary texts and secondary sources, Lange seeks insights into the potential impact of an author's gender on the portrayal of women in literature.

In the study "Feminism in Abidah El Khalieqy's Novel *PerempuanBerkalungSorban*." conducted by Sipahutar (2018) aims to explore feminism portrayed within the novel and describe the different forms of feminism presented. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach based on Lambert's proposal (2009). The applied feminist theory aligns with Rose's perspective (2003), emphasizing the recognition of gender role differences between men and women, categorized into liberal feminism and radical feminism. The findings reveal that the novel depicts the struggles of the protagonist, Annisa, in attaining independence and asserting her rights as a woman. The feminism in *PerempuanBerkalungSorban* encompasses both liberal and radical feminist themes.

Sander (2002) in her article named "The Feminism of Dorothy West's "The Living Is Easy": A Critique of the Limitations of the Female Sphere through Performative Gender Roles" examines the feminism portrayed in novel, and critically analyzes how the novel critiques the limitations imposed on women within the female sphere through the lens of performative gender roles. Employing a qualitative approach, the study delves into the complexities of gender dynamics, societal expectations, and the challenges faced by women in the narrative. West's work vividly portrays the struggles of female characters in navigating restrictive roles and underscores the importance of challenging these constraints. By highlighting the performative nature of gender roles, the article sheds light on the significance of feminist perspectives in literature and broader societal contexts.

Jones (1997) investigates the link between literature and medicine in Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*", delving into how the novel intertwines themes of love and sickness in a 19th-century Caribbean setting.

Jones emphasizes Márquez's abilities in depicting the emotional challenges of the people in the midst of a cholera outbreak, utilising the backdrop of a medical catastrophe to illustrate the intricacies of human relationships. The article provides an enthralling viewpoint on how literature may reflect and illuminate medical and societal issues, transforming novel into a timeless literary jewel. Buehrer (1990) examines how García Márquez incorporates aspects of postmodernism and the post-apocalyptic into the novel's plot named *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Buehrer investigates how the author blurs the borders between the past and the present, producing a timeless mood reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic world. The piece goes into the protagonists' unique love story, relating it to the postmodern era's chaos and uncertainty. Buehrer gives a new perspective on the novel's thematic complexity and literary brilliance by viewing it via these lenses.

Moraa's (1990) paper, "Modernity and Marginality in Love in the Time of Cholera," published in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, critically investigates the connection between modernity and marginality in Márquez's acclaimed novel. The author examines how Márquez conveys the complications of modernity in the Caribbean milieu, concentrating on the characters' conflicts with societal standards and marginalised identities. Moraa (1990) illuminates how the work tackles themes of love, power, and cultural hybridity against the backdrop of a cholera outbreak. The paper provides a better understanding of the novel's comprehensive investigation of human interactions and the human condition by delving into the complicated links between modernity and marginality.

While several studies have analyzed the selected novel, there is a research gap concerning a comprehensive feminist analysis that delves into the gender roles and cultural exceptions depicted in the novel, providing a nuanced understanding of how the female characters navigate societal expectations and challenges within the Caribbean context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The feminist movement in the 20th century brought women into various socioeconomic arenas, leading to significant advancements in voting rights, reproductive freedom, education, and employment opportunities. As a result, Western society underwent a reassessment of its traditional perceptions of women and their societal roles. The study of gender and gender roles in academic disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and psychology became increasingly significant during this period, highlighting the distinction between "sex" as biological attributes and "gender" as socially constructed meanings (Lindsey, 1997). This exploration of gender dynamics deepened understanding of societal complexities and their influence on shaping cultural norms and roles.

According to Eagly's definition from 1987, gender encompasses the societal and individual attributions given to "male and female categories" (p.4). It pertains to the meanings assigned by cultures and individuals to these categories, reflecting the social construction of gender roles and expectations. In the realm of gender studies, gender roles are considered societal constructs

encompassing a multifaceted structure of self-perceptions, psychological attributes, and a wide array of familial, professional, and political obligations that are typically allocated in dichotomously to members of each sex" (p. 2). This distinction underscores the socially fabricated nature of gender expectations, illustrating how cultural norms influence the roles and conduct deemed suitable for individuals based on their perceived gender. Dobson(1995) giving his remarks about gender roles remarks that according to biological theory, the disparities in the biological distinctions between the sexes result in male and female roles . According to Parsons (1960), for a society to sustain itself effectively, each gender must assume distinct roles and occupations that contribute to the perpetuation and efficient functioning of the society as a whole. Lindsey (1997) ascribes the development of gender roles to the process of socialization, which encompasses a lifelong journey where "individuals learn their culture" (p. 53), nurture their capabilities, and integrate themselves as active members of society. Bem(1988) proposes that the initial step in acquiring gender roles involves a child learning the cultural definitions of male and female. After the establishment of gender definitions as a schema, the child proceeds to learn how to utilize this diverse network of sex-related associations to assess and integrate novel information. In essence, "the child learns to encode" (p. 130) and structure information according to a developing gender schema.

Blackstone (2003) gives his arguments that:

Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments, and they give individuals cues about what sort of behavior is believed to be appropriate for what sex. Appropriate gender roles are defined according to a society's beliefs about differences between the sexes. (p. 2)

Grant (2013) argues that the concept of "woman" presents an essentialist view that tends to idealize the notion of femininity, while the category of experience, originating from the former, leads to the elevation of individual experiences as the basis for all knowledge. Nonetheless, disparities do exist, prompting certain feminists to acknowledge their significance, whether arising from socialization, biology, or the complete historical context of existing within a patriarchal society as a woman. Birrel (2000) says

Like other sociological theories, feminist theory offers an explanation of our lives within culture by attempting to abstract from concrete individual lives a general pattern of experience. Thus a theory is a framework for understanding, but it always develops within a particular cultural context and it is always provisional. (p. 100)

Grant (2013) says "Feminist writers have spoken of the silencing of women's history and the difficulties in achieving recognition of the historical importance of the contemporary women's movement" (p. 1). Employing feminist literary theory as the primary framework, the analysis sheds light on the portrayal of female characters and their agency in challenging traditional gender norms. Intersectionality is also instrumental in understanding how

gender roles intersect with other social identities, revealing the complexities of power dynamics and cultural influences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing feminist literary analysis to explore gender roles and cultural exceptions in *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. A literature review will be conducted to identify relevant themes and theoretical frameworks. Data will be collected from the novel through textual analysis, and thematic analysis will be employed to examine the interactions and behaviors of characters.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Marquez's (1988) renowned novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, narrates a poignant love story spanning over five decades. Amidst a backdrop of historical and political significance, the triangular love story unfolds, with love, sex, and lust playing essential roles. The novel sheds light on the status of women in a patriarchal society, where gender norms and dualities prevail. Women are often objectified in these conventional societies, depicted as mere sex objects. While the protagonist claims undying love for Fermina, the novel portrays sexual encounters that objectify women, warranting critical analysis. The gender roles are depicted with Fermina attempting to distract her husband from his nostalgia after watching a war film. She invites him to play chess, a common pastime for them. Dr. Urbino initially plays inattentively, showing a sense of superiority as he plays with the white pieces. Novelist sums up this event as:

In an attempt to distract him, she invited him to play chess and he accepted to please her, but he played inattentively, with the white pieces, of course, until he discovered before she did that he was going to be defeated in four moves and surrendered without honor.(p. 14)

FerminaDaza humbly denies any praise for her chess skills, attributing her victory to Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, who has already passed away. "She insisted that she deserved no praise". (p. 14) Despite winning the game, she suggests that Saint-Amour played without passion or love. As the public dances' music comes to an end, Dr. Juvenal Urbino asks Fermina to leave him, perhaps indicating his desire for solitude and introspection after the game and their time together. This moment may reflect Fermina's modesty in her achievements and Dr. Urbino's need for some personal space to process his emotions.

Despite being the subjects of numerous artistic endeavors, female artists remain underrepresented in these institutions. Marquez (1988)mirrors this disparity as a theme in novel where women find themselves pursued without their active consent. The novel's central narrative revolves around FlorentinoAriza's lifelong pursuit of his revered object of affection, FerminaDaza, "crowned goddess" (p. 88). Interestingly, Fermina's life story, as depicted in the novel, appears to derive its significance primarily from its intertwining with Florentino's relentless pursuit.Farmena is full of sorrows after her husband demise and she also suffers from the feelings of loneliness

and oppression. In the house of her misfortune (135), she developed an intense aversion to everything and everyone apart from him. The solitude, the desolate cemetery garden, and the vast, “windowless rooms” (p. 135) weighed heavily on her spirit, plunging her into a state of profound melancholy. The long nights seemed never-ending, tormenting her with the agonizing screams of madwomen from the neighboring asylum, causing her to feel as though she was “losing her mind”. (p. 135)

The novelist portrays the emotional reality of women's agency being compromised as their lives become inextricably intertwined with the relentless pursuits of men, as exemplified in Fermina's journey with Florentino. Her experiences of loss and the intrusion of Florentino's reasserted love epitomize the constrained autonomy that women face in patriarchal societies. Fermina's life story, meticulously portrayed in the novel, appears to derive its meaning primarily from its association with Florentino's persistent pursuit of her. Despite marrying and starting a family with another man, Fermina is destined to cross paths again with the very man who had once rejected their engagement just one week before their wedding date, leaving her “to wander the limbo of abandoned brides”. (p. 128). Over the years since Fermina's initial rejection of Florentino at the tender age of eighteen, she had firmly held onto the belief that her decision had sown “a seed of hatred” (p.182) within him, a sentiment that would only intensify with the passing of time. This underlying animosity was an aspect she had always anticipated, sensing its presence in the air whenever the enigmatic figure of Florentino was nearby. The mere sight of Florentino had a profound impact on Fermina, causing her to “feel upset and frightened” (p. 182), which in turn hindered her ability to interact with him naturally. On the night he audaciously reaffirmed his love, while the lingering fragrance of funeral flowers permeated the household, Fermina struggled to fathom that his insolence did not foreshadow the initial move in an ominous scheme of revenge.

Taking a feminist perspective, one cannot overlook the implications of Fermina's experience. Despite her agency in rejecting Florentino, her actions inadvertently sowed seeds of resentment within him, leaving her haunted by the consequences of his lingering bitterness. This exemplifies the power dynamics at play in patriarchal societies, where women's actions can provoke unpredictable and potentially harmful reactions from men. Fermina's unease and fear in Florentino's presence are emblematic of the gendered norms that restrict women's ability to feel secure and at ease in their interactions with men. Fermina is fated to grapple with the rekindling of a connection she had once unequivocally rejected despite making life-altering decisions by marrying another man and starting a family. This circumstance highlights the lack of control women often have over their own destinies and underscores the social dynamics that perpetuate such limitations.

Fermina's struggle to reconcile the Florentino of her past with the aged and disrespectful man before her resonates deeply. It highlights the impact of time and circumstance on men's perceptions of women and their relationships. The transformation from a once vulnerable boy to an older man seemingly devoid of empathy may symbolize the gradual erosion of sensitivity and

understanding toward women as men age in patriarchal societies. Imagining Florentino Ariza as he had been in the past proved to be a challenging task for Fermina. The taciturn and vulnerable boy, once so present in her memory, seemed almost inconceivable when confronted with the image of the “moth-eaten, aged wreck” (p. 183) of a man who now stood before her. This changed version of Florentino had shown “no consideration for her situation” (p. 183), exhibited no “respect for her grief”, and inflicted a “flaming insult” (p. 183) upon her, leaving an indelible mark on her soul that continued to cause her distress and difficulty in breathing.

América Vicuña, entrusted to Florentino Ariza as her guardian, arrived from Puerto Padre with a government scholarship. From the moment she arrived, he had a foreboding that they would share many Sunday siestas together. América was being used by as sex object. When América agreed to be a girl ready to explore life “under the guidance of a venerable old man who was” (p. 177) unfazed by anything, Florentino chose to embody the very thing he had feared becoming in his life: “a senile lover” (p. 177). The relationship between Florentino and América exemplifies the oppression of rights, as the vulnerable girl is taken advantage of by an older man in a position of authority. América's agency and autonomy are undermined, perpetuating harmful gender norms and power imbalances. It highlights the need to challenge oppressive behaviors and promote a more just and equitable society.

Throughout text of novel, Florentino's misogyny is evident in his mistreatment of women. Engaging in numerous sexual affairs while separated from Fermina, he deceives her upon their reunion by claiming to be a virgin, emphasizing the symbolic value society places on female purity. In the context of his relationship with América, the character expressed a genuine appreciation for her identity and gradually developed love for her, savoring twilight-like pleasures as novelist mentions in text, “he came to love her for what she was” (p. 177). Notably, he exercised significant precautions “against accidental pregnancy” (p. 177), suggesting a deep concern for their mutual well-being and a desire to avoid any potential disruptions to their connection. The notion of virginity is equated with worthiness, portraying women who are sexually inexperienced as more valuable. This concept is further reinforced through Florentino's prolonged relationship with América, wherein he takes pleasure in her innocence. However, as their encounters progresses, América's purity is compromised, leading to the eventual end of their relationship. This highlights the harmful double standard that perpetuates the objectification and devaluation of women based on their sexual experiences.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino's resemblance to the ideal man her father desired for her was the primary factor against him. Fermina Daza's suspicions intensified when he made an unsolicited visit to her home. Cousin Hildebranda's influence further confused Fermina, leading her to avoid meeting Florentino Ariza at the telegraph office. However, as her twenty-first birthday approached, the fear of missed opportunities and the imminence of fate compelled her to decide on marriage with Dr. Urbino. In that moment, she “wiped away the memory of Florentino Ariza” (p. 134), erasing him entirely from her thoughts. In its place, she allowed a field of poppies to bloom,

symbolizing the fresh start and new chapter she was embracing. Despite the bittersweet parting sigh for the man she once loved, she resignedly uttered, "Poor man," (p. 134) acknowledging the complex emotions and circumstances that led to this turning point in her life. Upon her return from the honeymoon, the most unsettling doubts began to plague her. As the trunks were opened, the furniture arranged, and the numerous chests unpacked, she imagined herself as "a prisoner in the wrong house" (p. 134).

These experiences served to encapsulate the profound challenges she faced as she navigated her life within the confines of her new marital home, fraught with complexities and discontent. Fermina and Florentino lingered on the bridge until lunchtime. As they sailed past the town of Calamar, once a vibrant place of perpetual fiestas now reduced to a ruined and deserted port, they encountered a lone woman clad in white, signing for help with a bandana. To Fermina's bewilderment, the Captain revealed that "she was the ghost of a drowned woman" (p. 215), deceiving ships to veer off course into perilous whirlpools on the other shore. Though the ghost's face seemed strangely familiar, Fermina perceived her as a mere illusion, a reminder. From a feminist perspective, this encounter symbolizes the entrapment and vulnerability women often face, as the woman's spectral presence entices ships into treacherous waters. It serves as a metaphor for the danger and exploitation women confront in a patriarchal society, where deceptive appearances and false signals may lead them into harmful situations and power imbalances. Fermina's recognition of the familiar face underscores the shared experiences of women, irrespective of time or place, in their struggles for agency, identity, and liberation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, is a compelling literary work that weaves a tapestry of love, passion, and societal norms in a patriarchal context. Spanning over five decades, the narrative revolves around three central characters: Florentino, Fermina, and Dr. Juvenal. Within this intricate love story, gender roles, power dynamics, and the objectification of women come under scrutiny, presenting a thought-provoking analysis from a feminist perspective. Marquez's portrayal of Florentino Ariza exemplifies the oppressive treatment of women as mere objects of desire. Despite claiming undying love for Fermina Daza, Florentino engages in numerous sexual affairs with other women, thus objectifying them and contradicting his proclaimed devotion. This contradiction highlights the social double standards prevalent in patriarchal societies, where men may freely indulge their desires while women are expected to conform to restrictive norms. Fermina Daza's journey, too, reflects the struggle of women in a patriarchal world. Fermina's plight after her initial rejection of Florentino at a young age demonstrates the lasting impact of gender norms and societal expectations on women's lives.

Marquez's (1988) masterful storytelling urges readers to reflect on the impact of gender norms on individual lives, prompting discussions about love, agency, and freedom in a society constrained by rigid gender roles. As a timeless literary masterpiece, the novel continues to resonate with readers, inviting contemplation on the pursuit of genuine connections amidst societal

constraints. Moreover, the novel's exploration of marriage reveals how societal expectations and gender norms can impact marital dynamics. Dr. Urbino's sense of superiority and Fermina's modesty in her achievements exemplify the complex power dynamics and societal pressures experienced within a marriage. From a feminist perspective, the novel also delves into the vulnerability of young girls like América Vicuña, whose innocence is exploited by older men. América's relationship with Florentino exemplifies the oppression of women's rights, illuminating the challenges faced by young girls in vulnerable positions.

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