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Gabriel García Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*: Love and Death as New-World Mosaic

From its title to its ambiguous ending, Gabriel García Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* unfolds an intimate and ever-altering relationship between love and death. Most critics writing on García Marquez examine his Magical Realism or Postmodernism. Far less attention has been paid to *Love in the Time of Cholera*'s location in what Alejo Carpentier identifies as Latin America's Baroque *spirit* (93). This "constant of the human spirit," an artistic impulse enduring beyond Europe's seventeenth-century propensity for opulent aesthetics, is, in Carpentier's view, responsible for enriching much of Latin American's contemporary fiction (93). In exploring *Love in the Time of Cholera*'s portrayal of the complex, ever-proliferating relationship between love and death, transcendence and decay, we find distinct markers of the novel's participation in this Baroque spirit, manifested as the Neo-Baroque in García Marquez's twentieth-century. Reading García Marquez's novel through the Baroque tropes of *horror vacui* and *coincidentia oppositorum*, we will examine the novel and its protagonist Florentino Ariza as the embodiment of productive Baroque tension, a tension largely located in a mosaic composed of varying relationships between love and death. In so doing, we identify another entry point into this beautifully complex novel and can begin to identify the Baroque in our own lives.

The novel's basic plot is not difficult to summarize. A young postal employee with a Romeo-esque susceptibility to prodigious romantic fantasies (Florentino Ariza) falls passionately in love with the beautiful Fermina Daza. With the onset of Fermina Daza's adulthood, she rejects her childhood sweetheart to marry the wealthy and well-connected Dr. Juvenal Urbino. During fifty-one years which follow, Florentino Ariza preserves his heart for Fermina Daza but assuages his loneliness with an endless stream of lovers. Upon Dr. Juvenal Urbino's death (he falls from a ladder while attempting to recapture a pet parrot), Florentino Ariza, now in his eighties, recommences his courtship of his newly widowed beloved.

Love in the Time of Cholera's plot is certainly innovative—how many authors write of the all-consuming love of octogenarians?—yet much of the novel's surpassing excellence is tied to its

complexity and subsequent openness to varied readings. Critical attempts to flatten *Love in the Time of Cholera* into the single-narrative mold of realist, Western fiction do the novel little justice. Claudette Kemper Columbus attempts such a feat, proposing a reading of the novel as a satire *à la* Jonathan Swift (89, 91).

Certainly there is a sense of parody and irony within the novel; one readily senses that García Márquez does not take his serious-minded characters seriously at all. And as Louis Parkinson Zamora reminds us in her discussion of Neo-Baroque style, parody is an important element in the transition from the Baroque to the Neo-Baroque (240-1). She writes, "The Baroque writers of the seventeenth century...didn't realize they were Baroque, whereas the [contemporary Neo-Baroque writers] do" (240). The strategies the Baroque used in earnest—*horror vacui*, *coincidentia oppositorum*—Neo Baroque authors twist into a comedic and self-reflexive mirroring (241). Driven by a need to navigate the religious and scientific movements de-centering their seventeenth-century society, Baroque artists used such tactics to process their changing world. Neo-Baroque authors, influenced by pervasive, postmodern skepticism, deploy and mine these same tactics to generate humor and preserve ambiguity.

Yet Columbus's demand for a strictly satirical reading disables the novel's capacity for expansiveness. This cry of "Satire!" can be traced to her misplaced racking of the novel for a univocal discourse on love (Columbus 93). Disappointed in her search, Columbus determines the novel to be pure parody—in her estimation, if one cannot identify a delineating concept of love, the novel must reveal the hollowness of its characters' romantic attempts (92). Columbus is absolutely correct to assert that the novel's discourse on love is slippery and contorting. *Love in the Time of Cholera* utterly fails as a monologue on love. After all, we are told both that Dr. Juvenal Urbino was "struck by the lightening of his love" for Fermina Daza *and* that he "was aware that he did not love her;" this is but one of many tensions we are tempted to read as outright contradictions (García Márquez 115, 159). But such a misreading as Columbus's is centered in the false belief that the novel is meant to be univocal. Here, we uncover why centering the novel in the Baroque is so critical to our embracing, rather than mutilating and rejecting, the mosaic García Márquez constructs of love and his collaborator, death.

This mosaic of García Márquez's is, and finds its strength in being, polyvocal, polychromal. The reasons necessitating this partnership between love and death will be discussed shortly, but first let us turn to the Baroque terms critical to this reading of the novel.

That García Márquez should ground his literary technique in a visual analogue like the Baroque should not surprise us. In his interview with Raymond Leslie Williams, García Márquez talks at length of his dependence as a writer upon visual images (131-4). In discussing the tools he uses to generate scenes and solve narrative challenges, García Márquez asserts that drawings (and other visual arts) serve "better than texts. Texts have a lot of paper. The drawings are like notes" (134). For García Márquez, "it is always something that [he] see[s]" which vaunts him forward



Figure 1: Church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla, interior.

through the challenges of writing (132). Of all the artistic motifs invigorating García Márquez's novel, Baroque techniques stand the starkest. And of those techniques, that of *horror vacui*—literally 'fear of the vacuum,' or empty space—is the most pervasive (Carpentier 93; Zamora 119). It is the impulse to fill gaps, to layer meanings, to cram negative space—no facet may be left ungilded, unexamined, unexplored. Literally every crevice must be stuffed, jammed, with something. Carpentier, in writing of Baroque plastic arts, describes "the imbrications of figures, the constant arabesques, the presence of...proliferating foci...foci that extend to infinity" (94). For a visual analogue, we look to the Church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla, located in the Mexican state of Puebla (Figures 1 and 2). In its New World Baroque styling—made New World by the union of European and Indigenous iconography—this church is overwhelmed by ornamentation. Angels, blond and European as well as dark and Indigenous, pile up like thousands of totem poles. Between these figures, local vines, fruits, and flowers dance and swirl. In the fervor of this artistry, negative space becomes figured as a demon necessitating exorcism.



Figure 2: Church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla, detail.

Love in the Time of Cholera is no less dizzying in its desire to accumulate, to fill. The markets of the unnamed city of the novel are jammed with "the hot clamor of the shoeshine boys and the bird sellers, the hawkers of cheap books and the witch doctors and the sellers of sweets" (García Márquez 101). The Urbinos' home is a land-locked Ark with "three Dalmatians," "Abyssinian cats," "cross-eyed Siamese," "palace Persians," "an Amazonian monkey," "Guatemalan birds," "premonitory curlews," "swamp herons," "a young stag," "a bird of paradise," "six perfumed crows," "an anaconda," "German mastiffs," and a "giant lucky charm tortoise" (21, 22, 23).

Throughout the novel, lovers cover jetties, prostitutes jam hotels, and Florentino Ariza makes love in every place imaginable, from a riverboat cabin to his office (65, 75, 142, 265).

Even Fermina Daza's mourning for her husband involves a proliferation of things. Over the years of her marriage, Fermina Daza collects various trinkets from her travels. Repeatedly, she attempts to clear away this clutter, only to relocate the overwhelming excess of items to other rooms. Her inevitably unfulfilled intention is always the same: to incinerate the lot of it. Only upon her husband's death is she able to exorcise these unnecessary, entangling objects. Beginning with her husband's clothes (in an effort to banish his memory and alleviate her loneliness) and continuing with the other items she has hoarded, Fermina Daza burns "overcoats for European winters," "hats she'[s] never worn," "shoes copied by European artists from those used by empresses for their coronation," "silk," "brocade," and "silver fox tails," to name but a few articles (301). The various types of love portrayed in the novel are no exception; as though possessed with a holy terror of leaving some aspect of love unexplored, García Márquez writes of sacrificial love, greedy love, false love, sexual love, intellectual love, fantastical love...any attempt to make an exhaustive list would be, in itself, exhausting.

The other Baroque term integral to *Love in the Time of Cholera* is *coincidentia oppositorum*. This artistic maneuver, “[t]he yoking of opposites in aesthetic structures that neither homogenize nor destroy difference, but rather hold oppositions open in order to generate expressive energy,” provides the indomitable tension which endows the Baroque with such life (Zamora 146). Some of the oppositional pairings



Figure 3: *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, detail. Bernini

privileged by the Baroque include the spiritual and the sexual, the natural and the transcendent. A discussion of the first pairing cannot fail to include the oft-cited but never banal *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (Figure 3). The eponymous nun figured in the sculpture is being pierced, via an arrow wielded by a fiery angel, with the love of God. This is an incredibly sacred moment. But the transfigured expression on her features (Figure 4) can only be likened to an orgasm; there is an inherent and overt sensuality to her pose. Lips parted, head dropped back, throat exposed, she is in the midst of ecstasy—a terms bearing all the connotations of spiritual and sexual rapture.



Figure 4 *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Bernini

The second pairing of transcendence and naturalism frequently appears in the religious painting of the Baroque, particularly in works figuring the martyrdom of saints. Peter Paul Rubens's *The Martyrdom of St. Lieven* boasts a galaxy of heavenly figures as angels overhang the clouds (Figure 5). St. Lieven's eyes are cast upward, also drawing aloft the viewer's gaze, toward the promise of transcendent heaven. Upon first glance, the drama of the scene—St. Lieven surrounded by men and horses, the turbulence of angels—is fully transcendent, capturing the overwhelming ethos of the moment preceding a Saint's ascension. But a closer examination of the work reveals the gory naturalism of St. Lieven's martyrdom—blood streams down his beard and the saint's tongue, ripped from his mouth by his attackers, is proffered a nearby dog (Figure 6). No one describes this example of transcendence/naturalism *coincidentia oppositorum* better than John Rupert Martin: “The hideous act is transfigured by the pictorial splendor...so that the death agony of the saint seems almost to approach the exalted state of mystical ecstasy” (112). Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *The Death of the Virgin* is similar



Figure 5: *The Martyrdom of St. Lieven*. Rubens



Figure 6: *The Martyrdom of St. Lieven*, detail. Rubens

(Figure 7). His naturalizing of the death of the Madonna seemed a degradation many of Caravaggio's contemporaries could not abide (Martin 41). Most Baroque artists figured the Virgin Mary's death as a moment of tremendous magnificence more focused on her accession than her decease, as modeled by Rubens' *Assumption of the Virgin* (Figure 8). To figure the death of the mother of Christ as a deathbed display of a swollen corpse was artistic heresy. Yet the quiet hush of the scene, the drama of the dark composition, signals to

the viewer that something profound and otherworldly is occurring. Even in this utterly unromanticized scene, we are offered the profound expansion and elevation of meaning produced by the *coincidentia oppositorum* of naturalism and transcendence.



Figure 7: *The Death of the Virgin*. Caravaggio

García Márquez's careful development of Florentino Ariza's penitential suffering and deprivation is too thorough to be mistaken; the link between this love-dizzied protagonist and the hyperbolically spiritual saint are provocative. Yet Florentino Ariza's foremost spiritual ritual is neither the counting of his rosary nor ceaseless praying; rather, it is a string of carnal affairs. With the vigor of a saint, he cultivates a prodigious 622 love affairs—all in the midst of his zealous supplication to the love of Fermina Daza. Yet in a fashion only the Baroque spirit could inspire, the opposing tension between the spiritual and sexual aspects of Florentino Ariza's love do not enervate it. The intensive, spiritual fervor of his passion for Fermina Daza only amplifies the ferocity of his carnal love through the sexual acts of penance he performs.

Similarly, the naturalism/transcendence pairing is frequently evoked in the novel. Twice over, men pursuing Fermina Daza's hand—dazzled by her beauty, eager for her love—suffer in the course of their love-hunt all the ignominious naturalism of vomit. Florentino Ariza drinks a liter of cologne to know what his beloved tastes like (García Márquez 65). His mother eventually “[finds] him wallowing in a pool of fragrant vomit” (65). Dr. Juvenal Urbino, in his quest to gain from Fermina Daza's father permission to court her, drinks endless glasses of anisette (more *horror vacui*) despite his usual abstinence from alcohol (119). The result? Upon returning to his familial home, Dr. Juvenal Urbino, in front of his female relatives, “[falls] flat on his face in an explosion of star anise vomit” (121). In these two cases, we see all the flush of budding love cloaked in the naturalism of human physicality and folly. Here, courtship encompasses vomit. But the courtship is not demeaned by the naturalism of its description;

Love in the Time of Cholera overflows with narrative elements steeped in *coincidentia oppositorum*. Primarily, we see in Florentino Ariza the intense embodiment of the push-pull tension between spirituality and sexuality. To this end, Zamora offers an excellent and insightful reading as she unfolds the strange, sensual martyrdom Florentino Ariza invokes. We are reminded that “martyrdom is repeatedly invoked to describe Florentino's state” as he worships his Madonna, Fermina Daza (Zamora 208). His love for her is so zealous, he succumbs to physical illness (García Márquez 61). Agonized by love, he strives to luxuriate in his pain, to “enjoy his martyrdom” (García Márquez 62; Zamora 208). He even develops the strange diet of an aesthetic:

As indifferent and irregular as he had been...regarding food, that was how habitual and austere he became until the end of his days: a large cup of coffee for breakfast, a slice of poached fish with white rice for lunch; a cup of *café con leche* and a piece of cheese before going to bed. (García Márquez 173)



Figure 6: *The Assumption of the Virgin*. Rubens

rather, the vivid naturalism of the description throws into sharp relief the extreme transcendence of Florentino Ariza's obsession and Dr. Juvenal Urbino's enchantment with Fermina Daza. Marta Morello Frosch has argued that García Márquez's earlier works privilege the real (the naturalized) above the fantastic (the transcendent) while the author's later works reverse these roles (496, 501). Certainly, this offers an admirable sensitive reading across García Márquez's literary ensemble. But García Márquez's relationship with opposed qualities like transcendence and naturalism is far more dynamic than hierarchical. He rather holds the two in tandem, using their equality to generate fierce energy, elusive life.

Previously, I mentioned the necessitated pairing of love and death; it is this we will now examine. Simply by dint of *Love in the Time of Cholera*'s possessing some traits of the modern, Realist novel, love and death must intermingle. This is no allegorical, Spenserian romance in which the knight and his lady fair, perfect in their status as symbols, are forever floating unmoored in a mystical time. This is a novel in which, despite its unspecified setting, time, disease, suffering, and death are real agents. And with such a title as *Love in the Time of Cholera*, the novel immediately notifies its reader of its two primary themes: love and death. Within its pages, this novel shall address love as located by a period of death and death as punctuated by love. *Love in the Time of Cholera*'s title presents these two elements as an opposing pair which cannot be divided and it is the tension between these two motifs which stands as the overarching *coincidentia oppositorum* guiding the entire novel.

Furthermore, this is a novel about a love extending into the couple's elderly years; as readers, we cannot enter into a character's eighties without feeling the ominous, predictive presence of death. Surely, this is a further signifier of a love which must meet with eventual decay, no matter how time-resistant that love has stood. I offer love as juxtaposed to Death because of the former's ability to elevate mankind both to pleasure and to spiritual ecstasy unmatched by any other of humanity's experiences. Both are triumphant emotive experiences which are threatened by death.

The novel's opening line asserts the essential yoking of love and death: "It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded [Dr. Juvenal Urbino] of the fate of unrequited love" (García Márquez 3). The word "fate" is a bold sign-post, conjuring images of *fated* Achilles, *fated* Romeo and Juliet, *fated* Oedipus. In short, fate rarely connotes anything but doom—in this case, the deadly fate of "unrequited love." This threat is concretized when we learn that this "scent of bitter almonds" is born of fatal cyanide and that Dr. Juvenal Urbino is standing beside the corpse of a suicide. Here, at the very genesis of the novel, love and death entwine. The irrevocability of this union is solidified in the thrust of that one word, "inevitable" (3). Neither death, the fate of unrequited love, nor love, doomed to death, can stand alone. That this suicide is a man named Jeremiah de *Saint-Amour*, "Saint Love" or Holy Love, not only further implicates the *coincidentia oppositorum* of love and death, but also that of the sexual and spiritual (Columbus 92). For though this man is a saint, he is a saint of love, of amour; he embodies *amorous*, rather than holy, affection.

Saint-Amour's suicide note leads Dr. Juvenal Urbino, Saint-Amour's chess partner and close friend, to Saint-Amour's longtime lover. The woman lives in the "old slave quarters," a filthy and diseased area of the city García Márquez reveals with exacting, disgusting detail (García

Marquez 11). We are told of its “open sewers” “buzzards,” “slaughter-house offal,” “sordid taverns,” “gangs of raged children” (12, 13). Nothing here is romanticized. This scene is an example *par excellence* of García Márquez’s use of naturalism; the reader is spared no detail. Yet, because this novel rides on the currents of *coincidentia oppositorum*, we expect and are answered with transcendence. Saint-Amour’s lover is depicted as something like a fierce African goddess, a “river idol” (15). She is “a haughty mulatta with cruel golden eyes” and a red rose in her hair (13). For Saint-Amour, she “cho[ses] the hazards of illicit love” and holds a “devotion and submissive tenderness that [bears] too close a resemblance to love;” despite García Márquez’s tongue-in-cheek, we know her feelings for Saint-Amour to be just that: love (13-4). This love is so expansive that she actually enables his pre-determined suicide despite the loneliness and grief she will suffer. Importantly, Saint-Amour’s first declaration of his intent to commit suicide upon reaching the age of sixty occurs when the couple “lay[s] naked after love,” further interweaving love and death (15). Here, in this woman who so selflessly aids her lover, we find the first tile of our love/death mosaic—the tile of Death as Love’s Duty.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino is appalled to learn of this woman’s enabling Saint-Amour’s suicide: “‘Your duty was to report him,’ said the Doctor” (García Márquez 15). She returns with this fierce refutation: “‘I could not do that,’ she said, shocked. ‘I loved him too much’” (15). In the circle of Saint-Amour and his beloved’s passion, death becomes a gift of compassionate and tender love. The decay culminating in death is debilitating and humiliating, a slow siphoning of life. To allow her lover an escape from such an end is, in this woman’s perception, a requisite of devoted love, a love devoted to the point of self-sacrifice. Saint-Amour’s fatal freedom is her grief; nevertheless, she smoothes his passage into death, evidencing the magnificent generosity of her love.

This otherworldly intermingling of love and death ultimately results in the transcendent quality of her love; she is able to be “so complaisant toward grief” as to be a mystery to Dr. Juvenal Urbino (16). Her sacrificial love, like that of the martyrs, raises her to a plane of transcendence quite above that of ordinary mortals. Yet this transcendent female figuration of love is encroached by the extreme naturalism of the “death trap of the poor” where she lives. This strange tension establishes within this scene dual levels of *coincidentia oppositorum*: love and death, naturalism and transcendence (16). Columbus reads this scene as an opportunity for the reader to decide whether this image of the devoted lover caged by squalor and secrecy “represents the absence of love” or “a true love” (93). I would argue that this establishes a false dichotomy. The love is real; we hear so from the woman’s own lips: “‘[she] love[s] him too much’” (García Márquez 15). Her love is simply so powerful, so devoted, that it transcends the shame of poverty, the grief after death. Her wretched living conditions amplify, rather than destabilize, the transcendence of her love.

A socially sanctioned version of Saint-Amour’s grieving beloved, the widowed Fermina Daza is offered by the proliferation of the novel’s *horror vacui* as another embodiment of love/death tension. Following her husband’s death, Fermina Daza becomes representative of a different tile in our love/death mosaic. As each of Florentino Ariza’s lovers is one in a *horror vacui*-inspired series, so Fermina Daza becomes one in a series of widows. The widow is herself a strange encapsulation of love and death. García Márquez emphasizes this love/death embodiment when

he informs readers that Fermina Daza, after her husband's death, "was no longer called by her maiden name, and she became known as the Widow Urbino" (García Márquez 302). In this joining of her status as a wife (albeit a widowed one) and her husband's name, Fermina Daza is more resolutely fixed to her lover than ever before. But the lover to whom she is linked is dead. The widow, garbed in black and associated with the vacuum of a departed beloved, becomes thereby forever reminiscent of the death awaiting all loves.

But in the strange mosaic tile the widow represents, we see not the hopelessness, but the perfection of love; this tile is that of Love-Perfecting Death. Repeatedly, we are told of loves whose bumps are smoothed by the removal, the death, of the beloved. This is epitomized in the Widow Nazaret, Florentino Ariza's first serious lover. Even as she undresses to make love with Florentino Ariza, she speaks ceaselessly of "her inconsolable grief for the husband who had died three years earlier" (149). After their love-making, she continues in this vein, "evok[ing] her husband's excellent qualities until daybreak, not reproaching him for any disloyalty other than his having died without her" (150). The picture she paints of her husband is flawless; his absence is the only blot she will admit to his character. Death has utterly purified any sins he may have committed. The Widow Nazaret even asserts that she is happy in his death, despite her terrible longing for him, "because only now do[es] she know for certain where he is when he is not at home" (150). Such a confession would seem to imply that her husband, during his life, may have been something of a philanderer. Why else should she be concerned about his activities when away? Yet his death permits even such a betrayal as this to be glossed over. As a memory, he is immortalized, sanctified.

Over the years of collecting his *horror vacui* of lovers, Florentino Ariza sees this strange, perfecting grief reiterated throughout his series of "happy widows" (García Márquez 202). "He ha[s] seen them go mad with grief at the sight of their husband's corpse [sic], pleading to be buried alive in the same coffin so they would not have to face the future without him" (202). Then, as these women begin to reconcile themselves to their status as widows, they begin to confess to themselves "how tiresome was the man they loved to distraction" (202). Yet all the while, each widow is ritualistically preserving her husband as though her sexual partner were a saint with his accompanying relics, a household god deserving ritual recognition. Each widow "se[ws] the buttons on the dead man's clothes, iro[ns] and reiro[ns] the shirts with stiff collars and cuffs...continu[es] to put his soap in the bathroom, his monogrammed pillowcase on the bed; his place [is] always set at the table in case he return[s] from the dead without warning" (202). As time and such rituals continue, these widows eventually become willing to take another lover. They are then able to become "happy twice, with one love for everyday use [that of the new lover]...and the other love that belong[s] to [them] alone, the love immunized by death against all contagion" (203). This mosaic tile of Love-Perfecting Death evidences what only widowhood can provide: a cleansed memory and a sanctified love. This deceased love, through death's confederacy, is protected against all "contagion:" bitterness, jealousy, neglect, frustration, malice. This elevation of a corporeal, sexual partner to a spiritualized, deified icon is a perfect manifestation of the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the spiritual and sexual.

Fermina Daza is no exception to this strange result of widowhood. As quickly as the first year of her widowhood, we find her comforted by "the purified memory of her husband, no longer an

obstacle in her daily actions, in her private thoughts, in her simplest intentions, [as he] bec[omes] a watchful presence that guide[s] but d[oes] not hinder her” (García Márquez 299). Fermina Daza does grieve for her husband; her complacency in her widowhood is not the fruit of indifference. But the corporeal failing of her husband’s body allows him to pass, in his wife’s estimation, to an exalted, transcendent state; no longer a fleshly man with wants and demands upon his wife, Dr. Juvenal Urbino becomes something of a purely benevolent, angelic figure. His very death, his absence from Fermina Daza’s daily life, idealizes him, cleansing his memory of flaws and firmly establishing his perfections.

In this dynamic we see at work several layers of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The primary, overarching *coincidentia oppositorum* is the love/death tension embodied in this particular mosaic tile. Beneath this, the naturalism/transcendence dynamic is manifested in the natural death which leads to the deification of Dr. Juvenal Urbino. But we find a second example of this dynamic as transcendent love, Fermina Daza’s fifty-year romance with her husband, is depicted in a naturalized, utterly un-romanticized way. This is no Juliet whose tremendous mourning for her beloved leads to suicide. This is no Mrs. Havisham whose existence disintegrates with the absence of her fiancé. We may be startled by the bluntness of García Márquez’s depiction of a widow who is relieved when no longer harried by her husband’s daily demands. But in the *coincidentia oppositorum* of transcendent love and the naturalism of Fermina Daza’s relieved grief, the reader is barred from a simplified concept of mourning. Here, the notion of grief is complicated with honesty and sensitivity of depiction. Death even becomes a defender of love. Love’s bumps and bruises are smoothed by death’s perfecting hand, allowing only the best of the two lovers to endure.

Having examined a few of the feminine figures tucked within the pages of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, let us turn to the central, masculine embodiment of love/death tensions—our protagonist Florentino Ariza. Continually driven by *horror vacui*, the novel packs into this one character several love/death mosaic tiles. The first tile Florentino Ariza symbolizes is similar to the devoted love/death paradigm of Saint-Amour’s beloved. We see this tile displayed at the height of the youthful courtship between Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza when their secret love is discovered by her perpetually-drunk father, Lorenzo Daza. Taking Florentino Ariza to his favorite watering hole, the Parish Café, Lorenzo Daza invites his young companion to enjoy a glass of anisette. Lorenzo Daza’s attempt to rationally discourage Florentino Ariza from pursuing Fermina Daza soon yields to violence:

Then Lorenzo Daza leaned back in his chair, his eyelids reddened and damp, and his left eye spun in its orbit and stayed twisted toward the outside. He, too, lowered his voice.

“Don’t force me to shoot you,” he said.

Florentino Ariza felt his intestines filling with cold froth. But his voice did not tremble because he felt himself illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

“Shoot me,” he said, with his hand on his chest. “There is no great glory than to die for love.” (García Márquez 82)

Slightly different than the previously discussed tile of Death as Love's Duty, here we see at the work the love/death relationship of Martyring Love. Rather than offering death to his lover as an act of Devotion, as is the case with Saint-Amour's "haughty mulatta," Florentino Ariza evidences a strange eagerness for his own death provided its cause is love. (In a wry case of *horror vacui*, Florentino Ariza later discovers a note written by his father which exactly duplicates this sentiment—"The only regret I will have in dying is if it is not for love" [García Márquez 169; emphasis his]). Unlike Saint-Amour's beloved, who facilitates another's death, Florentino Ariza seeks himself to die, to be a martyr for love—a desire absolutely appropriate for our sexual saint. This scene has every echo of the Roman-era martyr refusing to recant Christ, even as Florentino Ariza refuses to withdraw his love for Fermina Daza. In a strange, ever-so-Neo-Baroque twist upon that biblical verse—"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"—García Márquez secularizes, sexualizes, and ironizes the ready zealotry of a devotee to die for the beloved (*New International Version*, Phil. 1.21). Florentino Ariza's death would not be for a spiritual cause or a heavenly idol, but for a sexual love of flesh and blood. Furthermore, García Márquez's portrayal of Florentino Ariza, described as a pitiful figure with a "forlorn appearance," as the valiant lover carries a humorous tone defying the gravity of Lorenzo Daza's threat (54).

Additionally, there is that strange bit of narrative bridging Lorenzo Daza's threat and Florentino Ariza's response: "Florentino Ariza felt his intestines filling with cold froth. But his voice did not tremble because he felt himself illuminated by the Holy Spirit" (García Márquez 82). Brief as these sentences are, they perfectly encapsulate the *coincidentia oppositorum* of naturalism and transcendence. Note that García Márquez's description of Florentino Ariza's anxiety does not center in the ambiguous stomach, as is so typical of the rhetoric of bodily anxiety. Rather, García Márquez quite distinctly isolates the intestines as the source of Florentino Ariza's physical discomfort. The "cold foam" makes this description even more graphic, granting his pain texture and temperature. This is highly naturalistic description precisely isolates the bodily response fear would ignite in a long-term sufferer of intestinal complications like Florentino Ariza. Yet this depiction is held in tandem with his direct communion with the Holy Spirit, the very metonym of transcendence. This communion is manifested as "illumin[ation]," a state implying a holistic experience involving the entire body, an experience centered in an interior embodiment of the Holy Spirit which radiates outward. And so we are presented with the bizarre image of a corporeal, chronically-constipated saint who is ascending to the highest of spiritual states. This powerful *coincidentia oppositorum*, with all its accompanying tensions and energies, its realism and otherworldliness, only further propels the tension of Florentino Ariza's love/death dynamic of Martyring Love.

Pursuing our investigation of the novel's *horror vacui*, we find associated with Florentino Ariza another proliferation, another tile, in this love/death mosaic. After Fermina Daza marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino, Florentino Ariza is, of course, no less determined to woo her. But his hopes come to rest upon a single necessity—he must outlive Dr. Juvenal Urbino to win the heart of his widow. To this end, Florentino Ariza becomes fastidious in his habits of self-preservation. By the time of the good doctor's death, Florentino Ariza "ha[s] spent a great deal of money, ingenuity, and willpower to disguise the seventy-six years he ha[s] completed in March" (García Márquez 48). His determination to outwit old age and its accompanying decay manifests as intensive, even paranoid efforts to preserve his health. After getting soaked during the storm which ruins Dr.

Juvenal Urbino's funeral procession, Florentino Ariza is "terrified that he [will] catch pneumonia after so many years of meticulous care and excessive precautions" (49). He self-medicates with hot lemonade and brandy, aspirin tablets, and a cocoon of wool blankets (49). This is after a lifetime of his aesthetic diet, of fighting "touch and nail...against baldness," "face[ing] the insidious snares of old age with savage temerity," surviving "six blennorrhagias...a swollen lymph gland, four warts, and six cases of impetigo," and "even in his youth...climb[ing] up and down stairs with special care, for he had always believed that old age began with one's first minor fall" (160, 161, 218-9, 313). His fight against old age is so vigorous that it is not until his teenage affair with Fermina Daza is thirty years past that he realizes old age "ha[s] anything to do with him" and that the "first blow of old age" rocks his self-possession (219). It is in his desperation to sever himself utterly from aging, and consequently death, that we find our next mosaic tile.

Here we find the mosaic tile of Death-Forestalling Love, for Florentino Ariza's struggle against old age and looming death is driven by his fear that death will embrace him before he can embrace a widowed Fermina Daza. As his years draw longer, his greatest fear becomes that "death, that son of a bitch, would win an irreparable victory in [Florentino Ariza's] fierce war of love" (García Márquez 161). A comparison between this and the proceeding love/death tile, Martyring Love, establishes a particularly intriguing example of proliferating *horror vacui*. In the manifestation of Martyring Love, death is seen as an ally of love. To die for love is great glory. It is, as in all the great romances, the truest possible proof of love.

But here, death transmutes into the ultimate adversary. Death's interference in Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza's romance would be even more permanent than Fermina Daza's marriage—such damage would be "irreparable." This is an absolute reversal of Florentino Ariza's earlier love/death relationship. The notion of deadly old age as an enemy to love is a rare literary theme; most authors portray young love, or tragically severed-love. Geriatric love is hardly a popular theme, producing as it does a naturalized, even disquieting reflection upon romance. Yet, what better means exist for cultivating a potent, eloquent *coincidentia oppositorum*? After all, *Love in the Time of Cholera* presents no minor love, no pedestrian wooing. Florentino Ariza is waging a "war" of a love and a fierce one at that. If any love story can be called labeled epic, it is that



Figure 7: Self-Portrait with Bonito. Kahlo

which requires war. Florentino Ariza's obsessive, consuming passion for Fermina Daza is nothing if not otherworldly in its extremity, its ecstasy. Yet, even this transcendent love can be threatened by an enemy as ignominious as decay and death. This dynamic love/death relationship not only generates an invigorating tension—is Florentino Ariza's love transcendent and all-triumphant or as vulnerably human as any other man's?—but also makes such a love more accessible to García Márquez's reader. If such a great love can be defeated by the humanity of disease, cannot any of his readers' loves, equally susceptible to that "son of a bitch, death" also be transcendent?

These two tiles, realized in Florentino Ariza, both boast the same central figures—love and death. In both tiles, love and death's mutual significance to each other is emphasized. Yet a slight divergence between the first and

second tile entirely alters the nature of love and death's interaction. In the first tile, love and death work in tandem; in the second, they are opposed. By creating this strange, slippery dynamic, "García Márquez ironizes the affective strategies of Baroque self-representation" and the attempt to identify an entity through a series of repetitions—in this case, the *coincidentia oppositorum* of love and death (Zamora 208). In creating this dizzying array of alternative but not altogether negating oppositions, García Márquez fills his novel with an infinite series of variations on the possible correlations of love and death. This not only echoes the Baroque technique of *horror vacui*, but nods to the Neo-Baroque's affinity with postmodernism and its accompanying skepticism. Like Frida Kahlo's self-portraits, also eternally repeated with but slight variations (Figures 9, 10, 11), García Márquez's elusive, proliferating depictions of the *coincidentia oppositorum* of love and death, hints that "self-knowledge is fragmentary, fleeting, even futile" (Zamora 192). The relationship of love and death cannot be fixed. It is all the tiles García Márquez posits. It is none of them alone.



Figure 9: Self-Portrait with Monkeys. Kahlo

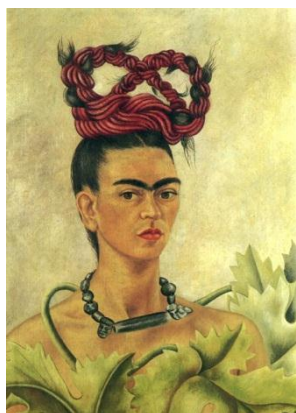


Figure 8: Self-Portrait with Braids. Kahlo

Ultimately, all these manifestations of the *coincidentia oppositorum* of love and death find their culmination in Florentino Ariza. Again and again Florentino Ariza is depicted in black, anachronistic clothing reminiscent of time elapsed, of hours now dead. And in the perpetual black of Florentino Ariza's garb, we find echoes of the widow's weeds, of the undertaker's morbidity. He even, for a time, wears the actual uniform of the dead—his deceased father's suits (260). Yet Florentino Ariza is also the epitome of love. His intensive love for Fermina Daza and his *horror vacui* storm of lovers demands such an interpretation of his figure. As much an echo of death as a personification of love, Florentino Ariza holds both in perfect, equivalent tandem within his intensely passionate self.

Further, his 622 lovers, amalgamated within his figure, are each their own *coincidentia oppositorum* of love and death, sexuality and spirituality, transcendence and naturalism. Each is Florentino Ariza's attempt to deaden, to kill, his longing for Fermina Daza. For though he carefully preserves his love for her, he does strive to annihilate the pain of his long-protracted Eros; each of the women, sacrificed as though in religious ritual, is feed to carnal love—a perfect *coincidentia oppositorum* of sexuality and spirituality. (In fact, several of the women are literally sacrificed—the young América Vicuña kills herself when she loses Florentino Ariza's love and Olimpia Zuleta is murdered by her husband when he learns of her infidelity [García Márquez 217, 336].) Florentino Ariza's incredible, transcendent zeal for love is all driven by a naturalized, parodied appetite rooted in inglorious sexual hunger—lust, to be blunt. Here, we locate in his love affairs the *coincidentia oppositorum* of naturalism and transcendence. In his unbounded *horror vacui* concentration of all these *coincidentia oppositorum* pairings, Florentino Ariza becomes the central and unifying source of *Love in the Time of Cholera*'s incredible tensions and eloquent incongruities. For, despite the novel's many and often opposing depictions of love and death, the novel is sustained by a tireless, indiscriminating exploration of these two elements so monumental to the human experience.

This is why an understanding of the Baroque spirit of the novel is so critical. Bell-Villada reminds us that García Márquez's works "enjoy a worldwide readership...and crystallize[s] new ways of applying the fantastical imagination to human experience" (15). Such incredible accomplishments are, I would argue, largely due to the indiscriminating Baroque techniques García Márquez employs. Because no facet of the human experience of love or death is omitted as unnecessary or illegitimate, as too worldly or otherworldly, the novel offers readers across the globe the means by which to connect with García Márquez's words, to find life and meaning within his texts. The technique of *horror vacui* produces more than mere excess of material with which to cram empty spaces; it also expands emotional exploration to unending fields and panoramas. Considered in this light, it becomes natural that García Márquez's novels should enjoy an audience around the globe. Despite the novel's obvious location in Latin American (which contributes to its status as a *New World* Baroque novel), the novel's themes prevent its being entirely moored in a specific time, place, or culture. The many aspects of love and death—sacrifice, perfection, martyrdom, and longevity, among others—as explored within *Love in the Time of Cholera* form an emotional bridge spanning the chasms which divide man from man, culture from culture.

It is, at last, the novel's *coincidentia oppositorum* which permits García Márquez to link the "fantastical" with "human experience" and to make such a yoking meaningful to the sweep of humanity. All men and women need respites from the mire of life. We all need moments of transcendence. To at once present the fantastic—spirituality, transcendence, love—and the earthly—sexuality, naturalism, death—as co-existent is to offer even the lowest man the hope of knowing the former in the midst of the latter. Aesthetic hope and elevation are presented as yet being accessible to man's world, man's life. In this, García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* offers its readers far more than entertainment, parody, or a romance. It offers hope and pleasure even in the midst of suffering, of reality. As with any fine art of the Baroque, *Love in the Time of Cholera* becomes a means, at least for a moment, of elevation to a transcendent plane even while one's feet are firmly planted upon the soil.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla, interior (page 4)

Figure 2: Church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla, detail (page 4)

Figure 3: *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Bernini (page 5)

Figure 4: *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, detail. Bernini (page 6)

Figure 5: *The Martyrdom of St. Lieven*. Rubens (page 6)

Figure 6: *The Martyrdom of St. Lieven*, detail. Rubens (page 7)

Figure 7: *The Death of the Virgin*. Caravaggio (page 7)

Figure 8: *The Assumption of the Virgin*. Rubens (page 8)

Figure 9: *Self-Portrait with Bonito*. Kahlo (page 20)

Figure 10: *Self-Portrait with Monkeys*. Kahlo (page 20)

Figure 11: *Self-Portrait with Braids*. Kahlo (page 20)

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