

Love in the Time of Cholera

Abdullah Shibli reviews one of Marquez's highly acclaimed novels

IN his novel, "Love in the Times of Cholera", (LTC) Gabriel Garcia Marquez compares the experience of falling in love and being in love to the pain one endures when ravaged by cholera. The title of the book, interpreted literally, would appear to point towards a time when cholera was a common epidemic in South America, particularly in the Colombian port city of Cartagena where the story unfolds, but as one reads on it is clear that the protagonists, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza, show all the symptoms of cholera after they fall in love. And Garcia Marquez finally shows his cards when he writes almost at the outset of the narrative that "His condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera. The symptoms of love were the same as those of cholera."

Garcia Marquez is one of the most celebrated and revered novelist of the 20th century. When his magnum opus, "One Hundred Years of Solitude" was translated into English I was just starting my graduate studies, and had enrolled in my first computer language course in Boston. The professor, Michael Brown Beasley, was a powerful force in the classroom with his ability to teach Fortran computer language and simultaneously display his ability to get the class, more than 30 strong from different backgrounds, enraptured in his tales from "One Hundred Years". It was not too difficult to figure out that the Colombian novelist had a magical influence on the American computer science professor. Unfortunately, my first attempts to read "One Hundred Years" was futile since the opening paragraphs were not very inviting to someone accustomed to the poetic styles of Dickens and Tagore. For my readers who are not familiar with Garcia Marquez, let me offer three quick tips to the uninitiated about his writing, without spoiling the fun of discovering his world, that one has to be prepared for: his settings (South America in the 19th century), storytelling with a substantive dose of magical realism, and non-linearity of the narrative.

In LTC, Ariza, an eighteen year old young man who works in the city's telegraph office, falls in love with Daza the daughter of a businessman. The rest of the novel is a spellbinding tale of twists and turns in their life, her marriage to Dr. Urbino, his lifelong desire to be united with her, and the final episode after her husband of more than fifty years passes on. At the superficial level, LTC is a love triangle between the two men and a woman, but to a romantic reader it a journey

with a magician who takes you to the inner depths of a man torn by his love for Daza that morphs and dazzles with time. As the different stages of this relationship is unraveled, one can see that the story is not only about how the pandemic of cholera casts a shadow over the pre-industrial society, but also how love itself can be a state of mind that is eviscerated by cholera.

Just after Ariza falls in love he starts to show many of the symptoms of cholera: sleeplessness, restless, inability to eat or digest, and loss of weight. His mother, with whom he stays, is convinced that her son has contacted cholera and tries the utmost to give him the antidotes for cholera. At other times but over the next few years, from time to time, he also shows other signs of the disease, such as fever, diarrhea, vomiting, and headaches. Since Colombia has witnessed several episodes of cholera during the sixty years covered in the novel, Ariza is considered by all who are ignorant of his secret love for Daza as a lifelong victim of cholera defying all the advances of medical science and advances in medicine.

In addition, Ariza during his fifty years of waiting for Daza shows many other indications of being both physically and mentally ill. His irrationality is on display when he takes a steam boat to take up his job as a telegraph operator at a remote destination, in Villa de Leyva, a dreamy city more than twenty day's journey away. However, once he reaches his new post, he changes his mind, and persuades the Captain to offer him return passage to Cartagena. Even after Daza gets married and is happily settled in her married life, he keeps on nurturing his dreams to win her back. But he also realizes that the only way he can claim her back is if she becomes a widow, and he is not without remorse for these evil thoughts. He says, "What hurts me is that he has to die" and she would suffer the pain of widowhood. And Daza is not without her own misfortunes in conjugal life. However, she accepts her plight, and to quote Garcia Marquez, "One night she came back from her daily walk stunned by the revelation that one could be happy not only without love, but despite it."

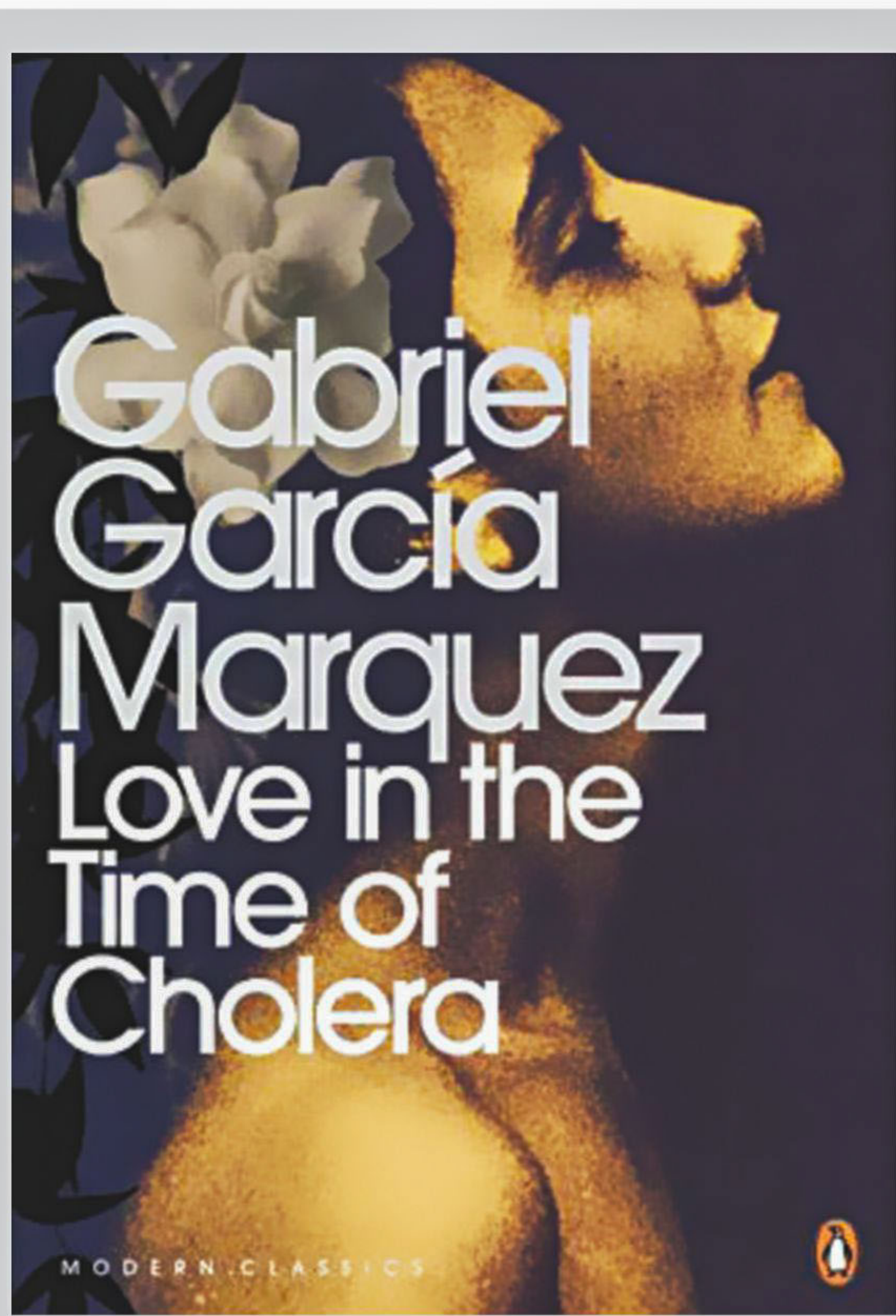
The book retains its crisp pace even as we move from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth, since it is evident that the symptoms of Ariza's love for Daza remain intact over time and show no signs of waning even as he ages and his "sickness" adversely affects his condition, suffuses all

aspects of his life, and even threatens his very existence. A quick summary of his mental state will aptly paint the picture: When he was young, and falls into devastating love, "Neither one could do anything except think about the other, and dream about the other." Then when he was in his middle age, and catches Daza getting off the boat he feels "shaken by a seismic tremor that tore his head". Finally, after the death of her husband, he gains the courage to approach her and renew his love for Daza and, on the first night of her widowhood, hemusters the courage to "repeat his vow of eternal fidelity and everlasting love". However, subsequent to this event, he also does not sleep a single night for two weeks since he could not bear to think of the pain that Daza might be experiencing in her solitary life, without him by her side to comfort her! And, ironically, all this after she had already rebuked him for his audacity and his shameless offering of love to a widow at Urbino's wake.

At other times, we find Ariza wandering aimlessly though the city's streets, almost like a vagabond and a man in the final throes of death, searching for her and hoping to get a glimpse of Daza. However much the symptoms of cholera are displayed in these descriptions, Ariza as a man in love suffers even more in what we do not see. The non-visible or hidden afflictions of love are strewn all over the place. After fifty years or unrequited love, he has the air of a man eaten away by a disease. His does not end with Daza jilting him, with her marriage, with the years passing, and his realization that he might pass on or she might before she becomes a widow and available again. The pangs and the ravages of love that he endures would have totally emasculated any other man but he fights on and keeps the fire burning at the age of seventy six, not to mention his hundreds of casual affairs which serve as an antidote.

But, at the end they find each other, or are reunited with each other and make a journey on a steamboat named New Fidelity of RCC up the river. And ironically, their love is cemented by faking they have cholera. Ariza has the captain lie to the Health Department and inform them that all the passengers have cholera and, as a measure of quarantine, ply up and down the river with the yellow flag on its mast to signal its status as a boat with passengers sick with cholera. A magical ending to a masterfully crafted love story!

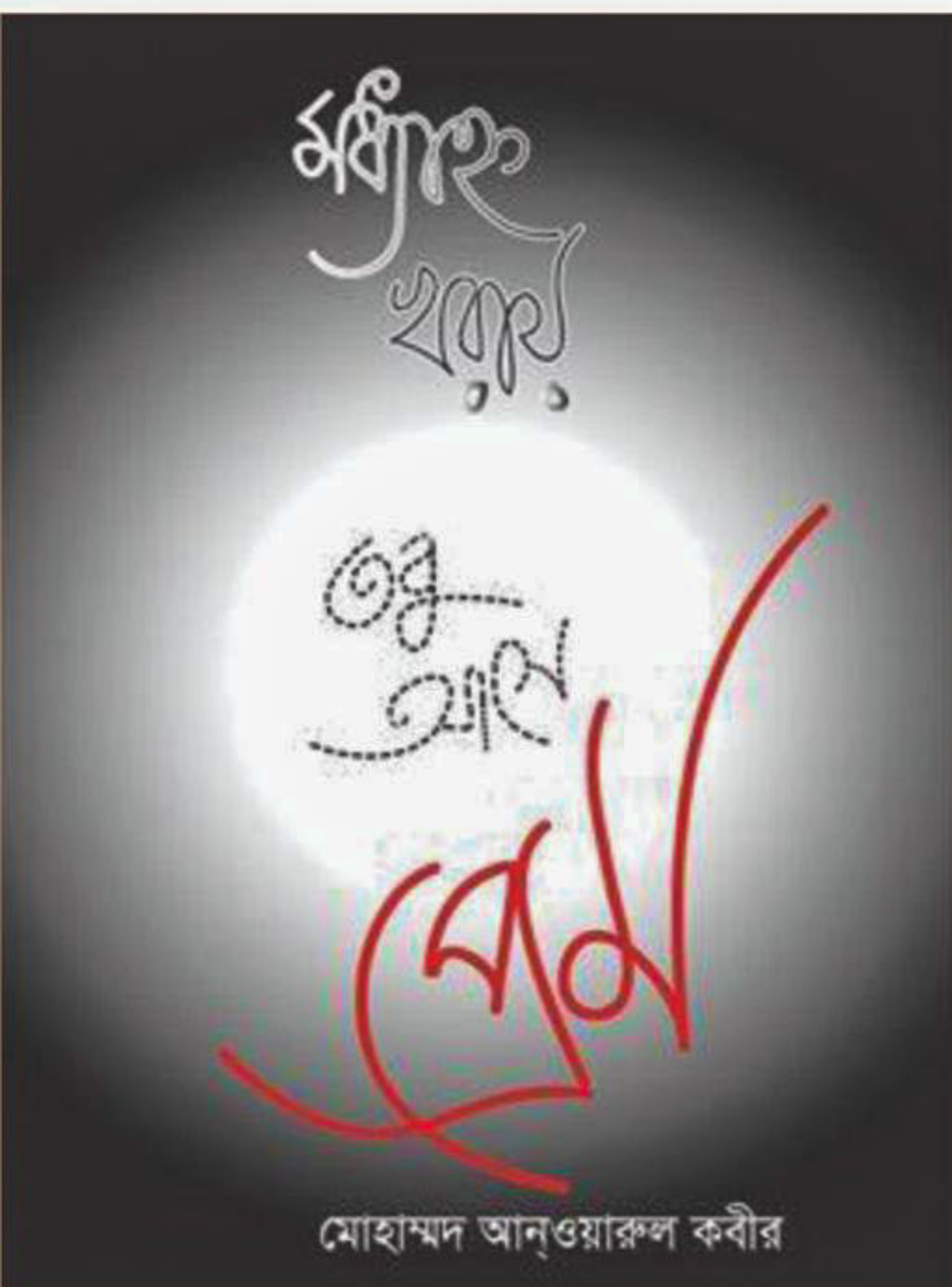
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Love in the Time of Cholera (Spanish: El amor en los tiempos del cólera) is a novel by Nobel Prize-winning Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez first published in Spanish in 1985. Alfred A. Knopf published an English translation in 1988, and an English-language movie adaptation was released in 2007.

A Mid-Aged Passionate Lover

Shomir Theo discovers a passionate poet in Anwarul Kabir



Book Title : Mohdhanno Kharai Tobu Ashey Prem (Love Comes even in Life's Afternoon), Published in 2014
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POETRY for Anwarul Kabir is a set of dialogues with self or with the beloved. His poems are, mostly, recollections in tranquility, and often from atonality with affinity. "Mohdhanno Kharai Tobu Ashey Prem" (Love Comes even in Life's Afternoon), Kabir's debut collection derives from such spontaneous dialogues or, monologues

of varied complexities of middle age. If time is circular so is life, as Kabir puts it, marching towards the circumference of eternally cyclic revolution, trailing love and separation and all the myriad of feelings in between. Take the titular poem that comes with definite hint of passionate affair. Societal barriers are as if the barricade in the warlike conquest of love while the over-

powering tide of sensuality cannot but overflow and the beloved and love turns synonymous. Meye Tumi ki Amar Kishani Hobe, (O girl, Will You be a Cultivator of My Heart) invites the reader in with freshness of modern diction and appropriate auditory images. In neatly written lines we find intimately precise sounds of glass bangles, light reflected back at the eye as love shines forth in brightened core of lover. The poem vividly captures the reminiscence of rural landscape left behind at growing up years. Amar Sathey Ari Niley (If you Part From Me) offers tight knitted lines with precision of visual images and gripping rhymed lines. Often the poet invites his beloved tenderly in Tagore's romantic strain while often he is metaphysical conceits capture forceful imagery of Armageddon, as Israfil calls upon, as if the lover is the final destiny. As for Kabir the poet is the lover, in passionate height the lover is as if god-head while making love finds greater urgency than all of life's good deeds meshed up to meet the judgment seat of the ultimate judge. Reliance on classicism is evident in Afsos Sudhu (Regrets Only). The ennui of unmitigated love that resides in the heart of lover is poisonous hemlock. While on another occasion, the lover is a crucified Nazarene, lover is stung in pangs of angst insurmountably. Take Nostalgiyem Kishor Mukh, childhood romances found nature as the first beloved, with relishing simple late afternoon meals on sweet potato, counting sbrabon streams, making way through pathway of white flowers. The

influence of the mughals comes across with Islamic terminology. Be it the Arabic strain or, the falling of Berlin wall, love finds poet's heart often strikingly. Scientific jargon such as algorithm and mythical figures like Arjun creeps in to convey deep speculation on Biraha or, heroic endeavours in love game. Consider the rhetorical question to start a poem, could the fragrance of Kamini be the scent of love, is it tranquil, real or, surreal? The whole poem is set to the quest. Could breathing the city air at midnight answer the poignant questions of lost love, lonesomeness? Often love-life is ever encompassing ennui, grappling over romancing while at other times love fails to drive out the ennui of modernity. Over cups of coffee, exchanges of desperate fire that can hardly be extinguished. Beloved, for Kabir, at other times is an oasis, a haven from the toxicated myre of making a living in Dhaka city. Her touch is like the buds of rose. Kabir surprises with gripping lines like this one - Gohin bukey chapa thakey sudhu dukho borof (Sorrow resides like a mine, hidden or, like Iceberg) beyond the mundane chit-chats, seemingly plausible laughter lies angst of a deeper kind. The quest continues, could love be the nirvana? Throughout the collection Kabir's view of woman can be summed up as patriarchal gaze, while woman mystifies or at times beguiles poet's mind. English heroes such as Arjun, Krishna comes in at times in the war of love and pronounces love as the only meaningful essence of life. A computer scientist by profes-

sion, scientific jargon like algorithm and progression flows into his poems as much as blended in Arabic, Hindi and English words. The lyrics hinting narcissism and post-modernist metonymies could be better executed. With precision of imagery and clarity of metaphors in Straight-cut Dhoro Haat (Just Hold My Hand), is one of the best lyrics. Projapati Mon O Fuler Shourov (Butterfly Heart and Flower fragrance) executes the sharpest kind of irony. Kabir's view of woman is quite traditional throughout the book until one reads the final poem of the collection - written as a dialogue with mother-in-law and a progressive daughter-in-law. The woman of two generation wages war over identity and liberty, over tradition bound customs where men are granted as bees to roam about in relationships and woman must be chaste, the idea is debunked with the logic that woman has the right to be butterflies. Love, for Kabir is synonymous to creative quest and whether or not, consummating, they hold the passion of English metaphysical poet John Donne. It is true that quite a few lyrics lack editing and economy of words, while the post-romancing unrest is quite evident, a better craftsmanship can be expected in his next collection. The cover could indeed be better for sure. Yet, any conscious reader will agree that the effort to pen-picture the strain of love and separation during the myriad afternoon of one's life is a commendable one.

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Matter of Faith

Syed Badrul Haque surveys an analytical work

GUIDE For Muslims (Indexed To The Qur'an) authored by Barrister Salauddin Ahmed is yet another milestone in the literary works in the broad spectrum of Islam. Last year I had the privilege to write a review for his remarkable work, Guidance From The Qu'ran, in this daily.

Regarding the title of the book, the author asserts 'it is not intended that it would be looked upon as a comprehensive guide for the Muslims, rather a tool for achieving one's own sincere efforts to study the Quran deeply and reflect upon it, only to please Allah.'

The present book is intended to serve the purpose of using it as a guide to the Qur'an to find a topic-wise discussion and analysis. It will be a step forward in helping Muslims to be aware of the duties enjoined upon them as mentioned in it and equip them for discharging their duties in creating confidence when they will face the questions on the Day of Judgment. The purpose of the book, the author says, is to read and study the texts in the Qur'an and make clear one's own understanding of his duties to Allah and the people around him. This book, the author hopes, shall create interest in the readers to climb some steps towards that lofty goal. The topics in this book have been arranged in alphabetical order making them user-friendly. For the purpose of reference to the Qu'ran, it has been entirely edited with Surah number and the relevant verse number.

The book virtually meets all the queries of an enquiring mind to satisfy its quest for knowing the contents of the Qu'ran and to carry out further on one's own to appreciate the majesty of Allah and his eternal guidance for man to live a contented life in this world and later in the Hereafter.

The book in hand has been presented in a brilliantly simple, lucid and unaffected way that can be readily accessed and absorbed. Surely when such a book graces your bookshelf, it indeed gains a permanence beyond generations. The author firmly believes that the book (which is available through internet) shall be warmly welcomed by readers who are anxious to learn more from the Qu'ran. It is an elevating read.

The author, Barrister Salauddin Ahmed, presently a resident in Australia is a well-known Bangladeshi Islamic scholar has to his credit four titles published from New Delhi and Kuala Lumpur. His landmark full-fledged Google book, A Dictionary Of Muslim Names (1999) was jointly published from London, New York, India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. His outstanding voluminous work of 600 pages of Islamic Banking Finance And Insurance: A Global Overview (Kuala Lumpur, 2006) went through reprint. Salauddin Ahmed, a practitioner of the Dhaka High Court became a law academic in the early 70s, moving later to the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia where he taught until the end of the last century. He is a contributor and consultant to the Muslim Names Section of the Dictionary of American Family Names (Oxford, 2003).

Kudos to A S Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur, for publishing the title, a seminal work in the realm of Islam.

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