

# Sexual Stereotyping and Idea of Pedophilia in *Memories of My Melancholy Whores: A Psychoanalytic Study*

Dr. Arif Mahammad Chaprasi

Faculty Member, Department of English, Sundarban Mahavidyalaya, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India

Mail Id: arifmahammad25[at]gmail.com

Phone No.6294535986

**Abstract:** *Pedophilia is a sexual (psychiatric) disorder in which a person experiences sexual feelings towards pre-pubescent children. The term "pedophilia" (ped-uh-fil-ee-uh) is derived from the Greek words for "child" and "love". It is, basically, a universal psycho-social problem, is a psychiatric disorder or a perverse sexual orientation. Although a few number of pedophilia supporting groups argue that having sexual interests in children is merely a sexual orientation or fantasy, but this paper explores further in analyzing different psychological insights of pedophiles, especially in the contexts of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel Memories of My Melancholy Whores (2004). It is evident that, Sexual stereotyping and pedophilia are related concerns (in relation to feminine sensibility) quite evident in Memories. Garcia Marquez writes about the near taboo subject of an elderly man deliberately seeking out of an adolescent girl for sex. The set-up invites an examination of socio-cultural ideas on geriatric sexuality. Generally perceived as asexual, the elderly section of the population is often subjected to age-related stereotyping. Stereotyping occurs when over generalised and preconceived characteristics are attributed to someone or something. Such attributes are rarely positive. Discrimination and prejudice as typical examples of stereotyping against an individual occur on the basis of the narrator's age in Memories. The conflict revolves around the un-named narrator's age and sexuality and invites a psycho-social analysis of how age, gender and sexuality manifest and shape García Márquez's narrative. Gerontology as the scientific study of old age, the aging process and the problems of elderly people, encompasses many ideas on what it means to be old. Most of the ideas on old age are social constructs rather than scientific facts. Ageism is understood here as the practice of treating people differently and usually unfairly on the grounds of age only, particularly when they are considered too old to participate in ordinary social or cultural activities such as brothel sex. Accordingly, the following discussion analyses the narrator's own response to his ninetieth birthday. It also considers how he behaves and responds to ageist attitudes displayed towards his sexuality by his acquaintances and colleagues at work on the event of his ninetieth birthday. What are the cultural links between femininity and insanity, and how are they represented? Through the lenses of disciplines such as theatre criticism, feminist theory, and psychiatry, this thesis examines the history of madness as a gendered concept and its depictions in art and literature. Additionally, it will explore the representation of female madness in contemporary dramatic literature as compared to the medical model used during the era in which it was written as well as the social and cultural conditions and expectations of the period. This is prominent in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Memories of My Melancholy Whore and this article delves the concept of affection beyond physical intimacy. However, Memories of My Melancholy Whores (2004), a magical realism novel as well by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, follows an unnamed narrator who treats himself to a night with an adolescent virgin on his ninetieth birthday, and as a result, finds himself falling in love for the first time.*

**Keywords:** Pedophilia, Memories, Sexual stereotyping, Gender, Sexuality, Marquez, Ageism.

*"He is a master of physical observation: Surfaces, appearances, external realities, spoken words – everything that a truly observant observer can observe. He makes almost no allusion to states-of mind, motivations, emotions, internal responses: Those are left to the inferential skills and deductive interests of the reader. "*

— Edith Grossman, 2003 PEN, *Tribute to Gabriel García Márquez*, New York City, 5 November 2003.

The unnamed, near-nonagenarian narrator of this splendid short novel has plans for his 90th birthday, a lifelong self-educated and not very attractive bachelor who lives frugally and writes a weekly column for the local newspaper in his provincial Colombian town. He calls the madam of his favourite local brothel and asks her to procure for him an adolescent virgin with whom he will spend one night. Thus begins a story that, upon hearing it summarized as I've done so far, you might think would be rudely realistic and, depending on your sensibilities, something that would produce varying degrees of revulsion.

The very first sentence in the novella, "The year I turned ninety, I wanted to give myself the gift of a night of wild sex with an adolescent virgin" (emphasis added) (Garcia, *Melancholy* 3), sets the tone of the whole interaction between the brothel owner and the narrator. Several ideas sustain the deliberate nature of the intended sexual experience. First of these is the imperious tone that expresses the birthday wish. His demand that an adolescent virgin be procured for him expresses an attitude that shows little concern with the legality and socio-cultural acceptability of the narrator's intentions. His peremptory declaration to the madam, "Today's the day" (Garcia, *Melancholy* 3), is a spur of the moment idea. There is no premeditation evident over this strange request or this almost spiritual declaration. The narrator's haughtiness objectifies the girl, potentially reducing her to a commodity ordered over the phone, especially as he specifies and demands freshness and promptness of delivery in his order. We are told: She [Rosa] ... offered me half a dozen delectable options, but all of them, to be frank, were used. I said no, insisting that the girl had to be a virgin and available that very night (emphasised) (3). García Márquez's

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representation of sexuality and its usual metaphoric link with colonial exploitation of the oppressed is addressed quite plainly in *Memories*. The exploitation has shifted to postcolonial politics where belonging to either the Conservative or the Liberal party has its gains or losses; as intimated by the narrator, in quite literal terms, when he observes to Rosa, "... [Y]ou are the only liberal with power in this government" (80).

*Memories of My Melancholy Whores* was not one of García Márquez's greatest successes. Upon its release, it encountered harsh criticisms because of its trivial setting. It is reasonable to argue, as many critics did, that it seems to simplistically romanticize prostitution and child exploitation. The old man never problematizes the grim underpinnings of the sex trade. On the other hand, as noted by American writer and literary critic John Updike, "such moral concerns are irrelevant to the rapture that is his basic subject": namely, the rebirth of love in a body that was set to decay. García Márquez's representation of sexuality in *Memories* is quite different in that at the literal level it appears a simple narration of sexual perversion and exploitation of a minor. It is not. Millington (2010) confirms that most of García Márquez's female characters are introduced to sex at age 14, the age at which García Márquez's paternal grandmother had had the writer's father (Shostak, 2003).

Age is irrelevant when it comes to being loved and showering love. In *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, the old man had a love affair with the young adolescent girl that went beyond sex. He recognises the power of love and realises that 'sex without love is like looking at the world through a pair of blindfolded eyes' (Rascovsky 109). He recognises true love as something more than lust. He looks after the young girl. When she has been absent for months, he hunts for her like a madman. He is brave enough to trade the family treasures for Delgadina's sake. The article unfolds the concept of love and lust in a different dimension. There is a trend in today's world to murder loved ones if there is no prospect of reconciliation. These individuals are oblivious to the true worth of love. They never consider that true love entails releasing the ones you care about. Despite his inability to join with Delgadina, the old man remembered her. The old man's love for Delgadina is evident, since he pines for her even when she is not around, and he makes no attempt to harm her.

The hero is a Colombian journalist who describes himself as second-rate. But García Márquez, perennially enraptured by the wonderful, can't quite make him lacklustre and gives him a newspaper column that has run for 50 years and readers who follow his work with breathless interest. On his 90th birthday, the nameless journalist, who says he had paid to have sex with 514 women by the age of 50, asks a madam to procure a virgin. On the first of many occasions, he enters the room to discover the naked 14-year-old girl asleep. Throughout the year, he obsesses over her; writes columns about her that drive his readers into a frenzy; and kisses her everywhere and reads to her as she sleeps—but never consummates the relationship sexually or sees her awake. Once, when she murmurs something, dreaming, he thinks, "That was when the last shadow of doubt disappeared from my soul: I preferred her asleep." For anyone who regards

the barest prerequisite for a relationship as both partners being conscious and of the age of consent, the scenario is disturbing. There is no indication—'unless it is the word "melancholy" in the title—that García Márquez means his tale to be the parody of macho idiocy it appears to be' (Sangari 3). His hero ends revitalized and radiantly optimistic, while readers are left wondering, "Can he be serious?" What can't be dismissed, however, is García Márquez's gift for the casually adept insight. The narrator, for example, catches sight of himself in a store window: "I didn't look the way I felt but older, dressed in shabbier clothes."

García Márquez's writing, so colourful and inventive in the celebrated masterpieces for which he deservedly received the Nobel prize in 1982—*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*—is in these pages flat and conventional: "I have a reputation as a miser because no one can imagine I'm as poor as I am if I live where I live, but the truth is that a night like this was far beyond my means". In his previous books, his characters, however fantastical, were believable. Here, only the old journalist comes to life: the women exist merely as scaffolding for his dreams—happy, wise, loving whores without a care in the world except (as in the case of Delgadina's friend) that caused by a surfeit of love. Finally, the "quotable" snippets of wisdom that García Márquez lent his characters in the past (almost a trademark of his style) become in this book either incomprehensible or banal: "peaceful madmen are ahead of the future"; "Whores left me no time to be married"; "There is still a great deal left for us to say about music"; "Age isn't how old you are but how old you feel." (Marquez, *Melancholy* 67)

The work is somewhat reminiscent of Vladimir Nabokov's well-known novel *Lolita* (1955), but the expected gender roles—of an older man psychologically dominating a teenage girl—are reversed. That is, the elderly journalist never physically consummates the relationship; instead, he finds himself unable to wake the sleeping Delgadina and comes to realize that love is not a product of sex but rather of emotional connection with another human. While Delgadina continues her innocence through her sleep, the journalist awakens her through the simplicity of romance. Here, García Márquez's Magical Realism is also inverted. Instead of the author presenting irrational and fantasy acts to produce a rational structuring of everyday reality in the mind of the reader, the simple existence and common wishes of a young girl produce an irrational state of fascination and adoration in the protagonist. This duality of realities forces the reader to confront societal and individual preconceptions about sexuality, love, prostitution, age, and obscenity. Through this work, García Márquez brings the reader to question the moral and aesthetic points of love and sex. Could it be that nobody can live a complete life succumbing to some obscene temptation? The book *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* reads like the laboured breathing of an old man and Delgadina for all the moral and ethical questions her almost-dalliance with our narrator elicits is no more than a metaphor for an unattainable ideal and on that score, Marquez still shows a maestro's touch like he did in previous novels with the same theme.

Some critics chastised the author and the novella's hero 'as dirty old men who have no social conscience about the exploitation of young women in third world countries' (Inani 453), but it is a misunderstanding of the tradition of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, as well as Garcia Márquez's obvious intention, to label this a perverted book about an old man's wicked lust for a teenage girl. As Garcia Márquez has suggested in previous works, visiting a brothel does not have the same unsavoury aspect in Colombia as it does in America. Indeed, the author of the classic *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) has praised the brothels of Bogota, where he studied law, even though he was once beaten up there for failing to pay a prostitute. There is no hint of criminal exploitation in the book, no sordid reality of young women made chattel to men with money. Rather the story is about enrapt attention, fantasy, the romantic dream of pure ideal love.

Although, the protagonist realizes that sex is merely a consolation for not having love, he has never been able to experience love; indeed, has never had sex with a woman unless he paid for it. That the final object of his desire is a fourteen-year-old girl has nothing to do with the social issue of preying on the helpless and innocent. Neither love nor sex in this novella has anything to do with social reality; the story is rather a complete romantic idealization of the art-like object of desire. J. Negel, a literary critic for *The Guardian*, considered the work to be 'flat and conventional lacking Marquez's characteristic color, inventiveness, and trademark quotable snippets of wisdom' (Negel 130). In the *Literary Review*, Sam Leith complained that the book was seeded with odd little paradoxes that were tense, careful, deadpan, and often baffling, while Michiko Kakutani writing in the *New York Times* had this to say:

The fertile inventiveness that animated his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is decidedly muted in these pages, and the reverence for the mundane realities of ordinary life, showcased in more recent works, seems attenuated as well. As a result, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* feels like a brittle little fable composed on automatic pilot. The trajectory of this narrative turns out to be highly predictable, leading to a banal ending to a banal story that's quite unworthy of the great Gabriel Garcia Marquez's prodigious talents. (Garrard 252, Kirsch 55)

However, the wonderful joke of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, though, is that its hero's life is changed by the late onset of a profoundly immature and not especially healthy emotion: the painful, idealizing, narcissistic romanticism of adolescence. And the narrator knows all too well how ludicrously out of season this desperate yearning is, how silly it is for a man his age-the whores' client of the year, no less-to be born again into puppy love. The wisdom the narrator comes to after his great conversion is so mundane, so homely, it's hilarious: "When I woke alive on the first morning of my 90's in the happy bed of Delgadina, I was transfixed by the agreeable idea that life was not something that passes by like Heraclitus' ever-changing river but a unique opportunity to turn over on the grill and keep broiling on the other side for another 90 years." (Marquez, *Melancholy* 15)

In *Memory of My Melancholy Whores*, the old guy admires Delgadina's attractiveness as well. The prostitutes keep him busy and that is the main reason the elderly guy being unmarried: "Whenever someone asks I always answer with the truth: whores left me no time to be married" (Arrington 39). Despite the fact that prostitutes, both good and wicked, have played an essential role in the old man's life, he has never experienced true love until he is ninety years old. He prioritised sex until he was ninety years old, but when he encounters the youthful, innocent Delgadina, his life changes and sex is replaced by love. In his mind, he has even lived with Delgadina. When he misunderstands Delgadina's status as a whore and develops possessive feelings for her, he becomes rude. He's met a lot of ladies throughout his life, but Delgadina is different. The affection between the two characters is depicted effectively by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Following his contact with Delgadina, the old man changes. The man who used to think of women as sex objects has evolved into a new man who values women's souls. The old guy yearns to join Delgadina's soul. Pure love has evolved from lust. A psychological shift has occurred in the old man. Aside from his sexual enjoyment with her, Damiana's affection for the old guy is also a servant-master connection.

To sum up, the representations of sexualities in *Memories* are principally driven by the impunity with which the brothel owners are able to operate above the law by corruptly engaging officials in brothel sex. The madams take advantage of the legal loopholes to traffic young girls and seem to get away with it all the time. In the world of the novel there seems to be a mismatch between legal dictates and social attitudes to brothel sex involving children on the verge of the age of consent and aged adult men. Public consciousness of the rightness of such laws does not appear particularly evident. Therefore, the laws have not effected the necessary change to deeply ingrained social attitudes to brothel sex. Garcia Marquez sheds light on the dangers associated with brothel sex. There is the potential risk of violence, particularly where sexual minorities are concerned. Disease is another element associated with the sex trade that Marquez explores in an understated manner so that as readers, we have to read between the lines to work out the writerly ideas on sexually transmitted infections. The underlying attitude seems to be that prostitutes are the carriers of disease but little literary attention is accorded males as vectors of disease.

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## Author Profile



**Dr. Arif Mahammad Chaprasi** is an unobtrusive Marquez scholar and has been teaching at Sundarban Mahavidyalaya (affiliated to University of Calcutta) since 2011. He was awarded M. Phil in 2013, and Ph. D in 2023. His doctoral topic was: *Treatment of*

*History in select fictions of Gabriel Garcia Marquez* under the supervision of Professor (Dr.) Subir Kumar Dhar. He has published articles in many reputed national and international referred and peer-reviewed journals so far and his areas of academic interests are British romantic literature and post-colonial literature of Latin America. He has been authored of two books comprise *A Reader's Guide to the History of English Literature and Language* published