

Gabriel García Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera

Monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 3-51

1. The novel's title suggests its two central concerns: love and death. How is love represented in the novel's opening chapter?
 - How would you characterize the love between Juvenal Urbino and his wife, Fermina?
 - In Urbino's final words, "Only God knows how much I loved you," he uses the Spanish form of the past tense for completed events. Is Urbino speaking from the perspective of his imminent death, or is he remembering the love of his youth as something past? Is the relation between Urbino and Fermina in old age based on love, or merely loyalty and convenience?
 - How would you characterize the love between Jeremiah de Saint-Amour and his mixed-race lover?
 - Does the unnamed lover's concealment call into question Saint-Amour's love? Does his relationship match his name? Is his lover's assistance in his suicide an act of love?
 - Do their owners love the Great Dane, Mister Woodrow Wilson, and the polyglot parrot? Do the pets love their masters?
2. How does this opening chapter of the novel portray the inevitability of old age and death?
 - How do the two chess players, Urbino and Saint-Amour, differ as they confront the challenges of aging?
 - Do these deaths—Saint-Amour's planned suicide and Urbino's accident—match the lives they lived? their images of themselves? their images in society?
3. Juvenal Urbino is a very different kind of character than anyone I remember in One Hundred Years of Solitude. In what ways do we come to know him that are different from the characterizations in Márquez's earlier novel?
 - In what ways is he represented as a basically good man?
 - What are his limitations? his flaws? his blind spots?
4. The first chapter largely takes place on the last day of Urbino's life. How does this day contrast with what we are told in flashbacks about his previous 81 years of life?
 - What effect does Márquez achieve by making Urbino's last day such a complete disaster?
 - What effects are achieved by the interaction between present and past time in the narration of his last day?
 - What mysteries linger following the narration of this day's events? Mysteries about Saint-Amour? about Urbino and Fermina's marriage? about Fermina's past?
5. Why does Fermina refuse to allow the church, the city, or the state to hold public funerary events for her eminent husband?
 - What do we learn about Fermina in her response to Urbino's death?
 - How does her response amplify what we learned in the stories about bath soap and pee on the toilet seat?

6. The setting of this novel is quite different from magical Macondo. How does Márquez characterize the city in which most of the novel takes place?
- What neighborhoods are described? in what detail?
 - What references allow us to locate the city in Colombia?
 - How is the city's social structure described?
 - How have history and geography molded the city into its current form?
 - What historical references allow us to locate, if roughly, the years of Urbino and Fermina's married life?