

Gabriel García Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera

Monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 53-163

1. Márquez presents two extended courtships of Fermina Daza.
 - What does the story of Florentino Ariza's courtship of Fermina suggest about the nature of his love? What is he in love with?
 - Biographers note that Florentino's courtship is, in part, based on stories of Márquez's own father's indefatigable pursuit of his mother (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Garc%C3%ADa_M%C3%A1rquez). Literary critics point out that the courtship also has literary antecedents (see "Florentino Ariza, Petrarch, and Dante"). Does this information enhance your reading of Florentino's courtship?
 - Does Márquez's humor lead the reader to pity Florentino or to dismiss him as a buffoon?
 - Why does Fermina participate in Florentino's clandestine courtship?
 - Why does Escolastica help Fermina and Florentino continue their relationship?
 - Why is Lorenzo Daza, Fermin's father, so opposed to Florentino's suit?
 - Why does Fermina suddenly reject Florentino's advances?
 - What does the story of Juvenal Urbino's courtship suggest about his love? Does this eminent young doctor love Fermina?
 - How do his courtship strategies differ from Florentino's? Why for so long do they fail to win over Fermina?
 - What role does Hildebranda play in Fermina's response to her suitors?
 - What role does Fermina's father play in Urbino's unsuccessful, then successful courtship?
 - What causes Fermina to yield eventually to Urbino's advances?
2. Both Fermina and Florentino experience their first sexual encounters on boats, but not, of course, with each other. Why does Márquez stage these encounters on boats?
 - Before these experiences, what have Florentino and Fermina learned about sexuality? From whom?
 - How do their early experiences of sexuality differ, and what does each discover from his/her first real sexual experience?
 - What tone does Márquez use to narrate Florentino's extensive sexual conquests, beginning with the widow Nazaret? To what end?
 - What seems to be the relation that Márquez is drawing between sex and love?
3. After reading this section of the novel, do you have a deeper understanding of Fermina's actions during the marital battle over bathroom soap narrated in the first chapter?
 - Do her acceptance of Florentino's courtship and her early rejection of Urbino's courtship arise from similar aspects of her character?
 - What does her response to the visit from the mother superior of her old school suggest about her character?

- How has Fermina managed to break through the barriers of class structure that excluded her father?
 - How do her decisions and actions compare and/or contrast to those of other female characters: Escolastica? Urbino's mother and sisters? Hildebranda? Tránsito Ariza?
4. The port city of the setting and the settlements along the river are plagued by epidemics of cholera.
- What do you make of the juxtaposition of descriptions of tropical lushness and rotting corpses during Florentino's river voyage?
 - What role do cholera epidemics play in the formation of Urbino's character?
 - How does Márquez relate cholera to love in this section of the novel?
5. As in One Hundred Years of Solitude, Márquez strategically includes references in Love in the Time of Cholera to Colombia's seemingly endless civil wars, to the coming of scientific and technological changes, to how business gets done, and to the history of Colombia's colonial past. For example,
- How does the sporadic fighting affect events as disparate as Lorenzo Daza's plans for Fermina and the sexual education of Florentino?
 - How and why is Urbino associated with the coming of modernity to Colombia?
 - What kind of businessmen are Lotario Thugut and Lorenzo Daza?
 - What traces of Colombia's colonial history remain in and around the city where the story takes place? Do Márquez's references to these traces confirm Faulkner's oft-quoted phrase: "The past is never dead. It's not even past"?
 - With what emphasis and with what tone does Márquez include these contextual references in the novel? What role do these references play in the development of his characters and their stories?