

Gabriel García Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera

Bi-Monthly Discussion Groups, pp. 165-348

1. In our last discussions, we considered whether Florentino Ariza, during his courtship of Fermina Daza, is more laughable or pitiable. Considering how he has lived his life since Fermina's rejection, how do you view him now?
 - As a monomaniacal egotist or as the epitome of undying love?
 - As a caricature to be laughed at, an idealist to be admired, or a pervert to be scorned?
 - If Florentino's story dramatizes a life lived for love, what is Márquez suggesting about love?
2. Márquez gives us multiple perspectives on his characters.
 - How does the town's perspective on Florentino Ariza differ from what Florentino thinks of himself and his motives?
 - How does Florentino's perspective on Fermina's married life differ from what we learn about Fermina's own experiences of her life with Juvenal Urbino?
 - What ironies do these different perspectives produce?
3. Are Florentino's sexual conquests simply meaningless escapism or does he learn something valuable about women's lives in these relationships?
 - If so, what does he learn?
 - How might we compare his sexual conquests to Urbino's one extramarital affair?
 - What kind of husband would Florentino have been to Fermina?
4. Love in the time of Cholera is a decidedly politically incorrect novel.
 - What do you think of the episodes focused on
 - the Chinese poet
 - Urbino's and Jeremiah de Saint-Amour's mixed-race lovers
 - Leona Cassiani
 - América Vicuña?
 - Would you categorize this novel as racist and sexist, or as a portrait (realistic and/or satirical?) of a racist and sexist culture? Or as something else?
5. The first chapter of the novel describes Urbino's and Jeremiah experiences of aging, while this section describes Florentino's epiphany that he too is subject to time.
 - How do these characters differ in their confrontation with the inevitable march toward death?
 - What realizations does each man achieve?
 - What does each prioritize?
6. Love in the Time of Cholera is a love story about private lives, but its characters often cross paths with historical and political figures--for example, the author Oscar Wilde and the president of Colombia Rafael Reyes. Moreover, the lives of Florentino, Fermina, and Urbino are impacted by historical figures like Simón Bolívar's arms dealer Juan Bernardo Elbers, and by historical events like the Colombian slave trade.

- To what degree is this novel the story of a country as much as a love story?
7. Immediately after Urbino's death, Fermina felt like an amputee who suffers pains "in the leg that is no longer there"; she felt "his presence where he no longer was" (p. 280). Then, in the second year of her widowhood on her boat trip with Florentino, she has a vision of her husband as "he tipped his white hat in a gesture of farewell from another boat out of the past" (p. 329). Through what stages does Fermina pass to be able to tell her husband of a half century good-bye?
 - Why, immediately after Urbino's death, does she feel like "a ghost in a strange house" (p. 279)?
 - Why does she burn Urbino's clothes and other possessions in a bonfire?
 - How does she finally regain the defiant rebelliousness of her premarital life?
 - How has Fermina's view of her social position changed over the course of her life, and how does she come to view her position as widow of the eminent Dr. Urbino?
 8. Immediately after Florentino's declaration of love at Urbino's wake, Fermina is enraged and imagines that Florentino's "hatred," the result of her rejection, has led him to "God knows what sinister plan for revenge" (p. 282). Then, in the second year of her widowhood on her boat trip with Florentino, she prays to God that Florentino will not give up on his courtship (p. 330). How does Florentino finally win Fermina's trust and love?
 - What courtship strategies does Florentino pursue this time around?
 - Did he learn anything in his experiences over the years with so many widows that helped him plan his campaign?
 - What role does writing play in his courtship this time? Has his writing changed?
 9. What do you think of Márquez's portrait of love and sex in old age? What has brought Fermina and Florentino together in the end?
 10. How are we to interpret Florentino's relationship with América Vicuña?
 - Is she (and Olimpia Zuleta, whose husband killed her) just collateral damage in Florentino's story of true love?
 - Does América's death reframe our reading of the novel's ending?
 11. Why is the destruction of the river environment described in such detail?
 - How does this description relate to the novel's repeated allusions to the history, politics, and modernization of Colombia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries?
 - How does this description of ecological destruction relate to the novel's central love story?
 - How is Márquez using representations of city, river, shore, and love on a boat to signify more than just settings for his plot?
 12. In Love in the Time of Cholera, Márquez seems to have traded his style of "magical realism" (a term he disdained) for a realism sometimes absurdly comic, sometimes

satirical, and sometimes brutal. Do you see any return to elements of “magical realism” in the description of Fermina’s and Florentino’s final voyage?

13. For those of you who saw the Lyric Opera production of Florencia en el Amazonas: how has the libretto of this opera adapted the final river voyage in Love in the Time of Cholera—in plot, in theme, in style? A summary and excerpts from the opera are available here: <https://www.lyricopera.org/shows/upcoming/2021-22/florencia-en-el-amazonas/>