

Love in the Time of Cholera

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 1985

Random House

368 pp.

In Brief

In the late 1800s, in a Caribbean port city, a young telegraph operator named Florentino Ariza falls deliriously in love with Fermina Daza, a beautiful student. She is so sheltered that they carry on their romance secretly, through letters and telegrams. When Fermina Daza's father finds out about her suitor, he sends her on a trip intended to make her forget the affair. Lorenza Daza has much higher ambitions for his daughter than the humble Florentino. Her grief at being torn away from her lover is profound, but when she returns she breaks off the relationship, calling everything that has happened between them an illusion.

Instead, she marries the elegant, cultured, and successful Dr. Juvenal Urbino. As his wife, she will think of herself as "the happiest woman in the world." Though devastated by her rejection, Florentino Ariza is not one to be deterred. He has declared his eternal love for Fermina, and determines to gain the fame and fortune he needs to win her back. When Fermina's husband at last dies, 51 years, 9 months, and 4 days later, Florentino Ariza approaches Fermina again at her husband's funeral. There have been hundreds of other affairs, but none of these women have captured his heart as Fermina did. "He is ugly and sad," says one of his lovers, "but he is all love."

In this magnificent story of a romance, García Márquez beautifully and unflinchingly explores the nature of love in all its guises, small and large, passionate and serene. Love can emerge like a disease in these characters, but it can also outlast bleak decades of war and cholera, and the effects of time itself.

About the Author

- Birth—March 06, 1928
- Where—Aracataca, Colombia
- Education—Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Universidad de Cartagena
- Awards—Nobel Prize, 1982
- Currently—lives in Mexico City, Mexico

Gabriel García Márquez is the product of his family and his nation. Born in the small coastal town of Aracataca in northern Colombia, he was raised by his maternal grandparents. As a child, he was mesmerized by stories spun by his grandmother and her sisters -- a rich gumbo of superstitions, folk tales, and ghost stories that fired his youthful imagination. And from his grandfather, a colonel in Colombia's devastating Civil War, he learned about his country's political struggles. This potent mix of Liberal politics, family lore, and regional mythology formed the framework for his magical realist novels.

When his grandfather died, García Márquez was sent to Sucre to live (for the first time) with his parents. He attended university in Bogotá, where he studied law in accordance with his parents' wishes. It was here that he first read *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka and discovered a literature he understood intuitively -- one with nontraditional plots and structures, just like the stories he had known all his life. His studies were interrupted when the university was closed, and he moved back north, intending to pursue both writing and law; but before long, he quit school to pursue a career in journalism.

In 1954 his newspaper sent García Márquez on assignment to Italy, marking the start of a lifelong self-imposed exile from the horrors of Colombian politics that took him to Barcelona, Paris, New York, and Mexico. Influenced by American novelist William Faulkner, creator of the fictionalized Yoknapatawpha

County, and by the powerful intergenerational tragedies of the Greek dramatist Sophocles, García Márquez began writing fiction, honing a signature blend of fantasy and reality that culminated in the 1967 masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This sweeping epic became an instant classic and set the stage for more bestselling novels, including *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *Love and Other Demons*, and *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*. In addition, he has completed the first volume of a shelf-bending memoir, and his journalism and nonfiction essays have been collected into several anthologies.

In 1982, García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his acceptance speech, he called for a "sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth." Few writers have pursued that utopia with more passion and vigor than this towering 20th-century novelist.

Book Club Discussion Questions

1. Why does García Márquez use similar terms to describe the effects of love and cholera?
2. Plagues figure prominently in many of García Márquez's novels. What literal and metaphoric functions does the cholera plague serve in this novel? What light does it shed on Latin American society of the nineteenth century? How does it change its characters' attitudes toward life? How are the symptoms of love equated in the novel with the symptoms of cholera?
3. What does the conflict between Dr. Juvenal Urbino and Florentino Ariza reveal about the customs of Europe and the ways of Caribbean life? How is Fermina Daza torn between the two?
4. Dr. Urbino reads only what is considered fine literature, while Fermina Daza immerses herself in contemporary romances or soap operas. What does this reveal about the author's attitude toward the distinction between "high" and "low" literature. Does his story line and style remind you more of a soap opera or a classical drama?
5. After rejecting Florentino's declaration of love following her husband's funeral, why is Fermina eventually won over by him?
6. Why does a change in Florentino's writing style make Fermina more receptive to him?
7. What does Florentino mean when he tells Fermina, before they make love for the first time, "I've remained a virgin for you" (p. 339)?
8. Why does Florentino tell each of his lovers that she is the only one he has had?
9. What does Florentino's uncle mean when he says, "without river navigation there is no love" (p. 168)?
10. Do Fermina and Dr. Urbino succeed at "inventing true love" (p. 159)?
11. Set against the backdrop of recurring civil wars and cholera epidemics, the novel explores death and decay, as well as love. How does Dr. Urbino's refusal to grow old gracefully affect the other two characters? What does it say about fulfillment and beauty in their society? Does the fear of aging or death change Florentino Ariza's feelings toward Fermina Daza?
12. Compare the suicide of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour at the beginning of the book with that of Florentino's former lover, América Vicuña at the end. How do their motives differ? Why does the author frame the book with these two events?

13. Why is Leona Cassiani "the true woman in [Florentino's] life although neither of them ever knew it and they never made love" (p. 182)?

14. When Tránsito Ariza tells Florentino he looks as if he were going to a funeral when he is going to visit Fermina, why does he respond by saying, "It's almost the same thing" (p. 65)?