

# FLORENTINO

Frederic Will, Ph.D.

## **Florentino Ariza** (In Gabriel Garcia Márquez' *Love in the Time of Cholera*) **Emotional**

**Overview** Gabriel Garcia Márquez (1927-2014) was a Colombian novelist, short story writer, and journalist who established brilliant new literary potentials, 'magic realism' in particular, which spearheaded the vivid energy of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literature. Beginning his career in law, he shifted to journalism, then gradually moved into the writing of fiction. He won the Nobel Prize in 1982, for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), and used his reputation to enforce his political influence inside Colombia—where he was a beacon of liberalism, and a close friend of Fidel Castro.

**Character** Florentino is a kind of romantic hero, in this book concerning the man's fifty years plus love affair with his childhood sweetheart, Fermina Daza. His adolescent love for this lady--who marries another--blossoms fifty years later into a passionate marriage, at seventy plus years of age. In order to grasp this profile, we have to imagine Florentino as a lover who is at first totally shy with women, while he is at the same time undyingly true to his first love, and whose bio is punctuated by a series of almost endless sexual encounters. We have here the classic romantic lover, who is also a reckless womanizer.

### **Parallels**

The Spanish writer, Tirso de Molina, in *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest* (1630), launched an early modern fascination with the literary skirt-chaser, a handsome charmer—the types of charm vary greatly—who is often after the ladies, and often wins them. (Don Juan is the classical form of the type, and the main figure in Tirso's work.) These sensuous gentlemen, who range from the systematic seducer—Valmont in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), to the handsome value free soldier, Vronsky in *Anna Karenina* (1875), to the romantic and mysterious Rochester, who is so fascinating to Jane Eyre, in the novel of her name (1897).

### **Illustrative moments**

**Romantic** As a young man Florentino—who was working as a telegraph operator in his town—was known as the romantic par excellence. His romantic temper appeared in his forlorn demeanor—'very thin, with Indian hair plastered down with scented pomade, and eyeglasses for myopia.' He had one suit, which he had inherited from his father, but which he cared for so well it looked brand new 'every Sunday.' Despite his marginal romantic look he was the fascination of the girls in his circle, who held 'secret lotteries to determine who would spend time with him...'

**Longing** Florentino soon became fixated on a 'beautiful adolescent with almond shaped eyes,' who went to a private school in his neighborhood, and 'who walked to school in groups or accompanied by an older servant...' (It is the same woman he will propose to at book's end, when they are both in their seventies; proof of his lasting intensity.) Florentino would sit in the park across the street from Fermina's house, half hidden on a leaf enclosed bench, and compose love letters to this sweetheart who did not know him. Unfortunately the young lady was tightly patrolled by her aunt, who never left her unaccompanied!

**Romantic** Florentino is a writer and has a writer's temperament. During his prolonged romantic fascination with his Fermina, while he watches her from the park, he writes voluminous love letters to her, and long seeks for a way to communicate them to her. In the end he decides to give her 'a sober and explicit half-page is which he promised...his perfect fidelity and his everlasting love.' His reaction to having finally outed his feelings is extreme; in addition to his usual bowel problems, he 'became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells...' His mother, unsure

of the meaning of these symptoms, suspected the 'devastation of cholera,' more than the ravages of love.

**Lover** After Florentino first proposes to Fermina, he is accepted, and plans are slowly being made, but thanks to some bad luck—for Florentino—her dad discovers the vast packets of love letters she has received from her wooer. Florentino thereupon becomes the clandestine bad guy, whom the father-in-law-to-be condemns. Florentino finds himself without the object of his neurotic passion, and begins the complex life of love affairs and visions which essentially crowds his life until the death of Fermina's real husband—by which time Florentino and Fermina are in their seventies.

### **Discussion questions**

On the whole, is Florentino a crazy phlanderer or an undyingly faithful lover, who remains true to his initial infatuation?

Why is Florentino so attractive to the ladies, from the earliest days?

Is Florentino shy? If so, how do the ladies know he is fascinated by them?