

Love in the Time of Cholera (2007)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 4; L-1; S-3/N-6 . Running time: 2 hours 19 min.

*You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,
you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.*

Song of Solomon 4:9

This is about as florid a romance as one could stand, over 50 years after he first proposed to Florentino Ariza, New Line Cinema screenwriter proposes again.

Ronald Harwood's adaptation of (c) New Line Cinema

Gabriel Garcia Márquez's romantic novel. Set in Cartagena, Colombia during the turbulent late 1800s, and extending into the early 20th century, it chronicles the undying love (or should we call it obsession?) of a man for a woman over a period of fifty one years. The outlandish tale reminds me of a film I reviewed early in my career, 1981's *Endless Love*, in which a girl's parents try to intervene in their daughter's romance with a teenage boy. Rebuffed continually, the boy goes slightly berserk and burns their house down. Our unrequited lover in this tale doesn't go quite that far, but he carries the

torch for an unusually long time.

In this South American version—best part of the film are the colorful shots of fiestas, city markets, lush jungles, soaring mountains, and paddle wheel boats plying the rivers—teenage Florentino (Unax Ugalde), a delivery boy at his Uncle Leo's (Hector Elizondo) telegraph office, spies beautiful Fermina (Giovanna Mezzogiorno), and is smitten immediately with love. He sends a series of poetic letters to her, she finally agrees to meet him, and at last accepts his proposal of marriage.

However, when her father Lorenzo (John Leguizamo) discovers their romance, and the boy will not abandon his plan of marriage, he packs up and leaves with his daughter for a relative's distant hacienda in the highlands. He plans for her to marry above, not below her comfortable station. That opportunity arises when Dr. Juvenal Urbino (Benjamin Bratt) is obviously attracted to her during a medical examination. He is both good looking and wealthy, so with papa's blessing the two are soon married.

When the Urbinos return to Cartageña, Florentino sees them from a distance and is heart-broken. He vows undying fidelity to his love for her, and decides that he will wait for her husband to die. However, this does not prevent him from bedding down a series of attractive maidens and wives through the years—the flesh will have its own way, he reasons, but will not touch his spirit. Javier Bardem plays the grown up Florentino, who writes poetry and love letters for illiterate peasants on the side, while rising in his uncle's shipping and telegraph business. When Juvenal dies, Florentino presents himself to Fermina on the day of the funeral and declares his love.

For Reflection/Discussion

1) What do you think of this story of “endless love” ? Do you

think Florentino is in love with love, or with the actual person Fermina? If the former, does this shed light on how he can bed down over 600 other women during the years of so-called waiting, and still remain true to Fermina?

2) Is Fermina as ardent in her love for Florentino? How does she show that she also loves Juvenal? What truth do you see in her telling Florentino that his love "is an illusion" ?

3) What do you think of the concept introduced a couple of times of the nobility in "dying for love" ? Similar to the lovers' belief in Romeo and Juliet?

4) What do you think of the statement made during the Turn of the Century celebration: "The 20th century will bring an end to man's suffering. The 20th century will bring us harmony...peace" ? Note that this optimism was shared by American Christians who named their magazine The Christian Century: what was such optimism based on?

5) What about the observation, "Think of love as a state of grace. Not the means, but the end itself...the alpha and the omega" ? What kind of "love" do you think he is he talking about? Compare this to the agape love of 1 Cor. 13 or 1 John 4:8 & 16.

6) What do you think of the exchange: "Do you believe in God?" "No, but I am afraid of him" ?

7) How does what Florentino's order to the river boat captain enlarge the meaning of the film's title?