Love in the Time of Cholera follows the development of the character of Florentino Ariza; Florentino is overly passionate and after falling madly in love with Fermina Daza, he decides to dedicate his life to her and a potential relationship. Although Fermina rejects his love, Florentino is determined to win her love and devotes his life to her. He convinces himself that he is saving himself for her even though he partakes in countless sexual acts with women other than Fermina. Florentino is passionate to the point of madness that, at times, can lead to readers’ misunderstanding and confusion of his character. A better understanding of the character of Florentino can be accomplished through the analysis of his actions as interpreted through various critical readings such as Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s The Signifying Monkey, Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth and Gloria Anzaldua’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.

Throughout the novel, Florentino engages in a multitude of sexual acts although he is determined to save himself for Fermina. These sexual acts can be seen as short distractions then for his mind as he waits for Fermina to return his love. Florentino does not love the women that he sleeps with for in reference to one of the women the author states, “…he [Florentino] realized he felt happy with her, above all in bed, but that she
would never replace Fermina Daza…” (Márquez 201). It can be interpreted in the novel that Florentino is actually using his sexual escapades as a means of self-protection. Henry Louis Gates refers to his concept of “linguistic masking” in his book *The Signifying Monkey*; linguistic masking is “the verbal sign of the mask of blackness that demarcates the boundary between the white linguistic realm and the black, two domains that exist side by side in a homonymic relation signified by the very concept of signification” (Gates 75).

It can be suggested that Florentino’s sexual acts are the physical embodiment of his double speech, or signification. Florentino is considered a part of the subordinate culture in the novel because he does not fit in to the higher class. He is refused the love of Fermina because he is not a part of her society and is, thus, dismissed to the lower class of prostitution and peasantry. Fermina’s father reiterates Florentino’s place in society when he says, “the only thing worse than bad health is a bad name” in reference to Florentino’s poor position in society (Márquez 81). The subordinate culture is the group that is able to be double-voiced; the idea of having double meanings behind speech is referred to as “signification”. Gates said, “…using antithonal structures to reverse their apparent meaning is a mode of encoding for self-preservation” (Gates 67). Gates also went on to say, “Teaching one’s children the fine art of signifying is to teach them about this mode of linguistic circumnavigation, to teach them a second language that they can share with other people” (Gates 76). Florentino is able to separate his sexual life from his love life; he is able to split himself and his emotions to engage in sexual acts while still being faithful to his love of Fermina. Florentino occupies his mind for a short while by having sex with other women, but his mind always is on and fully returns to Fermina.
This is supported when the author states, “as soon as the ship had disappeared over the horizon, the memory of Fermina Daza once again occupied all his space” (Márquez 270). Each female in Florentino’s life comes and goes like ships, but the woman that is forever there to stay is Fermina. These statements support the notion that Florentino uses signifying, or double voiced-ness, through his sexual acts as a means of self-protection in reaction to his unrequited love with Fermina.

It can be argued that due to his love of Fermina, Florentino conducts himself in a way in society that Fermina would approve of. Florentino engages in a multitude of sexual acts and relationships, but keeps them secretive in a way. Privately, Florentino is very promiscuous, but publicly and emotionally he remains true to his love of Fermina. Frantz Fanon asserts that our humanity is a function of being recognized by others in a social relationship and man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man. It is through that other man’s perception of him that human worth and reality depend. Florentino gains his self-worth through Fermina’s acceptance of him. When Fermina rejects his love at first, Florentino becomes love sick to the point that others feel he has become infected with cholera. Fermina, because she is in control of Florentino and his emotions, can be considered the colonizer in this situation and Florentino the colonized. In this situation, colonialism is considered the separation of colonized peoples from their individuality and culture; this is true for Florentino as the colonized because he actually becomes stripped of his power and emotions after coming into contact and falling in love with Fermina the colonizer. The colonizer forces the colonized to question their own worth because of its systematic negation of the colonized people’s culture. Fermina negates Florentino’s culture and worth when she rejects his
love when they are young; he is forced to question his worth and his place in the world. Her rejection of him leads him to reaffirm his love of her and to conduct himself in a way that is true to her for the remainder of his life.

The colonized are denied the opportunity to know themselves. Instead, the colonizer claims to know the colonized and teaches them the supposed right ways of things. This is true of Florentino, as he must conduct his life in a way that is suitable to the love of Fermina. After the death of Fermina’s husband, Florentino reiterates his love to Fermina only to continue to, “wander aimlessly through the streets that had been devastated by the afternoon flood, asking himself in terror what he was going to do with the skin of the tiger he had just killed after having resisted its attacks for more than half a century” (Márquez 284). The fact that Fermina has such a power over Florentino that he is led to such passion and confusion demonstrates her hold over him. This conditioning of others leads to the objectification, confinement and imprisonment of the colonized. Florentino is a changed man after he falls in love with Fermina for, “he was another person, despite his firm decision and anguished efforts to continue to be the same man he had been before his mortal encounter with love” (Márquez 173). The history and institutions of the indigenous population are physically and symbolically destroyed, and in their place the colonizer produces a people who deserve only to be ruled. It is only when the colonized people discover their self worth and “come to an understanding of [themselves], and understand the rest of the world differently, when [they] give birth to hope and force back the racist universe, it is clear that [their] trumpet sounds more clearly and [their] voices less hoarsely” (Fanon 1444). However, this was not the case for
Florentino as, “the truth is that he was never the same again…winning back Fermina Daza became the sole purpose of his life” (Márquez 173).

Florentino’s character is not clearly defined by one culture or outlet of society so in this was he can actually meld between multiple cultures and outlets. Just like the physical borderland between the United States and Mexico, there is a psychological “borderland” in which a person is placed when they are denied a culture and place in society. As a female and ethnically Native American and European, Anzaldua grew up in an atmosphere of oppression and confusion. Her work explores the feelings experienced by those who are “outside” of society and the ambiguity of being multicultural. She explores cultural expectations and their effect on both the people within the culture and outside of it, especially the roles of men and women in society and the issue of gender power. One of her main thoughts is that when a person is within a culture the representations, images and beliefs of that culture become ours for she says, “they occupy us; they are ours, they are us” (Anzaldua 2097).

At times throughout the novel, Florentino feels isolated and alone; it is during these times that he looks towards the comfort from sexual acts with women. When attempting to court Fermina, Florentino is overwhelmingly direct and his demand that she obtain her father's permission to accept his letters is extreme. Florentino insists that his need for her father's permission and her love is, “a matter of life and death” for without Fermina his life will be meaningless (Márquez 60). It is this search for meaning in his life without Fermina that leads to his feelings of emptiness and isolation. Anzaldua’s can explain these feelings of isolation in that it is difficult to acknowledge that there is more than one way to advance through life. People commonly fear that which is different
creating rifts between people within societies and cultures. It is fact, however, that it is actually the “other” that defines what or who is considered the “norm”. Anzaldua attributes this fear of the “other” to the potential ability of the “other” to challenge accepted power structures. Anzaldua discusses the fear of the “other” in relation to men and gender roles that are expected of them in Western society. She says, “I've encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, but they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate” (Anzaldua 2104). These men, both gay and straight, are not readily accepted by society and become isolated and alienated from the culture.

Florentino is isolated from any one culture or outlet in society in that he flows freely between them through his selection of sexual partners. Florentino does not discriminate against women of certain age, ethnicity, social standing or background. In this way, he is able to relate to many facets of society and understand multiple individuals. In reference to Florentino’s connection with this multitude of women Márquez writes,

“The memory of them all was with him: those who slept in the cemeteries, thinking of him through the roses he planted over them, as well as those who still laid their heads on the pillow where their husbands slept, their horns golden in the moonlight. Deprived of one, he wanted to be with them all at the same time, which is what he always wanted whenever he was fearful. For even during his most difficult times and at his worst moments, he had maintained some link, no matter how weak, with his countless lovers of so many years: he always kept track of their lives”(269).
This idea of being able to understand and actually straddle multiple cultures and identities is presented in Anzaldua’s *Mestiza*. Anzaldua said, “La Mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal, to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldua 2100). Florentino does this through his lack of discrimination of lovers and his refusal to lose focus of his one goal to attain the love of Fermina. He maintains his faithfulness to her while shifting between various facets and identities within society.

The character of Florentino is multi-dimensional and, at times, difficult to follow and comprehend throughout the novel. He never loses sight of his intentions to gain the reciprocated love of Fermina, although his actions throughout the novel somewhat cloud this for the reader. It is especially beneficial then to analyze Florentino’s actions throughout the novel through the various critical perspectives. Through the critical perspectives, the reader is able to focus on specific actions and break down Florentino’s character in order to better comprehend him. Florentino should not be taken at face value as this can lead to conflicting views of his character. It is important to consider the many facets of Florentino’s character and how analyzing him through different critical theories may actually be beneficial with other characters as well.
Works Cited


