

Aura Study Guide

Aura by Carlos Fuentes

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Plot Summary

Felipe Montero stumbles upon an advertisement for a high-paying job for a French-speaking historian. He fits the description perfectly and goes to the address listed the next day. After knocking on the door and receiving no response, he walks in. The interior is completely dark but a woman's voice rings out, asking him to come upstairs. Senora Consuelo, the woman who posted the advertisement, is eager to offer him the job. She wants someone to complete her dead husband's memoirs. Without saying why, the job requires that he stay in the house. After he has accepted the job, he meets Aura, Consuelo's young, beautiful niece, and is struck by her gorgeous green eyes.

Aura shows Felipe to his room, an upstairs loft with a glass, skylight ceiling. After inspecting his room, which appears to have not have been renovated for decades, he goes downstairs and finds Aura. They hear the loud yowling of cats. Aura explains there are a lot of rats in the area. They continue into the dining room where four places have been set. Two are for them, one is for Senora Consuelo—who is not feeling well—and the other is presumably in memory of Consuelo's dead husband. While they eat, Felipe tells Aura that he left some papers in his desk. She asks, suspiciously, if he wants to leave and, sensing her tone, he tells her the servant can retrieve them at his leisure and hands her the key.

He goes up to Senora Consuelo's room to retrieve materials so he can begin his work. He finds her knelt in prayer before a wall of religious icons. The icons follow a disturbing theme: Instead of portraying religious joy or hope, they are wrathful and gloomy. He notes that the only happy faces are those of the demons. As he watches, Consuelo becomes so excited by her prayer that she falls over and he helps her up to her bed. She gives him the key to a trunk in the corner of her room. Inside are her husband's manuscripts. He takes the first stack and returns to his room.

He reads the papers for awhile but eventually falls asleep. Daylight floods his room at sunrise, rousing him from his sleep. As he prepares for the day, he once again hears a terrible yowling. He finally locates its source: A group of cats are tied together, burning alive, in a tree outside of his window. He puts the image out of his mind, thinking that perhaps he only imagined it, and goes to breakfast. This time, both Aura and Consuelo are present. He notes something strange about Aura's behavior: Her every action directly corresponds to Consuelo's action. She sits silently and without emotion while she listens to her aunt's litany of complaints. They finally get up and leave together. Troubled by Aura's behavior, he tries to understand what is going on. Perhaps, he thinks, she is being kept here as a kind of prisoner to her aunt's will.

He decides not to confront her about it, at least not yet, and returns to his room. His sleep that night is troubled by vicious nightmares. He wakes up and finds Aura, naked, laying on top of him and kissing him. Without exchanging any words, they make love. Afterwards, she says he is her husband and he agrees. She leaves, telling him to come by her room at night. He goes to Consuelo's room and retrieves the second batch of manuscripts. As he leaves, he curses himself for not confronting her. He opens her door

again and sees her dancing with her husband's old uniform. He closes the door and returns to his room. He looks through the manuscripts and discovers more about Consuelo. When she married her husband, she was fifteen and he was forty-seven. He recalls her green eyes and that she, like Aura, always dressed in a green dress.

Later in the day, he wakes up and goes to find Aura. She is in the kitchen beheading a goat with no expression on her face. He goes up stairs and finds Consuelo, moving her hands in the exact same motions in the air. Terrified, he runs and locks himself in his room. When he wakes up, he slowly realizes that he is moving with the same kind of mechanical rigidity that characterized Aura's movement. He goes to Aura's room for their arranged rendezvous. After she washes his feet—all the while looking at the black crucifix on her wall—they waltz around the room, in the same manner Senora Consuelo waltzed with the empty uniform of her dead husband. After performing a perverted variation of the Eucharist, they have sex. He wakes up the next day and discovers that Senora Consuelo had been sitting in the room and watching them make love.

He wakes up and feels a strange presence in the room, even though Aura and Consuelo have both left. The presence follows him throughout the morning and oppresses his thought. It finally drives him to return to Senora Consuelo's room. He opens the chest and takes the last bundle of manuscripts and a collection of photographs. He realizes when looking at the photograph that Consuelo looked exactly like Aura when she was younger and is even more terrified when he realizes he looks exactly like Consuelo's dead husband. He falls asleep and wakes up after an indeterminate amount of time. He stumbles into Consuelo's room and makes love to Aura, who has turned into an old, decrepit woman.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Felipe Montero is sitting in a cafe when he notices an advertisement for someone with a background in history who is fluent in French. He remarks how perfectly he fits the profile—he studied history in France for years—and is especially attracted by the handsome salary the job pays. The advertisement makes no mention of a phone number; he will have to meet its author in person. He leaves a tip and goes on his way and forgets, momentarily, about the advertisement. He takes a crowded bus home.

He returns to the same cafe the next day and finds the same advertisement. After dispelling the discouraging thought that perhaps someone else has already taken the job, he decides to go. He travels down Donceles Street searching for the house number listed on the flier. He notes that the street seems to be undergoing quite a bit of renovation. It was once filled with old, imposing houses, but most of them have been converted into storefronts. Even the numbers on the houses have changed. Finally, he arrives at 815, his destination.

He knocks on the door but receives no answer. With a light push, he opens it and steps into the dark interior. He looks for his book of matches to provide some light, but a woman's voice commands him to walk forward, turn right, and ascend a staircase. Somewhat bewildered by the specificity of the directions—the woman even told him the number of stairs—he obeys. As he climbs the staircase, he smells an array of different plants. Once he reaches the top, the voice instructs him to enter the door on the right. He pushes the door open and finds himself a room dimly lit by votive candles. He makes his way to the woman. He is unable to see her very well but is able to make out that she is very old. Her eyes are so yellowed that the whites can hardly be distinguished from the iris. By her side is a rabbit.

After a brief greeting, she asks to see his profile. Approving, she eagerly offers him the job before even telling him what it is. Once asked, she explains that her dead husband—a general who died sixty years ago—never completed his memoirs. Since she is now quite old and near death herself, she wants someone to complete the project. She informs him that the project requires that he stay in the house. He tries to receive permission to work from his own apartment, but she insists. During the conversation, the rabbit runs away and the old woman—whose name is revealed to be Senora Consuelo—calls for it. Once they have agreed upon the job, Aura, Consuelo's beautiful niece, comes into the room and introduces herself to Felipe. Felipe is only able to glimpse her briefly, but is immediately drawn to her vibrant, green eyes.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter sows the seeds for themes which will come to fruition later. First, several elements hint at the book's surrealist style. The advertisement Felipe sees in the cafe seems to be written for him—and he even remarks that all that it is lacking is his name. The specificity of the advertisement is actually quite extreme: There could not be many people fluent with "colloquial" French in the Mexican city who are also experts in history. In any case, posting an advertisement on the wall of a cafe seems to be a particularly bad way to find such a person; asking a local university would be more effective, one would think.

A few explanations can be offered for this. First, it could simply be meant to be bizarre and coincidental; according to some plausible readings of the story, this would be thematically appropriate. Second, one could see it as Providential: God put the flier in Felipe's way so that he would go to Senora Consuelo's house. As the book progresses, religious themes are—arguably—developed to a significant degree. Finally, one might think that Senora Consuelo intentionally put the advertisement in the cafe because she knows Felipe goes there. As he discovers later, he looks almost exactly like her dead husband. It may have been part of a plot to lure him to her house. Like much of the book, there is not a single clear answer and reasonable arguments could be given for each interpretation.

This chapter also develops the setting for the rest of the story, Senora Consuelo's house. There are many strange things about his arrival. First of all, the house seems to be notably out of place in its neighborhood. Though Donceles Street was once lined with houses of this kind, nearly all of them have been converted into storefronts; Senora Consuelo's house is the conspicuous exception. When he enters, he discovers the house is perpetually kept as dark as possible. Senora Consuelo (or maybe it is Aura, the narration leaves it unclear) even stops Felipe from lighting a match. Both of these facts give the house an almost otherworldly feeling; it is as if Felipe is stepping out of time into another, alien dimension. This theme, too, will be developed further in the chapters to come.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Consuelo tells Felipe that Aura will show him to his room. On his way, he thinks pleasantly about how easy the job will be and how much money he will make, but his attention soon shifts to Aura—whom he can only hear in the house's dark interior. He finally reaches his room and begins to get settled. Instead of a ceiling, he has a glass skylight. Everything in the room is very old-fashioned; much of it seems not to have been changed for decades. He briefly admires himself in the mirror and finds himself quietly repeating Aura's name. He smokes a few cigarettes and lays in bed for awhile, then gets up and leaves his room. As he gropes his way down the dark hallway, he accidentally flicks on a light switch. After letting his eyes adjust to the sudden brightness, he continues his way down the hall to the stairwell.

On the way down he is startled to see Saga, Consuelo's rabbit. It runs away at his approach and he takes a few more steps before he finds Aura. He begins to walk towards her but halts when he hears cats loudly crying out. Aura explains that there are a lot of rats in this part of the city. As they walk to the dining room to have supper, Aura informs him that a servant has already been sent to gather his belongings. Felipe is a bit perplexed at how and why this was done without his knowledge or consent. Intimidated, perhaps, by the environment, Felipe does not question it.

They arrive in the dining hall. Though only two of them will eat, four places are set. Felipe asks if others will be joining them, but Aura says no—Senora Consuelo is feeling ill and will not be joining them. The fourth spot is presumably set in memorial for Consuelo's deceased husband. The dinner of liver, onions, and broiled tomatoes is served on old, worn dishes. While they eat, Felipe mentions that there are some papers he left at his apartment that are locked in his deck. Aura asks if he wants to leave. Detecting the suspicion in her voice—and rather confused by it—Felipe says that they are not very important; he tries to hand her the key so the servant can retrieve them, but she looks at him motionlessly. When she gets up from the table, he finally gathers the courage to go after her and put the key in her hand.

Aura leaves and Felipe lingers for a moment in the dining room to smoke a cigarette. A calming ease comes over him as he sits there, the source of which is not entirely clear. He gets up to see Senora Consuelo, who Aura said will be waiting for him. He arrives at her door, knocks softly and calls out her name. There is no response. He gently pushes it open and discovers her inside, knelt in prayer before an array of religious icons on the wall. All of the major figures of the Christian religion are represented there: Christ, the Virgin Mary, various saints, and even demons. The theme which pervades the picture is wrath and judgment; in fact, everyone in the picture except for the demons seems angry, even unhappy. The demons, however, rejoice in the torture of the souls of the damned. While she prays, she moves her hands in sudden, violent gestures, as if she were taking part in some cosmic battle. The excitement is too much for her, however,



and she collapses. Felipe runs to help her up. He helps her into her bed—which is covered with breadcrumbs—and notices tears are running down her cheeks. Embarrassed, she explains that old women like herself have nothing left but religious devotion.

They finally turn to the business at hand. Consuelo entrusts him with the key to the chest in the corner. Inside, she explains, are the General's unfinished memoirs and various notes that will help Felipe complete them. He goes to the chest and is repulsed to find a rat's nest next to it; Consuelo is unconcerned when he tells her: she does not go over there, she explains. He takes the papers and leaves.

Chapter 2 Analysis

It would be incorrect to think of Felipe as a normal person thrust into a bizarre situation. Throughout the story, Felipe does not appear to act like a reasonable person would in the same circumstances. This is seen in a minor way in the first chapter. He sees the advertisement for a job which he fits perfectly. Moreover, it pays over four times as much as his current job. Yet, for some reason, he does not immediately do anything about it. Indeed, he forgets about it until the next day.

The second chapter continues and escalates the pattern. First, he sees the cats "twined together" burning alive in the tree outside of his room. His reaction is to not react at all. Though he tells himself that perhaps he imagined it, it does not seem like he should be completely untroubled. For one, he might not have just been seeing things. He might also question why he would imagine such a vivid and horrifying sight. Yet, he just goes on with his daily business as usual.

Of course, if it is difficult to rationally explain Felipe's actions, it is impossible to explain Senora Consuelo's. It is not clear what exactly Senora Consuelo is doing when he interrupts her "prayer" session. It is reasonable to guess that she is not exactly praying; at least, not praying in the normal sense of the word. Felipe remarks that the only joyful pictures on her wall of religious icons are those of demons, who rejoice in torturing the souls of the damned. All of the benevolent figures of Christianity—Jesus, Mary, the angels, the saints—are angry and even unhappy. Her final prayer before she collapses laments how long the world takes to die. It is safe to say that whatever Consuelo's religious beliefs are, they are of a decidedly darker and more wrathful stripe than more typical forms of Christianity.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Before going to bed, Felipe looks over the General's papers. He is unimpressed by the quality of writing; it does not live up to Senora Consuelo's descriptions. The subject-matter is likewise uninteresting. The things the General describes—his boyhood on a Mexican hacienda, his dealings with Napoleon III, various military skirmishes—are all things he has heard before. He is amused by the old woman's foolish devotion to her husband, but is even more pleased when he thinks about the money he will be paid.

Felipe wakes up far earlier than he desired. His glass roof has no curtain and thus his room is flooded with bright light at sunrise. He tries to get back to sleep, but it is useless. He starts his morning routine of washing and shaving but is interrupted by a dreadful yowling. He looks all around to find its source. It is not coming from anywhere in the house, so he climbs up to the ceiling and opens up one of the windows to look out. In a tree outside, he discovers several cats twisted together. They are burning alive. As he climbs back down from the window, he questions whether he really saw it; perhaps it was just his imagination supplying a source for those horrible cries. He continues getting ready and hears a bell ringing outside of his room. Aura is making her rounds throughout the hallway, signaling that breakfast is ready; Felipe finds this strange, since he is the only guest, but he heeds it nonetheless. He arrives at the dining room to find that this time, only a single setting has been placed.

After quickly finishing his meal, he climbs the stairs to Senora Consuelo's room. He begins to discuss the papers, but she interrupts him. She does not care to hear his opinion about them. He returns to his room to work. In order to prolong his stay there, and likewise his earnings, he spends some time planning out his own personal projects. Hours go by and finally he hears the bell again, this time announcing lunch. He goes down to the table and finds that both Aura and Senora Consuelo are there. Once again a fourth, superfluous place has been set. He dismisses it; he is happy to put up with Senora Consuelo's oddities for the amount of money he is being paid. During the meal, Consuelo bombards Aura with a litany of complaints. She talks about medical costs, new (suspected) illnesses, problems with the house, and so on. Felipe notes that Aura, meanwhile, sits silently and eats with a kind of mechanical rigidity that mirrors Consuelo's every motion. Finally, Consuelo decides to get up and go to bed. She asks Aura to help her, and the latter, once again mechanically, rises and obeys her requests.

Now by himself, Felipe takes some of the cold coffee that was left on the table and ponders his strange situation. He theorizes that Aura is somehow held here against her will. Consuelo seems to have a kind of power over her, so strong that Aura feels free only to do what her aunt does. Whatever the case is, Felipe does not like it. He finishes his coffee and decides to sneak into Aura's room; there, maybe, he will find some clue. Her room is bare, the white walls are only interrupted by a black crucifix. There is a door

in the wall that leads to Consuelo's room. He decides not to enter it. If he is going to talk to Aura, it should be alone. He returns to his room.

He tries to focus on his papers but his mind keeps returning to Aura. His desire, which previously was only carnal, now has a moral basis. He sees himself as Aura's potential savior from the tyrannical will of Consuelo. The dinner bell rings, but he ignores it. He cannot stand the thought of enduring another dinner like the last one. Plus, he thinks that perhaps Aura will come to his room—alone—to see why he did not come. After working for hours, he decides to go to sleep. His dreams are haunted by an image of a skeletal hand ringing a bell screaming for everyone to leave. The skeleton's face approaches him and wakes up to discover a naked body on top of him. It is Aura. Without saying a word, they have sex. When it is over, she whispers in his ear, "You're my husband." He immediately agrees. It is now dawn and she gets up to leave. She tells him to come to her room that night.

Unlike the previous morning, Felipe has difficulty waking up. Finally, after Aura has knocked for some time, he gets up. Through the door, she tells him that Consuelo wants to see him. He goes to the widow's room and finds her laying in bed. She tells him to take the next batch of her husband's papers. She strokes Saga, who is laying in her lap. She asks Felipe if he likes animals and he responds that he does not. She explains that in her old age she finds them to be ideal company. They never pretend to be anything they are not and love their owners unconditionally. Though people say that solitude is the best way to cultivate virtue, she says that solitude can also be a great temptation to sin. Felipe does not understand and she chooses not to elaborate. He leaves the room and rebukes himself for not confronting her about Aura. He wishes he could go in there and tell her that he will be taking Aura with him when the job is finished. He silently pushes the door ajar and sees her inside, dancing with her husband's old military uniform. He closes the door and returns to his room.

This batch of documents describes how he met Consuelo. When they married he was forty-seven and she was only fifteen. He writes of how entranced he was by her green eyes. One day he found her torturing a cat by squeezing it between her legs. She seemed to be so transfixed by her activity that he could not attract her attention until she was done. Strangely, the sight arouses him, and he passionately makes love to her. He lived until he was eighty-two, which means he died fifty-nine years ago. Felipe does the math and determines that Senora Consuelo must now be one hundred and nine years old. The general writes of his wife's enduring beauty: "Always dressed in green. Always beautiful, even after a hundred years" (45).

Chapter 3 Analysis

There are two ways to interpret Felipe's familiarity with the General's memoirs. Fuentes could merely be implying that Felipe, a well-read historian, has read the accounts of such things many times before. This would almost certainly be true about the General's accounts of various battles in Mexican history. It is more difficult to apply to the General's recollections about his childhood and friendships. Perhaps Felipe has simply

heard about such things before in a general sense. It could also be argued that Felipe knows about them through some supernatural means; perhaps he is some kind of reincarnation of the General. Such a position is probably not yet tenable with the facts presented in the story so far, but certainly becomes arguable as the story progresses. This scene shows—like many others—how each part of the story must be read in the context of the whole story. Reading and re-reading is indispensable to understanding the novel.

The question of Felipe's identity is related to the question of what exactly Aura is. As this chapter begins to reveal, she is not entirely normal. She seems to be some kind of shadow which mimics every motion of Senora Consuelo's. At other times, she is something more like a puppet, able to deviate from Consuelo's exact actions, but still not displaying a will of her own. For now, however, Felipe does not have enough evidence, or credulity, to believe that anything supernatural is happening. He instead hypothesizes that Aura is a kind of slave or prisoner to her tyrannical aunt.

When Aura suddenly and inexplicably appears naked on top of him while he is sleeping, the question again reverts to his nature. Much of the interpretation hinges on what exactly Aura means when she whispers, "You're my husband" (40). It could be that Aura intends this statement as a kind of question: She hopes that he assents and then, somehow, will become her husband. However, it also could be that Aura is stating a fact which she assumes both of them know. Such a reading would corroborate the view that Felipe is the General somehow reincarnated and also implies that Aura is a projection of Senora Consuelo. Even stranger than Aura's whisper, however, is the fact that Felipe agrees to it. Perhaps he is simply agreeing to whatever she says out of sexual contentment. It seems more likely that Felipe is genuinely agreeing with her, however, since the sexual act is already over.

Whatever Felipe's metaphysical status is, Aura's is clearer. She is definitely some kind of supernatural projection of Consuelo's youth. As the strange meal shows, she does not have a will of her own. (The beginning of Chapter 4 makes this even clearer when Aura is skinning a goat in exact imitation of Senora Consuelo's motions, though they are not even in the same room.) The second batch of documents reveals their physical identity. Though her eyes are faded and yellowed now, Consuelo once possessed the same striking feature which distinguishes Aura: her beautiful green eyes.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

After reading through the manuscripts, Felipe thinks he understands why Consuelo keeps Aura around: She is a kind of image of her past beauty. He puts down the papers and runs downstairs hoping to find Aura. She is in the kitchen beheading a young goat. She looks at Felipe with no emotion. He runs upstairs to Consuelo's room, meaning to finally confront her and free Aura. In her room, she is standing, staring at the wall performing some kind of strange ritual with her hands. He realizes, with horror, that she is going through the motions of skinning some invisible animal. He runs downstairs to find Aura perfectly mirroring the widow's actions on the goat.

Terrified, he escapes to his room and blocks the door with an armchair. He falls into a kind of trance and is assaulted by troubling nightmares in which Aura shifts back and forth into Consuelo. He wakes up to the sound of the bell. He washes himself and dresses—not noticing how he deviates from his normal routine—and makes his way downstairs. Once again, there is only a single setting. He begins to eat with a mechanical motion. Underneath his napkin is a simple, worn doll that he idly plays with as he eats. He realizes that he is moving in the same rigid, lifeless way that Aura and Consuelo moves. He drops the doll, fearing it has some kind of illness or curse within it. He looks at his watch and realizes Aura will be waiting for him.

It is not yet time for their rendezvous so he sneaks into the patio. The patio houses the variety of plants he smelled when he first arrived. Lighting up the room with a match, he sees that they are all herbs used for various purposes, like alleviating the pains of child birth or dilating one's pupils.

After enough time has passed, he goes to Aura's room. It is as it was before. A circle of light illuminates the region of the room where the bed is. The crucifix is visible on the wall. The rest of the room is immersed in darkness. After he closes the door, Aura approaches him and tells him to sit on the bed. She will do everything. He immediately realizes she seems older than she once did. The night before, she seemed to be in her twenties; now, she looked like a forty-year-old. Nonetheless, he does not resist her. He cannot determine the source of the light and she says, cryptically, "The sky is neither high nor low. It's over us and under us at the same time" (54). She takes off his shoes and begins to wash his feet, looking up occasionally at her crucifix. They begin to waltz around the room to a soft, quiet melody she hums. They begin to kiss and muffle the sound. She undresses and goes to the bed, where she plays with some object between her thighs. As he approaches, he realizes it is some kind of bread wafer. She breaks it in half and gives him a piece. He eats it and then climbs on top of her. As they make love, they whisper into one another's ear. She makes Felipe promise that he will love her forever, even if she grows old and dies.



He wakes up the next morning and finds she is not by his side. Instead, she is sitting in the corner of the room. By her side is an armchair which was previously obscured by the darkness. Sitting in it is Consuelo who smiles and nods at him. He realizes that the old lady was there last night when they made love. He recalls the dance he shared with Aura and realizes that it was the same dance Consuelo shared with her dead husband's uniform. The two women get up and exit the room, leaving Felipe to sleep by himself.

Chapter 4 Analysis

As already mentioned, the strange and exact correspondence between Aura's and Consuelo's actions proves that Aura is some sort of mystical projection of Consuelo. However, it is important not to miss what Aura is doing: She is beheading and skinning a goat. She is probably not doing this to prepare a meal. As Felipe laments, every meal seems to be the same: liver and onions. Instead, it might be part of some kind of occult religious ritual. While certainly animal sacrifice is not part of the Christian religion, it is entirely possible that it fits in with Consuelo's strange, ghoulish variation of it.

The religious oddities reappear with force later in the chapter. Aura begins their sexual rendezvous by washing his feet, repeatedly looking at the "black Christ" hung on the wall. There is an obvious parallel here with the Gospels, in which Christ washes the feet of his disciples. However, in this case, the significance of the act is inverted. Christ washed his disciple's feet to teach them humility; here, Aura does it to seduce Felipe. The inversion, or perversion, of Christ or his actions is commonly used to depict the action of the devil. The most familiar example is the literally inverted upside-down cross, a well-recognized symbol of the devil.

After they dance—in the same manner that Felipe saw Consuelo dancing with her dead husband's uniform—Aura squats on the bed with a bread wafer between her legs. Afterward, she breaks it in half and gives Felipe a piece, which he eats. It is important to understand the religious ritual which this act is meant to imitate and, once again, mock. According to the Catholic religion, a priest has the ability to perform the sacrament of the Eucharist over bread, which supernaturally transforms it into the Body and Blood of Christ. He, and anyone else in attendance, then eats the bread. This act is known as Communion and is a sign of one's membership in the Church. The wafer Aura rubs between her thighs is clearly either a wafer consecrated in this way or at least meant to represent one. Instead of treating it with religious reverence, she commits an act of sacrilege with it. Then, as if to incorporate Felipe into their diabolical religion, she offers Felipe a piece of the host.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Felipe wakes up from a troubled sleep. Though he sleeps in her room and was just physically intimate with her the night before, he feels an inexplicably great emotional distance from her. Meanwhile, he feels a strange presence in the room. Though he knows he is alone, he feels like there is a kind of "double presence" (60) in the room, created by their intercourse the previous night. He has a strange sense of emptiness, as if he were incomplete and desires to be reunited with his other half. His more mundane physical needs take precedence for now, however, and he returns to his room. As he bathes, he ponders the strange relationship between Consuelo and Aura. Whenever they are together, their actions mirror one another's, as if their beings were somehow intertwined. While he continues his morning routine, he falls into a strange kind of daze. He wakes from it momentarily when he cuts himself with his razor, but almost as quickly falls back into it. He looks through his toiletries and mumbles their names: He is trying to find some way to distract himself from that other strange presence he has felt.

His mind shifts to Aura. He wonders what she wants from him. As if giving an answer, he hears her bell in the hallway. He opens the door and finds Aura standing on the other side—at least, he thinks it is Aura. She is wearing her usual green dress, but her face is covered with a veil. He grabs her wrist and demands some answers. He asks if Senora Consuelo is keeping her there against her will and asks if she will go with him when his work is done. She does not seem to understand what he means but he persists. He asks why she stays—does she really love her aunt that much? She explains that it is because Consuelo loves her that she stays. Felipe responds by pointing out that the woman is so old that she is almost a corpse. Aura says, despite her exterior appearance, Consuelo has more life than she does. Aura urges Felipe to trust her and then tells him that Consuelo will be out all day; apparently, despite the great effort it takes, she takes occasional day-long outings. With the Aunt gone, they decide to spend the day together. She says she will be waiting in her room later.

Aura continues on her way down the hall. She reminds Felipe of a leper, who ties a bell around itself to warn others of its contagious presence. He finishes getting dressed and goes downstairs for breakfast. Consuelo is sitting there, dressed in her white wedding gown, veil and all. She explains that she will be gone for the day and tells him to continue working on her husband's memoirs. Felipe sits in the dining room listening for the sounds of her departure. Clutching the chest key in his hand, he goes up to Consuelo's room and listens at the door to make sure she is really gone. After fifteen minutes of waiting, he quietly pushes the door open and steps in. Saga, the rabbit, is sitting on the filthy bed, chewing on a carrot. Felipe walks to the rat-infested corner where the chest is and opens it again. He pulls out the third and final bundle of manuscripts and finds a stack of photographs beneath them. He takes those, too. He leaves the room, closes the door, and climbs the stairs to his bedroom.



He reads through the manuscripts. This time, however, his interest is not scholarly; rather, he hopes to discover some clue about Aura. He finds some letters or notes the General wrote to Consuelo. Apparently, he was infertile and they never had any children, a fact which created difficulties for their marriage. He begs her to take him back and asks that his love for her be enough. Without specifying what they are, he asks her to leave behind her "sick imagining" (68). In another letter, he writes about Consuelo's obsession with herbs. He told her they were useless, but she implied that he did not understand. The herbs, she said, were not for the body, but for the soul. In yet another letter, the General writes of finding Consuelo hysterically screaming, "Yes, yes, yes, I've done it, I've re-created her! I can invoke her, I can give her life with my own life!" (68). He could not rouse her from her state and had to summon a doctor. The doctor concluded she was under the influence of some kind of narcotic and went away, unable to do anything. In the last letter, the General writes that he found Consuelo walking through the hallways, commanding him not to stop her. She claimed her youth was coming back to her in the garden. The last line reads, "Consuelo, my poor Consuelo! Even the devil was an angel once" (69).

Felipe now turns to the photographs. The first is a picture of the General in his later years. Next is a picture, seemingly, of Aura, but it is dated 1894, long before Aura could have been born. The picture's French caption indicates that it was a memorial of her and the General's anniversary. A third picture shows both of them together. Though she is older now, the woman is unmistakably Aura. As he studies the general, he makes a startling discovery: If he covers up the general's thick, black beard, it is himself, Felipe Montero.

Startled into a daze, Felipe buries his face in a pillow. He lays there for an unknown length of the time, refusing to look at his watch because he cannot bear to think about the passage of time. When he wakes up, it is dark. He stumbles his way to Consuelo's room, where Aura said they would meet. He murmurs her name a few times—there is no response—and opens the door. He hears, but cannot see, her on the bed. He tries to embrace her but she tells him not to touch her. She asks him to kiss her, but only her face. He professes his undying love for her and they begin to have sex. During the act, the moonlight seeps occasionally into the room, revealing her body which is now wrinkled and decrepit. His passion does not relent, however. She tells him that, together, they will bring Aura back.

Chapter 5 Analysis

It appears that Felipe conceived some kind of double for himself when he had sex with Aura the previous night. Perhaps their sexual act created a new kind of being that is the reverse of Aura. Aura is the younger projection of Consuelo. This new creation might be an older projection of Felipe; namely, the projection might be the General himself. Alternatively, it might be the Felipe has really been the younger projection of the General all along and he merely became aware of his double existence. Whatever the case, a dramatic change seems to have come over Felipe. He no longer is repulsed by old Consuelo. In fact, when he has sex with Aura again, the moonlight reveals that she

has aged to the point of looking like Consuelo. Far from being disgusted, he embraces her with even more passion. The fact that Felipe physically resembles the General—which he discovers when he looks at Consuelo's photographs—corroborates the theory that Felipe is, like Aura, a younger projection of the General.

The General's memoirs give the reader a vague idea of Aura's origins. Consuelo was horribly upset when they realized they could not have children together. It was so upsetting that they apparently separated for some time. It appears that Consuelo then began to dabble in the occult, experimenting with various herbs (which, she says, are for the soul and not the body) and performing some kind of animal sacrifice with a cat. The last of his notes describes her in a state of euphoria over having finally achieved her goal—presumably, she was able to regain her youth by creating Aura.

Characters

Felipe Montero

Felipe Montero is a history teacher who is enticed by the generous salary of Senora Consuelo's job posting. His great dream is to produce a work which unifies all of the existing scholarship on the Spanish influence on the Americas into a single book. He hopes to save enough money while working on General Llorente's manuscript to be able to take time off from working and dedicate himself entirely to this personal project. He completed his studies at the Sorbonne in France, where he learned to speak French fluently. It was quite fortuitous that he happened to exactly fit the requirements for Senora Consuelo's job.

It is tempting to read the novel as if Felipe were the one sane character in a story otherwise dominated by Senora Consuelo's insanity, but from the book's beginning it is difficult to understand his behavior from a rational perspective. It is hard to explain, for one, why he would initially pass up the job offer at the cafe: He fulfilled all the requirements perfectly and it offered a salary more than four times higher than what he was currently earning. Only after seeing the advertisement again the next day does he decide to go. As the story progresses, his behavior becomes stranger, but also more significant. When he and Aura make love for the first time, he agrees with her when she says he is her husband. As the story develops, the possibility opens up to the reader that Felipe is somehow the same person as General Llorente, perhaps a kind of supernatural projection like Aura is. This reading is strengthened by the fact that he seems to already be familiar with the General's life (30) and that he is physically identical to him (70). His actions reach their final, logical conclusion when he makes love to Aura at the novel's end, even though she has transformed into the decrepit Senora Consuelo.

Senora Consuelo

Senora Consuelo is a 109-year-old widow of General Llorente, who died fifty-nine years before the story takes place. She is the author of the ad which attracts Felipe. Ostensibly, she wants to hire someone to finish her husband's manuscript, evidently a project she had wanted to finish for sometime. However, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that she really sees Felipe as a kind of replacement for the General. Indeed, though it is intentionally ambiguous, Felipe might in fact be the General, or a projection of the General's youth.

Consuelo is driven by a desire to recover her youth. She has turned to various means to achieve this like herbs and occult religious practices. At first, Consuelo's religious devotion seems to be perhaps a little eccentric but still basically orthodox. However, Felipe at one point finds Aura—controlled by Consuelo—beheading a goat. Though the purpose of this act is never made clear, it is fairly obvious that she is not killing the goat



for dinner, for Felipe notes that dinner is always liver and onions. One possible explanation is that the goat is part of some kind occult—possibly Satanic—ritual sacrifice. Later, Felipe eats alone and finds a doll placed suspiciously under his napkin. When he realizes he has begun to move in the same mechanical manner he observed in Aura, he throws the doll away, fearing some kind of illness or curse lingers in it. The strangeness of Consuelo's religion reaches its climax when Aura and Felipe have sex in Aura's room. The entire act is overseen by a crucifix hung on the wall. Several religious rituals, like Holy Communion and the washing of feet, are performed, as if in mockery of Christ, before they have sex.

Aura

Aura, at first, appears to be Consuelo's beautiful niece. As the story unfolds, however, it becomes obvious that she is in fact some kind of supernatural projection of Consuelo's youth.

General Llorente

General Llorente is Consuelo's dead husband. He was forty-seven when he married Consuelo, who was then only fifteen years old. Their marriage was troubled by their inability to produce a child and the grief evidently caused Consuelo to look into the occult. He died at the age of eighty-two, fifty-nine years before the story takes place.

Saga

Saga is Consuelo's rabbit. There are some clues to suggest that Saga is the foundation onto which Consuelo projects Aura. For example, when Saga leaves her side during her first meeting with Felipe, she confidently says that she will be back. When Aura comes not long after, Consuelo says to Felipe that she told him that she would come back.

The Servant

Consuelo and Aura make reference several times to a servant who sets the table and retrieves Felipe's belongings from his apartment. Felipe wonders why he never sees this servant.

The Demons

In Consuelo's religious art, Felipe notes that the only happy figures are the demons, who take pleasure in torturing the damned.

Jesus Christ

Above Aura's bed, where she and Felipe make love, there is a "black Christ" on a cross. During this encounter, she engages in several acts of blasphemy and sacrilege aimed at Christ and the Catholic religion in particular.

The Saints

In Consuelo's religious icons, the saints are never depicted as happy, but always wrathful and gloomy.

Napoleon III

Napoleon III was the French leader during the time General Llorente served the army. The French controlled Mexico until 1867.

Objects/Places

The Cafe

Felipe finds the advertisement for Senora Consuelo's job in a cafe.

Donceles Street

Donceles Street is where Senora Consuelo's house is located. Nearly every house, except for Consuelo's, has been converted into some kind of store or place of business.

Consuelo's House

Consuelo's house is very old and has been intentionally kept in its original form as much as possible. Senora Consuelo keeps the house dark at all times and discourages Felipe from even lighting a match to see his way.

Consuelo's Room

Consuelo's room is filthy. Her bed is covered with crumbs—perhaps from desecrating Communion wafers—and rats have nested in one of the corners. The third time Felipe and Aura have sex, it is in Consuelo's room.

Felipe's Room

Felipe's room, like every other room in the house, is old and outdated. One particularly annoying feature is that it has no ceiling, but instead a glass skylight. Whenever the sun rises, the room is filled with light and Felipe cannot sleep.

Aura's Room

Aura's room is plain and simple. It has no wall decorations except for a black crucifix. It is the site of Felipe and Aura's second sexual encounter.

The Black Christ

On Aura's wall is a black cross with a black Christ crucified on it. Since Consuelo, and therefore Aura, engages in various sacrilegious rituals, its presence is probably meant as a mockery of Christ. It is significant that the crucifix is black, for it reflects the dark, gloomy nature of Consuelo's religion.

The Double Presence

After Felipe and Aura have sex for the second time, he feels the invisible presence of some being conceived by their sexual act. It is never made clear exactly what it is, but it suggests that Felipe has some kind of "double" like Aura.

The Doll

One day Felipe eats dinner by himself and discovers a doll under his napkin. Without thinking, he plays with it for some time but realizes that his actions resemble Aura's mechanical, rigid motions. He throws the doll away, fearing it has some curse or illness in it.

Holy Communion

During Felipe's second sexual encounter with Aura, she rubs a wafer between her thighs, breaks it in two, and gives him one of the pieces. It is clear the wafer is either literally a Holy Communion or at least a representation of it. By eating the wafer, Felipe implicitly becomes a part of Consuelo's occult and perhaps even diabolical religion.

Themes

Consuelo's Quest to Recapture Her Youth

Senora Consuelo's primary motivation throughout the story—and indeed, even before it takes place—is to recapture her youth. When Felipe meets her, she is 109 years old and shows it. Her hands are withered away; her mouth is almost toothless; her eyes, once green and beautiful like Aura's, are now faded and yellow. Consuelo's desire to recapture her youth is a perhaps a response to her lack of any children. General Llorente, apparently, was incapable of fathering a child. So great was her grief over this fact that the two separated at some point, but eventually were reconciled. She changed in their time apart, however, and began to experiment with the occult to find a way to relive her youthful days. Her desire to relive the past is also related to her love for the General and the pain she experienced when she lost him. He died nearly sixty years before the story takes place and though she was hardly young when he died—she would have been about fifty—she still longs for him.

Aura is the fruit of Consuelo's dabbling with the supernatural. Though initially presented as Consuelo's niece, Aura is in fact a projection of Consuelo's youth. When Felipe discovers a collection of Consuelo's photographs, he realizes that Consuelo looked exactly like Aura when she was younger. Aura has no will of her own; all of her actions are a reflection of what Consuelo does. If Consuelo moves her hand, Aura moves hers. Therefore, when Felipe has sex with Aura, he is really having sex with Consuelo. This allows Consuelo to relive the passion and sensuality of her younger years, pleasures which are no longer available to her at 109. Consuelo, however, wants Felipe to love her no matter how old she is and each time they have sex, Aura becomes older. When they have sex for the third and final time in the novel, Aura is as old as Consuelo.

The Inversion of Christianity

At first, it seems like Consuelo has a normal, if mildly eccentric, Christian devotion which might not be terribly surprising for an old widow. Her devotion is first hinted at by the dim votive candles which serve as the only light source in the otherwise pitch black house. Felipe gets his first glimpse into the nature of her devotion when he goes to ask for her husband's manuscripts. He finds her knelt down in prayer before a wall of religious icons. The icons are dominated not by themes of joy or hope, but of wrath and vengeance. Christ and the Saints appear gloomy and unhappy. The only joyous figures are the demons, who take pleasure in torturing the souls of the wicked. He can hear her quietly mumbling a prayer awaiting the death of the world. She then collapses from excitement and requires his help to get to her bed.

What might be thought of as a gloomy but otherwise orthodox piety is clearly revealed as something occult, and perhaps even demonic. Felipe discovers Consuelo's control over Aura's body when he finds Aura beheading and skinning a goat in the kitchen.



Consuelo, though in another room, is putting her hands and fingers through the same motions as Aura. Though Felipe is horrified by Consuelo's puppeteer like control over Aura, it might be validly asked what exactly Aura was doing beheading a goat in the first place. It was probably not for dinner, since they always eat (calf) liver and onions. The possibility of ritual animal sacrifice certainly presents itself, and there are some hints that Consuelo has engaged in it in the past. First, her husband writes in his memoirs of her torturing (and presumably) killing a cat during her experiments with the supernatural. Felipe finds a group of cats bound together and burning alive outside of his window. Certainly no Christian ritual includes animal sacrifice, and so, if indeed the goat is being killed ritualistically, it is yet another hint as to Consuelo's strange religion.

While animal sacrifice is not directly part of Christianity, it is not so opposite of its tenets as the acts Aura performs during her second sexual encounter with Felipe. First of all, the entire rendezvous is done beneath a "black" Christ hanging on the wall, almost as if they were fornicating in mockery of him. While staring at the cross, Aura washes Felipe's feet, imitating how Christ washed his disciples' feet during the Last Supper. In this case, however, the purpose is not to teach humility, but to seduce Felipe. Finally, Aura performs a sacrilegious form of the sacrament of the Eucharist. She rubs a bread wafer between her naked thighs and gives half of it to Felipe.

Fuentes' Creation of a Dream-like World

From style to setting, Fuentes effectively creates a world which seems like a dream (or nightmare). One of the most immediately noticed features of the book is its unusual narrative style. It is written in the second-person, putting the reader into Felipe Montero's position. It is also written in the present tense. The effect of these choices is to place the reader immediately into Felipe's perspective. The reader does not feel like he is reading about somewhat else is doing (like he naturally would if the book were narrated in the first- or third-person perspectives); rather, he is being specifically and directly commanded to imagine the events as they happen to Felipe. Such an effect also heightens those parts of the book which are meant to frighten and shock the reader. For example, there is a part of the book where Felipe is horrified by the fact that his actions are just as mechanical and involuntary as Aura's. A passive reader cannot help but feel the same way as he watches Felipe act inexplicably such as, for example, when he agrees with Aura that he is her husband. This phenomenon is one which is closely associated with dreams. People dreaming often do things which they would never do in real life; indeed, sometimes a dreamer is even appalled or horrified by what he does.

The setting of the book also contributes to this dreamy atmosphere. The house is almost surreal. It is kept dark all the time. Strange noises occasionally resound through the house. When Felipe finds their explanation—Consuelo, apparently, is burning cats alive—it does nothing to ground the bizarre world he has found himself in. Indeed, the characters themselves present the house as something quite otherworldly. For example, when Aura notices Felipe is looking for the source of light in her bedroom, she says,

rather cryptically, "The sky is neither high nor low. It's over us and under us at the same time" (54).

Style

Point of View

The book is written from the uncommon second-person perspective. This perspective is used effectively to make the reader feel like a part of the dream-like environment Fuentes creates. The other perspectives, first- and third-person, all put the reader into the role of an observer to someone else's actions and thoughts. However, in a dream there cannot be an observer; there is only the dreamer. Thus, in "Aura," the reader is made the sole person experiencing the story as it unfolds.

Moreover, a dreamer also assumes a kind of passive role in his own dreams. He will often do things involuntarily, sometimes watching with horror as his actions defy reason and even morality. A similar experience is recreated in *Aura*. The reader is put into the position of Felipe who behaves erratically and often without any obvious explanation. Felipe's irrationality is made sharper by the fact that the actions are attributed to the reader himself, who, imagining that he does what Felipe does, also must imagine why he would act in such a way.

Of course, the second-person perspective also has the effect of immersing the reader more completely into the story. No longer an outside observer, the reader is forced to imagine the surroundings being more immediate. Likewise, by using the present tense, Fuentes even more tightly draws the reader into the narrative.

Setting

Aside from a non-nondescript cafe, the entire book takes place inside Senora Consuelo's house. The house is an almost surreal place that seems disconnected from the rest of the world. Indeed, Consuelo and Aura seem insistent upon ensuring that Felipe never leaves after he arrives at the house. He offers to do the work from his own apartment—not wanting to be a burden to them—but Consuelo lays down living there as an inflexible condition of employment. Later, when Felipe mentions that he left some papers in a locked drawer of one his desks, Aura asks suspiciously if means to leave. Sensing, but not understanding, her apprehension, he dismisses the topic and lets the servant retrieve them instead.

The house is always kept dark, at least in those parts of the house where Senora Consuelo goes. In addition to contributing to the house's overall surreal atmosphere, the perpetual darkness also ties into the story's plot. Consuelo probably keeps the house dark because she does not want to be reminded of how ugly and disgusting she looks as an old woman. Aura seems to travel freely through the light areas of the house, like Felipe's room. This should not be surprising, since Aura is still young and beautiful; when they make love for the last time, however, and Aura is as old as Consuelo, it is in the dark. Light seems to, at times, come from clandestine locations. When Felipe and

Aura make love in Aura's bedroom, he searches in vain to find the light. Aura's cryptic response implies that it has a supernatural origin: "The sky is neither high nor low. It's over us and under us at the same time" (54).

Language and Meaning

Fuentes' word choice is, for the most part, simple. Likewise, sentence constructions stay relatively uncomplicated. Short sentences are more effective in creating the immediate, emotional effects he wishes to create.

However, though his style is simple on the sentence level, the narrative and descriptive approaches he takes are quite sophisticated. The book is filled with ambiguity. Fuentes directly explains almost nothing about the book's unclear aspects—Consuelo's religion, what Aura is, Felipe's relationship to the general. Some of these questions can be answered from clues in the text. For example, it is obvious that Aura is some sort of projection of Consuelo's youth. This is obvious from the fact that she looks exactly like Consuelo did when she was young and the kind of total control she exercises over Aura. Aura really has no will of her own; she simply does what Consuelo wants her to do.

That said, there are many plausible explanations for how exactly Aura came about. The most reasonable explanation is that Consuelo used some kind of occult ritual to create her. Her strange religion is simply foregrounded too much in the story to not at least be related to Aura's origin. It is also, perhaps, related to Felipe's connection with the general. Felipe may be, like Aura, a projection of the general; perhaps Consuelo somehow transformed Felipe into the general. Whatever the case, the reader will be his or herself best equipped to understand the text by carefully reading it several times. Many details cannot be understood in their full significance until later in the text. For example, when Felipe first meets Consuelo and Aura, he notices that they nod together in unison. After reading the story, the reader will understand that this is because of their mystical connection with one another, but such a detail will probably be passed over without note on a first read.

Structure

The novel's structure is very simple and straightforward. It is divided into five chapters of roughly equal length. The first chapter introduces the characters and sets up the rest of the plot. It begins with Felipe finding the newspaper advertisement for Senora Consuelo's job. He lets a day go by before deciding to go to the house listed on the ad. The old-fashioned house sticks out conspicuously on a street which is dominated by newly built or renovated storefronts. Inside, the house is kept in perpetual darkness. Senora Consuelo is eager to give him the job, but insists that he stay there for the duration of the job. Reluctantly, he agrees.

In the second chapter, Felipe becomes acquainted with the house and spends some brief moments with Aura. He later stops by Senora Consuelo's room to retrieve the papers he requires to do his work. He finds her in the middle of prayers before a wall of

gloomy religious icons. She becomes so excited that she falls over. Felipe helps her up, gets the key to the chest, and takes the first batch of documents. In chapter three, he begins reading her late husband's manuscripts, but quickly becomes bored, as if he already knew everything they contained. He falls asleep and wakes up the next morning in time for breakfast where he witnesses a disturbing sight. Aura seems to exactly imitate Consuelo's every action and Felipe begins to suspect that the aunt holds some kind of tyrannical power over her that keeps Aura from leaving. He avoids going to lunch that night, incapable of seeing the same sight again. That night, Aura comes into his room, undresses, and climbs on top of him while he is sleeping. He wakes up and they have sex without exchanging a word. They arrange another rendezvous the next night.

In chapter 4, Felipe wakes up and decides to look for Aura. He finds her beheading a goat in the kitchen; he runs to Consuelo's room and finds her mimicking Aura's motions. He realizes now that there is some kind of supernatural relationship between them. He is frightened but still finds himself drawn to Aura. He shows up at the appointed hour for the rendezvous and they make love. In the morning, he discovers that Consuelo has been watching the entire time and falls back asleep. In chapter 5, he wakes up and feels a strange, inexplicable presence with him—a kind of "double presence." He tries everything he can to take his mind off of it, but winds up visiting Aura again. They make love again, but she now is so aged that she looks like Consuelo, but he is too enraptured to care.

Quotes

"You're reading the advertisement: an offer like this isn't made every day. You read it and reread it. It seems to be addressed to you and nobody else." (3)

"It's surprising to know that anyone lives on Donceles Street. You always thought that nobody lived in the old center of the city." (6)

"There isn't any light to guide you, and you're searching in your coat pocket for the box of matches when a sharp, thin voice tells you, from a distance: 'No it isn't necessary. Please. Walk thirteen steps forward and you'll come to a stairway at your right. Come up, please. There are twenty-two steps. Count them.'" (8)

"Finally you can see that those eyes are sea green and that they surge, break to foam, grow calm again, then surge again like a wave. You look into them and tell yourself it isn't true, because they're beautiful green eyes just like all beautiful green eyes you've ever known. But you can't deceive yourself: those eyes do surge, do change, as if offering you a landscape that you can only see and desire." (15)

"You eat in silence. You drink that thick wine, occasionally shifting your glance so that Aura won't catch you in the hypnotized stare that you can't control. You'd like to fix the girl's features in your mind. Every time you look away you forget them again, and an irresistible urge forces you to look at her once more." (22)

"While you're thinking of the continual rubbing of that rough wool against her skin, she suddenly raises her fists and strikes feebly at the air, as if she were doing battle against the images you can make out as you tiptoe closer: Christ, the Virgin, St. Sebastian, St. Lucia, the Archangel Michael, and the grinning demons in an old print, the only happy figures in that iconography of sorrow and wrath, happy because they're jabbing their pitchforks into the flesh of the damned, pouring cauldrons of boiling water on them, violating the women, getting drunk, enjoying all the liberties forbidden to the saints." (25)

"Just as you finish shaving the early morning silence is broken by that painful, desperate yowling. You try to find out where it's coming from . . . You open one of the windows and pull yourself up to look out at that side garden, that square of yew trees and brambles where five, six, seven cats—you can't count them, can't hold yourself up there for more than a second—are all twined together, all writhing in flames and giving off a dense smoke that reeks of burnt fur." (31)

"But the fourth place has also been set. You note it in passing. It doesn't bother you any more. If the price of your future creativity liberty is to put up with all the manias of this old woman, you can pay it easily." (35)

"You've figured it up: Senora Consuelo must be 109. Her husband died fifty-nine years ago . . . Always dressed in green. Always beautiful, even after a hundred years." (45)



"Aura, squatting on the bed, places an object against her closed thighs, caressing it, summoning you with her hand. She caresses that thin wafer, breaks it against her thighs, oblivious of the crumbs that roll down her hips. She offers you half of the wafer and you take it, place it in your mouth at the same time she does, and swallow it with difficulty." (56)

"She [Aura] turns away, ringing her bell like the lepers who use a bell to announce their approach, telling the unwary: 'Out of the way, out of the way.'" (64)

"She'll come back, Felipe. We'll bring her back together. Let me recover my strength and I'll bring her back" (74)

Topics for Discussion

Explain the significance, if any, of Saga, Consuelo's rabbit.

If the job pays so well, why does Felipe seem reluctant to respond to the advertisement?

What is Felipe's relationship to Consuelo's dead husband?

What is Aura's relationship to Consuelo?

What is the significance of the doll Felipe finds under his napkin?

Why does Consuelo keep the house dark all the time?

Explain the significance of the burning cats outside of Felipe's window.