

The Law of Love Study Guide

The Law of Love by Laura Esquivel

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Introduction

When *The Law of Love* was published in 1996, Laura Esquivel was already a successful author. Her first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments, with Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies*, published in 1989, became a bestseller in Mexico and the United States and has been translated into numerous languages. Her second novel, *The Law of Love*, however, did not receive the critical acclaim of the first. As in *Like Water for Chocolate*, in *The Law of Love* Esquivel focuses on the redemptive power of love. In this novel, which takes place in the twenty-third century and includes several "regressions" into past centuries, the main character, astroanalyst Azucena, struggles to reunite with her "twin soul" Rodrigo and, at the same time, restore peace to the universe by reinstating the Law of Love. This law states that when a person opens her heart enough to forgive all enemies, she will help perpetuate a Divine Will, a "cosmic order" that will bring peace and harmony to all. Esquivel's multimedia presentation, including color illustrations by Spanish artist Miguelano Prado and poetry and accompanied by a CD that contains arias by Puccini and Mexican danzones, results in a clever tale of love and understanding.

Author Biography

Laura Esquivel was born the third of four children of Julio Caesar Esquivel, a telegraph operator, and his wife Josephina, in 1951 in Mexico. In an interview with Molly O'Neill in the *New York Times*, Esquivel explains, "I grew up in a modern home, but my grandmother lived across the street in an old house that was built when churches were illegal in Mexico. She had a chapel in the home, right between the kitchen and dining room. The smell of nuts and chilies and garlic got all mixed up with the smells from the chapel, my grandmother's carnations, the liniments and healing herbs." In another *Times* interview, Esquivel told Marialisa Calta that her ideas for her first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, came out of her own experiences in the kitchen: "When I cook certain dishes, I smell my grandmother's kitchen, my grandmother's smells. I thought: what a wonderful way to tell a story." Attention to the senses would also be one of the themes in her next novel, *The Law of Love*.

Esquivel grew up in Mexico City and attended the Escuela Normal de Maestros, the national teachers' college. After teaching school for eight years, Esquivel began writing and directing for children's theater. In the early 1980s she wrote the screenplay for the Mexican film *Chido One*, directed by her husband Alfonso Arau and released in 1985. Arau also directed her screenplay for *Like Water for Chocolate*, released in Mexico in 1989 and in the United States in 1993. First published in 1989, *Like Water for Chocolate* became a best-seller in Mexico and the United States and has been translated into numerous languages. The film version has become one of the most popular foreign films of the past few decades. In her second, less successful novel, *Ley del amor*, published in English in 1996 as *The Law of Love*, Esquivel again creates a magical world where love becomes the dominant force of life.



Plot Summary

The Law of Love mixes science fiction and magic realism with a sprinkling of New Age philosophy as it tells the story of Azucena, an astroanalyst in twenty-third-century Mexico City. Throughout the novel Azucena tries to help others as well as herself to remember and cope with their past lives. Along the way, she struggles to escape villains who threaten world peace and to reunite with her "twin soul" Rodrigo. Her multimedia story, interspersed with color illustrations by Spanish artist Miguelano Prado and poetry and accompanied by a CD that contains arias by Puccini and Mexican danzones, ultimately asserts the unifying power of love.

The novel begins with the Spanish wresting control of Tenochtitlan, Mexico from the Aztecs in the sixteenth century and constructing a new city which will eventually become Mexico City upon its ruins. Rodrigo Diaz, one of Cortes's captains, demolishes a pyramid on a site where the Aztecs had conducted pagan ceremonies honoring a goddess of love, and builds his house there. As Rodrigo moves the stone that had formed the apex of the pyramid, he sees Citlali, one of his Aztec slaves, and rapes her on the spot. During the conquest of the city, Rodrigo had killed her son. Eventually, Citlali takes her revenge by killing Rodrigo's son. When his wife Isabel learns that after her son had died, her husband murdered Citlali and then took his own life, she does not have the strength to live.

The story then shifts to Mexico City in the twenty-third century and Azucena's pursuit of Rodrigo, her "twin soul." Anacreonte, Azucena's Guardian Angel, explains the spiritual system of this future world, governed by a "Divine Will" or cosmic order that has been disrupted by "Wreckoncilers" who substitute "lies for truth, death for life, and hatred for love inside our hearts." The Wreckoncilers are allowed to "straighten out their screwups" through several reincarnations "until finally they learn how to love." Anacreonte insists that Azucena and Rodrigo both still have "some outstanding debts to pay." The twin souls enjoy one blissful meeting with each other before Rodrigo disappears and Azucena begins a quest to be reunited with him. Isabel Gonzales, candidate for Planetary President, has exiled Rodrigo to the penal planet Korma, where he is unable to remember anything about his past. As she searches for Rodrigo, Azucena discovers someone is trying to kill her. With the help of Cuquita, her apartment building superintendent, she changes bodies in an effort to fool her pursuers. After Azucena spots Rodrigo on a newscast about Korma, she and Cuquita travel on an interplanetary spaceship to the planet. There she listens to music and regresses back to a past life during the Mexico City earthquake in 1985 that caused the death of her parents. She sees herself as a child who is killed by Isabel. Azucena then realizes that Isabel has hidden her violent past and probably has ordered her assassination. Rodrigo escapes the planet undetected after he exchanges bodies with Cuquita's husband. During the flight home, Azucena helps him regress into the past where he remembers that he was a pregnant woman raped by her brother-in-law, who was Citlali in a past life, and that he had raped her in the ruins of Tenochtitlan. Citlali and Rodrigo forgive each other for their past crimes.



After returning to the earth, police storm Azucena's building, Azucena and Cuquita's grandmother dies, and Azucena's soul takes her body. Teo, an undercover Guardian Angel, notices Azucena's acute jealousy over Rodrigo's attentions to Citlali and comforts her. Azucena regresses and discovers that she was Citlali's murdered child in a past life and that Rodrigo was the Conquistador who had killed her. During a televised debate between the two candidates for Planetary President, Azucena watches as Isabel's regressions become unblocked and projected on the screen. When Azucena then regresses, she realizes she was the daughter Isabel tried to have killed. She also discovers that Citlali had murdered Isabel's baby (Rodrigo's child), and Isabel had died hating her. In their next parallel lives, Isabel and she had been brothers. Citlali had raped her brother's wife (Rodrigo), and in return, Isabel had murdered her. Azucena decides that "then the Law of Love had come into play to balance the relationship between them, causing them to be born as mother and daughter, to see whether those ties could ease the hatred Citlali felt for Isabel. However, Isabel had never loved her daughter. After she met Rodrigo and fell in love with him, Citlali and Rodrigo ran away together. Isabel finds them dead in the rubble of an earthquake and kills their child, her grandchild, who turns out to be Azucena.

During her trial, Isabel is found guilty of her past crimes. When Azucena offers her forgiveness, Isabel allows love to enter her heart. Rodrigo's memory returns and he recognizes Azucena as his twin soul. After he finds and replaces the capstone to the Pyramid of Love, the lost city of Tenochtitlan reappears and merges with Mexico City. Azucena is allowed to return to her original body and the reinstatement of the Law of Love creates harmony for all.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

When Hernando Cortés conquers Mexico, he constructs a new city on the site of the ancient city of Tenochtitlán. He levels Tenochtitlán, reasoning that if he leaves ruins, they will become a monument to the Aztecs and lead them, sooner or later, to try to recapture their city. Rodrigo Díaz, one of Cortés' foot soldiers, is granted a sacred pyramid as a place to build his home. The pyramid is a religious site for the Indians and a place where pagan ceremonies have been conducted to honor a goddess of love. Capping the pyramid is a stone, which Rodrigo discards when the holy site is torn down to build his house.

Along with the pyramid, Rodrigo is also granted ownership of fifty Indians. Among them is Citlali, a woman of proud and noble heritage among the Aztecs. Citlali leads the Indians as they approach Rodrigo atop the pyramid. Rodrigo killed Citlali's newborn son and her husband during the conquest and destroyed her home and the city she loved. Her presence and her movements, coupled with the location on the mountain of love, so incite Rodrigo that he sends the other Indians away and rapes her. Citlali is outraged at the attack not only because of its savage nature but because it occurs on the holy site dedicated to the goddess of love.

Not only is Rodrigo obligated, for purposes of combating idolatry, to build a church on his land within six months, but he must also marry to meet the requirements to receive the grant of land. He sends to Spain to bring Doña Isabel de Góngora to Tlatelolco to become his wife. Citlali is placed in Isabel's service as a maid-in-waiting. Isabel and Citlali do not speak the same language and there is no communication between them. Isabel hates Tlatelolco and Citlali loves it because it is her home. Isabel loves and longs for Spain and Citlali hates Spain because it is where Rodrigo learned to kill. Both women are stubborn, arrogant and set in their prejudices.

Teo, Divine Singer, lives in Tlatelolco and entertains children by dancing small gods on the palm of his hand. Teo has shaped the little gods and they can speak, wage war and sing in the voices of animals. Citlali cherishes her childhood memories of Teo.

Citlali and Isabel become pregnant by Rodrigo. Isabel awaits her son with great joy, but Citlali aborts the child within her. Rodrigo's marriage to Isabel is a marriage of convenience, but he is obsessed with Citlali and believes that he is showing his love when he constantly demands sex from her.

Citlali only asks something of Rodrigo once, but in that single instance he can do nothing to satisfy her wish. Teo has been driven mad by the conquest and has been wandering about. He has been picked up and is being brought to the Viceroy, who is dining at Rodrigo's house. Teo's hands have already been severed and now the Viceroy decrees that his tongue must also be cut out. Even though Citlali pleads with Rodrigo,



he can do nothing because he is already suspected of treating the Indians with too much kindness. Had Rodrigo spoken, his Indians would have been taken from him and he cannot risk losing Citlali.

Citlali never speaks to Rodrigo again. The house is now occupied by people who never communicate with each other. The true reason, we are told, is the location. The house was built on the House of Love, which intended to take the mount back. Citlali's strategy is to take revenge and she soon has an opportunity. She intentionally drops and kills Isabel's newborn son. Rodrigo kills Citlali and himself. Isabel dies immediately afterward.

Chapter 1 Analysis

A didactic story is one whose purpose is to teach. The Law of Love is such a tale. Esquivel has beliefs that she wants to communicate and she teaches through a story rather than a sermon or a speech. Sometimes the lessons are in the words of the narrator, who seems to be the author herself. Sometimes she puts those words into the mouths of her characters. For example, in Chapter 15, Teo says, "The solution for humanity will come only on that day when those who assume power do so by acting in accordance with the Law of Love."

Also, Esquivel has Anacreonte, Guardian Angel, say in Chapter 14: ". . . It's not by changing the social order that one's problems are resolved. It's by changing ourselves. When that happens, society is automatically modified."

Later in Chapter 14, Anacreonte is again the teacher: "Power will convince her [Azucena] that she is a very important woman. Feeling important, she will believe that she is deserving of all kinds of honors and recognitions. . . Why? Because to this day, no one in power has ever reacted differently."

Critics are usually not positive about didactic tales, particularly not about one whose intention is as obvious and forthright as this one. Some would say that in fiction the story should be paramount. In this case, the story is overpowered by the sermon.

When we speak of the tone of a piece of writing, we are talking about the author's attitude toward the material and the ideas he or she is presenting. In a story where the message is important and where the purpose of the work is to teach a lesson, we expect a serious tone. However, this is not the case in *The Law of Love*. Rather, Esquivel treats the subject matter playfully and when the lessons are given, such as in Chapter 13, they are presented almost casually. The tone is light and half-serious.

This first chapter establishes the plot. The 16th-century Aztec city of Tenochtitlán is razed and Rodrigo rapes his slave Citlali, setting in motion the plot that is played out in the 23rd century and comes to a climax with the trial in Mexico City in Chapter 16. Mexico City is the city that eventually replaces Tenochtitlán. The closing paragraphs of the story show a mystic fusion of that ancient city with the modern one when the capstone removed by Rodrigo in this first chapter is replaced. The pyramid from which

the capstone is removed is appropriately called the Pyramid of Love. The Aztec rites practiced there, while sexual in nature, were supposed to have maintained harmony because they were the key to the Law of Love, which is spelled out in Chapter 13.

The theme of the story and the philosophy expressed by Esquivel, is the redemptive power of love. However, love is defined in many ways in the story and is ultimately ambiguous. Certainly, sexual relations, sexual attraction and the commitment between a man and a woman are all involved in this definition. However, unqualified love between all humans, between social classes from the very primitive to the most advanced, is also an essential part of the definition.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

We now jump ahead to the 23rd century and Azucena's Guardian Angel, Anacreonte, is speaking.

There is no place to house hatred, so it is forever seeking a refuge, "taking over sites reserved for others, invariably forcing out love." Nature, on the other hand, is obsessed with order, tries to put things back where they belong and will not permit hatred to reside permanently in the heart. Through the art of a Reconciler, the soul can separate itself from the body. When it returns, there is room again for love to live in the heart.

In the Law of Love, only a Wreckonciler, the person who causes an imbalance, can straighten it out, so Nature provides reincarnations so that hatred will disappear. Once two people have learned to love, they will be allowed to meet their twin souls, the highest reward a human being can hope for.

Azucena, a willful and stubborn woman, is determined to be with her twin soul even though she is unwilling to do what is necessary to achieve that goal. Her Guardian Angel has his work cut out for him.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Characterization, the way a writer creates a character, is complicated in this story because the characters are fluid. They are one person today, but in one of their many previous lives they were someone else. For example, in the first chapter Citlali kills Isabel's baby, but in their next parallel life she and Isabel are brothers. Citlali, now male, rapes Isabel's wife and Isabel murders Citlali. In the next life, Isabel is Citlali's mother. Isabel doesn't love her daughter and when Citlali reaches adolescence, Isabel sees her as an enemy. Divorced, Isabel falls in love with and marries Rodrigo, but Rodrigo loves Citlali and they run away together. Isabel finds them in a run-down mansion with Citlali pregnant on the day of the 1985 earthquake. Citlali and Rodrigo are dead, but their baby, Azucena, is still alive, so Isabel crushes her head with a stone.

Azucena as a willful, rebellious, rambunctious sort who seems to survive in all of her incarnations. This is also true to some extent with Isabel, although what seems to survive in Isabel is wickedness, which sets the stage for the major conflict in the story.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Despite physical obstacles, Rodrigo comes to Azucena and they unite. The union is between souls, but it has many times the intensity of physical sex because the fusion of souls is total and complete. Azucena and Rodrigo form a single body that "lulled by orgasms, danced through space to the rhythm of the music of the spheres."

When Rodrigo and Azucena awake the next morning, they find themselves in a murder scene. The victim is Mr. Bush, the American candidate for Planetary President. The scene is in Azucena's bedroom because she has forgotten to shut off the alarm on her Televirtual set. She turns it off and Rodrigo leaves to go to his apartment to collect his belongings. He will come back, he says and they will never again be separated. However, we are told, "that was the last image Azucena had of him."

Cuquita is the superintendent in Azucena's apartment building and does not like Azucena because she feels inferior to her. Cuquita is from a lower class and is uneducated. Azucena feels superior to Cuquita and often shows her contempt.

Azucena tries to get Cuquita to look for Rodrigo, but not surprisingly Cuquita refuses to help. Azucena would like to go to Anacreonte, her own Guardian Angel, for help, but she has broken off communication with him. She has no place to turn. She suspects that Rodrigo's disappearance is related somehow to the assassination.

Meanwhile, Rodrigo has been delivered by spaceship to Korma, a primitive tribe. He has no memory of his liaison with Azucena and he is disgusted by the animal-like lifestyle of the tribal people.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This book is an experiment in multimedia. A CD of Puccini arias and Mexican dances comes with it. Directions for when to play parts of the CD are included in the chapters. Text is also interspersed with "paintings" by Miguelano Prado that illustrate the story. In addition, poetry is sprinkled throughout the chapters.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Azucena is an astroanalyst, the 23rd-century version of a psychoanalyst. She and Dr. Díez, a colleague, cook up a plan for Azucena to work as an Official Investigator in the Center for the Oversight of Previous Existences, which has a machine created by Dr. Díez that will give Azucena access to information that will help her find Rodrigo. The office will search Azucena's subconscious before they will hire her, so Dr. Díez plants a substitute computer for her subconscious. During the examination, Azucena momentarily lapses into her own subconscious as the result of hearing some music from a CD and gets a glimpse of Rodrigo but loses it immediately. She passes the exam and gets a job with the Center for the Oversight of Previous Existences.

Azucena waits in a long line to be inducted into the Center and the office closes before she reaches the window. She decides to go to the Consumer Protection Agency with her complaint, but she finds no satisfaction there. As she returns to her apartment, a spacecraft circles overhead announcing the nomination of Isabel González for Planetary President.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Esquivel's imaginary science-fiction version of life in the 23rd century closely parallels life in the 20th century, when the novel was first published. People watch television for the news with the added twist that it is now virtual. The reporters and those reported on are in the room with the viewer. Instead of a psychoanalyst we have an astroanalyst, who has the added capabilities of exploring the history and psyche of clients, including the close examination of previous lives and their influence on the current one.

Since its population is reasonably static, the setting of Mexico City is appropriate for this time-warp story. It is a large modern city in 1995, but it has a history that lends itself to the traveling back and forth of the characters from the 16th century. It makes sense that the Rodrigo of the 16th century would reside in the same place in his 23rd-century incarnation. He settles there at the time of the Conquest and builds a house there, so it's logical to expect that he has not traveled very far from the original site.

Mexico is also an appropriate setting for a mystical story because of the mixture of mysticism with Christianity through the centuries. Even in Catholic churches in the 20th century, many practices related to the original mystical religions that preceded the Conquest still exist side-by-side with Christian faith and practices. Many of the original celebrations have simply been adapted.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

This short chapter is narrated by Isabel's demon, Mammon. He depicts Isabel as an extreme example of devilry. We are told that she is the most "merciless, ambitious, cruel and sublimely obedient of all the violators." The philosophy of demonology is that man must experience the most wicked to value goodness, the opposite of evil. In the words of Isabel's demon, "If a man is to value life in the universe, he must first learn to destroy it: to regain Paradise, he must first regain Hell." Mammon predicts that Azucena will be part of Isabel's destiny and it will bring them into contact with God.

Chapter 5 Analysis

There are many levels of conflict in this story. While it deals with Azucena's quest for her soul mate, the major conflict is between Azucena and Isabel. Even that conflict becomes twisted because of the shifts and turns through the characters' many incarnations. Even so, when the story begins to move toward its climax, it is Azucena and Isabel who are battling it out.

At the same time, the story is about good and evil. Azucena, with all her flaws, represents good and Isabel represents evil. Azucena has a frustrated Guardian Angel who is trying unsuccessfully to aid and guide her and Isabel is advised by a demon, a representative of Hell or evil. The plot is complicated, particularly in the identity of the characters and at the climax at the end of the 15th chapter and the beginning of the 16th when Isabel is brought to trial and the decision is handed down, we find out who and what wins.

At the same time, in Chapter 2, our first introduction to 23rd-century Mexico City, the principal character, Azucena, is seeking her twin-soul and in the denouement, she is united with him, presumably permanently. A case could be made that the theme of the story is a search for the perfect love. In this multifaceted story, all of these themes are played out. Readers must decide for themselves which one is the most important.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Isabel is the Americas' candidate for Planetary President and she will be holding a reception on her patio today. She has been in the news, as has her extremely obese daughter Carmela. Isabel has had another daughter disintegrated for a hundred years so that she will not have to deal with her while she is achieving her political goals.

Agapito, a servant, is making the arrangements for the reception on the patio and there is a problem. A pyramid keeps emerging in the middle of the patio. Isabel doesn't want it known because it will cause the government to declare the pyramid a historic site and excavations will take place. The solution is to place 660-pound Carmela over the pyramid so it won't show.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The pyramid is a recurring symbol. Introduced in the first chapter, its destruction echoes the destruction not only of the city but of the Aztec culture and religion, which is based, according to this story, on the Law of Love. Originally intended to promote harmony, the pyramid instead has provoked conflict, violence and hatred. The pyramid figures in the final paragraphs when it is restored to its original location. In that light, it can be described as a symbol of the conflict between good and evil. Until Good, or love, is restored, harmony is not possible.

Esquivel is teaching her readers about love and she includes two cases of discrimination to strengthen her case. The first is Cuquita, Azucena's neighbor and the superintendent of her apartment building, who is poor and uneducated and is looked down upon by Azucena. The other one is Carmela, the overweight daughter of Isabel who is punished not for anything she does but because she is not thin. Esquivel's message is one of unconditional love. We will see many cases where the connections between the characters are sexual and there is no doubt that the original religious practices in Tenochtitlán were sexual in nature. This is not an erotic story, however. It is about love in all its aspects, including the love for one's fellow man that is unconditional and accepting of differences in appearance and background.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Azucena is looking for a CD of the music that resurrected Rodrigo in the office of the Center for the Oversight of Previous Existences and she tries to coerce Cuquita to find out where she can get it on the black market. Azucena secures the CD, but in a fight for an aerophone booth where she has gone to teleport herself back to her apartment, she is misssent to the house of the man she had been contending with for the phone booth. When she finally gets back to her apartment, she finds the man there murdered and she realizes that she had been the intended victim. She goes to a "coyote," who has a supply of bodies generated from fertilized eggs that have no souls because they had no mothers and arranges to have her soul implanted into the body of a beautiful woman.

Now Azucena is in a quandary because she has lost the computer that Dr. Díez had transplanted in her mind. She goes back to his office, where she finds him murdered. Back at her apartment, Azucena is watching the news and learns that Rodrigo has been found dead and is suspected of the assassination of Mr. Bush. She needs help and knows that Anacreonte is the only one who can help her, but Azucena's pride will not permit her to contact him.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The plot thickens. The work of the evil force that is opposing Azucena has begun to be demonstrated. We don't know yet who is behind it, but we know now that the conflicts in the story are not just those within Azucena, whose major objective is to be with Rodrigo, but between Azucena and someone who intends to do away with her.

Sorting out this story is a challenge because of the many levels of any single character. To stabilize what is going on, the author uses typical 20th-century events and practices to hang her story on, such as the employment office and the phone booth in this chapter.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

This chapter is narrated by Anacreonte, Azucena's Guardian Angel. He is exasperated with Azucena because she won't listen to him. Azucena can't sleep and she is depressed. Anacreonte could help her if only she weren't so mule-headed. Pavana, Rodrigo's Guardian Angel, is waiting for Anacreonte to work with him so they can arrange a reunion between the two.

To run smoothly, creation requires that everyone carry out his or her role correctly. Otherwise, the rhythm of the Universe is disrupted. This makes it impossible for Azucena to go off on her own. A Supreme Intelligence directs humans to foster the balance between creation and destruction. When one seems paralyzed, as Azucena is right now, it's because she is just rearranging things inside. The problem is that not only is Azucena not doing anything about her physical paralysis, but she is also not doing anything to deal with her inward paralysis.

Divine Love is infinite and it is everywhere. It is foolish for Azucena to limit it to Rodrigo's physical presence. She needs to understand that there is love all around her and that she is a beloved "daughter of the Universe," and she will no longer feel lost. She needs to learn to exercise more control over her impulsiveness and rebelliousness. Anacreonte will arrange for Azucena to be put in a position where she must help someone else. By helping someone else, Azucena will be able to help herself.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Point of view in this story is as diverse as the story's twists and turns. It is consistently third-person omniscient or told in the third person and we are allowed into the mind of that one person. However, the author is selective about which character plays that role. Often, as in this chapter, this is how Esquivel teaches. She puts the lessons into the mouths of various characters, her favorite being Anacreonte, the protagonist's Guardian Angel. It is from Anacreonte that we learn that God is Love, that Azucena is loved by the almighty and that Azucena is thwarting her own desires by failing to carry out her role as she should. She should be cooperating with Anacreonte, but her perverse nature will not permit her to do it.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Azucena is going to help Cuquita, who is fleeing her violent husband. He has been abusing and beating her for some time, but now he has turned his violence on Cuquita's grandmother and Cuquita has had enough. She wants Azucena to take her and her grandmother in for a few days and Azucena reluctantly agrees because she and Cuquita have little in common. The invasion of the two women plus Cuquita's parrot and the things she has brought with her are annoying to Azucena, but she squelches her annoyance and tries to help.

Cuquita has no Televirtual, a sort of 23rd-century television set but with enhancements, because she can't afford one. The news shows on Televirtual transport the viewer to the scene of the newscast. Cuquita is watching a soap opera when a newscast breaks in showing Isabel visiting Korma. Cuquita wakes Azucena because the man they already know is responsible for the murder of the man in Azucena's apartment, who had been mistaken for herself and the murder of Dr. Díez is on the newscast and is a colleague of Isabel's. For a brief moment, Rodrigo appears on the show. The two women decide to get their friend Julito to take them to Korma on his interplanetary spaceship.

Suddenly, Azucena figures it all out. She knows that Isabel killed her in 1985 at the time of an earthquake, but she now identifies herself in that generation as Mother Teresa. Azucena knows that is a lie and that the murderous Isabel from 1985 is no different from the Isabel of the 23rd century. Azucena knows now that Isabel is much older than she represents herself to be and was responsible for the assassination of Mr. Bush. Azucena also knows that Isabel killed Dr. Díez because he was the one who helped her fabricate a life and put it on a microcomputer, just as he had for Azucena. Isabel couldn't have him alive with that knowledge, so she had him murdered.

Azucena also knows now why Isabel wants her dead. Since Isabel murdered Azucena in 1985, Isabel has a criminal record and no one with a criminal record in the past ten lives can run for Planetary President. Now Azucena wonders why Isabel hasn't killed Rodrigo because he was Azucena's father in 1985. Azucena also knows that Rodrigo's life is in danger and that she must keep out of Isabel's way because she is extremely dangerous.

Cuquita is looking after Azucena, which touches her. No one has ever looked after her with the sole purpose of making her feel better and she loves Cuquita, an uneducated person from a lower class.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This is an important chapter because not only is the truth about Isabel revealed to Azucena, but it is also revealed to the reader. We also see the Law of Love at work in

the relationship between Azucena, who has held Cuquita in disdain before she was put in a position where she needed to help her and Cuquita, who has been resentful of Azucena because of her superior education and class. Esquivel, the teacher, is telling readers that helping people in need fosters the love she is promoting in this book.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Azucena finds Rodrigo in the cave of the primitive tribe. The others have gone hunting and he has remained to straighten up the cave. Azucena runs to him, but he does not recognize her. She tells him who she is and Rodrigo doesn't know who she is talking about. Azucena is distraught and runs from the cave. Cuquita finds her and Anacreonte uses Cuquita to give Azucena the message she needs. He tells her that she will not find happiness through a union with her twin soul because that happiness can only come as the result of suffering and through acknowledging and accepting the pain that comes with it. Happiness will come from that and if Azucena will enlarge her consciousness enough to encompass Rodrigo completely, she will figure out why he doesn't know who she is.

Azucena does just that and she figures out that "Rodrigo didn't know who I was because they erased his memory!" She and Cuquita are ecstatic, but their happiness is short-lived because Isabel and her entourage are on their way to Rodrigo's cave to spirit him away before anyone finds out that they are on Korma.

The co-conspirators arrange for a soul-exchange between Rodrigo and Cuquita's drunken husband, leaving the husband on Korma at the mercy of the primitive tribe. Rodrigo does not know where he is nor does he understand why he is in a body that disgusts him. Azucena, an experienced astroanalyst, takes him through his past lives. In one of those lives, he was a woman who was raped by his brother-in-law, a painful memory for him. Anacreonte is encouraging Azucena, through Cuquita, to play the CD for him that would trigger memories from his past life, which she and Cuquita do using Julito's equipment.

Azucena asks Rodrigo what he learned from his death. He replies that he learned what it was like to be raped, to feel powerless and enraged. Azucena explores why the brother-in-law raped her and discovers that he had raped the brother-in-law in a former life (AD 1521) when the brother-in-law was a woman named Citlali. Then Azucena has him tell Citlali how he paid for his violence. He had been forced to be a monk in the next life, around 1600, whose purpose in life was to dominate his body and his desires. He had suffered greatly in that life. Once Rodrigo has worked through all of this, he is relieved, relaxed and happy.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, the conflicts between Azucena and Isabel can be clearly seen, particularly because both are after Rodrigo and Azucena captures him. Azucena, the astroanalyst, uses her skills to help Rodrigo understand what has been going on with him. He has unjustly raped Citlali and has, in turn, been forced to be a monk in his next

life. Eventually in his life as a woman he was raped himself. Esquivel is making the point that what goes around comes around and that if you behave unjustly, you will eventually be on the receiving end of injustice. She is also making the point that redemption is possible. By understanding the lives he has lived, Rodrigo can throw off his unhappiness with life.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The Kormian volcano erupts and Isabel, who was an accomplished runner as a young girl, is racing to escape the lava and is out ahead of the others of her entourage. She comes upon Ex-Rodrigo, who now has the soul of Cuquita's drunken husband. Isabel's bodyguards and Ex-Azucena find her apparently dead and are fabricating a tale about who killed her so they won't be blamed. She comes to and Ex-Rodrigo tries to persuade her to take him back to Earth because his wife and Azucena have changed his identity and left him here. Isabel figures out that she no longer has Rodrigo here but a substitute. A reporter is there, so Isabel tells everyone that "Rodrigo" was involved in the murder of Mr. Bush, that she identified him and hurried ahead to capture him. She now knows that she must eliminate Azucena, Cuquita and her grandmother.

Isabel is in love with Rodrigo, which is why she has kept him alive. Isabel knows who her opposition is and she vows that she will deal with them when she returns to Earth.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The battle lines are clearly drawn. Isabel knows that her adversary is Azucena and that they are competing not only for power but for Rodrigo. The identity switching complicates the plot. The person who looks like Rodrigo is not Rodrigo but the drunken, violent husband of Cuquita.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

This chapter is narrated by Isabel's Demon, who is trying to calm her. His purpose on earth is to use Isabel to create chaos because the Universe cannot allow order to become permanent. Life is only possible as a need to balance chaos, so if chaos ends, so does life itself. If the souls of all people were filled with love, that would be the end of the Universe. This is why Hell must continually create wars and conflicts and fill people's hearts with hatred and confusion. Orders come from the top down, so Demons tell the rulers what to do so that destruction will reign. Without it, there will be order and that will be the end of the Universe.

The Demons are concerned. Isabel, who has been in the highest position in the power pyramid for many lives, has fallen in love. Love between human beings leads to harmony, which, once filtered into their souls, opens the door to Divine Love. Once that happens, humans want nothing else.

Isabel was born to be a destroyer and the Demons fear that she will go over to the side of creation and harmony. The only weakness she has ever shown is letting Rodrigo live. Her Demon is concerned because once Isabel is no longer a destroyer, he will cease to exist.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Now the point of view shifts to Isabel's Demon, who provides yet another view of how the Universe works. The lesson here is that love prevents chaos. If love dies, then the Universe will die also. The purpose of the Demons and Hell is to destroy the Universe by preventing love from happening. If people love each other, they can experience Divine Love.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Cuquita and her grandmother are moving back to their apartment and taking Rodrigo, who is in Cuquita's husband's body, with them for the sake of appearance. Azucena is not happy with this arrangement because she wants to continue the astroanalysis. However, she is relieved that with her apartment to herself, she can conduct the sessions privately.

Citlali and Teo appear via astrophone and Rodrigo is dumbstruck at seeing her. Azucena is jealous that he has never looked at her like this. The Televirtual then shows a news program where Isabel is identifying Julito, Cuquita and Rodrigo as guerillas. Azucena is not included because she is not in her real body. But Julito, the owner of the spacecraft, is included as a member of the group. As they try to convince Cuquita's grandmother that she is being accused of belonging to the terrorist group, a blast blows out the entry gate to the building.

As policemen storm the building, an earthquake occurs. In the race up the stairs to escape, Azucena and Cuquita's grandmother are killed. Azucena is thrown into the arms of Anacreonte. She begs him to let her stay on Earth to complete her mission and he agrees that she can stay on in the aged and blind body of the grandmother. But first he must teach her the Law of Love, which embodies the following principles:

1. Every action we take has repercussions in the Cosmos. Everything we think and feel has its effect on the external world.
2. Energy throughout the Universe is always the same, yet in constant movement and transformation. The movement of one energy produces displacement of another.
3. Energy that remains static weakens and energy that flows grows stronger. When a person does good, it will be returned to him.
4. Anacreonte tells Azucena that the Pyramid of Love was once charged with all of this, which is why it must be restored. He tells her that he will be with her at all times and the two return to Earth.

After Azucena's return to Earth, the entire group gets into Julito's spaceship. Although Azucena is now blind and old, she is incensed with jealousy because she can hear the relationship between Rodrigo and Citlali heating up. Teo, an agent of Anacreonte, steps in and becomes her lover, transforming Azucena's aged body. The two come together and Azucena is refreshed by the orgasm she experiences. She is now ready to do the job she has been sent to do.

Now Azucena sees the past clearly. She was Citlali's newborn infant who was killed by Rodrigo and Citlali was the woman Rodrigo raped. Her mission in that life was to inform



the Aztecs of the Law of Love, but she had not accomplished that mission. In 1985, she had another opportunity to deliver that message and again was prevented from doing so.

Cuquita has discovered that groups from several planets are making a pilgrimage to La Villa in Mexico City to worship at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe and that they could join them, blend in and return to Earth undetected.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The teaching continues with Anacreonte as teacher again and at last we know what the Law of Love actually is. There are other revelations in this chapter. We go all the way back to the first chapter to find that in a former life, Azucena was Citlali's baby who had been killed by Rodrigo when, as a member of Cortés' army, he had captured Tenochtitlán.

We also know now that the pyramid is important because it contained the Law of Love. Until the pyramid is restored, chaos will reign. Here the theme of restoring the pyramid is introduced. The forces for Good are actively intervening in characters' lives to bring about that restoration.

Keeping the various characters straight is a challenge in this story, but Esquivel frequently stops and puts it all together as she does in this chapter, which makes reading go more smoothly.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The narrator in this chapter is Anacreonte, Azucena's Guardian Angel. He is exasperated with Azucena, as usual, but this time it is because she's infatuated with Teo and Teo is not helping. The two are having a torrid affair.

The chapter is made up of Anacreonte's analysis and philosophies about life and the world, such as, "No social organization will ever be able to find the one road that's good for everybody." Another of his philosophies is: "It's not by changing the social order that one's problems are resolved. It's by changing ourselves. When that happens, society is automatically modified. Every internal change has repercussions in the external world."

His philosophy is that the solutions to problems can be found in knowledge of the past. The Ego is an obstacle to solving one's problems. "Everyone in the world likes to feel important," he says. The big problem with Azucena is that if she is successful in her quest to solve the immediate problem, Isabel's malevolent power grab, she will become a government politician. In his perception, all government politicians are corrupt, largely because of their Egos.

We also find out in this chapter that the Guardian Angel has a Guardian Angel.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Sometimes Esquivel uses the grotesque to achieve humor. She creates a situation here where an elderly, infirm, blind woman has a torrid love affair with a man who has been reincarnated several times and the results are often amusing. However, the grotesqueness pushes the bounds of reason, as much of this novel does. Even so, this skillful writer pulls it off. We believe that these are real people engaging in real relationships.

Authors ask readers to suspend their own reality and enter a universe they create. It is this transaction between writer and reader that makes fiction successful. Readers can live for a time in a world they will never experience in reality and they can see the world differently than ever before. If a story is successful, the reader will know more about life, people and the world after reading it, largely because of this transaction with the author.

Esquivel has created a strange universe. Her purposes are clear. She wants to teach us how to live more successfully. She is more forthright than some writers in delivering her message and her story is sometimes so convoluted that it is difficult to follow. Even so, readers who make the transaction with her to live in this universe for a while have an opportunity to see the world differently and possibly to live their lives differently.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Azucena and Teo are absorbed with each other to the extent that Azucena has forgotten Rodrigo. She has reconciled her jealousy. The narrator makes a statement about fidelity, saying: "The union should last only as long as loving energy flows between the two partners: once it is no longer present, we should search for a different partner. In sum, the solution is infidelity, but a qualified infidelity."

Azucena has the mission of returning the capstone of the Pyramid of Love that Rodrigo removed in the first chapter. Isabel stands in the way of her achieving this.

The group of escapees has joined the horde of pilgrims trying to enter the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe. They plan to wait until after the Mass to break away from all of the worshipers except Rodrigo and Citlali, who have separated themselves from the others. Azucena and Teo discover, however, that Ex-Azucena, the man who now occupies Azucena's body, is right behind them. Teo picks up the blind and aged body now occupied by Azucena and is carrying her quickly through the crowd when they encounter two policemen who look at them suspiciously. Teo leads them into an abandoned building where they find Ex-Azucena sobbing because he/she has been fired by Isabel because he/she is pregnant. Now Azucena finds that the baby who Ex-Azucena is carrying is her own child, the result of her brief encounter with Rodrigo. Ex-Azucena tells of his years serving Isabel, including doing away with one of her daughters, who Isabel believed would grow up to threaten her own position. Ex-Azucena tells them that he did not kill the baby but put it in an orphanage.

Azucena learns that the implanted micro-computer had malfunctioned, allowing Isabel to know Ex-Azucena's real thoughts. This gives Azucena hope that the micro-computer implanted in Isabel might also malfunction.

Rodrigo and Citlali run to the group for protection. Their pictures are on "Wanted" posters everywhere because they are accused of masterminding the plot to assassinate Mr. Bush.

All are assembled in Teo's apartment because it's the only safe place they can find. They are going to watch the debate between the two candidates for Interplanetary President. Teo is preparing food for everyone, so Azucena must rely on Cuquita's account of the debate. They are all hoping that Isabel's micro-computer will malfunction.

At first the debate goes very well for Isabel, who is shown as the saint she has presented herself to be in her first three lives. Then the micro-computer fizzles out.

Azucena's mind has wandered and she can access information about her own past lives, particularly the present one and she realizes that she is the child who Isabel



ordered killed and who Ex-Azucena rescued. Ironically, now Ex-Azucena occupies Azucena's own body.

Rodrigo is shouting that Isabel's past revealed that Isabel was a murderer of the worst kind and that she stabbed and killed Rodrigo's brother-in-law. Isabel is required to pay for her lies and murders. Isabel's followers try to convince viewers that the images they have seen are false and were transmitted by saboteurs.

Now Azucena and her entourage are trying to come up with ways to prove that the real Isabel is the one uncovered by the regression into her past lives.

Azucena is remembering again and she knows that it was she who guided Rodrigo through on the spaceship. She remembers that she learned that Citlali, the Indian woman Rodrigo raped in 1521, raped him in 1890 during his life as a woman. Therefore, in that lifetime the male Citlali was Isabel's brother, or the female Rodrigo's husband.

The group uses conjuring to bring up photos of the murderous Isabel. Azucena is remembering that the Pyramid of Love is buried under the house where Isabel lives. Ex-Azucena knows where it is and how to get to it. He also tells them that Isabel's fat daughter, Carmela, has been like a daughter to him. He says that he has brought Carmela up lovingly and that she will cooperate because she hates her mother. The only way that love and peace will be restored is if the capstone that was removed by Rodrigo in Chapter 1 is returned to the Pyramid. Everyone agrees, so they decide to contact Carmela.

Unfortunately, at that moment, the police arrive to arrest them.

Chapter 15 Analysis

In this chapter, the writer, in her own voice, is the teacher and the subject is fidelity/infidelity. The message is not traditional. "Qualified infidelity" is simply the ending of a relationship when it no longer energizes both partners. We also have more of the sorting out of who is who and who was who in a previous life. We find that the person occupying Azucena's previous body, now called Ex-Azucena, was, in fact, her savior when her mother, Isabel, tried to have her killed. He also becomes important because he has served as a loving parent-figure for Isabel's overweight daughter, Carmela and has her trust. Carmela will be their agent in recapturing the capstone to the pyramid.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Now is the trial between Isabel, defendant, represented by Mammon, the Demon and Hell's secret police and Azucena, prosecutor, represented by Anacreonte, the Guardian Angel advised by the Archangel Michael. The Law of Love is at stake.

In the first round of the trial, Cuquita's husband, Ricardo Rodríguez, is the first witness for the defense. He admits to murdering Mr. Bush and names Cuquita, Azucena, Rodrigo, Citlali, Teo and Julito as accomplices.

In the second round, the witness for the defense is Ex-Azucena, who explains in detail his participation in the murders of Mr. Bush, Azucena and Dr. Díez with Isabel as the mastermind. The jury responds sympathetically to a woman nine-months pregnant.

In the third round, Agapito, henchman for Isabel, testifies that Ex-Azucena had acted on Agapito's orders and that he himself was the mastermind, absolving Isabel of all responsibility.

In the fourth round, Cuquita is on, but her testimony neither helps nor hurts the case for the prosecution.

In the fifth round, Cuquita is on the stand. This is her story: In 1521, Citlali had murdered Isabel's newborn baby and Isabel had died hating her (refer to Chapter 1). In their next parallel lives, she and Isabel had been brothers. Citlali had raped his/her brother's wife and Isabel had murdered him/her. Thanks to the Law of Love, they were united in the next life with Isabel as Citlali's mother, but it didn't work. Isabel didn't love her daughter and when she reached adolescence Isabel saw her as an enemy. Divorced, Isabel fell in love with and married Rodrigo, but Rodrigo loved Citlali and they ran away together. Isabel found them in a run-down mansion with Citlali pregnant. On the day of the 1985 earthquake, Isabel found both of them dead, but Citlali's baby, Azucena, was still alive and Isabel crushed her head with a stone.

Citlali's testimony hurts Isabel in the sixth round, but she is unable to project images, which damages her credibility. Only Isabel holds the key that will make it possible for the images to be projected. Besides, the defense claims, in 1985, Isabel was Mother Teresa. He asks the jurors, who are mediums, to look into her eyes and see if they can detect any deception there. Isabel is so accomplished at protecting her thoughts from others that she seems innocent to the mediums.

In round seven, Carmela, now transformed because she has reunited with her sister Azucena, from whom she has received love and approval, has lost 528 pounds. She is next on the stand. She brings with her a piece of stained glass that was saved from the house where all the dastardly deeds had taken place. When it is analyzed, the glass



reveals the truth about Isabel. Also revealed is the role Ex-Azucena, who is actually Rosalío Chávez, has played in saving the baby Azucena and parenting Carmela.

In round eight, the last round, Azucena takes the stand. She says that she had hated her mother because she had twice tried to have her killed, but she had forgiven her after serving time in a rehabilitation facility. Azucena now turns a loving gaze on Isabel with her blind eyes.

Isabel's sentence is that she must pledge to enforce the Law of Love and that she will be Consul in Korma where she is to teach the Kormian natives to understand the Law.

When Isabel speaks the word love, it is the magic word and Citlali and Rodrigo have their memories released. Rodrigo realizes that Azucena is his twin soul and asks her to marry him. They go to the shrine of Guadalupe to say their vows and Rodrigo sees the capstone to the Pyramid of Love in the water there. The capstone is put in place and the ancient city and colonial Mexico City become fused into one.

Now the Law of Love reigns. Everyone forgives past hurts. Ex-Azucena gives birth to Azucena's baby girl and presents it to her. He/she dies because his/her mission is complete. Azucena's former young body is restored. Anacreonte's mission is complete and he marries Pavana, who he courted during the trial. Citlali finds her twin soul, as does Cuquita. Equilibrium is restored.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This is the most absurd extreme of happy endings. Not only are the protagonist and antagonist happy, but the whole world is joyous. The trial is the climax, with the protagonist, Good, triumphing over Evil as Azucena triumphs over Isabel and Anacreonte triumphs over Mammon.

The denouement, the unraveling of all the strands of the story, is in the last three paragraphs. Isabel is not sentenced to anything even closely approximating her crimes, but to the task of enforcing the Law of Love, not a pleasant job for such an evil person. What becomes of her Demon, Mammon? The author does not answer that question. All the players find their own happiness, particularly Rodrigo and Azucena, whose quest for union is now consummated with the bonus that the baby their first encounter conceived is now in their custody. All the others find their own happiness and life is wonderful.

Touching back to the introduction in Chapter 1, the capstone to the pyramid is put in place, bringing together ancient past and turbulent present and rounding out the story that began with Cortés's army conquering Tenochtitlán, which became Mexico City. Another possible theme, the evolution of a city, is suggested.

Foreshadowing and flashback are used in unique ways in this story. In the first chapter, for example, Rodrigo's rape of Citlali foreshadows his own rape by her in another life when she is a man and he is a woman. This gives Esquivel the opportunity to make her "what-goes-around-comes-around" point in Chapter 10. Another more direct example of



foreshadowing occurs in Chapter 5, when Isabel's Demon predicts that Azucena will be included in Isabel's destiny and it will bring them into contact with God, which is what happens in the final paragraphs of the story.

The flashbacks are not to an earlier time in a person's life or even in the lives of the other characters but to former lives. The reincarnation stratagem used to tell this story gives a whole new dimension to the use of the flashback. For example, when Azucena as psychotherapist is guiding Rodrigo through his discovery of his past so that he might be healed in the present, she has him flashing back even to the invasion of Mexico by Cortés and his own despicable treatment of Citlali. The trial itself hinges on flashbacks to previous lives and to earlier stages of the history of Mexico City. The understanding that the capstone must be replaced comes from such a flashback.

Esquivel uses a fictional style called magic realism, which is often seen in South American stories. It is a unique combination of the surreal and the real, most obvious in this story in the grotesquery of the characters and the bizarre switching of personalities from one reincarnation to another. This is obvious in Esquivel's use of the real history of Mexico City and the creation of real characters. However, both the history and the characters are slippery. The history remains fairly reliable because actual dates and occurrences anchor the story. However, the characters step back and forth not only between time periods but from one personality to another.



Characters

Anacreonte

Azucena's guardian angel, who tries to help her with her mission to reinstate the Law of Love. For most of the novel, however, Azucena refuses to communicate with him, preferring to work on her own. Anacreonte gets peevish when Azucena will not take his direction.

Azucena

Azucena is a "highly evolved" Super-Evo who gets preferential treatment in the novel's future society. As an astroanalyst in twenty-third-century Mexico City, she helps others regress to their past lives in order to provide them with harmony in their present lives. She is too proud to ask for Anacreonte's help on her quest to reunite with Rodrigo, her "twin soul," or with her mission to help bring peace to the planet through the reinstatement of the Law of Love. She, like Rodrigo, still has "some outstanding debts to pay," and so they are allowed to merge souls only on one occasion. "Her lack of selfconfidence had prevented her from forming a stable relationship in the past. . . [D]eep down, she had always felt she didn't deserve happiness; yet she still had had a profound need to feel loved. It was in an effort to resolve these problems that she had decided to find her twin soul, thinking that with him she couldn't go wrong." Throughout the novel Azucena wavers between optimism and pessimism over her relationship with Rodrigo and the fate of the universe. Ultimately, with the help of her friends, she is able to stay on track and fulfill both of her goals.

Mr. Bush

The American candidate for Planetary President. Bush's assassination "presaged a return to an age of violence that everyone believed had been left behind" for more than a century, which makes Azucena's quest even more urgent.

Citlali

The novel opens with Rodrigo raping Citlali, an Aztec princess who had become his slave. Citlali's privileged upbringing helped develop her "great pride verging on defiance." Her sensuality causes Rodrigo to fall in love with her. Rodrigo earlier had killed her son, and as a result, Citlali vowed revenge. When she subsequently murders the son of Rodrigo and Isabel, she unwittingly starts a battle between herself and Isabel that is not played out until the end of the novel, several centuries later. In their next parallel lives, she and Isabel become brothers. After Citlali rapes Isabel's wife, Isabel murders her. The Law of Love influences their next reincarnation when Isabel becomes mother to her daughter Citlali. Azucena appears in the mix when Citlali and Rodrigo give



birth to her. With Azucena's help, Citlali is able to forgive Rodrigo and Isabel for their past crimes against her.

Cuquita

The superintendent of Azucena's apartment building. In one of her past lives she was a film critic and so has "dubious credibility." Initially Azucena and Cuquita did not get along because Cuquita was "a social malcontent" who belonged to the Party for the Retribution of Inequities. Cuquita had always spied on Azucena, "trying to catch her at something. . .in order not to feel so inferior to her." When Azucena turns to Cuquita for help, however, Cuquita's compassionate nature emerges. Toward the end of the novel, Cuquita's desire to help Azucena is so strong that she becomes the ideal medium for Anacreonte to convey a message to his protegee.

Rodrigo Diaz

Azucena's soulmate and the object of her quest throughout the novel. The novel begins with Rodrigo as a Spanish conquistador in a past life and his rape of Citlali. "Rodrigo entered her body the same way he made his way through life: with the luxury of violence." He was, however, "not easy to fathom. Two people lived inside him. A gentle, loving side and a restless violent one." After a series of reincarnations, where he often commits violent acts against the other characters, he is reunited with Azucena.

Dr. Diez

Dr. Diez, Azucena's friend and her colleague at the clinic, invents a new device that photographs a person's aura and detects traces of others who have been in contact with that person. Isabel orders him killed after he plants a device in her head that will prevent anyone from learning about her past lives.

Divine Singer

See Teo

Ex-Azucena

One of Isabel's guards, who through a mixup now inhabits Azucena's old body. Ex-Azucena discovers he/she is pregnant with, as we later learn, Azucena Rodrigo's child. As a result, Isabel fires him/her. By the end of the novel, Ex-Azucena dies and Azucena returns to her body.



Carmela Gonzales

Carmela is Isabel's daughter. Carmela's obesity embarrasses her mother. Ex-Azucena's and Azucena's friendship and attention cause her selfimage to improve, which enables her to lose weight. She fills in several details of her mother's villainous deeds during the trial, feeling no loyalty to her.

Isabel Gonzales

The merciless and ambitious villain in the novel, Isabel "eliminates whatever must be eliminated without a trace of remorse." She "provokes wars, practices corruption, and abuses the privileges of power. After she becomes a primary candidate for Planetary President, she becomes paranoid that everyone around her is an enemy. She orders her daughter disintegrated for one hundred years when she learns she will grow up with a strong will that might challenge her mother's. In past lives, she had murdered Citlali and Azucena and had been desperately in love with Rodrigo. After Isabel is pronounced guilty, Azucena forgives her, which results in Isabel's change of heart.

Grandmother

Azucena occupies the body of Cuquita's blind grandmother after her own dies. The elderly, disabled body takes some getting used to.

Ricardo Rodriquez

Cuquita's drunken husband who beats her and her grandmother. Rodrigo exchanges bodies with him during his escape from Korma, leaving Ricardo behind to deal with the planet's Stone Age inhabitants and Isabel's wrath.

Teo

Teo, an undercover Guardian Angel, notices Azucena's pain over Rodrigo's attentions to Citlali and comforts her. Their subsequent sexual encounters help return Azucena's optimism and enable her to carry on her mission. In an earlier reincarnation Teo had been the Divine Singer, who would dance small gods on the palm of his hand and speak through them. His hands and tongue were cut off after being arrested for disobeying the royal edict forbidding clay idols.



Themes

Meaning of Life

The meaning of life in *The Law of Love* involves a search for universal harmony and peace, which becomes Azucena's quest. In order to achieve harmony, individuals must open their hearts to Divine Love, which, Anacreonte explains, is "infinite. It is everywhere and entirely within reach at every moment." By the end of the novel, Azucena helps the inhabitants of Mexico City regain this peace: "The eyes of all present were able to look deep into the eyes of any other, without apprehension. No barrier existed. The other person was oneself. For a moment, all hearts harbored Divine Love equally. Everyone felt part of a whole. Like a mighty hurricane, love erased every vestige of rancor, of hatred."

Flesh vs. Spirit

Esquivel defines the Law of Love, which becomes the impetus in the novel for universal peace, as a fusion of the flesh and the spirit, involving a process of reincarnation: "The person who causes an imbalance in the cosmic order is the only one who can restore balance. In nearly all cases, one lifetime is insufficient to achieve that so Nature provides reincarnation in order to give Wreckoncilers the chance to straighten out their screwups. . .again and again they will be born near each other, until finally they learn how to love. And one day, after perhaps fourteen thousand lives, they will have learned enough about the Law of Love to be allowed to meet their twin soul. This is the highest reward a human being can ever hope for in life." When Azucena meets her twin soul, Rodrigo, their sexual encounter becomes a spiritual experience, as they "danc[e] through space to the rhythm of the music of the spheres." Azucena achieves a similar state when she has sex with Teo. Then, "the enjoyment Azucena was experiencing so opened her senses that she was able to perceive Divine Light. . .It was not until she was loved that she knew peace."

Anger and Hatred

The novel chronicles the characters' past crimes against each other, which fills them with anger and hatred and results in a disharmonious universe. As a result several of the characters seek revenge, which creates more suffering. After Rodrigo rapes Citlali and murders her son, she kills his and Isabel's child. In their next reincarnation, a male Citlali rapes a female Rodrigo. After observing this scene, Isabel kills Citlali. In another life, Isabel kills Rodrigo's and Citlali's child (her granddaughter Azucena), because she had been in love with Rodrigo and so was jealous of his love for Citlali.



Change and Transformation

The theme of change and transformation is closely linked to another theme in the novel: memory and reminiscence. Change can only occur when the characters force themselves to deal with their painful memories through regression into past lives. Azucena helps them face their suffering and release their anger as a first step in realizing a sense of peace and harmony.

Atonement and Forgiveness

The final step in the characters' growth process involves atonement and forgiveness. Through regressions, Azucena encourages Rodrigo, Citlali, and Isabel to give voice to their pent-up anger and so be ready to forgive those who have harmed them. This process also involves the recognition that they have caused others to suffer. In her session with Rodrigo, Azucena helps him regress to two past lives: when Citlali raped him when he was a woman and when he, as a Spanish conquistador, raped her. The first regression teaches him what it feels like to be raped. He is then able to release his feelings of powerlessness and rage. When he subsequently faces what he did to Citlali, he asks her forgiveness and is able to pardon her and himself.



Style

Structure

The Law of Love's innovative structure intersperses the story with color illustrations by Spanish artist Miguelano Prado and poetry. These pieces illuminate and intensify the action of the story. A CD containing arias by Puccini and Mexican danzones accompanies the novel, which periodically asks the reader to play different tracks. The music, like the illustrations and poems, is an effective tool for pulling the reader into the action of the story, especially one that relies on a fantastic style.

Style

Magic realism is a fictional style, popularized by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, that appears most often in South American literature. Authors who use this technique mingle the fantastic or bizarre with the realistic. Magic realism often involves time shifts, dreams, myths, fairy tales, surrealistic descriptions, the element of surprise and shock, and the inexplicable. Esquivel mixes New Age philosophy and science fiction with magic realism in *The Law of Love* as she explores the novel's themes. Regressions into past lives reveal important information about her characters that will help them find harmony in their present lives. Esquivel also uses futuristic inventions to aid her characters' discovery of themselves: Inanimate objects like glass have memories of events that can be projected onto a screen. When human's memories are projected, lies are unveiled. Bodies can easily be exchanged when one is in trouble. As a result of this type of body switch, characters can experience another's psyche and emotions and so are able to establish more sympathetic relationships with each other.

Imagery

The novel opens with the destruction of the dominant image in the novel, the Pyramid of Love, during the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan, Mexico. That act disturbs the "Divine Will" or cosmic order of the universe, which in turn disrupts the characters' lives. The narrator notes, "As long as the Temple of Love was not functioning, people would concentrate their love on themselves, not being able to see beyond their own image in the water's reflection." When the Pyramid's capstone is placed back on its apex, the lost city of Tenochtitlan reappears and merges with Mexico City, and harmony returns. Azucena engineers the return of the capstone through her devotion to the Law of Love. Anacreonte explains this law, noting that "when a person accumulates hatred, resentment, envy, and anger within, her surrounding aura becomes black, dense, heavy. . . To build up her energy level, and, with it, the level of her life, that negative energy must be released" and, as a result, love will fill her heart. Here Esquivel blends magic realism and New Age philosophy as she explores the novel's dominant theme: the

redemptive power of love. The Pyramid of Love and the Law of Love focus attention on forgiveness and acceptance, which bring order and peace.

Historical Context

The Aztecs

The Aztecs dominated central Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest. From their arrival in Mexico at end of the twelfth century until the founding of their capital, Tenochtitlan, in 1325, the Aztecs were a poor, nomadic tribe absorbing and adopting neighboring tribal cultures. However, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, they became powerful politically and developed their own distinct culture. They excelled in engineering, architecture, art, mathematics, and astronomy. Their art revealed innovations in sculpture, weaving, metalwork, ornamentation, music, and picture writing for historical records. When the Spaniards, under Hernan Cortes, arrived in 1519, the Aztec civilization was at its height. Many neighboring tribes who had suffered under Aztec conquests and so rebelled against Aztec rule aided the Spanish takeover of their lands. Cortes captured Montezuma II, the last of the independent Aztec rulers, and attempted to rule through him. After the Aztecs revolted in 1521, Montezuma was killed, and the Spanish destroyed Tenochtitlan.

Karma and Reincarnation

Karma is one of the basic concepts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and New Age philosophy. Karma is defined as a universal law of moral cause and effect that does not include a belief in a supreme power who punishes or absolves sinners. Those who believe in karma insist that individuals enjoy free will and so are fully responsible for their physical and mental actions. Those actions will determine their destiny in future incarnations. Thus, for example, those who cause others to suffer will experience feelings of guilt that they carry with them as they are reincarnated. During reincarnation, the soul occupies a new body after the old one dies. Some followers believe that the soul assumes the new body immediately, while others insist that this occurs only after an interval of disembodiment. Although some religions teach that the soul may be reincarnated into a higher or lower form of life, most believe that the soul will inhabit the same species.

Literary Heritage

Magic realism is a fictional style, popularized by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, that appears most often in South American literature. This style may have emerged from the mystification of Latin America that occurred during colonization, as many Europeans chronicled strange and supernatural occurrences in the new land. The term was first associated with the arts and later extended to literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, Latin American artists were influenced by the surrealist movement and so incorporated the style into their art. Authors who use this technique mingle the fantastic or bizarre with the realistic. Magic realism often involves time shifts, dreams, myths, fairy tales, surrealistic descriptions, the element of surprise and shock, and the inexplicable. Often something common converts into something unreal or strange in order to reveal the inherent mystery in life. The writer, however, usually creates a supernatural atmosphere without denying the natural world—a paradox characters appear to accept without question.

Critical Overview

When Margaret Sayers Peden's translation of Laura Esquivel's second novel, *The Law of Love*, was published in 1996, the reviews were mixed. Some critics argue that the novel does not live up to the promise of Esquivel's critically acclaimed first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*. Others, however, like *Salon's* A. Scott Cardwell, conclude that the novel "shows off, once again, Ms. Esquivel's romanticism, playfulness and bold ambition."

Many critics deem the book to be, at the very least, a partial success. A writer in *Kirkus Reviews* finds the novel "exuberant, hectic, [and] ultimately exhausting" and continues, "Whenever Esquivel is celebrating 'the hidden order of the world,' the salvational possibilities of love, she's engaging and persuasive. But the novel, which comes with a CD featuring arias and Mexican danzones (presumably to foster the right mood in the reader), and which includes several gaudy, comic-book-like sections illustrated by the artist Miguelano Prado, finally seems too anxious to overwhelm, too determined to entertain at any cost. There's enough here to demonstrate that Esquivel can write, and that she possesses considerable originality. Next time out, though, she needs to try a little less hard to astonish." *Library Journal* reviewer Barbara Hoffert echoes this review when she writes that the work "is at once wildly inventive and slightly silly, energetic and cliched."

Robert Houston in his article for the *New York Times Book Review* argues that "the CD. . . is a delight; and the illustrated panels by Miguelano Prado, though they contribute little, will surely please aficionados of that craft. The pre-Columbian poetry is welcome in any context." He concludes, however, that "no amount of razzle-dazzle can hide the fact that *The Law of Love* is seriously, perhaps even fatally, flawed. At times, Ms. Esquivel appears to ask a reader to take the book's characters and their troubles seriously, and at other times to see them only as the cardboard characters of farce or of Saturday morning cartoons. Nor can a reader be certain whether the novel is a sendup of New Age cliches or whether its narrator is truly an advocate for them. In trying to have it both ways, Ms. Esquivel has it neither." Commenting on the novel's structure, Houston writes, "confusing, tediously plotted, marred by muddy philosophy and dubious verities, [the novel] strains far too hard to achieve its effects. It is, one hopes, only a brief detour for Ms. Esquivel. What was humor and charm in *Like Water for Chocolate* has become in this book simply silliness."

Other reviewers find the novel to be a literary success. Donna Seaman in *Booklist* argues that while the novel "gets off to a rocky start. . . [in its] sloppy opening sequence" and "gimmicky 'multimedia' presentation, Esquivel gets her bearings, and her narrative coalesces into a highly amusing mix of mysticism, science fiction, and her own brand of earthy and ironic humor." She finds the main character "engaging" and Esquivel's construction inventive. Seaman adds, "Esquivel revels in clever futuristic speculation, imagining such things as an aura-reading computer, soul transplants into "unregistered" bodies, and intergalactic soccer matches. She also executes a number of inventive plot twists that keep Azucena and Rodrigo in suspense and danger and her readers in



excellent spirits." Lilian Pizzichini in the *Times Literary Supplement* finds that this "multimedia event. . .incorporates elements of magic realism, science fiction, and New Age philosophy." She concludes, "Esquivel dresses her ancient story in a collision of literary styles that confirm her wit and ingenuity. She sets herself a mission to explore the redemptive powers of love and art and displays boundless enthusiasm for parody."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



Critical Essay #1

Wendy Perkins, an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, has published articles on several twentieth-century authors. In this essay she examines how the imaginative plot structure of The Law of Love reinforces the novel's main theme.

Reviews of Laura Esquivel's second novel, *The Law of Love*, were mixed when it was published in 1996. Robert Houston argues in the *New York Times Book Review* that the novel is "confusing, tediously plotted, marred by muddy philosophy and dubious verities" and "strains far too hard to achieve its effects." However, Donna Seaman in *Booklist* admits that while the novel "gets off to a rocky start. . .[in its] sloppy opening sequence" and "gimmicky 'multimedia' presentation, Esquivel gets her bearings, and her narrative coalesces into a highly amusing mix of mysticism, science fiction, and her own brand of earthy and ironic humor." While *The Law of Love* achieves neither the thematic depth nor the structural tightness of her critically acclaimed first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, it does provide another example of what *Salon's* A. Scott Cardwell calls Esquivel's "romanticism, playfulness and bold ambition." Ultimately, the novel succeeds in its inventive celebration of the redemptive power of love.

In the beginning of the novel, when Citlali plots revenge against the Spanish conquistador Rodrigo, who has killed her child and raped her, she meets his wife, Dona Isabel de Gongora. The narrator notes,

neither of these women inhabited the same house. Isabel continued to live in Spain, Citlali in Tenochtitlan. Neither of them could recognize herself in the eyes of the other. Neither of the two shared a common landscape. Neither of the two could understand what the other said. And this was not a matter of comprehension, it was a matter of the heart, for that is where words acquire their true meaning. And the hearts of both were closed. . .Both women would have to have been born with less arrogance to be able to set aside all that separated them and to discover the many things they had in common. . .While Isabel saw in Rodrigo the man she had dreamed of long ago in Spain, Citlali saw only her son's murderer. Neither of the two saw him as he really was.

This quote reflects the situation the characters find themselves in at the beginning of the novel. Each has closed his or her heart and, as a result, each has been unable to find happiness and fulfillment. Esquivel employs several creative plot devices that mix elements of magic realism, New Age philosophy, and science fiction to illustrate the novel's main theme—that one must open one's heart to others in order to find peace and establish harmony.



The opening scene in the novel sets the tone of disharmony that pervades for several centuries. The Spanish conquistadors raze the sixteenth-century Aztec city of Tenochtitlan and destroy sacred pyramids, including the Pyramid of Love. When Rodrigo rapes Citlali, his Aztec slave, on the Pyramid's former site, he begins a cycle of revenge that eventually erupts in universal chaos in the twentythird century, when the novel's action takes place. Esquivel's employment of magic realism in this scene imaginatively illuminates the violence of Rodrigo's act and projects its devastating consequences for both Citlali and Rodrigo. The narrator suggests that the present-day trouble stems from the "vexation of the pyramid" beneath Rodrigo and Citlali, since the stones "contain a truth beyond what the eye manages to see. . . a force of their own." After the rape Citlali begs "the Gods for the strength to live until the day that this man should repent for having profaned not only her, but the Goddess of Love. For he could not have committed a greater outrage than to violate her on such a sacred site." This violent act disrupts not only Citlali's life, but also the cosmic order of the universe, which is ruled by the Law of Love. Anacreonte, Azucena's guardian angel, defines the process of this law: "every action we take has repercussions in the Cosmos. . . When a person accumulates hatred, resentment, envy, and anger within, her surrounding aura becomes black, dense, heavy. . . To build up her energy level, and with it the level of her life, that negative energy must be released." After the release of this energy, the heart can prepare to receive and give love, and as a result, "cosmic order in which we all have a place" will be restored. Anacreonte notes that when we find this order, "all is in harmony."

Esquivel's imaginative vision of the repercussions of such a violent act shifts to the twenty-third century and Azucena, who is charged with restoring the Pyramid of Love and thus the cosmic order. Here, Esquivel adds New Age philosophy to the narrative mix when she introduces Azucena, an astronanalyst who helps people regress back to their previous lives. Azucena thinks she is ready to be a "Reconciler," one who helps people "be in accord with Divine Will," but as Anacreonte notes, she is still too willful and stubborn to put others' needs before her own. When she refuses his guidance, Anacreonte insists, "Azucena never listens to reason. She is used to having her own blessed way." Since she has not yet gotten "some control over her emotions" and has "some outstanding debts to pay," she is allowed only one meeting with her "twin soul," Rodrigo—what all can attain if they follow the Law of Love. During their meeting, they "recognize each other's energy" and experience an ecstatic "mutual contemplation of souls."

Esquivel illuminates the devastating effects of anger and vengeance as Azucena helps the other characters in the novel regress to previous lives. Rodrigo, Citlali, and Isabel all have closed themselves off to others as a result of past injustices. Rodrigo was raped by Citlali after he had raped her in a previous life, and so the two become "Wreckoncilers substituting lies for truth, death for life, and hatred for love inside [their] hearts[;] they repeatedly dam the flow of the river of life." According to the New Age philosophy promoted by the characters,

the person who causes an imbalance in the cosmic order is the only one who can restore balance. In



nearly all cases, one lifetime is insufficient to achieve that so Nature provides reincarnation in order to give Wreckoncilers the chance to straighten out their screwups. . . Again and again they will be born near each other, until finally they learn how to love. And one day, after perhaps fourteen thousand lives, they will have learned enough about the Law of Love to be allowed to meet their twin soul. This is the highest reward a human being can ever hope for in life."

When Azucena helps them discover their past lives, she encourages them to release their pent-up anger as an initial step in restoring harmony. She then has Rodrigo tell Citlali that he had "to endure great pain to atone for [his] guilt." Rodrigo finally comes to terms with his past suffering as he tells Citlali, "I release you from my passion, from my desires. . . I release myself from your thoughts of vengeance, for I have paid for what I did to you. . . I release you and I release myself. . . I pardon you and I pardon myself." When Citlali goes through a similar purging, she breaks the chain of vengeance and peace is restored.

Esquivel employs science fiction techniques in Azucena's process of evolution. She also experiences a sense of peace after regressing and purging herself of anger and jealousy, especially toward Citlali, who has been enjoying Rodrigo's attentions. She is able to open her heart to Citlali when she discovers that the woman had been her mother in a past life. Body transfer experiences also prompt Azucena's desire to connect with others. In the novel's futuristic society, one's soul can transfer to a new body, which is what happens to Azucena twice in the novel. The second time she takes over Cuquita's grandmother's body and learns what it feels like to be an old woman. The grandmother's blindness forces Azucena "to concentrate on herself, to look inward, to seek images from her past." A body exchange also forces the man who accidentally switched bodies with Azucena to experience what it is like to be pregnant.

The forging of sympathetic relationships with others from past lives and other bodies prompts Azucena to open her heart to all. Her friendship with Isabel's daughter fosters the girl's positive selfimage, which results in her dramatic weight loss. Azucena can even, by the end of the novel, forgive the villainous Isabel, who had tried and sometimes succeeded to kill her in the present and in past lives. When she looks at Isabel with love, a response Isabel had never experienced before, Isabel breaks down, "her days of villainy. . . over." By the end of the novel, Azucena has rid herself of her anger and jealousies and so can complete her mission to restore the cosmic order. As a result, Rodrigo can now recognize her as his twin soul and so asks her to marry him. Esquivel symbolizes the harmony of their union through Rodrigo's discovery and replacement of the Pyramid's capstone, which causes the ancient city of Tenochtitlan and Mexico City to fuse, and "for a moment, all hearts harbored Divine Love equally. Everyone felt part of a whole."

In the *New York Times Book Review*, Houston complains that a reader cannot be "certain whether the novel is a sendup of New Age cliches or whether its narrator is truly



an advocate for them. In trying to have it both ways, Ms. Esquivel has it neither." However, whether or not Esquivel promotes or parodies New Age philosophy as she mixes it with magic realism and science fiction is not the point of the novel. The characters' experiences with regressions, body exchanges, mystical stones, and cosmic order all come together in Esquivel's imaginative construction of the novel, which presents an effective and entertaining look at the law of love.

Source: Wendy Perkins, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.



Critical Essay #2

In the following brief review of Esquivel's second novel The Law of Love, reviewer Barbara Mujica gives a disfavorable overview of the novel's convoluted story and writes that while Esquivel's ability to use gimmicks in her prose were successful in her first novel Like Water for Chocolate, her use of multi-media gimmicks in The Law of Love ultimately can not save the novel.

Laura Esquivel is a master of gimmickry. In *Como agua para chocolate* [*Like Water for Chocolate*] her device was the recipe. By beginning each chapter with instructions for the preparation of a delicious Mexican dish, she artfully constructed the metaphor at the center of her novel: Love is food. Love nourishes the ravenous spirit just as food nourishes the body; at the same time, love satisfies physical hunger just as a good meal enjoyed in delightful company can achieve a spiritual dimension. Since love and food satisfy human appetites, the preparation of marvelous meals becomes an expression of passion, which is exactly what happened in the book.

In *La ley del amor* the gimmick is music. A compact disc comes with each copy of the book, and in the text Esquivel includes instructions telling when each segment is to be played. The idea is to give readers the opportunity to experience the same musical stimuli as the characters. Illustrated folios provide examples of the images the characters see when their memories are unlocked by the strains of Puccini. In addition the CD contains popular songs that set the mood for the upcoming chapters.

Unfortunately, the gimmick is not nearly as effective in *La ley del amor* as it was in *Como agua para chocolate*, partly because CDs are inconvenient, especially if you happen to be reading at, say, the beach or perhaps in the metro or the bathroom, and partly because the story is so tedious and convoluted that nothing—not even Puccini—can save it. The tale begins in the sixteenth century, when Rodrigo Diaz, one of Cortes's captains, rapes a beautiful Indian noblewoman named Citlali on the pyramid where the Aztecs worshiped the goddess of Love. The stones of the pyramid are, of course, magical, and so the act will have far-reaching consequences. When Citlali gives birth to a baby boy, Rodrigo tears the child from her and brutally murders him. The Indian woman takes revenge by killing the son Rodrigo has with his Spanish wife, Isabel.

According to the *Law of Love*, acts of brutality upset the cosmic order, which can only be restored when the perpetrators are purged of hatred and make amends. Since one lifetime is insufficient to achieve spiritual cleansing, reincarnation permits people who loathe each other to meet again over and over in successive lives until the process of purification is completed. Thus, Rodrigo encounters Citlali, Isabel, and the two murdered babies repeatedly throughout the centuries until at last, sometime around the year 2200, we find him in the arms of Azucena, his true love and kindred spirit (*alma gemela*).



Just when he and his loved one have finally found one another, Rodrigo is whisked away and sent to Korma, a distant planet inhabited by fierce, primitive beings. Disregarding the advice of Anacreonte, her guardian angel, Azucena, in search of Rodrigo, wheedles her way into a government office where she is outfitted with a virtual-reality headset. By listening to music, Azucena is able to relive a past life experience, during which she is a baby who is rescued from disaster by Rodrigo, who at that time (about 1985) was her father.

The power-hungry Isabel, who is running for World president, is in love with Rodrigo and has stolen him away from Azucena. Realizing that she is in imminent danger, Azucena finds her way to an unused body storage area and dons a new body just before her apartment is blown up by Isabel's goons. Unrecognizable in her new form, Azucena returns to her old apartment. Cuquita, a neighbor who is paying penance for misdeeds during a past life by living with an abusive husband, escapes from her own place and moves in with Azucena. The two are joined by Cuquita's grandmother, who comes in handy later when she dies, leaving her body available for Azucena, who is killed by Isabel, but receives permission of the gods to return and occupy the newly released body.

After a series of intergalactic spaceship chases, Azucena finally links up once again with Rodrigo, who doesn't recognize her and takes off with Citlati. By listening to music through virtual-reality headsets, Azucena witnesses scenes from past lives in which she was a baby murdered by Isabel, Citlali was a man who raped Rodrigo (a woman), and Isabel was Rodrigo's brother-in-law, who murdered Citlali in revenge. It is not until Azucena starts listening to Anacreonte and obeying the gods that things start falling back into place.

If all this sounds impossibly complicated and silly, it is, but the story is muddled even further by the appearance of an endless array of nonsensical characters—a highly maternal goon who occupies Azucena's former body and is known as Ex-Azucena, Cuquita's husband (whose body is later taken over by Rodrigo), Isabel's overweight daughter (who turns out to be Azucena's sister, which means, of course, that Isabel is really Azucena's mother).

While *Como agua para chocolate* touched readers with its clever weave of fantasy and reality, as well as its portrayals of a female-dominated family in revolutionary Mexico, a complex mother-daughter relationship, and a true love nourished by custards rather than kisses, *La ley del amor* offers readers little to relate to. At the end of *La ley del amor*, cosmic order is restored and Azucena gets her man, but the truth is, we couldn't care less.

Source: Barbara Mujica, "La ley del amor," in *Americas*, Vol. 48, No. 6, November-December, 1996, p. 61.

Critical Essay #3

In the following brief review of Esquivel's second novel The Law of Love, reviewer Louise Redd gives us an overview of the novel's tangled story and writes that though the convoluted plotline may at times seem too soap-operaish (and the multimedia packaged with the story too encumbering), its parallels to Mexico's shedding the aftereffects of the Conquest keep it from descending too far into parody.

In Laura Esquivel's first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, she wrote of potent dishes that wreaked strange effects, often acting as love potions, on those who ate them. Now in *The Law of Love*, her second novel, she again proves herself a talented literary chef, creating a delectable feast from ingredients as disparate as a 16th-century rape and a 23rd-century spaceship.

The *Law of Love* is an exuberant mix of science fiction, new age psycho-babble, fable and oldfashioned love story. Although its characters transport themselves from planet to planet by astrotelephone and can photograph each other's auras, they're still looking for love. And no one looks harder than Azucena, an astro-analyst who spends her days helping clients regress through past lives. After hours, and with the help of a bossy guardian angel, Azucena attempts to fulfill her life's mission: to reinstate the toppled capstone of the Pyramid of Love, on the site of ancient Tenochtitlan.

In addition to the absent capstone, she's also searching for a missing person: Rodrigo, her "twin soul" or ideal love. Her motivation to find Rodrigo is stoked by the memory of the one night of passion she enjoyed with him before he disappeared and incurred amnesia at the hands of the evil Isabel, the candidate for planetary president who has good reason to keep Rodrigo from spouting off about her past-life escapades.

Azucena must not only restore the pyramid but find Rodrigo and jolt him from his amnesia so he can recognize her as his twin soul. Both are hefty tasks, but Azucena has been prepping for them for many lifetimes.

Her two missions are not unrelated. The law of love, as explained by Azucena's guardian angel, dictates that "as we displace hatred, we receive hatred in return. The only way around this is to transmute the energy of hatred into love before it leaves our body." The Pyramid of Love helped humans achieve this transmutation until Rodrigo, during a lifetime as a conquistador, knocked the top off the pyramid, raped a woman there and then built his home on the site.

And this is Azucena's "ideal love"? It seems that multiple lifetimes can cure even serious personality flaws; Rodrigo has spent seven centuries working off that nasty conquistador karma and earning the right to meet his twin soul. Both lovers suffer comic and cosmic transmutations along the paths to each other, until it is clear that the 23rd century's dazzling technology hasn't done much to improve the lot of the lovelorn.



Occasionally the gender and personality changes induced by the characters' multiple lifetimes lend *The Law of Love* an annoying soap-operatic quality. But there's a stubborn parallel between the characters' shedding of bad karma and futuristic Mexico's shedding of the trauma of the Conquest that keeps this light, sometimes silly novel grounded in serious concerns.

The *Law of Love* is being billed by its publishers as "the first multimedia novel," as it comes with illustrations and a CD of classical music and Mexican danzones. The reader is periodically instructed to take an "Intermission for Dancing," to listen to a certain track of the CD, or to study the illustrations. Ironically, the compelling nature of Ms. Esquivel's story renders the multimedia aspect of the novel somewhat intrusive; *The Law of Love* is such an enjoyable read that I resented being asked to step away from it to listen to a CD track or to look at some illustrations.

Ms. Esquivel has written a wild, romantic and often funny novel that needs no assistance from other media.

Source: Louise Redd, "Too Good for Such Fripperies: Reading Aids Distract from a Magical Novel," in *Dallas Morning News*, October 20, 1996, p. 8J.



Topics for Further Study

Research the fall of Montezuma's Mexico. Explain how this takeover provides an effective backdrop for the tensions in *The Law of Love*.

Examine the technological advances described in the novel. Which ones could become a reality in the twenty-first century?

Investigate the term "magic realism." Read another work that employs this technique and compare it to *The Law of Love*.

Research theories on reincarnation. How do they compare with the theories offered in the novel?

What Do I Read Next?

House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende (1986) is a magical story about a Latin American family that survives internal and external pressures.

Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, first published in 1989, chronicles the life of Tita de la Garza in northern Mexico during the early part of the century as she struggles to win the right to be with the man she loves.

One Hundred Years of Solitude, written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and published in 1967, is considered the classic example of magic realism. This novel explores several generations of a Latin American family set against the age of revolution.

Further Study

O'Neill, Molly, "At Dinner with Laura Esquivel: Sensing the Spirit in All Things, Seen and Unseen," in *New York Times Book Review*, March 31, 1993, pp. C1, C8.

In this interview Esquivel discusses the magical nature of food and the "spiritual underpinnings of modern daily life."

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of “classic” novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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