The Old Gringo Study Guide

The Old Gringo by Carlos Fuentes

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Introduction

The *OldGringo* is one of Carlos Fuentes's best-known works. It is a complex novel that intertwines psychology, mythology, and political events to examine the culture of modern Mexico. At the core of the story is the disappearance of Ambrose Bierce, an American newspaperman and short-story writer. Bierce, who is most remembered for his brutally sardonic parody *The Devil's Dictionary* and the often-anthologized short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," left his job and home in 1913 at age seventy-one and disappeared, never to be heard from again. Speculation has held that he went to Mexico to join Pancho Villa in fighting the revolution, but there has never been conclusive evidence to support this. Bierce is the old gringo referred to in this novel's title. The story focuses on the relationships the character forms in Mexico with Harriet Winslow, a schoolteacher from Washington, DC, and with General Tomás Arroyo, leader of the revolutionary band that is on its way to meet up with Villa's army. The three form a triangle, exploring questions of love, respect, and sensuality in ways that highlight the differences between Mexican and American ways of thinking. A few years after the book was published, it was adapted into a motion picture starring Jane Fonda, Jimmy Smits, and Gregory Peck as the old gringo.

Author Biography

Carlos Fuentes is considered one of the preeminent voices in Mexican literature in the last half of the twentieth century. He was born in Panama City, Panama, in 1928, and is the son of a Mexican diplomat. Throughout his childhood, he moved from one country to another, living in Chile, Argentina, and the United States. In his early years, he spent much time in Washington, DC, which is described vividly in *The Old Gringo.* He attended high school in Mexico City and received degrees from the National University of Mexico and the Institut des Hautes-Etudes in Geneva, Switzerland.

Fuentes's writing career developed after he already had a successful career in the diplomatic corps. Even after he was an internationally recognized novelist, he remained in politics, holding such positions as the chief of the Department of Cultural Relations of Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and, from 1975 to 1977, as his country's ambassador to France. His development as a writer coincided with the emergence of a Latin American avante garde during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This movement also included Julio Cortazar and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez.

Fuentes's fiction has developed throughout the years. His first novels, *The Good Conscience* and *Where the Air Is Clear,* reflect the author's concern with Mexican identity, using the magical realism techniques that came to be associated with him and his peers. Fuentes's prose is so richly luxurious that readers find it hard to distinguish between actions that are presented as reality and those that are the dreams or fantasies of the characters. The same features have appeared in Fuentes's later books, but over the years his novels have become less rooted in the imagination and increasingly more representative of reality. Fuentes has also written extensively about politics, exploring Mexico and Latin America's place in the world culture as well as his country's identity in relation to the United States. Since the publication of *The Old Gringo* in 1985, his nonfiction writings have vastly outnumbered his fictional works. Fuentes's most recent novel is 1995's *Diana, The Goddess Who Hunts Alone,* which was based on his affair in the 1960s with the actress Jean Seeberg.

Plot Summary

The Old Lady Remembers

Though the protagonist of *The Old Gringo* is Ambrose Bierce, and the novel an extended meditation on his possible fate, Bierce's name is not mentioned until the final pages of the book. The novel takes place within the frame narrative□an old lady remembering. Bracketed by her act of memory, the story of Tomás Arroyo, Harriet Winslow, and the old gringo is pieced together in a dizzying series of multi-layered perspectives, voices, and times. It starts with the gringo's corpse being disinterred so it can be sent back to the United States. As they uncover his desiccated body, the diggers share their memories of him. He had come to Mexico to die, and no one ever found out who he was.

The Old Gringo Arrives

With the railway bridge burning behind him, the old gringo buys a horse at El Paso and rides off across the border into the deserts of Mexico. He is looking for Pancho Villa and the revolution. He is looking for death. The narrative shifts to the perspective of the revolutionaries, watching him approach. They immediately understand that he has a death wish. Introduced to the General, Tomás Arroyo, the gringo offers his services as a fighter, and is mocked until he proves his marksmanship by shooting a tossed peso through the center. Pedro□ then a boy, later one of the voices that remembers the gringo as his body is dug up□is given the peso. Arroyo agrees to let the old gringo stay.

General Tomás Arroyo

The gringo rides with Arroyo in a lavish train carriage□plunder from the revolution. On their way to the Miranda Hacienda, Arroyo's current base and his past home, the general explains the nature of Mexican history and his right to reclaim the Mirandas' property. He carries with him a set of ancient papers, sealed by the King of Spain, that granted perpetual land rights to his people. As he explains, he cannot read, so the papers act as an icon that validates and represents his hereditary memory. As they arrive at the hacienda, it is burning to the ground.

Harriet Winslow

The hacienda is decorated with hanged bodies and jubilant crowds. The only thing left standing is the mirrored ballroom, and in a thematically vital moment, the peasants gaze at their reflections, realizing for the first time that they are whole, physical individuals. In the midst of the mayhem is Harriet Winslow□a prim, responsible spinster from Washington, DC, who had been hired by the Mirandas as a governess. Her Protestant work ethic, she says, compels her to stay and finish the job for which she has been

paid—"improving" children. Through a series of flashbacks and conversations with the old gringo, we learn that she is genteelly impoverished—she and her mother have lived on a military pension after her father disappeared during the action in Cuba.

The First Campaign

The old gringo and Harriet have begun to enter each other's dreams. The troops ride off to fight the Federales, and the gringo leads the decoy charge across the plains. As the gringo rides out, he is lost in a version of one of his most famous stories, a tale of patricide in the U.S. Civil War, and this image of a son killing a father is reworked as a symbol of revolution throughout the novel. Hailed as a hero, he returns to the hacienda, which Harriet has been ordering the peasants to rebuild. Undermining her unwillingness to comprehend, a series of voices from the past and present explain the reasons for the revolution to her. She and the gringo drink together, and she learns his identity, but does not name him. She understands that he has rejected that name in favor of the generic term "gringo."

The Federales

During the second engagement, Arroyo's troops take many prisoners. Those who refuse to join the cause will be killed, and Arroyo demands that the old gringo be the one who shoots them. Arroyo says that a man as brave as the gringo is dangerous, and must prove his loyalty. The gringo deliberately misses the captain of the opposing troops, and Arroyo kills him instead. As they ride back, the gringo realizes that though he came here to die, he has rediscovered life, fear, and his need to write. Back at the hacienda, Harriet has spent the day exhorting the revolutionaries to establish a new society, and trying to teach them "Christian virtues." When a string of pearls goes missing, she dismisses the revolutionaries as larcenous. Later, Arroyo will show her that the necklace has been taken to the chapel and placed on a statue of the Virgin Mary. Harriet knows herself to be alien, and has uneasy dreams in which Mexican voices speak to her, and her father's death is revealed as something other than what she had said.

Tomás and Harriet

Arroyo and Harriet make love in the mirrored ballroom, and Harriet knows that she is experiencing life and love for the first time. As she said in the first pages of the novel, she will always hate Arroyo for showing her what she could never be. Afterwards, he explains his relationship to the hacienda. He grew up there as a servant. She tells the old gringo what happened, and says that she did it to protect the gringo from Arroyo. The gringo tells her he loves her, but it's too late—she and Arroyo are like his children to him now. Harriet reveals that her father didn't die at all, but stayed in Cuba to live with "a negress." Now that Harriet has experienced physical love, she understands her father better.

The Old Gringo Dies

Arroyo returns. The old gringo goes into the train car, and Arroyo follows him. Shots are fired, and the gringo stumbles out, Arroyo following and shooting. The gringo is holding Arroyo's talis-manic papers—they are burning. The gringo dies facedown in the dirt, and the burnt words send echoes through the desert. Now another story begins. The narrative switches to a point later in time, where Pancho Villa is being interviewed by the U.S. press. They ask him about a U.S. citizen murdered by Arroyo and buried in the desert. Harriet Winslow has claimed that the old gringo is her father, and is demanding the return of his body.

The End—The Death of General Arroyo

The exhumation of the old gringo's body is juxtaposed with Arroyo's final conversation with Harriet. While the corpse is dug up and shot in the front for the sake of military etiquette, we learn that Arroyo was a Miranda—the son of the hacienda owner. Shocked, Harriet accuses him of being merely a disgruntled heir. Back at the grave, Villa asks Arroyo to deliver the coup de grace to the gringo's body. As he does so, Villa's troops open fire. Arroyo dies shouting "Viva Villa!" The gringo's corpse is buried in Arlington Cemetery. In the final pages, Harriet says his name—Ambrose Bierce—and returns to the point at which the novel began: "Now she sits alone and remembers."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

A woman in Washington, D.C. is recalling events in which she participated many years earlier in the arid regions of Northern Mexico. She thinks of Tomas Arroyo (anglicized Tom Brook), who had been her lover, and the dreams of what could have been. She was an American woman visiting Mexico, and to pursue such a dream was beyond her ability given the circumstances. She recalls crossing the border back into the United States and looking back at the Mexicans who had accompanied her there: a young boy, Pedro, already carrying arms, and an older soldier. She recalls the desert and the hot harsh climate and her dreams that dried up and died there.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This book starts out with stream-of-consciousness recollections of Harriet Winslow, one of the three main characters in the book.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The second major character of the book is the old gringo (old man). Colonel Frutos Garcia is supervising other soldiers who are digging the old gringo up from an unmarked grave in the desert. At the burial site, Pedro recalls when he met the old gringo, who had greatly impressed him with his marksman's skills.

The Colonel recalls that he knew all along that the old man had come to Chihuahua to die. He talks about gringos who wanted frontiers. Now, the only frontier left for adventurers was to the South. There is also an older woman, La Garduna, as well as Inocencio Mansalvo, who along with Pedro, would accompany the body and Harriet Winslow to the border.

These people recall the old gringo, including some of his strengths and weaknesses, and the fact that he was somewhat vain. They also muse on some of his fears. They recall him discussing with them his trips throughout the United States. They either joke or revel in memories of all gringos who look alike and who come to the land of the Aztec to meet their fates. The Colonel then pushes them to hurry and get the body loaded on a litter to be taken overnight to Camargo, the nearby town, to be presented to the General.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter flashes back to another time in the book and introduces several recurring characters. These characters are natives of Northern Mexico and the deceased is an old American male. Called the old gringo, he is being dug up from an unmarked grave. The characters admired the old gringo, but didn't worship him.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The old gringo is coming to Mexico. He goes to El Paso by train. He is surprised by the development of the city, including cars and bigger buildings. He notes that most of the people he sees are young and probably born in the twentieth century. He stays long enough to orient himself and to determine in which direction he will head to cross the border. He has traveled lightly, all in black except for his shirt. He has only one suitcase, which contains a few articles of clothing, a Colt .44, two books he has written, and a copy of Don Quixote. He acquires a white mare and has a purposefully vague discussion with the seller about why he is there and where he is going, in order to throw off anyone looking for him.

The old gringo heads west about twenty kilometers and crosses the river into Mexico at a narrow point. Just then, an explosion occurs on the bridge in town. He thinks about people who may have come before him: Spaniards looking for gold, Indians fleeing Americans and other fugitives going toward the harsh reality of the desert and leaving behind the supposed civilization of El Paso's trains, cars, and bridges. Late in the day, the old gringo accepts the hospitality of a man and his woman living in a small hut. They are preparing a modest dinner. He accepts, knowing this will be a hardship to the hosts, but also knowing that to turn it down would insult them.

After dinner, the old gringo thinks back over his seventy-one years, his various travels, and his time during the Civil War. In the morning, he asks for directions to Chihuahua. The host warns him how dangerous this direction is, that this is Pancho Villa territory. As he enters into the more remote and hostile part of the desert, he sees the prickly plants that survive there, as well as the snakes, buzzards, and scorpions. He knows how tough life is and how easy death is in the desert. He becomes weakened by the alkaline winds and his own asthma.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter tells more about the old gringo, and helps place the time and location of events of the book. The explosion at the bridge shows that this character is facing real danger, as opposed to the imaginary escapades that Don Quixote experienced.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The old gringo is riding into a camp. The soldiers there are watching him. Inocencio Mansalvo remarks when he first sees the old gringo that he has surely come to die. Pedro, 11 years old, gives due deference to Mansalvo as well as the old gringo. The Colonel states that he believes the old gringo to be a man of honor, so the guerrillas do not set upon him at once, but warily watch his every move.

La Garduna makes some remarks indicating that she is a prostitute who has attached herself to the troops of General Arroyo. The old gringo travels with them for a few days. As they get to know him and his vanities, they tease him for wanting a warm towel and a mirror to shave. Some think of him as a peacock, not well adapted for the life of a guerrilla.

The old gringo had found the group after four days in the desert. He is clearly exhausted, but holds his own, so he earns the respect of those around him. The "army" is traveling on horseback, but they also have commandeered a train. The women and children ride on the train, which also holds provisions for the group. General Arroyo comes and goes from the train, using a luxurious Pullman car as his base.

As the people question the old gringo about his knowledge about the Mexican revolution, he thinks back to his days as a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, of the stories he has covered for the Hearst publishing empire. The old gringo thinks of the biased newspaper coverage he has seen in various political arenas. Hearst is pushing a popular American agenda of wanting to expand American power by controlling the political leaders of Mexico.

So many American reporters are covering the revolution that the old gringo blends in without challenge. When he asks to meet Villa, he is told that their General Arroyo is due to meet Villa soon. He is taken to the train. Arroyo asks him if he is there to interview him or sell him supplies. Mansalvo introduces him as the man who has come looking for death. The old gringo says he has come to fight. They all laugh, due to his advanced age and spare, angular body. The young General tells him to go home to tend his garden.

The old gringo tells the General to try his abilities as a fighter. The General throws him a Colt .44 and then throws a big silver peso into the air. Without any effort, the old gringo shoots the coin just as it comes down next to the head of Arroyo. The crowd is anxious by what the General's reaction will be, but the General doesn't move. He directs Pedro to pick up the coin. The hole is through the eagle in the middle of the coin. The general gives the coin to Pedro. The old gringo thinks of his own mortality and his wish to die here.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter gives more details about the old gringo and introduces the general, who is the third main character in the book. The old gringo is intelligent, brave, and a very good shooter. He is smart enough and strong enough to survive on horseback in the desert for four days. The general is young and rough, but wants the luxury of a Pullman car.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

General Tomas Arroyo introduces himself. Because he has given himself that military title, the old gringo knows the general will test him and push him to see how far he will go. As the others realize that the general is not angry about the coin, they give the gringo a sombrero and force food and mescal on him. They assume he has been a military man in the United States and call him "general." He clarifies that he was a topographical engineer for the Indiana Volunteers in the American Civil War.

The group amazed that the old gringo is talking about a war from fifty years before. They introduce themselves as they visit over the meal. The old gringo earns their respect by eating spicy tacos and hot chilies without reacting, and he drinks the mescal without being bothered by the worm in the bottle. The guerillas joke about weak Americans who can't take the local food and alcohol. The old gringo waits patiently to have time alone with the General, to see a side of him he knows he wouldn't normally share with his band of guerrillas.

The old gringo is called to the General's lavish train car, which reminds him of a New Orleans brothel, with all of its rich decor. The old gringo tries to match drink for drink with the young general as the train slowly travels down the tracks. He has almost a paternal feeling for the general. Arroyo explains that the train had belonged to a wealthy European family that owned half of Chihuahua, as well as parts of Durango and Coahuila. They discuss the politics of a family "taking" land that did not really belong to them, disenfranchising the natives who have worked the land for generations.

The general shows the old gringo a big wooden box that holds many old papers, presumably land grants by the king of Spain to the initial European wealthy families who came to rule the land for Spain. The old gringo realizes that General Arroyo cannot read the papers, but treasures them and the box as being his history. The old gringo knows that no matter what the natives have by possessing the grants, they would never be truly free without a revolution to divest the Europeans of landholdings.

The old gringo riles and embarrasses the General by questioning whether he can read. Defensively, the General states that he knows the contents of the papers and that Colonel Frutos Garcia reads to him. The General focuses on his memories and what he knows to be true in regard to real ownership, but the old gringo has seen enough of Europeans and their descendants to know how land grants can clash with historical use of property.

A fire appears in the distance through the train's windows and the General explains that his men have gotten to a hacienda ahead of the train. Much of it is burning. Arroyo's group is already there, setting up camp and beginning to settle in for the evening. The old gringo hesitates to step off the train because some mongrels are growling at him.

The General teases him and warns him that the Federales are much tougher than the dogs.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The general is ambivalent about his lineage and how he and his people have been manipulated by those in power. He is illiterate, and so must use his own abilities to intuitively read those around him to know how to interpret events around him. The old gringo is a somewhat compassionate man who feels paternalistic toward the general even as he pokes at him for being illiterate. He knows how to prod the general without being overtly mean to him.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Harriet is standing in the middle of the crowd, a young woman in American clothing, clearly frightened, but determined to be respected. The old gringo realizes her danger, even though she seems to be unable to grasp it. He recognizes that she is an American with an East Coast accent. She is trying to communicate with those around her, explaining that she has been hired by the owners of the hacienda, the Miranda family, to teach their children.

The old gringo can tell by the look on Arroyo's face that he is going to toy with Harriet. The old gringo knows he must get to her and try to gain enough control of the situation to avoid her possible murder. He also sees in the general's eyes some internal conflict. He thinks Arroyo is like a dangerous buffoon. When he reaches the young lady she asks for his help under her breath. The Colonel tells her that the family probably hired her as a cover for their intention to flee. She cannot believe they would pay her wages in advance and then leave her stranded.

The old gringo can tell that Harriet is probably from a family of limited means but appears to have had a life where she has been in control of the situation. He admires her spunk and wants to help her without appearing overbearing. He sees the light of her personality and transparency, but knows that if she sees him as being overly protective, she will reject his help, leaving herself in danger. He knows he must be very careful in how he handles this situation.

In contrast, the old gringo knows that General Arroyo is very opaque. He has multiple layers to his personality and will be difficult to read. The old gringo's career as a reporter tells him it will be hard to get the general to open up and talk. The general turns the young woman over to the old gringo to care for and protect. Arroyo's people swell up around him and the crowd moves off, leaving the two Americans alone together. They begin walking, with the old man slightly behind her, using his skills as a reporter to assess her. As they reach a building that has not burned, he reaches forward with gentlemanly charm and opens the door for her.

The old gringo and Harriet realize they are in a ballroom with many mirrors. As they go and sit in a corner, she again explains her background. She introduces herself as Harriet Winslow of Washington, D.C., and repeats that she has come to teach the Miranda children. He can tell that she is about thirty, dressed as a Gibson Girl. He knows that she has not passed from the safety of a father's home to a marriage, but has pursued a career in teaching.

The old gringo tells Harriet he is from San Francisco, California. They carefully avoid talking openly about being prisoners. He thinks she is free to go and he offers to try to arrange safe passage for her. He reminds her that it is not her fault the family fled.

Although overwhelmed by the circumstances, she seems honor-bound to stay in case the family returns.

The old gringo offers to speak to the General about Harriet's transport, and she is shocked when she realizes the scruffy leader is claiming to be an officer. The American can tell she is genuinely offended and realizes that she has some exposure to military life. She confirms that her father had been a commissioned officer who disappeared in Cuba in the Spanish-American War.

Some of the men in full revelry burst into the ballroom. Their laughter quiets immediately as they see the floor-to-ceiling mirrors down both sides of the room and the ostentatious display of wealth. The old gringo realizes that the people who have entered are caught up in looking at themselves, many probably never having been before a full-length mirror. In contrast, the old gringo realizes that neither he nor Harriet had noticed the mirrors and the opulence; they were so used to such decor in America. Harriet becomes upset when the people flood in, beginning to play music and dance. In their roughness, they are scratching up the parquet. She wants to tell them to stop, to prohibit damage to the property that she feels has been entrusted to her. She tells the American that she had become bored as a schoolteacher in America and that she will teach the native children until the Miranda family returns. The American is surprised at her naivety and realizes she still does not understand the enormity of events around her.

Harriet tells the American that an education using American values would help these people more than rifles. He explains that it is a much more complicated situation than she thinks. However, she states her intention to begin teaching the next day. He tells her the "place" is mostly burned down and that most of them, including the children, will be moving on.

The old gringo literally picks Harriet up and carries her from the ballroom out into the dark night. They are in the middle of the desert. It has cooled off considerably, but there are bonfires and groups of people all around them. There are also the corpses of federal soldiers who had been protecting the hacienda who have been shot and hung. It is a frightening situation, as they realize they have nowhere to go. They are both disconsolate. He asks her whether she had looked at herself in the mirrors of the ballroom. She is baffled by his question.

A woman who is referred to as La Luna because of her round, moon face comes out of the train. She is the general's woman. Harriet is to sleep with her and the old gringo is to go see the General, who is in the train waiting for him. Tomorrow they are to fight.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The time line moves forward to when the train arrives at the hacienda, where Harriet Winslow is in danger due to her own inexperience. In addition, both men notice Harriet and may be attracted to her, setting up additional potential conflicts. American culture is

compared to Latin American culture, as is youth versus experience and female versus male.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Harriet and her mother are living in a modest apartment in Washington, D.C. They had been living in New York, but moved to be close to the Army to press the claim her mother had to a widow's pension when the captain did not return from Cuba. His body had never been found. Harriet is 31 and received her education from a public school rather than a private finishing school. She continues to live with her mother and she attends the Methodist church weekly. For eight years she has been dating a Mr. Delaney, a 42-year-old who works as a lobbyist for various causes before Congress. He lives a bachelor's life and makes it clear that he does not want to marry. She suspects he is involved in some shady business dealings, but doesn't ask him. She accepts the fate of merely dating him regularly.

Harriet is so bored that she decides to look for a position in some country where Spanish is spoken. She has studied Spanish a little, but knows her focus would be teaching English. Through a newspaper, she finds the Mirandas' ad. One day when she returns home, she finds the letter the Mirandas have sent, already opened by her mother. Both her mother and Mr. Delaney object to her leaving, but she is determined to get away. Harriet knows that her life is crushing her. Her life is destined to be endless teaching and living with her mother if she does not change. She wakes from dreams, remembering a possibility in the unknown as opposed to the oppression of the known. She accepts the job offered by the Mirandas.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter recounts the rationale for Harriet leaving the comfort of the United States and going to Mexico. She felt restricted and bored in the confines of the times and place of her upbringing.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

It is dawn. The guerillas will look for pockets of federal soldiers hiding in the hills. They will try to quash them as soon as possible and move on to Zacatecas. The old gringo is disappointed that they are not planning to meet up with Pancho Villa right away. The general assures him that he stays in contact with Villa, but it is up to Villa to direct his movements.

The old gringo goes into the train car where Harriet is sleeping. He gently pulls a serape over her and kisses her on the cheek without waking her. He hopes that she will allow him into her dreams. He believes as long as they can dream, no matter how far apart, they will still be together. He does not want her to enter his dreams, since his are of death.

The old gringo and the general chat as they head out on horseback into the nearby hills. General Arroyo speaks of his hatred of the hacienda. As they approach the hills, the old gringo recalls skirmishes from the Civil War, when his group had helped Sherman round up stray rebels. He had wanted to be in that campaign because he knew his father was fighting for the Confederacy

As bullets hit the ground near them, Arroyo orders everyone to dismount. The old gringo instead picks up the pace and begins his charge against the soldiers. They have their guns trained on the guerillas, but the bullets fall short. The old gringo believes the soldiers think he is an apparition, with his white hair and blue eyes on a white horse, until he actually comes at them. As he goes by, he lassos and pulls away the automatic gun and turns quickly to kill the four soldiers. He continues up the hill as he shoots at a non-existent Confederate soldier he imagines at the ridgeline. He is still recalling the Civil war and killing Confederate soldiers when the guerillas meet up with him to congratulate him on his success.

The American knows that he is living in the past and that his many years as a reporter and writer have filled him with the tendency to vary reality in order to write a good story. He feels a disconnection between reality and the fantasies he creates. He tells General Arroyo it is not hard to be brave when one is not afraid to die.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The old gringo shows that he cares for Harriet, setting up a possible conflict between himself and the general. He then heads into battle recklessly. He also has unresolved inner conflicts over his relationship with his father. Conflict between parent and child is a recurring theme throughout the book .

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Each of the characters wakes the next morning reflecting on dreams and trying to envision the day. Harriet is still disoriented. She has never been so close to an actual battle scene and she is remembering the old gringo's question about whether or not she looked at herself in the mirrors in the ballroom of the hacienda.

General Arroyo leads his men out to look for the Federales. The women and children and some of the oldest men have remained behind. Harriet has gotten everyone busy cleaning up the debris from the fire. She gathers the women and children in the ballroom to begin teaching them, using her limited Spanish. When he returns, General Arroyo is very upset to find what Harriet has done. He had been determined to burn the hacienda down as a humiliation to the owners. He finds them in the ballroom. She had been cautioning the children to avoid looking at themselves in the mirror. She had spoken of vanity and wickedness. The children were reminded of their priest and his homilies.

General Arroyo comes up to Harriet with a whip in his hand and looking very menacing. Everyone there fears physical violence. He loudly storms across the parquet, demanding to know why she felt she had permission to clean up the place and to confuse his people into the process. He lets her know that it had been his orders to burn down the hacienda and he was determined that it should remain in ruins. She responds by reminding him that not everyone in his group can sleep in the fancy Pullman car he is using. Harriet dares to call him mad and to address him as sir, rather than by the title she believes he has wrongly bestowed upon himself. He demands that he is to be addressed as General Arroyo. When he asks her if she has understood his command, she again replies, insultingly, "You are mad, sir."

General Arroyo grabs Harriet's arms, shakes her, and again demands that she refer to him as General Arroyo. She begs him to release her and she tells him she will not call him General since she is sure he was not a commissioned officer but is merely using a title he has generously given himself. General Arroyo pulls her by the arm outside, where they continue their argument. The old gringo is in the Pullman car, drinking the General's mescal when he hears the argument. The train is close enough to the hacienda that the American can hear the rising voices of Harriet and the General. The old gringo senses the strength and resolve of the General, his manliness and bravery contrasting with Harriet's beauty and innocence. Once again the American sees Arroyo as opaque, i.e., having many parts to his personality. Harriet is transparent, with no hidden agendas. He looks upon Harriet as a beautiful woman, but does not want to let himself fall in love with her since he is there to die.

Arroyo asks Harriet to look at the land, the dry, scruffy desert. She sees a dead land that must fight amazingly hard to produce anything, as opposed to the fertile parts of the

United States. Arroyo tells her that the Mirandas were occasional visitors, who would come once or twice a year and stay for a short period until they grew bored, at which time they went on to another one of their holdings. The Mirandas trusted the property to an overseer, forcing the people who really owned the land to slave away, eking out some form of profit for the Mirandas. When the family arrived for a vacation, they would ride through the fields, fighting young bulls and raping the local women and girls. Now Harriet was forced to look at the charred ruins of the hacienda through Arroyo's eyes.

The old gringo thinks about the wild oats he had sown as a young man, of some of the exploits he has gone through, and what has brought him to this place where he wants to be killed quickly, romantically, rather than die a slow death from asthma, or worse. General Arroyo tells Harriet that his mother was actually the victim of a rape as a young girl, raped by one of the men of the Miranda family. Harriet now sees the reason for his anger, his attempt at revenge. He tells her that this is what gives him the authority to claim the title of general.

Harriet tells the general that revenge may be his motive, but it is not a good way to live. Others have told her that as long as the hacienda is there, they will stay to work it, but upon its destruction, they feel free to leave. Some told her about the pain and suffering they had endured by the Mirandas and the overlords, but didn't want to leave the scrap of land their parents had worked. Even Colonel Garcia tells her that his father was a merchant, but that he joined the revolution to have self-government, rather than a puppet government run by absentee Europeans. The old gringo cannot hear all of the conversations, but he knows the essence of them and he has begun to figure out what Arroyo is all about.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter recounts the general's background and tells the story of his relationship with the Miranda family: a frequently repeated conflict between landowners and serfs. It also exposes more of Harriet's personality, showing what drives her to do things that might put her life at risk. Through her interactions with the people who live at the hacienda, Harriet learns more about the way of life for the wealthy and the destitute. The sexual tension between Harriet and Tomas also puts her life at risk.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

General Arroyo releases Harriet, who joins old gringo in the Pullman car. She accepts a glass of tequila and they sit down to visit, almost as if they were in the drawing room of a home. They exchange simple pleasantries for awhile. He asks her why she left New York. Rather than speak about the recent past, she tells him of the time when her father left for the Spanish-American War, when she was only 16. He never returned.

Harriet tells the old gringo a story about some of her ancestors: a great uncle who bought many paintings in Europe that were not appreciated in the United States, and his daughter who gave the paintings away. The family would have been wealthy in a few years if her aunt had only hung on to the paintings or bequeathed them to family. Instead, the recipient of the paintings sold them at auction for five million dollars. Harriet's father had been left without an inheritance and he had to turn to a military career. Harriet would have no dowry, severely limiting her choices in education, in society, in marriage.

Harriet then asks the American to tell her about himself. She has seen the books in his suitcase. She asks him if he has read Don Quixote or the other two books. He only says that he hopes to read Don Quixote before he dies and for her to avoid the other two works. He tells her that he has worked as a reporter for a muckraker and that most of his columns were vile and slanderous. She tells him she really wishes to know about him. He tells her about uncovering stories of political corruption in California. He tells her how his family scrimped by on his limited salary as a reporter, rather than accepting bribes to not print damning stories. She can tell he is getting too worked up thinking back on those days in San Francisco.

The old gringo goes on to tell Harriet how sanctimonious he was, being judgmental of other people's foibles and shortcomings. He muses about mortality, his own and others, and what it all means at the very end. Harriet tries to comfort him, but she can tell he is lost in his memories. He tells her that it is only now that he realizes how Hearst used him to sell newspapers and that the truth had been manipulated in the editing process. They each are quiet and say that they will talk again tomorrow, knowing that they may not live long enough to have that conversation.

The old gringo buries his face in Harriet's long hair, the only thing he perceives to be living in the desert. Then he moves somewhat away from her to avoid letting her know how much he is beginning to care for her. He wants her to still see him as a military man about to go to war. He tells her of his alienation from his children, who rejected him for his writing style and for working for Hearst. His two sons have died, one by suicide and one due to alcoholism, to avoid rejection by their father. His daughter refuses to speak to him again. He reminds Harriet that there is a special bond between a father and

daughter. It pains Harriet to hear this, as she does not want to talk about the relationship she had with her father.

Harriet asks the old gringo about his wife. He admits that she was very unhappy due to his absences, his writings that caused him and her to have so many enemies, and of strained quietness while he wrote. He feels she blamed him for the deaths of his sons and their alienation from society due to his muckraking columns. He admits, as he sinks into an asthma attack, of even having made fun of the United States government, leaving his family to always wonder when he would bestow mockery upon each one of them. Harriet turns the conversation to her respect for the U.S. Army. He lashes out at her, questioning whether her patriotism and respect is only generated by the widow's pension and how it protected them from abject poverty. He can tell by the stricken look on her face that he has hit a nerve.

The old gringo goes on to lash out at the military for its campaign of killing Indians, including women and children, rather than assimilating them. He contrasts America with Mexico in this regard. She tells him she knows he is just lashing out at her to keep from opening up any more to her. He thinks about the military career of his father, who had gone into the Confederacy and into Mexico as a soldier, killing many Indians.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter delves further into the characters of Harriet and the old gringo. Harriet details her unfortunate circumstances on the loss of family money and how she and her mother have struggled to survive. The old gringo begins to open up to her by filling her in on his career as a journalist and how his muckraking style had alienated him from society and formed conflicts within his own family. Thus, both characters are on the "fringe" of society, with certain possibilities in society closed off to them. However, Harriet's limitations occurred to her family before her birth, in contrast to the limitations the old gringo chose for himself.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

As General Arroyo and the old gringo go out on the trail, Arroyo talks about the fact that eventually his people will want peace again and will want self-rule. His belief is that a new kind of guerilla warfare, much different that the traditional European tactics, is needed to purge the land of European influence. He acknowledges that Harriet is right in wanting peace and rules to live by, but that she doesn't understand the price that must be paid.

As the old gringo and the general ride along, the old gringo learns more and more about the complex personality, and to a certain extent, the naivety of Arroyo. Arroyo talks about Porfirio Diaz, the current ruler of Mexico. He has maintained power by giving large land grants to foreigners who will not be around enough to challenge his authority. Arroyo speaks of Diaz as having been a radical guerilla soldier such as himself when he defeated the previous government. The old gringo thinks back to the time when his own father had gone as a soldier in 1847 with American troops who had invaded Mexico City. He recalls a reporter in the Hearst chain who had prepared a report for publication revealing that Diaz had become a tyrant. The old gringo thinks about the fact that Hearst would not publish the story. He liked the idea of Mexico staying the way it was and didn't want any publicity that might help the opposition. The old gringo recalls his own father and his fights with him and thinks that this is the way of the world: young men fighting father figures in order to find their own destinies and to affect change. He thinks back to his Calvinist father and how they had become alienated due to the son, who lived a totally different lifestyle as a form of rejection of his father. The American laughed at himself and appreciated the irony that as much as he rejected his father, now he was riding down the same path toward Mexico City his father had.

The old gringo then brings up the subject of love. He asks Arroyo what he would think if the old gringo were to fall in love with a young lady. Arroyo tells him he is too old for Harriet and to think of himself as her father. The old gringo then tells Arroyo that it is the fate of every revolutionary, once he has seized power, to become like Diaz. He warns Arroyo that his fate will be the same as Diaz if he lives that long. Arroyo says that he has never envisioned himself as an old man. He has always assumed he will die young. He laughs and tells the gringo that he has lived too long. The old gringo tells Arroyo that at times Hearst had him write stories encouraging America to invade Mexico to protect United States citizens who were there. The old gringo knew that Hearst had vast landholdings in Mexico and was merely trying to protect his investments. Hearst was also afraid of the Revolution. The old gringo thinks that maybe he should die here, as atonement for the way he had reported the situation.

Conversation stops as the two men reach an overlook and Arroyo looks around to be sure things are in place as he had directed. He then tells the old gringo that now is the time for him to decide if he will fight on the plain or if he will come with Arroyo to attack

from the rear. By coming out of the hills, Arroyo thinks they can come at the soldiers in such a way as to cut off their supply routes and trap them like rats while the soldiers are engaged in a battle at the front. The old gringo says that he would rather go down on the plain and join the guerillas at the front, as it is dangerous and glorious. Arroyo tells him that coming at the soldiers from out of the hills on the flank or rear would be even more dangerous. The old gringo agrees that it would be more dangerous, but less glorious. The old gringo joins the battle.

The old gringo wonders what the guerillas are thinking as they march to probable death. He hears the noise of the horses and the sounds of metal on flesh as the guerillas pull out their sabers and run at the federal soldiers. He then hears the roars of the guns and horses as they come at the soldiers from all sides. He feels sorry for the soldiers, who are weighted down and stifled by heavy uniforms inappropriate for desert warfare. They are not able to turn the heavy cannons around to fight the guerillas before they are set upon and killed. The old gringo sees many soldiers killed as they attempt a retreat. He is amazed that he survived the battle. He had expected to die.

The guerillas set up camp. They tell the surviving soldiers that they are traveling too fast and light to take along prisoners of war. The soldiers can either join Pancho Villa's side or they can be shot. Most of the soldiers take off their government insignias and swear allegiance to Pancho Villa. The few who refuse are rounded up and put into a pigsty. A Colonel who is the highest-ranking officer of the federal troops offers his sword to Arroyo and tells him that it is a crime to kill soldiers who have surrendered. Arroyo tells him he is very brave and asks him if bravery determines how one lives or how one dies. The Colonel tells him it is how one dies.

Arroyo uses the sword to cut meat from a pig that has been roasted over an open fire. He hands the sword to the old gringo to cut some meat. The federal soldier begins a conversation with Arroyo, knowing it will probably be his last. He tells Arroyo that it seems ironic that he will die while the old gringo will not and he speaks of the whims of fate. He also tells Arroyo that in his opinion it is great to be a leader of brave men, but one should take care around a very brave man such as the old gringo who knows no fear. He tells Arroyo that a man such as this makes other soldiers look like cowards in comparison.

Over food, Arroyo recounts the story of a General Fierro, who had taken a little over three-hundred federal troops prisoner. Fierro told those men they could try to escape from the compound; he would only shoot once at any one soldier. Three made it. Arroyo offers the federal colonel a similar fate. He orders the old gringo to shoot. The colonel walks backward, stumbling across the compound, not wanting to be shot in the back. He trips and falls, then stands up and runs. The old gringo purposely shoots a nearby pig. Arroyo kills the colonel.

The rest of the soldiers line up against a wall expecting to be shot, but at the last minute, Arroyo orders that their ears be cut off, as a sign of the battle. They are told they can flee, but that if they are ever seen again by Arroyo's men, they will be killed on the spot. The old gringo later tells Harriet that it was the only thing he could do. He was not

going to shoot a man in the back, even if it made Arroyo so mad that Arroyo shot him too.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The old gringo's feelings for Harriet continue to develop. The general and the old gringo discuss the nature of revolutions and the fact that those who obtain power want to keep it, whatever it takes. The old gringo points out the naive notions of some guerillas, such as the general, who don't want to face the shortcomings of their leaders.

The old gringo is conflicted by his work. He continues to work for his boss, William Randolph Hearst, even though Hearst either skewed or omitted publishing stories that would threaten his own power and landholdings in Mexico.

This chapter also introduces an officer of the federal army who knows that he will probably die, as well as other leaders of the revolution who gave prisoners of war a slim, but possible chance to survive. Men in conflict continues as one of the major themes of the book.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

As the guerillas march back to the hacienda, everyone can tell that Arroyo is unhappy and not to be bothered. His hat is pulled down and his serape up, so that only his eyes show. He is quiet, contemplative and his eyes are unfriendly. He knows that his men are anxious to ride forward; they want to connect with Pancho Villa and march to victory. He is torn because he does not want to leave the hacienda where he was born and raised.

Colonel Garcia tells his compatriots that the men are getting restless and Arroyo must make a move. As they march, the old gringo lets himself be pushed further back among the troops, knowing he will face Arroyo's wrath if he gets too close. In later years, then-General Garcia would look back and remark that the old man's bravery sparked envy among the other troops. The old gringo had remarked out loud that to be a good soldier, one must try to get oneself killed. Garcia later became famous for repeating this remark as his own.

During their absence, Harriet has again decided to take charge and organize the servants so that life can continue in a semi-normal way. She still anticipates the return of the Mirandas. She has everyone sweeping out the ashes and cleaning. She intends to set up a classroom. She finds a big box of jewels hidden in a wall behind the bed in the master bedroom. It had been exposed in the fire. She sets the box out in the hallway leading to the ballroom. She wants them to learn to avoid temptation and not take other peoples' property.

After the people eat a large midday meal, they are preparing to leave to go back to their quarters. She stops them and tells them that beginning the next day, they will stay after lunch to start planning their own form of management of the place. The people are shocked when she talks of managing the property for the Mirandas, but they are too polite to contradict her. They are anticipating events that with her plans will be impossible.

Harriet goes to have a siesta. In and out of her dreams, she thinks about various times when she has done her duty. La Garduna awakens her to tell her that her baby is desperately ill and needs her help. The little girl is blue from lack of oxygen. Harriet momentarily hesitates, thinking about the ardors of her journey to the hacienda. She has risked life and limb to come here to be a teacher, not a nurse. In a split second, Harriet decides that she must try to clear the baby's throat. She puts her own mouth over the infant's and starts sucking and spitting out the build-up of phlegm. She saves the baby's life. Later, Harriet said that she turned the baby upside down and hit her back to get the phlegm out, rather than admit such intimate contact. Harriet innately knows that while she will be there to help other children, she will never have her own.

Chapter 12 Analysis

While the men have gone off to battle, Harriet naively tries to keep the hacienda and its contents in place for the benefit of the Mirandas. She explains the "American" way of educating the masses and setting up a more egalitarian society, while the locals know that they have little control over their lives or a brighter future. Harriet knows the general will be angry that she has continued to clean up the hacienda. However, she feels, from a religious standpoint, the right to assume what is best for the people there. Her hesitation to help the infant shows that she has a hard time developing close interpersonal relationships

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The men begin arriving back at dawn. They women are there to meet them, looking for their men among the troops. They see some new faces. Colonel Garcia tells Pedrito that this is the way of women in love, waiting for their men to return. La Garduna is there to flirt with the new men who have sworn allegiance to Villa when they were captured. She speaks of all of their travels; most had ever left their home village before. The old gringo is surprised at his own response, knowing that he will soon see Harriet. When he gets to the train, she has bathed and is putting her hair back up. She tells him that the women had bathed her, the first bath she has had since she arrived. He tells her he dreamed of her. She cuts him off before he can be romantic by asking if he had dreamed of her like a father would. She tells him she is glad to see him.

Harriet and the old gringo then hear rapid sounds of nearby gunfire. She panics, thinking the federal soldiers have returned and they are in grave danger. She says she fears for her safety. The old gringo makes light of her fear and tells her that if it is federal soldiers, they will know she is an American adventurer. In her nervousness, she babbles on about her reasons for coming.

General Arroyo arrives at the train car and is greeted by La Luna, who is telling the old gringo and Harriet that they are hearing fireworks. It is a day of festival, the day of the patron saint of the village. The two of them go outside to see the fiesta. The American looks back at the train and sees Arroyo there, looking at him and Harriet. Arroyo is shirtless and smoking a cigar, giving a very brave appearance.

Harriet walks the old gringo around to show him what they have accomplished at the hacienda while they were gone. She is shocked and embarrassed to see that the box of jewels is empty. She realizes that the servants want the spoils of war. She thought her lecture had gotten through to them. Arroyo arrives, wearing only pants and boots. He apologizes for being so casual, but inquires of Harriet about what she has done in his absence. She shows him the empty box and says that his people are just like anyone else, just there for the booty. She states that any talk of revolution is a cover for wanting to steal from others.

Arroyo grabs Harriet by the wrist and starts pulling her away. She looks at the old gringo, silently begging him to help her. He knows that both of their lives are in danger if he does anything. She had been warned by Arroyo not to do what she has done. The American can only hope that she will survive whatever happens. For the first time, the true danger dawns on her: Mexico is in chaos; it is not a safe place for an American woman to be.

The overt display of the wealth of the Mirandas was what Harriet and the American, both Protestants, considered to be shocking. Raised in churches with empty crosses

and plain interiors, the excess of gold and silver decorating the hacienda's chapel, throws them both out of their comfort zones. They see Jesus on a cross, with a red velvet robe on his statue and blood painted on his body.

Arroyo shows the Americans Mary at her altar, perfect in her blue and gold robe with pearls around her neck. Harriet asks him how the peasants could afford such an extravagantly decorated chapel and Arroyo tells her they live frugally and save all year just for this festival. The old American slowly goes closer and closer to the front of the chapel, but even as he distances himself, he can tell by the look on Harriet's face that she knows he cannot save her and she is beginning to realize what her fate will be.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The women passively wait for an outcome that may mean their own demise. They are fragile yet enduring. Harriet is fragile in another way: she can only make a meager living and must hope for a survivor's nominal pension that she waits for the American government to bestow upon herself and her mother. This chapter also contrasts the religious practices of American Protestants and Latin American Catholics.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The festival continues in the plaza of the hacienda. Arroyo has taken Harriet to the ballroom and made her dance with him. As she does so, she keeps her composure by daydreaming that she is in Washington dancing with her father. She senses the smells of Washington, D.C. The vines and overwhelming jungle-like plants bring an odor of slightly overripe fruit, if not outright decay. She imagines the smell of an overworked Negress. This is how Arroyo smells to her.

Tomas Arroyo imagines that he is a child, once again at the hacienda, but dancing with his mother, who should have been the legitimate wife of the owner. She is foreign, well dressed and clean. He smells this on Harriet. He remembers that he had hoped that the owner of the hacienda, who was his father, would recognize him as his son and not treat him just as a servant. Harriet senses that Arroyo is getting more attracted to her. She wishes he would kiss her, but fears he won't. She recalls her conversation with the American. She had hoped to civilize Arroyo. The old gringo had told her there was nothing to civilize. Mexicans were already civilized, just different than North Americans.

Harriet envisions herself in different seasons doing different things as she dances with Arroyo, and his kissing becomes more passionate. In him she sees only one season, one destiny, to bring upon himself and others. She whispers of many things in English, knowing he will not understand her, She promises that she will keep his memory and the memory of the old man alive in her after she has returned to Washington. She hopes he will not ask her to exchange sexual favors for the life of the old man.

Arroyo tries in his own way to communicate to Harriet that he is hoping she will return to America and always keep alive her memories of her time with him. He wants his memories and those of the old man's to survive. Arroyo hopes both will return to America, permanently changed by their experiences in Mexico with him. Then he says, "It is up to you to decide whether or not the old gringo returns to his country alive."

Harriet doesn't hear what else Arroyo adds about the American, but she does sense that he is desperate to have her and will do anything. She looks at herself and feels as if in a dream because of all of the mirrors creating multiple images of her. She kisses him with abandon. Everyone, especially the old gringo, knows what must be happening between Arroyo and Harriet.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The sexual tension between Harriet and Tomas Arroyo is reaching a critical juncture. Harriet has long repressed emotions that are surfacing in an overwhelming way. Arroyo is tentative at first, but determined to get his point across to her. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the language barrier, they are each free to hope that what they are saying

to each other will be adequately interpreted by the other. When Harriet kisses Arroyo, the soldier, it is almost as if she is admitting how much she misses her father. Clearly, Arroyo thinks of her as the type of woman he had dreamed his mother might have become.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The old gringo is in the ballroom with the General's woman, La Luna. He has heard of this kind of woman who travels with soldiers. She tells him that Arroyo is the kind of man who needs more than one woman and she has accepted this fate. She has accepted that men and women are different in the ways of love. He says that each sex is always trying to get the better of the other, that women are more secretive than men are. He looks at her and can tell by her language and her soft hands that she is an educated woman. She admits she can read and write. He is puzzled as to why she would become involved with General Arroyo.

The woman tells the old gringo the story of how she and Arroyo met. She was living in a town with her family. Arroyo had come into town in the early days of the revolution, and went into hiding in the basement of her home when federal soldiers came. Not knowing he was there, the owner had boarded the basement shut to keep his dogs in there. Arroyo could here the gunshots and the sounds of men being killed. The dogs, two mastiffs, silently watched him.

Arroyo tells the same story to Harriet. She tells him she feels like she is trapped as he had been. He tells her she is there of her own free will. She says that she is only there to protect the old man, a man she can understand. Arroyo asks her if she will save the gringo the way the Mexican woman, La Luna, had saved him. Harriet tells him she doesn't know how he had been saved, so he finishes the story.

At dark, Arroyo knows he must kill the dogs. He shoots them, fearing that the federal soldiers will hear him, but knowing the dogs are vicious. La Luna comes and tells him through the wood that she will come back to free him as soon as it is safe. Days go by. He can tell by the sounds that there are firing squads and death all around. He could eat the dead dogs, but does not, for it would show the woman that he didn't believe her. He feels as if he will starve to death. He reminds Harriet that the story is gruesome and that she could leave if she wants, but that she is choosing to stay. She again says that she is staying to save the gringo.

Next Arroyo tells Harriet about the battle the day before and how he could have shot either the gringo or the federal colonel. He tells her how brave the colonel had been in his death. They speak of death and she senses that the time for his death has not yet come. He tells her he hopes she sees him die. They joke about having children together, knowing it is not meant to be. They make wild, passionate love. Harriet thinks of her father. At the same time that Arroyo cries out at his climax, La Luna tells the old gringo that Arroyo has come here to die.

Arroyo goes out and swaggers around camp while La Luna returns to the part of the train that she and Harriet have been sharing. She tells Harriet not to be embarrassed,

that she knows Arroyo needs love and to be able to cry out while making love is a privilege the peasants never had. They would have been whipped if they had been caught. Harriet wants to make amends to her, but knows that her words would be futile.

Harriet knows Arroyo has made love to her as some form of revenge and knows that revenge is what drives him. She becomes upset when he confronts her about her own emotions. Arroyo tells her that the only reason he had not killed the gringo was that he knew if he did, she would never forgive him. He tells her he knows she will never make love to a murderer, which was why he had attempted to make the old gringo kill the colonel. She is amazed that he would be able to erase all of the previous killings he had done. He wants her to admit that she enjoyed the lovemaking and he hints of coming to her again. She begs him not to, stating that she had only agreed to it in the chapel because she knew he would kill the old gringo if she didn't. He questions her and pushes her to admit that she enjoyed the lovemaking. She finally admits the truth of it, but she hates him for making her face this truth.

Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter gets to the heart of many of the ongoing conflicts and contrasts in this book. La Luna, in spite of having led a sheltered existence, was still subject to the vagaries of war. However, she was not forced to go with Arroyo. The revolution moves forward because of sympathizers like her. Even though she had more education, in this instance Harriet was just as vulnerable as La Luna.

There are differences between men and women when it comes to love and interaction. Harriet slips back to the Pullman car after her sexual encounter with Arroyo, while Arroyo swaggers around camp. Arroyo was attempting to put himself on an equal footing, to be just as "good" as the upper class, by being able to conquer Harriet. In his swagger, he is declaring that he has conquered the upper class.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Before they part, Arroyo tells Harriet why he has returned to the hacienda. He tells her of his childhood, of his thirty years on the hacienda, of sleeping on a mat in servants' quarters while his father slept in the house. Arroyo is naked before her as he discusses this. For the first time, she sees a man comfortable in his own sexuality. Part of her thinks that only simple men would be so comfortable, but prefers to think that Arroyo is more complicated than that. She has heard about men of households who sneak into the bedrooms of female servants and knows that the sexual drive is not exclusive to him.

Arroyo tells Harriet that he had felt locked into the life of a peasant on the hacienda and that the revolution allowed him to break free and move. Now he was feeling locked in again by the momentum of the revolution. He felt his choices diminish as those around him expected him to take a leadership role. Harriet feels that he is hoping to go home again. He tells her that it was much more, that as a servant he could observe everything without being noticed. One time as a child he had gone into the main room of the house with an old servant while he wound the big clock. Arroyo had been able to hold the keys to the house that the servant had handed to him. A guest of the house had noticed Arroyo and had fawned over him and how cute he looked until she realized that he must be a bastard child of the host.

The old servant, don Graciano, had explained to Arroyo that he should retain his dignity and never take charity from members of the household, charity being the enemy of dignity. He had given Arroyo a box, which he told Arroyo contained papers that made him the true heir of the land. The next day don Graciano was dead. Arroyo tells Harriet that he feels all of the ancestors who came before were there to greet Graciano and that death is a natural part of life. Harriet rejects this. She calls death the enemy of life. She says that only by good works can we avoid a sinful death and eternal damnation. He felt what she said were only convictions, whereas he spoke the Truth.

Arroyo believes that the only choice he had in life was either to live on the hacienda as a servant or to take to the hills to live like an Indian. He tells Harriet that he has come back to the hacienda so that no one else will ever have to make the kind of choice he did. To him, that is the true purpose of the revolution. Harriet felt a freedom, a passion rising as she saw so much of Arroyo's past flash before her. She thought of her father and the black servant he slept with. She became impassioned and knelt between Arroyo's legs, trying to get him to be vulnerable to her. He would not respond. He knew this was what she wanted. She eventually gave up. She would never forgive him for refusing to become vulnerable with her.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The character of Arroyo shows issues of class differences. Arroyo was the bastard son of the landowner and was treated little better than a dog. Arroyo represents the serfs, who struggling to be treated as human beings. Yet, Arroyo craved to be recognized by his father and did anything he could to try to get his attention.

Don Graciano discusses whether a poor person can maintain dignity in spite of being mistreated and left in abject poverty. Harriet and Arroyo contrast in their different attitudes toward death.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The old gringo and Harriet head back to the train. The old man is thinking back to the time of the Civil War. He feels the pangs of love and knows that he could take care of Harriet, but also knows it is bad timing. He chastises her for having sex with Arroyo. She tells him that she is the one who used Arroyo rather than the other way around. When questioned why, she tells him it was to save his life. He laughs bitterly, feeling the irony of her attempting to save the life he is determined to end.

Harriet fills in more reasons for justifying her actions. The old gringo is thinking of all of the deceit between people, especially among themselves. Arroyo spied on his rich father, who disavowed him. Harriet has known that her father abandoned her by not returning from the Spanish American War. The old gringo knows he in essence killed his own father in the Civil War by fighting with the North. The old gringo knows he is on a collision course with Arroyo. Harriet tells him that Arroyo believes a man who is too brave is even more dangerous than a coward and that Arroyo sees him as a demoralizing threat. She finally acknowledges that Arroyo was also jealous of the old gringo; he had seen the old gringo kissing her and eying her in a loving way.

The old gringo finally confronts Harriet with the reality that he had come to Mexico to die. He felt her hug him, he with the closely shaved face and lotion, smelling of a fresh bath. They observed Arroyo off in the distance, strutting among his people, encouraging some while chastising others. The old gringo felt a supernatural awareness of being in this desert. It was as though he were in another universe, with new sights, sounds, and smells. He felt as though he were a man being hanged, who in an instance sees the dew on grass and the veins on a leaf just at the second that life slips away.

The old gringo tells Harriet that he loves her. She acknowledges that with Arroyo she could have a sensual love, but that with him, she was trying to recreate the lost love of her father. He holds her close, knowing that in her honesty she is finally opening up. In this moment, he knows she is changed forever. He asks her to tell him one true secret before he dies. She reveals that her father had not actually died in combat in Cuba. He had secretly written to her that he had fallen in love with a black woman and had chosen to stay in Cuba with her. She says she hopes that her mother never realized this, but had been cashing the pension checks in good faith, while Harriet felt smothered by the secret.

Harriet tells the old gringo that she realizes who he is, but that she will keep this a secret. From the covers of the books, she knows that he is Ambrose Bierce, a man who made his career as a muckraker in the Hearst newspapers. She tells him that even though she had come to Mexico to teach, she is the one who is learning. They speak of the platitudes they tell themselves and others in order to be able to live with themselves.

She looks at him in a way that tells him she will hold him in her thoughts and memories forever. She will not let Arroyo have the luxury of this supposition.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The plot is reaching a critical point. Harriet is finally opening up and telling the old gringo the truth about her father. The old gringo finally reveals who he really is. Each can begin to see the difficulties that brought the other to Mexico and possible death. However, each acknowledges that they can appreciate this without having to talk about it too much. Harriet realizes that in spite of her effort to take away Arroyo's focus on killing the old gringo, her efforts were futile. One way or another, the old gringo is determined to die.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

La Luna and Harriet talk, with La Luna telling Harriet about her past. She puts music on the gramophone to cover the sound of her voice as she speaks to Harriet. She explains that she had a repressed childhood in a patriarchal household. She whispers to Harriet about her Catholic education and of her arranged marriage as a young girl. Other than very infrequent, passionless sex once her husband realized she was barren, La Luna could only reject herself for her inability to give life. She spoke of the confusion she felt, attempting to understand the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

La Luna told Harriet that her husband was a wealthy man. Every Saturday, peasants would line up outside the house to either receive wages or pay back loans. One Saturday as she went from the house to church for confession, she saw a man who looked her squarely in the eyes. He told her he was Doroteo Arango. In church, the priest talked of forgiving debts. La Luna made the mistake of warning her husband that this man Arango was very brave and would not be downtrodden. He needed to think about the uprising of peasants angry enough to kill him. Her husband slapped her and threatened to kill her and ranted about the peasants as though they were rats that should be exterminated. He banished her to her room.

A few days later, as La Luna's husband threatened to send her to the cellar, the bells pealed out and many men invaded their home, including Doroteo Arango. He and his men dragged her husband out to the corral. She fainted and when she awoke, her husband was dead and the rebels had fled ahead of the federal soldiers. They told her that Doroteo was Pancho Villa. After the soldiers left, she got as many of the planks out of the chicken coop as possible and brought them into the house to cover the door down into the cellar. She was not sure what was down there, but if it was anything of value, she wanted it for herself. She heard two gunshots from the cellar. She pulled back the slats to tell whoever was down there to be quiet; she would free him when it became safe.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter explores the type of people who would feel compelled to join a revolution. La Luna's husband has been killed, yet she did not mourn his loss. She abandoned her way of life without regret. She envisioned an importance with Arroyo that she knew she would not have in an arranged marriage. Yet she instinctively knows she will not be enough for Arroyo.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The old gringo leaves Harriet and heads into the railroad car. Arroyo soon follows. Harriet is trying to reach him, to beg him to let the old man live. Harriet knows that she and Arroyo have each substituted the old man as a father figure. La Luna holds her back, knowing that this is a score the men must settle. When Arroyo arrives, he sees that the old man has broken into his box of papers and set fire to the legal documents showing his rights in the property. Arroyo shoots him on the spot. The old man falls dead. Harriet and Arroyo know that nothing will ever be the same. The Indians and servants have been exposed to Americans and Europeans. They no longer need to stay tied to the land. They can be landless and blow like dust in the desert.

Each of the characters must deal with the reality that the Revolution really was bringing permanent change. Each knew that Pancho Villa was bringing change. As the old man died, it began to rain, a remarkable event in the desert. Arroyo pushes his people to accept that everything he has done, he has done for them. He encourages them to think that Pancho Villa will do the same. He tells them he has destroyed everything at the hacienda except for the mirror-lined ballroom. He wanted to destroy every vestige of servitude, but wanted them to be able to see themselves for who they are and what they can accomplish.

His men urge Arroyo to move on, to connect with Villa, or at least follow his orders and head some place rather than hang on at the burned hacienda. The men leave Arroyo alone that night to mull over his choices. La Luna fears what Harriet will do to Arroyo.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The book reaches its climax as the son figure, Arroyo, kills the father figure, the old gringo. Each knows that the father figure must be "killed" as a young man reaches adulthood. The old gringo envisions the death of his own father by fighting for the North in the Civil War when he knew his father was fighting for the Confederacy. Each generation must break away from the prior. Harriet's father abandoned her. Arroyo's father refused to formally recognize him. The old gringo lived long enough to not only reject his own father, but also to be rejected by his children. In a broader sense, a political revolution is a younger generation rejecting an older generation.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Pancho Villa arrives in Camargo, the regional town that is a business hub for the haciendas and landowners. All in power have fled or gone into hiding. Villa rides in on his horse wearing a buckskin suit with gold and silver buttons and buckles. He has the confidence of someone in power and the look of an Indian or Chinese man, with dark hair and inscrutable eyes.

The American reporters are there and a new invention, the movie camera, is there as well. Villa senses how to use reporters to his advantage. There is the atmosphere of a fiesta, as the local people greet him and his men. The reporters ask Villa about his immediate plans and how he will deal with the political realities of the various leaders of the Revolution. Villa tries to laugh it off, when he is questioned about others being sent to Zacatecas to overtake the city, rather than him. He tries to make light of it and says he will offer help if they get bogged down.

The reporters ask Villa about the presence of American troops in Veracruz and the possibility that an American presence in Mexico might expand. Villa states that he believes that by invading Veracruz, the Americans have only bolstered the will of the people to join Villa's side of the Revolution. Further, he reminds them that the Mexican federal soldiers were forced to split up and go several directions, weakening the government's army and making the revolutionaries jobs easier.

The reporters then ask Villa about a rumor that a supposed American officer has been shot in the back and they ask Villa when the body will be returned to America. In truth, Harriet has been spreading the story that her father, a former American soldier, has come from Cuba to see her and make amends before he dies. A reporter tells Villa it is an unwritten law that foreigners should be returned to their native soil to be buried. Villa is furious for several reasons. Tensions among the leaders of the Revolution are rising. Villa, a former cattle rustler, feels hemmed in and knows that supplies to him have been few and far between. He knows other leaders will be able to get to Mexico City before him to claim the glory and the power of the Revolution.

Villa knows that in order to save face with the reporters, he must find out the truth about the American. Secretly, he is trying to buy time while he tries to regain power among the leaders of the Revolution. He jokingly tells the reporters he feels his compatriots are doing such a good job without him, he just might head north into Texas. The reporters do not know that he has dictated a letter to resign from his position, thinking he will make the other leaders of the Revolution realize they can't win major areas of Mexico without him.

Arroyo receives orders to dig up the old gringo and bring his body to Villa. He is told that a newspaper is trying to keep the story alive, but Arroyo knows it must be Harriet who is

spreading the lies. He saw the hatred in her eyes. He had argued with Harriet and told her that by burning his papers, the old gringo had forced Arroyo to kill him. She tells Arroyo that the old gringo wanted to die anyway, but that his life was more important than papers, and that everyone knew he was really Tomas Miranda, the son of the owner of the hacienda.

The plot returns to the time of the first chapter, when the old gringo's body is dug up. Villa orders that it be brought to Camargo and in the dead of night, to be shot again from the front rather than the back. Villa tells his men to spread the story that the American had been captured and killed by the federal soldiers. The old gringo's body is propped up against an outdoor wall in the compound where Villa is staying. Villa orders Arroyo to shoot him again from the front at point blank range. As soon as Arroyo shoots the body, Villa shoots Arroyo, who cries out "Viva Villa" as he is dying. Pancho Villa tells his men that killing Americans could only draw the ire and possible intervention of Americans. He doesn't want America to have any excuse to invade Mexico.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Pancho Villa shows Arroyo layers to the revolution that Arroyo had not appreciated. Villa knows how to work the press, and also knows that he must control how Americans who have come to Mexico are treated, because he knows America could use it as an excuse to invade the country.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Harriet intends to claim the old gringo's body and return it to Washington, D.C. for burial next to her mother. She knows that her real father will never be buried there, but that someday she will be buried there next to her mother and the man she had come to see as a father figure. La Luna comes to get her. Harriet has been thinking about the truths of war and how each person must unmask other feelings as each thinks about death. She knows that the path she has chosen here in Mexico will radically change her future. She knows that now she has enough memories of such momentous events, that she will have years to think upon them.

Harriet and La Luna go to a chapel where the bodies of the old gringo and Tomas Arroyo have been placed. Villa is waiting for them. While La Luna keens over the body of Arroyo, Harriet quietly maintains the facade that the old gringo is her father.

The women and guerillas take the two bodies in coffins out of town. When they reach a crossroads, some go with La Luna and the body of Arroyo. La Luna says she is returning Arroyo to the desert to be buried in an unmarked grave. Pedrito and Mansalvo say their goodbyes to them, saying they Villa ordered them to get Harriet and the gringo's body to the American border.

Colonel Frutos Garcia arrives to pay his respects. Mansalvo and Pedrito are to go with Harriet to the border. He speaks of the look of sorrow on the face of the gringo and how he had come to Mexico to die. He tells her that no harm will come to her because they want her to remember and be a voice about what was happening in Mexico.

Mansalvo saw to Harriet's needs as the group slowly made its way to Ciudad Juarez. Once there, Harriet began the difficult task of making arrangements for the body of an American soldier to be transported to Arlington for burial. Harriet says her goodbyes to Mansalvo and Pedrito. Mansalvo shows her a newspaper clipping he has with the byline and picture of the gringo on it. He says it is a shame he can't read English and drops the article into the Rio Grande. He tells Harriet it is a shame she had not fallen in love with him instead, so that Arroyo would have lived. She doesn't know how to tell him that she has promised to always remember Arroyo, so that a part of him would always live.

The American reporters close in on Harriet. They tell her the story of her father has made national news and someone asks her if it is time for America to go into Mexico to impose democracy and order. She is overwhelmed by the attention. She wants to join the casket.

She blurts out that America must learn to live with Mexico as it is, not as how we want it, and she flees from the reporters. Harriet tries to run close enough to Pedrito and Mansalvo to yell at them: she begs them to forgive her for the death of Arroyo. She yells

that she will always remember Arroyo and that he will live on. However, they are far enough away that they cannot hear her. As she turns back to cross into Texas, she knows her life will be like a dream and that Mexico will always be a part of her.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The plot of the book is coming to conclusions. Arroyo, in spite of his efforts to be a key player in the revolution, will fade away as dust in the desert. His father will never know it was he who ordered the destruction of the hacienda. Pancho Villa, a man he adored and thought of as a father, has killed Arroyo. La Luna will go her own way, as will La Garduna. Harriet returns to America and, ironically, buries the old gringo next to her mother. He has been more of a father figure to her than her own father. Harriet feels guilty for the danger she has brought others, but knows her own attitude toward life is changed forever.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Harriet thinks back upon a dream that Arroyo related to her while they were together. He tells her that in this dream his real mother is legally married to his father and the wife is a spinster off in the shadows of the hacienda. The wife would dress and act like a crone, carrying all of his father's sins. Arroyo told her he longed to be present at the death of his father, so he could shame him by not looking at him as he died. He longed to disinter his body and carry it around, watching it rot, until only the bones were left.

Harriet tells Arroyo there is more than one kind of death and we each carry around our own kind, some already dead on the inside. She relates to Arroyo that all these emotions are new to her. She admits she has had a sheltered life and is overwhelmed by so much death. She tells him that she is trying to understand the Mexicans and the reason for the revolution, but she needs to hang on to her American roots. She says this is the reason she must cling to the old gringo, and if Arroyo kills him, she will never forgive him.

Harriet looks on the bodies of the federal troops who have been laid out on the ground in front of the hacienda. She thinks of the distorted figures she has seen in art by Great Masters and she realizes that the artists may have been trying to get the viewer to realize that a corpse lives within each of us. Harriet thinks of the possibility of all humans as actually being corpses shrouded in living bodies. She thinks of each of them, including Ambrose Bierce, as corpses, temporarily housed in bodies. By actually thinking of his name, she is afraid she has sentenced him to death. She listens as Arroyo tells her that his father had actually been killed in another part of Mexico. He had gone there on business and had taken a servant girl into his room and raped her. Another servant, when he realized what had happened, went to the man's room with others. They killed him and wrapped him up among the linens to hide him. Then they hung his naked body by the scrotum halfway down a well. He told the servant girl to watch the body and tell no one until it was completely rotted. He then fled and joined the Revolution. Arroyo told her he was looking forward to meeting the man who killed his father

Arroyo and Harriet make love one more time. Harriet becomes like an animal. She lets go of all her inhibitions, but in the back of her mind that she can never become one of them. She knows she could not travel with the men as so many women did and that this country, with all of its complications, could never be a homeland for her. She would be an alien who must leave. Coupling with Arroyo could never overcome their differences or offer her a future.

Arroyo plays a game with Harriet by asking her "what if" questions of the past and future. Harriet denies all "what ifs" and says that she fears only what he might do to himself and others. She knows he may have made mistakes that could get him killed.

She even asks him if Pancho Villa might be mad at him for staying so long at the hacienda. He tells her he knows he has gambled heavily by doing this, that Villa will probably be very mad at him. He says it is as though there is a lone wolf chasing him; he feels that he has a being inside who must come out and over whom he has no control.

Harriet knows she can never drop her life and travel with Arroyo like La Luna. She knows she will go back to the life she has known, without the freedom of sexual pleasure and the ability to see things the way she has with him. For this, she hates Arroyo for showing her a life she will never have. Harriet wishes she had been able to be with Ambrose, to stroke his dead body. She wanted to tell him that she had set things in motion, not to avenge his death, but to get even with Arroyo for showing her things she could never have.

Harriet knows she has given Arroyo what he wanted: a young death. She knows that the old gringo has what he wanted: to be a good-looking corpse in Mexico.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The heart of the plot lies in Harriet's words about the corpse within each of us. The differences among people revolve around how they choose to live and choose to die. Harriet knows her limitations in regard to being able to be close and passionate with others. She knows she will never have children. She serves as a contrast to the old gringo, who was in conflict with those he loved through his own passions. Arroyo shows how events can spiral out of control when one is too passionate.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Harriet, alone, sits and remembers.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Harriet shows that survival doesn't always bring happiness, but she is a foil against those who didn't survive.

Characters

Doroteo Arango

See Pancho Villa

Tomás Arroyo

Tomás Arroyo is the general of the revolutionaries. The plan is supposed to be that Arroyo will lead his band of soldiers across the northern state of Mexico and meet up with the forces of Pancho Villa later to attack Mexico City. In reality, though, Arroyo is hesitant to leave his encampment at the Miranda hacienda. The Mirandas were a wealthy family, "owners of half the state of Chihuahua and parts of Durango and Coahuila as well." Arroyo is the illegitimate result of a union between the head of the Miranda family and one of the servants, and though he was raised on the estate, he has never been recognized as a relative. Now that the revolution has driven the Mirandas out, Arroyo seems to relish his position as master of the household, and he hesitates leading his troops' departure.

Arroyo has a box of documents in his possession that was given to him by another servant on the estate, Graciano, an old man who died soon after turning the papers over. Arroyo explains that the ancient documents grant the land to his people, by order of the King of Spain, but as Bierce points out, Arroyo is illiterate and does not really know what is written on the papers.

Arroyo develops an intimate relationship with Harriet on the night that the revolutionaries are celebrating a victory over the federal forces, a victory due in large part to Bierce's reckless bravery. In part, Arroyo wants her because she is someone to whom he can explain his people's struggle, as well as someone cultured and sophisticated who can recognize him for more than a greedy criminal. However, his actions toward Harriet are also motivated by jealousy for the admiration that she shows Bierce.

When Bierce destroys the documents toward which Arroyo had been so reverent, Arroyo kills him in frustration. Harriet, angry with him, shouts out, "You poor bastard. You are Tomás Miranda," humiliating him by implying that he has the same values as his land-owning father. After having the corpse of the old gringo executed "properly," Pancho Villa tricks Arroyo into standing near the gringo's body against the wall: "Give him the coup de grace," he tells Arroyo, "you know you're like a son to me. Do it well. We have to do everything aboveboard and according to the law. This time I don't want you to make me any mistakes." He then gives the firing squad the order to shoot Arroyo, and fires the final, lethal bullet into Arroyo himself.

Ambrose Bierce

Part of the story of the old gringo□his death□ is based on the fate of William Benton, a British citizen who was beaten to death by Pancho Villa's men, and whose body was later dug up, formally executed, and sent home. The rest of the gringo's story is based on what is known about the last days of the writer Ambrose Bierce. Most of the details given about the character in the book fit with the facts of Bierce's life: he was a satirist, short-story writer, and journalist, who lived in San Francisco for much of his life and wrote for the newspaper chain owned by William Randolph Hearst. In 1913, at the age of seventy-one, Bierce left everything he had and went to Mexico to join Pancho Villa and his band. There is no historical record of what happened to Bierce after he crossed the border, and this is where the novel picks up his story.

A well-known cynic, the old gringo is tired of the hypocrisy of American life, and of life in general: he describes himself to Harriet Winslow as "[a] contemptible muckraking reporter at the service of a baron of the press as corrupt as any I denounce in his name. I attack the honor and dishonor of all men, without distinction. In my time, I was feared and hated." Having traveled to Mexico to die in the revolution, Bierce has the advantage of not fearing death in battle. This attitude earns him the admiration of the revolutionary band he joins after he rides straight into the enemy's gunfire.

The old gringo's relationship with the schoolteacher Harriet Winslow, however, gives him something for which to live. His relationship with Harriet is complex. To a certain degree they are lovers: the narrator explains that she gives him, not Arroyo, the right to dream about her. However, their relationship never becomes a physical one, like the relationship Harriet has with Arroyo. To both Harriet and Arroyo, Bierce is a father figure, replacing the fathers that rejected them both in childhood. The old gringo, however, is later killed by Arroyo after the gringo burns Arroyo's precious papers.

Frutos Garcia

Frutos Garcia is a colonel in the revolutionary army; he is one of the people responsible for digging up the old gringo's body in the opening scene. He appears periodically throughout the novel, expressing opinions about the actions of the three main characters and explaining Mexican customs to Harriet. At a certain point, Harriet recalls that it was Colonel Garcia who gave the order to kill his friend Mansalvo after Mansalvo was caught stealing gold coins from a derailed train car in Charco Blanco.

La Garduña

La Garduña joined the revolution from a house of prostitution in Durango. She plans to be buried in holy ground when she dies; her family is going to tell the priest that she is her virginal Aunt Josefa. Harriet saves La Garduña's two-year-old child from choking by sucking the phlegm out of her mouth and earns La Garduña's gratitude.

BOOKRAGS

Graciano

An old man on the Miranda hacienda while Arroyo was growing up, Graciano was responsible for winding all of the clocks, and so was entrusted with keys to all of the rooms. When he took young Tomás Arroyo with him on his rounds one day, and let the boy carry his key ring, the master of the house severely admonished him. Graciano taught the boy about dignity and refusing charity. Before he died, he gave the box of ancient papers with the seal of the King of Spain to young Arroyo to watch over.

La Luna

La Luna is one of Arroyo's lovers. She met him when he hid in the basement of her house in a small town in Durango. Her husband was a moneylender, and when the revolutionaries came through town they took him out to the corral and shot him. Arroyo was trapped in the basement when Federal troops came chasing the revolutionaries—the moneylender had nailed boards over the basement door. La Luna pulled the boards up after the troops left, saving Arroyo's life.

Inocencio Mansalvo

Inocencio Mansalvo is a Mexican peasant who is traveling with the revolutionary band. He was a peasant field-worker before he joined them. At the end, after the death of Arroyo and Bierce, it is Mansalvo who is responsible for escorting Harriet back to the American border. There, she takes her first good look at him: "He was a thin man, with green eyes and hair black as an Oriental's; two deep clefts furrowed his cheeks, two marked the corners of his mouth, and two crossed his forehead, all in pairs, as if twin artisans had hurriedly hacked him out with a machete, the sooner to thrust him out in the world.... Until this minute, she had never *looked* at this man." In her last moments with Mansalvo, Harriet comes to understand the Mexican people better.

Old Gringo

See Ambrose Bierce

Pedrito

See Pedro

Pedro

Pedro is the eleven-year-old boy who first talks to Bierce and leads him into the camp of the revolutionaries. He gains respect for Bierce when the old man shoots a peso in the air, and Arroyo lets Pedro keep the peso as a souvenir. Pedro's last words to the old

gringo's corpse as it is shipped across the border are, "The way you wanted it, old man. Pancho Villa himself gave you the coup de grace."

Pancho Villa

Pancho Villa was a real person in the Mexican revolution. In the book, he is presented as a showman who knows how to manipulate the American reporters who follow him. When the press asks about the person who was shot in the back by his people, Villa has the body of Bierce dug up out of his grave and shot again, from the front, so that the revolutionaries will not get a bad reputation. Then he has his soldiers kill Arroyo for embarrassing the revolution with the shooting of the old gringo.

Raul Walsh

Raul Walsh is the photographer traveling with Pancho Villa. Walsh is one of the novel's actual historical personalities: he was one of the pioneers of silent movies.

Harriet Winslow

A thirty-one-year-old woman from Washington, DC, Harriet lived with her mother and was engaged to marry a corporate lobbyist, Mr. Delaney, who idealized her and would not have sex with her until after they married. Her father had left to fight in the army in Cuba when Harriet was sixteen, and she never saw him again: for years, Harriet and her mother lived on the pension the government sent them because it was thought her father was killed in the war. However, Harriet knew from a letter he had sent that he actually had moved in with another woman.

An older Harriet moves to Mexico to become the schoolteacher for the Miranda family. However, when she arrives, the wealthy family has abandoned their huge home and it has been taken over by Arroyo and his band of revolutionaries. Harriet decides to stay because she feels responsible for the Mirandas' house, having received a month's salary in advance from them. She also intends to teach American ways to the children of the revolutionaries. In Bierce, Harriet finds a substitute for the father who abandoned her, and in Arroyo, she finds the promise of romantic adventure, and also a sympathetic figure who understands what it is like to be rejected by one's father. Harriet explains to Bierce that her sexual relationship with Arroyo is only to keep him from taking the old gringo's life, although the satisfaction she feels during the experience is real and profound.

After Arroyo kills Bierce, Harriet returns to Washington and tells reporters that Arroyo shot down an officer in the American army. This news brings political pressure on the revolutionaries which results in Arroyo's death. Harriet also tells U.S. government officials that the old gringo was her father, who had actually survived the Cuban invasion and had come to Mexico to rescue her. Thus, Bierce is buried in her father's grave at Arlington National Cemetery. The novel begins and ends with Harriet as an old

woman, sitting alone in her apartment in Washington, remembering the events of her trip to Mexico.

Themes

Identity

All three of the principal characters in this novel have mixed feelings of both love and hatred toward their fathers. When Ambrose Bierce, the old gringo, charges recklessly toward the guns of the Federal troops and is triumphant, his first words are "I have killed my father." He imagines himself, having grown older and increasingly bitter, as having "invented myself a new family, a family of my imagination, through my Club of Parenticides, the target of destruction." He has even lost his chance to identify with his own children because one son became an alcoholic and the other took his own life, mirroring Bierce's own cynical attitude.

Harriet Winslow's sense of herself is based on her idea of honor, which is both supported and offended by memories of her father. The official story that is accepted by the war department is that he died serving his country during the 1898 invasion of Cuba, and in his honor, the U.S. government has sent his pension checks to Harriet and her mother. Harriet's secret shame is that she knows her father did not die in battle but abandoned his family to live with a woman who, because she was a Negro, was considered to be from a lower social order in early twentieth-century America. In a way, Harriet's affair with the Mexican peasant Tomás Arroyo is based on her identification with her father.

Arroyo's father would not acknowledge his illegitimate son's existence: Arroyo remembers an incident from when he was nine years old, when a trusted servant allowed him to hold the ring of keys that opened all of the doors of the house, and the father shouted at the servant to "take those keys from the brat." Arroyo's strong sense of self comes from the mysterious documents that he cannot read, which he counts on to establish his legitimate claim to the land. This situation puts him in the odd position of being a Mexican revolutionary who counts on the authority of the King of Spain to give him a sense of self. For Arroyo's followers, taking over the Miranda estate is a victory of the poor over the rich, but for him it represents an ascension to his rightful place in the world, as heir to his father's possessions.

Culture Clash

Ambrose Bierce goes to Mexico to die in this novel, because to him Mexico is a strange and dangerous frontier. He knows that it is a place where he can die fighting, and not just wallow away in corruption as he would in America. "Let me imagine for you a future of power, force, oppression, pride, indifference," Bierce tells General Arroyo. When the general relates these words to the fate of the revolution, Bierce makes another statement that applies equally to the country and to the man: "The only way you will escape corruption is to die young."

The novel presents the Mexican revolution as a product of uncorrupted society, probably the only place on the continent where hope is earned fairly. The Mexican establishment, represented by landowners like Miranda and the Federal troops that guard them, is well on its way to moral impurity. The height of corruption is represented by wealthy Americans, such as William Randolph Hearst, Leland Stanford, and Harriet's fiancé, Delaney, who is false to his business associates and false to himself about their relationship. The lower-class Mexicans, however, do not see the differences between the two countries as being about corruption and violence. To them, the United States represents the kind of wealth for which they can dare to hope. As Harriet leaves the peasant Inocencio Mansalvo, the novel explains, "she knew that he would always keep an eye on the long northern border of Mexico, because for Mexicans the only reason for war was always the gringos." One culture is violent and the other refined, one corrupt and the other pure: "what mattered was to live with Mexico in spite of progress and democracy," Harriet thinks at the end, "that each of us carries his Mexico and his United States within him, a dark and bloody frontier we dare cross only at night: that's what the old gringo had said."

Death

Death is not feared by the characters in *The Old Gringo.* The Mexicans who encounter Bierce early in the novel acknowledge the fact that he came to Mexico to die. In the novel, the gringo quotes the real Ambrose Bierce in explaining why he welcomes death on his trip: "To be a gringo in Mexico, ah, that is euthanasia." Going to Mexico is Bierce's way of putting himself out of his misery, of freeing himself from the complications of American life that he knows are false. He gains the respect of Arroyo's men by riding straight into enemy gunfire because the possibility of death does not frighten him. Arroyo himself is quite fearless, fully aware that success in the revolution would eventually make him as corrupt as the heartless, passionless men he is fighting to overthrow, like President Diaz, who, he points out, was once a revolutionary like himself.

Perhaps the most stirring symbol of death in this story is the open grave at Arlington National Cemetery that is waiting for the body of Harriet Winslow's father. According to one story, Major Winslow was a war hero who died serving his country, but another story holds that he lived out his life in a cheap apartment with his mistress. Either way, the same open grave awaits him. In the end, the grave is filled with the body of Ambrose Bierce, an exalted resting place for someone who went to Mexico to die in anonymity. Bierce states throughout the story that he wants to leave a good-looking corpse: having been shot, exhumed and shot again, his corpse is not in good physical shape, but it is given a hallowed resting place, while the corpse of Tomás Arroyo is put out in the desert to be forgotten.

Style

Structure

The action in *The Old Gringo* is structured within a framing device; that is, the main part of the novel is "framed" by scenes of Harriet Winslow described in the present tense, sitting in her apartment in Washington and reflecting on events long past. Periodically throughout the course of the novel this present-tense Harriet is mentioned briefly, reminding readers that the story being told is not being narrated directly but is a summary of one character's memories. Many novels use a framing device to contain their story within a particular context, but *The Old Gringo* has an even more complex structure: it presents a frame within a frame. The first and last settings are in Harriet's apartment, but the second and second-to-last actions happen after the death of the gringo, with the exhuming of his body coming in chapter two, and the story of how Arroyo was executed□which should come right after the exhumation chronologically□coming in the last chapters. This makes Harriet's final days in Mexico a frame that is in itself framed by her sitting in her apartment.

Symbolism

Fuentes writes in a way that makes the most of the objects with which his characters interact, raising them to a symbolic level beyond their role in the telling of the story. One example of this is the way that Arroyo talks about the worm in the bottle of tequila in chapter five: "The worm eats some things and you eat others. But if you eat things like I was in El Paso ... then the worm will attack you because you don't know him and he doesn't know you, Indiana General." Obviously, Arroyo's speech has greater significance than just a worm, which is drowned in liquor, and so readers are led to assume that his point about familiarity and different types of foods relates to Mexicans and Americans.

Fuentes's use of symbolism is not subtle, and should be clear even to those readers who do not approach novels as puzzles. The mirrors in the ballroom represent self-awareness: if this is not clear from Bierce's oft-repeated question, "Did you look at yourself in the mirrors when you entered the ballroom?," the point is hard to avoid when General Arroyo explains that he left the ballroom unburned so that his men could see themselves. Another object in the story that is too mysterious to have less-than-symbolic value is the packet of ancient documents that Arroyo handles with such tenderness. The reader is never told whether they actually give legitimacy to Arroyo's claim to land, though it is implied that they do not. The important thing is not their actual worth, but what they mean to Arroyo: they represent his social legitimacy, and he believes in the documents so much, even though he cannot read them, that he kills Bierce out of frustration when they are burned. One final obvious symbol is the "open grave" in Arlington National Cemetery: of course, the cemetery would not leave a hole in

the ground waiting for someone who disappeared, but the phrasing of this item reminds readers of the chasm, the empty void, waiting for everyone at death.

Oedipus Complex

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, coined the term "Oedipus complex." It refers to the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus, who was sent away as an infant and, running into his birth father years later, did not recognize him and killed him, later marrying the man's wife□Oedipus's mother. In psychiatry, the Oedipus complex refers to the unconscious desire that makes a person wish to eliminate the parent of his or her own gender and replace the missing parent. In this story, Bierce is the acknowledged father figure, and the feelings that both Harriet Winslow and Tomás Arroyo have for him are nearly textbook examples of the psychoanalytic design. Arroyo sees himself in sexual competition with Bierce for Harriet's love, and it is for psychological reasons that he ends up shooting Bierce, who could otherwise have been an asset to his revolutionary cause. Harriet is attracted to Bierce as a father, as indicated in her near-panic regarding his relationship with his own daughter: after asking twice about his daughter during their most intimate conversation, she nearly screams out, "And your daughter?," as the narrator explains, "with a stubborn, controlled coldness." In the end, she adopts Bierce as her father and has him entombed under her father's name for all time.

In addition to their father-son-daughter triangle, each of the main characters has a desire to replace lost fathers. Even the old man, Bierce, thinks often about how much he is like his father: "The gringo thought how ironic it was that he the son was traveling the same road his father had followed in 1847." Arroyo never manages to move his troops out of the hacienda where his father□who had been violently chased away□ignored him throughout his childhood. And Harriet spends much time musing on the probable sex life of her father and his probable mistress.

Historical Context

Before the Revolution

Long before the revolution, which serves as the context for this novel, Mexico was a country steeped in political turmoil. In the early sixteenth century, conquerors from Europe overcame the indigenous peoples who lived there, notably the Maya, Aztecs, Olmecs, and Toltecs. Spain ruled the country as a colony from 1535 to 1821, when revolutionary forces were able to gain independence, in part because Spain itself was occupied by France.

Independence was followed by a series of revolts, as the country struggled to establish a unified national identity. President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, elected in 1933, tried to bring the numerous provinces that made up the country under one central government, which raised the question of who controlled Texas, leading to the Mexican-American war of 1846 to 1848. America won the war, and, in turn,Texas, and the border between the two countries was established as the Rio Grande River (which the old gringo crosses at the beginning of the novel).

After the war, the balance of power in Mexico shifted several times. Estate owners, many of whom did not live near their lands but only reaped the benefits of them, struggled against the peasantry who worked the lands. Uprisings broke out at different times, in different parts of the country. The liberal Benito Pablo Juarez led the fight for a new constitution in 1858, which included such benefits for the citizenry as freedom of speech and the right to vote for all males. He was elected president in 1861, but he incurred the wrath of Spain, France, and Great Britain by refusing to pay interest on loans from them: those countries sent invading forces to Mexico, and as a result, Juarez and his cabinet fled into exile for several years, during which a conservative government favoring the land owners took power. Juarez returned to power in 1865.

In 1877, Porfirio Diaz was elected president, a post that he held, with one brief interruption, until he was ousted by the revolution in 1910. Diaz had been a soldier during the political turmoil and ran unsuccessfully for the presidency twice, in 1867 and 1871. He led military uprisings after each defeat. During Diaz's tenure, Mexico became an active participant in the world economy, but the peasantry were discontent, left unable to share in the wealth that was generated.

The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1920

In 1910, the Republic of Mexico was actually run as a dictatorship under President Diaz's control. Diaz had brought stability to the country and helped build its economy early in his long presidency, but he and his followers became increasingly totalitarian as the years went by. In order to build up the country's infrastructure and to provide government contracts for his friends, Diaz had to raise money by turning over more and

more land to foreign interests, taking it out of the control of poor Mexicans. In 1910, Francisco I. Madero led a successful revolution against Diaz, sending him into exile, and in 1911 Madero was elected president.

Madero, however, did not deliver the country back to the people, and he became unpopular by allowing corruption to fester. In 1913, one of his generals, Victoriano Huerta, a former Diaz supporter, led a counterrevolution, took control of the government, and had Madero killed. Although Madero had been unpopular, the people deeply resented his murder. Several branches of revolution broke out across the country. The governor of Coahuila, Venustiano Carranza, led one; Emaliano Zapata led the revolution in the southern state of Morelos; and in Chihuahua, the revolution was led by Francisco ("Pancho") Villa, who appears as a character in *The Old Gringo.* The American press portrayed the media-savvy Villa as a modern-day Robin Hood.

In July of 1914, with his own people and the international community opposing him, Huerta resigned and left the country. The capital was taken over by followers of Carranza. Soon, Carranza was at odds with the other leaders of the revolution; in 1915, his forces fought against Villa's, and by 1916, Villa had lost any official claim on the government and was leading a band of outlaws in making raids across the Texas border. President Woodrow Wilson sent U.S. troops under the command of General John "Blackjack" Pershing into Mexico to capture Villa. A new constitution in 1917 established Carranza as the country's president, but he was ousted and murdered in 1920, replaced by a former ally, General Alvaro Obregon.

Critical Overview

The Old Gringo has remained one of Carlos Fuentes's most widely read novels, in part because of the star-studded Hollywood movie adaptation that followed shortly after its publication. Many of the early reviews of the book expressed admiration for the story and for Fuentes as an author and as a writer. At the same time, though, many reviewers held back their praise, unsure about the novel's cool style. Earl Shorris's review in *The New York Times Review of Books* showed deep respect for the issues that Fuentes touches upon in *The Old Gringo:* "It is the work of an integrated personality, the artist who contains and illuminates all of the times and cultures of a nation." Shorris had difficulty finding fault. "The only serious flaw for me is that the book may be too concise. I wished for details to more fully realize the characters, to limit them less by their symbolic roles."

Gloria Norris mentioned in her review of *The Old Gringo* in *America* that "Fuentes uses the approach of the poet rather than the novelist." She went on to praise his rendering of Washington, DC, over his descriptions of the Mexican settings, adding that, "surprisingly, his Mexican figures are more like statuesque figures in a mural, while Bierce and Harriet are given more depth." Neither of Norris's comments are negative, but they both touch upon the most frequent causes of discomfort among reviewers: that this novel about Mexico is too distant from both its characters and its country.

John Seabrook, writing for *The Nation,* said early in his review that *"The Old Gringo* is a fascinating novel to reflect on, though at times a dense, bewildering one to read." Like Norris, Seabrook was more impressed with Fuentes's handling of his American characters, feeling that the Mexican characters functioned as symbols, as explanations for the mind of modern Mexico, rather than as people. Thomas R. Edwards picked up on the same idea in his review. After explaining the symbolic positions of Arroyo, Winslow, and Bierce, he pointed out that their symbolic functions were sometimes too simplistic, that the author was trying too hard to convey ideas about sociology. "This triptych of characters risks being too obvious a device to show the distance between Mexican and American minds," Edwards wrote in *The New York Review of Books,* "but Fuentes sometimes forces the point he wants to make about them on the reader□there are a few too many remarks like 'each of us carries his Mexico and his United States within him' or 'be us and still be yourself' or 'I want to learn to live with Mexico. I don't want to save it.'"

Michiko Kakutani took an opposite view, explaining in *The New York Times* that Fuentes's cultural and racial myths actually bring life to the love triangle the novel is centered around, making it "as inevitable as it is real." One of the least forgiving reviews was written by noted novelist, poet, and playwright John Updike, for *The New Yorker.* Updike expressed admiration for what Fuentes was trying to achieve, but even more pressing for him was his regret that, in his opinion, *The Old Gringo* is "a very stilted effort, static and wordy, a series of tableaux costumed in fustian and tinted a kind of sepia I had not thought commercially available since the passing of Stephen Vincent Benet." While other reviewers appreciated the novel's enchanting, heavily stylized tone,

Updike could not accept the falseness of what is presented: he could not suspend his disbelief long enough to find much to admire in the book. "Fuentes is certainly intelligent," he concludes, "but his novel lacks intelligence in the sense of a speaking mind responsively interacting with recognizable particulars. Its dreamlike and betranced gaze, its brittle grotesquerie do not feel intrinsic or natural: its surrealism has not been earned by any concentration on the real."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

McIntosh-Byrd is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. In the following essay she looks at Carlos Fuentes's The Old Gringo *as a critique of the Western-European traditions of philosophy and narrative.*

The Old Gringo is a novel about borders□ about the boundaries that demarcate countries, separate minds and cultures, and mark the edges and turning points of linear history. It is also a novel about the falsity of those borders□presenting a structural and textual collapse of distinctive chronologies, viewpoints, identities, and narratives. Carlos Fuentes's book takes on form among the multitudes of discrete stories and histories. It generates itself at the points of impact between nineteenth-century U.S. novels and Mexican peasant oral history, between journalism and fiction, playing with the harmonies that are produced from the simultaneous speech of disparate voices.

Even on its most basic level, that of plot, *The Old Gringo* is a hybrid text, combining fact□Ambrose Bierce□and fiction□a version of what may have happened to him□in its choice of subject matter. Just as in the work of the Hearst journalists, from whose ranks Bierce had himself recently escaped, fictional invention is allied to historical fact, and the personal agendas of writers, storytellers, and historians are brought to the forefront. In creating the alliance between fact and history; in providing border crossings for the frontier that seems to separate them; Fuentes makes a powerful case for the contingent, poetic, and socially constructed nature of life, history, and writing. In doing so, he offers a powerful alternative to the tradition of Western-European literature, and a critique of the assumptions that underlie its structures.

Perhaps the single most powerful recurring image in Fuentes's novel is that of "the self" reflected in a mirror. If the ramifications of this image are traced, the critique that Fuentes is offering becomes much easier to understand, as do the structural purposes of his complex narrative style. Within the Western psychoanalytic tradition associated with the French philosopher Lacan, this mirror image has pivotal importance in understanding how human personalities are constructed. According to Lacanian theory, the turning point in human development comes when a child sees his or her reflection in a mirror and understands for the first time that the person reflected is not a stranger, but him- or herself. In other words, the child first objectifies and then accepts herself as an individual□ a physical and social entity separate and removed from others, who are also understood to be individuals. With this separation comes a full awareness of personal identity, need and desire□the Ego, which literally translates as, "I am." To put it another way, the Western tradition understands human development as the successful imposition of a series of boundaries, especially the mental boundary that creates a line of demarcation between "self" and "other." As the Old Gringo says, the greatest and final frontier is not that which marks the border between the United States and Mexico, but the "frontier" within our own minds.

Fuentes's novel can be read as an extended examination of this way of thinking, an attack on Western theories of individuality and the kind of reality they construct.

BOOKRAGS

Nowhere is this clearer than in his reworking of Lacan's mirror theory. Western individualism of the kind outlined above is exemplified in the characters of the Old Gringo and Harriet Winslow. Before they begin to lose their coherence and blend into one another, realizing that "each of us exists only in the imagination of another," they reach out to each other by sharing their life stories. This formalized exchange of individual, narrative accounts of themselves is predicated on very specific understandings of history and personality from which certain cultures and peoples are excluded. Inocencio Mansalvo's voice interjects itself into their conversation to point this out, in a narrative moment typical of the novel's methods. "They live a life we don't understand," he says:

Do they want to know more about our lives? Well, they will have to make them up, because we're still nothing and nobody.

The Americans' gradual realization that their identities are neither so contained nor so separated as they have been taught to believe is figured throughout the novel by the image of the mirror. The question that haunts Harriet throughout the text is the Gringo's insistent need to know if she looked at her reflection. Turning up again and again throughout the book in fragments and ellipses, the Gringo asks her, "Harriet, when we entered the ballroom, did you look at yourself in the mirror?" When she makes love to Tomás Arroyo in the ballroom and embraces the continuum of life and love for the first time, Harriet is surrounded by mirrors at which she doesn't look. In effect, she must deny the validity of Western individualism in order to live. The fact that she cannot stay is linked to her awareness of the roomful of reflections that surround her—this will be only a temporary respite from isolation. In the first and last lines of the novel she is returned to her "bordered" self—"Now she sits alone and remembers."

As Inocencio Mansalvo's words, quoted above, make clear, the Mexican peasant voices of *The Old Gringo* express no sense of personal individuality—not as it is understood by the Gringo and Harriet. The North-American sense of self-contained identity that makes life-story telling possible is absent. Prior to the revolution, the peasants are caught in an unstriated and perpetual "pre-mir-ror" stage. As illustrated by their astonishment in front of the mirrors, the revolution represents a psychological revolution that is as great as the simultaneous socio-political one. Arroyo explains the peasants' reaction to their reflections—silence and subsequent jubilation—to Harriet in terms that are strongly resonant of Lacanian theory:

They had never seen their whole bodies before. They didn't know their bodies were more than a piece of their imagination or a broken reflection in a river. Now they know.

The identities of the oppressed and the colonized are here shown to be hybrid self-compositions of history, imagination, and partial viewing—just like the novel itself. Resistance and self-determination conversely require an initial understanding of the powers and limitations of people as individuals. Arroyo's fatal weakness and his greatest source of power are the same thing—his possession of a sense of self as clearly defined as that of the gringos. In this way, it is his need for *personal* revenge on his father, Miranda, that leads him to stay too long at the hacienda and then to murder Bierce

when his documented rights to the hacienda are destroyed. Both of these acts of proprietary self-interest doom him—placing him in opposition to the Villa-established revolutionary principle of movement. As he says, he is fighting because he understands injustice as it relates to *him,* because he understands himself as an individual who can resist. It is:

All because one day I discovered the ballroom of mirrors and I discovered I had a face and a body. I could see myself. Tomás Arroyo.

All of the leaders of the revolution, especially Pancho Villa, need to establish themselves as individuals in this way in order to revolt. In so doing they begin to mimic the cheap political expediency of the "yellow journalists," as the symbiotic association of Villa with the Hearst press corps makes clear. What Fuentes's novel as a textual whole presents is an attempt to "freeze" the process of movement into one narrative moment—a blend of perspectives, realities, and times that the Gringo understands as part of the process of revolution— the principle of revolution, as it were. Caught between an unknowing "pre-mirror" stage, and a self-interested individualist stage, the novel's technique of assemblage allows the characters to be always "becoming"—always moving restlessly forwards, backwards, and sideways in time, with narrative history as a principle of movement instead of a delimiting act of definition.

The expression of this idea can be seen clearly in Fuentes's literalization and use of the metaphor "to burn one's bridges." Bierce, the product of a linear culture, leaves the El Paso railway bridge burning behind him when he crosses into Mexico. He has come here to die and there is no turning back. When Harriet returns to Washington, she too leaves behind a crossing in flames. For both of them, return across chronological or developmental boundaries is impossible. Significantly, the Gringo crosses his burning bridge with a copy *of Don Quixote* in his suitcase. A powerful satire of quest narratives, this text serves as a commentary on the Western culture and personalities of Bierce and Winslow. As a book that is often credited with the creation of the modern novel, the presence of *Don Quixote* signals that the nature and history of Western narrative is being called into question. At the same time, the text's major theme, that heroic quests are a symptom of madness, subtly undercuts the Gringo's heroism and his stated mission.

As all of the Mexican characters realize, Bierce's bravery in battle, his fearlessness, is the product of a kind of narrative derangement. His obsession with the end of the story, the fact that he has "come to Mexico to die" by offering his services to Villa's troops, is as much a deluded product of Romance literature as Don Quixote's "tilting at windmills." The bridge burning behind the Gringo thus becomes symptomatic of his inability to understand life as anything other than a linear narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. Only later, when it's too late for him to stop what he has set in motion, will he start to realize that his obsession with his "ending" has prevented him from living. His Calvinist sense of Predestination—the fated nature of individual lives—is contrasted with the populist Catholicism of the Mexican lower classes. Where Calvinism offers no alternative to the prescribed ending, stating that individual souls are bound either for

heaven or hell and can do nothing to alter their fate, Catholicism offers an endless process of change and redemption through confession and acts of contrition.

In this way, the Gringo's quest□his initial belief that his life will be ended in Mexico and that his fate is decided by a determined set of actions□ is linked to his Calvinism, and both are tied to his role as an author. His trained, conscious mind turns his shifting dreams into "an elaborate plot peopled with details, structures, and incidents." The power of the story he has invented for himself, the power of storytelling, and the impact of his religious childhood make him unable to embrace the multitude of possibilities that revolutionary Mexican culture offers. As Harriet says, in their way of thinking they have crippled themselves by folding "death into life"□allowing "the end" to take over the story. When Arroyo arrives at the Mirandas' hacienda, the buildings are burning *before* him. In effect, "the end" precedes him. His bridges are burnt before he comes to them, undermining normative narrative conventions of cause and effect, just as the secret of his motivation comes out only in the final pages of the novel.

By positioning it this way, Fuentes allows us to question the logic of traditional novels, the conventions of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman that demand an orderly, logical progression of character development and motivation. In dissolving the first and greatest boundary of the Western-European tradition, the boundary between ourselves and others, *The Old Gringo* dissolves all of the philosophical and social boundaries that govern literary representation. In so doing, the novel calls into question the abiding myths of Western culture itself. They too are "figments of someone else's imagination," and the only real border is in the mind□"a dark and bloody frontier we dare cross only at night."

Source: Tabitha McIntosh-Byrd, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000.

In the following excerpt, Hall examines Fuentes's handling of the female perspective in The Old Gringo *and illustrates parallels between the novel and "elegiac Western" films "which are characterized by a quality of lament for the passing of the hero, and by extension, of the heroic age of the American West."*

The opening of *The Old Gringo* (1985), by Carlos Fuentes, sets in place the chief organizing principle of the novel, the narrated memories of Harriet Winslow, an unmarried schoolteacher from Washington, D.C., who, the reader discovers, once came to Mexico to instruct the children of the rich *hacendado* Miranda family and there became embroiled in the Revolution. Her contacts with the *uil-lista* general Tomas Arroyo and the Old Gringo polarize her experiences between an apparent infatuation with Arroyo and an attempt to substitute the Gringo for her lost father. In her memories of the incidents which led her to place the body of the Old Gringo in her father's empty tomb in Arlington, an elegiac tone□one of mourning for lost experience as well as a questioning of the value of that experience□is clearly discernible. Like the heroine of a classic Western film such as *The Virginian* (1929), Harriet, as the "Eastern school-marm" character type, confronts the heroic Westerner, in this case "doubled" into the figures of the Old Gringo and Arroyo, and in the process re-examines her own preconceptions about civilization. She becomes conscious of her marginalization from

the society around her, as an intellectual woman who questions her past and present. One concern of the discussion here will be the importance of the female perspective in the elegiac Western narrative: rather than a mere foil or pretext for the hero's actions, the female character serves a critical function in clarifying the degree and nature of the hero's loss of relevance in present-day society. The heroic figures themselves, the Old Gringo and Arroyo, can lay strong claim to kinship to the heroes (and villains) of Western film and fiction. Equally larger-than-life and ironically viewed, the Old Gringo has the superhuman marksmanship and courage of classic Western heroes such as the Ethan Edwards of John Wayne or the Shane of Alan Ladd. But he carries about him a cynicism and world-weariness which, though mirroring his real-life source in Ambrose Bierce, yet recall the elegiac musings of the aging gunfighters J. B. Books of *The Shootist,* Steven Judd of *Ride the High Country,* and Pike Bishop of *The Wild Bunch.*

The term "elegiac Westerns" has been applied by popular culture and film critics such as Michael Marsden and John Cawelti to Western films which are characterized by a quality of lament for the passing of the hero, and by extension, of the heroic age of the American West. These Westerns share the central element of a frequently poetic treatment, anywhere on a scale from ironic to tragic, of the myths and heroes of the Old West as cultural icons whose time has passed, usually with some indication of the influence of technology on their passing. They share the quality of nostalgia found in the literary Western as typified by Zane Grey and Owen Wister. The motif of the gunfighter cognizant that "his days are over," as the titular hero of *Shane* is told, is frequent, as is the tendency for many of the heroes of these films to be aging. The element of the now vulnerable hero, an erstwhile near-superman with a six-shooter, may be tragic, as in *Ride the High Country* or *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* or it may be savagely, even morbidly ironic, as in *The Wild Bunch.* But in all cases, the once invincible hero of dime-novel Westerns has become a complex representation of a member of an age which has passed and whose violent solution to once simple situations has now become either outmoded, as in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* or merely criminal, as in *The Wild Bunch:* Pike and Bishop could at an earlier stage of their development (or decline) have been Stephen Judd and his friend Gil.

Much as the aging, sick, and outdated hero of *The Shootist* (1976), played with understated sensitivity and power by John Wayne, wishes to die with self-respect, so too does the Old Gringo wish to die in a moment and manner chosen by him. Both characters shun their reputations. The Old Gringo avoids mentioning his name or revealing significant autobiographical data, such as his association with William Randolph Hearst, to anyone but Harriet. Similarly, Books, the aging shootist, is reluctant, at least at first, for the truth about his identity to get around the small town to which he has come, as he does not wish to give fame-hungry guns a chance to prove themselves. He even forces a Ned Buntline-like newspaperman to leave his boarding house at gunpoint after hearing his publicity scheme.

Important to *The Shootist* is the discrepancy between the myths or legends which have formed around Books and in general around the figure of the gunfighter, as opposed to the historical reality of such figures as well as, in this case, the personal biographical facts about J. B. Books. In *The Old Gringo,* a similar conflict between historical fact,

legend, and falsification of history is established, since the character of the Gringo is based on the historical figure Ambrose Bierce: their "biographies." as Joaquin Roy has shown, tend to intersect in several ways, the chief of which is their journey to Mexico with the intention of dying or disappearing.

The picture given of Books and of the Gringo is well-removed from "history." The Fuentes narrative, filtered through the recollections of Winslow, presents a picture of the Gringo, who only slowly comes to be revealed as Ambrose Bierce; his anonymity is maintained during the earlier part of the novel, until he begins to reveal himself to Harriet. The Gringo character, presented in legendary proportions (as in the battle scenes or the early incident of heroic "proof," in which the Gringo demonstrates his marksmanship), is in part derived from legends about Bierce, especially the tale about his disappearance in Mexico. As Joe Nickell has suggested in his "Biography: The Disappearance of Ambrose Bierce" *[Literary Investigation: Texts, Sources, and "Factual" Substructs of Literature and Interpretation,* UMI Press, 1987] this tale may have been fabricated by Bierce to cover his withdrawal from society, perhaps to live in Colorado until his expected death, probably from suicide. In any case, the Gringo, or Bierce, becomes as much a part of Winslow's perspectivist recollections as does the portrait of the Mexican Revolution which emerges from such mythmaking works as *Vámanos con Pancho Villa! [Let's Go with Pancho Villa!]* (1949), by Rafael Luis Muñoz.

Similarly, J. B. Books is placed into parallel in an interesting manner with the filmic image, that is, the mythic or fictionalized image, of John Wayne. The film opens with clips from some of Wayne's earlier movies, all showing him in heroic or dynamic sequences. Here the effect is not, as Marsden and Nachbar have stated [in "The Modern Popular Western: Radio, Television, Film and The sense of loss and marginalization felt by the Old Gringo is mirrored in Harriet Winslow, who has never, at least until the unfolding of the narrative here, become reconciled with her father's abandonment of her and her rather domineering mother and has in fact collaborated or acquiesced in fictionalizing the desertion into a heroic death for her father at San Juan Hill. Harriet, like the Gringo, and like Ned Buntline or any other popularizer of the Western hero, is engaged in "mythmaking," that is, lying and the falsification of history.

Or perhaps, one might say, in rationalization, since Harriet would rather eschew mention of her fixated concentration on her father, an undeserving object of such attention. The Electra motif here is similar to the less clearly expressed, but nonetheless central complex dramatized in *True Grit,* novel and film (1969), in which Mattie Ross (Kim Darby), a stubborn adolescent girl, enlists an aging marshal. Rooster Cogburn (John Wayne), to help her bring to justice the murderer of her father. She is inordinately determined to punish the killer, driving Rooster and a Texas Ranger who accompanies them sometimes to exasperation. One of the more interesting aspects of *True Grit,* clearer in the Charles Portis novel than in the more emotionally diffuse Henry Hathaway film, is the gradual transference of Mattie's affection from her father□who soon drops into the background of the narrative, becoming only a motivating plot element□to Rooster, whose "cussedness," at first repellent to the arch Mattie, gradually becomes endearing to her. Harriet Winslow, on the other hand, does not see the Old Gringo as repellent so much as she recoils from his cynicism; nevertheless, as does Mattie with

Cogburn, she becomes fascinated with the Gringo and literally supplants her father with him. An interesting sidelight on *The Old Gringo* and *True Grit* is their narrative technique, as both are told in flashback (on much differing levels of sophistication, however) by their female protagonists.

The female perspective is often quite important to the elegiac Western. Just as Mattie criticizes and ironizes the action around her (especially in the novel), so Marian (Jean Arthur) in *Shane* provides a reasonable perspective on the rivalry between ranchers and homesteaders. It is she who perceives the truth about Shane's vulnerability and about his incapability of fitting into present-day society and who points up the absurdity of the hard-driving male solutions to range problems. Similarly, in *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952) Amy (Grace Kelly) acts as a balance to her husband's sense of perhaps misplaced duty by questioning the morality of violence as a solution. Such female characters are not merely stereotypical "voices of civilization" who try to restrain male depredations: more than this, they serve as surrogates for a critical perspective on the essential absurdity of the hero myth. Thus, Laurie (Vera Miles), in *The Searchers,* generally treats Edwards and Pauley in a rather indulgent manner, as if they were irresponsible adolescents who refuse to let the past alone and who thus jeopardize their present.

One should not make the error of seeing the elegiac elements in *The Old Gringo* as positively nostalgic (as, perhaps, one could see *Ride the High Country);* if nostalgia is an element here, its core of loss is emphasized. Or it is shown as nostalgia without basis, as in the fond stories propagated by Harriet about her father. As *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* reveals the lie behind the fame of Ranse Stoddard and calls into question as well the myth of the Western hero (who, as Robert Ray has noted [in *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980,* Princeton University Press, 1985], is shown to be the other side of the outlaw coin), so too *The Old Gringo* questions and criticizes the revolutionary past of Mexico—Frutos Garcia dies a comfortable, scarcely heroic death in his house in Mexico City in 1964—while still not sparing the Porfiriato. Arroyo's fantasy about the Indians' land title is deflated by the criticisms of the Gringo concerning the lack of worth of the written word and by the inability of Arroyo to read, and is finally exploded by the Gringo's burning of the papers. The legalistic appeal by Arroyo is shown to be just as fruitless, one might suggest, as has been the sad appeal to treaties by the wronged original inhabitants of North America. The heroic myths about the U.S. Civil War are questioned by references to the ironic stories of Bierce about that war, in which its "glory" is deflated. Thus, *The Old Gringo* demonstrates its affinity less to autumnal elegies like *Ride the High Country* or to pastoral hymns like *Shane* than to more corrosive and de-mystificatory critiques such as *The Wild Bunch, Little Big Man* (1970), and, occupying a middle ground, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.* Like Pike Bishop in *The Wild Bunch,* the Old Gringo wishes to emend his compromised past with heroic action—however futile—and as do Pike, Tom Doniphon, and J. B. Books, he dies an outsider, only finding an ironic re-integration into the community after his death.

Source: Kenneth E. Hall, *"The Old Gringo* and the Elegiac Western," in *University of Dayton Review,* Vol. 23, No. 2, Spring, 1995, pp. 137-47.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Chrzanowski analyzes Fuentes's use of the "double" or "doppelgänger" literary device as well as the theme of patricide in El gringo viejo (The Old Gringo), *and asserts that the author's employment of both "has imbued his novel with remarkable structural coherence and has touched upon human issues which transcend history, geography, and culture. "*

In reading Carlos Fuentes's *El gringo viejo,* (1985; *The Old Gringo)* one is struck by the masterful way in which he has conjoined fictionalized biography, dramatic action, and ideological concerns. It also becomes evident that it is a novel in which character psychology has a dominant thematic and structural role. Central to the psychological component are father-child conflict and the concomitant motif of patricide. This study examines Fuentes's use of literary doubling in his treatment of these themes and in his portrayal of the novel's three principal characters.

The "gringo viejo," of course, is a fictionalized Ambrose Bierce□the controversial American journalist and short-story writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1913, at the age of seventy-one, the historical Bierce set out for revolutionary Mexico, aware of the likelihood of dying there. Although he did maintain some written correspondence with a friend in the United States, it was not long before Bierce disappeared without a trace. In *Gringo viejo,* Fuentes presents an imaginary account of the writer's experience in Mexico.

A second main character is Harriet Winslow, a young American who meets the "gringo viejo" in Mexico and whose recollections of him form the novel's organizational frame. In contrast to the disillusioned and cynical old man, she is portrayed as naive and idealistic. Contracted to tutor the grandchildren of a wealthy landowner, Harriet is present at his estate when it is over-run by a group of revolutionaries who have allowed the "gringo viejo" to join them.

The third major character is Tomás Arroyo, the leader of a band of insurgents and the illegitimate son of the owner of the estate where Harriet is employed. Also an idealist, Arroyo embodies the spirit of protest that has motivated the revolutionaries to rebel against a system and a history of oppression and injustice.

Readers familiar with Ambrose Bierce's life and works will recognize the biographical accuracy and inaccuracy of various situations, statements, and persons presented in the novel. They will also readily perceive Fuentes's allusions to some of Bierce's short stories. The most important of these references are to "A Horseman in the Sky," a story whose title is evoked in the following descriptive passage. "At this early hour the mountains seem to await the horsemen in every ravine, as if they were in truth horsemen of the sky."

Set in the United States Civil War, "A Horseman in the Sky" begins with a description of a young Federal soldier who has fallen asleep while on guard duty. A flashback provides

information about him. The only son of a wealthy Virginia couple, the boy had unexpectedly decided to join a Union regiment that was passing through his hometown. Acquiescing to his son's betrayal of the State of Virginia, the father stoically advises him: "Well, go, sir, and whatever may occur do what you conceive to be your duty." *[The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce,* compiled by Ernest Jerome Hopkins, Doubleday, 1970]. The reader is then returned to the war scene to witness the young man awakening to the sight of a horseman on a distant ridge that borders a cliff. A grey uniform indicates that he is a Confederate scout who has discovered the presence of the Union force. For several moments, the young man anguishes over whether to kill his enemy. Recalling his father's parting counsel, he finally takes aim at the rebel's horse and fires. The scene immediately shifts to a Federal officer who observes "a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air" *[The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce]*□obviously the Confederate soldier upon whom the sentry has fired. Another shift in scene occurs as a Federal sergeant approaches the young guard and asks if he discharged his weapon. The boy acknowledges that he shot at a horse and observed it fall off the cliff. Responding to the sergeant's inquiry as to whether anyone was on the horse, the young guard hesitatingly states: "Yes ... my father" *[The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce].*

A common treatment of decomposition or fragmentation in literature involves the creation of several characters, all of whom represent a single concept or attitude. This technique has been referred to as "doubling by multiplication." Borrowing the motifs of parental conflict and patricide from "A Horseman in the Sky," Fuentes employs doubling by multiplication to link his ostensibly dissimilar characters and to introduce the presence of psychological conflict in the novel. In doing so, he alters and simultaneously commingles historical fact and the fictional antecedent of Bierce's story. The "gringo viejo," who, like Bierce himself, had been a Union soldier, is described as experiencing a dream in which his father served in the Confederate army. Without elucidating the nature of the father-son conflict, Fuentes introduces the patricidal motif by attributing the following thought to the "gringo viejo": "He wanted what he had dreamed of□the revolutionary drama of son against father."

Juxtaposed with this dream is a dramatic battle scene in which the "gringo viejo" single-handedly attacks a group of Mexican Federal soldiers. Reinforcing the dream's psychological symbolism, the narrator clarifies that the American's inordinate act of bravery was in reality the externalization of unconscious rage directed at his father's memory: "it was toward this horseman, flashing his anger from the mountaintop, the gringo rode, not toward them, their machine gun lost now." The thematic and structural importance of the "gringo viejo‴s dream and its patricidal implication is apparent in Fuentes's allusion to it on five other occasions in the novel. The conflictual nature of the paternal relationship is also underscored by the following description of the "gringo viejo"'s father: "a hell-fire Calvinist who also loved Byron, and who one day feared his son would try to kill him as he slept."

Harriet Winslow's father, like the "gringo viejo‴s, was a military man. Because of him, she too bears the burden of psychological scarring. The narrator singles out two circumstances that have had lasting impact on her: (1) her discovery of her father's

licentiousness and infidelity with a black servant and; (2) his abandonment of his wife and daughter in order to live in Cuba with another woman. Recurring references to her father attest to Harriet's psychological struggle in dealing with her loss of him on both the ideal and real levels. Paralleling the characterization of the "gringo viejo," her latent patricidal inclination is also expressed symbolically. When Harriet and her mother are overwhelmed by the economic necessity occasioned by the father's disappearance, they declare him dead in order to obtain a government pension. Harriet's lexical choice in referring to the incident has obvious psychological significance in the context of the patricidal theme: "We killed him, my mother and I, in order to live."

Arroyo's father, while not in the military, was also an authoritarian figure by virtue of the absolute power emanating from his socioeconomic standing Like Harriet's father, he was licentious. In fact, Arroyo is a produce of his abuse of power and position to sexually exploit a family servant. Arroyo's hatred for his father stems from that circumstance, as well as from the latter's refusal to recognize him legally. Even as a child, he would have readily killed his father if given the opportunity: "I spied him as he was drinking and fornicating, not knowing his son was watching him, waiting for the moment to kill him." The intensity of his hatred only increased over the years, as evidenced in his virulent declaration to Harriet toward the end of the novel.

As these references indicate, the patricidal motif is developed in *Gringo viejo* in a concrete, insistent manner. A further examination of textual evidence points to the presence of a psychological paradigm that is less obvious, yet fully consistent with the motif as employed by Fuentes in his portrayal of all three characters. In his recent study, *The Son-Father Relationship from Infancy to Manhood: An Intergenerational Inquiry,* Peter Blos underscores the Freudian notion that usurpation of the father's position can be interpreted as an unconscious attempt to "annihilate" him. Interestingly, Blos uses the term "patricide" figuratively to describe such usurpation. Reflecting this phenomenon, there is a moment or circumstance in *Gringo viejo* in which each protagonist duplicates some important trait of his or her father and, moreover, is identified with him at that moment. (Consistent with the basic premise of psychological criticism that textual evidence can point to unconscious as well as conscious motivation in characterization, none of the protagonists in *Gringo viejo* perceives the psychological significance of these details.) In the "gringo viejo"'s case, it is repeating his father's trip to Mexico more than fifty years earlier and distinguishing himself as a brave soldier: "The gringo thought how ironic it was that he the son was travelling the same road his father had followed in 1847." For Harriet, it is her rejection of her cultural and religious values through surrender to her most primitive sexual desires with Arroyo. In doing so, she consciously identifies with her father: "Don't you know that with Arroyo I could be like my father, free and sensual." In Arroyo's case, it is returning to the Miranda ranch and acting with the same arrogance and violence as did his father. The parallel between the two is underscored by Harriet's admonition of Arroyo: "you provoked yourself to prove to yourself who you are. Your name isn't Arroyo, like your mother's; your name is Miranda, after your father." If it is true, as Jean-Michel Rabaté asserts, that "a father is not a 'problem' but a nexus of unresolved enigmas, all founded on the mysterious efficacy of a Name," then Arroyo's choice of surname and Harriet's comment have particular significance in the patricidal context. Similarly, it should be remembered that

the "gringo viejo" does not reveal his family name to anyone except Harriet while in Mexico. These details substantiate that, even on the unconscious level, the patricidal wish is central to Fuentes's depiction of all three characters.

As the plot of *Gringo viejo* unfolds, the paternal issue has profound effect on the manner in which the three protagonists relate and respond to one another and to events. In this regard, the "gringo viejo"'s role as father figure for Harriet and Arroyo merits special discussion. Their disposition toward relating to him as such is consistent with their figurative orphanhood: "General Tomás Arroyo, who, like her, had no father, both were dead or unaware, or what is the same as dead, both unaware of their children, Harriet and Tomas." The "gringo viejo"'s role as surrogate father is compatible with his advanced age, position of respect among the revolutionaries, and the paternal affection and behavior he demonstrates toward both characters on several occasions.

As a father figure, the "gringo viejo" facilitates Arroyo's and Harriet's resolution of the psychological conflict they experience as a consequence of their individual relationships with their fathers. It is well to clarify, however, that neither father has any active contact with his offspring in the historical present recreated in the novel, and that Harriet's and Arroyo's fatherlessness, as is often the case in literature, "is not so much the absence of relationship as a relationship to an absence."

In relating to the "gringo viejo" as a substitute father, Harriet and Arroyo each embody one pole of a basic endopsychic conflict: the love-hate relationship of child to father. Consequently, Fuentes has drawn his characters by also utilizing the literary device of doubling by division: "the splitting up of a recognizable, unified psychological entity into separate, complementary, distinguishable parts represented by seemingly autonomous characters."

Arroyo, of course, represents the negative pole of the paradigm. The principal issues in his psychic struggle are lack of identity stemming from his father's refusal to acknowledge him, the hatred it engenders and the need to express that hatred and to avenge his father's treatment of him. (On a conscious level, the latter need is one factor which explains Arroyo's participation in the Revolution.) These issues play a decisive role in the culminating action of the novel: Arroyo's murder of the "gringo viejo." As the plot unfolds, a number of references are made to papers which Arroyo is safeguarding on behalf of his corevolutionaries. The papers date from the colonial period and constitute a legal claim to the land that Arroyo's family had

appropriated. They also represent a de facto affirmation of personal and social identity: "The papers are the only proof we have that these lands are ours. They are the testament of our ancestors. Without the papers, we're like orphans."

The "gringo viejo"'s eventual burning of the papers therefore acquires profound psychological significance. On the one hand, the papers are symbolic of Arroyo's identity and claim to legitimacy within the social system. On the other, the man who destroys them is, at this point in the novel, a substitute for his father. Consequently, the childhood trauma of the son being reduced to a non-person is symbolically recreated

and relived on an unconscious level. The destruction of the papers provokes the hatred underlying Arroyo's previously mentioned patricidal wish and is externalized and expressed through his murder of the "gringo viejo." The psychological dynamics of the act mirror the drama of the Revolution itself: the socially and economically disenfranchised striking out against the fatherland that has denied them their patrimony and identity. Hence, with consummate artistry, Fuentes intertwines the personal drama of his characters with the historical drama of the Revolution.

Harriet's relationship with the "gringo viejo" as a hypostatic father is developed more fully in the novel, and in a way which suggests her awareness of it. The exclusively positive nature of the relationship corroborates Fuentes's presentation of her and Arroyo as a "composite character." Having been deprived of a father from the age of sixteen, Harriet finds in the "gringo viejo" a person with whom she can openly share her innermost thoughts and feelings; an object of tenderness, concern, and love; and, ultimately, a literal replacement for her absent father. Her awareness of what the "gringo viejo" signifies for her is first alluded to in a conversation in which he states: "I thought a lot about you last night. You were very real in my thoughts. I think I even dreamed about you. I felt as close to you as a ...." Before he completes the thought, Harriet interrupts by asking: "As a father?" In a subsequent exchange, she explicitly and dramatically communicates to him that he indeed represents a father to her: "Don't you know ... that in you I have a father? Don't you know that?" Similarly, when Harriet senses Arroyo's determination to kill the "gringo viejo," she begs him not to the kill "the only father either of them had known."

It is Arroyo's murder of the "gringo viejo," however, that provides Harriet a lasting solution for her psychological conflict. Having returned to the United States after his death, Harriet publicly states that she had gone to Mexico in order to visit her father, and that she had witnessed *his* assassination at the hands of Arroyo: "She says she saw him shoot her daddy dead." Some time later, when his body is disinterred, she identifies it as her father's and has it buried in the family plot next to her deceased mother. Her words to the lifeless body of the "gringo viejo" confirm the presence of unconscious as well as conscious psychological motivation in the novel: "An empty grave is waiting for you in a military cemetery, Papa." The abandoned child has fulfilled her need to have and love a father.

In sum, *Gringo viejo* is a multifaceted novel that deftly combines dramatic action, historical verisimilitude, and ideological statement. It is also a work of profound psychological dimension and implication. In utilizing the literary device of the double and developing the patricidal motif which he borrowed from Ambrose Bierce, Carlos Fuentes has imbued his novel with remarkable structural coherence and has touched upon human issues which transcend history, geography, and culture.

Source: Joseph Chrzanowski, "Patricide and the Double in Carlos Fuentes's *Gringo viejo,"* in *International Fiction Review,* Vol. 16, No. 1, Winter, 1989, pp. 11-16.

Adaptations

The Old Gringo was adapted for film and released by Columbia Pictures in 1989. The motion picture was directed by Luis Puenzo and starred Gregory Peck, Jane Fonda, and Jimmy Smits.

The video titled *Carlos Fuentes* was released by Ediciones del Norte and Television Productions and Services Inc. in 1983.

Carlos Fuentes: Bridging the 20th and 21st Centuries, another video, was released by Metropolitan State College in 1998.

Bill Moyers' A World of Ideas, Volume 8: Carlos Fuentes was released on video by Films for the Humanities in 1994.

Carlos Fuentes: A Video was released by Lan-nan Foundation in 1989.

The video *Carlos Fuentes: A Man of Two Worlds* was released by A. J. Casciero in 1988.

Crossing Borders: The Journey of Carlos Fuentes was released on video by Home Vision Video in 1989.

The audio cassette *Faces, Mirrors, Masks: Twentieth Century Latin American Fiction* was released by National Public Radio in 1984.

Carlos Fuentes: An Interview in Spanish was released on audio cassette by Ediciones del Norte in 1988.

Carlos Fuentes Reads from Distant Relations was released on audio cassette by In Our Times Arts Media in 1986.

Topics for Further Study

Read Ambrose Bierce's famous short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," which is mentioned in this novel. What does that story tell you about the character of Bierce as Carlos Fuentes portrays him here?

Pancho Villa's reputation is still controversial: many people see him as a hero of the revolution, while many others see him as a criminal who manipulated the media. Research his life story and explain whether you think he did more good or harm for the development of Mexico.

Many Americans are familiar with songs that were popular in 1914, such as "St. Louis Blues" or "Peg O' My Heart." Research some Mexican music that was popular at the time, and compare it to popular music of Mexico today.

How has the relationship between the United States and Mexico changed since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994? Do you think it will it help or hinder Mexican economic development? Explain what you think one of the three main characters of this novel (Bierce, Harriet, or Arroyo) would say about it and why.

Compare and Contrast

1914: The assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, sets off a chain of political events that draws most of the countries of the world into the First World War.

1985: Many of the countries that had formerly been in the Austro-Hungarian empire before the start of World War I are members of the Soviet Union.

Today: After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, some countries are struggling to cope with independence and establish their own identities.

1914: Feminist Margaret Sanger is forced to leave the United States for England to avoid prosecution for printing her pamphlet, "Family Limitation," which dealt with the subject of birth control.

1985: U.S. abortion rights, which were established by the Supreme Court in the 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade,* constitute one of the most talked-about political issues. Candidates for national offices endure tremendous pressure to declare themselves supporters for either the "pro-life" or "pro-choice" sides of the debate.

Today: Scientific advances, such as time-released implants and "morning-after" pills, have made birth control a commonplace concern in the United States.

1914: President Victoriano Huerta of Mexico, who had come to power by having his predecessor murdered, is forced to leave the country for exile. One of the decisive elements in his leaving was a military occupation of Mexico's main seaport, Veracruz, by the U.S. Atlantic fleet.

1985: The administration of President Ronald Reagan, opposed to the leftist government of Nicaragua, arranges illegal arms shipments to guerrilla revolutionaries.

Today: The U.S. government's intervention into the affairs of other countries is severely limited by its own laws and by United Nations supervision.

What Do I Read Next?

Don Quixote, the book that the old gringo says he intends to read some time, was written by Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes Saave-dra and published in 1615. It is the classic story of idealism and of standing up to unbeatable odds.

The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce is available in a 1985 paperback, edited by Ernest Jerome Hopkins. Among the most notable pieces referred to in Fuentes's novel are "A Horseman in the Sky," about a Union soldier who kills his father, a member of the Confederacy; and Bierce's most famous work, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge."

Mexico's most honored contemporary poet was the late Nobel Prize laureate Octavio Paz. The most comprehensive volume of his work is 1987's *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957-1987.* This volume contains both English and Spanish versions of his poems.

Most of Fuentes's novels received critical acclaim. Readers interested in his work may want to contrast the intellectualism of this book with the vigor of his first published novel, *Where the Air Is Clear* (1958).

Carlos Fuentes is almost as well known for his essays as for his fiction. He frequently explores the character of his homeland. His 1996 collectionA *New Time for Mexico* revisits themes explored in his book from twenty-five years earlier called *Tiempo mexicano* ("Mexican Time").

Gabriel García Márquez is a Nobel Prize laureate from Columbia and one of Fuentes's contemporaries. His book *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1969) is recognized as his masterpiece, and stylistically it resembles the work that Fuentes was doing in the 1960s. Like Fuentes, though, Marquez's style evolved, and his 1985 novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* is closer in style and tone to *The Old Gringo.*

One of the most striking and influential novels by a Latin-American writer of Fuentes's generation was Argentine author Julio Cortazar's 1963 book *Hopscotch,* about international intrigue. Though the book's subject matter is not much like that of *The Old Gringo,* Cortazar's style is similar, and this book is widely praised as one of the best of the century.

Reviewers have pointed out that British writer Malcolm Lowrey's 1947 novel *Under the Volcano* is one of the best examples of a non-Mexican capturing the country's essence. It is the fevered, nightmarish story of an English counsel's spiritual collapse.

E. L. Doctorow's 1975 novel *Ragtime* shows the life of three American families in New York at roughly the same time as this story takes place. At the end of Doctorow's book, one of the characters runs away to join Pancho Villa and his bandits.

Print," in A Literary History of The American West, Texas Christian University Press, 1987], to "suggest that Books and Wayne are identical," but rather on the one hand (1) to show the character of Books as derived from a corpus of myth; (2) to imply that the public image of Books as heroic may be as much of a fiction as was the image of Wayne as a frontier hero; and (3) to emphasize the elegiac core of the film, since the clips lead us to remember the past deeds of Books.

Further Study

Written soon after the publication *of The OldGringo,* this book is by an eminent researcher in Third-World studies.

Lanin Guyrko, "Twentieth-Century Literature," in *Mexican Literature: A History,* edited by David William Foster, University of Texas Press, 1994.

Contains sections about various genres in different eras of Mexican history. A good reference source for putting Fuentes in an historical context.

Kristine Ibsen, *Author, Text and Reader in the Novels of Carlos Fuentes,* Peter Lang Publishing, 1996.

Ibsen, the editor of a book about female authors in Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, gives a detailed analysis of Fuentes's works and the ways in which they involve readers more than traditional fiction.

John Rutherford, *Mexican Society during the Revolution: A Literary Approach,* Oxford University Press, 1971.

Examines the revolution and its leaders as they are depicted in literature written at the time.

Cynthia Steele, *Politics, Gender and the Mexican Novel, 1968-1989: Beyond the Pyramids,* University of Texas Press, 1992.

Steele's work covers Fuentes's most active time as a novelist, and reviews the social attitudes that affected him and his contemporaries.

Maarten Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico and Modernity,* Vanderbilt University Press, 1997.

Van Delden explores the schism between Fuentes's differing visions of Mexico.

Raymond Leslie Williams, *The Writings of Carlos Fuentes,* University of Texas Press, 1996.

Focused principally on Fuentes's major novel *Terra Nostra,* this study examines the treatment of Mexican culture throughout the author's works

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Michiko Kakutani, "The Old Gringo," in *The New York Times,* October 23, 1985, p. C21.

Gloria Norris, "The Old Gringo," *in America,* May 17, 1986, p. 416.

John Seabrook, "One of the Missing," in *The Nation,* January 18, 1986.

Earl Shorris, "To Write, to Fight, to Die," in *The New York Times Review of Books,* October 27, 1985, p. 1.

John Updike, "Latin Strategies," in *The New Yorker,* February 24, 1986, p. 98.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) 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'sFor Students Literature line, NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 unnamedfor 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 NfS 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

NfS 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 Novels 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 NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS 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 Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels 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 NfS 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.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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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