

Rosaura a Las Diez Study Guide

Rosaura a Las Diez by Marco Denevi

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Plot Summary

The story begins with Inspector Julian Aguirre interviewing Mrs. Milagros, the proprietress of La Madrilena boardinghouse. A murder has been committed, and Mrs. Milagros is giving the inspector a detailed account of one of her boarders, Mr. Camilo Canegato. Camilo has lived at her boardinghouse for twelve years. He is a quiet man, an artist, who has never caused any trouble and whom she regards as a member of the family.

The first half of the book details Mrs. Milagros's account of Camilo and his romance with a mysterious woman named Rosa. Camilo meets Rosa when he is asked by her father to restore a painting of his deceased wife. Every Wednesday, a perfumed letter arrives at the boardinghouse for Camilo, and Mrs. Milagros, her daughters, and Miss Eufrosia find a way to read the letter when Camilo is not around. The women become obsessed with Camilo's love affair. Finally, after eight weeks, the love affair comes out in the open when one of the letters arrives without Camilo's name on it. Mrs. Milagros opens the letter, reads it, and confronts Camilo about it. He tells her the whole story, and Mrs. Milagros wants to find a way to help Camilo and Rosa to get married.

Then one evening, Rosa shows up at the boardinghouse unexpectedly. Everyone is thrilled to see her, but Camilo acts very strange. He doesn't want to talk with her or touch her. Still, Mrs. Milagros pushes the two towards marriage, thinking that Camilo doesn't have the courage or fortitude to do it himself. After the wedding there is a party at La Madrilena, and then Rosa and Camilo leave for the hotel. Later, one of the boarders, David Reguel, returns to the house yelling, "He's killed her!"

The next part of the book is David Reguel's testimony to the inspector. He reports that he foresaw the murder. David has never liked Camilo. He feels that Camilo is always on the brink of exploding because of his pent-up anger at being a physically deficient man. The educated David has all kinds of theories about Camilo. He adds to the evidence in the case by saying that Rosa told him that her real name is Marta Correga. Also, David follows Camilo and Rosa to the hotel and sees Camilo leave the hotel without Rosa. David investigates and finds Rosa's strangled body.

Part III covers the interview between the inspector and Camilo. Camilo tells the inspector that he's always had difficulty differentiating between dreams and reality, and he's taken medicine for this problem in the past. Mrs. Milagros convinced him that he didn't need it anymore. He confesses that he invented Rosa, wrote the letters to himself, and fabricated the entire romance. When Rosa showed up at the boardinghouse, he couldn't tell if she was real or not. He wanted to get rid of her but didn't know how.

Next to be interviewed is Miss Eufrosia Morales, a retired school teacher who lives at the boarding house. She reports being skeptical of Camilo and Rosa's romance because a friend of hers told her that Camilo cannot paint portraits from life. He only paints over photographs. Thus, Camilo's story about the romance cannot be true.



Eufrasia adds that the maid, Elsa, has long been in love with Camilo, and that there is a letter somewhere that Rosa didn't want anyone to know about.

Last of all, Elsa the maid produces the letter written by Rosa (Marta Correga). The letter clears up the crime, showing that Marta Correga is a prostitute, and that Slit Turk is her murderer. Camilo's name is cleared, and he is rescued by the woman who loves him.



Part I, Chapter 1

Part I, Chapter 1 Summary

The narrator is talking to an inspector about a boarder who has lived at her boarding house for twelve years. She describes to the inspector how this young man arrived on her doorstep carrying an enormous suitcase. He is awkward and painfully shy. She interrogates the young man to help her decide whether or not he was worthy to live in her boarding house.

Her first impression is favorable. She thinks he might be a law clerk or a solicitor. He wears a too-big black overcoat on his scrawny frame and a large black hat over his fuzzy blond hair. He tells her that he is a painter, and she is not impressed by this because she doesn't think painting pictures is steady, honest work, but he shows her his bank book, which has a large sum in it, so she accepts him.

He is a bachelor and claims to have no relations in the world. His father has just passed away, which explains the all-black clothing, and this softens the narrator's view of him. She assumes that the young man's father drank himself to death because that is what her husband did. The young man protests once, but then he falls silent when she refers to his father's death again.

She accepts his money and tells him the rules of the house. She emphasizes that the house is to be clean and respectable because she's raising three daughters by herself. She takes him up to a room that she deems appropriate for an artist. He gives her his business card, which says, "Camilo Canegato - Painter - Picture Restorer - Specialist in Oils." She's impressed with the card but laughs at his name, Canegato - dog and cat. Once she goes down to the dining room, she bursts out laughing at his name and then feels badly about it because she knows that from his room he can hear everything that happens in the dining room.

Part I, Chapter 1 Analysis

The author creates immediate tension by beginning the story with the investigation of a crime. The readers know nothing of the crime, only that a woman who owns a boarding house is giving a report to an investigator. Most of the chapter is written in flashback form with the woman thinking back twelve years to when a particular boarder first arrived at her boarding house.

Camilo Canegato seems like a man who could never be associated with a crime, except perhaps as a victim, so her description of him creates conflict and many questions as she speaks with the inspector. From the narrator's description we learn a lot about her character. She is not at all shy, and she has a lot of confidence in herself. She is a motherly figure, but she is also very guarded about whom she bestows her affections

on. She talks incessantly, never letting the inspector in on the conversation. She laughs easily and seems thrilled by the inspector's attentions.



Part I, Chapter 2

Part I, Chapter 2 Summary

Continuing her report to the inspector, the narrator describes Camilo Canegato as the ideal boarder. Over the ensuing twelve years he proves himself to be quiet, well-behaved, and humble. He doesn't stay out late or drink alcohol. At first, he brings lots of bottles filled with pills, powders, and syrups with him to the dining table. He says the medicines are for his brain, but he doesn't expound because the other boarders give him such a hard time about it. After a while, he quits bringing the bottles to the table.

Several weeks after he moves in, the narrator follows Camilo to his studio to see what it's like. She is impressed by his business and can't believe that people pay him so much money to restore their paintings. During some point over the twelve years, Camilo paints a large portrait of the narrator and her daughters and doesn't charge them anything for it.

The narrator then notices signs of his wanting to settle down. He hangs pictures on his walls and becomes more familiar with the narrator and her children. They speak to each other with more familiar language and Camilo takes the girls to the zoo, helps them with their work, and buys them candy. The narrator and her children become the family that Camilo has never had. She notices that he never receives letters or visitors. The narrator tells Camilo that he should get married. He answers that nobody would want to marry him. The girls grow up, however, and they and Camilo stop using the familiar form with each other. The narrator said she's beginning to feel old.

Part I, Chapter 2 Analysis

Camilo Canegato becomes a more lifelike character in this chapter. In the first chapter he is so painfully shy that it's difficult to come to any understanding about him. Now, though, we see that he is generous and kind. He doesn't have much confidence, as evidenced by his reaction to the narrator's advice that he marry.

The reference to the bottles of syrups and medicines is significant. Apart from being very shy, Camilo doesn't seem very out of the ordinary. But bringing countless medicinal bottles to the table to eat with his meals is mysterious. His explanation doesn't reveal much ("It's for—er—my brain"), which leads the reader to wonder if the bottles are somehow connected with the crime that is being investigated.



Part I, Chapter 3

Part I, Chapter 3 Summary

Mrs. Milagros continues to talk to the inspector. She tells him that everything was fine until one morning about six months ago. On this morning, a letter arrives for Camilo Canegato. A retired schoolteacher who lives in the boardinghouse, Miss Eufrosia Morales, always meets the postman at the door and takes the mail from him. Eufrosia examines the mail and uses her inferences to gossip about the other members of the boardinghouse. When the mail arrives this particular morning, Eufrosia is intensely interested in the letter for Camilo Canegato because the envelope is pink and reeks of violet perfume.

Every Wednesday hereafter, a similar letter arrives for Camilo. Eufrosia and Mrs. Milagros can hardly stand their curiosity. They mention the letters to Camilo at meals, but Camilo just blushes and doesn't say anything about them. The women in the boardinghouse, including the narrator's daughters, become consumed by their curiosity. Finally, Mrs. Milagros discovers where the stack of pink letters is stored in Camilo's room. With her daughters, she opens them all and reads them. She tells the inspector that she remembers them all very well, even though the letters were not found among Camilo's things.

The letters are all written by a woman named Rosa. Mrs. Milagros's daughters assume that Rosa is an old maid, and they find great amusement in talking about the letters and making fun of Rosa and Camilo behind their backs. Mrs. Milagros is not at all amused by the letters. She feels betrayed by Camilo. After all she has done for him, she thinks he should at least talk with her about Rosa. At first, she thinks Camilo is carrying on an adulterous affair with a married woman, but the letters make it clear that Rosa is not married, is 26 years old, and lives with an old aunt where Camilo visits her on Mondays. The letters also reveal that Rosa is very well educated and increasingly in love with Camilo. Each letter from her is a little less formal and little more ardent.

The other boarders notice that something is wrong with Mrs. Milagros. Mr. Coretti, a bank clerk, says, "What's the matter with you Mrs. Milagros?" He says that she wears a pained expression on her face. At the same time, Camilo behaves as if he is in another world. Mrs. Milagros complains to the inspector about what a terrible predicament this left her in. She had to pretend like she didn't know what was going on, but Eufrosia knew that Mrs. Milagros knew, and she shot a wicked smile at her over the dinner table.

One day, when Mrs. Milagros and her daughter are reading Camilo's latest letter from Rosa, they find a long silky lock of blond hair. The girls laugh at this gesture, but Mrs. Milagros thinks the hair is lovely. One Monday, when Mrs. Milagros suspects that Camilo is visiting Rosa, she sets out for his studio on San Martin Street to confirm her suspicions. The studio is locked, so she is sure that he is off visiting Rosa.



Part I, Chapter 3 Analysis

The character development in this chapter moves the plot along. Both Mrs. Milagros and Camilo Canegato begin to change, and these changes move the action forward. Mrs. Milagros becomes jealous of Camilo. It's clear that she feels more for Camilo than she does for the other boarders because she becomes obsessed with the love letters arriving in the mail for Camilo. She can't concentrate on anything else. Camilo's changes are subtler, but he no longer behaves as if the people in the boardinghouse are his entire life. He daydreams at dinner instead of interacting with Mrs. Milagros and her daughters.

Education springs up as a theme in this chapter. Mrs. Milagros feels inferior to the mysterious Rosa because of Rosa's vocabulary and learned writing. She also feels inferior to her daughter Clotilda, who has received more education than she. Having control over the boardinghouse and even some aspects of the lives of her tenants has heretofore given Mrs. Milagros a sense of superiority, of control over herself and others. However, when she sees that Camilo is in love with a learned woman, her sense of control and superiority begins slipping away.

This chapter also includes a bit of foreshadowing. Part way through the narrative, Mrs. Milagros switches back to the present to her conversation with the inspector and says that the letters were not found among Camilo's possessions. This hints that Camilo has either fled or is dead, but the readers still must piece together such clues to find out what happened to him.



Part I, Chapter 4

Part I, Chapter 4 Summary

On the eighth week of Rosa's pink love letters, the postman brings the mail at 10:00 in the morning as usual, but this time Miss Eufrasia notices that something is different about the letter, and she runs in to Mrs. Milagros all flustered. Camilo's name is missing from the letter. Instead, it is addressed to "Mr. La Madrilena, Roja Street." Miss Eufrasia convinces Mrs. Milagros that the letter is addressed to her and that she should open it and read it.

At first, Mrs. Milagros holds to the moral high ground because she doesn't want Miss Eufrasia to know that she's read all the other pink letters, but she gives in to the pressure and curiosity and reads the entire letter to Miss Eufrasia, her daughters, and all the other boarders who have gathered around for the mid-day meal. One of the boarders, David Reguel, does not approve of this, and he gives Mrs. Milagros a hard time about it, but she rationalizes by saying that David Reguel is a disagreeable man.

That night at supper, Camilo arrives at the table, and everyone knows about the love letter and has heard it read in its entirety. The maid spills hot soup on Camilo, and he feels very embarrassed. Miss Eufrasia announces at the table that Mrs. Milagros has something for Camilo. Mrs. Milagros pretends that she has just remembered the letter in her pocket. She pulls the pink letter out of her pocket and takes it across the table to Camilo; before she can finish explaining why she has opened the letter, Camilo leaves the table and walks out the door. Mr. Coretti shouts, "Bravo, Camilo, bravo!" as he leaves.

Later that night, Mrs. Milagros asks the maid to get Camilo from his room. She and her daughters wait for him in the dining room. Mrs. Milagros is furious with him and begins to tell him (in a whisper so none of the other boarders can hear) that she thinks he is very ungrateful for not telling her about his love affair. He withdraws even more until Clotilda, the educated daughter, says, "If you don't want to, don't tell us anything, Camilo. But we know that you and Rosa love each other, and we're happy!" He then sits down in a chair and begins to speak.

Part I, Chapter 4 Analysis

Camilo remains very much a mystery in this chapter. He reacts the way any shy person would react to having his private life revealed to a group of relative strangers. The only insight readers get into his personality is in the last two lines of the chapter when he softens up to Clotilda's remark and sits down to talk with Mrs. Milagros and her daughters. Leaving Camilo out of our reach adds to the mystery begun in the first chapter.



David Reguel is a new character in this chapter, and he is interesting because he puts Mrs. Milagros on edge. We learn that David is studying the law and is a part-time insurance salesman. He wears enormous glasses that obscure his face. He knows at least five languages and always carries books with him. He likes to deliver lectures and talks a lot. David intimidates Mrs. Milagros, both with his learning and with his morals.

Mrs. Milagros makes a reference to Christ at the beginning of the chapter when she says, ". . .in the eighth station of my Calvary, that is to say at the time of Rosa's eighth, letter. . ." In essence, she is saying that Camilo's love affair with Rosa, and her desperate attempt to keep her stealth knowledge a secret, is as burdensome to her as Christ's cross was to him as he carried it up the hill to Calvary.



Part I, Chapter 5

Part I, Chapter 5 Summary

Mrs. Milagros continues her testimony to the inspector. She tells the inspector that a man in mourning appears at Camilo's studio one day and asks if he can restore a painting for him at his home. The man had a very authoritative air about him, and he asks Camilo to get in his car. A chauffeur drives the man and Camilo to a very large house, and during the drive the man doesn't speak a word to Camilo. The mysterious gentleman takes Camilo all through the large house until he comes to a large portrait of a beautiful woman, the man's deceased wife. The painting is on the verge of cracking, and the man wants Camilo to restore it.

Camilo accepts the job, and they agree that the work will be done at the man's house because the portrait is so large. Every Monday at three o'clock a car arrives at Camilo's studio to pick him up. He spends time working on the portrait and then the driver take him back around six o'clock.

One day Camilo meets a beautiful young woman at the man's house. He assumes that she's his daughter. She is interested in art and talks with Camilo about painting. For weeks after this, Camilo wants to see the young woman again. He hopes to catch a glimpse of her while he's working, but he doesn't see her. Then, the day Camilo finishes the restoration, the man asks him if he can paint a picture of his daughter. She is the same beautiful young woman Camilo met weeks before. Her name is Rosa, and an elderly aunt sits and snores in the room while Camilo paints the portrait. Over the weeks he paints her, they fall in love, but Camilo is afraid that their love is impossible because she is so rich and he is so poor.

Mrs. Milagros tells Camilo to take heart, that it doesn't matter what the girl's father thinks. They're both adults, and they don't need anyone's permission to marry. As Camilo tells his story to Mrs. Milagros, the little maid is in the corner listening. Mrs. Milagros tells the inspector that the maid is hard-of-hearing and dense and that she went off to her room silently after hearing Camilo's story.

Part I, Chapter 5 Analysis

It's easy to forget that Mrs. Milagros is giving this account second-hand to the inspector. She tells the story with such graphic detail, even describing the humidity in the house where Camilo paints, that it seems that she's the one who lived the story, not Camilo. This detail serves three purposes.

First of all, the detail with which Mrs. Milagros tells Camilo's story shows how completely she believes everything Camilo has told her. She remembers each scene vividly. One might even infer that she has added some of her own details. Her romantic whims may have tainted her recollection of what Camilo has told her.

Secondly, as a storytelling convention, the details serve to make the story vivid in the mind of the reader. An entire novel of second-hand accounts could become quite dull if the accounts are not vivid and full of sensory images.

Thirdly, the details show us that Mrs. Milagros and Camilo have a close enough relationship that Camilo is willing to share personal details about his life with her. There is a vast difference between the public Camilo and the Camilo Mrs. Milagros portrays in this chapter. Normally, he blushes and becomes silent at the slightest personal pretext, but here, Mrs. Milagros knows all about his romantic feelings for a young woman.



Part I, Chapter 6

Part I, Chapter 6 Summary

After the heart-to-heart talk between Mrs. Milagros and Camilo Castegano from the previous chapter, Rosa is frequently and openly discussed at La Madrilena. Mrs. Milagros assumes that Camilo and Rosa will be engaged as soon as things can be worked out with Rosa's father. Mrs. Milagros and her daughters long to meet Rosa, and they beg him to bring home a picture of her.

Camilo tells them that he's been painting a smaller portrait of her to keep for himself and that it's much better than the larger one he has been painting for Rosa's father. One night, he brings the portrait home wrapped in a paper package. After supper, Camilo, Mrs. Milagros, and her three daughters congregate in Camilo's room to look at the portrait. They all want to see whether Rosa is beautiful or plain. Mrs. Milagros, Clotilda, and Enilda are all very impressed with Rosa, but Matilda, the oldest daughter, is not impressed.

David Reguel comes into Camilo's room and congratulates Camilo upon seeing the beautiful woman in the portrait. By the next morning, all the boarders know about the portrait, have seen it, and congratulate Camilo. David Reguel keeps saying that he knows her from somewhere but can't think where. Miss Eufrosia is the only boarder who doesn't want to see the portrait.

One Monday, Mrs. Milagros finds Camilo looking downhearted. He tells her that the portrait is nearly finished and that he only has one more Monday at Rosa's house. That Wednesday another letter arrives from Rosa that informs Camilo that they must be separated until she can arrange some things with her father. The letter ends, "Be patient and wait." The old aunt who has supervised the portrait sitting tells Camilo that she knows all about their love and is on their side, but she too advises him to be patient and wait. As the days pass, Camilo's stoic face returns, and the other boarders, except for Mrs. Milagros, ignore him once more.

Part I, Chapter 6 Analysis

Mrs. Milagros is enthralled with the romance between Camilo and Rosa. At the end of the chapter, she cannot understand the indifference toward Camilo that she senses from the other boarders. The contrast between her reaction and Miss Eufrosia's reaction to Camilo's predicament foreshadows that there is more than one side to this story.

There is an abundance of metaphors in this chapter, many of them related to the sea: "he grabbed at that smile the way a shipwrecked soul grasps at timber," "his flag's at half-mast," and "froggy-voiced gentlemen." These metaphors allude to the fact that something about the story is murky, unclear, or under the surface.



Part I, Chapter 7

Part I, Chapter 7 Summary

A letter arrives from Rosa while Camilo is at work. Mrs. Milagros feels that there is something sacred about this letter, so instead of opening it, she puts it in his room and waits patiently for Camilo to come home. Her daughters all know about the letter's arrival, and they're all anxious to know whether the letter holds Camilo's salvation or destruction. When Camilo arrives home for dinner he goes to his bedroom and remains there for a long time. Mrs. Milagros begins to worry that he's hurt himself. Finally, his door opens and she snatches up the letter to read it. In the letter, Rosa tells Camilo good-bye forever.

Excitedly, Mrs. Milagros encourages Camilo to go and find her, to take her away and marry her. He argues that he must stay away for Rosa's good. Mrs. Milagros offers to go talk with Rosa's father herself, to get Rosa and bring her to the boardinghouse. That evening, David Reguel says that he saw Rosa out on the street during the day. He says he recognized her from her portrait and called out her name and she turned to look at him.

Mrs. Milagros is very skeptical that David Reguel has seen Rosa. She asks him what he talked about with Rosa. Reguel says that there are "certain things that one doesn't ask a gentleman." She says she knows, and that's why she asked. Davide Reguel is speechless after this comment by Mrs. Milagros. She figures that she finally won an argument with him, but really, this is a clue about how David knows Rosa.

Part I, Chapter 7 Analysis

Mrs. Milagros is intensely frustrated by Camilo's lack of gumption when he receives the letter from Rosa telling him farewell. Her repressed romantic notions have entangled her in Camilo's love affair. She wants a happy ending more than anything, and she's willing to risk herself in order to obtain the happy ending for Camilo. She cannot understand Camilo's reaction to this letter, but she assumes it is because he is not like other men, not because the story does not add up.

Mrs. Milagros also projects her feelings onto Camilo. She really can't read Camilo, but she assumes that he feels as she would in a similar situation. For example, after their argument about what to do about Rosa, she says, "I left him, wrapped in the shroud of his grief." From later evidence, the reader knows that he's not grieving at this point, but Mrs. Milagros projects her own grief over lost love (her dead husband) onto Camilo, an emotionally blank slate.



Part I, Chapter 8

Part I, Chapter 8 Summary

At a particularly gloomy supper at the boardinghouse, the clock strikes ten and the doorbell rings. Mrs. Milagros sends the maid to see who's at the door, and a woman's voice says, "Is this the home of Mr. Camilo Canegato?" Mrs. Milagros realizes that Rosa's at the door, and she leaps to her feet. Soon, the entire household, except for Camilo, is at the door, welcoming Rosa and inviting her inside. Rosa is completely bewildered by this response and stands there speechless.

Mrs. Milagros treats her as a mother would, but Rosa seems to not understand what is going on. Mrs. Milagros notices bruises on Rosa's arms and assumes that she's had an awful fight with her father, but Rosa just nods her head when she's asked questions. Mrs. Milagros praises Rosa for being so brave to run away from her father, and she calls Camilo a coward.

After Mrs. Milagros and her daughters condemn Rosa's father, Rosa bursts into tears. Mrs. Milagros rearranges the boarders' rooms to make room for Rosa. She asks David Reguel to move into Camilo's room temporarily. At first David resists, but then he gives in and moves his things. Mrs. Milagros orders the maid to get some food for Rosa, and Rosa eats ravenously, as if she hasn't eaten for a long time. Mrs. Milagros pulls a chair up next to Rosa and asks questions about where she lives and what she's been doing, but Rosa just remains silent, which infuriates the curious Mrs. Milagros.

Part I, Chapter 8 Analysis

Again, the disjointed nature of expectations and reality casts many questions over the story. When Rosa appears at La Madrilena, everyone is excited to see her. Everyone crowds around her in the vestibule, everyone except Camilo. This time, however, it is not just Camilo's behavior that perplexes Mrs. Milagros (and the reader); it is also Rosa's behavior. Rosa, who so perfectly resembles the woman in the portrait, does not resemble the woman in the letters that have been arriving for Camilo for several months. This Rosa is tongue-tied and confused, not eloquent like the Rosa in the letters.

The last paragraph of the chapter is very interesting and ties in with the ocean metaphors of the previous chapter. The imagery in this paragraph is reminiscent of water: "foggy and pinpointed with reflections," "seeing . . . through a splattered glass." Again, the story is confused, convoluted, and unclear. Mrs. Milagros sees that something isn't right, and the items that finally tip her toward this conclusion are the bruises on Rosa's arms.



Part I, Chapter 9

Part I, Chapter 9 Summary

When Mrs. Milagros finally gets to her bedroom that night, her three daughters are waiting for her, eager to talk about Rosa. They are skeptical about her age, her bewilderment, her dirty shoes and the run in her stocking, and her strangeness. Mrs. Milagros is upset with her daughters for being so rude about Rosa. Clotilda says that she can see inner corruption in Rosa, and Matilda says that it looks like Rosa had time to fix her hair.

Mrs. Milagros informs the inspector that Rosa stayed at La Madrilena from that day until yesterday, when Camilo and Rosa were married. She continues to describe Rosa as very quiet and lacking in spunk. She remarks that Camilo never touches her and doesn't even dare to get near her. Rosa's manners do not seem to be aristocratic. She never turns anything down but always says "yes" to everything that is offered.

Rosa becomes great friends with David Reguel. David and Rosa spend a lot of time talking cosily, and Coretti and Hernandez also enjoy flirting with her. Mrs. Milagros reports to the inspector that one afternoon during siesta time, everyone is awakened by a fight and weeping coming from Rosa's room. Camilo and David are shouting at each other, and Rosa is in David's arms, crying. After Mrs. Milagros breaks up the fight, she takes Rosa to the dining room and gives her a glass of port. She tries to get Rosa to talk, but Rosa says nothing happened. To this day, Mrs. Milagros doesn't know what happened.

One morning, two police officers come to the door looking for a woman. Mrs. Milagros instructs Enilda to hide Rosa in the maid's room. Mrs. Milagros assumes that Rosa's father has called the police to help him search for her. After looking at Miss Eufrosia and the maid, the police officers leave. The inspector tells Mrs. Milagros that the police came that day because of an anonymous phone call by a woman.

Part I, Chapter 9 Analysis

Although Mrs. Milagros is irritated with her daughters for doubting Rosa, the three of them are right on. Their youthful minds are not clouded by the romantic notions that are tainting Mrs. Milagros's view of reality. Clotilda says she can see inner corruption in Rosa, which ends up to be true, and Matilda says that despite Rosa's tattered appearance, she had time to fix her hair, and this also turns out to be true. This lends itself to a Romantic philosophy, that children are wiser than corrupted adults.

Rosa's entanglement with David and Camilo's unwillingness to fight for Rosa lead the reader to believe that Rosa and Camilo's relationship does not match up with the relationship described in the letters. Rosa's attentions to David do not jive with a woman who has just left her family and endured abuse for the man she supposedly loves.

Part I, Chapter 10

Part I, Chapter 10 Summary

A couple of days before the wedding, Rosa confesses to Mrs. Milagros and her daughters that Rosa is not her real name. Her name is Marta Correga. Mrs. Milagros asks her if Camilo knows her real name, and Rosa says, "Of course," but Mrs. Milagros remembers that Camilo once told her that he didn't know her last name. Enilda asks Rosa if she can see her identity card, and Rosa leaves to go find it. They want to see if she's as old as she says she is. The birth dates match up.

Mrs. Milagros tells the inspector that yesterday Rosa and Camilo were married. There was no trouble at city hall during the ceremony. They had a little party at La Madrilena after the wedding with cakes and dancing and cider. Around midnight they left in a car for the Hotel Wien, and they both seemed happy. The rest of the boarders stayed up for a while, and no one noticed when David Reguel left, but some time in the night there was noise and the door bell ringing. David Reguel was shouting, "He killed her! Camilo Canegato killed Rosa in a downtown hotel!"

Part I, Chapter 10 Analysis

The inconsistencies in Rosa's story persist right up until the wedding, but Mrs. Milagros is intent on hushing them up or ignoring them. Even when Rosa admits that her name is really Marta Correga, Mrs. Milagros continues to trust her, even though her daughters and Miss Eufrosia are extremely skeptical.

This last chapter in the first section is very short. It is right about in the middle of the novel and ends with a climax: the death of Rosa. This is the end of Mrs. Milagros's testimony, which has raised many questions and answered none of them. This literary device builds suspense, which will have to be resolved in the rest of the story.



Part II

Part II Summary

Part II consists of one lengthy chapter. In this chapter, David Reguel gives his testimony to the inspector. His language is thick with literary allusions and philosophical terms, which gives credibility to Mrs. Milagros's description of him. He begins by talking about Camilo's motive for killing Rosa. He encourages the inspector to value Mrs. Milagros's statement at "next to nothing" because she can't be taken seriously. He assumes that Mrs. Milagros would blame the murder on the victim because the victim can't defend herself.

David Reguel claims to have foreseen this murder. He thinks that the other boarders at La Madrilena have been living in the clouds in regards to Camilo's character. Because of Camilo's physical deficiencies, his small frame and henpecked stature, David believes that Camilo's character is deficient and that he should be distrusted "because of his physical vulnerability." Other characters from history who have suffered from this problem include Napoleon and Robespierre. They belong to the category of "potentially dangerous little men." David believes that Camilo is a volcano waiting to burst, that the stones heaped on him by the others, with Mrs. Milagros as the foremost culprit, pushed him toward the brink of disaster. David also thinks that Mrs. Milagros's daughters attributed to Camilo's dangerous character by the way they do not maintain a minimum of coquetry in his presence.

David explains the love affair between Camilo and Rosa by saying that Rosa has been kept away from the outside world by her protective father. She lives in a somber, old house where she can never be herself. Then Camilo comes along, a being from another world, an artist, as opposite to her father as possible, and she falls in love with him. Camilo realizes immediately the impression he has made on her, and he takes advantage of her, emotionally and physically. David has read some of her letters, and he reads sexual innuendo into them instead of the romantic promises that Mrs. Milagros reads into them. David believes that Camilo compromised Rosa, and she then thinks that she can never be good for anyone else, and that is why she pursues him at all costs. He also thinks that once Camilo has conquered Rosa, he is repulsed by her. That is why Camilo stays seated at the dining room table while all the other boarders run to greet her when she shows up at La Madrilena at ten o'clock.

All the while, David believes that he is the only one who can see the truth and that everyone else is ignorant or stupid. He watches Camilo and prods him, chides him and watches his reactions to test his hypotheses. David talks about his deepening friendship with Rosa and a conversation he has with her before she marries Camilo. David asks her if she really loves Camilo, and she asks to talk about something else. Then Rosa asks him what happens when a person gets married under a false name. She wants to know if the marriage will be valid or not. She tells him that her name is Marta, not Rosa. She says that Rosa is a name that she and Camilo picked out to protect themselves.



David advises her to put "Marta" down on the register because she'll have to present her papers at city hall.

David tells the inspector about the shouting incident mentioned by Mrs. Milagros. He overheard Camilo say to Rosa, "Get out of here! Pack up and get out this minute!" He heard Rosa and Camilo argue more, and then he heard Camilo call Rosa a "slut." David ran into the room and attacked Camilo. He wanted to kill him.

The night of the wedding, David feels bitter. He can barely stand to look at Camilo, and Camilo cannot seem to bear to look at Rosa. When it comes time for the newlyweds to leave for the hotel, David feels it is his responsibility to follow them to protect Rosa. He gets a cab to follow their car to the hotel. He watches as they go into the hotel, and then he sees Camilo come out of the hotel alone. David shouts at him to ask why he's left Rosa. David goes up the stairs and sees a scar-faced man who looks like he probably works at the hotel. He tells the man that a blond girl has probably been killed and asks the man which room Camilo Canegato was in. The man tells him to get out or he'll call the police. David goes back down into the street and finds a policeman to bring back to the hotel. He finally gets into the room and Rosa is dead. She has strangle marks on her neck.

Part II Analysis

Just as Mrs. Milagros projects her romantic fantasies onto Camilo, David Reguel projects his desire for power and sexual fulfillment on Camilo. From his lengthy, inflated testimony, it is absolutely clear that David honestly believes that he is smarter and more insightful than anyone else at the boardinghouse. He thinks they are all stupid and shallow, and he sees deficiencies in everything they do. He has immense learning, but his pride in his learning blinds him to reality. When he uses Rosa's letters to justify his theory that Camilo has compromised her, the reader notices that the letters really don't back up his theory, and from then on out, it is difficult to trust him implicitly.

Another reason it's difficult to trust David's testimony is that he clearly has feelings for Rosa by the end of his time with her. His explosive anger toward Camilo and his overly gentle words toward Rosa are evidence of his bias. He is clearly not an objective witness to this case. However, David does see Rosa's dead body with his own eyes just after he has seen Camilo leave the hotel, and this evidence is difficult to refute.

David's vocabulary and literary knowledge is formidable, and the first few page of his testimony are difficult at best. As the testimony wears on, the vocabulary and literary allusions tone down. They get in the way of the plot.



Part III

Part III Summary

The inspector now interviews the accused, Camilo Canegato. This time, the conversation is two-sided, whereas the previous two interviews have not included any dialogue by the inspector. The inspector asks Camilo if he smokes, and Camilo declines. The inspector thinks Camilo's fingers look like smoker's fingers, but Camilo explains that the yellowish tint is from the acids he uses to restore paintings.

The conversation begins with a discussion about art. Camilo is very talkative and expounds on his ideas and theories at length. He seems eager to discuss his passion with anyone who will listen to him. He is especially interested in the idea that modern art has to be phony to survive. Because of photographs and cinematography, artists don't have to be skilled anymore at making things look lifelike. In fact, in order to differentiate themselves from artists of previous generations, they have to make their art look different, abstract. Camilo says he is to painting "what the piano tuner is to music. A servant."

Camilo tells the inspector that the portrait of Mrs. Milagros and her daughters is simply a photograph projected onto a canvas and then painted with tiny brush strokes. He tells the inspector that some people prefer these imitation portraits to photographs to satisfy their ambition. Camilo prides himself in being able to imitate the styles of various painters and has even taken orders to do portraits in particular styles and then sign the name of someone else to them.

The inspector asks Camilo about his family. His father was strict and uncommunicative, and his mother died when he was a baby. Camilo says that he is fond of the Milagros family and that it's only because of them that he has stayed at the boardinghouse so long. They have been like a family to him.

The inspector accuses Camilo of falsifying documents because Rosa's identity card for Marta Correga is false. Camilo admits that the identity card could be false, but he says he's not the one who made it. Camilo tells the inspector that Rosa never existed. He encourages him to go to the widower's house in Belgrano and ask if it's true that he had a wife that died ten years ago from cancer. This is true, but if you ask the man if he has a daughter, he will say that he doesn't have any children. If you ask if Camilo Canegato did a portrait of his daughter and if his daughter ran away, he will not understand.

Camilo explains that Rosa is a creation of his. He wrote the letters to himself and mailed them. He dreamed up Rosa, bought the blond tress at a costume shop, and then somehow she materialized. Camilo has had trouble with his dreams in the past. Sometimes he hasn't been able to differentiate between dreams and reality. For example, when his father died, he often dreamt that his father was resurrected, and then he thought that the death was the dream. He couldn't keep his dreams and reality



straight, and that's why he took so much medicine "for his brain" when he first arrived at La Madrilena.

Now that he's explaining this to the inspector, he asks the inspector why he should be held accountable for something he dreamt. The inspector replies that usually when he wakes up there isn't a dead body anywhere as a result of his dream. Camilo says that Rosa was an impossible ambition. He felt that if he could get one woman to love him, that other women would then love him as well. Since he couldn't get the first woman to love him, he had to invent her. He wanted to make Matilda jealous of Rosa.

Camilo broke off the artificial affair with Rosa when he felt his purpose had been served, but then David Reguel came home saying he had seen her face. Then, several nights later, Rosa's face appeared at the boardinghouse asking for him. Camilo felt like he was going crazy when Rosa appeared. From that point until the wedding, Camilo is frantic, trying to figure out whether he is dreaming or facing some ghost. He still believes that she is an invention of his imagination, so he tries to snuff her out. He tries to strangle her, but he runs out of the hotel before she is dead. He runs out of the hotel room and sees the scar-faced man called Turk. He sees another man who steps into a room as if hiding from him, and then David Reguel grabs him outside.

Part III Analysis

The false portraits Camilo paints symbolize the false reality he creates. He explains to the inspector that he paints over photographs to make artificial portraits for people that resemble real, authentic paintings. The people who order these portraits do not mind that they're not genuine because it is the façade that is important to them. Camilo has taken great pains to create a false reality for himself when he creates Rosa. He painstakingly writes the letters from Rosa, perfumes them, and sends them in the mail for the benefit of the boarders, especially Mrs. Milagros. He buys a lock of hair at a costume shop and mails it in one of the envelopes. He creates an entire, intricate story about his love affair with Rosa, and he does all this for appearances, so that other women will think he is desirable and want to pursue him.

After the testimonies of Mrs. Milagros and David Reguel, Camilo Canegato's voice is surprising. Mrs. Milagros has portrayed Camilo as painfully silent and embarrassed of everything, but he speaks genially with the professor at great length regarding art, people, and his story. David Reguel has portrayed him as lewd, evil, and psychotic, but again, this is not the Camilo that we hear from in this conversation. The contrast between this Camilo and the Camilo we have heard about from Mrs. Milagros and David Reguel points either to duplicity or to misunderstanding.



Part IV

Part IV Summary

Part IV contains the statement given by Miss Eufrasia Morales. She declares that she has known for some time that the romance between Camilo and Rosa has hidden "something abominable." Her first clue came from a friend. This friend asked Eufrasia if she knew of anyone who could do a portrait "from life." Eufrasia referred her friend to Camilo Canegato, and some time later, Eufrasia asked her friend how it had gone. Eufrasia's friend reported that it had gone poorly because Camilo had admitted that he couldn't do portraits from life but only painted over enlarged photographs. Therefore, when Camilo talked about his romance with Rosa developing as she sat for a portrait, Eufrasia knew something was amiss.

Secondly, Eufrasia makes reference to the little maid Elsa, who works at La Madrilena. For years, Eufrasia has noticed that the maid has been infatuated by Camilo Canegato. Elsa spends extra time cleaning and straightening Camilo's room, and she gives him extra large portions of food at the dinner table, which Eufrasia notices because her own portions are then smaller. Eufrasia reports that Elsa spilled soup on Camilo the night his affair with Rosa was made public. After this, Elsa becomes even more withdrawn and ceases speaking altogether.

The day of the fight between Camilo and David Reguel during siesta time, Eufrasia is awakened by the noise and puts her head to the wall to catch what they are saying. She overhears Rosa saying, "If I leave, what will the people here think?" She can't hear what Camilo says in his low voice, but then she hears Rosa say, "If you want me to leave, you're going to have to give me every last penny you've got in the bank. I wouldn't leave here for anything less." Then Rosa threatens to tell Matilda what Camilo thinks about her and the argument blows up into a fight with David coming in to rescue Rosa. After the hubbub has subsided, Eufrasia sees Elsa lingering about in Rosa's room. Later, Eufrasia overhears Camilo and Rosa talking in the garden. Camilo tells Rosa that "there aren't any more letters from Rosa," and Rosa asks if something is torn up. She is afraid that someone might find it. Eufrasia tells the inspector that she believes there is a letter that contains important information about the investigation, but she doesn't know where it is.

Soon thereafter, Elsa takes a day off, which she has never done before, and goes to Lujan (Miss Eufrasia finds a second-class train ticket to Lujan after Elsa returns). No one knows what she did while she was there. During the entire investigation, Elsa has trembled and groaned. After the wedding, Eufrasia finds Elsa weeping bitterly in the kitchen.



Part IV Analysis

In the first part of the book, Mrs. Milagros speaks of Miss Eufrosia Morales with contempt. Eufrosia's testimony justifies some of that contempt (she spies on the other boarders without remorse and tells the inspector that she condemns them all), but this testimony also reveals that Eufrosia is more shrewd than Mrs. Milagros gives her credit for.

Eufrosia notices things that none of the others do. For example, she notices that the maid Elsa is in love with Camilo Canegato. Eufrosia is the only boarder who seems to even know the maid's name, let alone her habits and mannerisms. Eufrosia keeps her knowledge to herself, never revealing to Mrs. Milagros the information she obtained from her friend about Camilo's portraiture skills.

By the end of this chapter it's clear that the character with the most important information for unraveling the crime is the character that no one has bothered to ask: Elsa. At the end of this chapter, Miss Eufrosia Morales, referred to as a prophetess, says, "The rock cast aside by the architects may well prove to be the keystone of the building." She is saying that everyone has cast aside the person who knows the most about the house. The maid is in everyone's rooms, serves everyone's food, and constantly listens and never talks because everyone assumes she has nothing to say.



Part V

Part V Summary

Elsa leads Inspector Julian Aguirre to her bedroom where she pulls a letter out of a book in her bottom dresser drawer. The long letter, written by Marta Correga (or Maria Correa), does not in any way resemble the perfumed letters Rosa sent to the house for several months. The handwriting is wild and the spelling and grammar atrocious. The discovery of this letter explains Elsa's anonymous phone calls to the police and her fruitless journey to Lujan in search of Mrs. Ana Chinca. The letter also clears Camilo's name and proclaims his innocence. In addition, it will be the vehicle by which Sarkis Abulaf, alias Slit Turk, is sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Marta Correga. Here is what the letter contains:

The letter is from Marta to her aunt, Ana Chinca. Marta has just been released from a five-year jail sentence. She is writing to her aunt to express gratitude for all she's done and to apologize for her former behavior. After being released from prison, Marta found herself on the street with no money, clothes or home. She wandered around the city looking for friends or relatives, but she couldn't find anyone that she used to know.

Finally, she comes across a woman named Iris that she knew from before she was in prison. The woman feeds and clothes her and involves her in a prostitution ring. A man named Slit Turk gets her a false identity card with the name of Marta Correga. Marta and Iris get into a big fight, and Marta leaves her for dead. She leaves the house with bruises all over her arms and goes wandering about in the streets. She doesn't know where to go. She wanders to the Plaza Once and then remembers that Camilo Canegato lives there. Marta's aunt had done laundry for Camilo at one time, and she had given Camilo a picture of her niece. This niece, Marta, had been working as a prostitute, and Camilo went to visit her every week until she got in trouble and went to jail. She remembered Camilo's address and went to find him at La Madrilena. That's when everyone assumes she is Rosa and takes her in.

Part V Analysis

The picture of Rosa has been in Camilo's subconscious all along. He has amorous feelings attached to that photograph because of his memories of the prostitute Marta. But his conscious thought does not put two and two together. He believes that Rosa is a dream, but her face does in fact belong to a flesh-and-blood human, who has completely different attributes and motivations from the idealized dream Rosa.

Even in this chapter where the maid Elsa rescues her love from lifetime imprisonment, she never says a word. With silence and dignity she just reveals the evidence that clarifies the entire situation and solves the crime. Elsa is the female version of Camilo Canegato. She has physical deficiencies that cause others to ignore her. She is not the

object of anyone's adoration. She becomes a recluse. Nonetheless, she has dreams and desires like everyone else, and these dreams prompt her to action, just as Camilo's dreams have prompted him to create Rosa. Instead of causing confusion, though, Elsa's actions cause clarity.

The novel ends in a circular fashion. Instead of ending with a period, it ends with ellipses. It ends with the sentence, "And now, Auntie, begins the strange thing I wanted to tell you about. . ." Thus, the reader is sent back to the beginning to make sense of the entire story. This sort of ending fully integrates the reader into the mystery in the same way an investigator or detective has to sort through all the evidence one more time when the crime is finally solved. The investigator has to make sure that all the pieces add up to his conclusion, and this is what the reader is forced to do as well.



Characters

Camilo Canegato

Camilo Canegato is a middle-aged man who lives in a boardinghouse. He is small in stature, pale, and very plain. He has lived at the boardinghouse for twelve years, since his father died, and he considers the proprietress and her daughters to be like his family. He has no other friends or relatives. When he arrives at the boardinghouse he takes pills and syrups with his meals to help his brain, but Mrs. Milagros convinces him that he doesn't need it.

In his loneliness and to Matilda Milagros, Camilo invents a beautiful woman named Rosa. He writes letters to himself from Rosa and makes up very involved stories about their romance. Mrs. Milagros and the other women at the boardinghouse become obsessed with the romance. One night, though, Rosa, the invented woman, arrives at the boardinghouse, and Camilo begins to lose his grasp on reality. He believes that his dream has become reality. He is confused but doesn't know how to get help. Finally, he marries Rosa and Rosa is murdered on their wedding night. He reports to the inspector and tells everything he knows, but his name isn't cleared until the maid Elsa saves him.

Mrs. Milagros

Mrs. Milagros is a widow with three daughters who supports her family by running a boardinghouse. She is very talkative and kind at heart, but she is not always sensible and hardly ever tactful. Mrs. Milagros favors Camilo and may even be a little in love with him at times, but she is more like a mother to him and she wants what she thinks is best for him. She gets carried away with her romantic fantasies, and this tendency blinds her to the truth.

Mrs. Milagros interferes in her boarders lives to the point that she reads their mail. Camilo banks on this interference to raise him in the esteem of the other boarders. Pushy and difficult to dissuade, Mrs. Milagros eventually forces Camilo into marriage with what he thinks is a figment of his imagination. Her interference pushes the scenario to the breaking point, and a murder results.

Miss Eufrosia Morales

Miss Eufrosia Morales is a retired school teacher who has never been married and who holds everyone in contempt. She immediately suspects depravity or foul play in the conduct of the others. No one likes to be around her. She spies on the other boarders and tries to catch them doing bad things. Despite these traits, she can see what is going on more clearly than Mrs. Milagros can. She doesn't share her findings with anyone else except for the inspector.



David Reguel

David Reguel is perhaps the youngest boarder at the boardinghouse. He is a law student who can speak five languages and always has a book under his arm. He likes to lecture to others and is always right about everything. Camilo and Mrs. Milagros are intimidated by David. He is tall and wears big round glasses that obscure his face. He thinks he knows the truth about the murder, but he doesn't. He has Camilo's character all wrong, despite his intellectual theories that prop up his lecture.

Elsa Gatica

The maid Elsa is a small woman about thirty years old. She is lame and walks with a limp. She doesn't speak much at all, and once she knows that Camilo is in love with someone else, she ceases speaking altogether. Mrs. Milagros largely ignores Elsa, as do the rest of the boarders. Camilo seems to be completely unaware of Elsa's attachment to him. Elsa is the person who finally solves the mystery.

Hernandez

Hernandez is one of the boarders. He is handsome and very concerned with his looks. He is something of a playboy, and Mrs. Milagros's eldest daughter Matilda likes him. Hernandez congratulates Camilo on his conquest with Rosa when Camilo produces the portrait of Rosa.

Coretti

Coretti is another of the boarders. He is a jolly fellow who likes to tell jokes. He is a shallow man, and David Reguel doesn't like him.

Clotilda

Clotilda is Mrs. Milagros's second daughter. She has received more education than her mother or sisters, and her mother resents this. Clotilda is skeptical of Rosa and never fails to explain why or to point out inconsistencies in the story.

Enilda

Enilda is the youngest Milagros daughter. She is silly, laughs a lot, and likes to criticize and point out inconsistencies in Rosa's story.



Rosa a Las Diez

Rosa is not a real person but a figment of Camilo's imagination. Her face is that of the prostitute Marta Correga, but her personality is Camilo's ideal woman.

Marta Correga

Marta Correga is the woman who shows up at the boardinghouse looking for Camilo. She has just been released from prison and has worked as a prostitute. She has nowhere to go and no relatives to help her, so she looks for Camilo, whom she knows through her aunt who was his laundress. Marta Correga is murdered by Slit Turk.



Objects/Places

La Mardrilena

La Mardrilena is the boardinghouse where most of the action takes place. The story begins with Camilo Canegato arriving at the boardinghouse after his father passes away. Mrs. Milagros runs the boardinghouse and acts like a mother hen to her tenants.

Camilo's Studio

Camilo has a studio in town where he works during the day, restoring paintings and painting portraits. It is a sort of refuge for him, away from Mrs. Milagros' prying eyes.

David's Glasses

David wears thick round glasses that obscure his face. Mrs. Milagros admits that she doesn't really know what he looks like because of those glasses. They represent his weakness, which he projects onto Camilo and expounds on with great detail as he recounts physically inferior men who have caused huge problems in history.

Golden Tress

Camilo includes a tress of golden hair in one of his letters from Rosa. He bought it at a costume shop. The tress gives credibility to Rosa and impresses Mrs. Milagros.

Perfumed Letters

The perfumed letters Camilo sends to himself begin the charade of the romance between Rosa and himself. The letters become an obsession of Mrs. Milagros, and they are to her material proof that Camilo is in love.

Portrait of Rosa

To prove that Rosa is not an old hag, Camilo paints a portrait of her to bring home to the boardinghouse. In reality, the portrait is painted over a picture of Marta Correga, and the picture was given to Camilo by Marta's aunt about five years previously.

Dining Room

Most of the important conversations between the characters take place in the dining room. The dining room is also where Camilo's sanity originally ends (when Mrs.



Milagros convinces him to stop taking his medicine at the beginning) and then ends (when Rosa appears at the boardinghouse).

Identity Card

Marta Correga is very concerned about her identity card as the wedding approaches. Everyone knows her as Rosa, so her identity card doesn't match. Slit Turk originally made her identity card, and he ends up being her killer.

Hotel Wein

The Hotel Wein is the scene of the murder. It is the hotel where Camilo and Rosa go on their wedding night. When David follows them in a taxi, it appears to him as if the car stops in front of the hotel, waits for a while, and then they finally get out. Perhaps Marta convinced him to go to this hotel when he wanted to go to a different one.

Dresser Drawer

The letter from Marta Correga that finally unravels the mystery is carefully concealed in Elsa's bottom drawer. She takes great pains to keep the letter safe, putting it inside a book, under some clothing, in her bottom dresser drawer. It is the item that will save Camilo Canegato.

Themes

Education

The theme of education first appears when Camilo begins receiving love letters from Rosa. Mrs. Milagros secretly reads the letters and discovers that Rosa is a very well educated woman, and this makes Mrs. Milagros feel inferior. She has always held a position of authority over her children and boarders, but now she feels that she is lacking something, and it is something that Camilo holds in high esteem.

David Reguel is another character for who education is of the utmost importance. He tries to use lofty vocabulary and literary and philosophical allusions to convince the inspector that he is the only one who can see the crime clearly enough to have any idea about it. Though David does have a lot of knowledge, his knowledge steers him in the wrong direction, and he is incorrect about the nature of Marta Correga's murder.

Clotilda, Mrs. Milagros's middle daughter, has received more education than the rest of the family. Mrs. Milagros is distrustful of her because of this. Whenever Clotilda professes an opinion about Rosa, which is almost always negative, Mrs. Milagros says that this is what comes from sending your children to school.

In the end, Marta Correga turns out to be very uneducated. Her letter to her aunt, which we read in the very last section, is full of spelling and grammatical mistakes. Her lack of education has led her down a road to ruin.

Duplicity

Duplicity manifests itself on many levels and through many characters in the story. Duplicity muddles the truth, making the real story difficult to get at. First, Camilo invents a woman to make others think that he is something he is not. He regularly hears Coretti and Hernandez talking about women, and he thinks he will gain the boarders' respect by having a woman fall in love with him. So he carries on an elaborate falsehood, fabricating evidence that a woman is in love with him.

Marta Correga, the woman everyone thinks is Rosa, is carrying on a false life as well. She has just gotten out of prison and needs a place to stay. She obtains a false identity card from Slit Turk, and she goes along with the story Camilo has fabricated so that she can have a roof over her head and regular meals. Slit Turk himself has an alias. He has been running a prostitution ring, but he gives off the appearance of running a respectable hotel. In the end we find that his name is Sarkis Abulaf.



Relativity of Reality

The protagonist of this story, Camilo Canegato, has an altered view of reality, which casts a shadow on the perceptions of those around him. Before he arrives at the boardinghouse, he has been taking medicine for his mental illness, but when Mrs. Milagros tells him he doesn't need to take the medicine, he begins to lose his grasp on reality.

Hence, the fabrication he devises affects different characters in different ways. Mrs. Milagros grasps on to the romance and becomes obsessed by it. Such a romance would make her very happy, so she assumes that it will make Camilo happy as well. She cannot understand why it doesn't send him into raptures. The false romance makes David think that Camilo is a lewd man, that he is taking advantage of this Rosa. He thinks ill of Camilo. The Milagros daughters worry about Camilo and suspect that Rosa is taking advantage of him. Miss Eufrasia is curious at first but then shuns the whole ordeal when she has proof that something about it is false. Elsa mourns because she loves Camilo.

Not until all of the testimonies have been taken and all of the evidence has been discovered does the story take the shape of an entire entity. Still, with all the loose ends wrapped up, it's difficult to tell how everyone perceives the event. We don't know if David changed his view of Camilo based on the evidence. He may hold to his corrupted view of Camilo.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from the points of view of five different characters: Mrs. Milagros, David Reguel, Camilo Canegato, Miss Eufrosia Morales, and Marta Correga. The inspector, Julian Aguirre, puts the five testimonies together to solve the case. Each of these characters uses the first person point of view as he or she explains to the inspector what happened.

Although the characters are all talking about the same set of events, they all tell the story quite differently, based on their perspectives, their personalities, their backgrounds, and their affection or contempt for other characters. Therefore, this story is an interesting study in point of view. Within this one novel, readers can compare and contrast the points of view based on the above elements.

Setting

The story is set in the Once Quarter of Buenos Aires, Argentina. From references within the story, the reader can assume that the Once Quarter is not one of the nicest parts of town, but it certainly isn't a ghetto either. More specifically, the bulk of the action takes place in La Madrilena, a respectable boardinghouse run by a widow with three daughters. The boardinghouse has a large dining room, several boarders' rooms, family rooms, a patio, a garden, and a sizable vestibule.

The story was written in 1962, and the time setting is presumably modern. Mrs. Milagros, the proprietress of the boardinghouse, reminds Camilo Canegato that these are modern times; he doesn't have to abide by the wishes of his fiancée's father, and her father certainly does not have the right to arrange her marriage.

Language and Meaning

Originally written in Spanish, *Rosa a Las Diez* (or *Rosa at Ten O'Clock*) is a translation if you're reading it in English. Place names and people's names, along with occasional phrases and words, are Spanish, and more particularly Argentinian.

Within the novel, the author writes with a wide variety of voices because he writes from so many perspectives. Mrs. Milagros's voice is very colloquial. David's is esoteric but passionate at the same time. Camilo's voice is humble and sincere but also confused. Miss Eufrosia Morales's voice is austere and condemnatory, very confident. We never hear Elsa's voice, but her actions are those of an almost invisible person. Marta's voice, when she's writing the letter to her aunt, is coarse, loquacious, and uninhibited.



The author includes a great deal of metaphors and similes to help readers see the action. He also uses interesting imagery, especially when Camilo describes his confusion about dreams and reality. The sequence involving Rosa's death is so convoluted and mysterious that it resembles Faulkner's writing in *The Sound and the Fury*.

Structure

The novel is divided into five parts. Each part consists of the interrogation of a different character by Inspector Julian Aguirre. The first part is Mrs. Milagros's testimony and it covers about 100 pages or half the book. Mrs. Milagros's testimony sets the stage for the rest of the novel, and it's divided into ten chapters. None of the other parts are divided into chapters, even the lengthy ones. Mrs. Milagros's testimony is never interrupted by the inspector, although sometimes she responds to questions that the reader is unaware of until she addresses him.

The next part is David Reguel's testimony. This part contains very long paragraphs, some longer than a page. Like Mrs. Milagros's testimony, the inspector is largely invisible, the focus being on David Reguel. The third part is Camilo's testimony. Unlike the previous two parts, in this part we get our first glimpse of Inspector Aguirre. His words are included in the dialogue. The fourth part is a statement given by Miss Eufrosia Morales. It is shorter than the previous parts and seems to be written by a third party, recording Eufrosia's statement. The last part has one page of explanation followed by an unfinished letter written by Marta Correga. The novel ends with the unfinished letter.



Quotes

"As a matter of fact, he had with him a suitcase of extraordinary proportions, all covered with straps and clasps and handles, and so big, so truly big, that at first I suspected that someone else had brought it that far and left him standing there with it like a dwarf alongside a cathedral. A person who goes down the street with a load like that on his back can't have any pretensions, so I deduced that my candidate wouldn't be a difficult case." Page 8

"We kept on reading the letters, secretly and with all discretion, because Miss Eufrasia, who is sorcery incarnate (as far as I'm concerned all she's missing is a crystal ball and an owl on her shoulder), seemed to have smelled something and we started running into her everywhere, as if she had been multiplied by ten. What a fine scene it would have been if she had caught us with one of the letters in our hands! We didn't care so much about Camilo, who was like one of the family and would have pardoned us; it was the others, you see; the others because they would immediately have thought we were doing the same thing with their correspondence, besides which Miss Eufrasia would have raised such a row that the whole thing would have showed up in the morning newspapers." Page 32

"I don't know much about psychology, but I was very struck by this attitude taken by people I would have expected more from. It was as if Camilo were making them feel uncomfortable or guilty. It was as if they didn't care to take any part in his sordid business that might involve some unpleasant responsibility for them. So they just pretended that they neither saw nor were aware of Camilo's sorrow, in spite of the fact that with that gloomy face of his it was all very evident. Yes, sir. That attitude of my boarders gave me something to think about for quite a while." Page 72

"A phony story if I ever heard one. He made it all up only to aggravate Camilo's suffering, because Camilo was right there and heard the whole thing. Reguel invented the story just to make Camilo think that Rosa was traipsing around as gay as could be while he was pining away over her." Page 78

"I remember that the clock in the dining room struck ten. Ten strokes that sounded to me like the tolling of a bell for the dead. At that precise moment the front doorbell rang. It sounded weak and lifeless, but it rang for a long time, as if it were never going to stop. It was like the moan of some dying person calling for help. (As you can see, that night everything had a morbid tinge for me.) The sound made us all jump. Why did it have that effect?" Page 80

"Rosa's image shattered, and became smaller; the lights in the room flickered and multiplied; the table, the chairs, the magazine, everything was fading away, was becoming foggy and pinpointed with reflections, as if suddenly I were seeing the dining room through a splattered glass." Page 91



"What I mean to say is I realized that, in spite of his appearance, he was a man who someday could cause us a lot of trouble. The outside surface was too smooth. He never reacted; he just perspired. He never defended himself, but a vein in his forehead throbbed. He didn't shout; he just turned red as a tomato. And when he did all this, when he perspired, when he blushed, when the vein on his forehead throbbed—get this—he was smiling. There it was! The classic example. The clinical portrait of the man who endures and cannot get rid of those stones that are crushing him. And I saw the enormous, cruel stones that the others piled on his spirit." Page 109

"Lord, what fools these mortals be! On the other hand—him! I'll never be able to forget his face the day of the wedding, that scorched-looking face, like a burned, wrinkled piece of paper, like a deflated balloon. And those eyes, those two little reddened eyes that shone like two little bits of fruit looking out from a gash in the skin of a dry, rotten pomegranate. He didn't once look at the bride, didn't once speak to her or take her hand." Page 138

"All modern painting is phony. It has to be. Because if it weren't, it would disappear. Ah, but the farce—ha, ha!—the farce can't last forever." Page 149

"Just that from your point of view, the identity card is false. But the explanation may lie in the fact that you believe that Rosa is real. What is false does not lie in that card, but rather in the person it represents. The adulteration isn't in the document, but in the life to which that document tries to attest." Page 153

"Let us say that there is a little scrap of food rotting in the mud of the chicken coop. They all ignore it. But just let one of them begin to peck at it and you've got the whole lot of them fighting over it and chasing all over the coop to grab it out of each other's beaks. They even reach the point of getting into a bloody fight over the little piece of garbage. That's right, Inspector. Have you guessed it? The fable of Rosa had a purpose. I wanted one woman to begin pecking at my little scrap of food, because I knew that this would immediately arouse the interest of the rest; and since the first woman couldn't be one of flesh and blood, since one had never appeared, I invented her." Page 163

"Elsa's love was expressed only through the few techniques available to a strange and lonely creature of her species: in the drawn-out delight with which she cleaned and tidied Camilo's room, and in the generosity with which she would serve him his food at the table (with serious prejudice resulting with regard to the portions of the others, and to those of Miss Eufrosia in particular)." Page 177



Topics for Discussion

How does each of the testifiers see Camilo Canegato? Is he in any way a reflection of them?

Why is it that Mrs. Milagros's daughters can see Rosa's true self better than she can? Which of the daughters is best at discerning Rosa's true self?

What is David Reguel's motive for following Rosa and Camilo to the hotel? Is he chasing Rosa or is he chasing Camilo? Why?

Why does the inspector interview the testifiers in this particular order? How does the order of the testimonies contribute to the suspense of the story?

Discuss truth. Each witness believes that he or she is telling the truth. What, then, is truth?

How do false appearances affect the story? Think about Camilo's portraits, which are painted photographs. Think about Rosa's real name, Marta Correga. Are there other examples of false appearances?

Did Camilo's testimony surprise you? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Camilo and the little maid Elsa. Are their motivations the same?