

Traducción al inglés de la novela *Aura* por Carlos Fuentes

by

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This project is an English translation of the 1962 novel *Aura*, written by the Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes. Using many literary elements characteristic of magical realism and fantasy literature, Fuentes recounts the story of Felipe Montero, a young historian who accepts a very abnormal job while living in Mexico City during the 1960s. At the request of his new employer, the mysterious Señora Consuelo Llorente, Felipe is tasked (as a live-in assistant) to review, edit, and have published the memoirs of Consuelo's late husband, General Llorente. While living in the Llorente household, Felipe meets Consuelo's niece, Aura, and upon their encounter, he immediately develops a strong desire to be with her. However, as the story progresses, Felipe learns more and more about the Llorente family, and he realizes that there exists a stronger bond between Aura and Consuelo, and that his initial perceptions about the family were completely wrong.

In this project, I attempted to translate *Aura* into English in order to bring a new perspective to this classical piece of Mexican literature. My goal was to ultimately create a more modern reading experience which flowed naturally in English, while preserving the amazing and intricate atmosphere that Fuentes meticulously constructed. *Aura* is greatly driven by strong, vivid, supernatural imagery, and it is this type of imagery that I wanted to pay homage to. This translation does not aim to replace or ameliorate the original work. It serves as a counterpart to

the Spanish text, breathing new life into the original, and allowing more people to immerse themselves in the literary world created by Fuentes.

Adrien Ziegler
Dr. Karen Muñoz-Christian
WLC 460
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Traducción al inglés de la novela *Aura* por Carlos Fuentes

Chapter 1

You read the advertisement: an offer such as this one is not a common occurrence. You read it once, and then again. It seems to be directed at you, and you alone. Distracted, you let your cigarette ashes fall into the cup of tea you've been drinking in this cheap and dirty cafe. You re-read it. Young historian required. Well organized. Scrupulous. Adept in the French language. Perfect colloquial knowledge. Able to perform secretarial duties. Youthful, knowledge of French, preferable if has lived in France for some time. Three thousand pesos a month, meals and a comfortable bedroom; sunny, adequate study. All that is missing is your name. All that is lacking is for the blackest and most striking letters of the advertisement to announce: Felipe Montero. Felipe Montero required, former scholar of the Sorbonne, historian burdened with useless facts, used to exhuming yellowed papers, assistant professor in private schools, nine hundred pesos a month. By reading this, you suspect a prank. Donceles 815. Come in person. No phone number is given.

You pick up your briefcase, and leave a tip. You think that another young historian with a situation similar to your own has already read this ad, taken the lead, and filled the position. You try to forget about it while you walk to the corner of the street.

Bibliografía

Fuentes, Carlos. *Aura*. Ciudad de México. Segunda edición, Biblioteca Era, 2012.

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Introducción

Cuando comencé mi último año de la universidad, tenía una gran incertidumbre con respecto al tema de mi proyecto final. A diferencia de algunos estudiantes que saben en qué dirección quieren que vaya su proyecto, yo ni siquiera tenía una vaga idea de cuál podría hacer. Sin embargo, después de tomar una clase de literatura latinoamericana, comencé a tener una idea más clara de cómo podía completar mi proyecto. En esa clase, leímos libros de muchos movimientos diferentes como el romanticismo o el naturalismo, pero el corriente que me interesó más fue el corriente del realismo mágico. El realismo mágico me intrigó debido a su estilo sometido y al mismo tiempo descontrolado. Por alguna razón, la yuxtaposición de la vida real con elementos mágicos me fascinó, y en mi opinión, creó los escenarios más cautivadores. Durante la última semana de la clase, leímos el libro *Aura*, escrito por Carlos Fuentes, y aunque el tiempo que pasamos leyendo el libro fue breve, me dejó un impacto considerable. Después de leerlo, sabía que quería hacer algo con este libro para mi proyecto final, pero no sabía que. Después de investigar el libro, descubrí que fue traducido al inglés solo una vez a mediados de los años 1960. Sin embargo, esta traducción al inglés estaba anticuada y en mi opinión, sigue demasiado la cadencia del original. Por ejemplo, en el primer capítulo, cuando Felipe sube al autobús, la traducción, como el texto original usa una oración extremadamente larga. Esto funciona bien en español, pero la versión en inglés parece apresurada y falta ritmo. Debido a

esto, decidí hacer una nueva traducción de *Aura* en inglés, pero con un estilo más actualizado que tiene una cadencia, un ritmo, y sintaxis apropiado para inglés.

Mientras que existen muchas excelentes novelas de realismo mágico, *Aura* me llamó la atención debido a su estilo extremadamente único. Aunque técnicamente *Aura* se considera como realismo mágico, muchos argumentan que, en realidad, hace parte del fantástico. Al igual que el realismo mágico, *Aura* incorpora magia en la historia, pero a diferencia del realismo mágico, la magia es un factor integral en la progresión de la historia. La magia no solamente es una parte de la historia, es la fundación de la historia. Por esta razón, creí que *Aura* sería un libro extremadamente interesante para traducir debido a su uso profuso de imágenes simbólicas. Otra razón por la que elegí traducir *Aura* se debe a la forma única en que el autor narra la historia. Utiliza una narración en segunda persona singular, y es aquí que el lector ve directamente el aspecto más único de la novela. Con este tipo de narración, el lector se encuentra en el cuerpo del personaje principal, y debido a esto, el lector se involucra mucho más en la historia. Esta elección estilística no solo crea una experiencia de lectura poco común, sino que también presenta un verdadero desafío para alguien dispuesto a traducir la historia.

Aunque tenía muchas dudas sobre la traducción de un libro, debido a que no tenía experiencia previa traduciendo literatura artística, la novela me interesó tanto que dejé mis premoniciones negativas. Sabía que la traducción sería un reto, pero no tenía ninguna idea clara de lo que enfrentaría hasta que finalmente comencé el proyecto. A pesar del aspecto desafiante, todavía creía que este sería un proyecto que valía la pena.

Chapter 1

You read the advertisement: an offer such as this one is not a common occurrence. You read it once, and then again. It seems to be directed at you, and you alone. Distracted, you let your cigarette ashes fall into the cup of tea you've been drinking in this cheap and dirty cafe. You re-read it. Young historian required. Well organized. Scrupulous. Adept in the French language. Perfect colloquial knowledge. Able to perform secretarial duties. Youthful, knowledge of French, preferable if has lived in France for some time. Three thousand pesos a month, meals and a comfortable bedroom; sunny, adequate study. All that is missing is your name. All that is lacking is for the blackest and most striking letters of the advertisement to announce: Felipe Montero. Felipe Montero required, former scholar of the Sorbonne, historian burdened with useless facts, used to exhuming yellowed papers, assistant professor in private schools, nine hundred pesos a month. By reading this, you suspect a prank. Donceles 815. Come in person. No phone number is given.

You pick up your briefcase, and leave a tip. You think that another young historian with a situation similar to your own has already read this ad, taken the lead, and filled the position. You try to forget about it while you walk to the corner of the street. You wait for the bus, light a cigarette, and silently repeat the dates you need to memorize in order for those drowsy children to respect you. You need to be prepared. The bus is approaching and you're looking at the toes of your black shoes. You need to get ready. You put your hand in your pocket and play with some copper coins. Finally you select thirty cents, which you clench in your fist and you extend your arm to firmly grasp the iron bar of the bus that never stops. You jump on, make your way to pay

the thirty cents, push yourself between the standing passengers who are squeezed together, place your right hand on the handrail, press your briefcase to your side and absentmindedly place your left hand over the back pocket of your pants, where you keep your money.

You will live this day, identical to every other, and will not remember it again until the next day when, seated once again at the table in the small café, you order breakfast and open the newspaper. When you arrive at the announcements page, there they are, once again, those salient words: *young historian*. No one came yesterday. You read the advertisement. You stop yourself at the last line: four thousand pesos.

It surprises you to imagine that someone lives on Donceles Street. You have always believed that nobody lives in the old center of the city. You walk slowly, trying to identify the number 815 in this conglomerate of old colonial palaces converted into workshops, watchmakers, cobblers, and outlets selling fruit drinks. The building numbers have been revised, superimposed, confused. Number 13 next to 200, the old tile numbered — 47 — on top of the new placard written with chalk: *now* 924. You look up at the second story: there, nothing changes. The jukeboxes do not disturb, the mercury lights do not illuminate, displays of trinkets do not adorn the second level of the buildings. *Tezontle* tablets, niches with their truncated saints crowned with pigeons, Mexican Baroque stonework, lattice balconies, embrasures and laminated channels, sandstone gargoyles. The windows darkened by long, greenish curtains: the window from which someone withdraws as you look at it. You look at the cover of tangled vines, and you lower your gaze to the entrance with peeling paint and discover 815, *before* 69.

You knock in vain with the door-knocker, that dog's head made of copper, worn smooth: similar to the head of a canine fetus found in museums of natural science. You imagine that the

dog smiles at you, and you remove your hand from its icy surface. The door yields to the very slight push of your fingers, and before entering, you glance over your shoulder for the last time, and you frown because the long, motionless line of cars and trucks grunts, whistles, and releases the unhealthy smoke of their haste. You attempt in vain to retain a single image of this featureless world outside.

You close the door behind you and try to penetrate the darkness of the roofed courtyard, because you can smell the moss, the humidity of the plants, the rotting roots, the thick, numbing perfume. You search in vain for a light to guide you. You search for matches in the pocket of your bag but a sharp, cracked voice warns you from afar:

- No...that is not necessary. Please. Walk forward thirteen steps, and you will find the staircase on your right. Walk up please. There are twenty-two steps. Count them.

Thirteen. Right. Twenty-two.

The smell of humidity, of rotting plants, surrounds you as you count your steps, first on stone tiles, then on creaking boards, sodden from the dampness of the surroundings. You softly count to twenty-two, then you stop, the matchbox in your hands, your briefcase pressed against your ribs. You knock on a door that smells like old, damp pine; you search for a doorknob; you end up pushing and feel, now, carpet under your feet. A thin carpet, badly spread, on which you stumble into new, grayish, dim light which only illuminates certain outlines.

- *Señora* - you say in a monotone voice, because you think you recall the voice of a woman-. *Señora*...

- Now on your left. The first door. Be so kind.

You push the door — you no longer expect any to be properly closed, you already know they are all unlocked — and the scattered light weaves into your eyelashes, as if it were passing through a thin silk net. All you see are walls with unequal reflections, where dozens of lights flicker. You finally perceive them to be candles, placed on shelves and ledges of asymmetrical orientation. They slightly illuminate other objects such as silver hearts, glass jars, framed images, and only behind this intermittent glimmer will you see, in the background, the bed and the sign of a hand that seems to beckon you with its slow movement.

You are able to see her when you turn your back on that firmament of devout lights. You stumble to the foot of the bed; you go around and approach the head. There, a petite figure is lost in the immensity of the bed; when you reach out, you do not touch another hand, but thick, felted skin, the ears of an object that nibbles with obstinate silence and offers you its red eyes: you smile and caress the rabbit that lies beside the hand that, finally, touches yours with cold fingers that linger a long time on your moist palm, which you turn to touch the lace pillow, to release your hand from the other.

- Felipe Montero. I read your advertisement.
- Yes, I know. I'm sorry, there is nowhere to sit.
- I'm fine. Don't worry about me.
- Fine. Please, turn to the side and show me your profile. I can't see you well. In the light.

Like that. Good.

- I read your advertisement...
- Of course. You read it. Do you feel qualified? *Avez vous fait des études?*
- *À Paris madame.*

- *Ah, oui, ça me fait plaisir, toujours, toujours. Toujours, d'entendre...oui...vous savez...on était tellement habitué...et après...*

You turn aside so that the combined light from the silver, wax, and glass, draws a silk cap that gathers up white hair and frames a face so old it is almost infantile. The tight buttons of the white collar go up to ears hidden by the mob cap, sheets and quilts cover the entire body with the exception of the arms wrapped in a worsted shawl, pale hands that rest on the belly: you stay fixated on the face, until a movement from the rabbit allows you to look away and discreetly observe the crumbs, the crusts of bread scattered on the dull, threadbare red silk quilts.

- I'll get to the point. I do not have many years left, Señor Montero, and that is why I decided to violate the routine of a lifetime and place that ad in the newspaper.

- Yes, that's why I'm here.
- Yes. Then you accept the offer.
- Well, I'd like to know more...
- Naturally. You are curious.

She surprises you while you are observing the night table, the jars of different colors, the glasses, the aluminum spoons, the lined-up pill bottles, other glasses stained with whitish liquids that are lying on the floor, within reach of the hand of the woman lying on this low bed. You realize that it is barely raised above the ground when the rabbit jumps down and disappears in the darkness.

- I offer four thousand pesos.
- Yes, that is what today's announcement said.
- Ah, then it came out already.

- Yes, it came out.

- It is about the manuscripts of my husband, General Llorente. They must be organized before I die. They must be published. I have decided this recently.

- And the general himself, is he not able to...?

- He died sixty years ago, sir. They are his unfinished memoirs. They must be completed. Before I die.

- But...

- I will inform you of everything. You will learn how to redact in the style of my husband. Organizing and reading the papers will be enough for you to be fascinated by such prose, such transparency, such, such...

- Yes, I understand.

- Saga, Saga. Where is she? *Ici* Saga...

- Who?

- My companion.

- The rabbit?

- Yes, she will return.

You raise your eyes, which you had kept lowered, and she has already closed her lips, but that word —return—, you listen to it again as if the old lady were saying it right now. Her lips stay still. You look behind you; you are blinded by the bright halo of flickering religious objects. When you look back again at the old lady, you feel that her eyes have opened disproportionately, and that they are clear, liquid, immense, almost the color of the yellow cornea which surrounds them, so that only the black dots of her pupils break that clarity lost minutes earlier in the thick

folds of her eyelids drooping to protect that gaze that once again hides, retreats, you think, at the back of its dry cave.

- Then you will stay. Your room is upstairs. There light does enter.

- Perhaps, madam, it would be best not to bother you. I can continue to live as usual and edit the papers in my own home...

- My conditions are that you live here. Little time remains.

- I don't know...

- Aura...

The old lady moves for the first time since you entered her bedroom; as she extends her hand again, you sense agitated breathing by your side, and between the old lady and you another hand extends and touches the fingers of the old lady. You look to the side and the girl is there, a girl whom you fail to fully see because she is so close and her appearance so unexpected, without a sound — not even the sounds that are not heard but are real because you feel them immediately, because in spite of everything they are stronger than the silence that accompanied them—.

- I told you that she would return...

- Who?

- Aura. My companion. My niece.

- Good afternoon.

The young woman tilts her head, and at the same time, the old woman imitates the gesture.

- This is Señor Montero. He is going to live with us.

You move a few steps so that the light from the candles does not blind you. The girl keeps eyes closed, hands crossed over one thigh: she does not look at you. Little by little, as if frightened by the bright glare in the bedroom, she opens her eyes. Finally, you can see those sea-like eyes, that flow, foam, ebb to calm green, intensify like a wave: you see them and you repeat to yourself it isn't true, that they are identical to all the other beautiful green eyes you have known or could come to know. However, do not be fooled: those eyes flow, transform, as if they are offering you a landscape that only you could imagine and desire.

- Yes. I am going to live with you.

Chapter 2

The old woman smiles, then in a sharp tone laughs and says that your good will pleases her, and tells you that the girl will show you to your room. Meanwhile you think about the four thousand peso salary, the work which could turn out to be pleasant because you like these meticulous research tasks which don't require physical effort, moving from one place to another, the inevitable and bothersome encounters with other people. You think of all of this as you follow the footsteps of the girl — you realize that you are not following her by sight but by sound: following the murmur of her skirt, the rustle of taffeta — and you are yearning to see those eyes once again. You climb the stairs following the sounds, in the midst of the darkness, without getting accustomed to the shadows: you remember that it must be around six o'clock in the afternoon and you are surprised by the flood of light coming from your room, as Aura's hand pushes the door — another door without a lock — and stepping aside she says to you:

- Here is your room. We expect you at diner within the hour.

And she walks away with that sound of taffeta, and you are unable to see her face again.

You close — push — the door behind you and finally raise your eyes toward the immense skylight that serves as the ceiling. You smile when you realize that there is enough twilight to blind you and contrast with the gloom of the rest of the house. Happily, you test the softness of the mattress on the golden metal bed, and you look around the room: the red woolen carpet, the gold and olive color papered walls, the red velvet chair, the old walnut and green leather desk, the antique oil lamp, the opaque light for your nights of research, the shelf nailed above the desk, within reach of your hand, with the bound volumes. You walk toward the other

door and, with a push, you discover an old-fashioned bathroom: a four-legged tub, with little flowers painted on the porcelain, a blue pitcher, an uncomfortable toilet. You look at yourself in the large oval mirror on the wardrobe, also made of walnut, placed in the bathroom. You move your bushy eyebrows, your long, full mouth fogs up the mirror; you close your dark eyes and, when you open them, the fog has disappeared. You stop holding your breath and run a hand through your dark, straight hair; you touch your straight profile, your thin cheeks. When the fog obscures your face once again, you will be repeating that name, Aura.

After smoking two cigarettes, you consult the clock while lying on the bed. Once up, you put on your jacket and you run the comb through your hair. You push open the door and try to recall the path that you took on the way up. You want to leave the door open so that the light from the oil-lamp will guide you: it's impossible, because springs close it. You could entertain yourself by swinging that door. You could take the oil-lamp downstairs with you. You give up because you already know that this house is always in darkness. You will obligate yourself to get to know it and recognize it by touch. You advance with caution like a blind man, with arms outstretched, brushing against the wall, and your shoulder inadvertently presses the electric light switch. You come to a stop, blinking, in the illuminated center of this long, bare corridor. At the end, the banister and the spiral staircase.

You descend counting the steps: another custom immediately imposed on you by the house of Señora Llorente. You go down counting, but take a step back when you encounter the pink eyes of the rabbit that immediately turns its back on you and jumps away.

You do not have time to stop in the lobby because Aura will be waiting for you with a candelabrum in her hand, from a half-open door of opaque glass windows. You walk, smiling,

towards her; you stop to listen to the painful meows of several cats — yes, you stop to listen, already close to Aura's hand, to make sure they are cats— and follow her into the living room.

- It is the cats — says Aura —. There are so many mice in this part of the city.

You cross the living room: furniture covered with matte silk, display cases where porcelain dolls, musical clocks, decorations, and crystal balls have been placed; Persian rugs, bucolic paintings, green velvet curtains drawn. Aura dressed in green.

- Are you comfortable?

- Yes. But I need to pick up my things in the house where...

- It's not necessary. The servant already went to get them.

- You shouldn't have gone to the trouble.

You follow, always behind her, into the dining room. She places the candelabrum in the centre of the table; you feel a damp cold. All the walls in the room are covered in dark wood, carved in Gothic style, with ogives and rosettes. The cats have stopped meowing. When you take your seat you notice that there are four places set and that there are two hot plates underneath silver casseroles and an old bottle that shines with the greenish film that covers it.

Aura uncovers the casserole. You inhale the pungent aroma of kidneys in onion sauce that she serves while you take the old bottle and fill the cut crystal glasses with the thick, red liquid. You try, out of curiosity, to read the wine label, but the film prevents you from doing so. From the other platter, Aura takes some whole roasted tomatoes.

- Excuse me — you say, looking at the two extra settings, the two unoccupied chairs —
Are we expecting someone else?

- Aura continues serving the tomatoes:

- No. Señora Consuelo is feeling weak tonight. She will not join us.

- Señora Consuelo? Your aunt?

- Yes. She wishes for you to see her after diner.

You eat in silence. You drink the particularly thick wine, and you turn your eyes towards her, then glance away over and over again so that Aura does not catch you in that hypnotic impudence which you cannot control. Even then, you want to cement the young woman's features into your mind. Each time you divert your gaze, you have already forgotten them and a sense of unrestrainable urgency obligates you to look at her once more. As always, she looks down, and you, looking for the packet of cigarettes in the pocket of your jacket, find that latchkey, remembering, you say to Aura:

- Ah! I forgot that one of my desk drawers is locked. My documents are in there.

She murmurs:

- So...Do you want to go?

She says it like a reproach. You feel confused and extend your hand with the key hanging from your finger; you offer it to her.

- It is not urgent.

But she draws away from the touch of your hands, keeps hers in her lap, finally looks up and again you doubt your senses, you attribute the light-headedness, the dizziness produced by those green eyes, clear and shining, to the wine, and you stand up, behind Aura, caressing the wooden back of the Gothic chair, not daring to touch the bare shoulders of the young woman, the head that remains motionless. You make an effort to contain yourself, you distract yourself by listening to the imperceptible banging of another door, behind you, which should lead to the

kitchen, you deconstruct the two malleable parts of the dining room: the compact circle of light cast by the candelabrum that illuminates the table and one end of the carved wall, the larger circle of shadow, surrounding the first. You have, at last, the courage to approach her, take her hand, open it and place the key ring, like a promise, on her smooth palm.

You see her clench her fist, look for your gaze, murmur “thank you,” get up, leave the dining room in a hurry.

You take Aura’s place at the table, stretch out your legs, light a cigarette, invaded by a pleasure that you have never known, that you knew was within you, but only now fully experience, liberating it, casting it out because you know that this time it will be answered... And Señora Consuelo is waiting for you: she warned you: she waits for you after diner...

You have learned the path. You take the candelabrum and you make your way through the room and the lobby. The first door in front of you, is that of the old woman. You knock, but do not receive and answer. You knock once more. You push open the door: she is waiting for you. You enter carefully, murmuring:

- Señora...Señora...

She will not have heard you, because you discover her kneeling before that wall of devotions, with her head resting against her fists. You see her from afar: kneeling, wrapped in that coarse woolen nightgown, with her head sunken between her thin shoulders: thin as a medieval sculpture, emaciated: her legs stick out like two threads under the nightgown, gaunt, covered in inflamed erysipelas; you think of the continuous abrasion of rough wool on her skin, until she raises her fists and beat at the air weakly, as if fighting a battle against the images that, when you approach her, you begin to distinguish: Christ, Mary, Saint Sebastian, Saint Lucia, the

Archangel Michael, the grinning demons, the only smiling ones in this iconography of pain and anger: smiling because, in the old engraving illuminated by candlelight, they pierce tridents through the skin of those condemned, empty cauldrons of scalding water, rape women, get drunk, enjoy freedoms forbidden to the saints. You approach this central image, surrounded by the tears of Our Lady of Sorrow, the blood of the Christ, the pleasure of Lucifer, the rage of the Archangel, viscera preserved in jars of alcohol, silver hearts: Señora Consuelo, kneeling, shakes her fists, babbling words that, nearing her, you can hear:

- Come, City of Gods; Sound, Gabriel's trumpet: Oh, how long it takes for the world to die!

She beats her chest until she collapses, in front of the images and the candles, with a coughing fit. You take her by the elbows, lead her gently to her bed, you are surprised by the size of the woman: almost a girl, bent over, hunchbacked, with an exhausted spine: you know that, if not for your help, she would have to return to the bed on hands and knees. You lay her down on the big bed of crumbs and old quilts, cover her, wait for her breathing to return to normal, while involuntary tears roll down her transparent cheeks.

- I am sorry...Sorry, Señor Montero...Old women are only left with...the pleasure of devotion... Pass me a handkerchief please.

- Miss Aura told me...

- Yes, exactly. I do not want us to lose any time... You must...you should begin work as soon as possible...Thank you...

- Try to rest.

- Thank you...Take this...

The old woman lifts her hands to her collar, unbuttons it, lowers her head to remove a purple ribbon which she now passes to you: heavy because a copper key hangs from the ribbon.

- In that corner...Open that trunk and bring the papers that are on the right, on top of the others...Tied with a yellow cord...

- I cannot see very well...

- Ah yes... It is because I am so used to the darkness. To my right...Walk and you will find the chest...They have walled us in, Señor Montero. They have built around us, they have taken the light from us. They have tried to force me to sell. We'll die first. This house is full of memories for us. Only dead will I be taken from here...That's it. Thank you. You can start reading this part. I will be giving you the rest. Good night, Señor Montero. Thank you. Look: your candelabrum has gone out. Light it outside, please. No, no keep the key. Accept it. I trust you.

- Señora...There is a mouse nest in that corner...

- Mice? I never go over there...

- You should bring the cats here.

- Cats? What cats? Good night. I'm going to sleep. I am weary.

- Good night.

Chapter 3

That same night, you read the yellowed papers, written with mustard-colored ink; in places, burnt carelessly by tobacco ash, sullied by flies. General Llorente's French does not warrant the praise that his wife had attributed to it. You tell yourself that you can considerably his style, tighten up the diffuse narration of past events: childhood in a 19th century Oaxacan *hacienda*, military studies in France, friendship with the Duke of Morny, within the intimate circle of Napoleon III, the return to Mexico in the joint chiefs of staff of Maximiliano, the ceremonies and soirées of the Empire, the battles, the defeat, the Hill of the Bells, exile in Paris. Nothing that had not already been told. You get undressed, thinking of the warped whim of the old woman, of the false value that she attributes to these memoirs. You lie down smiling, thinking about your four thousand pesos.

You sleep, without dreaming, until the stream of light wakes you up, at six in the morning, because the glass pane roof has no curtains. You cover your eyes with your pillow and try to go back to sleep. Within ten minutes, you give up and walk to the bathroom where you find all of your things laid out on the table, your few suits hanging in the closet. When you finish shaving, an imploring and pained meow destroys the silence of the morning.

It reaches your ears with an atrocious, coarse, imploring vibration. You try to locate its source: you open the door that leads to the hallway, but you do not hear it there: those meows are seeping in from above, from the skylight. You quickly climb onto the chair, from the chair to the desk, and leaning on the bookcase you can reach the skylight, open one of its windows, lift yourself up with effort and fix your gaze on the side garden, that square of yew and tangled

brambles where five, six, seven cats — you cannot count them all: you cannot hold yourself up there a second longer —, chained to each other, writhing, wrapped in flames, they give off opaque smoke, a smell of burning fur. As you fall into the armchair, you doubt whether you have in fact seen that; maybe you just connected that image with the dreadful meows that persist, diminish, and eventually end.

You put on your shirt, pass a piece of paper over the tips of your black shoes and listen, this time, to the warning sound of the bell that seems to be traversing the corridors of the house and approaching your door. You look out into the hallway; Aura approaches with the bell in her hand, bows her head at the sight of you, tells you that breakfast is ready. You try to stop her; Aura has already descended the spiral staircase ringing the black painted bell, as if to wake a whole orphanage, an entire boarding school.

You follow her, in shirtsleeves, but when you get to the vestibule you cannot find her. The door of the old woman's bedroom opens behind you: you can see the hand that appears behind the barely open door, places that pot porcelain in the hall and withdraws, closing again.

In the dining room, you find your breakfast served: this time, only one place setting. You eat quickly, return to the vestibule, knock on Señora Consuelo's door. That voice, weak but sharp, asks you to enter. Nothing has changed. The permanent darkness. The gleam of the candles and the silver trinkets.

- Hello, Señor Montero. Did you sleep well?

- Yes. I read until late.

The old lady waves a hand as if to dismiss you.

- No, no, no. I don't want your opinion. Work on those papers and when you finish I'll give you the rest.

- Understood Señora. May I visit the garden?

- What garden, Señor Montero?

- The one behind my room.

- There is no garden in this house. We lost the garden when they built around the house.

- I thought I could work better in the open air.

- In this house there is only that dark patio where you came in. There my niece grows some shade plants. But that's all.

- Very well Señora

- I wish, to rest all day. Come and see me tonight.

- Very well Señora

You review the papers all day, correcting the paragraphs that you intend to retain, redrafting those that seem weak, smoking one cigarette after another and reflecting that you should pace your work so that the review is prolonged as much as possible. If you could save at least twelve thousand pesos, you could spend about a year dedicated to your own postponed, almost forgotten work. Your great work documenting Spanish discoveries and conquests in America. A work that summarizes all the scattered chronicles, makes them intelligible, reveals the correspondences among all the companies and adventures of the Golden Age, between human prototypes and the grand event of the Renaissance. In reality, you end up abandoning the tedious papers of the imperial military man to begin writing records and summaries of your own

work. Time flies by and only when you hear the bell again do you consult your watch, put on your jacket and go down to the dining room.

Aura is already seated; this time the head of the table is occupied by Señora Llorente, wrapped in her shawl and her nightgown, topped with her mob cap, hunched over the plate. But the fourth place is also set. You notice this in passing; no longer do you worry. If the price of your future creative freedom is to accept all the obsessions of this old woman, you can pay it without difficulty. You try, as you watch her slurp her soup, to calculate her age. There is a moment in time when it is no longer possible to distinguish the passing of the years: Señora Consuelo has long since crossed that border. The general does not mention her in what you have read of the memories. But if the general was forty-two years old at the time of the French invasion and died in 1901, forty years later, he would have been eighty-two years old when he died. He would have married Señora Consuelo after the defeat of Querétaro and his exile, but she would have been just a girl then...

The dates confuse you, because the lady is already talking, with that sharp, light murmur, that bird chirp; she is speaking to Aura and you listen, attentive to your food, to that flat listing of complaints, pains, suspicions of diseases, more complaints about the price of medicines, the humidity of the house. You would like to intervene in the domestic conversation by asking about the servant who picked up your things yesterday but whom you have never seen, who never serves the table: you would ask if, all of a sudden, you were not surprised to notice that, until this moment, Aura had not opened her mouth to eat with a mechanical fatality, as if waiting for a foreign impulse to take the spoon, the knife, cut the kidneys — you taste, again, that diet of kidneys, apparently the favorite of the house — and bring them to her mouth. Your gaze shifts

quickly from the aunt to the niece and from the niece to the aunt, but at that moment, Señora Consuelo stops all movement and, at the same time, Aura leaves the knife on her plate and remains motionless and you recall that, a fraction of a second before, Señora Consuelo did the same thing.

They remain silent for several minutes: you finish eating. Immobile as statues, they watch you eat. Finally, the lady says:

-I've grown tired. I should not eat at the table. Come, Aura, accompany me to my bedroom.

The lady will try hold your attention: she looks directly at you so that you look at her, even though her words are directed to her niece. You have to make an effort to detach yourself from her gaze — once again open, clear, yellow, stripped of the veils and wrinkles that normally cover it — and fix your gaze on Aura, who in turn stares with a blank expression and moves her lips silently, gets up with movements similar to those you associate with dreams, takes the old hunchbacked woman by the arms and guides her slowly out of the dining room.

Alone, you serve yourself some coffee that has also been there since the beginning of lunch, the cold coffee you sip while you frown and wonder if the lady might possess a secret power over the girl, if the girl, your beautiful Aura dressed in green, might be locked up against her will in this old, gloomy house. It would, however, be so easy to escape while the old woman sits in her darkened room. And you cannot overlook the path that reveals itself in your imagination: perhaps Aura expects you to save her from the chains that, for some hidden reason, this capricious and unstable old woman has imposed on her. You recall Aura minutes before, inanimate, stultified by terror: unable to speak in front of the tyrant, moving her lips in silence, as

if silently imploring you to grant her freedom, imprisoned to the extent of imitating every movement of Señora Consuelo, as if only that which the old woman did were permitted for the young girl.

You rebel against this image of total alienation: you walk, this time, towards the other door, the one that opens onto the vestibule at the foot of the stairs, the one that is next to the old woman's bedroom: this is where Aura must live; there is no other room in the house. You gently push open the door and enter the bedroom, which is also dark, with whitewashed walls, where the only decoration is a black figure of Christ. On the left, you see the door that must lead to the widow's bedroom. Tiptoeing, you approach it, place your hand on the wood, desist in your effort: you must talk to Aura alone.

And if Aura wants you to help her, she will come to your room. You remain there, forgetting the yellow papers, your own annotated reflections, thinking only about the ungraspable beauty of your Aura — the more you think about her, the more you want to make her yours, not only because you think about her beauty and you desire her, but because now you wish to free her: you have found a moral reason for your desire; you will feel innocent and satisfied — and when you hear the warning of the bell again, you do not go down to dinner because you cannot endure another scene like that of lunch. Maybe Aura will notice and, after dinner, will come to look for you.

You make an effort to continue reviewing the papers. Tired, you slowly undress, fall on the bed, and quickly, fall asleep. For the first time in many years you dream, you dream of only one thing, you dream of that grim hand that moves toward you holding the bell, shouting for you to go away, for everyone to go away, and when that face with the vacant eyes approaches your

face, you wake up with a silent cry, sweating, and you feel those hands that caress your face and your hair, those lips that murmur in the softest voice, comfort you, ask for calm and affection. You reach out your own hands to find the other body, naked, slightly shaking the key which you recognize, and along with it the woman who leans over you, kisses you, envelops your whole body with kisses. You cannot see her in the darkness of the starless night, but in her hair you smell the perfume of the patio plants, on her arms you feel the softest and most tender skin, in her breasts you touch the interlaced flower of sensitive veins, you kiss her again and do not ask for words.

When you part, exhausted, from her embrace, you hear her first murmur: “You are my husband.” You nod: she will tell you that it is dawn; she bids you farewell, saying that she will wait for you tonight in her bedroom. You nod again, before falling asleep, satisfied, light, pleasure fading, holding by your fingertips the body of Aura, her trembling, her surrender: the girl Aura.

It is hard for you to wake up. There are several knocks at your door and you get out of bed heavily, groaning: Aura, on the other side of the door, will tell you not to open it: Señora Consuelo wants to talk to you; she is waiting for you in her bedroom.

After ten minutes you enter the widow’s sanctuary. Bundled up, sheltered against the lace cushions: you approach the immobile figure, her eyes closed behind the drooping, wrinkled, whitish eyelids: you see those puffy, wrinkled cheeks, that utterly fatigued skin.

Without opening her eyes, she says:

- Did you bring the key?

- Yes...I think so. Yes, here it is.

- You can read the second folio. It is in the same place, with the blue ribbon.

You walk, this time with disgust, towards that chest around which rats swarm, their bright eyes appear between the rotten floorboards, they run towards the open holes in the crumbling wall. You open the chest and remove the second set of papers. You return to the foot of the bed; Señora Consuelo caresses her white rabbit.

From the buttoned throat of the old woman emerges a dull cackle:

- Do you not like animals?

- No. Not particularly. Perhaps because I have never had one.

- They are good friends, good companions; especially when old age and solitude come.

-Yes. They must be.

- They are natural beings, Señor Montero. Beings without temptations.

- What did you say its name was?

- The rabbit? Saga. She is wise. She follows her instincts. She is natural and free.

- I thought it was a male.

- Ah, you don't know how to tell yet.

- Well, the important thing is that you do not feel alone.

- They want us to be alone, Señor Montero, because they say that solitude is necessary to attain holiness. They have forgotten that in solitude, temptation is greater.

- I do not understand, Señora

- Ah, that's better, better. You can keep working.

You turn your back to her. You walk towards the door. You leave the bedroom. In the hall, you clench your teeth. Why do you not have the courage to tell her that you love the girl? Why

do you not go in and tell her, once and for all, that you plan on taking Aura with you once you are finished with the work? You move back towards the door; you push it, still doubtful, and through the crack you see Señora Consuelo standing, erect, transformed, with a tunic in her arms: that blue tunic with gold buttons, red epaulettes, bright insignias of crowned eagles, that tunic which the old woman fiercely bites, kisses tenderly, places on her shoulders and spins around with a tottering dance step. You close the door.

Yes: *she was fifteen when we met* — you read in the second folio of memoirs —: *elle avait quinze ans lorsque je l'ai connue et, si j'ose le dire, ce sont ses yeux verts qui ont fait ma perdition*: the green eyes of Consuelo who was fifteen years old in 1867, when General Llorente married her and took her to live in Paris, in exile. *Ma jeune poupée*, wrote the general in moments of inspiration, *ma jeune poupée aux yeux verts*; *Je t'ai comblé d'amour*: he described the house in which they lived, the promenades, the dances, the carriages, the world of the Second Empire; not in great detail, certainly. *J'ai même supporté ta haine des chats, moi qui aimais tellement les jolies bêtes...* One day he found her, legs apart, with her crinoline pulled up, tormenting a cat, and could not draw her attention because he found that *tu faisais ça d'une façon si innocente, par pur enfantillage* and was so excited in fact, they made love that night, if you give credit to your reading, with a hyperbolic passion *parce que tu m'avais dit que torturer les chats était ta manière à toi de rendre notre amour favorable, par un sacrifice symbolique...* You have calculated: Señora Consuelo must be one hundred and nine years old today... you close the folio. Forty nine when her husband died. *Tu sais si bien t'habiller, ma douce Consuelo, toujours drapée dans des velours verts, verts comme tes yeux. Je pense que tu seras toujours belle, même*

dans cent ans... Always dressed in green. Always beautiful, even at one hundred years old. Tu est si fière de ta beauté; que ne ferais-tu pas pour rester toujours jeune?

Chapter 4

You realize, upon closing the folio again, that this is why Aura lives in this house: to perpetuate the illusion of youth and beauty of the poor, crazy old woman. Aura, locked up like a mirror, like one more icon on that religious wall, adorned with trinkets, preserved hearts, imagined demons and saints.

You toss the papers aside and you descend, suspecting the only place where Aura can be in the morning: the place the stingy old woman has assigned her.

You find her in the kitchen, yes, at the moment when she is slitting the throat of male goat: the steam that comes from the open neck, the smell of spilled blood, the animal's hard, open eyes make you nauseous: behind this image, the image of a badly dressed Aura — with disheveled hair, stained with blood — is lost. She looks at you without recognizing you, and continues the butchery.

You turn your back on her: this time, you will talk to the old woman, you will speak out against her greed, her abominable tyranny. You push open the door and you see her, behind the veil of lights, standing, fulfilling her duty of air: you see her, hands moving, extended out in the air: one hand outstretched, as if making an effort to stop something, the other pressed around an object made of thin air, striking again and again in the same place. Next, the old woman rubs her hands against her chest, sighs, and begins to cut at the air again, as if — yes, you see it clearly: as if she were skinning an animal.

You run out into the vestibule, the living room, the dining room, the kitchen where Aura slowly skins the goat, absorbed in her work, without hearing you enter or your words, looking through you as though you were made of air.

You slowly go up to your bedroom, enter, and throw yourself against the door as if you were afraid that someone had followed you: panting, sweaty, you are a prisoner to the helplessness of your frozen spine, to your certainty: if something or someone entered, you would not be able to resist, you would get away from the door, you would let them enter. You feverishly take the chair and place it against the lockless door, then push the bed towards the door, until it is blocked, and you throw yourself on it, exhausted and paralyzed, with your eyes closed and your arms tightened around the pillow: the pillow that is not yours; nothing is yours...

You fall into a stupor, into the depths of a dream that is your only way out, your denial of the madness. "She's crazy, she's crazy," you repeat to yourself to fall asleep, the image of the old woman skinning the imaginary goat with her knife made of air repeated each time you say those words: "...she's crazy..."

At the bottom of the dark abyss, in your silent dream, with mouth wide open, in silence, you see her moving towards you, from the black depths of the abyss, you see her crawling on all fours.

In silence,

moving her emaciated hand, advancing towards you until her face is next to yours and you see the old woman's bleeding gums, those toothless gums. You scream and she moves away again, moving her hand, sowing along the abyss the yellow teeth she is extracting from the blood stained apron.

Your scream is the echo of Aura's cry, in front of you in the dream; Aura screams because hands have torn her skirt of green taffeta in half, her head tonsured, with the ripped folds of the skirt in her hands, she turns to you and laughs in silence, with the old woman's teeth superimposed on her own, while her legs, Aura's bare legs, broken, fall into the abyss...

You hear a knock on the door, the bell following the knock, the dinner bell. The headache prevents you from reading the numbers, from seeing the position of the hands on the clock; You know it's late: in front of your recumbent head, the night clouds pass behind the skylight. You sit up painfully, dazed, hungry. You place the glass pitcher under the tap of the tub, wait for the water to run, fill the pitcher, and empty it in the washbasin where you wash your face, brush your teeth with your old brush smeared with greenish paste. You sprinkle water on your hair — without noticing that you should have done all this in reverse — you comb your hair carefully in front of the oval mirror in the walnut wardrobe, knot your tie, put on your jacket, and go downstairs to an empty dining room, where only one place has been set: yours.

And next to your plate, under the napkin, there is an object you brush with your fingers, a flimsy rag doll, filled with flour that leaks from the badly stitched shoulder: the face painted with Chinese ink, the naked body, detailed with scant brushstrokes. You eat your cold dinner — kidneys, tomatoes, wine — with your right hand: you hold the doll between the fingers of your left.

You eat mechanically, the doll in your left hand and your fork in the other, without realizing, at first, your own hypnotic state, later, seeing a reason for your oppressive nap, in your nightmare, finally relating your somnambulistic movements with Aura's, with the old woman's: looking with disgust at the hideous doll that your fingers caress, in which you begin to suspect a

secret illness, a contagion. You drop it on the ground. You wipe your lips with your napkin, then check your watch and remember that Aura awaits you in her bedroom.

You cautiously approach Doña Consuelo's door, but you do not hear a single sound. You check your watch again: it's barely nine o'clock. You decide to go downstairs, groping, to that covered courtyard, without light, that you have not visited again since you crossed it, without seeing it, the day you arrived at this house.

You touch the damp, miry walls; you inhale the perfumed air and you want to deconstruct the elements of the smell, to recognize the heavy, sumptuous aromas that surround you. A lit match, flickering, illuminates the narrow and humid tiled patio in which grow, on each side, plants sown on the edges of reddish, loose earth. You awaits the tall, branched forms, that cast their shadows in the light of the match that is consumed, burns your fingers, and forces you to light a new one to finish recognizing the flowers, the fruits, the stems that you remember mentioned in old chronicles: the forgotten herbs that grow fragrant, sleepy: the broad, long, split, hairy leaves of the henbane: the twining stem of flowers, yellow on the outside, red on the inside; the sharp, heart-shaped leaves of the nightshade; the ashen fluff of the mullein, its flowers blooming; the bushy bouquets of *evónimo* and its whitish flowers; the belladonna. They come to life in the light of your match, sway with their shadows as you recall the uses of this herbarium that dilates the pupils, numbs pain, alleviates childbirth, or weakens the will, consoles with a voluptuous calm.

You remain alone with the perfumes as your third match goes out. You go slowly up to the vestibule, and you press your ear to Señora Consuelo's door. You continue, tiptoeing, to Aura's door: you push it, without warning, and you enter the barren bedroom, where a circle of

light illuminates the bed, the great Mexican crucifix, the woman moves who towards you when the door closes.

Aura dressed in green, with the taffeta robe revealing, as the woman makes her way toward you, thighs the color of the moon: the woman, you repeat as she draws near, the woman, not the girl from yesterday — when you touched her fingers, her waist — could not have been more than twenty years old; the woman of today — while you caress her loose, black hair, her pale cheek — looks to be forty: something has hardened, between yesterday and today, around her green eyes; the red of her lips has darkened from its old form, as if it wanted to fix itself in a cheerful grimace, in a turbid smile: as though alternating, like that plant in the courtyard, the taste of honey and bitterness. You do not have time for more thought:

- Sit on the bed, Felipe.

- Yes.

- We are going to play. You don't need to do anything. Let me do everything.

Sitting on the bed, you try to distinguish the origin of that diffuse, opaline light, which barely allows you to distinguish objects and the presence of Aura, from the golden atmosphere that surrounds them. She sees you looking up, looking for that origin. From her voice, you know that she is kneeling in front of you:

- Heaven is neither high nor low. It is above and below us at the same time.

You remove your shoes, your socks, and she strokes your bare feet.

You feel the warm water that bathes your soles, relieves them, while she washes you with a thick cloth, directs furtive glances to the black wooden Christ, finally moves away from your feet, takes you by the hand, fastens a few buds of violet in her loose hair, takes you in her arms

and hums a melody, a waltz that you dance with her, caught in the whisper of her voice, turning to the slow, solemn rhythm that she imposes onto you, oblivious to the light movements of her hands, while they unbutton your shirt, caress your chest, reach for your back, grab it it. You also murmur the song without words, that melody which rises naturally from your throat: the two of you turn, each time closer to the bed; you stifle the murmured song with your hungry kisses on Aura's mouth, you halt the dance with your hasty kisses on her shoulders, on Aura's breasts.

You hold the empty gown in your hands. Aura, squatting on the bed, places an object against her closed thighs, caresses it, beckons you with her hand. She caresses a piece of fine flour, breaks it on her thighs, indifferent to the crumbs that roll down her hips: offers you half of the wafer that you take, you put in your mouth at the same time as she does, swallow with difficulty: you fall on Aura's naked body, on her open arms, extended from one side of the bed to the other, like the black Christ that hangs on the wall with its scarlet silk loincloth, its open knees, its wounded side, its crown of thorns mounted over the black wig, tangled, interspersed with silver sequins. Aura opens like an altar.

You murmur Aura's name in her ear. You feel the woman's full arms against your back.

You hear her warm voice in your ear:

- Will you always love me?

- Always, Aura, I will love you forever.

- Always? Do you swear to me?

- I swear.

- Even if I grow old? Even if I lose my beauty? Even if I have white hair?

- Always, my love, always.

- Even if I die, Felipe? Will you always love me, even when I die?

- Always, always. I swear. Nothing can separate me from you.

- Come, Felipe, come...

Upon waking up, you reach for Aura's back, but only touch the pillow, still warm, and the white sheets that envelop you.

Once again, you murmur her name.

You open your eyes: you see her smiling, standing at the foot of the bed, but not looking at you. You see her walk slowly towards the corner of the bedroom, sit on the floor, place her arms on black knees emerging from the darkness that you try to distinguish, caress the wrinkled hand that reaches out from the depths of the gradually clearing darkness: at the feet of the old lady Consuelo, who is sitting in the armchair that you notice for the first time: Señora Consuelo who smiles at you, nodding, who smiles at you along with Aura who moves her head at the same time as the old woman: the two of them smile at you, thank you. Recumbent, without will, you realize that the old woman has been in the bedroom all this time; you remember her movements, her voice, her dance, no matter how much you say she has not been there.

The two of them rise in unison, Consuelo from the armchair, Aura from the floor. They both turn away, walk slowly towards the door that connects to the old woman's bedroom, and pass together into the room where the lights flicker in front of the images. They close the door behind them and let you sleep in Aura's bed.

Chapter 5

You sleep poorly, unsatisfied. In your dream, you feel a vague melancholy, a tightness in your diaphragm, a sadness that does not allow itself to be captured by your imagination. Now proprietor of Aura's bedroom, you sleep in solitude, far from the body that you believed you had possessed.

When you wake up, you search for another presence in the room. You know that it is not Aura's, but rather the double presence of something that was engendered last night which worries you. You place your hands on your temples, trying to calm your senses in disarray: the defeated sadness suggests to you in a low voice, in the ungraspable memory of a premonition, that you seek your other half, that last night's sterile conception spawned your own double.

And you no longer think, because there are stronger forces than your imagination: habit forces you to get up, look for the bathroom adjacent to the bedroom, not finding it, going out rubbing your eyes, going up to the second floor, tasting the pasty acidity of your tongue, entering your bedroom stroking your bristly cheek, letting the bathtub taps run and entering the warm water, letting yourself go, not thinking anymore.

When you are drying off, you remember the old woman and the young woman who smiled at you, embraced, before leaving together, embraced: you think to yourself that, each time they are together, they do exactly the same thing: they embrace, they smile, they eat, they talk, they enter, they leave, at the same time, as if one imitated the other, as if the existence of one depended on the will of the other. You cut your cheek slightly, thinking about these things while shaving; You make an effort to compose yourself. You finish your grooming by counting the

items in the medicine cabinet, the bottles and tubes brought from the guest house by the servant you have never seen: you mutter the names of the objects, touch them, read the labels for their use and content, pronounce the name of the manufacturer. You hold onto the objects to forget the other, the other without a name, without a mark, without rational consistency. What does Aura expect from you? You end up asking yourself, slamming the medicine cabinet all at once: What does she want?

The dull rhythm of the bell that travels along the corridor calls to you, warning you that breakfast is ready. You walk, bare-chested, to the door: when you open it, you find Aura: it must be Aura, because you see the usual green taffeta, although a greenish veil hides her features. You take the woman's wrist with your hand, that thin, trembling wrist...

- Breakfast is ready...- she speaks in the lowest voice you have heard...

- Aura. Enough deception.

- Deception?

- Tell me if Señora Consuelo is preventing you from leaving, living your life; why must she be present when we are together...? tell me that you will leave with me...

- Leave? Where to?

- Outside, to the world. To live together. You cannot feel chained to your aunt forever...

Why such devotion? Do you love her that much?

- Love her...

- Yes; why are you sacrificing yourself like this?

- Love her? She loves me. She sacrifices herself for me.

- But she is an old woman, almost a corpse; you can't...

- She has more life than I do. Yes, she is old and repulsive...Felipe, I do not want to go back...I do not want to be like her...another...

- She is trying to bury you alive. You need to be reborn, Aura...

- You have to die before being reborn...No. You don't understand. Forget it, Felipe. Trust me.

- If you would only explain to me...

- Trust me. She is going out all day today...

- She?

- Yes, the other one.

- She will go out? But she never...

- Yes, sometimes she leaves. She makes a big effort and leaves. Today she will go out. All day...You and I, we can...

- We can leave?

- If you'd like...

- No, not yet. I'm hired for a job, afterwards...

- Ah yes. She is going to be gone all day. We can do something...

- What?

- I will be waiting for you tonight in my aunt's room. I will be waiting for you like always.

She turns away from you, while ringing the bell, like lepers who proclaim their proximity to warn the unwary: "Go away, go away." You put on your shirt and jacket, you follow the spaced sound of the bell that heads in front of you, towards the dining room; you stop hearing it

when you enter the living room: she comes toward you, hunchbacked, supported by a gnarled staff, Llorente's widow, who comes out of the dining room, small, wrinkled, dressed in that white suit, that veil of dyed and torn gauze, she passes by you without looking at you, blowing her nose with a handkerchief, blowing and spitting continuously, muttering:

- Today, I will not be home, Señor Montero. I trust to your work. Please continue. My husband's memoirs must be published.

She walks away, stepping on the rugs with her little antique doll feet, leaning on a cane, spitting, sneezing as if she wanted to expel something from her airways, her congested lungs. You have the will not to follow her with your eyes; you control the curiosity that you feel as you see a yellowed wedding dress, pulled from the bottom of the old trunk that is in the bedroom...

You hardly taste the cold black coffee that awaits you in the dining room. You spend an hour sitting in the old, tall, ogival chair, smoking, waiting for the sounds that never arrive, until you are sure that the old woman has left the house and cannot surprise you. Because in your fist, you have held the key to the chest tightly for an hour, and now you go, without making noise, to the living room, to the vestibule where you wait fifteen minutes more — according to your watch — with your ear pressed to Doña Consuelo's door, the door that you then push slightly, until you can distinguish, behind the spider web of devout lights, the empty, messy bed, on which the rabbit gnaws its raw carrots: the bed always sprinkled with crumbs, that you now touch, as if you thought that the tiny old woman could be hiding in the folds of the sheets.

You walk to the trunk placed in the corner of the room; you step on the tail of a rat that squeals, escapes the pressure of your sole, and runs to warn the other rats while your hand brings the copper key to the heavy, moldy lock that squeaks when you put in the key. You undo the

padlock, lift the lid and hear to the noise of the moldy hinges. You remove the third folio — tied with a red ribbon — from the memoirs, and when you lift it you find old, stiff photographs, nibbled around the edges, that you also take, without looking at them, pressing all the mementos against your chest, fleeing stealthily, without even closing the trunk, forgetting the rat's hunger. You go through the doorway, close the door, lean against the wall of the vestibule, breathe normally, and go up to your room.

There, you read the new papers, the continuation, the dates of a century in agony. General Llorente speaks with his most flamboyant language about the figure of Eugenia de Montijo, pours all his respect towards the figure of Napoleon the Little, exhumes his most martial rhetoric to announce the Franco-Prussian war, fills pages with pain in the face of defeat, rallies the men of honor against the republican monster, sees in General Boulanger a ray of hope, sighs for Mexico, feels that in the Dreyfus case, the honor — always the honor — of the army has prevailed again... The yellow pages crease under your touch; you no longer respect them, you are only looking for a new appearance of the green-eyed woman: "I know why you cry sometimes, Consuelo. I have not been able to give you children, you who radiate life..." And then: "Consuelo, do not tempt God, we have to accept it. Is my love not enough for you? I know you love me; I'm sorry. I do not ask for your acceptance, because that would offend you. I only ask that you see in the great love that you feel for me, something that is enough enough, something that can fill us both without having to resort to sick imagination..." And on another page: "I warned Consuelo that those concoctions are useless. She insists on growing her own plants in the garden. She says she is not deceived, the herbs will not fertilize her body, but her soul..." On a later page: "I found her delirious, hugging her pillow, screaming: 'Yes, yes, yes, I

can: I have incarnated her, I can summon her, I can give her life with my life.' I had to call the doctor. He said that he couldn't calm her down, precisely because she was under the influence of narcotics, not stimulants..." And finally: "Today I discovered her, at dawn, walking alone and barefoot through the corridors. I tried to stop her. She passed by without looking at me, but her words were directed at me. 'Do not stop me — she said — ; I'm going to my youth, my youth is coming to me. It's coming in now, it's in the garden, it's coming' ... Consuelo, poor Consuelo... Consuelo, the devil was once an angel, too..."

There was nothing else. There, the memoir of General Llorente ended: "*Consuelo, le démon aussi était un ange, avant...*"

And behind the last sheet, the photographs. The portrait of an old gentleman, dressed in military attire: the old photograph with letters in the corner: *Moulin, Photographe, 35 Boulevard Haussmann* and the date 1894. And a photograph of Aura: of Aura with her green eyes, her black hair gathered in curls, reclining against a Doric column, with a landscape painted in the background: the landscape of Lorelei on the Rhine, a suit buttoned up to her neck, a handkerchief in one hand, a bustle: Aura and the date 1876, written in white ink and behind, on the folded cardboard of the daguerreotype image, in a thin, spider like handwriting: *Fait pour notre dixième anniversaire de mariage*, and a signature, written in the same handwriting, *Consuelo Llorente*. You see, in the third photo, Aura accompanied by the old man, now dressed as a civilian, both sitting on a bench in a garden. The photo has faded a bit: Aura does not look as young as in the first photograph, but it's her, it's him, it's ... it's you.

You scrutinize the photographs, you lift them toward the skylight: as with one hand you cover General Llorente's white, you imagine him with black hair, and every time, you see yourself, erased, lost, forgotten, but you, you, you.

Your head spins, flooded with the rhythm of a distant waltz that supplies the sight, the touch, the smell of humid, aromatic plants: you fall exhausted on the bed, you touch your cheekbones, your eyes, your nose, as if you were afraid that an invisible hand had ripped off the mask you have worn for twenty-seven years: those rubber and cardboard features that, for a quarter of a century, have covered your true face, your old face, the one you had before and had forgotten. You hide your face in the pillow, trying to prevent the air from ripping off the features that are yours, that you want for yourself. You remain with your face buried in the pillow, with your eyes open behind it, waiting for what is to come, what you will not be able to prevent. You refrain from looking at your watch again, that useless object that falsely measures time allotted to human vanity, those little hands that tediously mark the long hours, invented to deceive true time, the time that runs with insulting, deadly speed, that no clock can measure. One life, one century, fifty years: it will no longer be possible for you to imagine those deceptive measurements, it will no longer be possible for you to hold that bodiless powder in your hands.

When you lift your head from the pillow, you see a great darkness around you. Night has fallen.

Night has fallen. Behind the tall glass panes rush fast, black clouds that tear the opaque light that insists on evaporating them and revealing their pale and smiling roundness. The moon appears, before the dark vapor clouds it over again.

You do not wait. You no longer consult your watch. You quickly go down the steps that lead you away from that cell where the old papers, the faded daguerreotypes are scattered; You descend to the hallway, and stop in front of Señora Consuelo's door. You hear your own voice, deaf, transformed after so many hours of silence:

- Aura...

You repeat yourself:

- Aura...

You enter the bedroom. The light from the candles has been extinguished. You remember that the old woman has been absent all day and that the wax has been consumed without the attention of that devout woman. You move forward in the dark, towards the bed. You repeat:

- Aura...

And you hear the slight rustle of the taffeta on the quilts, the sound of another's breathing that accompanies yours: you reach out to touch Aura's green robe; You hear Aura's voice:

- No...don't touch me...Lay down beside me...

You touch the edge of the bed, raise your legs, and remain immobile, reclined. You can't avoid trembling:

- She can return at any moment...

- She will not return.

- Never?

- I'm exhausted. She exhausted herself. I have never been able to keep her by my side for more than three days.

- Aura...

You want to bring your hand closer to Aura's breasts. She turns her back on you: you realize this by the new distance of her voice.

- No...Don't touch me...

- Aura...I love you.

- Yes, you love me. You said yesterday that you will love me forever...

- I will love you forever. I cannot live without your kisses, without your body...

- Kiss my face; only my face.

You bring your lips close to the head lying next to yours, and stroke Aura's long hair: you violently take the feeble woman by the shoulders, without listening to her sharp moan; you tear off her taffeta robe, embrace her, feel her naked body, small and lost in your embrace, without strength. You do not listen to her moaning resistance, her impotent crying. You kiss the skin on her face without thinking, without distinguishing: you are touching her flaccid breasts when the light softly penetrates and surprises you, it forces you to turn your face away, look for the crack in the wall where the moonlight begins to come in, that crack opened by the mice, that eye in the wall that allows the silver light to filter in, to fall on Aura's white hair, on her ravaged face, composed of layers like an onion, pale, dry and wrinkled like a cooked plum: you move your lips away from the fleshless lips that you have been kissing, from the toothless gums that open before you: by the light of the moon, you see the naked body of the old woman, of Señora Consuelo, weak, torn, small and old, trembling slightly because you touch it, you love it. You too have also returned.

Open-eyed, you sink your head into Consuelo's silver hair, Consuelo, the woman who will embrace you when the moon passes, covered by clouds, when it hides you both, when it carries in the air, for some time, the memory of youth, embodied memory.

- She will come back, Felipe, we'll bring her back together. Let me recover my strength and I'll make her return...

Conclusión

Cuando la gente habla de la traducción, generalmente surge un dicho común: si es fiel, no es bella, y si es bella, no es fiel. Si bien esta frase parece bastante exagerada y generalizada, contiene una cierta cantidad de verdad. Mientras que estaba en el proceso de traducir *Aura*, encontré constantemente una elección específica que guió mi trabajo: ¿debo traducir el texto literalmente para mantener la integridad del texto original, o debo modificar el texto original para hacerlo más relevante en el segundo idioma? Sin embargo, decidí no tomar una decisión sobre qué camino tomaría en el transcurso de mi traducción. No intenté adoptar una metodología específica y llevarla a cabo hasta el final de mi traducción. En cambio, traté de traducir cada sección del libro con atención individual: si creía que la traducción debería ser fiel al original, hice una traducción literal, pero si creía que el original podría ser modernizado, traduje con más libertad.

Había varios elementos del texto original que tuve que editar para que el nuevo texto se leyera bien en inglés. En primer lugar, tuve que encontrar una forma adecuada para traducir la obsesión de Carlos Fuentes por las oraciones extremadamente largas. En el texto original, el autor emplea frases muy largas para ilustrar una escena continua. Por ejemplo, “Metes la mano en el bolsillo, juegas con las monedas de cobre, por fin escoges treinta centavos, los aprietas con el puño y alargas el brazo para tomar firmemente el barrote de fierro del camión que nunca se detiene, saltar, abrirte paso, pagar los treinta centavos...” (Fuentes 10). Aquí, la frase funciona porque, en español, no debes poner pronombres antes de los verbos. Por eso la frase puede continuar por mucho tiempo sin repetirse. Sin embargo, en inglés, debes poner pronombres en

frente de los verbos, y si haces una traducción literal, hay una repetición constante de la palabra “you.” Para remediar esto, inserté la puntuación en las frases largas para mantener la cadencia adecuada en la traducción al inglés. “You put your hand in your pocket and play with some copper coins. Finally you select thirty cents, which you clench in your fist and you extend your arm to firmly grasp the iron bar of the bus that never stops. You jump on, make your way to pay the thirty cents...” Aunque esta no es una traducción perfecta del original, los cambios se prestan mejor al inglés.

El segundo gran cambio que realicé con respeto al texto original fue la eliminación y el reemplazo de todos los verbos conjugados en tiempo futuro. Por alguna razón, Fuentes utiliza verbos conjugados en el futuro para describir acciones, mientras que la mayoría del texto es conjugado en el presente. Por ejemplo “Ella te sorprenderá observando la mesa...” (Fuentes 15). En inglés, el fuerte contraste entre el futuro y el presente es demasiado notorio, y por eso cambié los verbos futuros en verbos presentes: “She surprises you...”

A pesar de hacer cambios considerables en el texto original, todavía trato de mantener el sentimiento original y el ambiente de la novela. En mi opinión, el ambiente en *Aura* es uno de los elementos más destacados del libro, y debido a esto, traduje directamente el vocabulario específico que Fuentes usó en el original. Por ejemplo, cuando Felipe entra a la casa de Consuelo por primera vez, Fuentes usa un vocabulario muy específico como “plantas podridas” y “madera crujiente” que hace referencia a la degradación de la casa. En mi traducción, usé las mismas palabras: “rotting plants” y “creaking boards.”

En el último capítulo del libro, me sorprendió la cantidad de cambios que hice para traducir *Aura* del español al inglés, ya que nunca antes había traducido una novela. Sin embargo,

creo que los cambios que he realizado son pertinentes para la traducción en su conjunto, y que respaldan las principales características del libro.