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## The Intertextual Intrigue of Carlos Fuentes's *Aura*

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In his remarkable novella *Aura*, Fuentes recreates the gothic setting and tone of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, borrowing not only from James's plot and characters but also from the thematic emphasis on the moral pressures of the past. The parallels between these two works are striking, and several critics have studied Fuentes's debt to James. Ricardo López Landeira's "'Aura,' 'The Aspern Papers,' 'A Rose for Emily': A Literary Relationship" includes a thorough analysis, and in *The Archetypes of Carlos Fuentes: From Witch to Androgyne* Gloria B. Durán proves Fuentes's familiarity with James by citing a letter dated 8 December 1968 in which Fuentes refers to James's Juliana Bordereau as one of his inspirations for the character of Señora Llorente (204). Also, Georgina García Gutiérrez adds a long footnote on James's work in her study of *Aura* in *Los disfraces: La obra mestiza de Carlos Fuentes* (117-19). But the intertextual intrigue of *Aura* extends beyond the obvious connection to James, for there are other sources that help create the unusual motifs that fascinate the reader. Familiar with Faulkner, Poe, and Hawthorne, Fuentes creates a novella that draws the contemporary reader of Latin American fiction, a reader very likely alert to the intertextual nature of much twentieth-century Latin American writing.

Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," for example, is a key source. For just as poor Emily devises a way of consummating her relationship with Homer Barron, insuring their eternal love by poisoning him and then apparently sleeping with the body for over forty years, Consuelo lures Felipe into her dark desire to be reunited with her dead husband by arranging for the sexual union of *Aura* and Felipe, the strange doubles of the old hag and the dead general. Faulkner's piece focuses on the unhappy life of poor Miss Emily, a fragile Southern belle who—after years of neglect, parental severity and jealousy, town gossip, personal tragedy, hereditary madness, and secretive perversion—earns simultaneously the narrator's disgust and affection. In the story, the pervasive "patient and biding dust"; the "stubborn and coquettish decay" of the dim, shadowy Grierson house; the "close, dank smell[s]"; the "thin, acrid pall as of the tomb" invoke the

narrator's sense of the dark, underlying meanings of this otherwise common, gothic story of a woman jilted in love (130, 119, 120, 129).

Upon this plot, however, Faulkner superimposes the more complex themes of the ruin of the old South and the potentially disastrous consequences—on both personal and cultural levels—of refusing to let go of the past. Yet, in "A Rose for Emily" the images of the quaint South and the codes of the past still are regarded as somewhat more attractive and somehow nobler than the crass present, just as in *Aura* Felipe is seduced undeniably by the old, blurred photographs of the younger Consuelo's haunting green eyes. The double vision of Faulkner's narrator renders Emily as both a grotesque, perverted murderess and a dignified, sympathetic victim of the combined effects of the town's "sibilant and macabre" whispers and her father's over-protectiveness and implied brutality (129). The dual perspective in Faulkner's story informs Fuentes's unusual use of the second person point of view in *Aura*, for Felipe becomes both detached narrator and involved participant. The narrative, as Landeira states, "evokes the casting of a spell" which is "disconcerting" (128); the effect is similar to Faulkner's genius of making the reader an accomplice of sorts by drawing him into the narrative gradually, allowing him to discover the bizarre facts of the story only in bits and pieces of retrospective analysis, until in the end the reader is as immediately shocked by the "profound and fleshless grin" on the remains of Homer Barron as is the narrator; the reader, in fact, becomes "One of us [who] lifted . . . a long strand of [Emily's] iron-gray hair" from the pillow beside the rotted corpse lying "in the attitude of an embrace" (130).

*Aura*, too, as Durán remarks, explores the theme of "the old returning to haunt the new" (51). Of course, this theme is developed in the gothic plot of Consuelo's ostensibly occult scheme to involve Felipe in an unholy relationship with her double, the young and provocative Aura. Even as Felipe realizes that the Señora has "una fuerza secreta sobre la muchacha" 'some secret power over her niece' and that "Sabes . . . que por eso vive Aura en esta casa: para perpetuar la ilusión de juventud y belleza de la pobre anciana enloquecida" 'Now you know why Aura is living in this house: to perpetuate the illusion of youth and beauty in that poor, crazed old lady,' he is powerless to alter the course of his destiny (70-71, 88-89). After he surrenders to his desires and falls "sobre el cuerpo desnudo de Aura, sobre sus brazos abiertos, extendidos . . . igual que el Cristo negro" 'on Aura's naked body . . . on her naked arms, which are stretched out . . . like the arms of . . . the black Christ,' Felipe intuitively knows the terrible truth that "la concepción estéril de la noche pasada engendró tu propio doble" 'the sterile conception last night engendered your own double' (108-09, 116-17). Felipe becomes the general; Aura becomes the withered

Señora. Thus, as June Dickinson Carter points out, "Lo que es real en el presente ha sido enmascarado por una inmortalización del pasado. Entonces, el pasado reaparece como un presente escondido, un presente perpetuamente en rotación" 'The reality of the present is a mask of the immortal past. Hence, the past reappears as a veiled present, a present which is perpetually recurrent' (121, trans. mine).

In his letter to Durán, Fuentes mentions his fascination with the actual, historical account of the tragic Belgian empress, Carlota, wife of Maximilian, making a statement that applies to Faulkner's Miss Emily as well as to the sad Carlota, dressed as a child, insane, writing love letters to her dead husband, executed sixty years before: "Es toda una parte de nuestra historia y de nuestra vida: la historia de todo lo que no puede morir porque jamás ha vivido" 'It is all part of our history and our lives: the history of all that cannot die because it has never lived' (204, trans. mine). Emily's presumed murder of Homer Barron—a common, Yankee day laborer—and her implied unnatural relations with his decaying body in her bridal bed are prefigured earlier in the story when she refuses to relinquish the body of her dead father and when she refuses to consent to the advancements of the town, symbols representing the passing of the quaint Southern manners and countryside. Consuelo's obsessive will to perpetuate both her youth and her peculiar marriage to General Llorente is foreshadowed in the general's memoirs, which Felipe translates hypnotically from French: "Un día la encontré, abierta de piernas, con la crinolina levantada por delante, martirizando a un gato. . . . Siempre vestida de verde. Siempre hermosa, incluso dentro de cien años" 'One day he found her torturing a cat: she had it clasped between her legs, with her crinoline skirt pulled up. . . . Always dressed in green. Always beautiful, even after a hundred years' (84-87). In both cases, the past repeats itself grotesquely; in both cases, failure to accept the present is to love and live with death.

Poe's "Ligeia" also plays a role in shaping Fuentes's *Aura*. Fuentes finds in Poe the unique play with narrative voice, the construction of an unstable narrator whose perceptions cannot be trusted. The narration, however, is provocative and odd enough to be spellbinding. Poe's narrator—stricken with grief, consumed with passion, drugged with opium, and obsessed with the past—staggered on the verge of insanity, unable to distinguish for certain the borders of imagination and reality. "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first become acquainted with the lady Ligeia," the narrator says in the first line, promptly casting doubt on the reliability of the tale (654). The ambiguity intensifies as he admits to his own unstable response to his beloved first wife's impending death: "My brain reeled as I hearkened, entranced to a

melody more than mortal—to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known” (658). Details of setting also contribute to the wavering mood: “The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole” (661). Later, as the narrator sits all night before the body of Rowena, his second wife, lost in an opium-enhanced delirium of grief, guilt, and remembered passion for Ligeia, he ponders the “inexpressible . . . mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable” (665). Soon, the ghastly secret of the story is revealed as the enshrouded Rowena of fair hair and blue eyes rises, as it were, from the dead and appears as the lost Ligeia of raven hair and black, wild eyes.

The connections to Fuentes's story are many, but the most fascinating and unique are the narrative voices and the recurring symbolic motifs that help to unify the tales in a method depending more upon psychological associations than upon logical or realistic details. As Richard J. Callan points out in his study “The Jungian Basis of Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*,” the three characters of *Aura* actually may be “only one” (65): three archetypal dimensions of a single self struggling with its own three demons of desire, fear of death, and the unconscious will to seduce and annihilate consciousness: Felipe, Consuelo, Aura. Callan adds that Felipe's entire account may be, in fact, a “hypnogogic drama” involving “only Felipe . . . and his archetypes” in a fantasy “having an abortive outcome” (73-74). Likewise, Poe's narrator seems trapped in his own archetypal nightmare in which he wills true the dying Ligeia's last words: “Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (659). As both speakers enter the “labyrinth of the unconscious” and surrender conscious self to the seductive lure of the archetypal anima figure, they engage dark forces that control them utterly: Hecate, goddess of darkness and fertility, come from her dim, underworld cave with her phallic keys, votive torches, lurid potions, and sacrificial animals to render both narrators powerless, confused, possessed (Callan 67). Both stories, we notice, are hallucinatory, as if the speakers doubt the veracity of not only the events they describe but the integrity of their own selves and their ability to communicate their experiences rationally. Wendy B. Faris claims that in *Aura* the “narrator is ‘really’ talking to himself,” a narrative strategy that recalls Poe's speaker. She quotes Fuentes as saying, “Reality is reality plus its mirrors. . . . All reality duplicates and prolongs itself magically” (69). Fuentes may as well have been discussing Poe's fictional techniques, especially in “Ligeia.”

Certain recurrent symbolic details—such as the play with light and dark; the suspicious, dark red fluid; the gothic furnishings; the implica-

tion of drugs—also tie the two stories together. But in a footnote to her study of Fuentes's novella, Gutiérrez observes the parallels between the strange, compelling eyes of Poe's Ligeia and the repeated image of Aura's provocative green eyes; the motif of the eyes of both *femme fatales* reinforces the discovery that in these stories “los seres femeninos, enigmáticos y bellos, son los poseedores de los secretos para trascender” ‘the feminine selves, enigmatic and beautiful, are the possessors of the secrets of transcendence’ (130, trans. mine). Poe's speaker utters, “The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! . . . What *was* it . . . which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes!” (656). Felipe recounts, “Al fin levanta la mirada y tú vuelves a dudar de tus sentidos, atribuyes al vino el aturdimiento, el mareo que te producen esos ojos verdes, limpios, brillantes” ‘Finally she looks up, and once again you question your senses, blaming the wine for your bewilderment, for the dizziness brought on by those shining, clear green eyes’ (42-43). Felipe, like the vulnerable and susceptible narrator in “Ligeia,” falls prey instantly to what Carter labels “el exquisito y cruel dolor encarnado en la belleza femenina” ‘the exquisite and cruel agony incarnated in the female beauty,’ a delicious death of the masculine self embodied in “La seducción de los ojos verdes de Aura [que] finalmente vence a la víctima” ‘The seductive green eyes of Aura [which] finally vanquish their victim’ (114, trans. mine). Thus, we return to Fuentes's epigraph from Jules Michelet and notice the uncanny appropriateness to Poe's story: “El hombre caza y lucha. La mujer intriga y sueña; es la madre de la fantasía, de los dioses. Posee la segunda visión, las alas que le permiten volar hacia el infinito del deseo y de la imaginación . . . Los dioses son como los hombres: nacen y mueren sobre el pecho de una mujer . . .” ‘Man hunts and struggles. Woman intrigues and dreams; she is the mother of fantasy, the mother of the gods. She has second sight, the wings that enable her to fly to the infinite of desire and the imagination . . . The gods are like men: they are born and they die on a woman's breast. . . .’ Both Felipe and Poe's speaker plunge irrecoverably into the darkness of the anima, lured by the eyes of their lovers into the sweetness and horror of desire and death.

Additionally, Fuentes borrows freely from Hawthorne's “Rappaccini's Daughter,” which serves Fuentes in several ways. In a passing remark, Faris is one of the few critics who mention Hawthorne's tale, but there are significant connections that merit further attention (77). Lois Parkinson Zamora's “‘A Garden Inclosed’: Fuentes' *Aura*, Hawthorne's and Paz's ‘Rappaccini's Daughter,’ and Uyeda's *Ugetsu Monogatari*” reveals that Fuentes was the “relatively unknown writer [who] wrote the program notes” for Octavio Paz's version of Hawthorne's romance, produced as a



"poetic drama in 1956 for the Mexican stage" (322). Clearly, Fuentes had ample opportunity to ponder Hawthorne's story, allowing him to fashion several important relations to his own novella. Hawthorne's ability to probe the ambiguities of moral choice are transformed into Fuentes's complex study of the sinister relationship between Consuelo and her double, Aura, and their combined effect upon Felipe. Fuentes's young historian becomes as obsessed with Aura as Hawthorne's young scholar, Giovanni, with Beatrice. Surrounded by strange plants and confronted with ambiguous events, Felipe, like Giovanni, is drawn into a love affair that ultimately consumes him.

In *Aura*, Felipe experiences essentially a crisis of identity; apparently, as he struggles to maintain the integrity of self, the occult identification with the dead general becomes stronger, and his submission to Aura's sexual provocations renders him powerless and possessed. Ironically, however, as Durán indicates, the quest for self is really an archetypal, "secret longing to lose [identity] in an eternal world of space and time outside previous experience" (60). Felipe, in a psychological sense, must be willing to submerge ego in the dark pools of memory and desire; he must submit to the "creative, animating aspect of the unconscious" before experiencing the wholeness of love and the liberation of a redeemed present (Callan 66). At the end of the story, Felipe perhaps has resigned himself to an "inevitable future" (Durán 61) as he embraces "el cuerpo desnudo de la vieja, de la señora Consuelo, flojo, rasgado, pequeño y antiguo" 'the naked body of the old lady, of Señora Consuelo, limp, spent, tiny, ancient' (144-45). Consumed by the anima, Felipe is willing to wait for the next opportunity to reunite past and present, desire and fulfillment, real and unreal, young and old, love and death: "Hundirás tu cabeza, tus ojos abiertos, en el pelo plateado de Consuelo, la mujer que volverá a abrazarte cuando la luna pase. . . . —Volverá, Felipe, la traeremos juntos. Deja que recupere fuerzas ya la haré regresar . . ." 'You plunge your face, your open eyes, into Consuelo's silver-white hair, and you'll embrace her again when the clouds cover the moon. . . . "She'll come back, Felipe. We'll bring her back together. Let me recover my strength and I'll bring her back . . ."' (145).

Likewise, Hawthorne's Giovanni must undergo an archetypal ritual sacrifice of self before he can learn the secret of love and before he can be restored to wholeness. The end of the story, however, shows that Giovanni fails the test of the questing hero when he rejects Beatrice, basing his scorn on the merely external observations of her kinship with the poisonous flowers in her father's strange garden. "Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me," Beatrice pleads in one scene. "If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence. But the words of

Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe" (112). But Giovanni soon rebukes her, frowning "so darkly upon her that Beatrice paused and trembled"; his rejection is a contrast to "her faith in his tenderness" (123). At the end, as she lies dying from a supposed antidote given to her by the faithless student, Beatrice utters the truth that condemns Giovanni: "I would fain have been loved, not feared. . . . Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart. . . . Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" (127). Giovanni's lover, though similar to Felipe's in the sense that both are terrible but lovely incarnations of the dark unconscious self, is not demonic at all; she is the young scholar's chance to return to the wholeness of Eden through selfless love, a journey that is fearsome yet redemptive and restorative. As Joseph Sommers says in *After the Storm: Landmarks of the Modern Mexican Novel*, the naive, susceptible historian in *Aura*, "trained in the logic of ordering known facts," surrenders to the "mother of fantasy" and accepts the "mysterious forces which intrude on his consciousness" (179); Giovanni, on the other hand, is unwilling to relinquish the rational for the irrational ambiguities that assault his senses every time he peers into Rappaccini's garden. Resisting the destructive yet creative, the repulsive yet attractive impulses toward the terrible yet beautiful Beatrice, Giovanni is doomed to loneliness and to the anxiety of separation: Adam without Eve, exiled from Eden: animus without anima: the labyrinth of solitude.

The emphasis on Edenic imagery of gardens and on Adamic protagonists clearly links the two works. One of the central symbols in *Aura* is the peculiar garden of "las hierbas olvidadas" 'forgotten herbs' which cause "el aire perfumado . . . los aromas pesados, suntuosos" 'the heavy, sumptuous . . . perfumed air'; the plants are all hallucinogens and narcotics that "consuela, fatiga la voluntad, consuela con una calma voluptuosa" 'bring consolation, weaken the will, induce a voluptuous calm' (101-103). Giovanni wonders if Rappaccini's garden is the "Eden of the present world," but he is disturbed by its apparently "malignant influences. . . . as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice" (96). The ambiguity heightens in Hawthorne's story as Giovanni notices that the presumably poisonous flowers that adorn the center of the garden and the beautiful maiden whom he admires "were different and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape" (98). Felipe, too, ponders the ambiguity of his attraction to Aura when he is seduced by the girl shortly after he has been lulled by the perfumes of Consuelo's garden: "Aura vestida de verde, con esa bata de tafeta por donde asoman, al avanzar hacia ti la mujer, los muslos color de luna. . . . [La sonrisa], a semejanza de esa planta del patio, el sabor de la miel y el de la amargura" 'Aura is

dressed in green, in a green taffeta robe from which, as she approaches, her moon-pale thighs reveal themselves. . . . [L]ike that plant in the patio, her smile combined the taste of honey and the taste of gall" (103-105). At virtually the same parallel moment in Hawthorne's tale, Giovanni wonders, "Am I awake? Have I my senses? . . . What is this being?—beautiful, shall I call her?—or inexpressibly terrible?" (103). The enraptured scholar "felt conscious of having put himself . . . within the influence of an unintelligible power," and he suspects that the beautiful Beatrice "had at least instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system. . . . a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it" (104-105).

Felipe and Giovanni ultimately are paired with their respective Eves despite their insubstantial complaints. They are, in part, victims of their own desires to possess and to be possessed; victims of their destinies as Adamic figures to experience the solitude of exile, the loneliness of lost identity; victims of the ambiguities of light and dark, life and death, present and past that surround them and that are suggested by the parallel images of the old, gloomy houses and the adjacent, mysterious gardens. They are victims also of the overseeing and controlling figures of Consuelo and Dr. Rappaccini, both who seem to direct the vulnerable protagonists toward their fatal attractions and do so apparently by perverting nature.

Often, as intertextual criticism invites us to examine the relationships among various works, we may wonder if the author of a particular piece consciously and deliberately has created certain connections. We know, for instance, that in his letter to Durán Fuentes himself admits the possibility of a number of specific, earlier literary sources for *Aura*: James's *The Aspern Papers*, Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and some of his own short stories (204). Faris reveals that Fuentes claims other precedents as well: *The Metamorphoses* of Apuleius and the Japanese film, *Ugetsu Monogatari*, directed by Kenji Misoguchi (204-205). Zamora points out the connection to Hawthorne, Paz, and others. And in his reflections of "How I Wrote *Aura*," Fuentes acknowledges an astonishing number of inspirations, including Francisco de Quevedo of the seventeenth century; Circe; *La Traviata*, sung by María Callas; and *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexander Dumas. In his reflective piece on the composition of *Aura*, Fuentes writes, "Is there a fatherless book, an orphan volume in this world? A book that is not the descendant of other books? . . . Is there creation without tradition?" (535). Earlier in the piece, he offers a critical observation that essentially validates intertextual studies:

This is the great advantage of time: the so-called "author" ceases to be such; he becomes an invisible agent for him who signed the book, pub-

lished it and collected (and goes on collecting) the royalties. But the book was written—it always was, it always is—by others. . . . "Originality" is the sickness of a modernity that wishes to see itself as something new, always new, in order to continually witness its own birth. In so doing, modernity is that fashionable illusion which only speaks to death. (532-34)

In the letter to Durán Fuentes hints coyly of the probability of multiple sources in *Aura* when he recounts Alfonso Reyes's response to a question of literary influence: "Si, dos mil años de literatura" 'Yes, two thousand years of literature' (204, trans. mine). Fuentes read Faulkner, Poe, and Hawthorne, and clearly there are many circumstances to suggest a relationship between these authors' works and *Aura*. In an interview of April 1978, Fuentes responds to a question of influence among various writers, including himself: "No creo que haya una influencia. Creo que hay una coincidencia" ('Diálogo' 223, trans. mine). Perhaps in the case of the intertextual intrigue of *Aura*, we may say that there is, undoubtedly, "coincidence."

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## El lector se rebela: "Instrucciones para John Howell" de Julio Cortázar o la estética de la subversión

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"Instrucciones para John Howell" es uno de los relatos de Cortázar que, sorprendentemente, han suscitado menos el interés de la crítica. Su carácter hermético ha llevado a unos pocos comentaristas a establecer obvias analogías con los llamados teatros de la crueldad y del absurdo, resistiéndose a explorar otros niveles de sentido.<sup>1</sup> En este cuento desconcertante, el espectador de un vulgar melodrama es urgido por unos personajes misteriosos a tomar parte en el desarrollo de la acción. Aunque recibe instrucciones muy precisas acerca de su papel, pronto empieza a rebelarse y a reafirmar su identidad mediante intervenciones inesperadas. Las cada vez más frecuentes transgresiones del espectador-personaje tienen su paralelo en una progresiva afirmación de su personalidad y de su capacidad creadora. El comportamiento subversivo de esta figura "morelliana" acaba por ser castigado con su expulsión del teatro.

En mi estudio interpreto el cuento de Cortázar como una metáfora del acto de la recepción literaria. Utilizando algunos conceptos del postestructuralismo de Roland Barthes y de la fenomenología hermenéutica de Wolfgang Iser, así como la teoría literaria que se desprende de la propia obra de Cortázar, analizo el proceso mediante el cual la audiencia pasa de ser un mero receptáculo pasivo a convertirse en agente "copartícipe/copadeciente" en la actualización del objeto estético.<sup>2</sup>

"Instrucciones para John Howell" está organizado en cuatro movimientos. Los tres primeros siguen la estructura general de los relatos de Cortázar que Jaime Alazraki define como neofantásticos: descripción de un orden cerrado, transgresión de tal orden y castigo (146-148).<sup>3</sup> En "Casa tomada" el orden edénico, aunque claustrofóbico, creado por los dos hermanos protagonistas es desplazado por la aparición de unos ruidos misteriosos que acaban expulsando a los personajes de su mansión familiar. En "Carta de una señorita en París", un apartamento meticulosamente ordenado es invadido por conejos que vomita compulsivamente el narrador y que provocan finalmente su suicidio.

Esta misma dinámica (orden, subversión y castigo) está presente en