



## Los años con Laura Díaz

*Carlos Fuentes*

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Laura Diaz is a passionate character, intimately connected to many historical events. Through her story, Fuentes writes the journal of the Mexican twentieth century, supporting his novel with facts and characters that define the shape of today's Mexico.

## Los años con Laura Díaz Details

Date : Published August 1st 2002 by Suma (first published 1999)

ISBN : 9788466303453

Author : Carlos Fuentes

Format : Paperback 648 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Latin American, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review Los años con Laura Díaz for online ebook

### **Lora Shouse says**

In some ways, this was sort of a slow book. I kept waiting for something to happen.

Of course, a lot did happen. The book was the story of Laura Diaz, a Mexican woman of partly German ancestry, but it is also in many respects a history of Mexico in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In her early teens, Laura met her half-brother, Santiago, who later died in the Mexican Revolution. They had been great friends, and Laura vowed to dedicate her life to him.

Over the years she had several love affairs with different men, all of whom were revolutionaries of one kind or another. She seems to have been drawn to the first two because of their relationship, or supposed relationship to Santiago. She marries the second of these men and moves to Mexico City with him after the revolution is successful.

After the last of her lovers dies, about 90% of the way through the book, Laura finally goes out on her own and discovers her own talent. She takes a camera and visits all the poverty-stricken parts of town that she had avoided before, documenting the suffering she finds there, but also the hope and strength. And she becomes quite successful in her own right.

There is a lot of discussion of politics and philosophy, and many tales of the other people in her lovers' lives, as well as a few other adventures.

I found this book on Scribd.

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### **Katia Samanamud says**

Great to learn some of Mexican history of the 20th century.

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### **Broadsnark says**

This was a hot mess of a book. The really infuriating part is that I am fascinated by a lot of the history that is the basis for the story. He also actually made anarchist characters that were idealists, organizers, and artists (instead of the usual bomb throwing, nihilist villains). He even had a few moments of deep thought about life thrown in. But none of that made up for the long stretches of banal philosophizing. It didn't make up for how lacking the characters of color are. And it didn't make up for the fact that the woman the book is about was a vessel instead of a full human. Don't you just hate when a book has all the things that should make you like it but just falls down in the execution. So disappointing.

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### **Bob says**

Laura Diaz' story is told through a series of vignettes, many of which Fuentes has modeled on the experiences of members of his own family, descendants of German immigrants from the region of Veracruz, and her experiences illustrate the artistic and political movements that shaped 20th-century Mexico. In an English television interview (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71W-uD...>), Fuentes characterizes the book as a sort of female "The Death of Artemio Cruz," but it struck me as much broader in scope (besides the Mexican revolution and economic development of the 1940's and 50's, Laura shelters the refugees from the Spanish Civil War and the McCarthy hearings in the United States) but also, intentionally, less psychologically realistic and more narratively interesting.

"That is why it took so long to reach her grandfather's bedroom. Reaching the dying man's bed required her to touch each and every one of the days of his existence, to remember, imagine, perhaps invent what never happened and even what wasn't imaginable, and to do so by the mere presence of a beloved being who represented everything that wasn't that was, that could be, and that never could take place." (p. 82)

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### **Jaimeoka says**

4.4

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### **Christian Flores says**

Frases:

Conocía la historio. Ignoraba la verdad.

La cámara es el pincel de nuestro tiempo.

No lo dejes pasar... Nada se repite.

No es el pasado lo que muere con cada uno de nosotros. Muere el futuro.

Pase lo que pase, el futuro será distinto de este presente.

Mejor transforma las cosas a tu gusto y a tiempo. Atrévete.

El larguísimo litoral donde el mar y la playa son distintos pero inseparables.

Cien años caben en un día de éxito.

No siempre me da el sol en la cabeza.

Nadie puede desandar lo andado.

Una fotografía es un instante convertido en eternidad.

**Tayebe Ej says**

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## **Mavis Bryant says**

Reading this book almost twenty years after it was originally published offered me a refresher course in Mexican political and cultural history. Carlos Fuentes took on the daunting task of seeing the world through the eyes of a female protagonist. That he succeeded so well says something about his stature as one of Latin America's leading novelists.

Given today's focus on the issues of feminism and immigration, *THE YEARS WITH LAURA DIAZ* sheds light on the decades when both were emerging as central aspects of national and personal identity in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Above all, we see how European immigration (the Spanish Civil War and the Holocaust in particular) contributed to changes within Mexico and the United States. Carlos Fuentes offers a panoramic view of world-shaping events while intimately suggesting how individuals experienced them.

**David says**

I loved this book. It is a big, sweeping saga about a woman's life and reflecting upon the last century of Mexico. True to Fuentes' style, it can be grandiose and very political and yet very intimate. There were few dull parts considering its 600 pages. It is the story of a woman's seventy some years so one needs time to tell the story.

Her begins when she discovers a magical person in the forest, glittering with jewels but she is corrected. She came across a spiny ceiba tree with the sun glittering on those spines. "Things are not what they seem" becomes a motif throughout the book. Laura's life grows from her German-Mexican family roots to her "fame" as a photographer of Mexico City. So many changes take place in her seventy years especially the men in her life, from her husband, lovers, children and grandchildren. At the same time its a reflection of Mexican history as well. Bear with it. There are so many surprizes and I found the last chapters powerful and full of reflections on life and growing old. At times, it felt almost like Garcia Marquez in tone but never crosses into magical realism.

Then when it's all over, Fuentes adds his "recognition" and explains how so much of the book is based on his own family. I was floored. Talk about life inspiring art. Well done, señor Fuentes.

Read in Spanish.

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### **Christy says**

Well, I didn't finish this book, but I read 80% of it. I'd previously read another book by Fuentes in a Spanish lit class in grad school, which I also did not enjoy and imagined it was due to a lack of language understanding on my part. Now that I've read so much of one in English, I've realized that it wasn't that I didn't understand the language - it was that I don't understand the way Fuentes writes, nor do I like his characters. His rambling paragraphs jumping from the third person to first person format was frustrating, jumping through history in flashbacks was confusing to follow, and there is so much political philosophy that I was often bored. 400 pages in, and I still didn't care what happened to the protagonist, whose behavior with men and disdain for her own family irritated me throughout.

At least now I can accept that it wasn't that I couldn't understand the words after reading a Fuentes novel in Spanish.

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### **Cyndi says**

A sweeping novel encompassing decades of Mexican politics, from the point of view of a fictional character who mingles with the movers and shakers, especially the socialists, labor activists, and artists.

Parts of the novel are fascinating and others are so inpenetrable that I couldn't get through them, I just had to skim. I don't know how much was the author's style and how much was the English translation. I don't think I've encountered another novel where I loved about half and couldn't read the rest, all mixed up like that.

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### **Adriana says**

I didn't really like this book. That's probably why it took me so long to read. Plus the fact that Spanish is the language that's more challenging for me. I had to keep on looking up words which took away from the storyline at times. Also, because the Spanish was challenging enough to get through, it was doubly challenging to read the writer's style. He loved to write in run on sentences! They were paragraphs long and sometimes up to a page or page and a half long!! It was so distracting! I also didn't like Laura's character. She seemed harsh and cold a lot and she left her entire family for Jorge Maura who didn't even stand by her side! The only good things about the book were learning new vocab and also whenever they mentioned Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

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### **kathe says**

Fue interesante. Es un libro con una historia sólida de ficción y además con importante información histórica. Nos narra un México en una (casi) centena de años y, como sudamericana, me resulta muy fácil identificarme. La forma en que los personajes históricos se mezclan con los de ficción es ideal. Un viaje por una realidad bohemia y, por tanto, tan viva, que facilita su lectura. Algunos capítulos son más densos que

otros (y probablemente eludibles) pero son fieles al concepto del libro. En fin, me gustó mucho la lectura de este.

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### **Linda says**

Only the fact that he's supposed to be a great Latin author makes me not give it a one star. Too long and obscure, kind of like One Thousand Years of Solitude, another supposedly great novel that I found almost unreadable. This one I slogged through for book club and got about half way through, with no reward for doing so.

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### **Dulce says**

Lo admito, no soy una lectora de clásicos.

Segunda confesión, por alguna extraña razón, los autores más renombrados, más analizados por los críticos literarios y de más seguidores entre los estudiantes de letras me han llegado a provocar urticaria literaria. En este nivel voy a colocar al famoso Carlos Fuentes (RIP).

El inicio de la novela me encantó y declaro que disfruté mientras Laura fue niña y hasta que se casó con el líder sindical pero de ahí en adelante, lo sufrió.

En algunas partes deseaba que alguien me arrebatara el libro y no me lo devolviera (pues no quería ceder y no terminarlo sino que una fuerza externa lo alejara).

Me gustó participar de la vida de Laura, de hacer un recorrido histórico por México de la mano de ella, pero sus tormentosas descripciones me provocaban vasca...oraciones, tras oraciones de cavar en el hoyo de la inmundicia de una mujer que no sabe lo quiere y va rebotando entre un Santiago y otro Santiago y otro Santiago.

Por otro lado, a veces me dio la impresión de que el mismo autor se perdía y tenía que invertir páginas y páginas en recordarse, so pretexto de recordarle al lector, lo que había pasado antes.

Podría ser una buen libro para análisis histórico-político del país, pero temo que recomendarlo a un lector inicial lo haga pensar que leer es aburrido.

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### **Cheryl Brown says**

I enjoyed the range of history and the historical figures but I felt no sympathy or empathy with or for Laura. The characters are like cardboard cutouts whose role is to show history and to philosophise (at times tediously).

I'm pleased I read it but I had to skim pages and kept checking how many pages I HAD to go before I got to the end. An interesting ride through various revolutions and oppressions.

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### **Brigget B says**

Laura Diaz is a vehicle to describe decades of Mexican history; how this was crafted and the overall content was intriguing, though I didn't connect much with Laura as a character. Glad to have read this, nevertheless.

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## Deea says

4.5\*

(the better-looking version of this review is on my blog: <http://elephantsonclouds.blogspot.com...>)

Our lives are hourglasses. Every grain of sand is a moment. An hourglass is turned over, gravity does its job, sand starts falling. A life starts. Personality is first an inchoate entity: a grain of sand, then two, then more... the accumulation of all the fallen grains of sand is what we are, what we become. Until the final grain has fallen, there is a continuous transformation: the present “me” is built upon layers and layers of different alter-egos: the multitude of “me’s” that we have been in the past.

Laura’s story does not begin when she is born. It would be too easy. None of our stories have this kind of well-established beginning. We only see the trees, but under the ground there are roots. We keep forgetting this. Laura’s family is a family of German immigrants. Each one of its members has its own drama. Discontent runs deep in the family, hidden one way or another behind stories that are meant to provide explanations and which only seem to succeed in romanticizing everything.

*“Returning to the past meant entering an empty, interminable corridor where one could no longer find the usual things or people one wanted to see again.. As if they were playing with both our memory and our imagination, the people and things of the past challenged us to situate them in the present, not forgetting they had a past and would have a future although that future would be, precisely, only that of memory, again, in the present.”*

Ab ovo, Laura’s story is this one: there is a grandmother whose fingers from the right hand (or maybe it was the left one, I don’t recall) were cut because she had been too proud to have surrendered her wedding ring to a thief she was strongly attracted to who had attacked her convoy when she was going to her husband’s mansion, there are two spinster aunts, one a never-published poet, the other a never-acknowledged pianist, there is another aunt who was her grandfather’s daughter with a prostitute, there is a mom who decides that the only way to escape the seclusion of her family is to keep her feet on the ground, unlike her sisters. The story starts being delineated in our minds before Laura even gets to enter the stage. Before the sketch of her own life starts to get contours, all these lives from the past are already strongly imprinted in her DNA.

*“... our existence has no other meaning but to complete unfinished desires...”*

Her own story revolves around “Santiagos”: her step brother, her son, her nephew and another Santiago that she does not interact with, but whose unseen roots below ground get to lean on her experience of life and vision. The grains of sand are falling in her hourglass: she encounters love and its different forms (the erotical love, the maternal love, brotherly love), she experiences solitude and lack of meaning, she experiences intimacy, she gets introduced to the Mexican art world (Frida and Diego Rivera), she gets to understand that she cannot love her two sons equally and that we are drawn to some people and not to others, she is vulnerable and learns to embrace this since it is all a part of becoming who you actually are, she finds motivation and artistic forms of self-expression, she learns to be alone without being lonely, she learns to forgive and she learns that all past experiences have their own safe place in her mind, that there is no reason to deny their existence because they are part of what she has become.

*“We have to make time for the things that have taken place. We have to allow pain to become knowledge in some way.”*

Grandeur of haciendas in contrast with corruption, cruelty of politics and senseless deaths are graciously woven in this saga. Laura is a survivor. She learns moral fortitude along the way. She is a daughter and a mom, she is a niece, a grand-daughter, a mother in law, a grandmother, a great-grandmother. A stepsister. A lover. A wife. A friend. She makes mistakes and she learns from them. She begins to understand that we are all unfulfilled promises and that we all understand this only too late.

*“Santiago had been an unfulfilled promise. Was that what Grandfather was, too, despite his age? Was there any really finished life, a single life that wasn’t also a truncated promise, a latent possibility, even more... ? It isn’t the past that dies with each of us. The future dies as well.”*

Other hourglasses are turned over all the time. Other lives begin. Sand starts falling. First grain. Second grain... Other personalities are getting shaped, but the process starts anew each time. For Laura, "*what might have been already was, [...]. Everything happened exactly as it should have happened.*"

(all photos are taken by me in Azore Islands and Lisbon)

## Hamid Hasanzadeh says

## **Soshyans Varahram says**