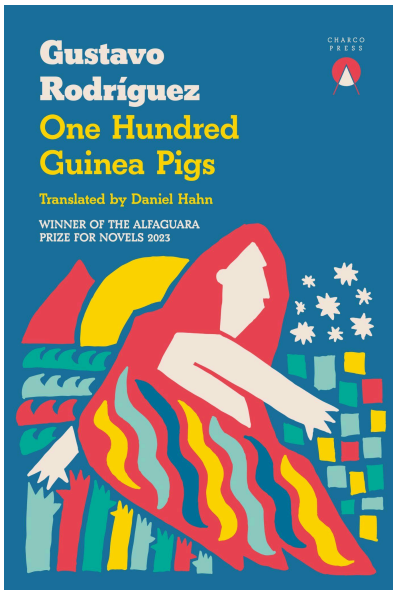
CHARCO PRESS

Reading Guide

One Hundred Guinea Pigs

Author: Gustavo Rodríguez

Translator: Daniel Hahn



Please be aware that this discussion guide contains spoilers.

Short Context Note for Readers

One Hundred Guinea Pigs is a contemporary Peruvian novel set in Lima and centred on ageing, care, dignity, and death. Peru, like many Latin American countries, has limited state provision for care of the elderly, placing a heavy – often invisible – burden on families, and particularly on women. Conversations around euthanasia and assisted dying have historically been taboo, shaped by Catholic moral frameworks and deep social inequalities.

While Peru's legal and medical context differs from that of the UK or US, the novel raises ethical questions that resonate strongly with current debates about assisted dying, end-of-life care, autonomy, and what constitutes a "good death", especially in the UK context. Rodríguez approaches these questions not through abstraction, but through intimate, uncomfortable proximity to bodies, routines, and moral compromise.

Short Summary of the Novel

One Hundred Guinea Pigs follows Eufrasia Vela, a woman from a poor rural background who migrated to Lima and who makes a living caring for elderly people in their homes. Her care, however, includes quietly helping some of them to die – an arrangement entered into at their explicit request.

As Eufrasia looks after her growing number of elderly people, the novel explores the thin line between care and exploitation, compassion and violence, autonomy and abandonment. Through dark humour, tenderness, and unease, Rodríguez exposes how economic precarity, social neglect, and ageism shape decisions around life and death.

The novel refuses easy moral answers, instead forcing readers to confront the systems that make such choices imaginable – and necessary.

Why Read This Novel Now?

At a moment when assisted dying and euthanasia are at the centre of public debate in countries like the UK, *One Hundred Guinea Pigs* offers a vital, unsettling perspective from outside a Eurocentric medical or legal framework. Rather than focusing on legislation or abstract ethics, the novel asks what happens when care is privatised, underpaid, feminised, and pushed into the shadows.

The novel sharpens questions about dignity, consent, and autonomy by placing them alongside class inequality, migration, and ageing societies. It challenges readers to consider not only whether assisted dying should be legal, but under what social conditions such choices are made – and who bears their moral and emotional cost.

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Discussion Questions

1. **Narrative voice and tone**
   The novel is narrated in a voice that is at once blunt, intimate, and unsettling. How does this narrative tone shape your moral response to Eufrasia? Did you find yourself empathising with her, resisting her, or both?

2. **Care as labour**
   How does the novel depict care work – as love, duty, survival, exploitation, or all of these at once? What kinds of labour are rendered invisible, and why?

3. **Consent and coercion**
   To what extent can the deaths Eufrasia facilitates be considered consensual? How do poverty, family abandonment, and illness complicate the idea of free choice?

4. **Ageing and social abandonment**
   What vision of old age does the novel present? How are the elderly valued – or devalued – by their families and by society more broadly?

5. **Class and moral judgement**
   Would the actions at the centre of the novel be judged differently if they took place in a wealthy household or a private clinic? How does class shape both morality and impunity?

6. **Religion and guilt**
   Catholic morality hovers over the novel even when it is not explicitly named. How do guilt, sin, and redemption operate in Eufrasia's inner world?

7. **Rural versus urban realities**
   How effective do you feel is the representation of the rural/urban divide in the novel? How do these social backgrounds shape the characterization of the main figures in the book?

8. **Dark humour and discomfort**
   The novel often uses dark or disturbing humour. How did this affect your reading experience? Did it make the ethical questions sharper or more difficult to pin down?

9. **Quote analysis I**
   Eufrasia at some point reflects on the uncomfortable idea that no one wants to see old people die, but everyone wants them to disappear. How does this line crystallise the novel's critique of family, society, and care?

10. **Quote analysis II - Moral responsibility**
    At another moment, the novel suggests that "old people resemble children not only in their physical defencelessness but also in their need for active adults to fight for their rights." What do you think about that?

11. **Who bears responsibility for the deaths in the novel**
    Eufrasia, the families, the state, society as a whole? Is responsibility shared, displaced, or avoided?

12. **Comparison with current debates**
    How does *One Hundred Guinea Pigs* challenge or deepen current discussions on assisted dying? What questions does it raise that are often absent from legal or policy-focused debates?

13. **Endings and afterlives**
    How did you interpret the novel's ending? Does it suggest judgement, inevitability, resistance, or something else entirely?

14. **Reading discomfort**
    What moments made you most uncomfortable as a reader, and why? What does the novel demand of us ethically – not just as readers, but as members of ageing societies?

15. **Comparatives**
    What other novels and/or films did the novel make you think of? How does it compare?