

# PABLO PALOMINO AND CARLOS FUENTES: PARALLEL LIVES

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses certain aspects of contrasting the literary careers of two writers, one of them probably the most successful and the other among the least mentioned in the literary field of Mexico. The respective trajectories of Carlos Fuentes and Pablo Palomino had many features in common from the beginning: they belonged to the same cultural group called the *Basfumistas*, were part of a generation of writers and published their first novels within a difference of three years: *Autopsia (The autopsy)* (1955) and *La región más transparente (The most transparent region)* (1958). Some of the issues and the obvious technicalities in the first account are presented in this space in order to observe the various features that they have in common, such as the so - called stream of consciousness used by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922).

**Keywords:** *novel, urban, avant - garde, paradox, contrasts*

Pablo Palomino is a case that is underserved by literary criticism, especially if we look at the discreet reception his first novel - *Autopsia (Autopsy)* (1955) – which had been compared to the loud acclaim of the first novel of his friend and colleague Carlos Fuentes - *La región más transparente (The most transparent region)* (1958) - who were joined with various circumstances, not just generational.

While the latter was released to the public “as if it were a detergent” (Richard Reeve, 1982: 51) *Autopsy* barely made mention in the press: the highlight was the review that was published in the supplement *México en la Cultura (Mexico in Culture)* (Emmanuel Carballo, 1955: 2).<sup>1</sup>

It did not have, no less, hosting from other books of the time, like the aforementioned volume of Carlos Fuentes reprinted the same year of publication, or indeed that of the as widely read *Casi el paraíso (Almost paradise)* (1956) by Luis Spota, both promoted by the *Fondo de Cultura Económica* in spaces in major magazines and cultural supplements of the moment.<sup>2</sup>

Three years after *Autopsy* appeared, the appearance of *The most transparent region* by Carlos Fuentes would be held. It stated that it was the first urban novel of Mexico (Carballo, 1986: 536), among other virtues and novelties. The enthusiasm led to imprecision, because before 1958 there had appeared numerous stories with characters, plots and urban scenery, among others *Soledad (Solitude)* by Ruben Salazar Mallen (1944) *Los días terrenales (Earthly days)* of José Revueltas (1949) and the novel that represents the clearest antecedent of the first comprehensive

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1. Remember that this publication was of great importance in the Mexican cultural horizon, to the point that there were comments like this one: “Cultural life in Mexico may be constructed in its best aspects, thanks to supplement the *News*” (Alfonso Reyes, 1958: 2). The review of “*Autopsy*” by Carballo was published in this space on Oct. 30, 1955.

2. One fact that stands out is that the copy of *Autopsy* borrowed in Daniel Cosío from the Villegas Library at El Colegio de México had linked pages on the top edge, ie, had not been read, not even opened since 1955 in which it was published, until 2000 when it became consulted.

account of Carlos Fuentes, *Autopsy*, from Pablo Palomino, as discussed below.

In one of the classic essays on Latin American narrative, it noted not only this but that there is even a tradition of urban novels in Mexico: “The capital of the country has an increasingly large place in the Mexican novel. Azuela led the way with *La Malhora* in 1923 “(Claude Fell, 1976: 82). In fact, one could speak of even earlier urban novels, like *La Rumba* by Angel de Campo, published in 1890, and *Santa* by Federico Gamboa, which appeared in 1903, although not until *El Joven (The young man)* (1928) by Salvador Novo and *La luciérnaga (firefly)* (1932) by the own Mariano Azuela where Mexico City is no longer a backdrop and it becomes true participant and protagonist, the site where parading bureaucrats, beggars, whores, bums and murderers, as will happen in respective novels as already mentioned in Palomino and Fuentes, with upper - class characters serving as a counterpoint to the capital of the underworld of modern cities.

The *Dictionary of Mexican Writers* on the piece dedicated to Palomino mentions that his novel *Autopsy* “revolves around F. Persons, a character that we know through friends Clara, Luigi and Sergio B, who were summoned to a meeting at the home of Persons, who made the moral autopsy of this character. With this structure, Palomino foreshadowed certain topics and resources that later would use sources such as the joke and parody of comic characters: “It was Baron von D., of Prussian aristocrat origin” (Palomino, 1955: 45), certain foreigners in Mexico called *engañabobos*( tomfoolery ) to be a bias exploited in *The most transparent region* to draw the secondary characters classified as “the foreigners”, reminiscent of the comedies of tangles filmed during the so - called Golden Age of National Theater, with performances full of grace and humor of Germán Valdés Tin-Tan and Joaquin Pardavé, among others.

It has been documented that during that time foreign visitors went to Mexico who sported fake noble titles to abuse the naive.

They took advantage of the welcome extended to the exiles to commit fraud. Not only in movies, but also novels used this situation as a theme, as seen in *The most transparent* region of Fuentes, where a cook is passed by as an Italian nobleman, a Texan adventurer is called an aristocrat and the self-named Conte Lemini, and another who states he is the third cousin removed of King Alexander assassinated in Marseilles. As you may recall, also by Luis Spota is the novel already mentioned, *Almost Paradise*, published a year after *Autopsy*, which manages to make a mural of the Mexican bourgeoisie in the fifties to tell the story of a character who impersonates a member of Italian nobility, a Neapolitan who actually is the son of a prostitute and takes the name of prince Ugo Conti, specializing in conquering the most beautiful girls, and does the same with the daughter of an ambitious upstart Mexican businessman.

Before publishing their first books, Carlos Fuentes and Pablo Palomino were part of a group calling itself the *Basfumistas*, kind of exclusive social circle of the late forties, according to what critic Richard Reeve wrote (1982: 40). Its members gave follow-up to the European vanguards that were booming in Europe during the twenties, but really only formed a group of young people who shared ideas about contemporary art and music, had fun making intellectual jokes, imitating foreigners from different backgrounds, were dreamers and made not too realistic projects like filming a movie with the collaboration of each of the members. Reeve continues in the same space:

*They possessed the means among themselves to produce the film: one of their close friends had practical filming experience, and they would be the actors. Later it was decided that Fuentes and Creel de la Barra would write a play rather than a film script. Ernesto de la Peña put forth a name of the group.*

Both writers are twinned by a similar training, common interests, intentions and political affiliation, as is common among members of the same generation, besides having a close friendship cultivated through the years of their youth. The literary success radically distinguishes and separates them. Just look at the editorials published about the first novel of each author: the modest Editorial Obregon, who printed few examples of *Autopsy*, and the most prestigious of the moment editorial, the *Fondo de Cultura Economica*, in its collection Mexican Letters, which, as he said, the same year of its publication launched the second edition of *The most transparent region*.

*Autopsy* is an urban novel that precedes the first novel of Fuentes in various technical and thematic aspects, among the latter, the treatment of the Mexican Revolution as the origin of the country's modernity, its transformations and institutionalization. Under this budget, it presents a society of newly rich, in power replacing the old Frenchified families of the former regime of Porfirio Diaz, now reduced in number.

The novel by Palomino is peppered with allegations of an ideological type, which will be seen at every step during the reading of *The most transparent region* - say when Sergio B., one of the protagonists of *Autopsy*, says: "I want to make the historical moment of my country, even if it means trampling hundred years of history" (Palomino, 1955: 13), or as a cosmopolitan view of the intellectual of the era, personified by Luigi, stereotype of young man, a cultivated and traveler ;:" at least five years ago I do not see. A rainy afternoon in Rome are my last memories (Palomino, 1955: 17).

The environments in which the characters are developed in *Autopsy* are set to a calculated counterpoint, as in the novel by Carlos Fuentes; in one as in another, certain actions are performed in the slums of Mexico City, for then presenting a radical turnaround of environments refined by gentry and politics.

In between, intellectuals roam as a critical consciousness that observes their surroundings with skepticism.

In one part of the story, Palomino's actions have their development in the richest areas of the Mexican bourgeoisie, in whose meetings "talking about golf, [...] the last friendship in presidential circles, and occasionally let go some word in a foreign language, in order not to appear too parochial" (Palomino, 1955: 39). Elsewhere, a tour of the popular neighborhoods of Mexico City, La Merced and La Lagunilla, is then delayed in Tepito, "the district for forced gangland meetings of the metropolis". There appears Body Street (Calle del Organó), where prostitution operates, flourishing in the capital of the Republic midway through the twentieth century and where customers and the poorest women wandered, and other nearby sites offering cabaret shows to the very poor. The forgotten and the outcasts of society of the time are also exposed, beggars, scavengers, pimps, transvestites and homosexuals, while showing the police and prison corruption, circulation and consumption of different types of drugs (Palomino, 1955: 120-135).

Amid this novelistic freedom *Autopsy* includes among its protagonists a young homosexual upper class capital native, Clara, from which her lesbian initiation and views advocating for a modern society is told which begins to just release certain prejudices, which puts into question traditional schemes. Clara has no problem confessing her sexual preferences or telling how he became the lover of the central character, Persons, nor, at the time, to say how she went to a clandestine clinic to have an abortion. Her views show a rare lack of inhibition in the characters in the novels from then, let alone its female characters. He says that "the mission of women has changed, but few understand. They believe they have acquired rights but not obligations. They are considered equal to men, socially, but are unable to deal with any problems" (Palomino, 1955: 147).

As seen three years after the much wider in *The most transparent region*, Autopsy gives reference to the life of the politicians who made themselves and made a fortune when political power changed hands, to appropriating the leaders of the revolution initiated with the slogan 'Effective Suffrage no Reelection' of Francisco I. Madero in 1910, an administration and devout aristocratic French culture is supplanted by a pragmatic, admiring and follower of the *American way of life*.

Persons explains: "We advance politically, and even more, I have almost done away with the Communist Party" (Palomino, 1955: 14). Of course, as the son of a revolutionary leader type of Federico Robles, the crucial protagonist in *The most transparent region*, Persons cannot see politics from a different perspective than that of his personal interests.

It is also interesting to observe how dialogues criticizing the Mexican reality of that time of expansion and urban growth are constructed, which had begun in the period of President Miguel Aleman, by 1946, explains Luigi Persons in his own words:

*-The City lacks a plan and architectural unity of criteria in the field. To the old colonial houses calls the center of the city, to join now skyscrapers that break the harmony and turn the show into a chaos of styles, intentions or motives. The new neighborhoods, villages of expensive homes, are located in the hills and nearby hills to the city, where the great plutocracy lies that dominates the country since 1946, demonstrates is royalty (Palomino, 1955: 115).*

Here and there phrases and words of psychoanalytic jargon starting to become fashionable among the middle and upper class fifties are included, for example: "unconsciously tried to create you an inferiority complex" (Palomino, 1955: 149). Terms of this type appear as part of the everyday language of these intellectualized protagonists, Clara, Sergio, and Luigi. The latter, as the Prince Vampa and others shown in *The most transparent region* - is a foreign resident in the capital of the Republic, which



each time reiterates his view on paranoia, traumas and complexes, among other terms of this species.

The capital 's modernity is presented through a series of symbols and images from the start of actions: Clara rises inside a bucket of luxurious wood in a building that rises at least 18 floors above the muddy ground of the ancient city of Mexico: "The elevator was exasperating. 15th floor, 16. 17 ... finally 18" (Palomino, 1955: 7). This urban modernity forms an aspect that precedes the first novel by Carlos Fuentes and manifests throughout the story to show the deep crisis caused by the large cities in the characters of the contemporary novel.

As for the technique of composition, it may be noted how the narrator abandons its role and the character assumes the voice of the story as the so - called stream of consciousness, the way it does with Molly Bloom during the final chapter of *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Persons thoughts flow freely, as did his predecessors, in a lengthy monologue that does not use punctuation:

*At least we will try in any case abbreviating many battles are won and becomes less heavy time naturally Luigi and Clara will be the most upset but I think Sergio to take things calmly that door has always creaked when opened must send that you aceiten hinges for that sharp that messes up the eustachian tube in order myth and really meet more than once in a hug purple of falling frost and so on until other stronger arrive (Palomino 1955: 120).*

The *Dictionary of Mexican Writers*, as quoted above, reports that Pablo Palomino trained as an architect and later studied literature at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the UNAM. He was a music critic and collaborated in *El Universal*, and with cultural supplements in *Mexico in Culture* and *Diorama of Culture, News* and *Excelsior* respectively.

He also worked in Mexican Telesistema, this according to Vicente Leñero says in an article published many years later. The author *Los albañiles* ( The Masons) says in that space that

responsibility for Palomino in the company that would later be called Televisa “was to oversee that the scripts [programs] did not contain scenes that can be then censored by the Interior”. This activity became important in decision-making, since even the producer Ernesto Alonso wanted to “ingratiate [with him] lest you [put] obstacles to their soap operas”.

Little more can be added to his profile – personal or professional of Pablo Palomino. The columnist Mario de la Reguera said in his weekly collaboration that his friend had died at home relaxing in a spa in Cocoyoc, where he had been living recently.

Palomino wrote one book, while Carlos Fuentes published over fifty.<sup>3</sup> He died a year after the author of *Terra Nostra*, but preceded it in his date of birth, which was in 1926; publishing his first novel in 1955, and married the first actress Rita Macedo, in 1956.

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3. In its extensive publishing activity there was very fertile periods. In less than three years 8 of his books appeared, for example from 1969 to 1971: *Cumpleaños*; *El mundo de José Luis Cuevas*; *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969); *Cantar de ciegos*; *Todos los gatos son pardos* (1970); *El tuerto es rey*; *Los reinos originarios*, and *Tiempo mexicano* (1971).

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