Fuentes, Carlos

Carlos Fuentes

Mexican, 1928–

Carlos Fuentes is one of Latin America’s greatest writers, remarkable as both a fiction writer and an intellectual. An enthusiastic participant in conferences and international forums, he has given countless interviews in which he talks about his life, literary ideas, world view, books, obsessions, and desires. He is cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and vigorous, as well as an assiduous inquirer and intense creator. Author of numerous essays, he also writes novels and stories, chronicles, articles, reviews, literary criticism, translations, plays, and movie scripts. Although he has published a dozen books of essays, many others are scattered in publications throughout the world. Of his writings his nonfiction prose is the least studied, but it is of enormous influence in politics, literary, and cultural discussions.

Fuentes began his career as a critic when, along with Emmanuel Carballo and Octavio Paz, he founded the review Revista Mexicana de Literatura (Mexican review of literature) in 1954. He undertook this endeavor, he explains in an interview with Jonathan Tittly in 1980, “with the express purpose of combatting the narrowness of literary chauvinism, of opening our windows to the world, and particularly to the rest of Latin America.” Paris: La revolución de mayo (1968; Paris: the May revolution), his first nonfiction published as a brief book, best defined as a political chronicle, became famous and widely read among students and leftwing intellectuals. His first book of essays, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (1969; The new Hispanic American novel), in which he reflects on the new Latin American narrative, is one of his best-known works, and frequently considered the theoretical exposition of his fiction. Fuentes writes about literature, especially the novel, constantly and extensively, but he also writes on political, social, and economic subjects, as well as history, culture, and life in Latin America. His essays are not limited to explicating his own writings: they are also part of the vast project that characterizes his creative effort. As in the novel, in the essay he seeks to formulate the many complex and interacting sides of history and culture, in which writing is conceived as a boundless verbal exploration arriving at knowledge only through the imagination.

Two books center on his own country: Tiempo mexicano (1971; Mexican time), and Nuevo tiempo mexicano (1994; New Mexican time). However, although Mexico is his main concern, Fuentes characteristically extends his perspective to all of Latin America, elaborating an intricate and expansive understanding of its many manifestations, often countering its past and present and conjointing its Indian and Spanish inheritance. A good example of this is the long essay, El espejo enterrado (1992; The Buried Mirror), where Fuentes explores the 500 years of what he considers the life of the American continent torn between dream and reality, between the precious cultural inheritance ranging from the stones of Chichén Itzá and Machu Picchu to modern Indian influences, from the baroque of colonial times to contemporary literature, and the failure and crisis of its political and economic systems.

The variegation in Fuentes’ fictional prose also appears in his essays. He constantly rereads and rewrites his own tradition, dismantling old schemes in literary, historical, political, and ethnic fields. For Fuentes, there is a silence hidden behind the sterile rhetoric of Latin American literature that overshadows the vitality of language and creation, and of the history and identity of Latin America. In his work, this becomes an assertion of the American universalism expressed in an intense confluence of speeches and cultures, incessantly revolving in multiple shadings. His essay prose is not only lucid, dense, and subjugating, but also precise, erudite, and polemical. It follows a linearity in the development of thought,
drawing together disparate elements and unfolding a multiperspectival world, which he rejects the pretense of totality and sufficiency of closed systems. Much of the innovation of his essays lies in their aesthetic texture. Fuentes writes in a characteristically autobiographical and anecdotal voice, but unlike the familiar essay, his themes are of an elevated nature. There is a constant essaying self, with attuned variations (it almost disappears in La nueva novela hispanoamericana), which are set as an axis from which the tensions of his discourse are displaced and unfolded. Fuentes’ essays are often a study of depth and breath of knowledge and assume an intelligent reader not willing to be guided by formulas. Fuentes does not accept the restrictions of genre; rather, he favors his own, a theory in their interimixture. He floats univocal views and Cartesian continuity, claiming instead the plurality and convergence of language as a cognitive process which is able to grasp a reality that is multiform and plural. In this sense, language becomes one of his main themes (José Carlos González Boix, 1988).

In his essays, Fuentes accumulates cultural information, displaying a vigorous process of comparisons, interactions, pronouncements, remarks, convergences, and divergences. Counterpoints abound: “Desire in the western world decreases in inverse proportion to the increasing number of objects capable of satisfying it” (Tiempo mexicano); even more: “Whoever has been in the city of Buenos Aires knows that the most fantastic flight of Borges was born in a backyard…” (La nueva novela hispanoamericana); counterpositions: “History is not an uninterrupted development, but a winding, spiral movement…” (Valiente mundo nuevo [1990; Brave new world]). Fuentes often freely combines serious, highly sophisticated language with humor and slant, as well as familiar and colloquial language. He sometimes mixes tragic and comic modes or interweaves high and popular culture. His tone may be refined but can quickly become visceral and ardent. Stylistically, Fuentes leads the reader along many tangents, resulting not in aimless thought but in an intensification of the vision he offers. For him this enriching use of language compensates for the many centuries of silence in Spanish American literature. Political, courageous, and outspoken (politically he defines himself as center-left), Fuentes has become a controversial writer. Nevertheless, he is admired and highly respected, for he has given expression to deep Latin American feelings, defending their justice and freedom, and maintaining a characteristically critical attitude against oppressive political schemes throughout Latin America and the rest of the world. In his essays he is essentially critical, but also maintains what he calls the horizon of literature—that is, memory and desire as imagination in our own time, so that we can witness both the past and the future.

BLANCA M. GARCÍA MONSIVAÍS

Biography

Selected Writings
Essays and Related Prose
Paris: La revolución de mayo, 1968
El mundo de José Luis Cuevas, 1969
La nueva novela hispanoamericana, 1969
Casa con dos puertas, 1970
Tiempo mexicano, 1971
Cervantes, o, La crítica de la lectura, 1976, as Don Quixote; or, The Critique of Reading, translated anonymously, 1976
Myself with Others: Selected Essays, 1988
Valiente mundo nuevo, 1990
El espejo enterado, 1992; as The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World, 1992
Geografía de la novela, 1993
Tres discursos para dos aldeas, 1993
Nuevo tiempo mexicano, 1994
Por un progreso inclemente, 1997
Other writings: 14 novels (including La región más transparente [Where the Air Is Clear], 1958; Las buenas conciencias [The Good Conscience], 1959; La muerte de Artemio Cruz [The Death of Artemio Cruz], 1962.; Aura, 1962; Cambio de piel [A Change of Skin], 1967; Tierra rosta, 1975; La cabeza de la hidra [The Hydra Head], 1978; Una familia lejana [Distant Relations], 1980; Gringo viejo [The Old Gringo], 1985; Cristóbal nombrado [Christopher

**Bibliographies**


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**Further Reading**

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Benítez, Fernando, Prologue to Obras completas by Fuentes, vol. 1, Mexico City: Aguilar, 1974:9–76


Boschi, Liliana Betumo, and Elisa Calabrese, Nostalgia del futuro en la obra de Carlos Fuentes, Buenos Aires: Garcia Cambeiro, 1974


Giacoman, Helmy F., editor, Homenaje a Carlos Fuentes: Variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra, New York: Las Américas, 1974


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Guzman, Daniel de, Carlos Fuentes, New York: Twayne, 1972


World Literature Today issue on Fuentes, 57, no. 4 (1983)

Zúñiga, Dulce Ma., Intertextos: Calvino, Borges, Fuentes, Guadalajara: University of Guadalajara, 1989

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Carlos Fuentes obituary. Mexico's most celebrated novelist. Nick Caistor. The writer and polemicist Carlos Fuentes, who has died aged 83, published more than 60 works, including novels, short stories, essays and plays, in a career that spanned six decades. Carlos Fuentes was born on November 11, 1928 in Panama City, Panama. He was a writer and director, known for Pedro Páramo (1967), Las cautivas (1973) and Muñeca reina (1972). He was married to Silvia Lemus and Rita Macedo. He died on May 15, 2012 in Mexico City, Distrito Federal, Mexico. Carlos Fuentes: Carlos Fuentes, Mexican novelist, short-story writer, playwright, critic, and diplomat whose experimental novels won him an international literary reputation. The son of a Mexican career diplomat, Fuentes was born in Panama and traveled extensively with his family in North and South America and in.