

UCLA

Mester

Title

The Development of the Double in Selected Works of Carlos Fuentes

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0np1670g>

Journal

Mester, 6(2)

Author

Schaffer, Susana D.

Publication Date

1977

DOI

10.5070/M362013575

Copyright Information

Copyright 1977 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

The Development of the Double in Selected Works of Carlos Fuentes

From Plato to Dostoevsky to Faulkner, writers of all time have been intrigued with the idea of the "double", or *doppelgänger*, as a pictorial representation of that which lies hidden within man's soul. It is not surprising, then, to find that the success of Latin American fiction in the last few decades is accompanied by a germination of the "double" theme in the literature of these nations. Until recently, only a few major authors, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Arturo Uslar Pietri, have been associated with this concept. Yet, in the later works of the Mexican contemporary novelist Carlos Fuentes—*Aura*, *Zona sagrada* and *Cumpleaños*¹— the growing fascination with the *doppelgänger* permeates this author's fiction. Even in his earliest works, *La región más transparente* and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, one senses Fuentes' desire to comprehend the identity crisis which has captivated Mexican thinkers today.² In his essay *Tiempo mexicano*, the author insists: "Desde la conquista hasta hoy, la historia de México es una segunda búsqueda de la identidad, de la apariencia, una búsqueda nuevamente tendida entre la necesidad y la libertad . . .»"³

The "double" in Fuentes' more recent, enigmatic works is virtually overpowering as he attempts to analyze the ramifications of the dual personality of Latin American man. At times, Fuentes adheres to tradition relying upon pre-scientific and folkloric manifestations of man's spiritual shadow.⁴ Yet, Fuentes goes beyond this initial phase to create something unique which advances the idea of *doppelgänger* in its development process. This step is the Mexican's successful utilization of multiple personages, wherein man becomes divided into three, four, or even an infinite number of duplicate selves.

To grasp the manner in which Fuentes manipulates the "double" in his works, it is necessary to look briefly at its evolution beginning with pre-literary notions regarding man's "other" self. The term *doppelgänger* is defined by the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* as a "second self, visible or invisible counterpart, spiritual or material double."⁵ In the primitive form, man conceived it as a reflection or shadow of his immortal (not biological) self. Belief in this shadow was created to insure the eternal survival of man's death-prone body. The "double" materialized through means of artistic and religious duplication processes; consequently, two became a sacred number in many ancient cults. In particular, duality, in pre-colombian Mexico, was creatively expressed through the moulding of two-faced idols representing gods such as Quetzalcóatl (whose name, Fuentes points out, means "precious twin").

The impact of the literary development of the "double" is not fully experienced until the Romantic era. Preoccupied with a loss of personal identity, the self-oriented writers of this period adopted the theme endowing it with a new, moralistic interpretation. The term *doppelgänger* was universally accepted to describe this phenomenon which dominated the literary production of Romanticism in Germany. E.T.A. Hoffman, author of "The Lost Reflexion", who was perhaps its most prolific advocate, popularized the theme throughout Europe.

It is significant that during this period the "double" was no longer considered to be a guardian angel type who guaranteed eternal being; rather it evolved as an omen of death, threatening to destroy the unity of modern man's internal self. Otto Rank in "The Double as Immortal Self" explains:

A positive evaluation of the Double is that immortal soul leads to the building-up of the prototype of personality from the self; whereas the negative interpretation of the Double as a symbol of death is symptomatic of the disintegration of the modern personality type.⁶

With the advent of modern psychology, the theme of the "double" acquires a new dimension. Interpretations of dreams and the reiteration of archetypal figures reaffirm the existence of an inner self which can often thrive divorced from man's conscious, calculating self. Implemented by the study of folk beliefs, myths and superstitions, the "double" in literature deviated from the moral, good versus evil, devil versus angel, interpretation.

In its dramatization of a constant threat to our identity and our internal selves, the modern *Doppelgänger* novel reveals an ambiguity in authorial and reader sympathy and judgment, a failure to assign negative value to the socially undesirable.⁷

The principal renovative factor of the contemporary novel dealing with the "double" is, in other words, the portrayal of modern man's psyche in shades of gray.

The application of these basic principles governing *doppelgänger* literature is aptly demonstrated in the works of Carlos Fuentes. An outstanding feature of the theme's presentation in Fuentes is the use of pre-scientific, mythological and cultural illustrations of replicate being. These are universally recognized (almost to a subconscious extent) as evidence of man's inherent duality. A common representative of this "primitive" aspect is the twin—two distinct flesh and blood creations often considered to be one and the same individual. In *Zona sagrada*, the writer weaves an ambiguous web of references to the twin, in which, Giancarlo, Guillermo's counterpart, is represented as friend and twin brother. Seen through Guillermo's eyes, Giancarlo is simply a school comrad; yet, as the novel progresses, allusions increasingly suggest that the two are, at least mentally, an identical pair. Giancarlo insists, "¿Camaradas, Guglielmo? . . . Gemelos" (ZS, 107),⁸ while Guillermo refers to the Italian as: "mi semejante" (ZS,178), "hermano" (ZS,178), "el hombre que fue mi hermano" (ZS,190) and "gemelo" (ZS,190).

In this same novel, Fuentes utilizes the ancient concept of mimicry, a process wherein cherished or prominent individuals are copied by a large, adoring crowd. Claudia's harem serves this function of adoration much in the same way that Guillermo's pack of dogs is a mock desire to replicate a loyal following. The character of Bela signifies a pictorial double of Claudia, even more so than the group of young girls. Bela's every action attempts to recreate the starlet's image:

Me revela su impudicia, su pelo negro y suelto, obviamente teñido, quizá una peluca, su ceja arqueada, falsa, pintada a propósito, imitativamente, como el arco de los labios y el falso lunar del pómullo. (ZS, 29-30).

Similarly, the identical actions of Aura and Consuelo, in the Gothic novel *Aura*, may be viewed as the subordination of the young spirit to her "creator":

Miras rápidamente de la tía a la sobrina y de la sobrina a la tía, pero la señora Consuelo, en ese instante, detiene todo movimiento y, al mismo tiempo, Aura deja el cuchillo sobre el plato y permanece inmóvil y tú recuerdas que, una fracción de segundo antes, la señora Consuelo hizo lo mismo. (A.33).

Again, the paralleling of George and the horseman in *Cumpleaños* is a primary clue that both men are, in reality, the same individual:

. . . yo muevo los labios al mismo tiempo que él, digo lo mismo que él dice cuando él lo dice; estamos los dos en la cama con Nuncia y hacemos las mismas cosas al mismo tiempo. (C.73).

Another technique borrowed from ancient sources that still persists today is the concept of children viewed as extensions of their parents and relatives. In all principal cases of *doppelgänger* as demonstrated by Carlos Fuentes, some blood relation exists between the character and his double.⁹ In *Aura*, the young woman is supposedly Consuelo's niece, but toward the novelette's close, it is discovered that Aura is the old lady's imaginative substitution for the daughter she was unable to bear. In *Zona sagrada*, Guillermo is Claudia's rejected son—rejected because his age damages the air of immortality which surrounds the starlet's image. Guillermo is reduced to invisibility, since he allows his mother to overshadow his individuality. Finally, the role of offspring in *Cumpleaños* is two-fold: George is simultaneously a father to Georgie and a father-figure to the child in the labyrinthine house. Georgie eventually reveals himself to be George as he appeared as a lad. The significance of the blood pact in *Cumpleaños* reaffirms the double image of juvenile-adult:

Hemos vuelto a sellar el pacto, murmuró extrañamente dócil y conmovido. Nunca nos hemos separado. Nunca nos podremos separar. Viviremos, de alguna manera, siempre juntos. (C,54).

The "double" viewed as material versus spiritual self is the next step Fuentes takes in refining his unique approach. In the macabre work *Aura*, Fuentes gradually reveals that Consuelo and Aura, just as Felipe and General Llorente, are one and the same. The numerous parallels which exist between these characters are rationalized away by the historian at first; it is only upon Felipe's discovery of a yellowing photograph and his reading of certain passages in the General's memoirs

that he is forced to recognize the truth. Constant references have been made to Aura's entrancing beauty, her emerald dress and her liquid, green eyes; the General accordingly says of Consuelo: "ce sont ses yeux verts que ont fait ma perdition" (A,37) and "Je pense que tu seras toujours belle, même dans cent ans . . . Siempre vestida de verde." (A,39). The mirror image goes beyond the physical, however; Aura's preoccupation with eternal being ["¿Me amarás siempre, aunque muera?" (A,47)] reflects Consuelo's overpowering desire to remain ever-beautiful. It is for this reason that the aged woman has conjured up the spirit of Aura, the function of the young woman being to carry out Consuelo's designs for immortality. The spell, unfortunately, is imperfect since Aura gradually ages and diminishes in strength.

Related to the notion of spiritual duplicity, in the works of Fuentes, is the concept of androgynous being. This integration of both male and female within the same body applies to the presence of *ánima*, previously outlined by critics who have studied the Mexican novelist's writings.¹⁰ The term *ánima*, as coined by Jung, distinguishes between the "creative, *animating* aspects of the unconscious from the total unconscious" and serves to "personify man's unconscious and suppressed femininity."¹¹ With the realization of the existence of androgyny in Fuentes' characters, it is easy to go beyond the obvious spiritual similarities of Aura/Consuelo, Claudia/Bela and George/horseman. For example, in *Aura*, the attentive reader may sense the intrinsic metaphysical bond that unites the female spirit with the enamoured Felipe:

Tú tomas el lugar de Aura . . . invadido por un placer que jamás has conocido, que sabías parte de ti, pero que sólo ahora experimentas plenamente. . . . (A,24),

tu grito es el eco del grito de Aura delante de ti en el sueño . . . (A,42).

Further indication of the *ánima* found in males is exemplified dramatically by George's reaction to his tumultuous affair with Nuncia in *Cumpleaños*. Here, man feels more than a mere physical link with his female partner; George actually experiences his existence as analogous to that of Nuncia:

Para ser el hombre de Nuncia, hube de afeminarme; de acercarme a la mujer, en sus gestos, en su olor, en sus poses más íntimas . . . Fue una larga identificación: quise . . . ser ella misma, uno con ella: ser Nuncia como ella era yo. (C,60).

The novel in which hermaphroditic behavior manifests itself as a transparent mirror of the "double" and attains a high degree of success is *Zona sagrada*, wherein Fuentes destroys the boundaries between masculinity and femininity by creating an entire cast of androgynous characters. Homosexuality and lesbianism mingle discreetly among Ruth, Claudia and the group of girls in the star's house, and again between Giancarlo and Guillermo in the palace in Italy. Furthermore, the mother-son relationship as depicted by Fuentes is a brutal twisting of maternal love into incestuous desire. The definitive assertion of Guillermo's obsession comes at the novel's close, when the demented son gazes at himself in his mother's dressing room mirror while donning her intimate apparel, shoes, dress and cosmetics:

¿Bastará mostrarme así, demostrar que soy ella, que ella usurpa mi identidad, que ella me ha convertido en esto que los espejos reflejan: en este príncipe de burlas, en este muñeco embarrado de cosméticos . . . en este perro famélico que ya no puede sostenerse sobre los tacones altos . . . ? (ZS, 186-187).

Fuentes greatly enriches the bi-part composition of the traditional "double" encounter and advances toward a multiplicity of characterizations by emphasizing the predominance of the number three in his later works. In the cases of *Aura*, *Zona sagrada* and *Cumpleaños*, a trio of protagonists replaces the principal interaction of two. In the first *novella* mentioned, the initiation of character groupings of three is exemplified by the juxtaposition of Aura, Consuelo and Felipe. Clearly, General Llorente plays such a nonexistent role that he may be excluded from this trilogy. As previously demonstrated, Aura is not only Consuelo's psychic creation, but also the feminine counterpart of Felipe. The physical union of the historian and the crazed old woman at the story's close indicates the birth of a third bond between Felipe and Consuelo. Certainly, Felipe is more than a mere bodily duplicate of the General. Along with Aura and Consuelo, the three form a closely knit unit. As Felipe clings to Consuelo, she comforts him by saying: "Volverá, Felipe, la traeremos juntos . . ." (A, 60). Consuelo's designs in creating Aura have now been converted into the identical designs of Felipe. Callan's Jungian interpretation of *Aura* further substantiates this view of the three main characters as being representatives, in reality, of only one individual:

the entire story is a hypnagogic drama like the famous one that Jung analyzes in *Symbols of Transformation* . . . In this case there would not be three persons in the list of characters, nor even two, but only Felipe Montero and his archetypes, which according to Jung, 'appear as active personalities in drama and fantasies.'¹²

Similarly, in *Zona sagrada* a transference from the pairing process (such as, Guillermo/Giancarlo, Guillermo/Claudia, Ruth/Claudia, Bela/Claudia) is enacted. Until the final sections of this novel, Fuentes emphasizes the dual nature of Guillermo, capitalizing upon traditional "double" manifestations:

Seré la pareja. La completaré. Formábamos una pareja. La primera pareja. Madre e hijo. (ZS,128).

This vision of duplication changes drastically, however, as little by little Giancarlo begins to win the attention of Claudia. Thus, Guillermo is forced to admit a new member to the private family game. In textual terms, the take-over from a unity based on two participants to a grouping based on three is quite explicit:

Los tres seremos perfectos, seremos madre, hermano, hijo, amante. Todos diremos No para decir Sí. Todos nos vedaremos y nos velaremos. (ZS, 166).

. . . y conservando dentro de ti que ya no podrás negarme tu compañía, tu calor, tus atenciones, esperearemos; él vendrá también, él entrará y estará con nosotros. Los tres, siempre los tres, solos y reunidos para siempre. (ZS, 168).

Finally, in *Cumpleaños* a two-fold transference occurs. As previously stated, the most obvious traditional "double" in this short novel is the link that exists between George and the horseman:

Seríamos uno: los dos. Me arrojé sobre él. Abracé a un hombre que me miraba con compasión, afecto, y aun, cierto desdén. (C,88).

Yet, constellations of three characters form the primary foundation of the novel. As the story begins, the bourgeois family is composed of George, Emily and Georgie; the second section of the novel shows the interaction of Nuncia, the child and the narrator; the third section treats the trilogy of George, the horseman and Nuncia; while the final episode is a composite of George, Siger and Nuncia. Furthermore, in the tomb-like house, three rooms represent the three *alter-egos* of the Englishman: the little boy, the young man who arrives on horseback, and the old Medieval philosopher.

The focal point of all these trilogies is George himself. It is in *Cumpleaños* that a true submersion into multiple personality occurs. The constant elements in the novel are Nuncia, representative of all female roles—mother, lover, wife, housemaid, sister—and George, who is a composite picture of *all* male figures. The revelation of this multi-character surfaces in the final section of *Cumpleaños* accompanying the appearance of Siger de Bramante, "teólogo magistral de la Universidad de París, denunciado por Etienne Tempier y por Tomás de Aquino." (C,115). Siger, murdered by his insane servant, belongs to another epoch, the thirteenth century. His is a doctrine that attempts to uncover the immortality of human collective being; as he informs the astonished George, the Englishman has served as a mere reincarnation of Siger's spirit:

Lo interrumpí. —¿Y ahora? ¿Quién eres ahora? Él dijo una palabra incomprensible; Nuncia tradujo: Ahora soy tú . . . (C, 104).

George is a supposed modern-day replica of an obsessed thinker of centuries past. However, if one accepts the notion that the reality of this story reflects a dream or a flash-back, since Fuentes suggests that George has suffered a mortal accident, it is not difficult to deduce that Siger's preoccupation with everlasting life is equivalent to the former's own desire to impede his death. The fact that his own son Georgie is celebrating his tenth birthday takes George back in time mentally to face a surrealistic duplicate of himself as a fetus, carried by Nuncia at the opening of *Cumpleaños*, which grows through the stages of childhood, adolescence, manhood and old age.

The recognition that Siger is George's double forces the Englishman to confront the fact that his death is imminent. Siger casually tells him: "Tu muerte será la continuación de mi vida. A donde salgas, en este momento, encontrarás tu muerte . . ." (C, 105). The physical appearance of one's

duplicate, then, heralds the inevitability of death. This is in keeping with more contemporary psychological beliefs regarding the "double":

Originally conceived of as a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, a reminder of the individual's mortality, the announcer of death itself.¹¹

Siger maintains, however, that the sacrifice of George will insure the immortality of collective being:

. . . el alma individual no es inmortal, pero el género de los hombres sí. (C.94).

Vislumbré ese secreto de la reencarnación: el mundo es eterno porque muere renovándose; el alma es mortal porque vive de su singularidad intransferible (C.101).

The circular structure of *Cumpleaños* appears to support Siger's thesis, for the novel begins and ends with an allusion to Nuncia's pregnant state. Whereas the first fetus represents the birth of George (or Siger in the form of George), the unborn baby at the end represents George's "reincarnation" in human form.

George's fight for immortality is a principal thematic offshoot of the "double" which is repeated in other *doppelgänger* novels by Carlos Fuentes. In *Aura*, the young girl is a product of Consuelo's desire for immortality. In the manuscripts that Felipe is deciphering, General Llorente remarks about his wife: "Tu es si fière de ta beauté: que ne ferais-tu pas pour rester toujours jeune?" (A.39). The General believes his spouse to be insane because she speaks of an imaginary second self convoked through demonic means:

Sí, sí, sí, he podido: la he encarnado; puedo convocarla, puedo darle vida con mi vida. (A.55).

Voy hacia mi juventud, mi juventud viene hacia mí. (A.55).

In the same way, Claudia, in *Zona sagrada*, is anxious to eliminate anything that will reveal her true age; particularly, she cannot tolerate the presence of a twenty-nine year-old son. The starlet creates the illusion of youth through cosmetics, ["El color regresa a su rostro, poco a poco, como si las pinturas más que aplicarlo, lo convocaran." (A.48)]; through portraits ("los cuadros que tan evidentemente pretenden inmortalizarla" A.12); and, naturally, through her films, "máscaras de juventud" (A.152). Self-delusion aids Claudia in envisioning herself as always beautiful, always triumphant:

Tú sabes que sólo quiero durar. (ZS, 91).

Nadie se queda más que yo. Ustedes pasan. Yo duro. (ZS, 134).

Carlos Fuentes' utilization of the *doppelgänger* theme throughout his fiction serves several purposes. Most evident is the indepth examination of the identity crisis which, although a common Mexican preoccupation, is a universal problem. Guillermo is perhaps the prime example of this disintegration of personality for, symbolically, he is transformed into a dog at the end of *Zona sagrada*.

Another important element is the employment of the "double" to illustrate man's obsession with immortality and his basic fear of death. On an individual basis, Fuentes' characters cling desperately to life by capitalizing upon their self-created second images. Although one character, Consuelo, achieves a certain degree of success in this pursuit, ultimately she fails. Exhausted by mental struggle at the *novella's* close, the woman states: "Estoy agotada. Ella ya se agotó. Nunca he podido mantenerla a mi lado más de tres días." (A.59). Fuentes suggests that immortality can be realized only on a second level of comprehension, that of collective man. In this sense, Siger becomes a mouthpiece for Fuentes' personal ideas. Man maintains his individuality at the cost of his immortality, but the essence of life that is common to all human beings lives on indefinitely.

The "double" in Fuentes allows the author to explore, within his fictional world, the realm of ambiguity characteristic of the contemporary novel in Latin America. The Mexican feels an intrinsic need to picture man as he really is, a truly ambivalent being. No well-defined traits of black and white, good or bad, can be indiscriminantly assigned to Fuentes' creations. They are complex figures that reflect the many psychological "selves" that reside in the subconscious domain of the mind.

The "double" in Fuentes' fiction should not be overlooked nor underestimated, for it aids dramatically in the comprehension of such enigmatic works as the three examined here. Yet, more than this, the novelist must be recognized for having forged ahead in his utilization of this centuries-old

concept through amplifying the traditional two-part juxtaposition of the "double". The advent of multiple personality in fiction affords the author new avenues in the analysis of human character; the novelist may explore not only what regulates human psyche in the present, but also what has affected man in the past and what will mold his life in the unknown realm of the future.

Susan Schaffer
University of California, Los Angeles

NOTES

1. Fuentes' two most recent works, *Cambio de piel* and *Terra nostra*, incorporate the "double" theme into their frameworks, but due to the limitations of this essay, they will not be analyzed here.

2. Octavio Paz has undertaken the task of analyzing this crisis in such works as *El laberinto de la soledad*. Furthermore, the theme is a constant in his poetry as well as in that of Rosario Castellanos, Jaime Sabines, Juan José Arreola, Ramón López Velarde, etcetera.

3. Carlos Fuentes, *Tiempo mexicano*. (México: 1972), p. 25.

4. James Hasting, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics Vol IV*. (Edinburgh: 1935), pp. 853-857.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 853.

6. Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, (Camden, N.J.: 1941), p. 66.

7. Claire Rosenfield, "The Shadow Within: The Conscious and the Unconscious Use of the Double", *Daedalus* (1963), p. 340.

8. Textual references will be noted in the body of this essay in the following manner: *Aura* as A, *Zona sagrada* as ZS, *Cumpleaños* as C, followed by the page number which corresponds to the quote.

9. This generalization excludes secondary double figures such as Claudia's secretary Ruth and George's housekeeper-lover Nuncia.

10. The articles referred to here are Gloria Durán's "Carlos Fuente's *Cumpleaños*: A Mythological Interpretation of an Ambiguous Novel," *Latin American Literary Review* (Spring-Summer, 1974), pp. 75-86; Gloria Durán's *La magia y las brujas en la obra de Carlos Fuentes* (México: 1976); and Richard Callan's "The Jungian Basis of Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*", *Casa de las Américas* (1962-1963), pp. 64-75.

11. Callan, "Jungian Basis of Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*", p. 66.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

13. Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, p. 76.

