

A Note on an Early Published Fragment of *Terra Nostra*

Late in 1968, seven years before its publication in the novel, the first chapter, or section, of Carlos Fuentes' *Terra Nostra* was published in the *Revista de la Universidad* (UNAM) with the title "Carne, esferas, ojos grises junto al Sena." In January of 1979, the same section was published in Spain in the *Revista de Occidente*.¹ Considering the amount of intervening time, one must be surprised by the degree to which Fuentes' ideas, form, and language had coalesced in this early fragment. Though the similarities are much greater than the differences, a comparison of this fragment with the same pages of the novel offers the student of literary history a glimpse into a process of literary creation.

The changes Fuentes made between the first and final versions tend to fall into three general categories: clarification or amplification (or, rarely, the opposite face of the coin, simplification) which may be only a phrase but often consists of several lines, even a page of additional text; second, a much more narrow focus on individual words, a kind of copy-editing for purposes of sharpening an image or a description; and, third, more meaningful and substantive additions or alterations that resulted from a decisive change in the shape or concept of the novel, from new characters or events, and new interpretations of them, that for purposes of fictional integrity needed to be incorporated into the opening section.

At times, such amplifications/clarifications/modifications serve to intensify a sense of place or culture, as seen in additions like "Hoy ni las coles y beterragas (del vecino mercado de Saint-Germain), ni el humo de Gauloises (y de Gitanes), ni el vino derramado sobre [la] paja y madera" (TN 15, RU 2).² Usually, however, this kind of modification is an elaboration of an idea or description sketched more tentatively in the early fragment; one example will illustrate:

. . . sino la simple imagen de su única mano adelantada, devorada por el humo. Invisible. Desaparecida. Mutilada por el aire. (Sólo tengo una. Sólo me queda una.) Se tocó los testículos con la mano recuperada (para asegurarse de la prevalencia de su ser físico). Su cabeza, allá arriba, (lejos de la mano y el sexo,) giraba en otra órbita . . . (TN 20, RU 4).

Examples of omission are much less frequent and, with the exception of one significant deletion concerning identification of a character, do not affect meaning.

Fuentes seems to have had an unusually clear vision of the specifics of this section years before its completion, but there are examples of editing for purposes of sharpening an individual image—a "camisa color de rosa" (RU 2) becomes a "camisa color fresa" (TN 16)—or, occasionally, for

"honing" an entire passage. An example of this clustering is found in the main paragraph on page sixteen of *Terra Nostra*: "improbable correspondencia" was formerly "posible"; "escasas" has been added to "cartas"; these letters, which are in the novel "separadas," were in the earlier version "clasificadas" and found "sobre la mesa" rather than "junto al espejo"; originally Polo "pasó el umbral," while in the revision he "cruzó el umbral"; "novedad espiritual" is modified to "novedad del espíritu" (an interesting subtlety); and "Pero el ruido no" is changed to "No así el ruido." It is apparent that here no substantive changes are implemented, though the addition within the first parenthesis of "ella vivía en casa de cristal" and the movement of the letters to "beside the mirror" were probably inspired by the many mentions of glass and mirrors in this scene, substantiating my own belief that the mirror is the unifying symbol of the novel.³

By far the most interesting changes are those resulting from the evolving process of creation, insights into how the author's ideas about his work were modified as the novel progressed. Such meaningful changes will be noted as nearly as possible in the order of their appearance in the text.

The fragment published in the Mexican and Spanish journals bore dedications to Geraldine Chaplin and Carlos Saura that in the novel are shifted to the list of acknowledgments. Fuentes also included two epigrams:

En la Ciudad de París, fuente de toda sabiduría y manatíal de las escrituras divinas, el persuasivo Demonio inculcó una perversa inteligencia en algunos hombres sabios.

CAESARIUS VON HEISTERBACH
Dialogus Miraculorum, s. XIII

I have sung women in three cities
 But it is all one.
 I will sing the sun.
 . . . eh? . . . they mostly had grey eyes.
 But it is all one. I will sing of the sun.

EZRA POUND
Cino, s. XX

In the novel these epigrams have been incorporated into the narrative. The first, the allusion to the *Dialogue on Miracles* of Caesarius of Heisterbach, is included in a letter addressed to Polo and signed by Ludovico and Celestina (TN 18). This letter is a significant change, as it links Polo to other incarnations in other times. When Polo later meets Celestina, she again mentions the letter (TN 32). Ludovico is not named in the fragment, though he is given the same description in both versions: "Polo se dijo que la carne de este hombre, más que morena, era una delgada inflamación tumefacta, verdosa" ("azul" in the first version, TN 25, RU 6). Celestina appears in both versions as the girl with the tattooed lips Polo sees on the Pont des Arts; like Ludovico, she is not identified by name.

One may tentatively deduce from these changes that the frame of the millenium in Paris was formulated in Fuentes' mind before the details of the more-elaborated historical segments of the novel; how the many worlds of *Terra Nostra* would meld together had not yet been definitively determined.

The second epigram lends an interesting insight into the creative process. Quoted in English in the fragment, it appears in Spanish translation in the novel (TN 27) without direct mention of its author. That identification comes in a later amplification:

. . . dónde estará ese libro de poemas?, ¿dónde dice que yo me llamo Polo?, ¿escrito por un viejo loco que confundió todos los síntomas con todas las causas?, ¿el poeta Libra, un fantasma veneciano, Libra, exhibido dentro de una jaula, recluso de un manicomio americano?, ¿ojos grises, eh? (TN 34)

Fuentes had decided in the intervening time to leave to the reader the connection between his character Polo Febo and Polo's model, Pound's Pollo Phoibee, a conclusion further borne out by the fact that Polo appears as Polo Phoibee in the fragment, a hybridization of the Spanish and English versions. By changing Phoibee to Febo, Fuentes both obscures and reveals the origins of his character. The reader who knows Pound in the English may take slightly longer to hear the phonetic resonance of the Spanish version and, at the same time, the Spanish reader receives a more direct allusion to the original model Phoebus (Febo), or the sun god *Apollo*. I cannot resist calling attention to Fuentes' play on "many moons" as a time reference, as he writes that "Pasarán muchos *soles* antes de que Polo Febo condescienda a analizar las impresions que . . . le provocaron" (TN 16, RU 3).

Polo Febo is a man with one arm. This physical characteristic is essential in linking Polo with other one-armed reincarnations of the same character, including the historical antecedent Cervantes. But twice in this section the number of hands creates problems. In Spanish journal, after Polo has delivered Madame Zaharia's infant, "se lavó la mano" (Roza), the correct procedure for a man with only one arm. Inexplicably, in the novel, as well as in the Mexican publication, the missing hand is temporarily restored: "se lavó las manos" (TN 18, RU 4). We can be sure that this strange effect resulted from some stage of the editing, for I was authorized in the subsequent English translation to restore "Pollo" to his normal, if handicapped, state: "He rinsed his hand" (English TN, 14). The confusion in reverse occurs toward the end of the section. In the novel we read that "Polo se cubrió la oreja con la mano (TN 26), a correction of the version in the fragments: "Se tapó las orejas con las manos" (RU 7). (The translation maintains the handicap: "He clamped his hand over one ear, English TN, 21.)

A series of meaningful changes are linked with the scenes of the Monk who is the focus for the pandemonium reigning in the streets of Paris in 1999. It is evident from "Carne . . ." that Fuentes originally conceived of

the Monk as a reincarnation of Felipe II. This intent is twice illustrated in a specific description—deleted in the novel—that cannot be confused with that of any other character: “. . . como si el monje respirarse por esa boca abierta y fuese incapaz de cerrarla jamás; tal era el peso de la mandíbula prognata que emergía audazmente del capuchón para recibir una blanca mancha de luz” (RU 6); on a second occasion, the monk is described more briefly as having “una inmensa quijada” (RU 9). These references to Felipe’s prognathism are inescapable, and their removal are the only instances when *deletion* is equivalent to a substantive change.

The chant of the pilgrims has also been amended, from

Piedad, Piedad.
Paz, Paz.
Piedad, Piedad. (RU 5)

to

El lugar es aquí,
El tiempo es ahora,
Ahora y aquí,
Aquí y ahora. (TN 22)

Though both examples have the ring of litany, the later version emphasizes the coming together of all times and all places into one apocalyptic final scene in Paris, an effect further illustrated by the addition of one phrase on the same page: “mientras el tiempo se colaba hacia París como hacia un drenaje turbulento” (TN 22).

Some of the additions to this section evidence a sense of play not often attributed to Fuentes. One insertion involves a kind of Keystone Cops chase through streets otherwise dominated by death and annihilation as Jean Valjean and Inspector Javert pop in and out of the sewers of Paris, along with a burlesque of other characters of nineteenth century French novels, captives in a time warp, revived almost a century and a half after their literary conception to find themselves threatened with extinction in the final apocalypse.

A similar ludic note evolves from a semantic game. In the scene in which Polo and his Patron witness the bizarre phenomenon of pilgrims willingly divesting themselves of their clothing in order to flagellate and be flagellated by their fellow penitents, Polo observes in the reaction of the pilgrims to the food he has just delivered a kind of instinctual appreciation of the *act of eating* that the communicants seem to wish to “inscribe” in the DNA of the future. Observing himself observe, he addresses himself with conscious self-denigration as “Polo Antropólogo” (TN 23). Fuentes picks up this game in at least six additional instances: Polo Catequista (24), Cartesiano (26), Mutilado (27), Trivia (28), Puber (28), and Cinemateca (29). One cannot know whether Fuentes added the game of the burlesque of literary characters and an auto-critical Polo from an *innate* sense of play, or as an objective decision to lighten the mood of the opening pages of the novel.

Also added to *Terra Nostra* was an object not included in "Carne . . .," a cohesive symbol in the novel, the feather mask first mentioned when Polo Febo sights it in an antique-shop window, "una tela o una máscara de plumas con un centro de arañas muertas" (TN 27). This mask appears in all sections of the novel with the exception of the Roman world. It serves as a map that facilitates passage through the New World, and as a magnet that draws together lovers separated by time and space. The last two people in the world don the mask before they can join in the copulation that results in a single androgynous survivor. The inclusion of the mask is a significant change between the maquette and the final version. The mask also motivates a change in a later scene in which Fuentes emphasizes through repetition the configuration—metaphoric and real—of this mysterious feathered object. In both versions Polo first sees Celestina sitting in the middle of the Pont des Arts, a girl, like so many other students, drawing with chalk familiar paintings or original designs for the few coins thrown by passersby. In "Carne . . ." Celestina was executing the drawing of "un arbol desnudo en el medio de un huerto invernal; pero un arbol cuya copa semejava una horca" (RU 8). This figure is certainly in keeping with the aura of death pervading the city, but Fuentes chose in the novel to reinforce a recurring rather than an immediate image: "dibujaba a partir de un círculo negro, irradiando de él zonas de diversos colores, azul, granate, verde, amarillo . . ." (TN 31). Even without the allusion to the feather mask, this emblem seems somehow more appropriate for Celestina, perhaps because it suggests the many-colored sinuous patterns on her tattooed lips.

The final three modifications, too, are related to Celestina. In the early fragment her greeting to Polo recounts both her amazement at changes in the city and the difficulty of her voyage. Referring to "yesterday," she describes the city as it had been when last they met: "El año pasado el puente era de madera" (RU 9). Further research proved that the Pont des Arts did not exist in the sixteenth century (taking the completion of the Escorial as a definable point in time), so in the novel version Celestina amends that error: "El puente no existía el año pasado; soñamos que debía haber un puente en este lugar, y ya lo ves, nuestro deseo se cumplió" (TN 32).⁴ Similarly, the points of origin of her long pilgrimage have been changed. In "Carne . . ." she had set out from "Brujas," and she speaks of the spread of terror in "Flandes." These sites are related generally to the heretical sects originating in the Low Countries and specifically to the community of Beguines that Ludovico and the three stigmatized youths visit in their long trek after leaving the patronage of Valerio Camillo. But Celestina did not accompany them in that long travel. In the novel, then, she tells that her voyage was begun in Spain, and describes terror pervading the territory from Toledo to Orléans.

The need to adapt an early section in order to conform to the developing tale is illustrated in this example of place names; similarly, an adaptation to allow for what was to be a principal device, the green bottles containing the read and unread manuscripts that foretell the destinies of

the three youths. In the journals, as Polo is carried off his feet by the wind, his sandwich-board wings flapping as ineffectually as the waxen wings of Icarus, Celestina clasps the handrail of the bridge and strains for a glimpse of his disappearing figure: "La muchacha clavó las manos en el barandal de fierro del puente, trató de mirar las aguas ocultas por esa niebla casi inmóvil and colgó la cabeza" (RU 9). But as the novel developed, the bottles containing the stories of the lives of the three youths had become a major story line and Celestina's reaction was correspondingly changed: "La muchacha clavó una mano en el barandel de fierro del puente y con la otra arrojó al río la verde y sellada botella, rogó que la mano del muchacho se asiese al vidrio viejo, trató de mirar las aguas ocultas por esa niebla casi inmóvil y colgó la cabeza" (TN 35).

The last words of this chapter/section belong to Celestina. Some critics have found in them the basis for a thesis that Celestina may be the ultimate narrator of *Terra Nostra*. The words have an incantatory quality; they appear in normal order and then in mirror-image reverse, echoing the glinting reflections of all aspects of the novel, the reversals of role, the reversals of place, the reversals of time. In the journal the words are as follows: "Quiero que escuches una historia; airotsih anu sehucuse euq . . . oriug" (RU 9). The revised version is more felicitous in euphony, in cadence, and in its hint of an exotic tongue—an unknown but almost recognizable language: "Este es mi cuento. Deseo que oigas mi cuento. Oigas. Oigas. Sagio. Sagio. Otneuc im sagio equ oesed. Otneuc im se else" (TN 35).

No true analysis of the progressive changes of concept and style of *Terra Nostra* can be made until Fuentes' notebooks and worksheets are made public. But in a comparison between a fragment published seven years before the novel and the novel itself we are afforded at least a glimpse into the continuous process of revision, research, reconsideration, and refinement that went into shaping *Terra Nostra*.

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NOTES

1. *Revista de UNAM*, 23, 243 (October-November 1968), 1-9; *Revista de Occidente*, 70 (January 1969), 23-38.
2. Additions are contained within the parentheses; brackets indicate a deletion.
3. See my "Readers Guide to *Terra Nostra*," scheduled for *Review 30*.
4. There is some confusion about this appointment, however, for in one place in *Terra Nostra*, Celestina speaks as if she had never been in Paris: ". . . te doy cita, lejos de aquí, en otra ciudad, Ludovice me lo ha dicho, París, fuente de toda sabiduría . . ." (TN 646).

The standard Spanish and English versions have been used for all quotations:

Terra Nostra. México: Mortiz, 1975.

Terra Nostra. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976. Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden.