

Carlos Fuentes picks a few good books

"To read a novel: A loving act, that teaches us to love better."

— Carlos Fuentes,
"Geography of the Novel"

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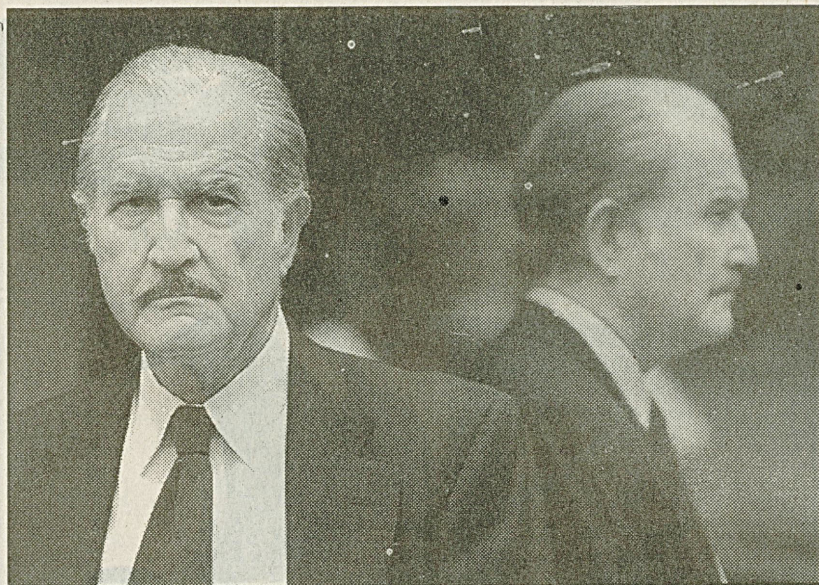
When the public thinks about the Mexican novel, the name Carlos Fuentes comes to mind. His books — translated into English — are easy to find in U.S. bookstores and libraries.

But one often has to look long and hard, and perhaps travel far, to find books — particularly in translation — by other Mexican novelists.

Mexico has many fine novelists whose works should be read by Americans, said Fuentes. It has a rich literary tradition, which includes many authors who have influenced him, just as he has influenced dozens of the Mexican novelists writing today.

The literary legend, who turned 69 Tuesday, was in San Diego and Tijuana last month to give a reading about the history of the border as part of the inSITE97 exhibition of art in public places.

Fuentes would not suggest which of his more than a dozen novels peo-



JOHN NELSON/Union-Tribune

Literary profile: *Carlos Fuentes, the author of "A Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World," reflected on Mexican literature during an interview at the Paladion.*

ple should read. "No, I won't talk about that," he said. "It's impossible. No, no, no. Because I think my work is one work. I wouldn't say of any of my children that one is better than the other. But I certainly can talk about other novels which I

esteem very much."

His favorite authors seem to write about the Mexican Revolution (just as Fuentes did with "The Death of Artemio Cruz" and "The Old Gringo") or about social issues (which has been a major theme for

Fuentes).

"I think the best Mexican novelist of the century is Juan Rufo. 'Pedro Páramo' is undoubtedly, as the century ends, the best Mexican novel that has been written, followed closely, I think, by 'La Sombra del Caudillo' ('The Shadow of the Tyrant'), the great political novel of Mexico by Martín Luis Guzmán. Then 'Los de Abajo' ('The Underdogs') by Mariano Azuela.

"I would rescue from oblivion the wonderful novelist of the revolution, Rafael Muñoz, who wrote the novel 'Vamonos con Pancho Villa.'"

Azuela, Guzmán, Muñoz and Rufo portrayed the 1910-1920 revolution as a complex phenomenon. In particular, Azuela's 1915 novel is considered "the novel" of the revolution, and brought Mexican writing into the 20th century.

"I think a wonderful novelist is Rosario Castellanos," Fuentes continued. "I would put her very, very high up with her novels 'Balún Canán' and 'Oficio de Tinieblas.'"

Castellanos wrote about social inequality, mainly in Chiapas state; her books can provide background for the reasons behind the Zapatista uprising there. Azuela also wrote about social justice; Mexico needs "a more equitable and fair allocation of resources," Fuentes said.

He also recommended "a masterpiece called 'Farabeuf' by Salvador Elizondo" — a book some also call chilling — and the novels of Fernando del Paso and Sergio Pitlor. These three authors, like Fuentes, are cosmopolitan writers and literary stylists who have lived much of their lives abroad.