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***El disparo de argón* by Juan Villoro:
A Symbolic Vision of Power, Corruption and Lies**

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Hipertexto

During the 1990s, many Mexican novels displayed an interest in the question of social and political change, explicitly linking the contemporary Mexican novel to the discourse of transition to democracy which had taken hold in the previous decade. However, despite the apparent “miracle” of 2000, when there was finally a change of party in national government and the right-wing PAN broke with 71 years of PRI rule, events surrounding the last presidential election suggest that perhaps little has changed. The pervasiveness of corruption in the political sphere and the public’s lack of confidence in official institutions have come ever more clearly to the fore in the wake of the 2006 presidential election and serve to highlight the pervasiveness of corruption in the political sphere and the public’s lack of confidence in official institutions.

In this scenario, the 1991 novel by Juan Villoro, *El disparo de argón*, can be fruitfully read for its continuing topicality and relevance given its provocative reading of certain social and political themes that continue to dominate Mexico’s social and political panorama. At the same time, the novel offers an opportunity to consider a number of aspects of style and technique in the contemporary Mexican novel. This opportunity arises as the novel seeks to adapt itself to this reality and breaks with pervading ideas concerning the nature of the Latin American novel in general and the Mexican novel in particular. Such a situation obliges us to consider the relation of the contemporary Mexican novel to discourses of Modernism and Postmodernism, and in particular the abandonment of a totalizing discourse in favor of a focus on more intimate and fragmented fictions. In all of these areas of analysis the idea of transition is dominant; the political transition to democracy and the literary transition to the *post-avant-garde*, and in both we also face the possibility that these transitions have yet to run their course.

Juan Villoro has noted that postmodernism is the product of a fragmentary use of certain modernist discourses and a recovery of elements from previous eras in order to recycle them for new times rather than for their

use in the constitution of a new *avant-garde*. The parodic use of, or allusion to, novelistic tendencies from previous eras and their ironic incorporation into the novel, according to Villoro, 'se trata de un movimiento saludable para curarse de las vanguardias, de la sed y la pasión desaforada por lo nuevo, de la obsesión de modernidad del siglo'(Interview). This apparent cure for the affliction brought by the *avant garde* does not, its must be emphasized, constitute a philosophy or conscious literary movement in itself but yet another transitional stage for which the term postmodernism is far from definitive. In seeing this period as transitional, Villoro implicitly links the current state of literature to Mexico's own period of political and social transition as the search for new forms of expression is equally applicable to both. This lack of fixed goals is mirrored in Villoro's novel El disparo de argón by a society which lacks stable co-ordinates and is seemingly locked into an endless period of political and social transition.

El disparo de argón is at one and the same time a hospital thriller, an architectonic novel about a city on the verge of collapse, a love story and a detective story. The book could be considered three novels in one: 1) A novel on and of Mexico City, 2) An allegory of the Mexican political system and 3) A detective story. In addition the novel redefines the parameters of the novel in its relationship with Mexico City as Juan Antonio Másoliver Ródenas notes in his essay "Narrativa mexicana actual: Disintegración del poder y conquista de la libertad". In the opinion of Masoliver, *El disparo de argón* offers a new experience of Mexican reality expressed as both a collective and individual conflict with the novel's emphasis gradually shifting toward the latter. It possesses two social centers, the Colonia San Lorenzo in Mexico City and the eye clinic run by Antonio Suárez located in San Lorenzo, and effectively reduces the scale of the city by focusing on a single *barrio* which is presented as an island isolated within an urban centre undergoing constant change and mutation, a fragment of a whole that is too vast for effective mapping or interpretation.

Such a reduction in *El disparo de argón* offers a means to give literary form to the chaos of Mexico City as San Lorenzo functions as both a typical inner city *barrio* and a unique imaginary creation. As Villoro notes, 'en El disparo de argón lo que quería escribir era básicamente una historia y pensar la ciudad a partir de una novela. Uno de los aspectos que me interesaba era crear un *barrio* imaginario, que en la novela se llama San Lorenzo, y a partir de ese *barrio* reproducir el macrocosmos que es la Ciudad de México' (Interview). At the time of its publication, Fabienne Bradu noted that *El disparo de argón* was unlike any other novel in the Mexican tradition of urban fiction and clearly demonstrated Villoro's liberation from the literary confines of the novel of the *Onda* (37). In an attempt to account for this liberation, we could perhaps best explain this break by understanding the fiction of Villoro as a deforming mirror that reflects a sense of indifference with respect to a previous generation's passion for utopia and demonstrates what Christopher Domínguez refers to as 'la progresiva anulación del espíritu juvenilista de 1968' (*Antología II* 535)

The decision to recreate Mexico City from a fragment is to a great extent determined by the impossibility of capturing the nature of such a megalopolis in a novel, a project undertaken by Carlos Fuentes in *La región más transparente* from 1958. At that time, Fuentes offered a vast mural of the city incorporating its diverse social strata in which the capital itself was the protagonist. The most ambitious novel of Mexican literature at the time of its publication, Christopher

Domínguez considers it the culmination and development of many of Fuentes' obsessions, in particular the duality of modern and pre-Hispanic Mexico. It is also a novel that reflects the determination of Fuentes, as would later be the case with his fellow Boom writers, to offer totalizing novels that strived to capture the collective experiences of peoples and nations. For Villoro, however, it is no longer feasible to offer a mural such as that offered by Fuentes for the simple reason that there are now many cities grouped together to form the urban expanse referred to as Mexico City and any attempt to offer a totalizing vision is condemned to failure. *El disparo de argón* therefore approaches this monster from a completely different perspective in the opinion of Villoro, attempting to 'recuperar la ciudad a partir de un barrio, de una zona, y que esa zona tuviera un poco como en las ciudades invisibles de Calvino, algo de la lógica de la ciudad, de lo que anima la ciudad, de las relaciones sociales, etc' (Interview). As Julio Ortega notes, whilst at the end of the 1950s it still seemed possible to project a fluid image of Mexico City, by the 1990s the capital required numerous images and, in order to give an image of Mexico City, 'se requeriría hoy de una novela por cada colonia, ya que la ciudad se ha multiplicado al punto de limitar, se diría, con el lenguaje' (51).

As for the nature of the contemporary city, *El disparo de argón* presents a degraded urban landscape enveloped by the smell of faeces, smoke and poisonous chemicals. The air itself is heavy with lead and forms a thick cloud that blocks the horizon, raindrops fall to earth like dying birds, and the city's residents suffer constant power cuts. However, despite the preceding list providing more than enough material in itself for a novel, Villoro does more than simply present a portrait of a city on the verge of ecological suicide. What he does is convert it into a sick body whose physical infirmities are reflected in its inhabitants. This shift is emphasized by the use of a first-person narrative suggesting not only identification between the protagonist Balmes and the writer, but also between Balmes and the city he inhabits. Balmes' point of view is wholly determined by his surroundings as everyone he meets or knows is referred to in biological terms, being little more than the sum of their illnesses and infirmities. But rather than this being merely a symptom of Balmes' own incipient glaucoma, the state of decomposition, with its emphasis on bodily functions, increases the crudity of a situation that seems increasingly beyond redemption.

This decomposition also functions on a symbolic level, allowing the novel to penetrate appearances and expose the sickening reality of the eye clinic in San Lorenzo and the struggle for power waged within it. The particular significance of the eye clinic, according to Juan Antonio Masoliver, is its potential for offering a new way of perceiving a 'una realidad nauseabunda, absurda y demencial' ("Narrativa mexicana" 39) which clearly demonstrates how the clinic can be seen to stand for the city that envelops it. Furthermore, Balmes' somatopsychic condition is reinforced by obsessive observations in which everything and everyone is seen in terms of disease: 'Como *cuerpo* nunca hemos estado en peor situación; somos una red de fermentaciones y secreciones a destiempo, los que fuman encienden cada cigarro con la colilla del anterior, la madre Carmen ofrece tés de cuachalate, masticamos aspirinas, corre el rumor de que el banco de ojos se ha quedado sin córneas' (*Disparo* 47). Balmes' professional opinions, as well as his way of relating to his surroundings, constitute a vision that detects physiological symptoms of decomposition in the city and its inhabitants that would escape the layperson and this, Juan Antonio

Masoliver notes, produces a symbolic vision 'literalmente agobiada por el excremento que lo rodea... y por el propio' ("Paisaje" 60).

These details are in turn reinforced by the use of Aztec codices forming part of the decoration of the clinic. These codices feature drawings of excrement that contribute to the formation of a cosmology in which hell is situated in life. In this way a series of symbolic variations are woven into the novel's portrait of a polluted and decaying city, converting it into a mythic space which offers an allegory of the Mexican political system. Starting as a thriller which investigates deaths at the eye clinic, the novel develops into a fable regarding the moral decomposition of the country, a complicated system of political corruption linking the clinic to the dirty tide surrounding it where 'cuarenta gobiernos inútiles' (*Disparo* 221) have served no other purpose than to create an atmosphere of infection, disease, corruption and death. The increasing violence, impunity and indifference permeating the lives of the general population and political leaders have produced a country where the old dreams of democracy and justice have been extinguished. Nevertheless, rather than collapsing into nihilism the novel reflects, and engages with, a deep criticism of contemporary society and in particular Mexico's "institutional transition" towards a long promised democracy in which changes occur but never seem to lead to a new or better stage.

This fable of transition is intimately linked to Mexico's twentieth century political history as, with the same party in power for roughly 70 years, the post-revolutionary era had been dominated by the same system of beliefs, political values, and social and family relations. The moral decomposition accompanying the PRI's stranglehold on power is clearly evidenced by the Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968 when, for Octavio Paz, 'el sistema político mexicano empezó a dar muestras de esclerosis' (*Pequeña Crónica* 9). Mexico's new middle class demonstrated that political structures were archaic and in need of change, but in contrast to many Latin American nations, this change was not from a military dictatorship to democracy but from a one-party authoritarian regime based on corporatism and patronage to democracy. This situation presented a different set of dangers and contradictions for it required the overhaul of systems and institutions and not merely the replacement of a party. In 1993 Octavio Paz stated that 'el cambio debe ser gradual y tiene que comenzar por la periferia, de las provincias al centro' (*Itinerario* 257-58). Consistent with Paz's belief, and despite the fact that by the end of the 1970s this system had clearly entered a period of decadence, change transpired virtually in slow motion. For this reason the end of the millennium exercised a distinct influence on the imagination of Mexican novelists as apocalyptic themes coincided with and dramatized what Villoro refers to as 'un desmoronamiento lento pero irreversible de todas nuestras estructuras sociales' (*Interview*).

The significance of the apocalyptic paradigm in *El disparo de argón* can therefore be seen in the way such a motif has been incorporated into the mentality of Mexican daily life. In an attempt to explain why this apocalyptic motif can be so easily assimilated, Villoro cites two traditions in Mexico that help us to understand its attraction; first, a pre-Hispanic inheritance in which the idea of renovation is an apocalyptic one and, second, the legacy of Catholicism; 'para los aztecas el fin de año significaba el fin de mundo y cuando se encendía el fuego nuevo a principios de año significaba que el mundo no se había acabado. Ellos estaban dispuestos a que se acabara el mundo entero y, a través de sacrificios, de ofrendas y sobre todo de la gracia de los dioses, seguían viviendo'

(Interview). In addition to this routinely apocalyptic means of conceiving the world is a Catholic tradition typified by *El apocalipsis de San Juan*. To emphasize this apocalyptic conception of the world, Mexico City itself displays numerous apocalyptic characteristics in its urban configuration. Resembling, says Villoro, 'la mujer barbuda del circo' (Interview), Mexico City could be considered the most polluted, dangerous and most densely populated city in the world – although it does of course have notable rivals for this dubious honor. These characteristics serve to generate a post-apocalyptic mentality as the daily perception of the capital's inhabitants is that the worst has already happened. Rather than announcing a future catastrophe, Mexico City seems to have miraculously survived an invisible catastrophe says Villoro 'y parecemos el resultado de una plaga, de una explosión nuclear, de un sismo de 10 grados, de alguna situación catastrófica, pero estamos vivos. Entonces en la medida en que estamos vivos, como decimos en México, *ya la libramos*. Y al haberla librado estamos más allá del daño. Ninguna desgracia es para nosotros, somos sobrevivientes' (Interview).

This vision of the city as a post-apocalyptic landscape has also been recognized by Hollywood producers with Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* and Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* using Mexico City as a primary location. Villoro notes that when searching for a site that was both futuristic and apocalyptic, Mexico City offered a natural choice with its degraded future landscape. In these films' presentation of the great metropolis of the future what is most interesting is that they found in Mexico City 'un futuro ya usado, degradado y envejecido. Eso era lo atractivo para los productores y es una de las sensaciones que genera esta ciudad' (Interview). It therefore comes as no surprise that apocalyptic themes permeate Mexican culture in a very specific way, above all in Mexico City, and link up with a general climate of crisis associated with the end of the second millennium.

In order to demonstrate just how much this mentality permeates daily life in the capital, some mention of Carlos Monsiváis treatment of the topic is relevant here. In the essay "La hora de la identidad acumulativa", Monsiváis states that for many people the greatest attraction Mexico City has to offer 'es su (verdadera y falsa) condición "apocalíptica"'. The general description offered by Monsiváis echoes an earlier passage from *El disparo de argón* with its enumeration of the city's charms, "quedarse en la capital de la república es afrontar los riesgos de la contaminación, el ozono, la inversión térmica, el plomo en la sangre, la violencia, la carrera de ratas, la falta de significación individual" (*Los rituales* 20). The psychological compensations for the city's inhabitants are derived from these very factors which, says Monsiváis, offer a sense of pride:

¿Adónde se fue el chovinismo del "Como México no hay dos"? No muy lejos desde luego, y volvió protagonizado el chovinismo de la catástrofe y del estallido demográfico. Enumero algunos *orgullos* (compensaciones psicológicas):

- México es la ciudad más poblada del mundo (¡La Super-Calcuta!!)
- México es la ciudad más contaminada del planeta (¡El laboratorio de la extinción de las especies!)
- México es la ciudad en donde lo insólito sería que un acto, el que fuera, fracasase por inasistencia. Público es lo que abunda, y en la capital, a falta de cielos límpidos, se tienen, y a raudales, habitantes, espectadores, automovilistas, peatones.

- México es la ciudad donde lo invivible tiene sus compensaciones, la primera de ellas el nuevo estatus de sobrevivencia. (19)

As a minor scale reproduction of the world outside, the interior of the clinic is a place of intrigues and corruption. In addition to its symbolic function as the last refuge of Mexican identity, indicated by its Aztec relieves and Xipe-Totec effigies, there is the Tezcatlipoca stone eye with which 'el hombre escruta su condición inescapable; es la pesadilla, el diagnóstico, la riqueza, el sufrimiento deificado' (Disparo 53). It is a place with the appearance of a ceremonial site of sacrifice as Suárez chooses the most restless of the Aztec pantheon, Tezcatlipoca, to symbolize his clinic. This god of fate serves as a permanent reminder of fragile destiny and, according to Balmes, says more about Suárez than all of his newspaper eulogies. But the dominant symbol of the clinic is the O over its door, signifying both an eye and the inert gas used to fire up the clinic's lasers and lighting. This blend of inertia and vigilance in the clinic also serves as a metaphor for Mexican reality.

The clinic's founder, Antonio Suárez, is the incarnation of power and chooses to direct the clinic's operations from behind the scenes. In a place where sight is returned a blind and invisible power is exercised leading to an allegory functioning as 'un *mise en abyme* de la teoría del panóptico' (Bradú 36). The theme of domination and surveillance in the clinic, symbolized by the act of seeing, also brings into play Bentham's Panopticon and the exercising of power¹. In relation to Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish, where explicit references are made to Bentham's Panopticon, Villoro states that rather than drawing directly on the work of the French writer the two share a common interest in the way power is more effectively deployed if it cannot be localized. For Villoro this invisible exercising of power 'tiene mucho que ver con la sociedad mexicana que es una sociedad muy piramidal y autoritaria, en la que no se conoce muy bien de dónde provienen las órdenes y las iniciativas' (Interview). The invisible dimension of power is of particular interest when incorporated into a novel concerned with the act of seeing and in which one of the principal characters – the clinic's director Adolfo Suárez – is absent. Villoro approaches this problem in an essentially intuitive and pragmatic manner derived from his first-hand experience of how power is exercised in Mexico, converting the novel into 'una especie de metáfora de lo que es México y de cómo se ejerce el poder ahí' (Interview).

On the literary plane this exercising of power presents the challenge of speaking of a character that is absent but nevertheless capable of exercising a strong influence over others. Suárez exercises his power from anonymity and only appears towards the end of the novel to symbolically represent the way Mexico City has redefined the act of seeing. He is the incarnation of power and the clinic in San Lorenzo resembles Bentham's Panopticon with Suárez controlling operations from a light panel in his office that, together with short circuit TV, offers a global vision of what takes place within it. In this way the clinic

¹ Bentham's Panopticon was a late eighteenth century prison with several floors of cells laid out in a circular building. The cells opened out into a central, circular courtyard so that each one was visible from a guard tower located at its centre. This design maximised the efficiency of surveillance and control as a single guard could oversee each cell and it was not even necessary for it to be guarded continuously as prisoners could not see into it. In such a regime of "hypervisibility" prisoners are at each moment located and individuated. See Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1991), pp. 217-218.

serves as an allegory of the Mexican political system in which decisions are not associated with people but places such as “above”, “the office”, “the boss”, “Los Pinos”, “an office on the sixth floor”. This is also linked to the idea of invisible conspiracies such as “La Mano Negra” described by Romantic liberals such as Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet and used to refer to the Jesuits. With respect to La Mano Negra in Mexico, Christopher Domínguez notes that ‘en países antidemocráticos como México, donde la verdad no es una cuestión sujeta al dominio público, la teoría de la Mano Negra debe su popularidad a lo que tiene de funesta y verosímil. Indefensos frente al poder, tememos con morbo a los sicarios de la Mano Negra, incluso cuando sabemos que formamos parte de sus legiones’ (*Tiros* 237).

The clinic itself is built around a secret which can only be approached indirectly and which sets in motion a chain of events influencing the lives of all the characters. Villoro witnessed at first hand the internal disputes of the PRI, between the dinosaurs and reformers, as well as the endemic corruption and deterioration of power leading to progressive social disintegration. This corruption is exemplified by an industry that has converted the country into a network of countless *maquiladoras* dependent on the quick fingers sewing raw materials arriving from Taiwan and South Korea. In the process an opportunity has opened up to get rich quick with sales of glasses and retinal operations while at the same time the border economy offers a point of entry to the lucrative US eye transplant market. In the novel the opening of this opportunity is linked to the disappearance of 52 minors from Mexico City in a matter of months. The secret at the heart of the clinic is its involvement in this organ trafficking, sending corneas to the US-Mexico border where another clinic changes the packaging since ‘los “primos” no comprarían ojos mexicanos’ (*Disparo* 225). From here they are sent on to another clinic in California. It is this operation that keeps the clinic afloat and which functions as the novel’s axis, a metaphor for the country’s moral and intellectual corruption. According to Adolfo Castañón this trafficking of corneas can be read in the light of ‘una historia clínica de la corrupción moral e intelectual de México’ (55). The novel also offers a metaphor for the country at the beginning of the 1990s when it was locked in negotiations that eventually led to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the US and Canada.

The problem presented by the trafficking of corneas across the northern border is not, however, resolved by the simple administration of justice and punishment for the guilty parties as would be the case in a novel adhering to the generic conventions of detective fiction because in Mexico ‘los crímenes no se resuelven (pero) quedan totalmente abiertos’ (Interview). The conventions of the detective novel are therefore deployed to present a criminal case but are then abandoned in order to remain faithful to Mexican reality. As Villoro explains, ‘toda trama policiaca desemboca en una trama de Kafka; toda trama policiaca en México desemboca en la proposición de una posible salida: no hay forma de solucionar el crimen. Entonces, en *El disparo de argón* planteo la situación del tráfico de órganos, planteo que son situaciones reales’ (Interview).

This use of the conventions of the detective novel contrasts with that of Paco Ignacio Taibo II, the best-known exponent of the genre in Mexico, who also confronts the question of criminality and corruption in his novels. A self-confessed ‘náufrago del 68’, in the 1970s Taibo II offered what he terms a moral literature ‘que se enfrentaba al país y a la sociedad de entonces’ (Torres 121).

What marks the greatest difference between Taibo II and Villoro is perhaps to be found in the assessment of the former by Christopher Domínguez when he notes that Taibo II believes in 'la naturaleza liberadora de las luchas sociales, la inmoralidad ridícula de la explotación del trabajo y la confianza – ya no mesiánica sino práctica – en un futuro utópico que hay que cambiar desde hoy' (*Antología II* 506). Put quite simply, in Taibo II there is a clear sense that good will always out while in Villoro this necessity is denied.

When researching his novel, Villoro proposed the possibility of organ trafficking to doctors who considered it possible but unlikely. Weeks after speaking to them, however, a story in the daily *La Jornada* on the subject 'rebasaba por mucho lo que yo había intuido que podía suceder en la novela en una situación determinada' (*Interview*). In opposition to the traditional deductive manner of detective fiction, *El disparo de argón* remains faithful to a speculative fiction proposing the existence of higher forces that do not seek a solution to the crime but its incorporation into a larger problem. For this reason 'el tráfico de córneas de alguna manera queda sumergida en una negociación superior, que no se sabe muy bien cuál es, tipo TLC' (*Interview*).

The overwhelming problem faced by the detective novel in Mexico, a problem dramatized by *El disparo de argón*, is the question of justice. Mexican society is inherently violent and corrupt, according to the novel, and this is reflected in the public's lack of faith in the ability and disposition of police to solve crimes. There is, consequently, a necessary re-reading of the canonical detective story as well as the adoption of a different approach to the question of legal responsibility. Rather than the political activism of a generation of writers from 1968, the generation of Villoro has been left to contemplate a pathetic and grotesque political spectacle that has led to a comic treatment of national politics. Although designed as a paradigm of modernity the clinic is run by dinosaurs old enough to have removed cataracts with tweezers and where the maintenance of up-to-the-minute technology is conducted in a country where the water and electricity are cut every third day. Politicians feigning blindness lead this nation to the verge of social collapse and the revelation offered by Suárez towards the end of the novel, his new way of seeing, is blindness. In a country of institutionalized transition, *El disparo de argón* therefore offers a portrait of the violent limbo brought on by the corrosive democratic transition experienced by Mexico, a process that the elections of 2006 clearly demonstrated has taken yet another step backwards and will be drawn out deep into the 21st century.

From such a reading there is a sense in which the behavior of Mexico's political elite dovetails nicely with ideas of the postmodern generated in the US and Europe, in particular the way they seem to have opted for 'el pastiche y el simulacro' in the words of Roger Bartra (124). This is evident in the way politicians refuse to accept democracy and fail to acknowledge a serious problem with electoral fraud since 'lo importante es que la sociedad mexicana crea que las elecciones son limpias, no que lo sean realmente. Para lograr esto ya no se acude a la restauración de las cadenas rotas de los significados y los significantes, ni al modelo existencial de la autenticidad o falta de autenticidad. La profundidad es sustituida por la superficie, como dice Jameson, o por superficies múltiples' (124).

But at the same time as a distinct notion of simulacrum exists in Mexican politics, it is important to note that there do persist in Mexico forms of cultural development that can be termed traditional and for which concepts such as truth

and truthfulness remain important. As Néstor García Canclini notes, while electoral fraud continues to be located at the centre of political struggle, 'for the peasants, and even for urban sectors, in Michoacán and Guerrero, who have been taking over the municipal offices and mounting very energetic political actions in defense of an electoral result that they want to coincide with the truth, with reality, to belong to the category of truth, it seems to me that certain parameters of the epistemology of traditional politics continue to be in effect' (90). García Canclini highlights this situation so as to avoid the substitution of the modern and show how Mexico finds itself in a complex situation in which different temporalities coexist and where for large numbers of Mexicans problems of truth, transparency and truthfulness continue to be of importance. Furthermore, it creates a situation in which various historical temporalities coexist and the scale of social phenomena is hard to judge since:

what is visible as a political fact for the peasants of Michoacán, so that they take over the mayor's office and demand that in their town of two thousand inhabitants the electoral results be respected, has apparently very little to do... with the big decisions of the Mexican government concerning the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. Nevertheless, one could think that, on very different levels, these facts are interconnected. And this is not simply a matter of articulating different levels of politics but rather of seeing at each level how the conditions of social action are governed by different dynamics and logics (90-91).

It is this continuing need for different dynamics and logics, and above all categories of truth, which pervades El disparo de argón. Consequently, the novel remains topical and relevant and is just one example of the way the Mexican novel of the 1990s engages with contemporary social and political reality – in particular apocalyptic themes of environmental degradation and political collapse - and in fact molds itself to this reality. In the process the novel establishes a specific link with discourses of Modernism and Postmodernism, in particular the abandonment of totalizing discourse, and their reliance on the idea of transition.

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