

The ghost, aspects of fantasy in the *Chronicle of New Spain*.
by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar

La fantasma, aspectos de fantasía en la *Crónica de la Nueva España*
de Francisco Cervantes de Salazar

DOI: 10.32870/revistaargos.v12.n30.4.25b

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Received: 10/03/2025

Reviewed: 04/04/2025

Accepted: 05/13/2025

Abstract

This paper argues that some chronicles about the New World contain passages that move away completely from the documentary purpose and approach literary fiction, as occurs in the *Crónica de la Nueva España* by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. The objective is to point out that in the narrative of this chronicle, in which anecdote and history converge, an intercalated fragment is identified which, due to the treatment of the theme, the type of discourse, its function and qualities, can be considered as a passage of invention. The methodology employed consists of using the elements of narrative analysis to establish the units that make up the selected work.

Keywords: Chronicle. Fantasy. Phantasm.

Resumen

Este trabajo plantea que algunas crónicas sobre el Nuevo Mundo contienen pasajes que se alejan por completo del propósito documental y se acercan a la ficción literaria, como ocurre en la *Crónica de la Nueva España* de Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. El objetivo es señalar que en la narrativa de esta crónica, en la que convergen la anécdota y la historia, se identifica un fragmento intercalado que, por el tratamiento del tema, el tipo de discurso, su función y cualidades, puede considerarse como un pasaje de invención. La metodología empleada consiste en utilizar los elementos del análisis narrativo para establecer las unidades que componen la obra seleccionada.

Palabras clave: Crónica. Fantasía. Fantasma.

How to cite this article (APA):

(Ruano, 2025, p. __)

Ruano, M. (2025) La fantasma, aspectos de fantasía en la *Crónica de la Nueva España* de Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. *Argos Magazine*. 12(30). 36 - 45. DOI: 10.32870/revistaargos.v12.n30.4.25b

The story of the ghost is part of the *Chronicle of New Spain*, written by the chronicler Francisco Cervantes de Salazar (Toledo, 1514 - Mexico, 1575). Cervantes de Salazar entered the service of Cardinal Fray García de Loaysa, inquisitor and archbishop of Seville, and at that time, at the court of Charles V, he met Hernán Cortés (Martínez, 1993, s/p.). According to José Luis Martínez, "when the Colony had consolidated and an organized society existed, numerous writers arrived in America, such as Cervantes de Salazar" (Blasco et al., in Pedraza, 2000, p. 77) who, as a humanist and Latinist, went to Mexico City in 1551. Several authors affirm that, later "in Mexico [Cervantes de Salazar] managed to improve his social position thanks to his links with the courtly circles of the capital, in particular with Martín Cortés" (Hurtado & Pedraza & Giuliani, in Pedraza, 2000, p 156).

Cervantes de Salazar taught rhetoric and in 1567 was rector of the University of Mexico, "which he himself inaugurated on June 3, 1553" (Hurtado et al., in Pedraza, 2000, p 156). In 1554 he received holy orders and the title of Doctor of Theology. In 1566 he began to write the *Chronicle of New Spain*; in 1558 the City Council of Mexico City designated him First Chronicler of New Spain. In 1567, Cervantes de Salazar, asks Felipe II to confirm him the position of First Chronicler of the New Spain, but he does not receive answer. He died as a canon of the Cathedral of Mexico. According to his contemporaries, it was considered that the chronicler reiterated in religious licenses, thus, the archbishop Pedro Moya de Contreras in a report of 1575, speaks of the religious relaxation of Cervantes de Salazar:

He has been in this land for 25 (years), to which he came in the opinion of a great Latin, although with age he has lost some of this.... he is a friend to be heard and praised, and flattery pleases him; he is light and changeable, and is not well accredited as honest and chaste, and is ambitious for honor, and is persuaded that he is to be a bishop, about which he has been mocked... he is not an ecclesiastical man to be entrusted with business [...] (Leonard, 1996, p. 164). 164).

In the 16th century, the *Crónica de la Nueva España* was the most extensive chronicle on the subject of New Spain, published by Francisco de Paso y Troncoso in 1914, José Luis Martínez (1993, s/p.) says that the work had two simultaneous initial editions: that of Paso y Troncoso and that of the text rediscovered by Mrs. Nutall, the chronicle is formed by six books, of XXXII, XXXVII, LXIII, CXXXIV, CXCVII and XXX chapters respectively, the first of them deals with the geography of the New Spain and offers data of cultures indigenous autochthonous of Mexico. The second book presents the discovery of the New World up to the moment when Cortés

disembarks in San Juan de Ulúa. The remaining four books contain historical data concerning Hernán Cortés' conquest of the city of Tenochtitlan. It has been said that this chronicle is an "incomplete work that he intended to include in a broader history" (Hitos et al., in Pedraza, 2000, p.156). For the elaboration of the data of the history, he relies on the *Cartas de relación* of Hernán Cortés and the *Historia general de las Indias* by López de Gómara, and also takes information from other accounts of the first conquistadors such as Motolinía (Hitos et al., in Pedraza, 2000, p. 156).

In addition to the story dedicated to the ghost, there are at least two other stories in Francisco Cervantes de Salazar's work:

- The devil appears to an Indian, book VI, chapter I.
- Montañón and Mesa enter the volcano, book VI, chapter XI.

The story of the ghost is found between chapter V and chapter VI of the sixth and last book of the *Chronicle of New Spain*, by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. It happens just after the conquest of Mexico City by Cortés, at the moment in which the latter sends to Spain ships in which the first treasures extracted from Mexico were transported, and at sea, Alonso de Ávila is intercepted by some ships of the French fleet.

The story about the ghost was written around 1558, and narrates the moment in which Alonso de Avila, during his voyage across the sea, with the treasure of Mexico that Cortes sent to Spain, was intercepted and taken prisoner by a French corsair, who upon discovering the riches he was carrying on his ship, believed he was someone very important, handed him over to his king and was kept prisoner in a French fortress for three years.

Summary of the story dedicated to a ghost

Almost as soon as Alonso de Avila arrived at the fortress, and throughout the first year, something strange happened to him, and that is that at night he was visited by a ghost that lay beside him and embraced him. He did not want to tell anything so as not to be branded as fearful. But on one occasion he stayed to sleep in the same room a clergyman, who witnessed the apparition of the ghost, and from that day the ghost never returned. Those in the fortress considered Alonso de Avila as brave, who grieved for the loss of the ghost, and

all hope collapsed in him to know about his future in prison. He remained there for two more years, until the French were convinced that Alonso was only an envoy, and not a great lord as they believed, and they let him go.

Background

What is known about the formation and cultural background of Cervantes de Salazar, according to the bishop of Michoacán in 1571, is that the chronicler grouped a great number of readings: "I would like that the first time he saw him was on the big mule, so that he would not lose sight of him. I don't know where on earth so much science was gathered in a cubit of a body" (Martínez, 1993, s/p.). Cervantes de Salazar's chronicle has been considered of great humanism and cultural richness.

For the construction of the *Crónica de la Nueva España*, the author relies on other chroniclers of the Indies such as Cortés, Gómara and Motolinía, and it is very likely that he was familiar with the *Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios* that Fray Andrés de Olmos wrote in 1553. The recreation of the story of "the ghost", in particular, is the result of much of Cervantes de Salazar's reading. For the vision of the ghost, the author could have relied, mainly, on La Filosofía (a ghost) that appears to Boethius while he is a prisoner: "Being a prisoner he suddenly seemed to see a woman above his head" (Boethius, 1985, p. 12), a ghost that solves all Boethius' religious doubts, especially regarding the just retribution in this world, in exchange for good or bad behavior. In a similar way Boethius "induced some moralized fables, in verse and prose" (Cossío, 1998, p. 75). Other authors, prior to Boethius, who already wrote about ghosts or apparitions were Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Florentius Tertullianus, or Tertullian of Carthage, around the third century), who affirmed that apparitions are the dead possessed by the devil.

In the polytheistic world of antiquity, human beings coexisted with divinities and the souls of those who lay in the place of the dead. Ghosts appear in literature from the earliest written texts, as in the ancient Sumerian poem of *Gilgamesh*, which has as its theme journeys beyond the grave; Pliny the Younger wrote about souls dragging chains (Klein, 2004, p. 51). During the Middle Ages, discourses on apparitional beings increased considerably due to religiosity, and texts dealing with the subject of apparitions multiplied, such as the case of *Amadís de Gaula* (Anonymous, 2005, book II, chapter LX, *passim*. First published in 1508), in which

we find a fairy godmother who accompanies and protects the knight. There is a certain analogy between the fairy of *Amadís de Gaula* and the ghost of Cervantes de Salazar, since both guard the protagonist.

The theme of the vision or apparition, as the main resource, together with the theme of the character's bravery, are among the arguments that serve to frame the story, the issues of the treasure extracted from Mexico and the attacks and robberies of the ships at sea, as well as the sale of the people captured in the attack. Likewise, the author gives an accent of misfortune to the vision of a ghost with a feminine appearance, who kept Alonso de Avila company at night during his stay in a French prison. Some of the adjacent themes that appear are happiness, honesty, divine will and wisdom.

The story, linear and open-ended, is constructed in such a way that at the beginning the character's situation is delineated. The story goes into the story inside the prison, in the intermission happens the story of the ghost and ends the event without formulating a conclusion, there is no end. It is not a circular or closed text, it is not known what happened to the ghost, nor to the corsair and the other characters; the writer removes his character from the stage and nothing else happens there. The following procedure of the story is totally linear, as it has already been said; that is to say, in the first paragraph there is the introduction of the character until leading him to the prison, the central part contains everything related to his prison, and the astonishing described by the unusual events of the apparitions of a ghost.

Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, as heterodiegetic omniscient narrator, is the one who tells from outside the action, a story in third person, the author does not intervene in the facts, he is not part of the characters of the chronicle, nor of the story. As a mediator, the narrator invariably gives an account of what the character thinks and feels, as shown in this quote:

After many days, without missing a night, this happened to him, one afternoon when he was sitting in a chair, very sad and pensive, he felt himself embraced by the back, and the ghost said to him: 'Mosiur, why are you sad?' He heard the voice and could not see more than the arms, which seemed very white, and turning his head to see the face, she disappeared (Cervantes, 1971, volume II, pp. 246 and 247).

The characters are the ghost: Presented as "a thing", which by the movements it made seemed to have the appearance of a person. The only thing that Alonso de Avila managed to see of her were her arms, which had a feminine aspect.

Alonso de Ávila: The main character of the story, in the narrator's opinion, served as a trustworthy person and obeyed Cortés' orders. During his capture and imprisonment he perceives the apparitions of the ghost, but he does not show any signs of disturbance, on the contrary, he remains calm, and for this reason he wins the friendship of the clergyman and the respect of the 'alcaide'.

The other characters are a clergyman who experiences the apparition of the ghost, the French corsair Florin who captures Alonso de Avila and a 'warden' in charge of guarding the prisoner.

In short, there is a main character who performs a series of actions around the appearance of a ghostly being, and he is accompanied by a series of characters that complement the scenario and the dramatic misadventure.

The actions keep a linear order with the events, they move around the journey, the captivity, the prison and the apparitions. The development of the main action is concrete and consists of the apparition of a ghost; this vision is followed by a series of introductory actions, such as the capture and imprisonment of Alonso de Ávila in a French prison, to whom every night, for a year, a ghost appeared, although his temperance as a Spanish knight obliges him to keep the secret. Once he gains the confidence of the warden, he reveals what happened, and the warden orders a clergyman to spend a night in Alonso's room. To everyone's surprise, the ghost made an appearance that night, confirming what Alonso de Avila had said, and from then on he was respected in the prison until he was able to leave it after three years of captivity.

In the story in which the ghost is found, there is no description of characters, although it does deal with her feelings. As for the geographical description, only some environments that constitute the scenarios are mentioned, such as the sea, the boat, the fort, the room, and the first great sample of the wealth extracted from Mexico and sent to Spain by Cortés is mentioned (he does not specify what this wealth consisted of). He points out the time that passes, without specifying exact dates, nor offering territorial details. However, the author does focus on the description of the actions that Alonso de Avila, as a passive agent, perceives the apparitions of the ghost, and he only points out that the arms of the ghost were very white and feminine in appearance. Of the room where he was imprisoned, he only notices that it had some candles and beds with curtains.

The narration moves quite fast, it changes from one place to another, the scenery starts in an open place like the sea, then moves to the ship, and ends in an enclosed space which is the room of the French fortress. The environments are not described in detail, they are environments that do not reflect the mood of the characters, they are only mentioned to facilitate the geographical location of the events. The main setting of the story, where the ghost makes her appearances, is the room in which the character is a prisoner.

In most of the story there is no dialogue between the characters. The acts of communication are interpreted by the chronicler, and included as part of the narrative. The only possibility of direct dialogue would be between Alonso de Avila and the ghost; although when Alonso de Avila speaks to her (interpreted by the chronicler): "He spoke to her, he told her many times", and the ghost does not answer anything, only once the ghost speaks to console Alonso de Avila who was sad and thoughtful, she said: "Monsiur, why are you sad?"

This type of dialogues, in which there is no exchange of opinions, Josep Solervicens calls it an instinctive element of dialogue in "Ficción y argumentación en los diálogos renacentistas", in Roger Friedlein (comp.), *El diálogo renacentista en la península Ibérica* (2005, p.13), fulfill the function of persuading the reader of something, or, to act on the understanding that the reader agrees with them, and then simply communicates his experience. In this story the author makes public the possibility of the vision of a ghost.

The characterization of the characters is laconic, and concentrates mainly on personifying and characterizing the figures of Alonso de Avila, the ghost and a clergyman.

Of Alonso de Avila, the author agrees in saying that he shows himself to be obedient, a trustworthy person, a good man, who resignedly consents night after night to the visit of the ghost.

The ghost is said to be the nocturnal companion of Alonso de Ávila. A shadow without matter, who opened doors, pulled back the curtains of the beds, and embraced Alonso de Avila.

A clergyman who slept in the same room as Alonso de Avila, and also suffered the vision of the ghost.

The other characters, singularly conduct themselves according to the plot, figures who, in the fulfillment of their duty, socialize kindly, even building a friendship with the captive.

Narrative analysis

La fantasma, does not boast numerous stylistic features as indicators for literary figures. It exhibits a text of narrative simplicity exposed with the typical aspects of a story that could seem prodigious: to confirm the astonishment it makes use of a character who suffers the event and another character witness who lives the same experience, in this way confirms what happened and gathers more credibility. The expertise of the witness, through another character or an object, resides as a common element among horror stories; it is an element used to offer the possibility of the surprising.

The formal components are oriented so that the text is perceived, by the strangeness, as a "tale of fear". A story in which the ghost appears as a consequence of the author's narrative skill, fruit of the illusions reached from different readings, incorporated into Cervantes de Salazar's own imagination.

Among the few stylistic devices used by Cervantes de Salazar in the story of the ghost, the following stand out:

Hyperbolic aspects such as: "Diciendo que el demonio andaba en aquel aposento" (Cervantes, 1971, volume II, pp. 246 and 247), its purpose is to provide greater emphasis to the story, and to provoke that what is revealed acquires a tone of exceptional emotion. The exaggeration is also accompanied by adjectives such as: "Despavorido y espantado", which collaborate in providing the reading with a fanciful vision.

Multiple gerunds that lighten the movements and increase the panic, such as: "Turning his head; feeling that person; opening the doors, he entered the room having closed them with his hands" (Cervantes, 1971, volume II, pp. 246 and 247). Likewise, the author incorporates into the story a certain accumulation of words with the same meaning, and in support of the same logic: "Todas las noches sin faltar ninguna", an overcrowding of words used to emphasize the same thing, with the purpose of achieving effects that cause greater suspense.

Conclusion

The stylistic resources employed by Cervantes de Salazar, for the story of the ghost, achieve a certain dramatism related to a horror story that is manifested by emotion, movement and emphasis on suspense, mainly through hyperbole, gerunds and adjectival accumulations. In the opinion of José Luis Martínez, the chronicler Cervantes de Salazar "was a writer familiar with the problems of literary expression. He had a keen

sense for the observation of the singular features of the new reality he was contemplating and knew how to place adequate emphasis on the relation of dramatic events" (Martínez, 1993, s/p.).

The story of the ghost is studied as an independent representation of the main text, in which an orderly and uninterrupted sequence of events prevails. Finally, it is important to contemplate the procedures adopted by the chronicler to move away from history at times and forge a story with some literary elements such as this one, which was conceived through the recreation of one of the best known resources among apparitions: a clearly human figure, white, accompanied by a voice.

The matter is not one of models of life to follow like the saints, but rather, here, Cervantes de Salazar uses the memory of other readings to offer teachings of religious attitude. The text inserted as *exemplum* is a story in which the manifest evidence has a communicative purpose. The theme of ghosts contributes to the instructive rhetoric, and is sustained by the belief in life after death. Thus, the fantastic aspect of the story is reduced to the revelation of a supernatural fact.

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