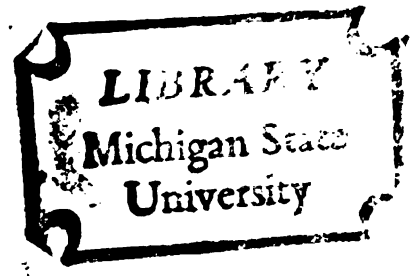
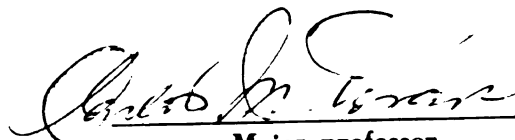


THE ART OF CARLOS FUENTES:
NOVELIZATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
RENATO J. GONZALEZ
1971



This is to certify that the
thesis entitled
THE ART OF CARLOS FUENTES:
NOVELIZATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES
presented by
Renato J. González
has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for
Ph.D degree in Romance Languages


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ABSTRACT

THE ART OF CARLOS FUENTES: NOVELIZATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

By

Renato J. González

Carlos Fuentes is one of Mexico's most creative and controversial novelists. A number of masters and doctoral theses as well as many articles have been dedicated to the study of his works. But in spite of this, little attention has been given to the relationship between literary form and ethical concern. This thesis studies each work internally in an effort to identify and delineate the basic ethical issues and to describe and evaluate their artistic elaboration. Elements that are studied are the function of the narrative point of view, the use of Aztec and classical mythology, the use of archetypal patterns, and finally the use of Mexican history. Each novel (La región más transparente, Las buenas conciencias, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Zona sagrada, Cambio de piel) reflects an experiment in form, a new direction in the art of narration. Thematically, the author Fuentes is constantly concerned with the individual sense of responsibility towards his fellow men. The experimentation with form reflects the author's intent

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to view the basic ethical problem from an ever-changing perspective. Of the works studied La muerte de Artemio Cruz and Cambio de piel best reveal a cogency and unity of form and content, of structure and ideas, of artistic elaboration and ethical concern.

THE ART OF CARLOS FUENTES:
NOVELIZATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

By

Renato J. González

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Romance Languages

1971

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To my wife, Margaret Ann, in deep
appreciation of her support throughout my studies;
to Professor Carlos Terán
for his guidance and friendship;
and to the students at Albion College
for their lively interest in the ideas explored here.

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INTRODUCTION

Carlos Fuentes is one of Mexico's most productive and creative writers. In the span of twenty-one years (1949-1970) he has written a vast number of articles dealing with politics, literature and the cinema, two books of essays, two plays, two books of short stories and seven novels. He is best known for his novels.

In spite of the numerous articles and several masters thesis and doctoral dissertations concerned with his novels, very little attention has been given to the relationship between literary form and ethical concern.¹ On the whole, the critics' main preoccupation has been with content, often resulting in a one-sided treatment of the works.² In order to understand how Fuentes translates ideas into fiction, one needs to analyze his works from within. This thesis is dedicated to demonstrating the artistic effectiveness with which Fuentes unifies form and content. Simply stated, the objective is two-fold: to identify and delineate the basic ethical issues in the novels of Carlos Fuentes

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and to describe and evaluate their artistic elaboration. Before demonstrating how Carlos Fuentes incorporates issues of ethical import and translates them into the language and craft of fiction, it is necessary to define the term "ethical issue".

In the field of axiology, ethics is the study of man's responsibility to his fellow man. An ethical issue exists whenever personal needs are in tension or conflict with the needs of society. Ethical issues may be reflected within the world of fiction in various ways. First, the characters themselves may be involved in resolving ethical problems. Secondly, the general point of view from which a story is told may indirectly reveal a definable concern. Finally, the author may directly expound an ethical position. The emphasis of this essay will not be to discuss the ethical issues themselves, but rather the artistic treatment accorded them.

Carlos Fuentes' own statements about the novelistic art reveal his desire to achieve a balance between ethical and aesthetic norms. Furthermore, he sees this as a basic problem of the contemporary novelist.

"A los escritores de mi generación se nos planteó ... el problema de cómo superar la novela realista, naturalista, de tesis, sin verdadera validez literaria, y, al mismo tiempo, cómo superar el ejercicio artificial

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del arte por el arte."³ The preoccupation with creating a work of literary merit which expresses an ethical conviction is crystallized as Fuentes states that his obligation as a novelist is " . . . to wield a double sword: the literary and the political. The novelist speaks not only for himself as a creative writer but for the millions who do not have a voice in his country."⁴

Fuentes' concerns are evident throughout his novels. The communication of revolutionary, social, political and moral ideals, according to him, requires new novelistic forms. In his words, "If you have a revolutionary view of society, you also have to have a revolutionary form to express it."⁵ This implies that the novelist must aspire to a revolution not only in society but also in the art of narration itself. This double aim is made more difficult in light of the trends in narrative technique since James Joyce. The psychological-literary devices used by Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner are part and parcel of a change in subject matter. With the new emphasis on characters' psychological lives, the narrative point of view radiates from within the characters. As a result, the author's voice is heard less and less and direct expression of his views becomes difficult. The modern engagé novelist must, then, if he is to be a part of the new trends, find an implicit narrative mode as vehicle

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for his message. The manner in which Carlos Fuentes handles the dialectics involved in creating new narrative forms and making the implicit ethical issues clear is a subject worthy of study. The relative success achieved in his six novels is directly proportional to his ability "to wield a double sword".

La región más transparente, Carlos Fuentes' first novel (published in 1958), is a courageous attempt to portray nothing less than the spiritual life of the inhabitants of Mexico City. The characters, although drawn from a repertoire of Mexican stereotypes, manage to become believable and convincing, thanks to the array of new narrative techniques used by their creator. The use of multiple central personages, while contributing to a narrative perspectivism (i.e., the central issue seen from various points of view), leads nevertheless to a fragmentation detrimental to the novel's unity. Though lacking sufficient unity to make the central ethical statement clear, Aztec mythological patterns strengthen characterization and structure the action into a meaningful unit. The symbolic figure of Ixca Cienfuegos indicates that Fuentes intended to go beyond the limits of realism. But his failure to overcome these limits is largely due to the fact that Ixca Cienfuegos is only partly mythological. The ambiguity of this character, along with the fragmentary narrative

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Carlos Fuentes' second novel, Las buenas conciencias, (published in 1959), is far more conventional in its treatment of form, style and theme than La región más transparente. Las buenas conciencias, a psychological-moral study of an adolescent's rebellion against the hypocrisy of his family, has a tighter plot line, a fixed focus of interest, and few stream of consciousness techniques. Unfortunately, he abuses the omniscient narrator's point of view by using it as a podium for expressing his moral indignation and his political convictions. Fuentes allows his moral, social and ethical concerns to override his aesthetic norms to such an extent that his presence becomes obtrusive. This results in a diminution of the characters' autonomy and a generally inferior novel. The blatant imbalance between ethical and aesthetic concerns makes Las buenas conciencias the least effective novel the author has written to date. In La región más transparente the writer's message was obscured by the proliferation of characters whose internal lives he portrayed. In Las buenas conciencias the opposite occurs: the author parsimoniously uses the psychological-literary techniques only to allow himself the costly luxury of turning his narration into a harangue, more suitable for a pamphleteer than a writer of creative fiction.

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La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Fuentes' third novel (published in 1962), is without question his best work of fiction. For the first time in his career as a novelist there is a balance and unity between artistic and ethical concerns. This novel, one of the masterpieces of contemporary Mexican literature, has the historical scope and breadth of La región más transparente while retaining the depth of character analysis attempted in Las buenas conciencias. In La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Fuentes overcomes the limitations of his previous works and creates a work of transcendental meaning by the use of a unique narrative point of view and the use of mythological and archetypal forms. As a result, he presents the reader with a flesh and blood protagonist whose life has universal meaning. Artemio Cruz, Mexican capitalist, betrayer of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, conqueror and "chingón" of the Western world, is symbolical of all those men who choose the role of the oppressor, the exploiter. At the moment of his death, Cruz confronts the meaning of life. The use of multiple narrational perspectives--the "he," the "you" and the "I"--emanating from within the psyche of the dying protagonist, precludes Fuentes' need to speak directly on the ethical issues. Eliminated is the overcommitment which stunted the artistic potential of Las buenas

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Aura, published in 1962, is a most engaging tale of fantasy. On the one hand, it represents a departure from the neo-realistic emphasis given his previous works; on the other, it incorporates the world of magic, mythology and metaphysics. This short novel represents a radical departure from the historicism so prevalent in his three previous works.

Zona sagrada (published in 1968) indicates a return to a more traditional art form. Here the focus is turned toward the destiny of one character. The identity crisis of an emotionally disturbed person is rendered in an autobiographical format. The psychological emphasis of Zona sagrada parallels the novelistic treatment accorded the protagonist in Las buenas conciencias. But the similarity ends there. Gone is the preponderance of the author's voice continually interfering in the natural flow of the narrative. The only voice heard in this case is that of the protagonist-narrator speaking to another character in the narration. The use of this particular narrative perspective makes this work one of the least concerned with issues of ethical import. In Carlos Fuentes' previous novels, the world of mythology often helped to underscore the ideology within the work. Here, the mythological

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Cambio de piel (published in 1968) is without a doubt one of the most intriguing novels written in the sixties. With this work the Mexican novel enters into the world of pop art, the mixed media and the "happening". But in spite of the author's use of these new art forms, often devoid of any apparent meaning, Fuentes is involved in raising an ethical question. Essentially, the reader is asked to respond morally to the execution and torture of millions of Jews by the Nazis. At the core of the book is the belief that all of mankind shares in the guilt of the heinous crimes committed in the thirties and forties. But if the reader is burdened by the guilt of the past, this book is also meant to serve as universal expiation for all the sins which we share with the Nazis by virtue of our humanity. To accomplish this indictment and atonement, the author creates an experience wherein the usual recognizable distinctions between reader, author and character are obliterated. Since we are all morally and existentially one, it follows that we are all interchangeable--reader, narrator, or fictional being. In a sense, the quest for identity finds its resolution not within the self but among one's fellow man.

The treatment here accorded each of Fuentes' novels varies with the form of each work. The discussion

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concerning La región más transparente focuses upon a central aspect, characterization, as it relates to the main issue. In La muerte de Artemio Cruz, the character's complex internal psychology in relationship to universal themes demands special emphasis on multiple narrative perspectives. The approach to Cambio de piel takes into consideration the complex handling of fictional planes, effected in order to obliterate the barriers between reality and fiction. In Las buenas conciencias, one of Fuentes' shorter works, the effectiveness with which a young man's moral crisis is depicted is directly related to maintaining a coherent narrative perspective. Zona sagrada departs from the usual autobiographical novel in its use of mythological patterns to reveal plot and character. Because of the absence of any discernible ethical issue, Aura is not treated exclusively in any chapter. Instead, mention is made of this novelette wherever a comparison with another novel adds to the reader's total comprehension of Fuentes' art. No matter the particular emphasis given the individual works, the basic formal element under discussion is the narrative point of view.

Carlos Fuentes, A Profile

Carlos Fuentes' career as a man of letters was shaped to a large extent by the cultural and educational environment of his early life. His father is

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a career diplomat and the family's travels have lent Fuentes' background a cosmopolitan flavor. He was born in Mexico City on November 11, 1928. Parts of his childhood were spent in Río de Janeiro; in Washington D.C., where he learned English; in Santiago de Chile; and in Buenos Aires. In Chile he published his first stories in his school's periodical, the Grange magazine, and in the Bulletin of the Chilean National Institute. Of his first creative impulses he says, "Escribí desde muy niño. A los seis años redactaba crónicas de viaje y cuentos de brujas y fantasmas."⁶

After a brief stay in Buenos Aires, Fuentes returned to Mexico to continue his education at the Colegio de México and at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where he studied law. As a university student he first became a part of the international jet-set in Mexico City. At literary parties centered in the home of Cristina Moya, Fuentes contributed avant-garde short stories and was accepted as the enfant terrible of that circle. He left Mexico again in 1950, this time for Geneva, Switzerland. He was there for a year as a member of the Mexican delegation to the International Labor Organization, and as cultural attaché to the Embassy. During this time he learned French and studied international law at the Institute of High International Studies. When Fuentes returned

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to Mexico the following year, it was to dedicate himself seriously to cultural, intellectual, and political commitments. His travels, his education at exclusive schools, his knowledge of and interest in languages, would prove crucial preparation for his various pursuits. In 1955 he received his law degree from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Starting in 1956, he was named to several diplomatic posts. He no longer frequented the high-society parties, and his friends now were few but included Octavio Paz, whose thought is a fundamental influence in the works of Fuentes.

Fuentes has also been active in journalism. He founded and directed the Revista Mexicana de Literatura with Emmanuel Carballo. This magazine published sections of La región más transparente. From 1959 to 1960 he was editor of El espectador and is a regular contributor to several other magazines: Revista de la Universidad de México, Política, ¡Siempre!; and to the newspapers Excelsior and Novedades.

Cinematography is another of Carlos Fuentes' cultural interests, and its influence is present in many of his novels. He has worked on movies with Manuel Barbachano Ponce, and with Abby Mann on the film version of The Children of Sanchez. Fuentes readily admits that his intense concern with literature may account for his limited success as a co-director.⁷

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Much of Fuentes' involvement in motion pictures takes the form of script-writing and adaptation, which he has done with Luis Buñuel in the case of El acoso and Nazarín, and Tiempo de morir with Gabriel García Márquez. He did the film script of Pedro Páramo and, involved in experimental theater, has adapted his own stories for the screen. Fuentes is a connoisseur of movies, especially those of the North American 1930's. He has put his knowledge to good use in Cambio de piel in which the characters are experts on that era of cinematography. He was movie reviewer for a time for the periodical Revista de la Universidad de México and keeps up to date on contemporary trends in the field. He admits the influence on his own work of Buñuel and of Welles.⁸

Fuentes is interested in a variety of art forms--the movies, the plastic arts, music--because they are all languages. He furthermore believes that they are exerting more and more influence upon the contemporary Latin American novel.⁹ Yet the novel itself fulfills a need impossible to assign to the other art forms because, as Fuentes says, the novel arose when the author was no longer a part of the elite: when he was relegated to the middle class. He likens himself to Norman Mailer in that both fight the middle class from within. The novel criticizes and, in Latin America, it informs because the normal vehicles of

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communication are not free of the control of government and vested interests. The novel must do the job normally relegated to television, radio and the press.¹⁰

Fuentes, a leftist, is a constant political critic, especially of the Mexican Revolution and its results. Though critical of the regime in Russia, he is a great supporter of the Cuban Revolution. These facts, combined with his affiliation with the socialist Movimiento de Liberación Nacional lead by ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas, have made him a persona non grata to the government of the United States.

On repeated occasions the U.S. government, considering him a threat, has turned down his request for a visa. One such denial meant the cancellation of a nationwide T.V. debate between Fuentes and a U.S. State Department expert on Latin American Affairs.¹¹

Fuentes, himself, prefers to be a spokesman of a politically neutral position for those nations wishing to be free from both the Western and Eastern ideologies. Though interested in Communism, he has strong reservations about its implications for art and the individual. Carlos Fuentes is an eclectic intellectual who manages to keep up to the minute with international trends, artistic and cultural as well as political. He has reviewed books by Herbert Marcuse, the leading socialist theoretician in the United States.

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Many of his recent statements reflect a knowledge of Marshall McLuhan's concepts of media. Although Carlos Fuentes is outwardly cynical about Mexico, his nation remains a deep concern to him. He advocates an easy-going, unselfconscious universalism for Mexico and claims that the Latin American artist today must contribute to the international mainstream and not copy the trends twenty years after their peak, as has been the case until recently.

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¹ The two most important theses written on Carlos Fuentes are: a) Richard M. Reeve, "The Narrative Technique of Carlos Fuentes: 1954-1964" (University of Illinois, 1964); b) Samuel Joseph O'Neill, Jr., "Psycho-Literary Techniques in Representative Contemporary Novels of Mexico" (University of Maryland, 1965). In general, Reeve's work presents a thorough catalogue of the narrative materials employed by Fuentes. There is very little attempt to interpret or to synthesize. This researcher includes a useful, extensive bibliography. O'Neill's analysis, dedicated to La región más transparente, excels in its scrutiny of the formal, structural elements of this novel as they relate to the contemporary psychological-literary techniques. The virtue of this work is that it is the first attempt to present Fuentes' works from an internal point of view.

² Selden Rodman, "Revolution Isn't Enough," New York Times Book Review, No. 13 (1960), Sec. VII, 44. "In this sense, Fuentes has written the classic Marxist novel." It is probably simplistic statements of this nature which have caused Mr. Fuentes to have difficulties with the U.S. Immigration Office (q.v. Henry Raymont, "Immigration Policy: Again the Issue of the 'Undesirable' Intellectual," New York Times [March 9, 1969] n.p.).

Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "El mundo mágico de Carlos Fuentes," Número, año I, No. 2 (July-Sept. 1963), 144-59. Rodríguez Monegal, more than any other critic, has the balance of mind to avoid a simplistic judgment of Fuentes' political position. For this critic, the time is ripe for analysing the works of Carlos Fuentes as works of fiction per se: "Creo que es hora de empezar a analizar a Fuentes desde una perspectiva interior. Ya se ha hecho el inventario externo de su obra" (p. 146).

3 Emanuel
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4 Lee Bax
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5 Ibid.,

6 Augusto
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7 Ibid.,

8 Idem.

9 Ibid.,

10 Ibid.,

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³ Emanuel Carballo, El cuento mexicano del siglo XX (México, 1964) p. 77.

⁴ Lee Baxandall, "An Interview with Carlos Fuentes," Studies on the Left, No. 24 (Fall 1964), 49.

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶ Augusto Torres y Vicente Molina Foix, "Entrevista a Carlos Fuentes," Cuadernos para el diálogo (Oct. 1968), 67.

⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹ Henry Rayment, "Immigration Policy: Again the Issue Of the 'Undesirable' Intellectual," New York Times (March 3, 1969), 11.

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CHAPTER I

LA REGION MAS TRANSPARENTE

La región más transparente, Carlos Fuentes'

first major work of fiction, is an attempt to discover Mexico's identity by examining its society, its history and its future directions. The author, in his quest for national identity, investigates the multiple economic and social classes of Mexico City. The historical sweep of the novel is no less extensive: the Aztec past, the Mexican Revolution and Mexico's economic and political ties with the United States are all vital forces within the Mexican psyche.

This vast kaleidoscopic vision of Mexico is brought into focus by a common concern shared by the major characters of the novel. "¿Qué es México?" Each personage raises the question within his perspective. Thus the nature of the concern reflects his personal crisis and destiny. Although the individual perspectives suggest different solutions, they are all related to the central issue. Thus characterization becomes an unmasking, an exposure of the inner lives of the principal protagonists. These revelations

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have a dual function: they allow the reader to understand what it means to be Mexican while at the same time they become a source of self-knowledge for the characters.

Such a cognitive process lends most of the characters a tragic dimension--an awareness of their flaws and shortcomings. This cognition may be expressed in several ways: a character's awareness of his own deficiencies or of other Mexicans and a critical awareness of the ills that beset Mexico. Often, the main protagonists examine and criticize the established order of which they are a part. On the whole, their commentary is bitter and scathing.

In La región más transparente, Aztec mythology and ritual serve as a poetic device to universalize the actions and thoughts of the characters. The use of such archetypal material in this book is perhaps Fuentes' greatest asset as well as his greatest weakness. The mythological treatment accorded Federico Robles, his wife Norma Larrogoiti, his mistress Hortensia Chacón, and Rodrigo Pola, increases the scope and meaning of their individual lives. On the other hand, the creation of a pseudo-mythical figure like Ixca Cienfuegos, instead of adding an original dimension, mars the novel. The potential range of this character is never fully realized. The mythic content does not effectively transcend the immediate world of the novel. The reader

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In Search of a Nation's Identity

Fuentes' use of thematic perspectivism, that is, the presence of divergent points of view on the same phenomenon, creates a centralizing force within the work. All the characters in the process of revealing their inner lives address themselves, directly or indirectly, to the central issue: " ... ¿qué es este país ... hacia dónde camina, qué se puede hacer con él?"¹ The foundations for this inquiry are set by two clear and opposing points of view.²

The extreme positions are presented on the one hand by the mysterious Ixca Cienfuegos, and on the other by the writer-poet-intellectual, Manuel Zamacona. Cienfuegos makes a case for Mexico's return to its ancient Aztec past. According to him all other social forms since the coming of Cortés are false masks that betray the Mexican's true nature--to collaborate with the gods in sustaining the duration of the universe through sacrifice. Zamacona looks to the future: Mexico must have a knowledge of the past in order to finally transcend it, but not return to it. Mexico furthermore must create its own image (rostro), its own source of identity, and not seek foreign models.

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Ixca Cienfuegos and the Aztec Cosmology

For Ixca Cienfuegos the fate of Mexico and mankind depends on man's re-establishing his relationship to the Aztec gods of creation.³ Through their son, Huitzilipochti, the favored Aztec tribe collaborated with the divine forces to maintain the life of the cosmos. "--El mundo no nos es dado ... --Tenemos que recrearlo. Tenemos que mantenerlo" (251). As a consequence, the Mexican people must save the world and mankind. They are the only ones given such redemptive powers. "La salvación del mundo depende de este pueblo anónimo que es el centro, el ombligo del astro. El pueblo de México, que es el único pueblo que aún vive con los dientes pegados a la ubre original" (367). For Ixca, "pueblo anónimo" means that Mexico has no personality, no history other than its eternal contact with the forces of the universe. Cienfuegos, in an argument with Zamacona, states that Mexico has no personality other than its extra-human relationship with the cosmos. The rest is sorrow and delusion (page 366).

The so-called history of Mexico from the Conquest to the present day is, according to Ixca, a disguise, a mask and a fraud. The break, the sacrilege, was committed when Cortés consigned the people of Mexico to exile, to a state of orphanhood (page 198). Teóduła Moctezuma, an indigenous woman, a sort of earth-mother

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figure, shares Ixca's beliefs. Like Cienfuegos, she believes in the immutable nature of the relationship between the gods and man. Sooner or later the world will return to that covenant. "Porque esta tierra reclama ... reclama y acaba por tragarse todas las cosas para devolverlas como deben ser, aunque sea muertas" (332).

Manuel Zamacona: History as Potential Future

Manuel Zamacona, a young intellectual who sincerely strives to understand the riddle of the Mexican ethos, proffers a more complex alternative than the return to Aztec beliefs espoused by Cienfuegos. Whereas Ixca rejects the whole of Mexican history, Zamacona looks to history, ancient and modern, from the Conquest to the Mexican revolution, for an explanation of Mexico.

Unlike Cienfuegos, Zamacona does not feel that Mexico's true identity lies in its Indian past. According to him, Mexico as a people did not exist until the Conquest. Zamacona sees the origins of his nation in the clash and subsequent mixture of Spaniard and Indian cultures. Even so, he says nothing is gained by Mexico's turning to the past for its identity. At most the past can reveal what Mexico has been. A country is in a sense its history, but it can no longer be equated with any particular period in the past.

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This is especially true regarding the Aztec past, and explains why returning to their mythological beliefs is impossible.

Ser para los ciclos, alimentar el astro, vivir bajo el signo de la naturaleza increada. No, ... todo esto sólo nos explica parcialmente. Y no es posible resucitarlo. Para bien o para mal, México ya es otra cosa. Es ese algo radicalmente diverso lo que hay que explicar, en su totalidad, y enfocándolo hacia el futuro, hacia su integración, no basándolo en un asensinato colectivo. (59)

The idea of a people or nation without a personality is repugnant to Zamacona. In answer to Ixca's statement that Mexico has no personality but is only an anonymous mass of twisted bones and stones, Zamacona states:

Ese punto oscuro donde no se puede alcanzar el amor, ni la compasión, ni siquiera la contemplación de sí mismo, porque hasta la unidad más nimia de la persona está atomizada, sin lugar de referencia con la liga vital que nos ata a un ser amado, a un simple, escueto admitir la vida de los demás. Esa vida ficticia que sólo admite la existencia de sí misma es lo satánico. (366)

The problem of identity, as Zamacona sees it, is that Mexico has never been true to itself. It has adopted a succession of false masks, beginning in the days of the colony and continuing in nineteenth century liberal thought and the influence of positivism, and to the recent mask of American capitalism (page 269). According to Zamacona, Mexico must not look for its identity in the past, but rather in the future. The nation must create its own image, forge its own identity.

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Mexico must look to the future for its true being. The past has to be submitted to the will in order to create the nation's image in the future. To this end Zamacona states:

Quiero que todas esas sombras ya no nos quiten el sueño, quiero entender qué significó vestirse con plumas para ya no usarlas y ser yo, mi yo verdadero, sin plumas. No, no se trata de añorar nuestro pasado y regodearnos en él, sino de penetrar en el pasado, entenderlo, reducirlo a razón, cancelar lo muerto--que es lo estúpido, lo rencoroso--, rescatar lo vivo y saber, por fin, qué es México y qué se puede hacer con él. (269)

History weighs heavily on Mexico. For Zamacona, the Mexican Revolution forced the Mexican to confront his past. He explains this phenomenon: "La Revolución nos obligó a darnos cuenta de que todo el pasado mexicano era presente y que, si recordarlo era doloroso, con olvidarlo no lograríamos suprimir su vigencia" (272). Mexico has been unable to transcend her history because it is made up of unjustifiable sorrow and suffering.

¿Qué justifica la destrucción del mundo indígena, nuestra derrota frente a los Estados Unidos, las muertes de Hidalgo o Madero? ¿Qué justifica el hambre, los campos secos, las plagas, los asesinatos, las violaciones? ¿En aras de qué gran idea pueden soportarse? ¿En razón de qué meta son comprensibles?" (267-68)

Zamacona goes on to suggest a means of transcending the purposeless events and meaningless suffering of the past. He postulates that if the responsibility for Mexico's crime and suffering were to be assumed

by someone, the ghosts of the past would fade away. The way would then be clear to forge the future of Mexico. He then raises the question:

"--¿Pero a quién se hará responsable de ese dolor y esa traición? ... no basta atestiguar la miseria y las derrotas de México. ¿A quién son imputables? Te lo digo en serio: por cada mexicano que murió en vano, sacrificado, hay un mexicano responsable. ... para que esa muerte no haya sido en vano, alguien debe asumir la culpa. La culpa por cada indígena azotado, por cada obrero sometido, por cada madre hambrienta." (368-69)

By taking the responsibility for mankind, each man becomes all men. A prerequisite for salvation is the renunciation of an egocentric personality. As Zamacona states, "Desnudos de todo lo nuestro, sólo podemos vivir con los demás, para los demás" (365). The ultimate solution lies in " ... arrancarse la piel de su individualidad falsificada y cubrirse con el llanto y la sangre desnudos de los otros ..." (365).

Zamacona is convinced that once Mexico creates its own image and identity by cancelling the debts of the past, the nation's future will lie in new forms of political and social life. He finds both capitalism and communism morally and economically insufficient and continues: "¿No es evidente que todo el mundo busca fórmulas nuevas de convivencia moral y económica? ¿No es igualmente claro que nosotros podríamos colaborar en esa búsqueda?" (272). Mexico, according to Zamacona,

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" ... debe alcanzar su originalidad viendo hacia adelante; no la encontrará atrás. ... hay que crearnos un origen y una originalidad" (58).

Federico Robles: The Rule of Power
in Present Mexico

Within the basic lines of the dialectic established by Zamacona and Cienfuegos, Federico Robles must come to grips with Mexico and his place in it. The most characteristic traits about him are that he was a revolutionary hero and is now enjoying the fruits of the Revolution.⁴ In expounding his ideas about the past, Robles reveals his concept of history. Unlike Zamacona, who believes the past is a present reality in the sense that it still has a grip on the Mexican conscience, for Robles the past is dead. For Zamacona, the Revolution caused Mexico to face its past. In contrast, according to Robles: "El pasado es lo muerto, ... algo que le hace a usted, en el mejor de los casos, sentirse grande o sentirse piadoso. No más No existe. México es otra cosa después de la Revolución. El pasado se acabó para siempre" (266). This notion of the past as a source of sentimental reminiscence differs markedly from Ixca's notion that the Aztec past is all that exists, immutable and pervasive. Zamacona's concept of history as a living reality to be understood in

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order to go towards the future is broader in scope than Robles' practical, empirical sense of the past. In the world of the financial tycoon the will creates the reality of the future.

Into Robles' world, in which the turbulent past is forgotten or buried in the subconscious, steps Cienfuegos, the omniscient "father-confessor" who persuades him to reveal what occurred during the years of the Revolution. Robles' endurance and bravery during the violent period of the war were without blemish.

But other skeletons rattle in Robles' closet. They bear the names of Froilán Reyero and Feliciano Sánchez. He recalls the dedication of his cousin, Reyero, to the democratic principles of the Revolution; he conjures up the image of this hero talking to his own father by the adobe hut which was their home in Michoacán; he evokes young Reyero's death before a firing squad in Belén. The words of Froilán, as he speaks of mutual suffering for the cause of justice, haunt Robles: "Porque se comían las uñas ... y hasta se hubieran cortado los brazos y la lengua para que los otros comieran algo. Si usted lo hubiera visto, ya sabría a estas horas que no está solo. Y también que no estar solo es como morir de pena. Yo tenía pena y rabia, y ya nunca se me ha de quitar ... " (94-95). Unforgotten shame and anger reveal that the past is

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This initial, painful reminiscence later triggers an involuntary memory which causes him deep shame:

"La directiva de México y nuestros amigos extranjeros lo consideran nocivo para los intereses, no digamos del grupo, sino de la patria. Mientras haya hombres como este Feliciano en México, no se podrá trabajar en paz. Los inversionistas se asustarán y no nos darán un centavo" (371). These are Robles' words ordering the execution of a man dedicated to the ideals of the Revolution. For Feliciano Sánchez, the cessation of the war had not been an end in itself; seeing that the promises of the Revolution had not been fulfilled, he continued to agitate for economic and social justice.

These, then, are the ghosts of the past that Robles staves off through the use of very skillful rationalization and rhetoric. For Robles, the Revolution has improved Mexico's situation. It has resulted in a rising middle class, growing industrialization, peace, and economic stability. Robles is convinced that the Revolution destroyed the old social order of the latifundia and the contingent feudal and agricultural plutocracy. The task of those who survived the holocaust of the war was to bring peace to Mexico and create the basis for a stable economy which allowed " ... millones que en treinta años han pasado del pueblo a la clase

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Had the Revolution been carried through by the radical revolutionaries, like Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, all would have been lost. The men who came to power realized that they had to " ... defender los postulados de la Revolución y hacerlos trabajar en beneficio del progreso y el orden del país" (109). Compromise was the order of the day. As Robles sees it, the compromise between ideals and reality was inescapable. The Revolution was after all brought about by " ... hombres de carne y hueso, no santos ... " (40). If, after the battles had ended, there had been no direct authority responsible for establishing peace and order, the country would have fallen back into anarchy and chaos (pages 362-63).

If a few men of will were needed then to carry forth the prosperity of the country, the case in the present is the same. " ... hace falta hacer tanto, y éste es un país de holgazanes. Aquí un puñado de hombres tiene que hacer el trabajo de treinta millones de zánganos" (263). The core of capitalists, according to Robles, know Mexico's problems and are the only ones capable of solving them. The members of the middle class, with their petty economic interests, are the very foundations on which men like Robles

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stand. He feels impermeable, invincible in his stronghold of power. "No hay más remedio que tolerarnos, o caer de vuelta en la anarquía. Pero eso lo impediría la clase media" (111). In all the statements uttered by Robles there is a strong association established between his brand of economics and that practiced in the United States. When Zamacona points out the fact that the United States, in spite of its material wealth, is undergoing a spiritual crisis, Robles replies: "Lo importante es que la mayoría de los gringos come y vive bien, tiene un refrigerador y un aparato de televisión, va a buenas escuelas y hasta se da el lujo de regalarle dinero a los limosneros de Europa" (270).⁵

Robles pushes the idea of self-justification further. Men like Zapata and Villa who fought for unalterable ideals would have ruined the country. Those who survived the war and began to equalize the economy did so through brutal courage and self-interest. These super "self-made men," the chingones, in order to save the country, rose to the top at all costs. Robles graphically describes them and the process as follows:

Entonces se necesitaban, en primer lugar, güevos, en segundo lugar, güevos y en tercer lugar güevos. Para hacer negocios, había que estar metido hasta el cogote en la circunstancia política y ser muy bragados. Entonces no había empresas de participación norteamericana que protegieran contra cualquier eventualidad. Entonces nos la jugábamos

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The image of the suffering, downtrodden hero is false according to this cynical spokesman. According to Robles, the tyrant, the chingón is the image that truly appeals to the Mexican, not the Moctezumas, the Hídalgos or the Zapatas, the defeated heroes. "Entonces, lejos de revueltas, hay admiración. Nada es más admirado en México que el gran chingón" (111).⁶

From the preceding arguments it is clear that Robles stands firmly in power in the present while Ixca looks to the past and Zamacona projects his dreams of Christian brotherhood into the future. Robles, for all his cynicism, presents a series of cogent arguments based on what he thinks is a realistic response to the historical moment. His is a life of action and success: from an Indian peasant's background he has risen to the power of a multi-corporate financier and director. The meaning of Robles' life in contrast to that of Zamacona and others is directly derived from experience. It is this factor which makes his fall from power highly significant. Robles' fall is primarily due to the fact that history is, in fact, not dead: the guilt and shame attached to the lives and deaths of Froilán and Sánchez, attest to that. His fall

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is in a deep sense a recognition that they are not dead and forgotten, and that he, Robles, is responsible for their deaths.

The other major factor in his fall is the fact that, although his power is derived from direct action born out of the Revolution, the country has changed. The "self-made" man is now being replaced by the "organizational" man who, instead of standing alone, gathers his strength from his vested social and economic group. The change is from the chingón to the chinga-queditos. This is forcefully brought home to the reader when Robles is being stripped of his power and in panic and bewilderment states: "Así no se asesina en México Así no. Por la prensa y con base en un chisme, en una calumnia cualquiera. Así no. Que vengan a matarme cara a cara. Que me den de dónde agarrarme. Como hombres" (357).

Rodrigo Pola: An Emerging Life Style

As a character, Rodrigo Pola has been greatly neglected and misunderstood. Without exception the critics have failed to see that Pola is the complement of Federico Robles. Pola, the introvert, is very much caught up in the tension created by the ideas propounded by Ixca Cienfuegos and Manuel Zamacona. The author devotes a great deal of attention to Rodrigo Pola's life and he is the only major character to

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be included in the third and final chapter of La región más transparente (pages 426-60). His rise from "rags to riches" has symbolic connotations for the future of Mexico. Perhaps the most important aspect of this character is his awareness and his sense of tragedy, which to a great degree is more expressive of modern Mexico than the "falling eagle," Federico Robles.

In their desire to find a central character among the many people in La región más transparente, critics have chosen either the banker, Federico Robles, or the mythic-symbolic figure, Ixca Cienfuegos. Federico Robles is perhaps selected as the protagonist because, as the narrative gathers momentum, his fate becomes more and more central to the work. Further support for choosing Robles is that he is at the top of the economic pyramid and his life naturally encompasses the lives of a large number of secondary characters. Ixca Cienfuegos has been chosen for the protagonist's role since in his omniscience and omnipresence he is equated with the author, Carlos Fuentes. In such an attempt to find a clear-cut "protagonist" the importance of Rodrigo Pola has been ignored.

In a novel with as many characters as La región más transparente, the time Fuentes devotes to the treatment of Rodrigo Pola is noteworthy. The reader is given a detailed picture of his past life: his early

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relationship with Norma, Robles' wife; his youth at home with his mother; his adolescent years; his membership in a group of writers and poets. A whole section of the book is given over to his father's death at the hands of a firing squad during the Revolution (pages 68-80); several sections deal with the effect of his father's death on Rodrigo's mother, Rosenda (pages 214-26), and the moment of her death warrants a section in itself (page 227). Rodrigo, himself, appears at various "jet-set" parties and at several script-writing sessions. The most important views we have of him are rendered in his conversations with Ixca Cienfuegos and in a seven-page written self-analysis (pages 232-39).

Rodrigo Pola is as important a character as Federico Robles. In many significant ways his life and personality represent the other side of Robles. The one is a revolutionary hero who has had to risk his life during the war and then rebuild the country from scratch. Pola is a new breed, a member of a new generation who experienced neither the violence of the Revolution nor the chaotic aftermath. Pola's is the generation which inherits the fruits of the Revolution. Robles is a man of action; for him the choice is clear: either national stagnation and misery or an adoption of full-scale capitalism and its inherent

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life-style. Pola, in contrast, is characterized by his inability to act decisively. He lives in an introspective world fraught with irresolvable dialectics and dualisms, preventing him from perceiving his identity. His continual search for identity turns upon itself like a tiger chasing its own tail. Pola represents, better than any other character, the nature of modern Mexico. Another contrast with Robles holds: if Robles falls from power, Pola ascends. Conversely, in falling Robles enters a state of grace, a recognition of his relationship to the Mexican pueblo, past and present. Pola's ascent to material wealth and prestige is replete with overtones of weakness, failure and self-deception. In the end, Pola is unhappy with his external success even though he now enjoys all the accoutrements formerly characteristic of the once-envied Robles. If Robles represents that generation of gran chingones, the generals who rose to the pinnacle of power by their courage, indifference to others and financial exploits, then Rodrigo symbolizes the new breed who, desirous of more than power over their fellow men, are involved in a consuming desire to belong.⁷

Carlos Fuentes' seriousness regarding this character is manifested in the close attention paid to Rodrigo's early childhood. The lives of child and mother--Rodrigo and Rosenda--is a story of two

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Rodrigo Pola's mother-child experiences are to be the basic psychological determinants in Rodrigo's life. He becomes introverted and indecisive. Unable to discover his identity, he is an outsider to himself and others. This in turn engenders feelings of inferiority on his part. He is consumed with the desire to understand who, what and where he is, and is anxious to follow his destiny. Rodrigo's self-exploration is projected into an inquiry into the nature of Mexico; his are the most poignant and searching questions of the novel:

¿Cómo le haces para entenderlo? ¿En dónde empieza, en dónde termina? ¿Por qué se conforma con las soluciones a medias? ¿Por qué abandona lo mejor que tiene? ¿Qué fórmulas sirven para entenderlo? ... ¿Qué le sucedió a su Revolución? ¿Sólo sirvió para crear a un nuevo grupo de potentados seguros de que lo dominan todo, de que son tan indispensables como creyeron serlo los científicos? (127)

For Rodrigo, the source of his identity is that there is a middle ground of uncertainty between his máscara (what he appears to be) and his rostro (what he is). "Lo cierto es que, llevado por esta dialéctica personal, yo ya no sé cuál es mi verdadera máscara" (234). Rodrigo's self-doubts deepen as he confesses that he has always wanted to emulate his father who died in the Revolution. However, he knows that he is not a part of the past when men defined themselves through

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action; neither can he project himself into the future. This feeling of not belonging extends to his status in society; he is neither part of the elite nor part of the pueblo. This is how Fuentes describes Rodrigo's awareness of existing between two worlds: "Y él anclado en el centro, el único hombre con conciencia de la zona intermedia, del estar entre dos mundos que lo rechazaban" (245).

Rodrigo's self-awareness makes his eventual sell-out to society take on certain tragic dimensions. His identification with the "intermediate zone" directly relates to the days when, standing outside the situation, he became the witness of his mother's desolation. "Uno sabe quién es desde muy temprano, y yo entonces supe que era algo así como lo que entonces sentí: un espía, es decir, un segundón, un contratado para enterarse de lo que viven los otros. Pero nada más" (126).

Rodrigo comes to classify himself as a chinga-quedito, the man who hurts, damages and exploits others behind the scene, under cover, without direct violence or risk. When examined in the light of his childhood and adult life, the appropriateness of this behavior is evident. At one point he poses a question, rhetorical for the reader and to himself, since both know the answer. "Tanto como yo de tí. Somos lo que se llama 'mexicanitos aguados'. Ladinos, reservados, chinga-

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queditos... Chingaquedito. ¿Quién a quién? ¿En dónde empezaba esa violación secreta, ese acto de abrir, de rasgar lo más escondido con tanto sigilo?" (122). He is not alone in this life-style. The days of direct action, violent or not, are gone. The days of manipulation and wheeling and dealing are in.

¿Por qué mi padre supo lanzarse a luchar, a superar esos defectos, y yo no? ¿Por qué para él y para sus hombres hubo una vía de acción honrada, abierta, y para nosotros no hay sino la conformidad, el quemarse por dentro, el sigilo y eso, eso, el chingar quedito? (127)

His consciousness of impotency and humiliation is carried to its pathetic extreme when he utters:
 " ... me enteré de algo peor. De mi capacidad para conocer todos mis defectos, y de mi incapacidad para superarlos" (126).

Mythological and Symbolic Nature of Characters

The use of mythology and symbolism has the important function of universalizing particular human actions. Where successfully employed, characters take on dimensions that transcend their temporal and spatial limitations. Carlos Fuentes' successful use of mythology and symbolism makes it possible for his creations to attain archetypal significance.

Norma Larragoiti de Robles is a character whose personality is well expressed through symbolism and mythological references. The image of the sun

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prevails in descriptions of her. Her death, also symbolically linked to the sun, is described in terms of the Aztec sacrificial myth. Her climb from lower middle-class obscurity to the apex of the elite is attributable to her single-minded desire to be the very best Mexico has to offer. Norma's rise requires hypocrisy and frequent compromise of her integrity. Her marriage to Robles is a deal: her beauty and charm in exchange for his prestigious economic and social position. Her passionate nature is given free rein in her torrid affair with Ixca Cienfuegos who unsuccessfully tries to bring about Norma's drowning. This brush with death only gives her new strength and desire. Her membership in the elite no longer suffices; she now aspires to be Mexico's center. The facade is abandoned; with her true identity revealed, she plunges into a series of destructive acts that culminate in death.

In many passages, Norma Larragoiti de Robles is intrinsically associated with the sun (pages 33, 56, 113-14, 305, 347, 383-84). Emphasizing her relationship to the celestial body are the scenes that depict her sunbathing in the nude. "Norma no deseaba mover su cuerpo tostado. Cada poro reflejaba la luz del atardecer, y cada uno, también, mientras se pasaba las manos por los hombros, revivían todas las imágenes

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de los últimos días, bañados de astro y sal, sobre arenas blancas ..." (319). This imagery of brilliance and light surrounds her even in those few episodes that do not show her outdoors beneath a calcinous sun. Norma's first appearance in the novel is described in the following manner: "Norma Larragoiti de Robles entró en el preciso segundo en que Bobó cambiaba las luces del azul al verde. Brillaron más sus joyas, el coup-de-soleil del pelo, las arracadas de oro, los párpados violáceos" (33). The connection is intentionally established between Norma's social brilliance and that of the sun.

This connection is strengthened as the reader is allowed to read the mind of Norma as a young girl. In a flashback, Norma is seen contemplating the drab aspect of her provincial home town and the conservative nature of her guardians in the capital. Her desire to rise to the top is revealed most poignantly as she exclaims: " ... quiero llegar alto, rozarme con lo mejor que ofrece México. ¡No, por Dios, no rozarme! Ser lo mejor que ofrece México. No vivir del brillo y la riqueza y la elegancia ajenas, ser, yo, el brillo y la riqueza y la elegancia. ¿Hay alguna ley que me ate a la mediocridad?" (116). Norma's obsessive desire to overcome her mediocre surroundings is couched in the imagery of a rising sun's brilliance. The

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intensity of her desire and her untiring persistence are reminiscent of the uni-dimensional drive and energy of a Medea. Norma will at all cost reach the top.

The manipulative aspect of Norma's personality coupled with her willingness to sell herself (as she did to Robles) accomplishes her goal. She reaches the pinnacle of Mexican society. However her power and prestige is borrowed and shared; it can never be openly manifested due to the hypocritical nature of the elite society. On occasions she is obliged to fabricate false versions of her heritage in order to inspire confidence (pages 89-90). Once she is securely installed at the top of her world, she displays unmitigated smugness and self-satisfaction at having left behind middle-class mediocrity. When asked by Cienfuegos what her snobbery consists of, she replies: " ... de nombres y dinero y de sentirme que soy lo mejor que puede ofrecer este país" (296-97). This self-satisfaction and security is soon shattered. Ixca Cienfuegos, in his desire to provide Teódula's dead relatives a human sacrifice, hopes to engineer Norma's self-destruction as a fitting offering to his sun god Huitzilipochtli. The sacrificial nature of Norma's life is evident in the use of sun imagery to describe Ixca's seduction of her. " ... Norma sintió que una marejada de sol la levantaba y la arrastraba y la dejaba caer en una

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Her feverish love relationship with Ixca is an integrating experience: the call of the flesh, given full rein, becomes an instrument of uniting Norma with the sun in sacrificial death.

The subtle suggestion of the sea's undulations, also used in the imagery of the seduction scene, artistically foreshadows Norma's brush with death in the waters off Acapulco. This incident symbolizes an archetypal movement of return to the source of life, the sea, and subsequent rebirth.

Su barbilla se hundió en la arena. Aflojó los músculos, cerró los ojos. Sólo sentía el entrar y salir de olas suavísimas por los labios. No pudo encontrar palabras para una oración; sólo 'Norma, Norma' escurría de su boca a la arena y al mar, nuevamente, el nombre ahogado, el cuerpo a salvo. Y de su cuerpo reptaban más nombres, salían de todos sus orificios pero no se desprendían de ellos, amarrados por un hilillo de baba. (321)

Fuentes is able to suggest linguistically various levels of birth by creating related images of regeneration. The repetition of her name is an Ego te baptiso motif.

Norma emerges reborn, with new strength and power. Her goal is not only to equal the brilliance of the sun but to become the sun herself. With this sense of destiny, the lies and pretense which had supported her in her ascent are superfluous. Having

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overtaken the aristocrats, she no longer must pretend to be one of them. In the words of Ixca, Norma discovers her "máscara definitiva." Her own true nature exposed, she strips others of their pose.

The first character to feel her destructive-ness is Pimpinela de Ovando. Norma had always pretended to be impressed by Pimpinela's aristocratic background and had helped the Ovandos avoid financial ruin. To facilitate her climb to the top, Norma has denied the whole of her life; she has let Pimpinela think her own mother was a servant. The Ovandos, as well as the entire Mexican high society, believe Norma to be a member of the old aristocracy. Suddenly, in one statement, Norma destroys the edifice of lies:

Mira, bebesona, yo no soy de ninguna familia popoff; mi padre era un comerciante pobretón del Norte y mi mamá una vieja bastante vulgar --tú la viste un día, hace mucho en la estación del tren, ¿te acuerdas?, y creíste que era mi criada. Mi hermano picó piedras toda la vida y ahora anda de bracero, ¿qué se te hace? Pero a pesar de todos tus títulos y antepasados coloniales, chulita, yo soy más que tú, porque estoy acá arriba, y tú allá abajo, ¿ves?, y la vieja atufada de tu tía no es más que una criada, por más sangre azul que tenga, es tan criada como tú o Rosa mi recamarera. (347-48)

Norma's unmasking of Rodrigo takes place on a more personal level. He had loved her since adolescence, but she proceeds to reveal to him the cowardly, indecisive nature of his love. She accuses him of being solely infatuated with the idea of loving her. "Pero

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no querías eso, ¿sabes?, querías complacerte a ti mismo, a ti solito, hacer tus monerías conmigo y luego irte a esconder y sentirte muy feliz y muy bueno. Pero a solas. Querías las cosquillas, nada más" (354). Rodrigo attempts to counterattack by accusing Norma of being obsessed with the prestige and security of material wealth. But she cuts through his defenses and imputes his masculinity.

¡Qué tu pobreza ni qué ojo de hacha! Eso vino después, porque no me dieron otra cosa. Tú no querías ser mío, querías ser un salvador de los hombres, sin vida real, y hacerme a mí un testigo sin sexo de tu grandeza moral, de tu gran bondad y talento. Nunca me dijiste: 'Te voy a dominar; y si no, domíneme tú.' (354-55)

And she repeats her latent desire to have been dominated by Rodrigo: "Si hubieras tenido el valor de violarme, te lo hubiera agradecido" (354).

Her final attack is against the very apex of the Mexican society of which she strove to be a part: Federico Robles. Robles and Norma argue about her jewels which he needs to rebuild his economic empire. "Me darás las joyas y te quedarás conmigo. ... ¡Contigo! ¡Pero si yo estoy casada con esta casa, con el automóvil, con mis joyas, no contigo!" (385). Norma then goes on to break down their mutual wall of hypocrisy. First, she reminds him of his Indian origins, and suggests that his rise has been little more than an attempt to bury his past. In her tongue-lashing, she affirms

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Pero si desde nuestra noche de bodas averiguaste que no era virgen, ¿qué te esperabas? ¿Y por qué me toleraste? Porque yo te daba algo, ¿verdad?, lo que no te podían dar todos tus millones. La sensación de que pertenecías, de que no eras un barbaán, un indio mugroso, que podías llegar a ser gente decente, ¡ja! ... Y sabes ... no soy fuerte porque soy tuya; yo sola puedo vivir, y amar y torcer a la gente e imponerme, no porque esté casada con ... con un pelado con aires, con un peón de hacienda ... (386)

As in the case of her attack on Rodrigo Pola, Norma ends her violent commentary by imputing Robles' manhood. Her harangue ends as she equates him to the passive, clammy chameleon. "¿Nunca sentiste el asco que me daba acostarme contigo, tratando de aguantarme, hasta vencer mi propia carne y dejarte pasar por ella como si fueras ... otra cosa, un camaleón, no un hombre?" (386).

The scene has been carefully prepared for her symbolic sacrifice. Norma's vinculum with Aztec mythology had been established from the very beginning through frequent association with the sun. This connection culminates in the description immediately prior to her death. Her physical position is reminiscent of early colonial scenes depicting the Aztec sacrificial victim, the arms and legs held by four men, about to have his heart violently ripped out.

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Allí se tendió, con los brazos y las piernas abiertos, a sentir cómo le ascendía la risa desde el vientre y después se le iba perdiendo entre los senos y volvía a surgir de sus labios un murmullo seco, furioso, que no era ya en beneficio de nadie, que a nadie trataba de impresionar. Que al escuchar Norma temblaba, como si surgiese de otros labios cercanos, no de los suyos. (387)

The room in which Norma is to die, heavily decorated in yellows, reds and golds, is suggestive of a temple of the sun. "Norma sólo dejó escapar un rugido hueco y arrestado en su origen, que rompía para siempre el destino evidente de la lujoso recámara de paredes capitoné, cristal enmarcado en oro y alfombras rojas" (383-84). Norma dies victim of the red tongue of flame which, like the obsidian knife of the Aztec priest, plunges violently and quickly. The sacrificial victim emits one abrupt cry, cut short by immediate death.

... Norma había corrido hasta la puerta, a gritar y a pegar con los puños: la lengua roja avanzaba sobre los tapetes, acariciaba las sábanas, por fin tocó su bata y las plantas de sus pies. --¡Ja!-- dijo Norma cuando sintió el dedo llagado sobre su espalda y se dejó caer hasta el fondo de sus propios ojos. (396)

The Falling Eagle

Contrapuntal to Norma's rise and consummation is Federico Robles' vertiginous fall from power. It too takes on symbolic connotations connected with Aztec rituals and archetypal patterns. His plunge

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from the peak of wealth and social position is seen as a return to the source of life. In a skillful manipulation of plot lines, Fuentes binds the "falling eagle's" end to his origins. The circular quality thus achieved coincides with the Aztec concept of the cosmos. Robles' life also represents the whole trajectory of man: the exile from the home that saw him as heir; his climb to power; his atonement and salvation.

Two women stand as living symbols of his origin and final destiny. Mercedes Zamacona, his adolescent love, represents the innocence of young sexuality. Hortensia Chacón, Indian mistress of the tycoon Robles, incarnates his return to the spiritual source of life.

Since the poles of Robles' life--origin and fall--are essentially one, the numerous similarities between the women who represent them are not surprising. Both Mercedes and Hortensia are portrayed briefly and concisely in indirect interior monologues. These are separated enough to avoid the appearance of superficiality in the necessary similarities. Significantly the episodes are presented in reverse chronological order, further contributing to the plot's circular movement. Through appropriate placing of the monologues in the narrative structure, the most is made of the important appearances of Mercedes and Hortensia.

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Hortensia's character is glimpsed in a one-page reference to her early in the novel. Here the reader learns of her blindness, her status as Federico Robles' mistress, and her posture of continual waiting. In a soliloquy, Hortensia herself delineates the two important elements of her nature: the darkness in which she lives, and her conception of the love act as a return to the beginnings (pages 47-48). Hortensia's next appearance is indirect; she occupies Federico's thoughts as he reiterates the primordially of her love:

... con Hortensia amor era un sobresalto,
 un no saber qué velo se rasgaría, qué cristal
 de fuego quemaría sus lenguas, qué susten-
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 --Federico, Hortensia--quedaría destruida
 o edificada al cesar el contacto. ...
 ... Hortensia era el tiempo, las horas,
 sin cronómetro. (151)

Hortensia's world is without time or space. She is a source of mystery and the unknown. With her, there is the danger of complete destruction and the possibility of rebirth.

Robles is attracted, in part, to the dark world in which Hortensia lives. It is echoed in the circumstances surrounding Federico's adolescent experience with Mercedes Zamacona. The boy, after weeks of silently contemplating her with " ... ojos oscuros que apenas levantaban una mirada densa y como recién sorprendida por una revelación" (407), consummates his yearnings

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towards Mercedes. The setting is a dark storage room at the priest-uncle's hacienda. " ... no, nunca volvería Mercedes a saber cómo supieron, los dos, el lugar de la cita no expresada, el lugar a oscuras donde los ojos se escondían en las uñas y las yemas de los dedos, ni cómo entendieron, vírgenes ambos, ambos sin verse, sin hablarse, lo que era necesario hacer ... " (409). Darkness as a symbol of the origin, of the birth of sexual desire and satisfaction, as well as of the source of masculine personality and strength is given excellent treatment by Fuentes. The use of the imagery of darkness and blindness in both of Robles' meaningful love relationships is revealing; both women thus come to represent the origins. Federico's final appearance in the novel takes place in Hortensia's room after he has fallen from power and undergone a spiritual transformation. The parallels with the previous passage are striking. "A ciegas, en la oscuridad del cuarto, ambos se buscaron con un tacto y una respiración directos y sin palabras" (425).

The relationships of Mercedes Zamacona and Hortensia Chacón to Robles are similar in another respect. They both have a love-hate relationship with him. Their motive is the same: involuntary separation from their children. Hortensia's resentment stems

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from Robles' symbolic exile of her children. They are well provided for but kept away from their mother. Mercedes' hatred of Robles begins the moment she discovers her new-born child has been taken away from her.

... el niño no estaba. Sólo entonces recordó y buscó al otro elemento, al padre, y en su sueño vaporoso y urgente lo condenó a la oscuridad--a la de la concepción y el parto--, a vivir a ciegas y a sólo encontrar en lo oscuro su verdad y su satisfacción y su origen ... (414)

Mercedes prophesies Robles' return to the origin:

" ... padre de mi hijo, no tendrás más poder que el que me exprimiste a mí, y deberás regresar a mi imagen y a la de tu hijo para encontrar la verdad y el origen de tu fuerza y lo demás será la disipación y el orgullo sin frutos y el crimen más horrible, el que no se sabe que es crimen ... " (417).

Robles fulfills this prophesy in his final union with Hortensia after his financial ruin. Even before this, his relationship with her was characterized by concern, respect and passion. Hortensia states at one point that Robles respects her for what she is and has not attempted to change her. Furthermore, he has taught her a lesson that he, himself, ignores until his final return to her: "Antes, ... vivía yo sola; con Federico ya no. Puede que sea más fácil aguantar la soledad No estar solo es como

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morirse de pena; esto es lo que me ha enseñado Federico, sin saberlo él mismo, que vive solo, solo" (343). Hortensia's love becomes, more than Robles' return, his redemption. It represents his salvation through a renewed grace with humanity. Hortensia, like Mercedes, foresees that Robles' redemption rests on his ability to recognize the existence of others. Herein lies his true and original identity. "Pero atrás ... está esa cara verdadera, la primera, la única. Cuando Federico reconozca que yo existo, ... que una persona existe fuera de él, de lo que ha sido, de su vida, entonces será lo que debió ser, sí" (344).

Fuentes carefully set the stage for Robles' dramatic fall from power. As in the case of Norma, the elements of the physical setting are carefully chosen in order to create a symbolic image. The first glance the reader has of this banker-speculator fully demonstrates the power he has over human beings. The slightest mechanical act has immediate repercussions on other people. "Federico Robles apretó el boton. --Sí, señor --gimió, ronca, la voz de la secretaria. Robles inclinó la cabeza, pegó la boca al micrófono, tocó con la yema del pulgar su corbata de seda ..." (22). The sharp, short sentences punctuated by the use of the preterite tense give Robles a mechanical dimension and an aura of authority and power. The cold world

of modern electronics is his method of communication. The touch of silk rounds out the picture of the powerful magnate.

Furthermore, it is significant that Robles' office, his seat of power, is located high in a modern skyscraper. On two occasions the narrative section given over to Robles begins depicting him surveying Mexico City from his ninth-floor vantage point. From these lofty heights Robles views all the people whose lives he controls in one way or another. The physical distance is symbolic of the indifference he feels toward the people below. "Robles gustaba de inclinarse, imperturbable, desde la ventana, y saborear el pulguel sin molestias de los pelados, de todas las hebras de la ciudad que pasaban inconscientes del rascacielos y de Federico Robles. Dos mundos, nubes y estiércol" (54).

It is fitting that the author should associate Robles with the skyscraper. It is the single structure most descriptive of the personality of the "self-made man." A skyscraper is a tribute to man's power over nature; it stands on and above the earth. It is further symbolic of the competitive and aggressive life-style necessary for Robles' success. If the skyscraper, with its obvious superiority, is the visual symbol of Robles, the verbal symbol is the word chingón with its aggressively hermetic connotations. According to

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Octavio Paz, the chingón views social life as a combat in which one is either on top or at the bottom. The characteristics of the succesful chingón are "aggressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability and other attributes of macho power."⁸ The power of such an individual is self-contained, personalistic; consequently, it is arbitrary and subject only to his desires and whims. At the height of his power Robles is symbolically the "skyscraper" and the chingón.

His fall from power and subsequent redemption consists of the dramatic movement from his origins to his end. This evolution is given literary grandeur and depth by forging a nexus between individual action and mytho-symbolic models. It is comprised of the fall from power, the purification through suffering, the rebirth and the final communion with man, which together form the archetypal pattern of mankind's trajectory.

Out of this fusion of the particular (Robles' actions in time and space) and the universal (rhythmic patterns of fall and redemption) emerges a tenable ideology. No man is alone. He is one with man past and present. To be with others is to suffer with them.

Ixca Cienfuegos bears partial responsibility for Robles' plunge to oblivion. He forces the tycoon to remember his past, particularly the days of the

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Revolution. Robles' memories focus first upon Froilán Reyero, the heroic cousin who had witnessed the sacrifice of a few men for the sake of others. Reyero's main idea was that solitude is not painful, but to be alone with others is to suffer. Robles' thoughts turn, then to Feliciano Sánchez, the revolutionary who was executed at Robles' command. The memory of Reyero and Sánchez becomes stronger as Robles' fall draws nearer. While sitting in his office contemplating his imminent bankruptcy, the images of the two men return to goad him (page 381). The reminiscence of the deaths of Reyero and Sánchez initiates a process through which they are identified with the souls of the anonymous dead (page 382). Several hours later his guilt persists and is accentuated through color imagery. "Federico paseó su nueva mirada por la pieza. Plantado como un macizo de plomo sobre el tapete, su figura no pertenecía ya al lugar. El color de la alfombra lo mareó; dos cuerpos, siempre dos rostros, le parecían surgir de esa mancha roja" (384).

True to Mercedes' prophesy, Manuel Zamacona, Robles' unrecognized and illegitimate son, symbolically becomes the instrument of Robles' return to grace. His are the words that begin to impell Robles to thought, awareness and eventual resurrection.

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quién son imputables? ... por cada mexicano que murió en vano, sacrificado, hay un mexicano responsable. ... para que esa muerte no haya sido en vano, alguien debe asumir la culpa. La culpa por cada indígena azotado, por cada obrero sometido, por cada madre hambrienta. Entonces, sólo entonces, ese hombre singular de México será todos los mexicanos humillados. Pero ¿quién acarrea los pecados de México ... ? (368-69)

The conversation with Cienfuegos and Zamacona has awakened a conflict in Robles. Symbolically stated, it takes place between the humble adobe hut and the modern skyscraper; between his peasant youth and the capitalist he has become. The conflict on a universal plane is between the man for himself (the chingón) and the man for others (exemplified by Froilán Reyero [page 277]). This conflict leads to Robles' fall from power which is imaginatively presented through the use of several basic images: the mask (the artificial rather than the real), the skyscraper, the serpentine underworld and the sacrificial rituals of the Aztecs.

Robles, sitting in his dark office overlooking Mexico City (just after he has been financially crushed), scans the material accoutrements of past power. This picture contrasts sharply with the early scenes in which he surveyed his empire through the tinted windows of his lofty perch. The regalia of power are reduced in size and relevance (page 375). There follows, immediately, the image of Robles shaving off a white mask. The emergence of the Indian face foreshadows

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his ultimate return to humanity. "Mojó la brocha y dejó correr el agua caliente. Bajo la máscara de jabón, el rostro comenzó a aparecer, piel oscura bajo máscara blanca, a medida que la navaja recorría, minuciosamente, las mejillas de Federico Robles" (375).

Long hours of meditation bring home to him the cost of his previous power: the men who died in vain and the men who were betrayed. The memories of Sánchez and Reyero initiate Robles' rebirth. The agony of being born anew is aptly shown with the simile of the placenta--all-encompassing and inescapable.

Las muertes de esos dos nombres rodeaban, como una placenta de fuego, el cuerpo y la vida de Robles en ese momento. Del mundo habían huído todos los objetos palpables: sólo una envoltura oscura y vasta, las dos estrellas errantes de los muertos y él, boca abajo, sin locomoción, con las alas rotas y los ojos pegados a la tierra. (382)

The image of the fallen eagle with his "alas rotas" gives way to that of the serpent "boca abajo" and "ojos pegados a la tierra." Once Robles steps into the streets, filled with the noise of celebrants of the Mexican Independence, the serpent image is reinstated. " ... salió de su oficina y serpenteando para evitar los grupos de borrachos y celebrantes ... " (383). Robles is described as an "hombre viejo y silencioso" who, because of his dark skin and sudden aging, is indistinguishable from the rest of humanity. As he walks the streets at early sunrise, the city itself

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becomes a huge serpent. "Las calles ... no tenían nombre ni rostro: como una serpiente gris, reptaban los pliegues de la ciudad, se enrollaban y erguían bajo los pies cansados de Federico" (420).

Robles is also identified with the early morning sun, a relationship that links him with Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god of the Morning Star Venus. In Quetzalcoatl are fused the eagle and snake imagery associated with Robles and his odyssey. In fact, Robles' aimless wandering through the streets of the city becomes, on the mythical level, a descent into the underworld. His descent parallels, in many significant ways, the ancient myth of Quetzalcoatl's expurgatory journey to the land of the dead. Where Quetzalcoatl finds the bones of the fourth cosmic age, Federico Robles encounters the dead of Mexico, specifically, the victims of the Revolution. Wearing his wrinkled suit of three days, an aged and dark figure, Robles is completely accepted in the barrios, whose existence he had ignored as a wealthy man. He stops at the door where the body of Gabriel, the young bracero (a total stranger to him), is laid out. As Robles, with "ojos de ave descendida," gazes at Gabriel's blood-stained body surrounded by women mourners, he realizes: "Este es mi primo Froilán la mañana que lo fusilaron en Belén ... éste es Feliciano Sánchez, asesinado por la espalda, corriendo en un llano de caliche ..." (421).

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Robles is finally brought to his knees when he hears Manuel Zamacona's voice, la voz adivinada, ask: "¿Quién dará razón de su muerte? ... ¿quién es el asesino de este hombre, de todos nuestros hombres?" (421). His knees sink into the land of the ancient Aztec nation's center, " ... el lugar de los encuentros ..." (422). It is here that Robles understands that the death of all others is his responsibility, that they have in a sense died for him, and that their deaths will not be in vain (page 422).

Robles' symbolic descent to the underworld and his encounter with the dead of his particular past is motivated by a need for expiation. Like Quetzalcoatl, Robles has transgressed against Mother Earth--his origins and ultimately his own true self. Having discovered Sánchez and Reyero in Gabriel, his past is reconciled with his present. As he assumes the weight of the bones of the dead, the pain and guilt he feels move him to look away toward the new day described in imagery reminiscent of the Sun Warrior defeating darkness and the stars: " ... dió la cara a la puerta, al cielo cada vez más claro de estrellas cercanas, feroces, oprimidas hacia la tierra por el temblor del sol" (421). The rising sun indicates forgiveness and the imminence of a rebirth. Robles had already been associated with the sun; as his descent begins: "La luz del amanecer se condensó en Federico

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Robles: en su opacidad, el hombre viejo y silencioso, con el traje arrugado y las manos escondidas en el saco parecía el origen de la misma luz que lo bañaba" (418). When Robles, having undergone the purgation implicit in his descent, has returned to his origins --his Indian past, his history--he experiences an epiphany, a fullness of being expressed through both the faculties of cognition and intuition. "Federico sintió que el sol de ese día llegaba a su punto más alto, desierto de color, llagado y suntuoso. Sabía que aquí, entre los dedos de Hortensia Chacón, iba a saber" (424).

The steps leading to Hortensia's apartment are symbolic of the sun's ascent to its zenith. The mythological elements borrowed from the Aztec religion are most obviously and artistically used as Robles ascends these seven steps. At each step he invokes the living memory of the dead. This sequence is a re-enactment of the Aztec ceremony in which the sacrificial victim, after having been abandoned by all, climbed the steps, stopping at each one to break a flute representative of past glories and his renunciation of the world. When the celebrant reached the top, he was sacrificed.⁹ This brief enactment in the novel symbolically synthesizes the dramatic events of Robles' death and rebirth. Each step indicates that

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the dead of the past are to be remembered, that their lives and deaths will not have been in vain, that man is his history. "Y el último peldaño, roto, donde el pie muelle pierde el equilibrio y toda la vida es vuelta a sacudir, exigiendo que se le recuerde, que se sepa que fue todo lo anterior, que se niega a ser cancelada. Allí, a la altura del último peldaño, se abría la puerta de Hortensia Chacón" (423-24).

Ixca Cienfuegos

The mythological treatment given Ixca Cienfuegos possesses neither the validity nor the beauty of that accorded Norma Larragoiti and Federico Robles. The major difficulty rests in the extensive and often contradictory roles which Ixca, as a novelistic creature, must execute. He is one of the novel's major theoreticians on the nature of Mexico; he is also an actor in the drama that is modern Mexico; finally, he is mythic by nature--in part, non-human. Within the world of the novel these roles are incompatible, inverosimil and ultimately disrupt the unity of the work.¹⁰

Regarding his philosophical position, although it serves as one of the major ideological poles between which others express their ideas, it is difficult to accept. The question is whether the return to an Aztec society, advocated by Cienfuegos, is a viable option for the modern Mexican. The lack of strength

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of his argument makes of Ixca a straw man. He is completely lacking in integrity when, in his final dialogue, he says to Rodrigo (who obviously feels guilt for having denied his past, his identity and self-respect), "Tu nueva vida debía cancelar la anterior" (436). This idea of changing or evolving, life-styles is in complete contradiction to his, Ixca's concept that nothing changes, that everything is false except the verities of the Aztec religion.

As a participant in the action of the novel he is equally contradictory. In many instances his mere presence elicits confessions from other characters. Even the blind Hortensia feels a compulsion to reveal her most private life (page 336). With this power he is able to exact long monologues from most of the leading characters. The exceptions, however, throw his powers into question. In an attempt to find out the life of the braceros, he is rejected brutally: "Qué buena gente ni qué la pinga. A poco cree que así nomás suelta uno lo que trae dentro? ¿Qué chingados va a entender?" (182). Cienfuegos is equally unable to wrest a confession from Pimpinela de Ovando, the aristocrat. This, then, is another of the many contradictions in the half-man, half-god Ixca.

His position relative to the narration varies from total omniscience to none at all. At one point

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he knows rather mysteriously of Norma's drab past (page 296); but when he walks into a foul-smelling room, he erroneously deduces it is gas and that Rodrigo Pola has attempted to commit suicide (page 55).

In terms of the plot function Ixca fulfills, he claims to be a mere spectator. Yet it is he who indirectly led Norma to her destruction; who started the gossip about Robles' shady finances; who gave Rodrigo Pola the lead on the script-writing job which dramatically changed his social and economic position (page 258).

The mythical dimensions attributed to Ixca are most perplexing. One of the characteristics of this personage is his lack of compassion and love. He is often seen ironically smiling at the tragedy of others (page 306). Even in his affair with Norma he is unmoved sexually (page 301). This lack of human emotion and warmth is consistent with his ageless body and face, and with his enigmatic character. All is undone, however, when Rodrigo sees him after a lapse of three years and doesn't recognize him because he has aged so much. In this scene Ixca becomes disturbingly human, filled with anxieties and problems.

¿Crees que recuerdo mi propia cara? Mi vida comienza todos los días ... y nunca tengo el recuerdo de lo que pasó antes, ¿ves?, nunca; todo fue un juego espantoso, nada más, un juego de ritos olvidados y signos y palabras muertas; ¡estará satisfecha, ella Teódula sí que estará satisfecha, ella sí que cree

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que Norma fue el sacrificio necesario, y que una vez que el sacrificio nos fue dado podíamos volver a hundirnos en la vida del pobre, a rumiar palabras histéricas sobre nuestros deudos, a jugar a la humildad! (442)

At this point the reader, surprised by Ixca's sudden impotency, is faced with irreconcilable contradictions. Adding to the confusion, his humanization reverses itself only a few pages later, when he fuses with the whole of Mexico City and its atmosphere.

El frío viento de diciembre arrastró a Cienfuegos, con pies veloces, por la avenida, por la ciudad, y sus ojos--el único punto vivo y brillante de ese cuerpo sin luz--absorbían casas y pavimentos y hombres sueltos de la hora, ascendían hasta el centro de la noche y Cienfuegos era, en sus ojos de águila pétrea y serpiente de aire, la ciudad, sus voces, recuerdos, rumores, presentimientos, la ciudad vasta y anónima ... (443)

Conclusion

To a great extent, the success or failure of La región más transparente is contingent on the coherence and significance of its central spectator and intelligence, Ixca Cienfuegos. This character, in his omniscience and omnipresence could have offered the unifying perspective lacking in the novel. Ixca Cienfuegos as a character does not hold up. As a semi-divine figure he could have united the divergent points of view of the novel within a "vision" or overview of Mexico. On the contrary, in the end he falls in stature and creates an ambiguity detrimental to

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It may be argued that a novel of multiple visions and diverse perspectives suffices to present the awesome reality of Mexico and its people. Indeed, the aesthetic imbalance created by the absence of perspective unity would be justified, were the author's purpose to paint an objective picture. The lack of unity could then be justly attributed not to the copy but to the original itself: Mexico City. However, the internal evidence of La región más transparente--the existence of so much mythology, the feverish desire for meaning on the part of the principal characters--overwhelmingly denies its confinement to the realm of objective realism. The push for a transcendental pattern and meaning is much too evident and powerful to allow acceptance of the idea that Fuentes' intention in the book is merely to mirror the Mexican world.

Federico Robles, in spite of his "salvation," gives us only a partial and unrealistic option. His departure for the north leaves his personal drama in a state of inconclusiveness. His return to the Indian past, supported by heavy use of Aztec mythology, cannot be seriously considered as an answer for modern Mexico. It may be said that Mexico must take its Indian past into account, but to return to that past is not a viable solution for a predominantly mestizo country.

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The inconclusiveness as seen in Robles' eventual resolution of his crisis is part and parcel of every major character in the novel. Even Rodrigo Pola, the only successor to the wealth and prestige of Mexico, is portrayed as an indecisive individual. His outward renunciation of human values is accompanied by a persistent inward uneasiness that never meaningfully asserts itself.

Indeed there is no central unifying character or idea in La región más transparente. The question posed dialectically by Zamacona and Ixca, if considered as the central idea, also fails to lend a unifying force. Ixca's ideas are continually being contradicted by his actions and by his ambiguous half-divine nature. Zamacona, whose ideas are the most reasonable and acceptable, is totally reduced in stature first when he admits to an inordinate inability to carry out his own beliefs and then when for no apparent reason he is shot by a drunk in a bar.

Some critics, in an attempt to give the work a unity not apparent, have put forth a rather seductive interpretation: that the central character is, in fact, Mexico. Its appeal is obvious; the problem of unity is resolved by the use of an attractive metaphor. However, the fact that the city is all-important in the novel doesn't make of it a character, for "character"

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implies a human intelligence and a will to action. Octavio Paz suggests that Mexico City is Ixca and Ixca is Fuentes.¹¹ If one accepts the proposition that Ixca equals Mexico City, one becomes involved in all the contradictions and ambiguities that this pseudo-mythic figure offers. This equation causes difficulties instead of resolving them, since Ixca is contradictory and mercuriously evasive. Finally, to equate a contradictory character of such immoral and inhuman proportions as Ixca with the author, Fuentes, certainly does very little for the unity of the novel, not to mention the resulting disparagement of the author's ethics.

Furthermore, the novel's finer elements such as the tragic dimensions of the characters and their mythological treatment contribute little to any total meaning. The novel fails in spite of the many excellent portrayals because there is no one central character to unify the work; nor does a composite of any do the job. As a work of art, it is left in a limbo between realism and mythology. It is a courageous, multifaceted probe into the meaning of Mexico. But no answer--or hint of an answer--is given. The probe itself is dispersive, therefore the possible solutions are themselves fragmentary. With all these reservations, the work is important because, as Fuentes' first novel,

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it is an important point of reference for his future work. In addition, it was a major piece of fiction which began to raise questions of transcendental import in a country where the ideals of the Revolution have become mere rhetoric. Finally, La región más transparente is the starting point of Fuentes' search for the technique which will allow him to wield a double sword: to make revolutionary statements (content) with revolutionary methods (form).¹²

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¹ Carlos Fuentes, La región más transparente (México, 1958), p. 251. Henceforth, all quotes from this edition will be identified in parentheses immediately following their appearance in the text.

² There is no doubt that the ideological structure of the novel is set up by juxtaposing these two figures. Perhaps Vázquez Amaral goes too far, though, in equating Zamacona to the poet Octavio Paz and Ixca to Paz, philosopher. See his article, "Mexico's Melting Pot," Saturday Review, No. XLIII (Nov. 9, 1960), 29.

³ Samuel Joseph O'Neill, Jr., "Psycho-Literary Techniques in Representative Contemporary Novels of Mexico" (University of Maryland, 1965). O'Neill, in his perceptive analysis dedicated to La región más transparente, becomes the first critic to investigate the use of Aztec mythology.

⁴ A similar scheme is expressed by Rosario Castellanos in "La novela mexicana contemporánea y su valor testimonial," in Hispania, XLVII, No. 2 (May 1964), 226.

⁵ As George Wing points out in his review, Books Abroad, Vol. 32, No. 4, (Autumn, 1958), 386, Americanization as a theme is prevalent in La región más transparente. It is to recur in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, and is rooted in the influence powerfully felt after the Second World War when Mexico's fate became inseparable from the political and economic fate of the United States.

⁶ The concept of the closed and open as a paradigm for the analysis of human relationships is one that has been adapted from El laberinto de la soledad (México, 1957) by Octavio Paz. Without a doubt, Paz is the most influential intellectual force in the thought and works of Carlos Fuentes.

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⁷ Rollo May, ed., Symbolism in Religion and Literature (New York, 1960), pp. 25-26.

⁸ Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude, trans., Lysander Kemp (New York, 1961), p. 81.

⁹ Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs: People of the Sun, trans., Lowell Dunham (Norman, Oklahoma, 1958), pp. 53-54.

¹⁰ There are two points of view as to the efficacy of Ixca Cienfuegos as a central intelligence. On the one hand, critics see him as a unifying positive force. q.v. a) Manuel Durán, "Notas al margen de La región más transparente," Revista mexicana de literatura (enero-marzo, 1959), 78-81; b) Charles Poore, "Books of the Times," The New York Times (Dec 27, 1960), Sec. VII, 27; c) Alberto Díaz Lastra, "Reseña a La región más transparente," Cuadernos hispanoamericanos, No. 175-176 (julio-agosto, 1964), 242-47. Others in agreement with the interpretation here presented contend that Cienfuegos' presence mars the unity of the novel: a) Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Carlos Fuentes y la otra novela de la revolución mexicana," Casa de las Américas, No. 26 (Oct.-Nov., 1964), 123-28; b) John Brushwood, "The Novel of Time and Being," Mexico and its Novel (Austin, 1966), pp. 36-41; c) Alfonso Rangel Guerra, "La novela de Carlos Fuentes," Armas y letras, Año I, número 2 (abril-junio, 1958), 76-80; d) H. Ernest Lewald, "El pensamiento cultural mexicano en La región más transparente," Razón y Fábula, No. 6 (marzo-abril, 1968), 7-16.

¹¹ Enrique Anderson-Imbert in his Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana (Mexico, 1964), agrees with Octavio Paz insofar as Mexico City is seen as the main character of the novel (pp. 335-36). Also, Richard Gilman in "The Self-Conscious Culture of Modern Mexico," Commonwealth, Vol. LXXIII (Feb. 10, 1961), 510-11, goes a step further when he identifies Ixca as Fuentes himself.

¹² "Pero, por más que tratara de poner su estilo al servicio de ideas e ideales socio-culturales, Fuentes no logró forjar una forma novelística revolucionaria." Lewald, "El pensamiento cultural mexicano . . . ", p. 7.

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CHAPTER II

LAS BUENAS CONCIENCIAS

Las buenas conciencias, published in 1959, contrasts radically with Carlos Fuentes' previous novel, La región más transparente. The broad, panoramic sweep is replaced by a concentrated lineal approach. The depth and range of the inquiring probe ("¿Qué es México?") is replaced by an interest in one character's spiritual dilemma. A traditional, pseudo-nineteenth-century narrative point of view supplants the multiple perspectives of La región más transparente. The major part of plot and characterization is given directly via the story-teller rather than by presenting the acts and thoughts through the personage's own psyche.

Another aspect markedly different from La región más transparente prevails. The ethical and moral concerns are expressed through rhetoric rather than fiction. The exposition often becomes a harangue against the hypocritical bourgeois classes of Mexico. The author's desire to communicate clearly his personal

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convictions overrides any considerations of character delineation; his creations are simply puppets.

In spite of these limitations, the novel presents several narrative techniques of interest. The use of Catholic religious ritual as an accompaniment to young Ceballos' growth from childhood to adolescence is skilfully done. Chapter V, a narrative collage, is reminiscent of the rich narrational texture of La región más transparente. Furthermore, there is a consistency of theme between his first major work of fiction and Las buenas conciencias. The idea that "man is not alone," that the individual must find his realization with and through others, is central to both works.

A Pilgrim in an Unchristian Society

Las buenas conciencias narrates an adolescent's attempt to lead a Christian life in the closed pharisaical bourgeois society in Guanajuato, Mexico. The birth of a Christian conscience to its renunciation constitutes the narrative sequence of the work. Jaime Ceballos' emergence as an individual depends upon his relation to religion. His failure to become a Christian is due to his lack of courage and to the failure of his milieu to provide him with either support or models of Christian conduct. Throughout his struggle to emulate Christ, Jaime hears various spokesmen reiterate one of Fuentes'

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favorite themes: "man is not alone." The irony of the novel and the source of anguish for Jaime rests on the fact that he is totally alone.

Fuentes, with ingenuity, presents Jaime's growth from childhood to adolescence with the events of Holy Week. Easter Week of his thirteenth year marks Jaime's first true self-awareness. Standing in a Good Friday crowd clamoring around a crucifix, his own individual separateness begins to assert itself. In accord with his fondness for religion, this new awareness focuses upon the Christ figure. "Jaime veía y sentía algo distinto. ... lograba distinguir una liga suya con la imagen de la cruz: desaparecían la muchedumbre popular y los espectadores, y el Cristo lo miraba a él."¹ His sense of uniqueness leads him to view his family with objectivity during the evening meal on Good Friday: " ... vio por primera vez el sonrojo de su padre cuando Balcárcel entonó la acostumbrada oración sobre la familia y las buenas costumbres" (54-55). The changes happen so quickly that he is unable to understand everything that suddenly bombards his awareness. The next day, Holy Saturday, he overhears a conversation concerning his exiled mother--referred to derogatorily as "ella." Though this conversation makes him uneasy, he does not fully comprehend it. Sensing a state of transition, he thinks: "Otro día entenderé todo" (60). Through

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these brief impressions the author captures the wonder, confusion and fugacity of the shadowy, dream-like world of the adolescent.

Jaime's psychological and spiritual awakening, related to his experiences of Good Friday, are paralleled by a carnal awakening on Holy Saturday. His new and separate identity is accompanied by an equally new, strange body. As he is bathing he notices that his shoulders are: " ... duros y cuadrados, como si los huesos ya no formaran parte del cuerpo acostumbrado" (56). The Easter candle becomes a symbol of his impending sexual awareness and his emerging virility. "El muchacho sólo tenía ojos para el cirio. ... La alegría de la luz consumía al cirio erecto; se sacrificaba alumbrando" (58). The fire image, here fused with the allusion to the erect phallus, foreshadows Jaime's subsequent preoccupation with the words of Christ: "Yo he venido a arrojar el fuego sobre la tierra" (84). Jaime comes to equate fire with one of the possibilities open to him as a man: that of aggressive, self-denying committed action. The opposing option is the hypocritical but peaceful example of Balcárcel and Rodolfo. "¿Ser hombre no era, como las vidas de sus familiares, la tranquilidad, sino como ... el fuego?" (84).

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Saturday: arousing of the flesh. Easter Sunday Jaime finds that his joy in being alive overwhelms him; it is marred by the dizzying feeling that all is transitory. It is his first experience of life's ambiguities, of his own ambiguous nature. "No sabe cómo pronunciar las palabras de amor a toda esa vida fluyente y rica que ha visto durante la mañana del Domingo de Pascua. Piensa sólo que todo se ha ido ya" (65). This adolescent sensation of confusion before himself and the world prompts Jaime to seek out a fixed ideal, an anchor in the tempest of adolescence. In Jaime's mind this ideal would be a bigger-than-life fusion of the spiritual and physical masculine identity ("fire") he is beginning to emulate. He first turns to Christ as a possible ideal. He has already suspected that his uncle has given him a false impression of Christ's imbalance; "... sintió por primera vez que no era verdad lo que decía el tío Balcárcel. ... que el hombre representado por esa imagen dolorosa no era un desequilibrado" (51). Jaime's thoughts suggest that he wants to cling to the spiritual relationship between himself and Christ in the face of the transitory nature of the things of the flesh. "Está seguro de que el cuerpo salvador no se moverá, no se escapará a su mano como las cosas del mundo ... " (66). However, his ambiguity before the Christ figure is evident as

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On Good Friday he had felt that a special communication had been set up between him and the Christ figure. This had been expressed in sensually suggestive terms: "El flujo caluroso se establecía ... entre Jesucristo y Jaime Ceballos" (52). Further, Jaime had come to expect an understanding from Christ not received from anyone else. Jesus is " ... capaz de aislarlo y entenderlo a él sólo" (52). His sexual awakening of Holy Saturday has lead to his hope that between Christ and him there may be established a corporal as well as spiritual affinity--that his masculine identity may be assured by emulation of Christ in body as well as in spirit. This hope is squelched however as Jaime discovers that the Christ he has hoped so much from is less "complete" as a man than he himself. " ... se acerca a los pies de la imagen otra vez, y le levanta el faldón. La reproducción natural termina en las rodillas cubiertas. El resto es una cruz de palo que sostiene el torso herido y los brazos abiertos" (67). The scene suggests symbolically that Jaime does not find the needed model for his emerging identity in the Christ figure, an ideal at too great a distance from the boy's physical reality. But the boy does find his ideal of both physical and spiritual manhood in the person of Ezequiel Zuno.

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Ezequiel Zuno, the strike-leader and a fugitive from justice whom Jaime conceals in his mansion's stable, represents the ideal Jaime has sought. This encounter occurs on Easter Sunday; it is as if Jaime's personal Christ had arisen from the dead and again walked among men. Even Zuno's biblical first name suggests the Christ figure. Ezequiel is Christ-like in the sacrifice of his own comfort for the good of others. He is characterized in terms of manly strength and self-assurance. "Una presencia borrosa, pero llena de fuerza ... "; " ... alto, ... fornido ... "; " ... seguridad dominante"; " ... torso ... robusto ... " (68-69). To the boy, Ezequiel represents "La fortaleza de un hombre. La voluntad verdadera de un hombre, no esa cosa el compromiso de los principios que predicaba el tío" (76). Ezequiel also recognizes Jaime as an equal. "--Eres todo un hombrecito --le había dicho Ezequiel Zuno. Nadie más lo sabía, o lo creía" (127).

The message of this "prophet of the Lord" (to Jaime) is that no man is alone. Ezequiel states that the person who is true to himself must live for others because no one is alone in the sense that he can legitimately isolate himself from others. Personal salvation necessitates a sacrifice of one's own well-being for others (page 72). Jaime's spiritual and

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sexual awareness is completed by a social awareness with Ezequiel as an ideal; Jaime feels supported in his urge to break from the pharisaical society he grew up in and live the life of a true Christian.

" ... Jaime asciende la señorial escalera con un paso nuevo, sereno y, a un tiempo, inquieto. Las cosas del mundo se fijan, no escapan más a su mano. Ve al Cristo cercano, fijado por los clavos. Ve a Ezequiel Zuno, más cerca todavía, y no mudo como la imagen crucificada. ... todos los rostros e imágenes--Cristo, Ezequiel, la vela--se anudan y explican la carne del hombre" (74).

The idea that man is not alone appears again in the person of Juan Manuel Lorenzo, Jaime's only friend. Although both comrades are the same age, Juan Manuel seems to be more socially aware. Jaime sees everything in personal terms while his Indian friend applies his knowledge gained in reading to the conditions of his class (page 144). In short, Juan Manuel's attitude--that of living for others--is at the heart of Christian ethics. It is arrived at, in part, through a sense of solidarity with those of the lower classes.

This thematic motif, "man is not alone," occurs again when Jaime's aunt and uncle send him to confess with a new priest, Padre Obregón. The priest, as do

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Ezequiel and Juan Manuel, predicates the philosophy that the Christian is not alone. "Siempre se necesitarán dos hombres para acercarse a Dios. Uno sólo no puede" (147). He goes on to say that the crucial test is whether the self-love of adolescence can be turned outward to a love of others. "Tantos se averguenzan de ese primer amor, que es amor de uno mismo, que después ya no se atreven a darlo. Esto es lo grave, hijo; ésa será tu prueba mañana: saber darles tu amor a los demás" (149).

Though the voices in behalf of Jaime's communion with others (Ezequiel, Juan Manuel and Padre Obregón) reiterate man's relationship to man, they are muffled by the din of the complacent bourgeois multitude. Jaime finds no support in his family and ultimately all, including Juan Manuel and Padre Obregón, condemn him for his weakness and selfishness.

Jaime Ceballos, from the time of his childhood, was meant to meet the neurotic needs and weaknesses of the members of his family. "Hijo postizo de Asunción pretexto para la autoridad patriarcal de Balcárcel, justificación--en aras de un destino superior que la madre hubiese entorpecido--para Rodolfo, el muchacho crecía rodeado de una interesada devoción y de una normatividad farisaica" (45). Balcárcel's life-style dominates the family structure and Jaime's

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personal growth. Threatened by the new masculine presence, Balcárcel induces a sense of guilt in Jaime. When Jaime rebels against his uncle and accuses him of turning Ezequiel Zuno over to the police, of allowing his mother (Adelina) to be thrown out, and of being a hypocrite (page 130), Balcárcel uses his strongest weapon against Jaime--the knowledge of the boy's autoeroticism: "Sé muy bien cuál es el origen de tu actitud. Eres un joven impuro ... " (130); "Tú has mancillado el cuerpo de Cristo; has ido a comulgar sin confesarte antes. Eres un joven cobarde y un sacrílego" (131). Jaime's father Rodolfo, an incredibly weak person, loves his son but is totally incapable of contradicting Balcárcel (who sees him as a bad example) nor the twisted Asunción (who cannot share Jaime). Rodolfo also sees Jaime as a means to fulfill his own needs: he hopes his son will be a support to him in his sickness and old age.

Since Adelina, Jaime's natural mother, was driven from the Ceballos' household when he was but a babe, Asunción became the mother figure. She fulfills this role with a great deal of protectiveness and, apparently, the boy grows to the age of eleven without much happening. "Había crecido, rubio, obediente, indiferenciado, en el seno cálido de una familia unida por el recuerdo de los antepasados y distanciada por los rencores que

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el apego a las apariencias silenciaba" (53). Once Jaime reaches the age of thirteen, Asunción fails to notice the change in her nephew since she wishes to possess him as a child. "¡Que nunca crezca, Dios mío!" When she notices that he is becoming a young man she adds to the boy's confusion with her veiled sexual advances. "El joven se sentía confundido ... hacia la mujer que tenía que solicitar, de esta manera, un poco del amor que ningún hombre le había dado" (108).

Utterly alone in his desire to find a stabilizing force for his life and surrounded by emotionally confused relatives, Jaime reaffirms his desire to lead a Christ-like life. First, he denies the validity of the Catholic Church as an intercessor and mediator. He affirms a one-to-one relationship to Christ and eliminates all the social implications that Christianity might have. In a second attempt to follow Christ, Jaime takes upon his shoulders the suffering and guilt of others. He chooses to atone for his family's sins against Ezequiel and Adelina (symbols of the poor sinners Christ came to save) by flagellation. His choice is determined by the shame felt concerning his sexual appetites, and by the feeling that he, too, is guilty for his family's sins (page 134). Both attempts to follow Christ in solitude fail. Jaime's downfall finally comes when he is unable to offer Christian love to

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his mother and father. Shame prevents him from going to his mother (an Evangelist who preaches in the bars of Irapuato) and vengeance prevents him from forgiving his father for his weakness.

On the death of his father, he momentarily regrets his lack of compassion. But with the burial, the object of his guilt is removed and he no longer is plagued by the presence of his rejected father.

" ... Jaime no podía contener la amarga alegría que le inundaba el pecho. Como no podía comprender el sentimiento de liberación que le asaltaba a medida que los restos de su padre iban desapareciendo ... "

(168). Jaime's conscience--his bad conscience--catches up with him and speaks to him in the incriminating voices of Juan Manuel Lorenzo and Padre Obregón.

The former openly accuses him of being ashamed of Adelina, his own mother. Jaime responds: "--¡Yo no me avergoncé!"; Juan Manuel replies: "--Tú también . . . te avergonzaste . . . igual que tu padre . . . y

tus tíos" (170). The second blow comes from Padre

Obregón who finds out from his father Rodolfo, on his deathbed, that Jaime denies him forgiveness to the end. In words that sound very much like those of Balcárcel's last tongue-lashing, Obregón says: "Lo condenaste a morir en el dolor y la desesperación. Eres un cobarde, ¿me entiendes?, un cobarde, y has pecado

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Eres un fariseo más" (177).

Accused on all sides of being another hypocrite, Jaime clings desperately to his new-found manhood. On the day of his father's funeral he seeks out, ironically enough, the same prostitute his father frequented for years. His visit to the brothel has provided him a weapon against the uncle's authority. Seeing his uncle in a ridiculous posture, dancing on the table among prostitutes, made the rules of the game transparent. The hypocrite is more than aware of his compromise with the truth; his actions are all aimed at personal comfort and tranquility, no matter the cost.

Guaranteed his uncle's support and no longer intimidated by his authority, Jaime is faced with his final decision. He holds his final conversation with the Christ of his adolescence and confesses his inability to act as a true Christian. "--Señor, te digo en secreto que no tendré el valor de descender hasta ella; te confieso que su mundo me llena de horror, que no sabría de qué hablarle, que no aguantaría esas palabras de ella, ni la suciedad, ni la mala educación, ni las habladurías de toda esta gente que está aquí ... " (180). Yet he finds it difficult to opt once and

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His vacillation ends abruptly as, picturing himself an adult completely dedicated to the ideals of Christianity and living a life of sacrifice for others, he realizes the utter loneliness such a choice would entail. In a final renunciation of the ideals of his adolescence, Jaime begs a new God for peace. Having proved to himself, in spite of his youthful aspirations, his incapacity to be a Christian and without any support in that direction from his family or the Church, Jaime decides to study law as his uncle had wished. His final decision is to join the establishment. He confesses to Juan Manuel, in spite of the latter's warning that he will only find loneliness there: "No he tenido el valor. No he podido ser lo que quería. No he podido ser un cristiano. No puedo quedarme solo con mi fracaso; no lo aguantaría; tengo que apoyarme en algo. No tengo más apoyo que esto: mis tíos, la vida que me prepararon, la vida que heredé de todos mis antepasados. Me someto ... para no caer en la desesperación" (190).

Structural Imperfection of Las buenas conciencias
and Related Problems

Most immediately obvious as a structural flaw
in Las buenas conciencias is the shift of point of

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view that takes place, inexplicably, between the prologue and the first chapter. The italicized prologue sets the novel up as a flashback on Jaime's part. That is, the reader is lead to expect the omniscient narration of Jaime's reminiscences as he stands and watches his friend Juan Manuel walk away. "Recargado contra el muro azul del callejón, veía alejarse a su amigo Juan Manuel. ... Recordaría. Repetiría los nombres, las historias. La casa, húmeda y sombría. ... El hogar donde quiso ser cristiano. La casa y la familia. Guanajuato. Repetiría los nombres, las historias" (9). This passage in conjunction with the use of the conditional tense leads the reader to expect a narration in flashback from within the character's consciousness. This is further reinforced in the prólogo which takes place at the same time and place as the epílogo. However, the first paragraph of chapter one belies this introduction as the author interrupts with his first comment, touristic and irrelevant to Jaime's history. "La gran casa de cantera, ... a unos metros de la hermosa plazuela a la que dan fama, año con año, las representaciones ... de los entremeses de Cervantes" (11). Though Fuentes returns to Jaime's reminiscences briefly at the end of the first chapter (" ... ciertos objetos del bodegón se aíslan en la memoria de Jaime" [page 13]), he departs more and more from the originally implied structure.

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Chapter two begins with the first of Fuentes' exposés on various subjects. In this case he elaborates on the character of the Guanajuatan in comparison to citizens of other Mexican states.

Guanajuato es a México lo que Flandes a Europa: el cogollo, la esencia de un estilo, la castidad exacta. ... La malicia de la concepción y la finura de la ejecución llevan un estilo originalmente guanajuatense; nadie, como sus hombres, conoce mejor las tácticas de la legalidad aparente para encubrir la voluntad decisiva; nadie, el valor de los procedimientos formales y de la maniobra de cámara. ... Así, el guanajuatense es un mocho calificado. ... Lo que en el poblano es hipocresía abierta, en el guanajuatense es insinuación talentosa. (14-15)

Here we have the author's first personal and direct criticism of the provincial society, irrelevant to plot development and characterization.

From a description of the Ceballos family mansion the author turns, in chapters two and three, to a detailed treatment not only of Guanajuato but also of the Ceballos family history. Further significant mention of the protagonist, Jaime Ceballos, is postponed until the latter part of the third chapter.

The author's intention seems to be to set the main character's geographical and historical circumstances before delving further into Jaime's own story. All this is done outside the limits of Jaime's range of knowledge and so breaks with the anticipated flash-back structure as set up in the prologue. Thus the second and third chapters, for the most part, are extraneous

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to the main focus of interest in Las buenas conciencias. Theoretically, it is sound to supply the reader with historical background for a character insofar as it sheds light on his actions. However, Fuentes' treatment of Jaime's history is burdensome and tangential, beginning as it does with the Ceballos family's arrival in Guanajuato from Madrid in 1852 when the humble basis for the family fortune was established. It follows step by step the family's ever-increasing financial prosperity and snobbishness, its Mexicanization as well as the trends in Mexican politics. All this is done almost entirely through exposition. The ponderous body of information presented to the reader is impossible to assimilate and thus much is lost to sheer quantity of detail. Indeed, the entire first three chapters with only one exception--a dialogue between Asunción and Rodolfo--reads more like the rapid sketch of a novel than the finished product.

Further breaking the illusion that the novel is filtered through the protagonist's consciousness is the derogatory picture of the Ceballos family. Such prejudice could hardly be attributed to Jaime; indeed it is the prejudice of Carlos Fuentes coming through: "Los Ceballos se hacían mexicanos: desde que Guillermina entró al cuadro, éste comenzó a parecerse a alguno de Hermenegildo Bustos. Fuera flores y escotes; adentro

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Disregarding the prologue and the narrative structure it sets up, the rest of the novel can be considered traditionally narrated by an omniscient author who chooses to interject his personal thoughts into the fabric of the story.²

Characterization

The author's ethical position is very obvious in the treatment of characters. There is little depth of characterization; his personages are stereotyped, flat, and manipulated at the author's whim. Even in their deaths they seem at the author's disposal. Fuentes appears to have a penchant for having his characters die on historic dates (pages 22 and 24). Though the deaths of characters on historical dates links the family history to that of the nation, it makes for flat, barely believable characters, puppet-like in their lack of freedom.

Jorge Balcárcel del Moral emerges as the most dehumanized character in the book. He is not credible precisely because Fuentes almost completely divests him of any human dimension. Before hearing him speak, we are even told how he speaks (pages 42 and 45). Balcárcel's characterization through expository prose

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is typical in Las buenas conciencias. Very little is revealed directly and practically nothing is left for the reader to discover himself. Explaining that Balcárcel had the opportunity to hold a seat in the National Legislature, the author states: "Diputado fue ... y aunque su gestión no fue memorable--o quizá, justamente, por esta razón--fue convocado a la Diputación Federal" (39-40).

Asunción, though characterized less negatively than her husband Balcárcel, nonetheless lacks a sense of development as a fictional entity. The reader already has the impression that she is a cold, heartless woman before the roots of her behavior are revealed. Asunción's psychology has rich possibilities, yet the author ignores a potentially interesting character and an equally fertile situation, devoting only a few lines to its exposition:

... Asunción se dio cuenta de la situación matrimonial de su hermano. Urdió, entre sueños y luces obsesivas, casi en la inconciencia, su proyecto. Instó a Rodolfo a tener familia Cuando Adelina le comunicó en secreto que estaba embarazada, hizo la vida imposible a la cuñada, hasta correrla. Obtuvo, en fin, que el niño fuese llevado a vivir a la casa de los antepasados: mil pesos en manos de don Chepepón y el muchacho fue sustraído del lado de su madre. (43-44)

Though these events lie within the realm of possibility, *in* order for the reader to completely accept them he *must* be convinced of the supporting psychology of

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It has already been shown that Fuentes is apparently more concerned with rendering judgment on the lives of his characters than allowing them to take on an existence of their own. While this involvement takes the form of negative reactions and, hence, negative value judgements about such characters as Asunción and Balcárcel, for others he shows a degree of affinity. Juan Manuel is the most favored of all. The image of him reveals a different attitude, one of interest for the character, one that is open to the character's own dimensions. " ... era un muchacho indígena de pequeña estatura y movimientos pausados. Sus ojos profundos y límpidos se abrían con cierto asombro, como si descubriesen por primera vez todas las cosas" (109). Fuentes' portrayal of Juan Manuel is idealistic; his sympathy and interest for this character is distracting from the focus on Jaime.

In the same vein, the priest Obregón is handled at first by Fuentes as a human, warm individual. The focus on details--his gondola-like shoes, his unwashed smell, the odor of nicotine on his breath, his reaching for matches underneath his robe--makes for an interesting character of dimensions often lacking in the secondary characters. Whereas Blacárcel is inclined to be all lack, Juan Manuel all white, and Rodolfo all grey,

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Obregón shows very convincing human variations. Scolding Jaime for his pride in wanting to imitate Christ, the priest suddenly intuits that Jaime might be sincere in his flagellation as penance. Without hesitating, he cries, "¡Ruega por mí!" (153), sensing that Jaime might be a chosen one. This rings true, though perhaps a bit dramatic. It is at least an attempt at sincerity. After this seemingly careful build-up of a sincere authentic character who has contributed to some of the more convincing scenes in the novel, Fuentes, for no apparent reason, destroys his personality in one stroke. Suddenly, the slightly unkempt priest, whose understanding made him especially popular with the young people, becomes a self-satisfied, hypocritical, complacent clergyman. These are the conclusions the priest reaches after the brow-beating he gave Jaime: " ... al sentarse a cenar, el chocolate caliente le convenció de que había hablado bien, muy bien. . . Nunca había tenido oportunidad de hablar así, de demostrar que sus estudios en el Seminario no habían sido en balde. Muy bien, muy bien . . . " (179-80).

Fuentes' presence becomes particularly obtrusive and problematic when he fails to distinguish clearly between his own comments and the thoughts and feelings of his characters. This is due to the author's direct intervention in the narrative. An example of this is the following portion taken from the burial scene.

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Even with the punctuation denoting dialogue, it is impossible to determine exactly where Jaime's thoughts begin. "El comerciante gordo había sido, a lo sumo, pretexto para algunos chismes olvidados. Nadie le había tendido la mano; menos que nadie su hijo --se dijo Jaime cuando recibió el último abrazo de condolencia" (168). This same imperceptible shift may occur within the same sentence as in this example, a "flashback within a flashback," taken from the last chapter:

Se dijo que era un muchachillo ridículo. Un niño pendejo, lo había llamado una vez Pepe Mateos, a la salida de la escuela, y él había permanecido allí, quieto, convulsionado, con los puños trémulos y abiertos y la cara roja, incapaz de contestarle, incapaz de arrojarle al rostro todo lo que traía adentro: el misterio de su adolescencia y de sus ideas. (183)

The last clause could be attributed only to the author. This imprecise narrative focus can be crucial in that it may cause confusion about the nature of a character. The reader needs to know exactly the character's range of awareness. The author must be clear as to whether the statement reflects the character's own thinking or whether it is an observation on his part. Otherwise, ambiguity can be an obstacle to total comprehension of that character. Such ambiguity occurs in Asunción's scene of hysteria when she is reaching out for her husband's support and affection. "Lo abrazó sin lograr que callase lo abrazó como hubiese

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querido abrazar a Jaime, y acercó las manos al sexo viejo del marido, luchando contra la esterilidad infamante, tratando de exprimírle los jugos de la vida" (141). It is not at all clear whether Asunción herself is conscious that she is embracing Balcárcel "as she would have liked to embrace Jaime" nor does the reader know whether this is unconscious wishing on her part or an insight proffered by the omniscient author. Clarity here is crucial not only to characterization but also for an understanding of the plot.

Equally important to clear character development are speech patterns and vocabulary appropriate to the level of the character's understanding. The author's interference is too apparent in cases where his creations speak or think out of character. At one particularly crucial point in Jaime's life--his first experience of masturbation--he is in the stable remembering all the things he has seen. The stark description of the episode clashes with the Weltanschauung of a sheltered thirteen-year-old boy. It is particularly damaging here where a close adherence to the boy's inner thoughts and impressions would have been very effective.

Huele rancio el lugar, pero la nariz del muchacho está llena del olor de sudores de caballo, de excremento de caballo, de calor de sexo de caballo cuando se acerca a la grupa quieta y al culo rojo de la mula. ... Y las manos apretadas de Jaime ... pueden tocar ... las nalgas levantadas de la placera, las tetas recién nacidas de las muchachas ... (64)

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Fuentes is particularly involved in Jaime's moral crisis. There are countless examples where he launches into a lecture, a summary or an embellishment of Jaime's situation. After the boy's discovery of Christ on Good Friday, Fuentes begins describing Jaime's feelings about his identity. He then brusquely reverts to a summary of Jaime's life and a recapping of the Ceballos family history.

Sabría más tarde que allí, frente a ese Dios victimado, sintió por primera vez que era otro y nuevo. Había crecido, rubio, obediente, indiferenciado, en el seno cálido de una familia unida por el recuerdo de los antepasados y distanciada por los rencores que el apego a las apariencias silenciaba. ... ¡Cuántas veces, durante las comidas familiares, se invocó la prudencia de doña Guillermina, la energía y bondad paternas de Pepe Ceballos! (53)

The cumulative effect of these interruptions that wind up taking over the narrative flow and never return to the point of departure is of a rambling, poorly constructed piece of writing.

The three heavily detailed chapters of family, city and national history that preface Las buenas conciencias are apparently not sufficient to set the scene for Jaime's appearance.³ Or so it would seem; the author cannot refrain from interrupting to add details as if he had forgotten to include them in these introductory chapters. For instance, Jaime has just returned, cut and bleeding, from lacerating

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himself. Balcárcel has admitted ignorance for the first time saying, "--No entiendo a este muchacho" (138). This is a dramatic point in the novel. Inexplicably, Fuentes drops the tension and rambles from a description of the master bedroom to a historical summary, to a treatise on the reason the Ceballos wear the clothes they wear.

La recámara de los tíos guardaba siempre ... un olor añejo y enclaustrado. ... Pues ésta había sido la recámara de los abuelos españoles que en ella se amaron con ternura y gracia; después la de Pepe Ceballos y su rígida mujer; después, brevemente, la de la incompreensión entre Rodolfo y Adelina. El ropero de caoba guardó las prendas de todo un siglo El vestuario ya se había estabilizado: los Balcárcel usaban, más o menos y para siempre, la ropa de los años de 1930. ... ¿Afán conservador? Más bien, callada nostalgia de juventud. (138-39)

This irrelevant digression only serves to destroy what background had been built up; one wonders why it was included at all. There is an overall tendency in Las buenas conciencias for flattening of dramatic effect through the editorializing presence of the author. At times it seems the novel is an excuse for the author's expression of private opinions, insights and experiences.⁴

Contemporary Narrative Techniques

Though, for the most part, Fuentes abandons the narrative innovations and psychological-literary techniques so abundant in La región más transparente,

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there are in Las buenas conciencias isolated examples of indirect interior monologue and the "interior dialogue."

In the bathtub scene depicting Jaime getting ready for Holy Saturday celebrations, Fuentes deftly uses a temporal device. By projecting the action into the future by means of the imperfect tense, he effectively recreates the mental images of the adolescent.

... continuó enjabonándose y pensando en el día de la celebración. Ya los cohetes tronaban y los muchachos corrían con toritos y mojigangas en alto. Ya tañían a gloria todas las torres de Guanajuato. Ya asomaban la nariz roja y el bigote de carbón de los Judas. Ya caminaban todos por el atrio. Su padre, su tía, él. Ya se unían a ellos todos los hombres y mujeres que venían a festejar la Resurrección. Ya se hincaban frente a los confesionarios. Ya recibían las hostias. Ya levantaba el coro su aleluya pascual. ... Ya salían a paso lento y apretado. Ya sentía los cuerpos muy cerca del suyo, con sus tactos y olores propios muy cerca de los suyos. El jabón resbaló y Jaime, al buscarlo, encontró una rodilla dura ... (56)

Also in Las buenas conciencias there is the rare use of direct interior monologue. As Jaime walks back from the church, his thoughts are recorded.

"('Debo ser otro distinto. Me ha de haber cambiado la cara. Ya no he de mirar igual. A ver cómo me miran en la cena los de la casa. ¿A poco ya soy hombre? Pero todos los de la escuela son de mi edad y se ven igual que antes. Puede que no se note nada') ... " (67).

This technique is carried one step further in the scene in which Asunción and Balcárcel, after the

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former's hysterical outburst, carry on simultaneous direct interior monologues denoted by the author with parentheses and the Spanish equivalent of quotation marks--hyphens. The result is a silent "conversation" between the two which point up their inability to communicate. Neither hears the other's complaints; each follows his own line of thought without taking into account the other's needs.

(--Abrazame.)
 (--¿Por qué han sucedido estas cosas desagradables, Dios mío? Yo soy un hombre bueno. ...)
 (--Abrazame.)
 (--No he trabajado por mí, sino por el muchacho. Algunos botarates infelices pueden criticarme porque he sido severo y exacto en mis préstamos. Detesto la prodigalidad; tengo la conciencia tranquila. ... ¿Por qué pienso estas cosas? ...)
 (--Nada te cuesta abrazarme. Mañana estaré tranquila.) (142-43)⁵

This is a much more effective way of revealing the inner workings of a character than simple exposition. Asunción's plaintive "abrazame" and the fact that she is not able to verbalize it to her husband reveals more about her than if the author were to explain: "Asunción was sexually frustrated and her education prevented her from speaking of such things."

A Narrative Collage: Chapter V

Throughout Las buenas conciencias, Fuentes' Presence is much too obvious as he lectures, gives Opinions, manipulates the characters. This is quite the opposite of what occurs in La región más transparente

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in which the author's voice is unidentifiable and indeed almost nonexistent. Las buenas conciencias, however, shows its relationship with La región más transparente in one major segment. Chapter five, a carry-over in its vocal collage technique from La región más transparente, is a good example of effective presentation of a whole way of life. What is most important is that the author is tactfully unobtrusive. The voices of Guanajuato and Jaime's world are heard; not once does Fuentes sermonize and very seldom does he break the continuity of narration or intrude into the character's delineation.

This chapter consists of five parts of varying lengths in which Jaime's view of his society is conveyed. Also society's impact on him is directly presented for the first time. At the same time, Fuentes evokes Jaime's increased confusion and conflict with the society. The chapter in its totality gives a comprehensive impression of Jaime's dilemma, his society and his place in it from various points of view. This is accomplished through the use of perspectivism. The author presents the reader with snatches of conversation and glimpses of seemingly unrelated events in the protagonist's life.

In the first part we hear the voices of nine people, all from the upper class, who give their opinions about Jaime. " ... las voces de los que dicen cosas

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sobre uno, de los que se sienten responsables del futuro de uno, de los que indican el buen camino: sacerdotes que toman el chocolate con doña Asunción, señoras tiesas que van de visita a la casa, señoritas de mirada púdica que ya son Hijas de María, políticos y hombres de negocios que almuerzan con el tío Balcárcel"

(79). These opinions are combined in a sort of verbal collage in a lengthy paragraph in which each voice is heard briefly and separated from the next by the dialogue hyphen.

... -- ... Le pido su consorcio revolucionario para formar el frente de la juventud. Tráigame a su sobrino, que él también ha de ser un cachorro de la Revolución, y no es nomás un decir. --Nos reuniremos en casa el día de la Santa Cruz. Ya mandé imprimir los rezos. Lleva al niño; también se admiten jovencitos de buena familia. (81)

From this emerges a vivid picture of the people and the social pressures surrounding Jaime, which will eventually determine his career.

The fourth section of Chapter five is also constituted by these "voces," in this case those of Asunción's Thursday sewing circle. A very effective piece in the mosaic of Guanajuatan society, this is among the longest uninterrupted dialogues in the novel. The topics of conversation range from the cost of servants to the necessity of solidarity among the "decent families." In an introduction to this part the reader is informed of the favorite gossip.

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El destino ajeno es tema preferido de las tertulias provincianas. Si trata de un destino sobre el que es dable influir, el interés se duplica. Si el destino influible es el de un adolescente, el interés se convierte en deber. Y si el adolescente es de inclinación rebelde, el deber amenaza con asumir las proporciones de la cruzada. Las familias se conocen; se han conocido durante varias generaciones. (87)

Completing the picture of Jaime in his setting are two sections directly involving him and sandwiched between the aforementioned voice collages. In the second part of Chapter five Jaime learns to apply quotations from the Bible to his own personal situation. This is interestingly demonstrated in a counterpoint presentation of the biblical encantations at the evening rosary in the Balcárcel-Ceballos household and the passages running through Jaime's mind.

Y mientras las voces repetían una y otra vez las palabras aprendidas--"llena eres de gracia, el Señor es contigo", "y libranos de todo mal"--, o el rezo especial de una festividad de calendario--"apárte Satanás, que de mí nada tendrás", "mira que te has de morir, mira que no sabes cuándo"--, o el himno de las procesiones --"amparádme y llevadme a la corte celestial"--, el joven, arrodillado, siempre cerca de las cortinas donde temblaban las sombras del candelabro, luchaba con palabras distintas al sonsonete del rosario: "¡Ay de vosotros, fariseos, que cerráis a los hombres el reino de los cielos! Ni entráis vosotros ni permitís entrar a los que querían entrar." (85)

This is tied in with the first and fourth sections as *the* guests reiterate some of the same ideas heard when *they* expressed their opinions concerning Jaime. "Terminaba el rosario. La señorita Pascualina hablaba de

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una pareja a la que había encontrado besándose en un callejón. El padre Lanzagorta se congratulaba de que aún hubiese unas cuantas familias capaces de dar el buen ejemplo" (86).

In the third section Fuentes records, conventionally, Jaime's confession with Father Lanzagorta. Whereas the previous section revealed Jaime's realization of the hypocrisy of his family, in his confession with the priest he begins to see how this hypocrisy will affect him. He speaks quite openly about his sexual desires: "--Quisiera una mujer, padre, le confieso eso también. Siempre la quisiera" (87), not realizing that the priest will act in behalf of the aunt and uncle. As the "best of Guanajuato," he caters to them by breaking the seal of confession. As a result, Jaime realizes the repercussions the pharisaical attitude of his class will have upon him. At the end of the supposedly confidential confession the priest announces: "Hablaré con tu tía Es como si hubiéramos estado platicando" (87).

The final section--Jaime's last conversation with his father--completes the picture of the kind of pressures this teenager feels. We have seen all the influential people of Guanajuato who, concerned about Jaime's future, reveal their opinions of what he ought to do and be. We have seen Jaime scrutinizing

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this society and becoming aware that it is comprised of people the Lord calls Pharisees. We have also seen his first realization that one's natural appetites must be curbed in order to conform with and win the approval of his society. In the final section of this amalgam of scenes from Jaime's adolescence, the author focuses on Jaime and his father as the boy confronts Rodolfo with the issues. This focussing is done artistically through the eyes of Asunción: " ... se asoma a uno de los balcones de la estancia y separa la cortina: Jaime y Rodolfo Ceballos salen de la casa y caminan hacia el centro de Guanajuato" (92). The reader views them from above, from Asunción's vantage point, then is brought down to their level to hear their conversation. Jaime, in the course of their talk, asks his father to explain the abandonment of his mother. Rodolfo, extremely upset, abruptly turns and leaves the boy in the street. The chapter ends as Jaime, alone in body and spirit, walks the streets of Guanajuato feeling all the pressures of adolescence. His conflicts and the depth of his emotions are readily accepted because the groundwork has been carefully laid within the chapter. "Lucha contra el rencor, el odio y la rebeldía. Lucha contra toda la vida provinciana, contra los chismes y las buenas intenciones y los sanos consejos, contra el cura Lanzagorta, contra el que entregó a Ezequiel

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Zuno, contra la señorita Pascualina, contra su padre, contra sí mismo. (94). The chapter ends on a dramatic note with Jaime's first overt act of rebellion: his decision not to confess. And it foreshadows the chapter to come with "Así puede pasar un año" (95).

Conclusion

Having pointed out the narrative shortcomings and accomplishments of Las buenas conciencias, it is necessary to reiterate that the failure of this novel is due to its poor execution, a failure to establish a clear narrative point of view. Fuentes intervenes too frequently to raise personal issues instead of incorporating them into the fabric of the work.

Because of the flagrant and biting criticism of the bourgeois society and especially the presence of Juan Manuel Lorenzo and Ezequiel Zuno who advocate solidarity among men, some critics have concluded that Las buenas conciencias is a Marxist novel. Thus, according to Selden Rodman: "Fuentes has written the classic Marxist novel."⁶ This generalization by Rodman could only be founded upon a series of passages taken out of the context of the novel. In a novel in which the author's voice is heard so loudly and distinguishably, it is difficult to understand how Rodman could mistake Juan Manuel's words for those of Carlos Fuentes. Rodman's conclusion that Jaime will not be able to isolate himself from social realities does not imply that Fuentes advocates



a revolution of the proletariat nor does it suggest historical determinism. It is more than clear that the ethical concern of Las buenas conciencias is best seen in Jaime's failure to pursue his ideals. It is a sad commentary on a society that provides no support for its idealistic youth.

There is a tendency to ignore that Fuentes, beyond his social criticism, offers no concrete social solutions. Other critics have concluded that, because of the author's affinity for Juan Manuel Lorenzo, the Indian student, Fuentes sides with the proletariat. Eunice Odio goes even further and sees (in what is sympathy toward a particular character) the concept of the infallibility of the proletariat and the idea that only mass action is valid.⁷ These misinterpretations arise from the particular prejudices of the critic.

Another critic whose personal convictions prevent a clear understanding of Las buenas conciencias is Raúl Chavarri. His political affinities are all too evident as he states that Carlos Fuentes has not wanted to commit himself to positive social reconstruction.⁸ The fact that Jaime decides to join the tranquil bourgeois order indicates to Chavarri that Fuentes is a historical determinist and a Marxist. His criticism of the ending is, in the final analysis, a lament of what he considers of a novel whose corruptive influence

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is due to the lack of a more positive solution. Here, again, he looks for a constructive way out as a good example for the youth of today. Chavarri's criticism is based upon his own social and political convictions which prevent his clear perception of the novel. Essentially he is asking that Fuentes write a novel which meets his personal expectations.

This is typical of the problems encountered when the merits of a work are judged not according to its internal ethical statements but rather by pitting the social statements taken out of context against the critic's personal code of ethics. Keeping in mind that the issue is not the validity of Fuentes' ethical stand but rather the implicit meaning of the novel in its totality, I consider that Las buenas conciencias is not a Marxist or Communist novel. The ultimate significance of the novel is that Jaime abandons the life of the true Christian because it proved impossible. He is aware that he is failing and that he is not realizing his potential when he joins the bourgeois society. In the dialogue with Christ, Jaime states that he couldn't live a Christian's life because it would be too lonely an endeavor.

This novel is the least successful of Fuentes' novels because the internal ethical issue--Jaime's attempt to lead a Christian life--is buried under a

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barrage of external considerations. Carlos Fuentes simply interrupts too often into the narrative flow in order to vent his personal feelings towards the Mexican bourgeoisie. The novel would have gained in stature and dignity had Fuentes sustained an internal narrative point of view which would have allowed Jaime Ceballos to confront the issues without outside help.

NOTES

¹ Carlos Fuentes, Las buenas conciencias (México, October 1959), p. 52. Further references to this book will be followed by the page number.

² The critics in their reviews are wont to refer to this novel as Galdosian or Jamesian in structure and style: Robert G. Mead Jr., "Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's Angry Novelist," Books Abroad, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Autumn, 1964), 380-82. In general such critics indulge in a bit of name-dropping which, more than elucidating the nature of the novel, misleads. The lack of coherence between ambiente and characterization disowns its parentage with Galdos' works. A Jamesian novel, as I understand it, dramatizes "the picture of a character's experience through the consciousness of the character himself." Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York, 1932), p. 7. Certainly all the evidence set forth in this thesis contradicts this definition of a Jamesian novel.

³ Mead refers to these three chapters as a "thumbnail history of the whole Ceballos family" ("Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's Angry Novelist," page 382). Certainly thirty-two pages of detailed historical background can hardly be called a "thumbnail history." The general evaluation Mead gives this work couldn't possibly contrast any more with the evaluation offered in this chapter. "With brief, deft and felicitous strokes Fuentes creates a number of authentic primary and secondary characters whose lives form a convincing background upon which is projected the coming-of-age of the protagonist Jaime Ceballos" (page 381).

⁴ Saul Maloff, "Growing Pains of a Bourgeoisie," Saturday Review (Dec. 16, 1961), 20-21. "The trouble is that the book cannot support its superb possibilities, failing as it does to seize the dramatic moments and establish a clear dramatic line, being as it is, excessively panoramic and expository" (page 21).

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5 The use of the direct interior monologue employed to convey a "silent" conversation first appeared as a stream-of-consciousness technique in La región más transparente, pages 195-98. The cab driver Beto and the prostitute Gladys García are the interlocutors.

6 Selden Rodman, "Revolution isn't Enough," The New York Times (Nov. 12, 1961), Sec. VII, 4.

7 Eunice Odio, "Carlos Fuentes: Las buenas conciencias," Cuadernos del Congreso, No. 44 (sept-oct., 1960), 121-22. "A la par de la idea mítica de la infalibilidad del proletariado, expresada por Fuentes con el binomio bondad-pobreza, existe la otra complementaria: sólo la acción de la masa es valiosa. Comentar semejante romanticismo pueril sería puerilidad mayor y consciente." This interpretation is based on a single conversation between Jaime and Juan Manuel. A great deal of extrapolation has taken place between Juan Manuel's statement and Odio's conclusion. This critic, in reviewing Las buenas conciencias, states: "En vez de hacer actuar, pensar y sentir a sus criaturas, este autor, por una parte nos cuenta cómo son y, por la otra, las hace hablar, hablar y hablar." It seems that just the opposite can be validly held. The characters themselves have so little to say, Fuentes upstaging them in his need to speak directly to the reader.

8 Raúl Chavarri, "Notas para el descubrimiento de una novela," Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, número 180 (diciembre, 1964), 526-31).

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CHAPTER III
LA MUERTE DE ARTEMIO CRUZ

Con tres heridas yo:
la de la vida,
la de la muerte,
la del amor.

(M. Hernández)

In our previous statements about La región más transparente and Las buenas conciencias, the concern was to assess the balance, or lack of balance, between the thematic and formal aspects of the work. The failure of the first novel to achieve equilibrium is basically due to its lack of coherence and unity. The multiple points of view are not pulled together by a unifying conceptual theme. The absence of a believable central character who could have stamped his personality, and therefore his unity, on the work is also apparent. On the other hand, Las buenas conciencias fails for very different reasons. In this work Fuentes continually shatters the narrative point of view established at the onset of the novel in order to deliver his personal indictments on a variety of topics often

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irrelevant to the thematic context of the main plot:

Jaime's ethical dilemma and ultimate fate.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz is the work of a creative artist come into his own. This novel is noteworthy for its equilibrium of artistic form and ethical concern. The necessities, aesthetic as well as ethical, are resolved by a creative use of point of view, which gives the narrative a most unusual structure. La muerte de Artemio Cruz not only narrates the life of an individual, but also the historical life of an entire nation and ultimately the life of universal man. This intricate relationship is established by means of a narrative structure which utilizes three distinct narrative voices: the yo of the concrete human being dying in the present time; the él of the historical man of the past as defined by his actions; and the tú, relating the other two voices with universal man and the cosmos.

The internal mechanism which unites the complex interplay of these three different points of view and imparts movement is the inner conscience and memory of the dying man; an awareness of what he is now (the yo in the present); an awareness of what he was (the él in the past); an awareness of what he could have been (the tú, which is future movement). This constant call to awareness is the active force within the novel

which drives the protagonist to realize he is free.

Freedom, existential in nature, can exist only within the limits of time and space. In Artemio Cruz's case, this is Mexico from the early years of the Mexican Revolution to the present. It is to Carlos Fuentes' credit that the history of Mexico and the life of Artemio Cruz are complementary. As a result, La muerte de Artemio Cruz is a novel of the Mexican Revolution. That is, Fuentes presents an image as well as an interpretation of those events.

The use of the tú form creates a field of references new to the dimensions of the novel. This direct address narrative voice has the power to create an ever-increasing range of meaning and relationships. Its resonance, as it addresses the dying Cruz, reaches beyond the confines of the sick-room to encompass the death of all men. It is through its use that Fuentes amalgamates a mythological dimension to the unique, particular and personal existence of one man, Artemio Cruz. This is accomplished by the incorporation of two basic techniques. One, Fuentes borrows from Greco-Roman mythology to delineate the identity of his protagonist; two, he places the protagonist's actions within the framework of archetypal patterns and motifs. This ability to universalize the life of an individual through the use of myths is one of the

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most salient qualities of this novel. In comparison, its use in La región más transparente pales.

One of the encompassing images to emerge from the use of mythology is that of the conqueror, the aggressor, the chingón. The creation of this archetypal man of violent action against others becomes an indictment not only of the Mexican but also of universal man. This indictment is accomplished entirely within the fabric of the novel and does not impair its worth. On the contrary, it is an inseparable part of the form and style. In this work the author accomplishes equilibrium between ethical concern and literary worth.¹

Form as Meaning: The Structure of the Novel

The most apparent novelistic virtue in La muerte de Artemio Cruz is its tri-partite structure. As we have noted, in this work Fuentes presents three distinct but related narrative voices. First of all there is a first person presentation (yo), followed by a voice of direct address (tú), and finally the third person (él) form. These three narrative modes are employed following this order (yo, tú, él) on twelve occasions, which for all practical purposes can be referred to as chapters. Thus, the first chapter is made up of material proffered by the yo, commented by the tú and illustrated by the él. All three modes are within the range of the omniscient narrator but

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encompass different planes of temporal and spatial reality.

Artemio Cruz, the seventy-one-year-old protagonist lying on his deathbed, speaks in the first person and expresses various levels of awareness of his immediate surroundings, his physical agonies, his partial memories and his desires. The time span covered is approximately one day, the last day of his life, April 19, 1959.² The range of the narrative focus is also limited to presenting only those events and recollections possible to the moribund. To cover both the interior as well as the exterior reality of the protagonist, the narrative techniques employed alternate between interior monologue and dialogue. In view of the limitations of range and the narrative modes employed, it is quite natural that the present tense dominates the verb usage.

The second person form (tú) of the three narrative voices is the broadest in scope and the most interesting and complex. The tú, like the other voices, is a mode of existence of the same person Cruz. The distinctive feature of this mode is that its discourse is directed towards the protagonist, so that it is ultimately another form of interior monologue: one dimension of the self speaks to another dimension of the self.³ Spatially and temporally, this narrative perspective

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has no limitations. It has the power to transcend both space and time, and in so doing relates the dying Cruz to universal man. This voice on occasion may narrate part of the plot, but its main function as super-consciousness is to provide poetic ethical commentary. The tenor of this voice shares some similarity to the encompassing chorus of the Greek theatre. The almost exclusive use of the conditional and future tenses adds a prophetic note to the novel, while at the same time imparting a sense of movement toward the future.⁴

The third-person narration, composed of twelve flashbacks, relates twelve specific days in the life of Artemio Cruz. These twelve sections are preceded by dates taken from Mexican history. The actions of a single man, Artemio Cruz, and historical man, the Mexican in general, are so aptly interwoven that the history of one is very much the history of the other. While its focus is broader than the yo form, it does not have the spatial or temporal expansiveness of the tú mode. The years from 1889 to 1959 mark the limits of its temporal scope, and the principal tense employed is the preterite.

The intricate texture established by these three perspectives through the treatment of time, association of ideas, imagery and theme is more enlightening than any attempt to analyze the three separately. The critics, on the whole, have been satisfied with an

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external analysis of the work and thus have neglected the task of putting this novel together from within. As a result, they have not captured the inner flow and dynamism of the work, nor have they fully understood the underlying existential beliefs that give meaning to the form of the novel.

Internally, the three modes of existence--the yo, the concrete human being; the man who was, él; the man that could have been, tú--are all forms of awareness for the protagonist, Artemio Cruz. The yo form is the central one since it is the origin and source of the other perspectives. It is within the psyche of the dying, semi-conscious Cruz that the three forms of awareness occur. Cruz, within the limits of one day (April 10, 1959) and the confines of his house in Las Lomas of Mexico City, is relentlessly pushed to recognize himself as "other" and, in so doing, to discover the "self" as freedom. Thus, Artemio Cruz, the suffering creature on his death-bed, begins a long journey into the darkness of his psyche, his history and his transcendence, in which the "other" emerges. In this revelation two aspects are important: Cruz, during his lifetime, ignores and refuses to recognize the "other" within himself and the "self" within others. This is why the tú calls his life una vida muerte, a life in which the choice of being

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other than what it became was denied. The other aspect is that the entire novel is a call to consciousness of the previous denial. The novel, then, is a call to awareness of a life of total unawareness.

The sense of the very first words of the novel "Yo despierto . . . " ⁵ is anaphorically echoed on almost every page of the yo form and begins every chapter. "Yo siento esa mano que me acaricia . . . " (28), "Yo siento que unas manos me toman de las axilas . . . " (55). In this manner, Cruz begins the voyage into self-awareness through the senses. Thus the yo as a central point initiates and relates through memories, usually triggered by sensations or images, the content of the third and second-person narrations. A good example of this technique is found in the first three chapters. The protagonist, in his anguished attempts to flee the dying and suffering self, searches for the "other of yesterday." "Artemio Cruz vivió. Vivió durante algunos años . . . Años no añoró: años no no. Vivió durante algunos días. Su gemelo Artemio Cruz. Su doble. Ayer Artemio Cruz, el que sólo vivió algunos días antes de morir, ayer Artemio Cruz . . . que soy yo . . . y es otro . . . ayer . . . " (12-13). Thus Artemio Cruz conjures up the mysterious, omniscient voice of the tú who brings before him the events that took place "yesterday," April 9, 1959. Like most of his days, it is filled with unscrupulous decisions,

all intended to keep his financial empire intact and to expand it. He bribes officials, newspaper editors and union leaders to quell and stifle any movements of political and social reform.

The first third-person narrative part dealing with 1941 is accomplished by the association of two events. The memory of "yesterday," the image of the imposing financial giant, and the imposition of Cruz's will upon the women who surround his death-bed.

Catalina, Teresa; ellas no acabarán de disimular ese sentimiento de engaño y violación, de desaprobación irritada, que por necesidad deberá transformarse, ahora, en apariencia de preocupación, afecto, dolor: la máscara de la solicitud será el primer signo de ese tránsito que tu enfermedad, tu aspecto, la decencia, la mirada ajena, la costumbre heredada, les impondrá: bostezarás: cerrarás los ojos: bostezarás: tú, Artemio Cruz, él: creerás en tus días con los ojos cerrados: (18)

Dominating this section, narrating the events that took place in 1941, is Artemio Cruz's victory over the North American investors who wished to use Cruz as a "front man." This event is recalled again within the presentation of the yo monologue of Chapter II in which Cruz states, "Recuerdo que salí a comer con Padilla, aquella tarde. Eso ya lo recordé. Les gané [the North Americans] a su propio juego" (32). The transition into the following tú section of the same chapter is seamless as the voice states,

Tú te sentirás satisfecho de imponerte a ellos; confiésalo: te impusiste para que te admitieran como su par: pocas veces te has sentido

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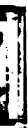
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más feliz, porque desde que empezaste ser lo que eres, desde que aprendiste a apreciar el tacto de las buenas telas, el gusto de los buenos licores, el olfato de las buenas lociones, todo eso que en los últimos años ha sido tu placer aislado y único, desde entonces has vivido con la nostalgia del error geográfico que no te permitió ser en todo parte de ellos: admiras su eficacia, sus comodidades, su higiene, su poder, su voluntad ... (32)

The image of the powerful capitalist becomes the pre-dominant one and unites the two chapters thematically. The yo is used as a point of departure for recollecting events in his life that are not given in chronological order, but tend, rather, towards a reverse order.

The third-person narrative tells of Artemio Cruz the veteran of the Revolution who, after the fighting has ceased, comes to Puebla equipped with both an iron will to survive and with the names of the father and sister of Gonzalo Bernal, a comrade who died in Perales. This chapter, although separated by 21 years from the previous chapter in the él form, and by forty years from the last day of his life (April 10, 1959), is deftly tied to them by establishing a relationship between the yo, the él and the tú in this second chapter. As stated before, Cruz remembers with relish his ability to subordinate the American investors to his own greed and enterprise; he also relishes the power that he has over Catalina, his wife, and Teresa, his daughter, even in his last moments of life.



Octavio Paz has pointed out that the aggressor, the tyrant-father who injures, insults and exploits, has his roots in the myth and reality of the Spanish conquistadores. Cortez is the arch-chingón, according to Paz.

Es imposible no advertir la semejanza que guarda la figura del "macho" con la del conquistador español. Ese es el modelo--más mítico que real--que rige las representaciones que el pueblo mexicano se ha hecho de los poderosos: caciques, señores feudales, hacendados, políticos, capitanes de industria. Todos ellos son "machos," "chingones."⁶

Fuentes draws on this image as he has the tú voice address the dying Cruz in the following way:

Alguien te tocará la mano, pero tú no responderás a esa ¿caricia, atención, angustia, cálculo? porque habrás creado la noche con tus ojos cerrados y desde el fondo de ese océano de tinta navegará hacia ti un bajel de piedra al que el sol del mediodía, caliente y soñoliento, alegrará en vano: murallas espesas y ennegrecidas, levantadas para defender a la Iglesia de los ataques de indios y, también, para unir la conquista religiosa a la conquista militar. Avanzará hacia tus ojos cerrados ... la tropa ruda, isabelina, española y tú atravesarás bajo el sol la ancha explanada con la cruz de piedra en el centro ... Avanzarás hacia la portada del primer barroco, castellano todavía, pero rico ya en columnas de vides profundas y claves aquilinas: la portada de la Conquista, severa y jocunda, con un pie en el mundo viejo, muerto, y otro en el mundo nuevo ... Avanzarás y penetrarás en la nave del bajel ... Caminarás, a la conquista de tu nuevo mundo, por la nave sin un espacio limpio ... crea la noche, hincha de viento el velamen negro, cierra los ojos Artemio Cruz ... (35-36)

Through these images--wrought within the darkness of Artemio's conscious mind--the tú voice associates the Spanish Conquerors and their churches, symbols

of their victory over the Aztecs and their gods, with Artemio Cruz, the conqueror of people, the super-capitalist. This imagery reaches fruition in the following section, narrated in the third person, as Cruz, the hero of the Revolution, enters a church in Puebla (in 1919) as the new conqueror about to claim a new domain:

Caminó, mirándose las puntas de los zapatos, por las viejas calles, trazadas como un tablero de ajedrez. Cuando dejó de escuchar el taconeó sobre los adoquines y los pies levantaron un polvo reseco y gris, dirigió la mirada hacia los muros almendrados del antiguo templo fortaleza. Cruzó la ancha explanada y entró a la nave silenciosa, larga y dorada. Nuevamente, las pisadas resonaron. Avanzó hacia el altar. (44-45)

With this example, which uses association through imagery, and the previous one, which associated the Artemio Cruz of ayer with that of 1941, it has been demonstrated that the yo perspective of the novel releases a series of narrative lines and plot connections that are subsequently picked up and elaborated by the tú form and the third-person él narration.

The use of fragmentary phrases, images or feelings scattered throughout the yo segments constitutes another device for unifying the multiple narrative perspectives. These cryptic fragments, occurring during the agonizing moments of the protagonist, only partially introduce the reader to important phases of his life. The central phrase, image or sensation becomes

more and more understandable as the novel progresses, and as the tú and él narratives elaborate and explain its full significance. Late in the novel, a whole body of meaning will have crystallized around each of the initially mysterious elements. An example of this process is the frequent mention of the smell of incense in the sick-room due to the priest's administering of the last sacrament to Artemio Cruz. As the novel unfolds, the reader comes to understand the full import of the protagonist's obsession with this particular odor through the discovery of its origin in the episode with Father Páez. Another instance involves the frequent repetition of the phrase, "Cruzamos el río," the meaning of which is clarified only in light of Cruz's relationship with his son, Lorenzo.

One of these sensory stimuli is the smell of incense, an image which grows in importance as the novel develops. It first occurs on pages nine and eleven, buried in a series of other images. The following passage includes a dialogue in which the dying man requests the windows be opened; this is followed by an interior monologue expressing his thoughts and feelings.

--Abran la ventana.

--No. no. Puedes resfriarte y complicarlo todo.

--Déjalo, mamá. ¿No ves que se está haciendo?

Ah. Huelo ese incienso. Ah. Los murmullos en la puerta. Llega con ese olor de incienso

y faldones negros, con el hisopo al frente,
a despedirme con todo el rigor de una
advertencia. Jé, cayeron en la trampa. (11)

The smell of incense is natural since the priest has been summoned to administer Extreme Unction. At this point the reader is not alerted to the fact that the odor has meaning beyond the limits of the immediate experience. The second mention of incense also comes as one of the many sense impressions received by the dying man. " ... hay alguien, hay otro que me ha clavado un acero en las entrañas: huelo ese incienso y estoy cansado" (12). Both of these examples occur in the yo part of the first chapter and are not easily noticed. The first hint that the odor of incense might be important does not occur until the tú section of Chapter V when the accusative voice states: "Tú olerás, en el fondo de tu dolor, ese incienso que no acaba de disiparse y sabrás, detrás de tus ojos cerrados, que las ventanas han sido cerradas también, que ya no respiras el aire fresco de la tarde: sólo el tufo del incienso ... " (121). At this point the odor of incense begins to impress the reader. Is the wish to dispell the smell of incense of the Last Sacrament a symbolic avoidance of death, or does this obsession with a particular odor have a history? This question is partially answered when the smell of an enclosed garden is associated with that of incense, both very subtly related to a day in Cruz's life in

which he failed to make two choices. " ... gritarás y los brazos te detendrán: querrás levantarte y caminar para calmar tu dolor: olerás el incienso, olerás el jardín cerrado, pensarás que no se puede escoger, que no se debe escoger, que aquel día no escogiste: dejaste hacer, no fuiste responsable ... " (122).

Although this reference only ambiguously situates the odor within the past, the reader is alerted that this particular experience is important. Accompanying this realization is a sense of suspense and expectation as the tú voice states: " ... el incienso será un olor con tiempo, un olor que se cuenta: el padre Páez vivirá en tu casa, será escondido en el sótano por Catalina: tú no tendrás la culpa, no tendrás la culpa ... " (123). With this, the barely perceptible narrative sequence dealing with the incense imagery becomes knotted with insinuations. This priest, Remigio Páez, has played a minor role up to this point as Don Gamaliel de Bernal's confessor in Puebla. As a member of a Church willing to accommodate herself to the new victors of the Revolution, he was in part responsible (more through acts of omission than of commission) for Artemio's take-over of Don Gamaliel's position. The full implications of Catalina's hiding the priest are carefully retained by the author. To a degree, he insinuates that Páez may be amorously involved with his wife Catalina. " ... sí, un hombre que puede hablar dolorosamente con

Dios un hombre que puede perdonar el pecado porque lo ha cometido, un sacerdote que tiene derecho a serlo porque su miseria humana le permite actuar la redención en su propio cuerpo antes de otorgarla a los demás ... tú rechazarás la culpa; tú no serás culpable de la moral que no creaste, que te encontraste hecha ... "

(124-25). The mystery implicit in the last two quotations revolves around Artemio Cruz's feelings of guilt about the episode involving Father Páez. The desire to exonerate himself from guilt by blaming a moral code he did not create is obvious.

Much of the ambiguity is resolved in the él part of Chapter V where the meaning of the incense clarifies the relationship between the priest and Catalina. On the morning of November 23, 1927, Cruz notices the smell of incense but chooses to ignore it on the pretext that he is rushed for time (page 128). Upon returning home that evening he intuits that something is amiss in the basement; as he begins to go down the steps to investigate, he encounters Catalina who says: "--¿Qué buscas aquí?, antes de corregirse y repetir con la voz pareja: --¡Ay qué susto! No te esperaba. Te juro que no te esperaba tan pronto--: pareja, sin burla y él sólo respiraba ese olor casi encarnado, ese olor con palabras, con sonsonete" (134). It is then that he turns on the

light in the wine cellar and discovers the priest who is attempting in vain to dispel the odor of incense (pages 134-135). This would seem to indicate that, as the strong odor implies, the priest was in fact performing a religious ceremony--such as the Mass--and that he and Catalina were not sexually involved. The priest feels condemned to death.

Sólo le quedaba este momento, pensó el sacerdote, para aceptar el destino, pero en este momento no había testigos. Ese hombre de ojos verdes pedía: le pedía a ella que pidiera, que se atreviera a pedir, que tentara el sí o el no del azar y ella no podía responder; ya no podía contestar. El cura imaginó que, otro día, al sacrificar esta posibilidad de responder o de pedir, ella había sacrificado desde entonces esta vida, la vida del sacerdote. (135)

The actual fate of Father Páez is left up in the air as the author jumps from the moment of his discovery in the basement to the following morning. Two events take place that begin to pull the plot together. The first is a telephone conversation, cryptic in nature, that takes place between Cruz, the diputado, and a police commandant, referred to only as el gordo. "--Bueno. --Ya lo tenemos en la comandancia, señor diputado. --¿Sí? --El señor Presidente está enterado" (136). The second event that sheds light on the meaning of these fragments takes place when Cruz steps outside to buy a newspaper.

Le compró el periódico a un voceador y trató de leerlo mientras manejaba, pero sólo pudo echar un vistazo a los encabezados que hablaban del fusilamiento de los que atentaron contra la vida del otro caudillo, el candidato. El

lo recordó en los grandes momentos, en la campaña contra Villa, en la presidencia, cuando todos le juraron lealtad y miró esa foto del Padre Pro, con los brazos abiertos, recibiendo la descarga. (136)

With this last ingredient the reader, aware of the historical moment, has everything necessary to understand the abiding sense of guilt on Cruz's part regarding the events of November 23, 1927. The year 1927 is the high point in the reactionary Catholic movement that had been violently fighting the Calles regime. A few days before November 23, an attempt had been made on the life of the candidate opposing Calles, Alvaro Obregón. The Jesuit priests, Miguel Agustín Pro and his brother, Roberto Pro, had been accused of the attempted assassination; on the twenty-third they and a few others, Father Páez among them, fell before the firing squad. The implications are that Remigio Páez was illegally saying Mass, dispensing the sacraments and wearing his habit; his violation of the federal law prohibiting these practices (passed in retaliation for the murders of federal school teachers in Jalisco) was the justification for his execution. In actuality, Páez was used by Artemio Cruz who turned him over to the government in order to win favor with the anti-Catholic Calles. The latter was in the process of manipulating his own re-election, contrary to the Constitution; Cruz's delivering up of Páez was, in fact, a political maneuver which affirmed his loyalty

to Calles in opposition to his old revolutionary leader, Obregón. This act does not go unrewarded. " ... el gordo le preguntó si deseaba algo y él le habló de algunos terrenos baldíos en las afueras de la ciudad, que no valían gran cosa hoy pero que con el tiempo se podrían fraccionar y el otro prometió arreglar el asunto porque después de todo ya eran cuates ... " (138). With the clarification of Cruz's relationship with Father Páez, and especially of the guilt he carries with him to his death, his obsession with incense is fully explained. Thus, the mention by the tú voice of the symbolic dispelling of its odor in reference to an event twenty years later (September 11, 1947) reaches the reader in all its meaning: " ... apartarás las cortinas para que entre esa brisa temprana: ah, cómo te llenará, ah, te hará olvidar ese olor de incienso, ese olor que te persigue, ah, cómo te limpiará ... " (147). Much later in the novel, the last mention of these events is no longer made in a direct reference to the incense, but to the priest himself; a confession is made of the people who had died so that Cruz might survive and become what he became: " ... les dejaré el testamento . . . les legaré esos nombres muertos . . . Regina . . . Tobías . . . Páez . . . Gonzalo . . . Zagal . . . Laura, Laura . . . Lorenzo . . . " (271).

Thus, in the Páez episode just a few phrases

and images carry the tenuous plot line until a point of revelation is reached leading to a fullness of meaning. This process is similar to the method of association used in the first two chapters in which the image of the Conqueror links the day before Cruz's death, the 1941 incident and his entrance into Puebla in 1915; in this case the image becomes clearer and clearer from chapter section to chapter section. There is, however, one strong distinction between the type of associative process used in the chapters relative to the Conqueror image and that used in the Páez episode. In the former case, the movement is from broad images and concepts to even more encompassing images and concepts, from Cruz to Conqueror. The latter process, exemplified in the Páez incident, is the dominant form of narrative sequence in the novel and consists of unifying fragments into a meaningful whole. The extensive use of the latter process in La muerte de Artemio Cruz may be due to the fact that it reproduces the structure of human memory. The mind begins with involuntary or voluntary recollections (i.e., an odor) and then, through association, weaves a pattern that emerges and crystallizes in the midst of a myriad of other memories. In duplicating the structure of memory, the narrative form of the novel creates in the reader a sense of cognition and an intellectual grasping. The resulting sense of intellectual pleasure on the

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reader's part is a hallmark of fiction.

This technique is used very successfully in the treatment of the events relating to the death of Artemio Cruz's only son, Lorenzo. From the very beginning of the story the semi-conscious Cruz makes allusions to a day he shared with his nineteen-year-old boy. "--Esa mañana lo esperaba con alegría. Cruzamos el río a caballo" (12). The image of crossing the river with the son and its accompanying feeling of expectant joy is repeated with insistence throughout the yo section. The phrase is almost the same in the twenty cases it appears, undergoing very slight modifications or expansions: "--Cruzamos el río a caballo. Y llegamos hasta la barra y el mar. En Veracruz ... " (143); and " ... eso lo recuerdo: recibí una carta con timbres extranjeros ... " (243). Sometimes it is reduced to the brevity of a short sigh: "--Cruzamos el río . . . " (221). The effect of the anaphoric use of this phrase is to create a sense of mystery and expectancy in the mind of the reader. Its insistent repetition functions almost like a bell summoning Cruz to remember this day; at the same time, it accentuates the fragile quality of the memory. It is obsessive, yet always on the verge of disappearing.

From the very first, Cruz wants to remember this day: "--Quisiera regresar allá, Catalina" (12), but is prevented by the contrapuntal conversation

of Catalina and Teresa. Cruz wishes to remember with nostalgia, but their words insist upon his guilt in the death of Lorenzo. The third time Cruz utters his phrase Catalina retorts: "--Lo dominaste y me lo arrancaste" (119). As Catalina and Teresa rejoin his statement, " ... lo esperaba con alegría" (119), with reminders of the burden of guilt Cruz bears for the death of their brothers, Gonzalo and Lorenzo, the reader is parsimoniously given more information about this cryptic crossing of the river. Even after many examples of mother and daughter reacting to Cruz's nostalgic statement, only a tenuous relationship has been established between father and son. "--Esa mañana lo esperaba con alegría. Cruzamos el río a caballo. --¿Ves en qué terminó? ¿Ves, ves? Igual que mi hermano. Así terminó" (162). These fragments, given within the first-person narrative mode, are finally picked up by the tú narration (pages 166-70). It is here that the father-son relationship is clarified and that the fragmented image of horsemen crossing a river takes full form: " ... sólo tú y él sentirán los cascos del caballo sobre la tierra porosa de la ribera. También, al salir del agua, sentirán la frescura mezclada con el hervor de la selva y mirarán hacia atrás: ese río lento que remueve con dulzura los líquenes de la otra orilla" (167). This recollection presented in the future tense has a very interesting way of pushing

memory backward instead of forward. The word recordarás serves to recreate this important day with Lorenzo, and once it is recaptured, the recordarás applies to a moment previous to the day remembered, in a process of memory within memory. " ... tú recordarás tu juventud por él y por estos lugares y no querrás decirle a Lorenzo cuánto significa para ti esta tierra porque de hacerlo quizás forzarías su afecto: recordarás para recordar dentro del recuerdo" (168).

Another feature of this memory-duplicating process is the conflict between the moribund Cruz who wants to remember the pleasant day with his son, and the tú voice which has vowed from the novel's onset that the dying consciousness (yo) must first remember all the events and people he would rather forget (page 34). The necessity of recalling events other than those related to his son, coupled with the time mechanism of the future tense in the tú narrative (recordarás), sets up one of the most dynamic sequences in the book. Because of the desire of the yo to recall the day with his son, the incident breaks through into the tú narration, but is prevented when an image triggers the memory of an event prior to the Lorenzo episode. Cruz is recalling the horse-ride through the tropical forests of Veracruz when he suddenly remembers a previous painful event: " ... Lorenzo se adelantará ... Tus espuelas rayarán el vientre del otero, hasta sangrarlo:

sabrás que Lorenzo quiere carrera. ... La tierra tronará bajo los cascos; tú agacharás la cabeza, como si quisieras acercarla a la oreja del caballo y acicatearlo con palabras, pero hay ese peso, ese peso del yaqui que será recostado, boca abajo, sobre las ancas de la misma bestia italics mine ... " (169). Through the use of a memory triggered within a memory, the Lorenzo episode has been postponed. The image of Cruz bending forward on his horse ushers in a long narrative in third person, relating the incident from the Revolution involving the Yaqui guide. "La mano del yaqui apretó el cinturón de Artemio; pero había en su presión algo más que el deseo de no caer: una insistencia comunicativa. Artemio bajó la cabeza, acarició el cuello del caballo y luego volvió el rostro hacia la cara congestionada de Tobías" (177).

With this method, totally justified by the internal workings of the future tense, Fuentes temporarily drops the narrative sequence concerned with revealing the nature of his relationship with Lorenzo. The yo picks up the thread of the previous quote fifty-five pages later in an effort to recall the memory of the day spent with his son in Cocuya. "Tú clamarás desde lo hondo de tu memoria: tú bajarás la cabeza como si quisieras acercarla a la oreja del caballo y acicatearlo con palabras. Sentirás--y tu hijo deberá sentir lo mismo--ese aliento feroz, humeante, ese sudor, esos

nervios tensos, esa mirada vidriosa del esfuerzo"
(224).

The tú, él and yo parts begun on page 224 are now fully devoted to Lorenzo and his father and the former's death during the Spanish Civil War. The day of joy and the death have been foreshadowed in the brief but pregnant phrases exchanged by Cruz and his wife and daughter, in which he is blamed for his son's death. The tú narrative voice relives the joy of a father and son in perfect harmony with nature; the él narration accounts for Lorenzo's death in Spain, thus explaining the accusing phrases in the yo segments: "--Si hasta lo que quise destruyó, mamá, tú lo sabes" (205), which are counterparts to his nostalgia.

The tú section also includes a counterpoint technique that is very successful. While Artemio Cruz is seen totally immersed in the land of his birth, Cocuya, with his son Lorenzo, there are quick flashes of Catalina at home lamenting the absence of her son. The method is cinematic in its effect as rapid, exuberant and rich images of Cruz and Lorenzo riding in the jungles of Veracruz are interspersed with the static repetitive and desolate character of Catalina's thoughts:

Y en seguida correrán lentamente, con un trote hipnótico, separando las hierbas ancladas, agitando las crines, levantando una espuma deshecha, dejándose dorar por el sol y el reflejo del agua. Lorenzo colocará la mano sobre tu hombro. "Tu padre; tu padre, Lorenzo . . .

Lorenzo: ¿amas en verdad a Dios nuestro señor?
 ¿Crees en todo lo que te he enseñado? ¿Sabes
 que la Iglesia es el cuerpo de Dios en la tierra
 y los sacerdotes los ministros del Señor . . . ?
 ¿Crees . . . ?" Lorenzo colocará la mano sobre
 tu hombro. Se verán a los ojos, sonreirán. Tú
 tomarás del cuello a Lorenzo; el muchacho fingirá
 un golpe contra tu estómago; tú lo despeinarás,
 riendo; se abrazarán en una lucha fingida pero
 fuerte, entregada, jadeante, hasta caer rendidos
 sobre la hierba, riendo, sofocados, riendo . . .
 "Dios mío, ¿por qué te pregunto esto? No tengo
 derecho, en realidad no tengo derecho ... No sé,
 de hombres santos . . . de verdaderos mártires . . .
 ¿Crees que se puede aprobar? . . . No sé por
 qué te pregunto ... " (226)

By means of this juxtaposition the author presents the struggle between Catalina and Artemio for the boy's fidelity. The mother would have wanted Lorenzo to live a life without turmoil and thus totally dedicated herself to his well-being during the early years of his life: " ... para que todo el tiempo fuese para Lorenzo, para que Lorenzo se acostumbrara a esa vida cómoda, sin opciones" (224). But his father takes Lorenzo away from Catalina and Mexico City and has him brought to Cocuya. "Sólo para él habrás comprado las tierras, reconstruido la hacienda y lo habrás dejado en ella, niño-amor, responsable de las cosechas, abierto a la vida de los caballos y la caza, del nado y la pesca" (225); while Catalina " ... se sentará a esperar al borde del lecho, con el espejo en una mano y el cepillo en la otra ... " (167). Artemio finds the image of his youth reflected in the body of his son: "Lo verás desde lejos, a caballo,

y te dirás que ya es la imagen de tu juventud, esbelto y fuerte, moreno, con los ojos verdes hundidos en los altos pómulos" (225-26). It is during this day that Lorenzo reveals to his father his intention to leave immediately to fight in Spain. "¿Tú no harías lo mismo, papá? Tú no te quedaste en tu casa. ¿Creer? No sé. Tú me trajiste aquí, me enseñaste todas estas cosas. Es como si hubiera vuelto a vivir tu vida, ¿me entiendes? ... Ahora hay ese frente. Creo que es el único frente que queda. Voy a irme ... " (228).

Artemio Cruz experiences a moment of truth after recollecting the events that led to his son's death under the fire of a Nazi fighter plane. Cruz, perhaps for the first time in his life, realizes that his son was a means of being other than what he became. His son's life was a return to the life Cruz had denied time and again: the man for others. " ... me diría que algo más, un deseo que nunca expresé, me obligó a conducirlo ... sí, a obligarlo a encontrar los cabos del hilo que yo rompí, a reanudar mi vida, a completar mi otro destino, la segunda parte que yo no pude cumplir ... " (242).

During the last moments of life the dying father realizes that his son, Lorenzo, lived this day for him. " ... ay, gracias, que me enseñaste lo que pudo ser mi vida, ay, gracias, que viviste

ese día por mí ... " (244). Catalina and Teresa, right up to the end, play the accusing role as they state respectively: "--¿Por qué fue así? Dime: ¿por qué? Yo lo crié para otra cosa. ¿Por qué te lo llevaste?" "--¿No envié a la muerte a su propio hijo mimado? ¿No lo separé de ti y de mí para deformarlo? ¿No es cierto?" (242). With this the narrative structure comes full circle. The episode dealing with Lorenzo, which begins with Artemio nostalgically recalling the last day with his son, ends in the same manner.

The Dialectic of Love and Power

Lorenzo, as a manifestation of the desire to return to the origins, constitutes one of the many examples of the protagonist's thirst for wholeness and unity. The return to the mythical origins is symbolic of the time when man was one with the cosmos, when he was one with the divine and the human. In human nature, this condition is approximated in the symbiotic relationship that the gestating child has to its mother while still in the womb. The physical separation from the mother, where desire and fulfillment were one, as well as the separation from the mythic origin of man, is the source of man's loneliness, or soledad. For Artemio Cruz, this loneliness, separation, is the source of love and power. Both love and power are ways by which man attempts to unite with another

human being. Furthermore, love and power are closely associated. Love may be a combination of spiritual or erotic union, and power is the daughter of hubris, or self-love and pride. Artemio Cruz, as he lies in his urine-soaked bed, elicits the memory of four women: Regina, Catalina, Laura and Lilia--all women he has loved during his life.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz is in one sense the chronicle of the birth, growth, decline and death of love and power. The dynamics of the love and power anagram are most useful in understanding the nature of the relationship that the protagonist has with these women, as well as the nature of the protagonist's personality.

Regina, Artemio's first love, is symbolic of the ideal union between one human and another; their relationship is a becoming one instead of two. This unity as the fruit of perfect love is best expressed by Plato in his Symposium: here he explains that human nature originally was one and that the hunger for love is in fact a hunger for wholeness. Love, then, is a quest for the "other self" which has been split away and lost. "And when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself . . . the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy . . . "7 The "amazement of love

and friendship and intimacy" that exists between Regina and Artemio is very well depicted by Fuentes. These intimate love scenes are among the most sensuously written in contemporary Hispanic literature. The eroticism captured in the intimacy has a genuine, masculine ring to it, as exemplified in the following description: " ... los muslos se separaron temblando, llenos, y la carne erguida encontró la carne abierta y entró acariciada, rodeada del pulso ansioso, coronada de huevecillos jóvenes, apretada entre ese universo de piel blanda y amorosa ... " (67). The "amazement of love" brings with it a reorientation with the cosmos through physical and spiritual unity. The multiple unities of the world are " ... reducidos al encuentro del mundo, a la semilla de la razón, a las dos voces que nombran en silencio, que adentro bautizan todas las cosas ... " (67). Happiness becomes a sense of fulfillment that destroys the lineal pattern of time and gives life a cyclical quality in which pleasure and happiness bring about a fullness of being. "¿Cuándo es mayor la felicidad? Acarició el seno de Regina. Imaginar lo que será una nueva unión; la unión misma; la alegría fatigada del recuerdo y nuevamente el deseo pleno, aumentado por el amor, de un nuevo acto de amor: felicidad" (67). For Artemio Cruz, Regina is part of his own being; she is the other "self" of

which Plato speaks. Regina is the "other" who through love becomes part of the "self." "Al contemplarla, se contemplaba a sí mismo" (73). And as Cruz intuitively: " ... todo lo que es, todo su amor, está hundido en la carne de esa mujer que los contiene a los dos" (74).

If the will to love as well as the will to power are born from the desire not to be alone, Cruz as well as Regina relinquish all forms of power in their relationship. It is interesting that in retelling the original moment in which they met, Regina does not see Cruz as a soldier, a symbol of power and aggression. "--¿No creíste que era un soldado más, buscando en qué divertirse? --No, no. No vi tu uniforme. Sólo vi tus ojos reflejados en el agua y entonces ya no pude ver mi reflejo sin el tuyo a mi lado" (69). Her vision is clearly that of the "other" as "self." This reflected image of the beloved for Regina replaces the very cosmos. "Allí me miraba y un día apareció tu cara junto a la mía. De noche, las estrellas se reflejaban en el mar. De día, se veía al sol arder" (66). The reader, after being lead to this idyllic, perfect love, is jolted by the discovery that Artemio did not in reality meet Regina at the shores of the ocean, but that he forceably possessed her in the army barracks.

El debía creer en esa hermosa mentira, siempre, hasta el fin. No era cierto: él no había entrado a ese pueblo sinaloense como a tantos otros, buscando a la primera

mujer que pasara, incauta, por la calle. No era verdad que aquella muchacha de dieciocho años había sido montada a la fuerza en un caballo y violada en silencio en el dormitorio común de los oficiales, lejos del mar, dando la cara a la sierra espinosa y seca. (82-83)

With this, the relationship is cast in an entirely new light. What had begun as an act of aggression and of violence, has been turned into a relationship of love in which each partner is open to the other. It is Regina who overcomes the barriers of an act of violence and rape. Admitting the new-found pleasure she experiences with Cruz, she invents the make-believe story from the circumstances of their first encounter. This she does not out of self-shame and a sense of degradation but for Artemio's sake. She recognizes the impossibility of complete love were Artemio to feel the guilt of their first act of love: " ... inventado por ella para que él se sintiera limpio, inocente, seguro del amor" (82).

On the morning of December 4, 1913, Artemio Cruz was to see Regina for the last time; when he returned to Río Hondo, it was revealed to him that the Federals had come back into the town, had taken ten hostages, and demanded the town or they would hang the hostages. Their demands refused, the hostages (among them Regina) were hanged. Artemio is to feel the separation of the self, never to recover the union of love.

The relative simplicity of the love-power relationship sustained by Artemio Cruz and Regina is given a more complex treatment in the protagonist's relationship to his wife, Catalina Bernal de Cruz. The ambivalent attitude that this woman displays toward her "conqueror" is the root of a broader, more detailed study of the protagonist's attempt to recover his original "oneness," to overcome his state of loneliness through the media of love and power. Ultimately, the conflict of lover and conqueror is reduced to the combination of the conqueror-conquered. That is to say, the dynamics of the struggle for power essentially kill the love potential of these characters and end up by making them both victims and conquerors alike.

From the start, it is evident that Artemio Cruz comes to Puebla in 1917 (May 20) to take advantage of the chaos following the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution. Through the imagery of the Spanish Conquistador we have seen that he enters Puebla with the same attitude and intentions of his Spanish prototype, the Conqueror. Before going to confront Catalina and her father, Don Gamaliel Bernal, Artemio Cruz spends six days gathering information and laying the foundations for his take-over of the Bernal estate. This is made possible since the old man, unable to collect the interest on the loans made to other latifundistas, has many debtors. Cruz intends to collect

for the old man at a commission. Ultimately, he wants to replace Don Gamaliel and take over his possessions, including his beautiful twenty-two-year-old daughter, Catalina.

In presenting Catalina, Fuentes sets up an interesting interplay of the love-power dialectic. It is foreshadowed in the first description of the young Catalina as she stands in the doorway of her father's library, about to enter and meet Artemio Cruz. "Detrás del perro, apareció la muchacha vestida de blanco, un blanco que contrastaba con la luz nocturna que se prolongaba detrás de ella" (39-40). Aside from the possible symbolism involved in the contrast between black and white, it is immediately apparent that Catalina is presented with images suggestive of conflicts and contradictions.

Artemio Cruz instantly perceives both the contradictory nature of the woman as well as her dazzling beauty: "... permaneció inmóvil ante la belleza de esa joven que no traspasaba el marco de la puerta" (40). The description which immediately follows this quotation is a good example of Fuentes' ability to characterize internal personality by means of physical description. The utilization of contradictory qualities in describing her physiognomy is highly varied and rich. Her eyes are described as "... a un tiempo duros y líquidos ..." having a "... doble durbuja de vidrio ..." (40).

Her body echoes the duality of liquidness and hardness, as it is " ... esbelto y lleno ... " while her breasts are " ... altos y apretados ... " (40). In summation, the author writes: " ... ojos, labios, senos duros y suaves, de una consistencia alternada entre el desamparo y el rencor" (40).

Returning to the love-power paradox, Catalina as an object of love represents both an invitation and a challenge. She is, at least at this point, most suggestive of Octavio Paz's analogy of the open and the closed, the simultaneously receptive and impenetrable. The addition of the desamparo y el rencor is revealed as Cruz and Catalina's relationship progresses. She walks toward Cruz, knowing full well his intentions of coming to take over her father's faded power; knowing also that Cruz lived in spite of the fact that her brother, Gonzalo, shared the same cell with him before being executed by a firing squad. "Avanzó hacia él una carne de oro pálido, que ya en la frente y las mejillas revelaba el claro-oscuro desvanecido de todo el cuerpo, y le tendió la mano en cuyo contacto él buscó, sin encontrarla, la humedad, la emoción delatada" (40). Catalina, in her ability to keep her emotions from showing, strengthens Artemio's desire to conquer her. Later at the supper scene Artemio, somewhat perplexed at the ambiguity of Catalina's character, wonders whether she understands

his sense of assured victory, his pleasure at having her presence crown his conquest; whether she can detect all this in his smile as he gazes unabashedly at her. Catalina's reply to his silent questions is described in the following manner: "Los ojos de ella sólo le devolvían ese extraño mensaje de dura fatalidad, como si se mostrara dispuesta a aceptarlo todo y, sin embargo, a convertir su resignación en la oportunidad del propio triunfo sobre el hombre que de esa manera silenciosa y sonriente empezaba a hacerla suya" (41). This control over her emotions demonstrates an unusual will power in hiding her feelings and thoughts, all the more noteworthy since she sees in Artemio Cruz a mixture of the desirable and the forbidden. He is a mystery and a temptation to her from the first meeting. Her silent surrender and apparent aloofness, as well as her inner feelings, are again presented in contradictory or ambivalent tones.

Ella se extrañó de la fortaleza con que sucumbía, del poder de su debilidad. Levantó la mirada para observar, impudicamente, los rasgos fuertes del desconocido. No pudo evitar el encuentro con los ojos verdes. Guapo no, hermoso no era. Pero esa piel oliva del rostro, desparramada por el cuerpo con la misma fuerza linear, sinuosa, de los labios gruesos y los nervios saltones de las sienes, prometía un tacto deseable por desconocido. (41-42)

Don Gamaliel facilitates Artemio's take-over of the household. His motto--similar in some respects to Artemio's--is, first to survive in spite of all the

vicissitudes of fate and fortune and, secondly, to carry all forms of victories and defeats with honor (pages 42-43). With this philosophy as his buckler, Don Gamaliel opens the door to his conqueror as well as his savior; Cruz will now recover the old man's power in Puebla and allow him to live out his final days with dignity.

Catalina immediately senses that her destiny is inseparable from her father and his possessions. She, too, will be one more prize in the battle with the stranger, Cruz. Her protests to her father are of no avail; her statement about the lusting Artemio's eyes is answered: "--Sí, sí ... Es natural. Eres muy hermosa ... " (51). Her statement that the parish priest had said Cruz was a heretic, a man without God, is coldly answered: "--Calma, calma. Las fortunas no siempre se crean a la sombra de la divinidad" (51). It is clear to Catalina Bernal that the stranger will possess her as well as her father's property. The ambivalent descriptions given earlier of this character are carried through in her decision to accept the conqueror without a struggle but to secretly, inwardly, deny him the love he wants most. Thus, she will avenge herself and her father for the death of her brother, Gonzalo: "Sólo podía vengarse esa muerte ... abrazando a este hombre, abrazándolo pero negando la ternura

que él quisiera encontrar en ella. Matándolo en vida, destilando la amargura hasta envenenarlo" (53). Catalina vows to accomplish this feat in spite of the nascent passion Cruz arouses in her. As she is undressing to retire for the night after Cruz's first visit, she vows to give in without " ... un sollozo de furia, sin una contracción del rostro: si nadie le explicaba la verdad, ella se aferraría a lo que creía ser la verdad" (53). This she vows to accomplish in spite of the fact that the stranger, when earlier that evening he touched her foot, " ... le inundó el pecho de un sentimiento desconocido, indomable" (53).

It is interesting that Catalina decides to make a distinction between her soul and her body. "Quizás su cuerpo no era obra de Dios ... sino de otros cuerpos, pero su espíritu sí" (53). This fragmentation in a sense is a disavowal of her sensuality; she feels it really isn't her true self. Her real identity is the noncarnal self, the will and the spirit which will deny love to the stranger. The body, which is receptive to the stranger, is simply not her and must be controlled. "No permitiría que ese cuerpo tomara un camino delicioso, espontáneo, anhelante de caricias, mientras su espíritu le dictaba otro" (53). Unlike Regina, Catalina is not willing to forgive Cruz's initial act of aggression. She clearly sees Artemio as the conqueror and in spite

of her attraction to him, she will surrender only in order to retaliate by withholding her love and pardon. It has been noted that Artemio Cruz, as he entered Puebla, was metaphorically the Spanish Conquistador, the symbol of the closed, in the words of Octavio Paz. To some degree, Catalina's fate is paralleled with the fate of Aztec peoples who found themselves abandoned by their gods, their allies, and by their emperor who opened the gates to the conquerors at Tenochitlán.⁸ Catalina, desirous of convincing her father of Cruz's ill intentions, suggests that Cruz invented the story of her brother's death in order to humiliate him and possess her. To this argument the father uses his ultimate weapon: her responsibility to him as a daughter and her obligation to him as a woman.

--Tienes la imaginación de los veinte años.
 --Se incorporó y apagó el cigarro--. Pero si
 quieres franqueza, seré franco. Este hombre
 puede salvarnos. Cualquier otra consideración
 sale sobrando . . .

Suspiró y alargó los brazos para tocar las
 manos de la hija.

--Piensa en los últimos años de tu padre.
 ¿Crees que no merezco un poco de . . . ?

--Sí, papá, no digo nada . . . (52)

Catalina, furthermore, feels abandoned by Gonzalo, her brother, because of what she despairingly calls his "idealismo idiota," (53). When her father asks her to think of herself, suggesting that Cruz will also provide for her even after his death, she answers: "--Sí, me doy cuenta. Sabía que algo así iba a pasar

desde que Gonzalo se fue de la casa. Si viviera . . . --Pero no vive. --No pensó en mí. Quién sabe en qué pensó" (52) Catalina's sense of desolation is complete when on the following day Cruz comes to tell her that she will marry him and that her recent admirer, Ramón, a grocery store owner, will no longer see her. Cruz explains: "--Ya hablé con él. Es un muchacho débil. No te quería de verdad. Se dejó espantar en seguida. ... --El tal Ramoncito se va de Puebla. No lo volverás a ver nunca más . . . " (55). With this news Catalina succumbs, at least externally, to the new master. In a symbolic gesture she frees all her caged birds, before accompanying Cruz to tell Don Gamaliel the news he already knows: that she will marry Cruz (page 55).

All these events take place during the year 1919. The dialectic of power and love, of the closed and the open, is again picked up and developed in the chapter dealing with the year 1924. Cruz has now become a latifundista and is on his way to becoming a diputado in the national senate. Catalina has borne him one child, Lorenzo, and is expecting another. As the chapter begins, we hear her murmur, "Me dejé ir" (93), words indicative of the passionate response to her husband's love-making. Because of her response, she feels guilty. "Después sentí rencor. Me dejé ir . . .

Y me gustó. Qué vergüenza" (101). She feels divided because during the day she displays nothing but indifference for her husband, Cruz, but at night she can't keep her passions from dominating her. In her polarity of sentiments she begins to suspect that Cruz, who has never been outwardly cruel to her, just might love her. Further, she suspects that she loves him and that through her pride she might be shutting herself out of a life of happiness. On the other hand, she feels that she has betrayed her responsibility of vengeance for her father's humiliation and her brother's death, and for Artemio's having bought her. "Estaba comprada y debía permanecer aquí . . . Sin voz ni actitud, comprada, testigo mudo de él" (97). Catalina's life is absorbed by the tension created by her passion on the one hand, and her guilt, self-hate and disdain for Cruz on the other. She turns the issues over and over in her mind but is unable to opt for one or the other of her possibilities (page 105). Ultimately, she recognizes that she may be giving up something positive and genuine. "¿Tengo derecho a negarme a mí misma una felicidad posible . . .?" (101); "¿Tengo derecho a destruir su amor, si su amor es verdadero?" (99). And she reasons that her pleasure ought not be a source of guilt. "Soy joven; tengo derecho Tengo derecho; está bendito por la Iglesia" (93).

In spite of all these reasons for abandoning her resentment and indifference, except for the fleeting moments of physical unity during the evenings, she fully realizes the power she possesses over the feared and strong Artemio Cruz. "Me vences de noche. Te venzo de día. No te lo diré. Que nunca creí que nos contaste. Que mi padre sabía esconder su humillación detrás de su señorío, ese hombre cortés, pero que yo puedo vengarlo en secreto y a lo largo de toda la vida" (103). This strength she is capable of asserting over Cruz is derived from his desire to overcome being alone. Whether he be the aggressor or not, he needs unity with another human being. For Artemio Cruz, his relationship with Catalina will always be hampered by his first appearance in Puebla with the evident intention of exploiting his having fought in the Mexican Revolution and his being the last to see Gonzalo, her brother, alive. His possession of her father's land, Don Gamaliel's humiliation, his scaring off her sweetheart, and finally his possession of her, are all facts that are contradictory to his actual love for her. Artemio has the illusion that the flesh will speak for him, that the flesh will communicate to Catalina his love for her and his desire to be accepted fully by her. "La quería. Supo, al tocarla, que la quería. Debía hacerle comprender que su amor era real, aunque las apariencias

lo desmintieran. Podía amarla como amó otra vez, la primera vez: se sabía dueño de esa ternura probada" (54); " ... supo que para lograrlo sólo podía hacerla suya sin palabras; se dijo que la carne y la ternura hablarían sin palabras. Entonces, otra duda le asaltaba. ¿Comprendería esta muchacha todo lo que él quería decirle al tomarla entre los brazos?" (102).

The conflict between Artemio and Catalina finally comes to a crisis when in 1924 Catalina fails to attend a political rally in support of his candidacy to the national senatorial seat. Cruz, upon confronting her with her failure as a wife, reveals that he needs Catalina at least as a witness to his life. Without her presence, he implies, his accomplishments lack significance. "--Preguntaron por mi mujer. Hoy fue un día importante para mí. ... --Cómo te diré . . . todos . . . todos necesitamos testigos de nuestra vida para poder vivirla . . . " (110). Catalina is very quick to see the love-power conflict inherent in her relationship to Cruz. She did not choose to be his wife; the choice was made by Cruz and her father. Though her husband may force her, he can not demand love in return. "--Déjame. Estoy en tus manos para siempre. Ya tienes lo que querías. Conténtate y no pidas imposibles" (111). When Cruz tells her that he has loved her and that "--No te quería apartada, sino metida en mi vida . . . ", she answers, "--No me toques. Eso

es lo que nunca podrás comprar" (112).

In an effort to bridge the widening gap between them, Cruz asks Catalina's forgiveness. Catalina replies that she can't forgive him since he can't accept her not forgiving him for having driven away her first love. She feels that all is impossible, for Cruz has robbed her of her innocence and any return is out of the question. At this juncture, both have the choice of opening themselves up, of revealing themselves freely. Cruz could explain the death of Gonzalo, asking that she compassionately weigh his love against his faults. She, in turn, could reveal the root of her contempt and impenetrability as a result of having been abandoned by her brother, her father, her church and society, asking that he understand the hatred and the wounded pride that make it difficult for her to be receptive to Artemio. Both fail to overcome this silence, in spite of the fact that "... esta cobardía los alejaba aún más y lo hacía a él, también, responsable del amor fracasado-- para que los dos se limpiaran de la culpa que, para ser redimido, este hombre quería compartir" (114). Instead of forgiving him, Catalina makes Cruz feel guilty for his original act of aggression. This attitude contrasts sharply with Regina's invention of the fantasy to spare him guilt.

Artemio realizes that their alienation is permanent. In an act of desolation, he searches out

an Indian girl for his sexual pleasure. As he walks her from her quarters back to the house, he states: "¿Ves aquella estrellota brillante? Parece que está a la mano, ¿no es cierto? Pero si hasta tú sabes que nunca la vas a tocar. Hay que decirle que no a lo que no podemos tocar con las manos" (116). This closure of self as exemplified by Cruz and Catalina is the last time that Artemio is capable of feeling love. This separation between Catalina and Cruz is wrought by an overweening sense of pride, by Cruz's inability to confess his aggressions, and by her inability to forgive him. Both relinquish their love for a form of power, one over the other. She will deny him her body and blame him for the death of her brother. Cruz vows retaliation: "--Entonces arde, y piensa que nunca renunciaré a ti, nunca, ni cuando me muera, pero que yo también sé humillar. Te va a doler no haberte dado cuenta . . . " (111-12).

Catalina's solitude and loneliness are increased when Artemio takes Lorenzo to Cocuya, a tropical islet, the place of his birth. For Lorenzo, age twelve, this experience is meant to give him a sense of maturity and responsibility acquired from the necessity of being the plantation's boy-manager. The boy's decision to fight for the Republic cause in the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent death become one more source for Catalina's desolation as well as another reason

to blame and condemn Artemio. During his day of agony, time and time again, Catalina accused Artemio of having taken Lorenzo away from her and having him killed.

Laura Riviera is the next woman of importance in the life of Artemio Cruz. Her impact is felt throughout the novel, since on his deathbed the protagonist calls out her name on several occasions. Although the relationship Cruz sustains with her is brief, we gather from the novel that he has known her for about a year. Laura is important as Artemio's last opportunity to change the direction of his life, as well as his last chance for love. Laura, who is a recent divorcée, expresses her feeling that all is not well in the relationship: "--Yo te quiero. Tú me has dicho que me quieres. No, no quieres comprender" (216). For Artemio, all is well and he sees no need to change anything. Laura implies that perhaps it is a lack of change that is wrong. "--¿No estamos bien así? ¿Hace falta algo? --Quién sabe. Puede que no haga falta nada" (219). But of greater import is her statement that she, Laura, has failed to transform Artemio: "--No te engañé. No te obligué. --No te transformé, que es distinto. No estás dispuesto" (219). The reader is never allowed to know exactly what Laura meant by "transform," but one can gather that she meant that the general character of Cruz's life remained the same: a life of exploitation, a

life in which the other does not exist as a person. This is manifested when she indicates to Artemio her desire to be a human being and not an object. "--Oh, quizás porque tengo una idea demasiado presuntuosa de mí misma . . . porque creo tener derecho a otro trato . . . a no ser un objeto sino una persona . . ."

(216). Artemio is then forced by Laura to choose. The terms are not entirely clear; she isn't really asking Cruz to choose between her and Catalina, but rather between an open relationship in which she is not a mere object of pleasure and the relationship they now sustain. "--Ya no puedo más, mi amor. Tienes que escoger. --Ten paciencia, Laura. Date cuenta . . . --¿De qué? --No me obligues. --¿De qué? ¿Me tienes miedo?" (218-19). Cruz feebly hides behind the idea of "appearances," suggesting that he does in fact fear her, or rather that he fears a true love relationship with her. "--Date cuenta, Laura, por favor. Esas cosas dañan. Hay que saber cuidar . . . --¿Las apariencias? ¿O el miedo? Si no pasará nada, ten la seguridad de que no pasará nada" (219). Finally wishing to avoid any further confrontation and recognizing that Laura would never allow herself to be a mere object of his pleasure, he quietly leaves her.

"El tomó el sombrero de una silla. Caminó hacia la puerta del apartamento. Se detuvo con la mano sobre la perilla. Miró hacia atrás. Laura acurrucada,

con los cojines entre los brazos, de espaldas a él. Salió. Cerró la puerta con cuidado" (219). It is noteworthy that by this time (1934) Cruz is no longer the powerful, strong-willed individual capable of imposing his will on anyone he wishes to conquer or exploit. Furthermore, it is clear that Cruz refuses to choose; it is a case of the abnegation of his freedom. He hasn't had a meaningful relationship with Catalina since 1924 and yet he wishes to retain the appearances. This fear is not really concomitant with his power as a capitalist who no longer needs to conform to a bourgeois ethic of keeping up the appearance of a happy marriage. It is clear that Artemio cannot and will not entertain a relationship with Laura which in any way interferes with his ruthless style of living. What is more, Artemio is unwilling and undesirous of opening himself to another human being. Laura recognizes that genuine love ought to transform the beloved and that love dies when the beloved, out of a desire for power, reduces her to an object.

This chapter also marks a decline in his virility which progressively degenerates until he can no longer derive pleasure from anything but a relationship to objects. Lilia, his fourth and final love, is a point of transition between Laura Riviera and his death. The episode with Lilia takes place in 1947 when Cruz is fifty-eight years old. The protagonist, by now

a multi-millionaire, has contracted Lilia for a week-end in Acapulco. In a span of one day he is faced with a series of episodes which make him seriously question his sexual power. As the day ends, this realization becomes violently revealed to him as he discovers a new Artemio Cruz in the mirror, an Artemio which he has been denying for years.

Lilia, a beautiful divorcée many years younger than Cruz, is the last of four women Cruz will love during his lifetime. The first time he meets her the conditions are clear: she is to provide Artemio with a pleasurable weekend in Acapulco with no strings attached (page 152). There is no doubt in Cruz's mind, during the morning of the day this holiday begins, that this relationship is reduced to the level of a contract, of an implicit agreement of no involvement. She will be one more object of his delight, soon to be discarded and forgotten. But the events of the day are to break in upon his placid existence. Artemio believes his sexuality is eternal; he will be changed.

The threat to his masculinity is first to appear in the figure of Xavier Adame, a young playboy who is sharing a yacht with Artemio and Lilia. His first appearance is seen in sexually aggressive terms. It almost seems as if Artemio were forced to an awareness of the other through an obsessive presentation of this young man's virility. "Xavier se descolgó

del toldo. El vio aparecer las piernas velludas, luego el nudo del sexo escondido, en fin los pechos ardientes. Sí: caminaba como lobo ... " (155).

Later in the afternoon, when Lilia is taking a siesta and Artemio Cruz finds himself on the beach, he is again confronted with the potency of youthful sexuality when he sees a young couple making love in the abandoned waters of Acapulco (page 160). Artemio returns to the hotel with the intention of taking a swim in the pool but changes his mind after he overhears a conversation in the locker-room which makes reference to him and Lilia: "--Hoy no aparecieron la bella y la bestia. --No hoy no. --Está cuerfísima la vieja . . . --Lástima. El pajarraco ese no le ha de cumplir. --De repente se muere de apoplejía" (161). Once Cruz returns to his room he finds Lilia gone, undoubtedly fulfilling a rendezvous with Xavier Adame. Then, in the act of shaving, he discovers the face he has long been neglecting to look at. A revelation takes place:

--No hoy no. --Está cuerfísima la vieja . . . --Lástima.

El pajarraco ese no le ha de cumplir. --De repente se muere de apoplejía" (161). Once Cruz returns to his room he finds Lilia gone, undoubtedly fulfilling a rendezvous with Xavier Adame. Then, in the act of shaving, he discovers the face he has long been neglecting to look at. A revelation takes place:

"Se detuvo con la navaja entre las manos. La acercó a los labios y cerró, involuntariamente, los ojos.

Al abrirlos, ese viejo de ojos inyectados, de pómulos grises, de labios marchitos, que ya no era el otro, el reflejo aprendido, le devolvió una mueca desde el espejo" (162). This episode marks a sharp decline in Artemio's virility. His weekend at Acapulco has made him realize he is an old man, and that his only weapon

in competition with such young men as Adame is his money.

There has been a steady decline of love in interpersonal relationships and a corresponding increase in the power that he holds over a large mass of anonymous people through his financial empire. His relationships with the women in the novel represent a movement from openness, receptiveness and a willingness to relate to others, towards complete closure. Laura rejects Cruz's treatment of her as an object while Lilia is obviously willing to enter into a relationship in which love is reduced to contractual eroticism. When Lilia appears again in the novel, in the chapter dedicated to the year 1955, she is still with Cruz. The people who surround Cruz have all been dehumanized by now; they are mere objects which mirror his economic power. He no longer has the ability to enjoy anything but the objective world. As a result, he surrounds himself with a world of objects which reflect the history of Mexico and changes his home from the new posh residential area of Las Lomas to Coyacán, an old colonial section of Mexico. "Catalina podía vivir en el caserón de Las Lomas, ayuno de personalidad, idéntico a todas las residencias de millonarios. El prefirió encontrar estos viejos muros, con sus dos siglos de cantera y tezontle, que de una manera misteriosa lo acercaban a episodios del pasado, a una imagen de

la tierra que no quería perder del todo" (252-53). Lilia, his playmate from Acapulco, lives with Cruz at Coyacán. The ability to hold the love of a woman is a tribute to his power, but it is born out of a sense of insufficiency and fear. "¿Cómo la iba a dominar? . . . Todo lo que dominaba obedecía, ahora, sólo a cierta prolongación virtual, inerte . . . de la fuerza de sus años jóvenes . . . Lilia podría abandonarle . . . le oprimió el corazón . . . No bastaba para conjurar eso . . . ese miedo . . . Quizá no habría otra oportunidad . . . quedarse solo . . . " (225). This fear of never being able to possess another woman is born the night of 1947 in Acapulco. The tú voice, in reviewing some of the important decisions made by Artemio Cruz, refers to his choice that night to take Lilia back after she had left him for Xavier Adame. "tú no tomarás a Lilia cuando regrese esa noche, no pensarás que nunca podrás tener, ya, a otra mujer" (247). Because of this eight-year-old fear, Artemio Cruz retains Lilia, not for any carnal pleasure but mainly as an extension of himself, as a symbol of his long lost youthfulness. He tolerates her vulgarity, her immaturity and her incipient alcoholism. "El permaneció inmóvil. No le concedía este derecho de hostigarlo y sin embargo . . . una lasitud tibia y abúlica . . . ajena por completo a su carácter . . . le

obligaba a permanecer allí . . . con el Martini entre los dedos endurecidos . . . escuchando las sandeces de esta mujer cada día más vulgar e ... e ... no, era apetecible aún . . . aunque insoportable . . ."

(255).

It is at his Coyacán home that Artemio Cruz holds a New Year's party, a symbolic feast of rejuvenation. The party's lavish meals, the excellence of the firecrackers and the brief orgy, all strike an ironic note with the man who is now referred to as the "momia de Coyacán." The irony resides in the physical and spiritual debilitation that the protagonist has undergone in contrast to the power he holds over his hundred guests--the affluent industrialists, sychophants, senators, newspapermen, their wives, mistresses, celestinas. One of the rituals repeated at this New Year's feast occurs when Cruz allows the newspapermen to photograph him for the society sheets. During this ceremony, there is a description of his waning physical powers as he is unable to retain the two dogs posing with him (page 252). In spite of this outward debilitation, Artemio Cruz still holds power over the business people who constitute his world. They, like Lilia, and the innumerable things of beauty in the house, are objects that reflect his power.

Unable to be vitally involved any longer within

the power-love dialectic, Cruz relinquishes that field of battle and objectifies the world that surrounds him. He is the master puppeteer and they are the puppets, the mere extensions of his will. Artemio Cruz reveals the pride he takes in the performance of his guests, a performance rendered to their chief (pages 260-261). "--¿Sabe usted por qué estoy por encima de toda esta gentecita . . . y la domino? . . . -- . . . mis cuadros, mis vinos, mis cómodas y las domino igual que a ustedes . . ."

(267). Thus, people are equated with objects. They cannot enter into the dialectic of power and love with Cruz. He merely turns them all into objects and thus reduces the danger of exposing his weakness and allowing himself the possibility of being either loved or overpowered. Things and their enjoyment become the end, the goal of his life, a fact he admits on his deathbed in 1959.

History in La muerte de Artemio Cruz

Carlos Fuentes' unusually fine historical sensitivity is reflected in a variety of interesting techniques. The past becomes part of the inner being of the protagonist; it is brought to life simultaneously for Artemio Cruz and the reader. In this way, the past is always tinged with a sense of the future: it is recollection that is about to take place. Thus Fuentes captures a human psychical process in that

thought and awareness not immediately present to consciousness are, in fact, future.

As a result of this basic existentialist intuition, the past--history--is not past, it is a living reality. Fuentes is able to create the feeling that Artemio Cruz is his past: that his past is a living form in the present. History as a means of describing man's essential nature is common to such thinkers as Octavio Paz, José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno. For Ortega y Gasset, man is his history, a becoming and unfolding in time. "La vida es un gerundio y no un participio: un faciendum y no un factum."9

The protagonist's recollections and memories are the warp and woof of Mexican national history. Each of the twelve sections dedicated to a phase of Artemio Cruz's life is preceded by a specific date. An examination of the historical background, suggested by these dates, sheds light not only on the nature of his acts but also on the nature of the historical moment. Thus, moments in Mexican history delineate and characterize the protagonist: the history of Mexico explains Artemio Cruz. Conversely, the life of Artemio Cruz explains the history of Mexico.

The point of departure for these twelve flashbacks is found within the consciousness of the dying seventy-one-year-old Cruz who is being forced to

remember his past. The twelve historical sections are not given in a strict chronological order since they are internally structured by the association of ideas found within the stream-of-consciousness of the yo. In spite of this apparent random selection, a general pattern may be discerned. There is a general movement established from the present moment back to the origins of the protagonist. Thus the narrative content begins with the moment of death and ends with the birth of the protagonist. This movement towards a rebirth, a return, a beginning, constitutes the very substance of memory and recollection. For the function of memory is to take us back into the past, into our history.

The events narrated for the day of November 23, 1927 is but one of twelve examples which bear this out. This particular date reveals that Artemio Cruz is becoming more and more involved in the political life of his country. This period of Mexican history is perhaps the most filled with violence of an unnecessary and stupid sort. It was during this time that about a dozen would-be rebels to the Federal government, some of them generals of the Revolution, were shot under the Ley Fuga.¹⁰ Also during this time--and more pertinent to our study--was the attempted assassination of Alvaro Obregón on November 13, 1927. Apparently Madre Conchita and a few young Cristero radicals threw a bomb at Obregón's car without even injuring him.

The result of this attempt was that Father Miguel Agustín Pro S. J. and his brother, Roberto Pro S. J., were accused of the attempted assassination. It was on the very morning of November 23, 1927 that they were executed by a firing squad in Mexico City. Artemio Cruz's involvement in all of this is direct. On this day a police commandant forces him to a game of Russian roulette in order to impress him that he ought to switch ideas, to drop his revolutionary leader for a new one (from Obregón to Calles, to be specific, although their names were never mentioned). During the same day his revolutionary buddies, in a reunion in a bordello, also decide that it would be better to switch loyalties. Of even greater importance in the life of the protagonist was the firing squad sent out to kill the Cristeros that day, for among those shot was Father Páez, Catalina's confessor.

The intimate relationship established between history and man is very much in line with existentialist thought. The implications of this view of man are important to the interpretation of this novel. Man as a time-space creature enacts his life within the limitations of both time and place, history and geography. History then becomes a dynamic interaction between historical contingency and man's will. For Ortega y Gasset, life is a drama, a doing, a project;

but the outcome of this futuristic projection is always contingent upon the reciprocal interaction of man and history. This philosophy is radically different from the deterministic view that history delimits man. Such a philosophy subordinates man to the historical circumstance, relegating him to the category of an object having properties in accord with the laws of the physical sciences. The existentialist position, while rejecting the Romantic view in which man's will is totally removed from historical contingency, contends that man is not the product of historical development but that he is history itself. Ortega y Gasset posits that "La vida es un que hacer."¹¹ Man, unlike physical objects which have fixed nature and properties, is free to create his life. The study of history is, then, the study of man and of his becoming to the present. As a result of all this, history is not an orderly presentation of facts given in chronological order, but rather an imaginative reconstruction of the past from the point of view of the present. History is not dead but is a living form to be found in the present consciousness of man. This removes history from the museum of the past and places it within the subjective consciousness of man in the present.

For Artemio Cruz, history, Mexican history in particular, is a living force within him: it is

the very substance of his life. The mechanism used to resurrect and objectify the past is memory, a function within man's psyche. The reader is a veritable witness to the process which engenders the form and meaning of history, the spirit of man. A mere chronological narration of historical acts isolated from the protagonist's life is rejected. Man, as the maker of history, cannot be separated from his creation, his history. Artemio Cruz's symbolic as well as concrete role within history takes the work beyond the level of the "chronicler." To this extent Fuentes differs markedly from the earlier novelists of the Mexican Revolution, such as Azuela and Guzmán, who might be regarded as "chroniclers" of the Revolution.

Carlos Fuentes goes beyond the limits of reportage to create history itself. La muerte de Artemio Cruz as a novel is history, which is to imply much more than to say that it is a historical novel. Since the Romantic novelists, the historical novel has been defined as including historical data within the fabric of the novel. Although La muerte de Artemio Cruz meets this definition, the author goes beyond this to create history. The selection of historical data, in Fuentes' case, is rigorously controlled by the vision or interpretation which structures them. This is exactly why Artemio Cruz and Mexican history are

so inseparable; both are viewed from the same interpretive point of view. The protagonist's betrayal to himself and to others is Mexico's betrayal to itself and to the Mexican. His failure to break the chains of solitude and unite himself with another human being through love is also Mexico's failure. Both Artemio Cruz and Mexico, in their will to power, have given themselves over to the love of objects.

Carlos Fuentes, through the use of the all-encompassing tú voice, makes his interpretation of history clear when he indicts not the past of Mexico, but what it has become.

... les legará sus líderes ladrones, sus sindicatos sometidos, sus nuevos latifundios, sus inversiones americanas, sus obreros encarcelados, sus acaparadores y su gran prensa, sus braceros, sus granaderos y agentes secretos, sus depósitos en el extranjero, sus agiotistas engominados, sus diputados serviles, sus ministros lambiscones, sus fraccionamientos elegantes, sus aniversarios y sus conmemoraciones, sus pulgas y sus tortillas agusanadas, sus indios iletrados, sus trabajadores cesantes, sus montes rapados, sus hombres gordos armados de agualung y acciones, sus hombres flacos armados de uñas: tengan su México: tengan tu herencia ... (277)

From this quote it is clear that history is not a dead past to be buried in museums, but rather a living phenomenon which endures. Furthermore, it is not mere data, but the interpretation of the past, for the facts chosen are intended to reinforce a specific interpretation.

The implied reverse chronological order of the dates selected for the novel significantly emphasizes that history is the present: memory may reach back in time, but its power and sense of life are within the present consciousness of man. Carl Löwith, in his Meaning of History, states that history ought to be written from the present, progressing towards the past, for it is in the present that the elements most worthy of historical study are to be found. Any other kind of historical study is abstract and not really the study of man, who is, for Löwith, present man.¹² In Essays in the Philosophy of History, R. G. Collingwood, one of the most articulate philosophers of history, supports Carlos Fuentes' use of history as present when he states: "Finally, since the past in itself is nothing, the knowledge of the past in itself is not, and cannot be, the historian's goals ... His goal, as a goal of a thinking being, is knowledge of the present; to that everything must return, round that everything must revolve."¹³ It is this insistence on the priority of the present, this call to awareness of a living history, which makes La muerte de Artemio Cruz the excellent novel of the Mexican Revolution that it is. To a certain degree, it is the only true novel of the Mexican Revolution, in that it views the current failure of Mexico as ultimately a failure to the ideals of that great social upheaval.

Mythology: The Search for Transcendence

Artemio Cruz, the suffering flesh and blood creature, is not a separate unit of humanity that dies alone. Cruz is Mexican history. The insistence of his return to the past is a desire to return to a mythological origin, to the innocence he once knew as a child in Cocuya, to the ideal love he experienced with Regina, and to the life he refused to choose through Lorenzo. This desire lays the groundwork for Carlos Fuentes' use of mythology. The incorporation of mythology lifts Artemio Cruz from the limitations of time and space and unites all mankind, the cosmos and creation in a mytho-poetic manner.

The use of archetypal forms and history are not at odds but are integrally related. The placement of the protagonist through history within the scope of time and space, and his removal through mythology beyond all time and space, are not in tension in the work but internally justify each other.

John T. Marcus in Heaven, Hell and History very poignantly delineates the trajectory of these two tendencies, history and mythology, in the Western tradition. For this scholar, history as transcendence has its origins in the Hebraic concept of history. For the Jew, history is the direct result of the Covenant that Jehovah has with his people. The Covenant is the idea that God guides their historical destiny.

The events of their history have a vertical relationship to the Godhead. "The Hebrews were the first people to seek transcendence through historical experience. In the Old Testament, the very identity of the Jews, summed up in the special bond of their religious tradition, is forged out of their national history."¹⁴ In contrast to this concept of history as transcendence is the Greek view, anti-historical in nature. As a result, the life styles of these two peoples are divergent. "Where the Hebrews looked for an historical ordering of experience, the Greeks looked for a logical coherence in the ordering of reality. Where the Hebrew moral sense was focused upon the covenant, Greek moral consciousness was embodied in the polis and in a transcending moral law that ultimately bound both the gods and men" (Marcus, page 5). For the Greeks there is the idea that beyond man and the gods there is a perfect and absolute moral order. Thus, the mythology of the Greeks is the search for the archetype which represents the eternal and immutable nature of man. For Marcus, the history of Western man has been a " . . . merger of the two major Western currents of self-transcendence and immortalization. On the one hand, we see the Greek ideal of man's moral transcendence of the human condition in a rationally ordered universe. On the other hand, we find the Judaic sense of a moral coherence

and meaning in human experience through the eschatological objective of history" (Marcus, page 18). History and mythology is very much in evidence in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. Mythology as it is used in this novel takes the meaning of Artemio's life and death beyond history, making it the life and death of archetypal man: the aggressor, the chingón.

Artemio Cruz' namesake in Greek mythology is Artemis, the huntress. The striking similarities in origin and life styles between these two figures bear out the intentional linking of Cruz to the mythological figure. Perhaps the most essential resemblance lies in the tripartite quality of both Cruz and Artemis. The latter appeared in three aspects: "She was Diana on earth, Selene or moon in heaven, and Proserpine below, and represented with three faces . . ."15 The three faces of Artemio Cruz are reflected in the triple narrative structure: the yo (present), the tú (future), and the él (past), which in turn represent three aspects of the same person. Cruz parallels Artemis' trinity in another important way: he is a mixture of the White, Negro and Indian races.

The resemblances between Artemis (Diana) and Artemio Cruz are very evident regarding the circumstances of their respective births. The goddess is but one of the innumerable illegitimate children of Zeus, characterized by his lust for mortal and immortal

women. Cruz is also illegitimate, the son of Atanasio Menchaca and one of his mulatto slaves Cruz Isabel (page 299). Both Artemio Cruz and Artemis were born in rather hostile circumstances, due to their illegitimacy. In the case of Artemis, the jealous Hera (Juno), wife of Zeus, drove the pregnant Leto from Olympus. The exiled Leto was hard put to find a place to give birth to Artemis. "Latona (Leto) was . . . to bear the jealous rage of Juno. . . . the future mother of . . . Diana, flying from the wrath of Juno, besought all the islands of the Aegean to afford her a place of rest, but all feared too much the potent queen of heaven to assist her rival."¹⁶ Cruz Isabel, Artemio's mother, suffered the wrath of Atanasio: " . . . la madre fue corrida a palos por Atanasio: la primera mujer del lugar que le dio un hijo" (306). The child Cruz was then turned over to Lunero, Isabel's brother. Realizing the danger the baby was in Lunero considered hiding him, as Moses was hidden, in the bullrushes. Fortunately for Cruz, Atanasio died shortly after his birth. "Sí, el amo Atanasio murió muy a tiempo; él hubiera mandado matar al niño; Lunero lo salvó" (285).

The goddess Leto gives birth to Artemis on the small island of Delos. Immediately thereafter, the Goddess of the Moon, acting as midwife to her mother, delivers a twin, Apollo. Thus one of Artemis' attributes as Hecate is goddess of childbirth. Acting

as Isabel Cruz' midwife is Lunero, a name derived from Luna (moon), another of Artemis' names. Symbolically, then, the goddess is present at the birth of Artemio Cruz. There is evidence that Cruz also had a twin, born after he was: "Lunero cortó el cordón, amarró el cabo, lavó el cuerpo, el rostro, lo acarició, lo besó, quiso entregarlo a su hermana pero Isabel Cruz, Cruz Isabel ya gemía con una nueva contracción ... " (315). This interpretation is supported by the constant reference, throughout the novel, to Cruz' double.

Artemio is brought up by Lunero in idyllic surroundings within the limits of the plush rain forest and the life-giving river. These are the domains of the Maiden of the Silver Bow, Artemis. "She ruled marsh and mountain . . . Springs and woodland brooks she favored . . . She blessed with verdure the meadows."¹⁷

The constant association of Artemio Cruz with horses, especially apparent in the repetitive phrase, "Cruzamos el río a caballo," also has its echo in the lore of the goddess Artemis. "She was . . . not only huntress, but guardian of wild beasts--mistress withall of horses and kine . . ."¹⁸

The linking of Artemio with Artemis is meaningful in that it characterizes the protagonist as the archetypal aggressor. The goddess as virgen huntress, is symbol of the closed; her weapon, the bow, is suggestive

of the ruthlessness which characterizes Artemio. The protagonist's full name, Artemio Cruz, is a contradiction, since Artemio, derived from Artemis, is the arch-aggressor. Artemio is the man who leads a wholly selfish life, never capable of the sacrifice and life for others implied in his last name, Cruz (cross).

Beyond the direct associations that exist between Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, and Artemio, there is a whole range of associations which are not directly related to any particular mythological figure but which nevertheless refer to the archetypal forms drawn from ancient mythology. These forms are more in the nature of symbolic action relating to basic human experiences such as birth, youth, loss of innocence, the fall, death, redemption, etc. They are universal happenings which through the ages have taken on certain patterns which have come to be called archetypal forms.

The most dominant archetypal pattern in the novel is its cyclical structure. It begins with a day in April 1959, and moves backward in time to the hero's birth; it is a return to his origins. More complex than a simple line toward the past, the last four chapters demonstrate a careful juxtaposition of time planes. For example, in the chapter dealing with the New Year's party, Cruz is described as an

old and tired sixty-seven-year-old magician. This celebration, in itself suggestive of renewal and cyclical time, a joining of new and old, is followed by those chapters dealing with Cruz as a young boy in his tropical Cocuya. Following this is a flashback into the disintegrating consciousness of the dying Cruz, intercepted briefly before it dies completely, by a brief description of his birth in 1889. The final section is comprised of his words of expiration. Thus, the author creates a movement from life to death and death to life, a circular progression in which the beginnings and ends of life are seen as one continuous mode of existence.

Within this overall circular pattern, the novel presents other actions which can be placed within the context of universal or archetypal patterns. For example, Artemio Cruz, the innocent child of nature, is placed within a paradise in which man and nature are in perfect balance. The image of the sleeping naked child about to be awakened to life is reminiscent of the spark of creation about to reach Adam as depicted by Michelangelo.

El niño se tendió desnudo debajo de la palma solitaria y sintió el calor de los rayos que iban arrojando cada vez más lejos la sombra del talle y el plumero. El sol inició su carrera final; sin embargo, los rayos oblicuos parecían ascender iluminando, poro a poro, todo el cuerpo. Los pies primero, cuando se acomodó contra el pedestal desnudo. Luego

las piernas abiertas y el sexo dormido, el vientre plano y los pechos endurecidos en el agua, el cuello alto y la quijada recortada, donde la luz empezaba a quebrar dos comisuras hondas, pegadas como arcos tirantes a los pómulos duros que enmarcaban la claridad de los ojos perdidos, esa tarde, en la siesta profunda y tranquila. (287)

The balance is, however, soon to be broken.

This child who spends most of his time swimming in the river must be cast out of the timeless world of his paradise into the world of freedom and choice. This is done through the introduction of the plantation owner's foreman into the untrammelled world of Artemio and his guardian, Lunero. The foreman seeks additional workers for the tobacco plantations and now comes to take Lunero away. Cruz, in an effort to maintain the integrity of his paradise, shoots and kills his uncle Pedro, mistaking him for the threatening foreman. The flight to the mountains now begins. Having climbed the mountains, he realizes that paradise is gone and that he is free to decide the direction of his life.

Te detendrás en la primera plataforma de la roca, perdido en la incomprensión agitada de lo que ha sucedido, del fin de una vida que en secreto creíste eterna Pero frente a tu convulsión internal se abrirá este nuevo mundo de la noche y la montaña y su luz oscura empezará a abrirse paso en los ojos, nuevos también y teñidos de lo que ha dejado de ser vida para convertirse en recuerdo, de un niño que ahora pertenecerá a lo indomable, a lo ajeno a las fuerzas propias, a la anchura de la tierra . . . Liberado de la fatalidad de un sitio y un nacimiento . . . esclavizado a otro destino, el nuevo, el desconocido, el que se cierne

detrás de la sierra iluminada por las
estrellas. (308-09)

This expulsion from the paradise, the garden of Eden, is at the same time a loss of innocence for the thirteen-year-old Cruz. It is a separation not only from the land of plenty but from the love of his guardian, and a removal from a state of being analogous to the womb, in which desire and fulfillment are one. The mountain is symbolic of initiation into the life of man, a life of sin and guilt, of freedom and choice. " ... la vida empezará a ser lo próximo y dejará de ser lo pasado La inocencia morirá, no a manos de la culpa, sino del asombro amoroso Tan alto, tan alto, nunca habías estado Y no te sentirás pequeño al contemplantar y contemplar . . . " (311).

Another archetypal pattern is established when Artemio Cruz is captured in the mountains of northern Mexico. A prisoner, he attempts to escape by hiding in an old mine. The men pursue him temporarily and, unable to find him, seal up the mouth of the cave. The subsequent descent into the bowels of the earth is symbolically treated in this section. Cruz, having been cast into utter darkness, and unrelated space and time, only survives this ordeal by relying on his most basic senses. The reduction of Cruz to an animalistic state is depicted as a transformation into a reptile as he works his way back into the world.

Coló el cuerpo y, en el nuevo pasaje, se dio cuenta de que no podía caminar de pie: sólo cabía de estómago. Así fue arrastrándose, sin saber a dónde conducía su carrera de reptil. Vetas grises, reflejos dorados de las espiguillas de oficial: sólo estas luces disparejas iluminaban su lentitud de culebra amortajada. Los ojos reflejaban los rincones más negros de la oscuridad y un hilo de saliva le corría por el mentón. (181)

His return to the world parallels, in some ways, Jason's return to the living, and Jonah's expulsion from the whale. The irony of his re-entry into the world is that he is greeted by the enemy and offered food and drink at the mouth of the cave.

Mythological Use of the Word Chingar

The transcendental meaning given the word chingar is one of Carlos Fuentes' most important accomplishments in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. In this work the novelist raises a common obscenity to the level of mythology. What is simply a prohibited, socially taboo word becomes an adequate symbol for the man who builds his life on the exploitation of his fellow men. Furthermore, it is a key to understanding the author's interpretation of Mexico and of universal man.

Of particular importance is the location of the treatment of the word chingar within the development of the novel. A detailed study of this novelistic accomplishment reveals, first, that it occurs near the center of the work; and, second, that it occurs after

the él narration of chapter VI, which tells of the Father Páez incident. In a novel filled with acts of exploitation and violation, this section outstrips the others in the callousness and indifference shown by Artemio toward his fellow men. The death of Father Remigio Páez is totally unnecessary. Pride both prevents Catalina from asking Cruz to spare the priest, and prevents Cruz from releasing the priest without her request (page 135). This pride prevents Cruz from giving in to Catalina's tacit desire to see the priest saved. Catalina's silence is also a fruit of pride, the refusal to give in to Cruz, thus admitting his strength over her. Her action in this chapter is an inevitable result of her entire eight years with Artemio, in which she is silent about his conquest over her, but during which she holds back love, affection and acceptance. She, too, is determined to be impenetrable, callous and closed. Thus, Father Páez becomes the scapegoat.

There is no doubt in Artemio's mind that pride has led him to survive and reach the apex of power; he is equally aware that humility would have kept him at the bottom of the social pyramid.

... imagínese en un mundo sin mi orgullo y mi decisión, imagínese en un mundo en el que yo fuera virtuoso, en el que yo fuera humilde: hasta abajo, de donde salí, o hasta arriba, donde estoy ... todo o nada, todo al negro o todo al rojo, con güevos, ¿eh?, con güevos,

jugándosela, rompiéndose la madre, exponiéndose a ser fusilado por los de arriba o por los de abajo; eso es ser hombre, como yo lo he sido ... (120)

Pride, though it enables him to vanquish all other human beings, remains his last enemy to be defeated. Artemis, Cruz's mythological namesake, is also symbolic of pride, the protagonist's only prevailing existential characteristic after everything has been peeled away.

... vencidos todos, sólo te faltará vencerte a ti mismo: tu enemigo saldrá del espejo a librar la última batalla: la ninfa enemiga, la ninfa de aliento espeso, hija de dioses, ... la ninfa del orgullo, tu doble, otra vez tu doble: tu último enemigo, en la tierra despoblada de los vencidos por tu orgullo: sobrevivirás: descubrirás que la virtud es sólo deseable, pero la soberbia es sólo necesaria ... (92)

The needless death of Páez, is compounded by a betrayal. Cruz, who had fought with Obregón from the beginning of the Revolution in 1913, now trades his fidelity for a few acres of real estate. His betrayal of 1927 takes on ironic overtones when, later in the novel, the episode with Gonzalo de Bernal (1915), in a vaticinatio ex evento manner, anticipates it. Gonzalo says to Artemio: "No es esto lo que quisimos cuando hacíamos la revolución con todo el pueblo, en '13 . . . Y tú, vete decidiendo. En cuanto eliminen a Zapata y Villa, quedarán sólo dos jefes, tus jefes actuales. Con cuál vas a jalar? a ver si . . ." (196). There is no need for Gonzalo to finish, for

the reader knows that the implied betrayal has been fulfilled when Artemio Cruz decides to switch his loyalties from the presidential candidate, his old military chieftain Alvaro Obregón, to Plutarco Elías Calles. Furthermore, since Calles is heavily involved in putting down the religiously inspired revolt (el movimiento cristero), Artemio sees in the capture of Father Páez an additional way of firmly aligning himself with the new powers-that-be. The betrayal of his Revolutionary leader represents a betrayal of one man, but his betrayal of the ideals of the Revolution and his willingness to benefit from the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in behalf of those ideals constitutes a betrayal of all men. This treachery is perpetuated for the sake of remaining in power and of being the one who can exploit (chingar) others and thus avoid being the victim.

The sense of closure, of impenetrability to other human beings as a result of pride and mistrust of others, takes peculiar forms within the human psyche. One of these manifestations can be described as the exaggerated sense of power, of machismo. In this chapter, the implicit condemnation of the forms of pride is subtly directed at the overweening sense of masculinity. The police commandant, in order to prove his valor and Artemio's, insists upon a dangerous

game of Russian Roulette. After having triggered an empty chamber, the commandant hands the pistol to Artemio.

El [Artemio] preguntó que qué cosa estaba probada y el otro dijo que estaba probado que por su parte no quedaba, que si se trataba de morir él no se rajaba, que no se trataba de seguir dándole vuelo a la hilacha para siempre y que así eran las cosas. Si eso no lo convencía, pues ya no sabía qué podía convencerlo. Era una prueba --le dijo el otro-- de que él debía pasarse con ellos ... (127)

Rajar, in its peculiarly Mexican significance, indicates an act of cowardice. No me rajaré means "I shall never chicken out." Interestingly enough rajar also means "to split open." The act of cowardice is equivalent to opening up to another person. The macho, the chingón, the "conqueror" will not yield to the other. As a result of this exaggerated sense of masculine valor, Cruz throws his death into the balance in order to prove a point. His old revolutionary buddies demonstrate the same attitude, as later that evening they discuss the respective pragmatic outcomes of switching loyalties or not. Their unwillingness to open themselves in a frank discussion is evidenced by the half-completed sentences.

--¿De plano crees que no sale adelante nuestro caudillo?

--Se me hace, se me hace . . .

--¿Qué?

--No, nada más se me hace.

--¿Y tú, por fin?

--Pues se me empieza a hacer también . . .

--Nada más que a la hora de la verdad ni se acuerden de que hoy platicamos.

--¿Quién se va a andar acordando de nada?
 --Yo digo, por si las dudas.
 --Las cochinas dudas.
 --Tú cállate. Tráenos algo, ándale.
 --Las cochinas dudas, monsiú.
 --Entonces, ¿nada de jalar juntos?
 --Juntos sí, nomás que cada chivito por su
 su caminito . . .
 -- . . . que al fin la bellota de encino la
 sigan repartiendo donde siempre . . .
 --Allí mismito. Eso sí. (131)

In spite of the ambiguity and noncommittal quality of this conversation, they all eventually desert their old chieftain, Obregón, for Calles. The pact is sealed by representatives of the group just prior to Artemio's obsequious affirmation of loyalty to President Calles.

Se abrió la puerta de manijas doradas y salieron del otro despacho el general Jiménez, el coronel Gavilán y otros amigos . . . y pasaron sin verlo a él, con las cabezas inclinadas y el gordo volvió a reír y le dijo [a Cruz] que muchos amigos suyos habían venido a ponerse a la disposición del señor Presidente en esta hora de unidad y extendió el brazo y le invitó a que pasara. (138)

Just as his comrades in the Revolution switched loyalties and were accepted by the opposing faction without concrete proof of their constancy, so Artemio would have been welcomed by Calles without the affirmation of fidelity represented by the death of Páez. Pride and opportunism are the forces which impel Cruz to needlessly take the life of another human being.

Fuentes closes this narrative section with the frequent use of the locution chingar which, once introduced, is followed by a veritable torrent of its derivations. The deliberate incorporation of

the chingar lexicon conveys Fuentes' moral and ethical intention. The tú voice acknowledges the scope and breadth of this word as it relates to Artemio:

Tú la pronunciarás: es tu palabra: y tu palabra es la mía; palabra de honor: palabra de hombre: palabra de rueda: palabra de molino: imprecación, propósito, saludo, proyecto de vida, filiación, recuerdo, voz de los desesperados liberación de los pobres, orden de los poderosos, invitación a la riña y al trabajo, epígrafe del amor, signo del nacimiento, amenaza y burla, verbo testigo, compañero de la fiesta y de la borrachera, espada del valor, trono de la fuerza, colmillo de la marrullería, blasón de la raza, salvavida de los límites, resumen de la historia: santo y seña de México: tu palabra. (143-44)

The encompassing nature of this word is without limits. It transcends time, space and social position; it is used for personal as well as impersonal experiences: in short, it is the word that describes a mode of existence, a common human condition.

--Viva México, hijos de su rechingada: ... Nacidos de la chingada, muertos en la chingada, vivos por pura chingadera: vientre y mortaja, escondidos en la chingada. Ella da la cara, ella reparte la baraja, ella se juega el albur, ella arroja la reticencia y el doble juego, ella descubre la pendencia y el valor, ella embriaga, grita, sucumbe, vive en cada lecho, preside los fastos de la amistad, del odio y del poder. Nuestra palabra. Tú y yo, miembros de esa masonería: la orden de la chingada. (144-45)

The active exploitation of others is dependent on one's ability to violate, injure, overcome and dominate the other. All human relationships are seen in a chingón-chingado duality: "Eres quien eres porque supiste chingar y no te dejaste chingar; eres quien

eres porque no supiste chingar y te dejaste chingar: cadena de la chingada que nos aprisiona a todos: eslabón arriba, eslabón abajo ... " (145). The word thus becomes, for Artemio Cruz and for Mexico and its people, the constant cortège. Yet the desire to return by way of the word to a mythical golden age is a lie and an act of useless nostalgia.

... crees que con ella regresarás a los orígenes: ¿a cuáles orígenes? no tú: nadie quiere regresar a la edad de oro mentirosa, a los orígenes siniestros, al gruñido bestial, a la lucha por la carne del oso, por la cueva y el pedernal, al sacrificio y a la locura, al terror sin nombre del origen, al fetiche inmolado, al miedo del sol, miedo de la tormenta, miedo del eclipse, miedo del fuego, miedo de las máscaras, terror de los ídolos, miedo de la pubertad, miedo del agua, miedo del hambre, miedo del desamparo, terror cósmico: chingada, pirámide de negaciones, teocalli del espanto. (145)

Similarly, to go forward with the word into the future creates an undesirable world.

... crees que con ella caminarás hacia adelante, te afirmarás: ¿a cuál futuro? no tú: nadie quiere caminar cargado de la maldición, de la sospecha, de la frustración, del resentimiento, del odio, de la envidia, del rencor, del desprecio, de la inseguridad, de la miseria, del abuso, del insulto, de la intimidación, del falso orgullo, del machismo, de la corrupción de tu chingada chingada ... (145-56)

With this futility in mind, there follows an exhortation to shed the word and kill it: " ... déjala en el camino, asesínala con armas que no sean las tuyas ... " (146). That is to say, kill it with its opposite: not pride and violence but humility and love. " ... matémosla: matemos esa palabra que nos separa, nos

petrifica, nos pudre con su doble veneno de ídolo y cruz: que no sea nuestra respuesta ni nuestra fatalidad ... " (146). The double poison of cross and idol refers to the response of the victimized (el chingado) and the aggressor (el chingón), or the Indian (idol) and the Spanish conqueror (cross). Both options kill the human spirit and shut off man from man. " ... ruega: que no sea nuestra respuesta ni nuestra fatalidad: la chingada, hijos de la chingada, la chingada que envenena el amor, disuelve la amistad, aplasta la ternura, la chingada que divide, la chingada que separa, la chingada que destruye, la chingada que emponzoña ... " (146). To be someone who lives the word chingar is to be closed to others and to turn them into objects of abuse, exploitation and hate. The tú voice seems to be asking Cruz and perhaps all men: " .. ¿a quién chingarás hoy, para existir?. ¿a quién mañana? ¿a quién chingarás: a quién usarás?: los hijos de la chingada son estos objetos, estos seres que tú convertirás en objetos de tu uso, tu placer, tu dominación, tu desprecio, tu victoria, tu vida ... " (146).

Cruz is symbolic of a life style which may be characterized as universal. He represents Western man driven by an insatiable desire to reach the pinnacle of power at all costs. He represents the man who kills another human being for nationalistic reasons. He is the man who has fossilized, who is unable to reveal

himself to others or to see himself in others. He is the man whose only final source of power is a world of objects which reflect his own egoism. He is Artemio Cruz and he is all men.

Chingar and its various derivatives become a mythic emblemata which demonstrates a universal prototype, the exploiter, the chingón, the closed. This all-encompassing image is heavily laden with ethical implications. Fuentes thus uses an obscenity in order to cleanse man of the obscene; he calls it forth in order to purge it from the consciousness of man. It becomes a moral call to bannish the hate, violence and exploitation symbolized in the word. It is a word that belongs to all humanity and thus each man must defeat the power of the word, self-love, with the power of love for others.

Imagery of Freedom

The all-embracing nature of the chingón paradigm makes of this work a voyage into the life of a man who lives for himself, a man who ultimately loses his humanity and dehumanizes all those who surround him. This process of dehumanization is described in the chapter section treating the New Year's party. For Artemio, all the elite who come to pay him tribute are puppets in his control (page 261). The movement from birth to death thus becomes a movement from the

open to the closed, a movement from unlimited potential to the ultimate denial of freedom. La muerte de Artemio Cruz is not a simple story of an evil man, but of one who continually denies himself to others, closes himself, and becomes the victim of his own exploitation since he, too, becomes an object. The wasted potentiality of being human, contrasted with the final awareness of such a life, constitutes the central paradox and dynamism of the novel. The entire work is a call to awareness of a life that was neither aware of itself nor of others. Artemio's life is one of vida muerte in which he refused to recognize the existence of others and during which he refused to consciously choose, to exert his freedom. This lack of sense of "otherness" is furthermore a refusal to recognize the "other" within himself, the potentials of being that which he chose to ignore. This dialectic between the "I" and "thou," as Martin Buber would call it, presents an interesting study in the phenomenology of freedom.

The fundamental concept that the self is a reality to which all other realities must be referred is the basis of José Ortega y Gasset's theories of history in the essay La historia como sistema. "La vida humana es una realidad extraña, de la cual lo primero que conviene decir es que es la realidad radical, en el sentido de que a ella tenemos que referir todas las demás, ya que las demás, ya que las realidades,

efectivas o presuntas, tienen de uno y otro modo que aparecer en ella."¹⁹ This concept of selfhood is an irreplaceable entity for Western man. Unamuno in his Soledad, in keeping with this emphasis on the indissoluble and unquestionable ontological existence of the self, posits a solitude which generates the emergence of the person: "Sólo en la soledad puedes conocerte a ti mismo como prójimo."²⁰ That is to say, only in the act of self-contemplation can we begin to look at the "other" within the "self." This supposes a psychic distance in which the "self" emerges through imagery as an "other." The imaginistic process emerges from man's ability to stand back and see himself in action, to see himself as "other." For " ... mientras no te reconozcas a ti mismo como prójimo, no podrás llegar a ver a tus prójimos otros yos."²¹

From the onset of his serious illness, Artemio is presented with the image of himself as a twin, as the "other." "Y entonces te llevarás las manos al vientre y tu cabeza de canas crespas, de rostro aceitunado, pegará huecamente sobre el cristal de la mesa y otra vez, ahora tan cerca, verás ese reflejo de tu mellizo enfermo ... " (16). The novel begins by confronting the protagonist with his "otherness."

... algo brilla con insistencia cerca de mi rostro. Algo que se reproduce detrás de mis párpados cerrados en una fuga de luces negras

y círculos azules. Contraigo los músculos de la cara, abro el ojo derecho y lo veo reflejado en las incrustaciones de vidrio de una bolsa de mujer. Soy esto. Soy esto. Soy este viejo con las facciones partidas por los cuadros desiguales del vidrio. Soy este ojo. Soy este ojo. Soy este ojo surcado por las raíces de una cólera acumulada, vieja, olvidada, siempre actual. Soy este ojo abultado y verde entre los párpados. Párpados. Párpados. Párpados aceitosos. Soy esta nariz. Esta nariz. Esta nariz. Quebrada. De anchas ventanas. Soy estos pómulos. (9)

Significantly, the image of the yo, here, is fragmented and objectified. The movement of the novel, as Artemio is confronted with himself as "other" and the "other" as self, is a movement toward a holistic view of his person.

The first instance in which Cruz refuses to take into account the "prójimo como otro yo" occurs during the Revolution when in the heat of battle he hides in a wooded area. It is here that he is confronted with the presence of a wounded soldier who embraces him, silently seeking help. "Sintió el brazo destruido sobre su espalda, manchándola y escurriendo una sangre azorada. Trató de apartar el rostro torcido de dolor: pómulos altos, boca abierta, ojos cerrados, bigote y barba revueltos, cortos, como los suyos. Si tuviese los ojos verdes, sería su gemelo . . . " (75). Artemio flees from this man, his double (pages 75-76).

Later in the Revolution, Artemio survives execution while Gonzalo and the Yaqui scout die.

As Artemio enters Puebla, Gonzalo's hometown, he puts aside any memory of Gonzalo's death which might make him realize the relationship that exists among men. To do so would be to recognize a debt, and would perhaps be a hindrance to his future acts of violence and exploitation. "Cuando entró a Puebla, ... sintió que entraba duplicado, con la vida de Gonzalo Bernal añadida a la suya, con el destino del muerto sumado al suyo: como si Bernal, al morir, hubiese delegado las posibilidades de su vida incumplida en la de él. Quizás las muertes ajenas son las que alargan nuestra vida, pensó" (43). This effort to obliterate any memory of the past is repeated often throughout the novel. Artemio becomes aware that he never thinks of his past life when he, Gonzalo and the Yaqui Indian are awaiting execution in Perales. "Sólo entonces recordó que siempre había mirado hacia adelante, desde la noche en que atravesó la montaña y escapó del viejo casco veracruzano. ... Desde entonces quería saberse solo, sin más fuerzas que las propias" (189). Cruz, by fleeing from the past, does not have to be indebted to anyone. This desire to be sufficient to himself is evident throughout the novel in his denying the existence of history as well as the existence of others. On his deathbed Cruz wishes to retain his complete autonomy, but the tú voice insists on recalling the dead to whom he owes so much, to recognize, finally,

that he did not live alone, though he acted as if he did. " ... querrás que todo suceda sin que tú le debas nada a nadie y querrás recordarte en una vida que a nadie le deberá nada ... " (121). Artemio not only denies during his life the debts he may owe to others and the meaning of the past, but also feels that he is outside the social order. In a sense he is a god unto himself, and need not follow the society's code, since it was not written for or by him.

There is for Artemio a progression from his youth, with its unlimited freedom, to his final days when freedom has been narrowed to his final destiny, death. Freedom for Artemio has been complete; he has had all the necessary opportunities, no more and no less, to become what he chose. "Nadie se enterará, salvo tú, quizás. Que tu existencia será fabricada con todos los hilos del telar, como las vidas de todos los hombres. Que no te faltará, ni te sobraré, una sola oportunidad para hacer de tu vida lo que quieras que sea" (34). Cruz, existential man, is condemned to freedom. He must choose and when he makes a choice he chooses not to act in a variety of alternate ways. This process continues until the alternatives are finally weeded out and man can no longer choose at the moment of death.

Y si serás una cosa, y no la otra, será porque, a pesar de todo, tendrás que elegir. Tus

elecciones no negarán el resto de tu posible vida, todo lo que dejarás atrás cada vez que elijas: sólo la adelgazarán, la adelgazarán al grado de que hoy tu elección y tu destino serán una misma cosa: la medalla ya no tendrá dos caras: tu deseo será idéntico a tu destino. (34)

The image of the reflection in the mirror, which occurs with great frequency throughout the novel, is symbolic of the choices available to Artemio; his refusal to see his image reflected during his lifetime was a refusal to recognize other choices open to him.

... elegirás, para sobrevivir elegirás, elegirás entre los espejos infinitos uno solo, uno solo que te reflejará irrevocablemente, que llenará de una sombra negra los demás espejos, los matarás antes de ofrecerte, una vez más, esos caminos infinitos para la elección: decidirás, escogerás uno de los caminos, sacrificarás los demás: te sacrificarás al escoger, dejarás de ser todos los otros hombres que pudiste haber sido ... (209)

But man, a finite space-time creature, is subject to the passing of time. Fuentes uses images that suggest fluidity and rigidity to depict the movement from life to death. Artemio Cruz perceives the world in metallic terms. The world of the metallic permeates his consciousness through the senses. In the opening pages of the novel, he tastes death metaphorically, metals being suggestive of death or the lack of organic life. " ... los párpados me pesan: dos plomos, cobres en la lengua, martillos en el oído, una . . . una como plata oxidada en la respiración.

Metálico, todo esto. Mineral, otra vez" (9).

The sea in Veracruz and the river in Cocuya interplay symbolically with the equation of life as water. Death is seen in terms of a mineral substance, marble. " ... adivinan tumefacción, tumefacción de contornos fluidos, eso dicen mientras me retienen, me palpan, hablan de mármoles, sí, los oigo, mármoles violáceos en el vientre que yo ya no siento ... " (243). A similar symbolic crystallization and hardening is used to describe Don Gamaliel's death: "El catarro crónico se fue endureciendo, como una burbuja de vidrio hirviente puesta al sol y pronto el pecho se le cerró y los pulmones no pudieron tomar más aire que el delgado, frío, que lograba colarse entre las rendijas de una masa de flema, irritación y sangre" (98).

In the life and death struggle in which man is involved, Artemio's stomach is poetically pregnant with death. " ... el abultamiento de mi vientre es mi parto, lo asemejo al parto, me da risa. Trato de tocarlo. Lo recorro del ombligo al pubis. Nuevo. Redondo. Pastoso" (116). The process from the fluid (water, ocean, river) to the fossilized is not only depicted biologically but psychologically as well. Artemio, as a child of thirteen stands on the mountain open to the universe and to the potentiality of his freedom. At the end of the novel he has become a fossil, a living cadaver referred to as "la momia

de Coyoacán." This sense of closure, hardening and crystallization is spiritually and morally the imagery of the chingón, for he is closed to the other. He refuses to reveal himself; to open up to another would be to rajarse, an act of cowardice. This is evident as Gonzalo Bernal attempts to reveal his last thoughts and sentiments to Cruz before they have to face the firing squad.

El gruñó y encendió su cigarro apagado. --Así no se habla --dijo entre dientes--. ¿Qué? ¿Te hablo derecho? Pues me cagan los cojones los que se abren sin que nadie les pida razón y más a la hora de la muerte. Quédese callado, mi licenciado, y dígame para sus adentros lo que quiera, pero a mí déjeme morir sin que me raje. (197)

For Artemio, the fear of opening up is the fear of recognizing the "other" and his own responsibility to him. On several occasions his continued life has in fact meant the death of others. What he fears most but finally has to accept is that he is responsible for the "other" that dwells within him and that was another part of him. "La palabra regresó a su temor oculto. Cainita: esa palabra atroz no debía brotar, jamás, de los labios de la mujer que, aunque se perdiera la esperanza de amor, sería sin embargo su testigo" (114).

Conclusion

La muerte de Artemio Cruz, for all its richness and narrative modes and its historical and mythological

dimensions, nevertheless retains a clear-cut and unequivocal ethical position. The author, while presenting the particular life-style of the closed, self-seeking man, achieves harmony of theme, style and structure. The narrative errors incurred in Las buenas conciencias and La región más transparente are avoided. Basically, this is the result of sustaining a coherent balance between the narrative points of view and their point of interest, the protagonist, Artemio Cruz. All three modes initiate within the consciousness of the main character and return to this source. The intensity of the yo with its interior monologue weaves in and out of the third-person él which narrates the action of the novel. The tú acts as a ligament to the yo and él while it presents an intricate and intimate relationship with Artemio Cruz and the cosmos. It is this vertical relationship that gives the narrative its range and power of association. The tú form is the religious nature of man, using the term in the Latin meaning of tying man with a transcendental realm outside the human being. The tú also interiorly duplicates the psyche of the protagonist and in this way remains within the scope and limits of the novel. The "dialogue" quality of the work derives from this interior duplication.

The tú then becomes metaphorically the guide

to the past. Psychologically, it can be said to be the ethical-religious dimension of Artemio Cruz, for it is this voice which views the world of the closed, the chingón, as a hell from which to retrieve Artemio's other dimensions, the yo and the él: the concrete flesh-and-blood creature, as well as the historical man. " ... me fatigas; me vences; me obligas a descender contigo a ese infierno; quieres recordar otras cosas, no eso: me obligas a olvidar que las cosas serán, nunca que son, nunca que fueron ... " (147). The tú not only guides the protagonist into the darkness of his psyche but also pursues him. The tú voice refuses to allow Cruz to die comfortably in nostalgia. Cruz must relive and re-enact the events of the past, and, in so doing, recognize that he was free to choose, that the choices he made were not the only ones possible. This re-enactment is, thus, primarily portrayed in the future since all memories must structure themselves at a future moment from the present. This process sets up within the work an inner cyclical movement which configures the structure of the novel and succinctly expresses Artemio's desire to return to his origins, to return to a time and place before the Separation.

Carlos Fuentes accomplishes all of this without having to enter the fabric of the novel as author in order to pontificate on the moral character of his protagonist, as he did in Las buenas conciencias.

This is not necessary because the tú has taken up the task of making the ethical and moral statements. The tú both admonishes the dying Cruz concerning his lack of humanity, and at the same time clearly reflects an ethical concern. Gone, too, is the diffuse and confusing fragmentation of La región más transparente caused by an incoherent handling of the narrative perspectives.

In effect, the author finds the apt vehicle to both express his ethical and moral concerns, while at the same time fulfilling the highest aesthetic standards of the novel. In this work, Carlos Fuentes adopts an existential focus on the nature of man. From this core the social, historical and mythical dimensions of man are united. It is this multiplicity within unity that makes La muerte de Artemio Cruz his best wrought novel to date.

NOTES

¹ Vargas Llosa, in a general appraisal of the contemporary Latin American writers, states, " ... La muerte de Artemio Cruz consigue un equilibrio eficaz entre compromiso social y vocación artística." In "Novela hispanoamericana: de la herejía a la coronación," Ercilla (June, 1964), 59.

² On this time factor, it varies from critic to critic. The time texture seems to be purposefully ambiguous. The twelve-hour sequence is aesthetically pleasing: twelve sections, twelve hours. There is really no proof.

"La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1962) narra las doce horas de agonía del personaje central, en las que aflora su pasado en relación con los días que supuso definitivos en su vida." María del Carmen Millán, Reseña a La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Revista Iberoamericana, XXVIII, nos. 397-399 (1962), 397.

Juan Sánchez Palacios, in "Algunos aspectos de la novela La muerte de Artemio Cruz," also expresses the idea that Cruz's death takes place in twelve hours. In Armas y Letras (Monterrey), VI (diciembre, 1963), 83-89.

Others have seen it in terms of vague, ambiguous time. For instance, Elena Soriano, "Este autoexamen agónico, de duración imprecisa--lo mismo puede ser de unas horas que de unos minutos" In "Tres escritores de un mundo," Indice, XVIII, No. 196, 22-24.

³ In his "Review of La muerte de Artemio Cruz," Hispania, XLVI (Dec., 1963), 856-57, Joseph Sommers, though correctly assigning the various voices to their respective narrative planes, does not go far enough. The tri-unity structure not only " . . . creates a high degree of suspense and dramatic tension," but is in fact the meaning of the novel: the dimensions of a man's life, existential, historical, religious.

⁴ The use of the tú has received varied reactions from the critics. The most critical, almost amusing, is the opinion rendered by Isabel Fraire in her review of the novel: "Yo le recomendaría al lector fácilmente irritable que se brincara todas las partes que empiezan con Tú, y al que es más bien perezoso que lea únicamente las que empiezan con El, pero que de ninguna manera lo deje de leer." In Revista mexicana de literatura, no. 7-8 (julio-agosto, 1962), 55-56.

⁵ Carlos Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz (México, 1962), p. 9. Further references to this novel will be followed by the page number.

⁶ Octavio Paz, El laberinto de la soledad, p. 69. Miss Eunice Odio is one of the few critics who mention the use of the word chingar in La muerte de Artemio Cruz: "... palabras nacionales enriquecidas con mil sentidos (como aquella tan reveladora de una psicología que Octavio Paz convierte en punto de partida para un ensayo: 'chingada') ..." in "Carlos Fuentes: La muerte de Artemio Cruz," Cuadernos del congreso por la libertad de la cultura, No. 70 (marzo, 1963), 83. Though she mentions Paz, she does not elaborate on the possible novelistic meaning given the word by Fuentes in this work. More intolerant in this respect is Mildred Adams who, in "The Line of Life Lies Between Paralysis and Frenzy!" states: "To play with four-letter words for their own sake, as Fuentes sometimes does, is to play an adolescent's game." (New York Times Book Review, May 24, 1964, 4).

⁷ Plato, "Symposium," The Works of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York, n.d.), p. 318.

⁸ Eric Wolf, The Sons of the Shaking Earth (Chicago, 1959), pp. 167-68.

⁹ José Ortega y Gasset, Historia como sistema (Madrid, 1966), p. 37.

¹⁰ This event is the historical matrix for La sombra del caudillo (México, 1929) by Guzmán.

¹¹ Ortega, Historia, p. 37. Undoubtedly an interesting topic worthy of investigation would be the impact of existentialist thought as it is manifested in the narrative art of Carlos Fuentes. The label "existentialist" is frequent in critical essays, but without concrete proof of the tenets of this philosophy being reflected in Fuentes' novels.

- 12 Karl Löwith, The Meaning of History (Chicago, 1949), p. 29.
- 13 R. G. Collingwood, Essays in the Philosophy of History (Texas, 1965), p. 186.
- 14 John T. Marcus, Heaven, Hell and History (New York, 1967), p. 3.
- 15 J. M. Woolsey, The Original Garden of Eden Discovered (New York, 1910), p. 323.
- 16 Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Fable (New York, n.d.), p. 38.
- 17 Charles Mills Gayler, The Classic Myths (Boston, 1911), p. 30.
- 18 Idem.
- 19 Ortega, Historia, p. 3.
- 20 Miguel de Unamuno, Soledad (Madrid, 1962), pp. 32-33.
- 21 Idem.

CHAPTER IV
ZONA SAGRADA

Zona sagrada is basically concerned with the problem of human freedom but, unlike previous works, the question is novelistically treated outside the social and historical matrix. Zona sagrada does not attempt to make an ethical statement about man and his relationship to his surroundings. The issue in this, his fifth novel, is rather the internal workings of a disturbed human psyche and the subsequent disintegration of identity. Zona sagrada, though distinct in many ways from the previous novels, holds several thematic similarities to them. The problem of freedom and the quest for identity are present in every one of Carlos Fuentes' novels; these are carried forward in Zona sagrada, as in other works, through the use of mythological motifs. The protagonist, Guillermo Nervo, stands in opposition to Artemio Cruz: whereas the latter is a man of action, constantly molding his own character through his decisions, always in

the context of society, Guillermo is an example of the dissolving self, the personality withdrawn from the world and incapable of action that would ensure his survival.

Zona sagrada embodies an experiment with point of view, which has been seen as basic to Fuentes' novelistic balance of form and content. In this case, the experiment involves the use of the conventional first-person narrator. The switch to a protagonist-narrator is a limiting factor. It explains, in part, the absence of any editorial value judgments since Fuentes' voice is excluded from the narrative.

Zona sagrada, as first-person narrative, owes its basic unity to the "I" of the story. The fact that Guillermo tells the story from beginning to end accounts for the structural unity. In contrast, the unity of content presents a problem. The content consists entirely of the search for identity of an unstable, extremely vacillatory person. In telling his story, Guillermo starts in the middle of things, jumps from past to present, and becomes increasingly incoherent and difficult to understand as the novel progresses. So it is that, though there is the unifying element of the consistent point of view (the "I"), the unity of the work is weakened by the dispersive psychological nature of the protagonist's ego. Compensating for this weakness, lending unity without

destroying the impression of Guillermo's basic instability, are the mythical motifs. Of particular import is the Ulysses myth, symbolic of the protagonist's relationship to his mother, Claudia Nervo, and to his best friend, Giancarlo.

The Structure of Madness

Carlos Fuentes' main concern in Zona sagrada is to present, in novel form, Guillermo Ramírez Nervo's failure to become an emotionally integrated human being. At a particularly crucial point in his life, Guillermo tells the story of that life (both past events and those simultaneous to the writing) to Giancarlo. As he writes, he reveals to the reader the progressive disintegration of his personality. Guillermo's trajectory from instability to insanity constitutes, accordingly, both the theme and structure of the novel. Because of this, the novel breaks with the chronological order of events. The novel is presented as a process in which past history, evoked by the narrator, becomes an organic part of the present.

Though not apparent at a casual reading, there are two distinct temporal planes functioning in the novel. The events dealing with any time prior to the moment Guillermo starts to write his small confession appear, not in chronological order, but as the protagonist remembered and presented them: achronologically

and shuffled with the events of the present.

PAST: Chapters I, III, VI, VIII, IX, XI, XIII

PRESENT: Chapters II, IV, V, VII, IX, X, XII, XIV,
XV, XVII, XVIII

Interestingly enough, the past events become part and parcel of the present time of the novel, due to its subject matter: a psychological process. This present depicts Guillermo's relationship to his mother as he becomes aware of the conflict between dependency and autonomy. He first has recourse to the past, hoping to find (in his childhood and adolescence) resolutions of his motherless state, answers for the present dilemma.

Guillermo's abiding confusion about his place in the world is revealed through his achronological presentation of the narrative material. It is important to note the prevalence of childhood events; being Claudia Nervo's son is the only identity he has had and yet his existence is ignored by most people, with the exception of servants--his cook, the tailor, the parking lot attendant, the airport guard. Claudia Nervo wishes it so; beautiful and renowned, she does everything possible to deny her forty-plus years, including keeping her twenty-nine-year-old son a secret to her public, which is more than willing to accept the illusion of her eternal youth. Her son, in his struggle to become a person, lacks the strength to

free himself from the dependence upon her for his identity. Hopeful that she will some day publicly recognize him and grant him a personality in the eyes of others, Guillermo remains bound to the circumstances of his birth. " ... soy yo: un hombre de su clase, de su tiempo, de su espacio: de una condición vencida de antemano por una especie de fatalidad escogida."¹ Thus his childhood is of prime interest to him as he begins his search for a meaningful existence. He hopes to explain his driving need to be recognized by his mother and his desire to possess her. Guillermo's obsessive focus on his childhood memories makes the reader aware that he has never cut the apron strings. He has remained the child he was when his mother took him from the paternal home in Guadalajara. This attitude of dependence upon his mother, to the point of stunting his psychological development, reveals itself in the atemporal structure of the novel: past and present events alternate, giving childhood events the immediacy that Guillermo attributes to them. They are as much in the foreground as the events of the ten-day period which constitutes the "narrative present." Structurally, the childhood events interspersed with those more temporally immediate gives the impression of simultaneity and becomes a contributing factor in understanding Guillermo's psyche.

The second discernible step in the protagonist's

psychological deterioration marks a thematic and structural turning-point in the novel. Through chapter XIII (the last of the flashbacks) the protagonist's faith in the past as a key to the present is manifested in the alternating narration of past and present events. The subsequent chapter, however, shows the beginning of Guillermo's desperation as he realizes that Giancarlo has robbed him of his mother. The protagonist's growing disturbance, instead of being manifested in an achronological order as in the first thirteen chapters, is evidenced in other ways. Primary among these is the use of imagery, to be discussed later. Also, there exists an increasing atemporal element, i.e., the fantasy sequence at the masquerade party in chapter XV. Actual happenings and fantasy become impossible to distinguish one from the other. Finally, unable to achieve fetal oblivion--a symbolic substitute for his mother--Guillermo chooses what for him is the only clear alternative. He commits psychological suicide by taking on the identity of his dog, Faraón. The structure of the novel once again parallels the protagonist's state of mind; added to the fantastic element is the discordant temporal sequence (chapters XIX, XX). In an attempt to approximate the time sense of an unreasoning beast, past and present are indiscriminately mixed. It is evident that time and space are no longer of concern to Guillermo-Faraón. With the breakdown of Guillermo's psyche

comes the disintegration of his relationship to people as separate beings.

So it is that Zona sagrada deals with the past and present of one person. It is a doubly internal novel: in form, autobiographical; in content, psychological. And the form fuses with content in that the order of presentation of the material and the varying emphases given certain episodes (this includes the omission of some) serve to characterize the protagonist.

The Epistolary Dimension of Zona sagrada

As stated before, Zona sagrada is concerned with the search for identity of the protagonist and first-person narrator, Guillermo Ramírez Nervo. In intimate communication with his friend of adolescence, the Italian, Giancarlo, he relates the story of his life from early childhood to the present. The communication itself takes place in the present. The intimate tone of the novel is due to its autobiographical nature, the main character telling his own story. This internal narrative point of view gains vividness because of the close relation of the narrator to the action. Zona sagrada is, besides being autobiographical, very nearly epistolary in form. Though not explicitly presented as letters, i.e., lacking the exterior format of the epistolary novel, it retains the essential element. The entire novel is directed to the aforementioned

friend, Giancarlo, the tú of the narration. This is apparent from the second line of the novel: "Pero tú tienes mirada para otras cosas" (3). The first explicit declaration of intent by Guillermo is found at the end of chapter III: "Quiero que lo sepas todo. Este es mi cuento" (19). This is repeated in the first line of chapter VIII which, like III, deals with Guillermo's childhood: "Quiero que lo sepas todo" (50). In chapter XI, Guillermo records this conversation with the same tú of the above declarations, who remains anonymous:

--¿Qué me vas a contar?
 --Todo.
 --¿Sirven para algo tus historias?
 --No sé. No lo creo.
 --Mejor. Diviértete." (77)

He is speaking to the schoolmate who has invited him to spend Christmas vacation with him in Italy. In chapter XIII, this tú is at last unequivocally identified with the companion of the first chapter, and as Giancarlo. Later in the work it is seen that not only does Guillermo write to Giancarlo, but that his intimate revelation is meant only for the eyes of the latter: "Yo te las conté a ti, nada más ... " (182). The reader, then, is reading over the shoulder of Giancarlo, as it were, and this illusion of literary eavesdropping reinforces the verisimilitude of the work.

The Second-Person Narrator

The use of the second-person narrator in the novels of Carlos Fuentes is one of the salient narrative features of his works. The germ of this particular device is found in the author's first novel, La región más transparente. This second-person narrative agent reaches maturity in La muerte de Artemio Cruz and finally becomes the only voice heard in Aura. A study of these three novels reveals how the narrative point of view influences both the form and the meaning of the novel.

In La región más transparente the dominant narrative point of view is rendered by the omniscient author who uses the third-person form of address. The inner life of the character is given through the direct and indirect interior monologue technique. This third-person mode structures the novel for all but eighteen pages of the total four-hundred and fifty-two; the first-person narration at the very start of the novel (pages 9-10) and the last pages (444-46) frame the work. The prologue identifies the narrator: "Mi nombre es Ixca Cienfuegos" (Región, 9), and continues to page eleven when the omniscient narrator takes over from the first-person narrator: "Boinas. El barrendero le dio un empujón ... " (Región, 11). The first-person narrator again picks up the story on page 444 and terminates the novel. It is during this

section (entitled "La región más transparente") that the author, Carlos Fuentes, speaks in the first-person singular and plural and for the first time uses the second-person form of address to speak to the whole of Mexico, past and present.

Dueños de la noche, porque en ella soñamos;
dueños de la vida, porque sabemos que no hay
sino un largo fracaso que se cumple en pre-
pararla y gastarla para el fin; corazón de
corolas, te abriste: sólo tú no necesitas
hablar: todo menos la voz nos habla. No
tienes memoria, porque todo vive al mismo
tiempo; tus partos son tan largos como el
sol, tan breves como los gajos de un reloj
frutal: has aprendido a nacer a diario,
para darte cuenta de tu muerte nocturna.
(Región, 444-45)

The use of the tú form of address in La región más transparente is important because it becomes one of Fuentes' characteristic modes of narration and a fertile source for experimentation.² La muerte de Artemio Cruz refines and delineates the function of the second-person narrative voice. Through a process of interior duplication the tú voice is both one dimension of the moribund Cruz and at the same time acts as his accusing conscience. The tú thus becomes a sort of super-ego of the main character. This use is by far clearer than its previous use in La región más transparente where the source of the voice is at once within the novel and outside it; where it is the voice of the character Ixca as well as that of the author Carlos Fuentes and Mexico. The second-person

mode in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, besides having an accusative function, also operates as a narrative voice. For example, the plot progression dealing with Lorenzo is primarily revealed from the second-person narrative point of view instead of the traditional third-person perspective. " ... tú lo escuchas entender, colocarse de cuclillas, de cara al mar abierto, con los diez dedos abiertos, bajo el cielo encapotado, súbitamente oscuro: 'Sale un barco dentro de diez días'" (Muerte, 227).

Aura is Fuentes' first novel to utilize the second-person form as its only narrative voice. Functionally, it is like the third-person form since it narrates the entire story. Unlike La región más transparente, the author does not identify with the "voice" nor does he give it the psychological dimensions found in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. It is not the protagonist, Felipe Montero, who speaks nor does this tú voice represent his inner psyche.³ It is a voice from no specific place directed to no particular person. The tú, generally implying a direct address in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, here relinquishes that quality and takes over the task of narrating. This ambiguity has led some to criticize its use.⁴ But the tú is necessary to the creation of a world in which time and space are abolished--one in which the sense of "person"

does not exist. The tú in Aura refers to no one and to everyone: the reader, the author and the protagonist. Here personality as the distinguishing feature of a person is cast aside in favor of a more perfect persona which exists eternally, sub-specie aeternitatis, in the systematic spiritual world beyond. The aesthetic balance of form and content rests upon the ambiguities created by this narrative mode.

The Imagery of Madness

Guillermo Nervo as a first-person narrator is limited in his narrative scope. To tell his story as well as to reveal the nature of his illness would be impossible. The use of imagery, without breaking the narrative point of view, reveals the protagonist's psychic derangement. The motif of the womb image allows the reader to recreate Guillermo's voyage towards isolation and madness.

The sacred place, as a substitute for the womb, is the single most important image in the novel. It is introduced in the first chapter and becomes an important means of characterizing Guillermo's particular emotional problem. Hence, it is subject to interpretation on various levels. In the chapter entitled "Happily Ever After" the ball game of the young boys of Positano captures Guillermo's attention because it is somehow reminiscent of beauty and life. In

fact, he passes from a description of the game directly to its analogy, the daily life of the fishing town:

Al amanecer, plantaron en la arena las estacas para marcar el espacio del juego: la zona sagrada. Toda la mañana ... la pelota sale disparada hacia el mar; regresa a la playa impulsada por el oleaje suave Los muchachos fueron arrojados sobre la arena negra por una marea llena de caricias: el esfuerzo no se hace sentir. También el de los marineros, entre semana, es casi invisible. Un ir y venir silencioso de barcas ... (3)

This game, then, is symbolically the game of life in general. Guillermo's use of the term "zona sagrada," sacred place, a term not commonly applied to the field of play, along with the emphasis of the masculinity of the players, suggests that this particular game is further representative of a specific phase of life: the transition from childhood to manhood.⁵ Guillermo remains a passive observer of the game which represents to him the rite of initiation to manhood. This is his dilemma: never to be capable of breaking with the secure, comfortable, maternal world where the male child lives innocently and passively, to enter the world of men. In this sense, the sacred place is the unreachable goal; his story is one of the impossibility of attaining the transition which would mean a break with the mother figure and all she represents, and the establishment of an independent, truly male identity.

Guillermo is twenty-nine years old but somehow acts like, and elicits the treatment of, the nine-

year-old boy brought by Claudia to Mexico City. His desire is to remain in the shelter and protection of the womb because the very essential mother-son relationship has apparently been lacking in his life. This is due to Claudia Nervo's neglect of her son for the sake of pursuing a movie career. Guillermo has felt deprived of the warmth and security of a mother's love and so has come to seek substitutes for her lap and embrace and, ultimately, for the womb. To him, in his emotional retardation, the womb has become the goal of life, the sacred place.⁶

Due to Claudia Nervo's inaccessibility to her son, he evolves successive substitutes for her. His father's home in Guadalajara is described in terms suggestive of the womb. His early life with his father and grandmother has many parallels, in his mind, to the foetal state. He is a spoiled, solitary little boy who is totally indifferentiated from his surroundings. " ... toda la casa en Guadalajara era este seno cálido y ciego, allí, bajo los aleros, estaba el nicho absoluto de la separación devota, del aislamiento protector. Yo me acurrucaba, extendía las piernas, volvía a recogerme, abrazado a mí mismo, temeroso de que ese calor eufórico del vientre no pudiese prolongarse ... " (18). Inherent in this womb-like niche into which he withdraws is the fear

of possible separation. His ancestors, seen in the old photographs, all wear gloves; this is symbolic of the lack of physical affection sensed by Guillermo, described by him as "tacto ausente" (18). His father's family does not fulfill the youngster's affective needs. The threat to this womb-like existence comes in the "epoch of the kidnappers," a period of fear of being kidnapped. At this time, Mito (Guillermito) must abandon his cubby-hole near the windows, out of the terror of being abducted, and establish his fantasy world under the bed. For Mito, the kidnappers become a nightmarish combination of all the childhood bugaboos and a symbolic embodiment of the threat to his euphoric existence. Claudia, his mother, who actually uproots him from the sacred place in Guadalajara, thus becomes linked in Guillermo's mind with the kidnappers. His first attempt to compensate for the lacking of motherly love is, ironically enough, destroyed by the mother whose absence triggered it. Furthermore, she fails, in his mind, to provide the needed substitute for the security of his niche in Guadalajara. She wins custody of him from the father, only to place him in a boarding school, compounding his need for her even more.

His life, a quest for the mother he never had, is expressed symbolically in the desire to return to the cubbyhole in Guadalajara. Hence, he says of his school in Switzerland: " ... aquí obtuve lo que

siempre busqué: el alero, el escondite debajo de la cama ... " (72). For him the Swiss school for foreigners was an ideal situation, similar in many respects to the environment in his father's house. In both cases he is spoiled, every need being met with nothing asked in return, but the pampering is devoid of affection.

Guillermo further withdraws from the world by forming uterine environments. As the reader takes stock of Guillermo's descriptions of his various "sacred places," it becomes evident that, though all are mother substitutes, the differences are indicative of the protagonist's growing emotional sickness. His construction of the selvatic environment in his Mexico City apartment is very obviously reminiscent of the womb in its curved lines, lack of apertures and especially in Guillermo's professed relationship to it--that of the foetus to the womb; it is the source and totality of his life.

Aquí regreso, como los incas, a renovar mi energía ... sólo en este espacio me renuevo. ... El claustro me envuelve; mi temblor fatigado lo recibe sin aristas, sin pisos, muros, ventanas; soy parte de la materia de este cáncer barroco, de esta proliferación ... curvilínea y flamboyante Todo el decorado se filtra hasta las uñas y las yemas de mi piel como a través de una larga, loca, perfumada, negra cabellera de mujer. (31-2)

However, there emerges an element here that, though

latent in his hiding-place in Guadalajara until this point, has not consciously manifested itself: Guillermo's role as creator. In his fantasy world under the four-poster bed in Guadalajara, he was the little monarch of a kingdom of paper creatures of his own making. Isolated from meaningful human contact, he was a little god in the security of his fantasy. "Los nuevos seres de papel y tela eran manipulados por el niño que fui yo, siempre solemne, risueño ... " (19). Similarly, of his apartment in Mexico City he says: "Mi gruta encantada: así la quise, como la veo esta noche, jadeando, reclinado contra la puerta de este claustro vegetal mío pensado por mí construido por mí ... " (30). The apartment is his own creation, his own world, but more importantly, in his mind it is equated with his mother and her world--all that is sacred to him. The intent seems clear: in his desire to identify with his mother to the extent that he is totally dependent upon her, he is moving toward an eventual attempt to actually replace her. The first step is to create a sacred place which, though at first imitative of her presence as the cathedral is suggestive of the presence of the Deity, gradually vies with her for validity as a sacred place. Guillermo is forgetting the original object of his desire, replacing it with the representation. In the crucial period before Claudia's departure for Italy, Guillermo is

aware of this as he says: " ... la zona rival de mi madre" (31). The idea of returning to his origins, sacred to all humans, has for Guillermo replaced all "normal" needs in life. "La zona sagrada me aísla y me continúa: afuera queda lo profano" (32).

Trapped Rodent

As he begins to assume Claudia's identity, Guillermo's isolation becomes more acute. The image which emerges is that of a rodent enclosed in a glass tube, suggestive of Guillermo's inability to break out of his circumstance as Claudia's son. This image is foreshadowed early in the novel (chapter VII) as he enters Claudia's room without knocking and notices that her secretary throws a robe over an object on the bed. Later on he hears, or thinks he hears, animal-like noises. "Ruth arroja una bata sobre un objeto que está en la cama. ... No sé si los débiles chillidos son parte de su voz" (43). His accentuated emotional disturbance is evident as, in chapter XV, this fleeting visual and aural impression has grown into an entire fantasy episode.

La espiaré a Claudia por la cerradura y la veré espiando, ... arrodillada, el objeto que está sobre la cama: el ratón negro dentro de un tubo de cristal. ... no es posible saber si ese tubo de cristal reúne aire o agua o el vacío. Claudia y el ratón se hipnotizan ... el ratón paralizado por el elemento extraño Claudia se pasea frente a los espejos pintados de negro ... el ratón araña la prisión

de cristal, este aire materializado que le permite verlo todo y tocar nada ... (122)

The germ of this image lies in a sensation he once had while in his mother's bedroom standing in the confines of her three-leafed full-length mirror, feeling the gaze of his mother as she watches him in her dressing-table mirror. " ... yo me peino frente al espejo de cuerpo entero, acomodo los espejos laterales de manera que pueda observarme a mí mismo de perfil y de espalda. Ella me observa en el espejo del tocador" (44). Filtered through his madness, this situation has evolved into the image of the rodent trapped in a tube, very expressive of the isolation he feels and of the role his mother plays in it. Ultimately he will want to free himself from his mother's prison by assuming her identity. This final step before his plunge to insanity takes place after he has been to Italy, seen Claudia and Giancarlo and assumed that his friend has taken his place in her life. "Dile que te pase mi mensualidad. Puedes comprarte perros y discos" (183). Returning to his mother's unoccupied house in Mexico City, he indulges in transvestitism. At first exalted by seeing himself dressed as Claudia, and therefore identical to her (having at last reached his goal of possessing his mother by in fact assuming her personality) Guillermo plans his denunciation of Claudia as a fraud. "¿Qué les diré cuando la denuncie? ¿Qué, cuando la vea

subir a la hoguera? ... ¿Bastará mostrarme así, demostrar que soy ella, que ella usurpa mi identidad ... ?"

(186). Looking at himself in the same full-length mirrors, Guillermo realizes immediately that he, not his mother, is a fraud; that he cannot free himself from the prison of his obsession with his mother by masquerading as her. " ... ella me ha convertido en esto que los espejos reflejan: en este príncipe de burlas, en este muñeco embarrado de cosméticos, en este seco árbol de Navidad cuajado de bisuterías, en este perro famélico que ya no puede sostenerse sobre los tacones altos, gigantescos, zancos ... " (186-87). The episode closes with the repetition of the rat image fused with the reality of Guillermo falling before the mirrors, " ... y cae arañando el vidrio, cae con el cofre vacío entre las manos y con él rasga los espejos. ... De bruces, contemplo al ratón que me contempla desde un tubo de cristal" (187).

The Dog as Symbol

Guillermo's gradual but inevitable transformation into a dog is the equivalent of a spiritual suicide and is logical within the context of his particular sickness. All alternatives to relate to his mother are exhausted. He can no longer hope to occupy a meaningful place in her life since, as he sees it, Giancarlo has usurped his rightful position. Nor

can he hope to assume her identity, for as long as she lives he will be the fraud. Killing her is impossible although he states that society should do away with her ("Debe ser exterminada" [187]) and that with her gone there would be no one to bury him.

"Pero si la mato para comérmela, ¿dónde me enterrarán y quién me velará cuando yo muera?" (176). These choices denied him, we see Guillermo in the last chapter as his maid's dog. As a dog he has nothing to fear ("Un perro sabe morir sin sorpresa" [191]). Death does not worry him and his past is no longer a burden since he has no memory. The resolution of his conflicts is brought about by a denial, an assassination of his own consciousness.

Guillermo's adaptation of the role of his own dog, Faraón, is announced from the novel's beginning. Claudia refers to him as "cachorro" and accuses him of acting like her lap-dog. "--Levántate de ahí. Pareces perro faldero. Vulgar y sin chiste, palabra" (49). Guillermo himself identifies with Faraón when, talking to Claudia, he maneuvers into a position at her feet. "Pretexto: sentarme a sus pies, sobre la tierra, como Faraón, cerca de mí ... " (46). His dependence upon her is reminiscent of that of a dog upon its master.

Guillermo, well in advance of his total depersonalization, has filled his apartment with dogs in

order to avenge his mother's neglect of him. She has ignored the fact that he wished to leave school only to be with her, and has arranged for him to live alone in an apartment. He obviously resents this very much as he says: "Nunca entendí [Claudia] por qué quería salir del internado y yo, quizá para mofarme de ella, pero también por una explicable compulsión, llené mi nueva morada de perros" (39). The revenge motive also contributes to his final insanity; by becoming a dog, he hopes to win out over Claudia at last.

With his dogs, and later with Gudelia the maid, Guillermo wishes to establish a parallel relationship between them and his mother. He provides for the dogs' physical comforts just as Claudia provides for his. "Las enfermedades y las comidas de los perros ocuparon mis días" (39). Later on he mistreats them, symbolically repeating the castration he has suffered at her hands. "Amputé sus colas y sus patas y los dejé desangrarse" (137). Eventually he neglects them completely, as Claudia neglected him: "Los dejé morir, perderse, huir, destruirse" (137). The only one who survives his neglect is Faraón, whose place he is to take and who arouses his sympathy. In the first description of his pet, the tone is one of admiration, almost envy of the dog's nature. "... sus ojos castaños,

tiernos y tristes, no abandonan esa terrible lejanía que uno, siempre mentiroso, siempre empeñado en atribuir formas y ánimas del hombre a estos sabios inocentes, quisiera indicar como el presentimiento o la memoria del perro. ... Su lejanía es sólo eso: una tristeza desdeñosa, sin comparación con la alegría inexistente" (38).

The Ulysses Myth: Form and Meaning

Fuentes relies upon Greek mythology in Zona sagrada, not as in his other novels to lend universal significance to the novelistic content, not to point toward archetypal forms, but rather to emphasize a set of relationships between individuals. His use of the myth of Ulysses, the dominant one in Zona sagrada, is based on the little-known continuation beyond Homer's version of the myth. Careful investigation reveals a close correspondence between the events of this ancient myth and those in the life of Guillermo Ramírez Nervo.⁷

As Giancarlo says: "--La historia no culmina donde se cree" (173). In the epic Odyssey, Ulysses returns after his peregrinations to his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus; he kills the suitors and after sacrificing to Poseidon, is forgiven. It doesn't mention the fact that Ulysses sired a second son, Telegonus, by the enchantress, Circe, while he was a guest on her island. An oracle had prophesied that

Ulysses' son would kill him; so it was that Telemachus, the Ithacan son, was exiled to prevent the fulfillment of this prediction. It was, however, Telegonus who, having gone in search of his father, mistakenly killed Ulysses.⁸ Giancarlo relates: "--Telégono, el hijo de Ulises y la hechicera, reinicia la peregrinación abandonada, el regreso que es el arranque: viaja a Itaca, al hogar negado, a consumir las sustituciones, a cerrar la verdadera crónica" (174). Indeed Telegonus marries Penelope; in Guillermo's words: "El Rey es hijo de la Reina" (178). His friend, Giancarlo, is representative of Telegonus who unites with Penelope (Claudia) after killing Ulysses (Guillermo) who has projected himself into the position of his own weak father.

Very little is known about Guillermo's father; he seems to be a hazy figure in his son's mind. Claudia refers to him as el Colorado and in his letter to Guillermo he mentions his once red hair. This, plus the fact that he travelled widely in Mexico as a salesman, links him superficially with Ulysses, also red-headed and a traveller, giving more evidence of the role of this particular myth in clarifying and characterizing the relationships in the novel.

In the context of the Ulysses myth, the correspondence is evident. The brothers, Telemachus and Telegonus are Guillermo and Giancarlo, respectively. Guillermo,

as he sees himself replacing his father (el Colorado) in relationship to his mother, is also Ulysses. Telegonus (Giancarlo) "kills" Ulysses (Guillermo) and marries the widow (Claudia, the mother-lover figure).⁹ Actually, it is Giancarlo who pushes Guillermo to insanity, not only by his courtship of Claudia, but by his treatment of him in Italy the second time. " ... no tienes derecho a arrojar a un hombre débil y enfermo en medio de esa multitud apresurada Es pisoteado ¿Por qué me has arrojado en medio de esta conmoción, por qué me has llenado de sudores fríos, de piernas temblorosas? ¿Por qué me has traído aquí, a enervarme, a gritarte?" (182). Considering his insanity as a sort of emotional suicide, the novel then is a suicide note, written to the person Guillermo holds responsible: his friend, Giancarlo, who has stolen his mother from him.

Claudia is not only Penelope, but also the enchantress Circe: " ... la hechicera es inocente y que por eso es culpable ... " (186). According to the Ulysses legend, the Ithacan son, Telemachus (Guillermo) sailed to Circe's island and married her. Circe was a witch, beautiful but dangerous because she changed men to beasts; only their reason remained; they knew what had happened to them. Thus, Guillermo is changed to a dog through the powers of Claudia, the enchantress.

The Concept of the Double

Guillermo in his fantasy displaces his father and ultimately all men (except Giancarlo) who are close to Claudia. For if Guillermo desires to be eternally her child, he also wants to be her lover. It is in part his incestuous urge, impossible to fulfill, which drives him to madness. In all her lovers he sees himself, or would like to see himself; guilt prevents him from distinguishing clearly the faces of these men. Claudia's current leading man is characterized by Guillermo as "faceless" and is symbolic of the many lovers she has had, of el Colorado, and of Guillermo himself, whose lack of identity tends to erase his features. The actor is referred to as " ... ese hombre sin rostro ... " (15). Later Guillermo says: "Quisiera ver el rostro de ese hombre; ver, siquiera, si posee un rostro ... " (23). At one point he amuses himself by inventing faces for him: "Veo la sorpresa de su mirada falsa, la que acabo de inventar como si yo tuviera un lápiz y pudiese dibujar las facciones de todos esos hombres a mi antojo" (25).

Significantly, his first encounter with Giancarlo is described emphasizing the indistinguishability of his face. Guillermo is in a dusty bookstore, selecting novels. "Al principio no pude ver el rostro de la persona que ... fue guiando mi mano sólo pude distinguir el rápido movimiento, las espaldas

anchas" (74). When Guillermo does distinguish his friend's face, he sees him not as an individual, but as a type--more particularly, the masculine version of his mother, symbol of sexual allure. "Pero aquella imagen era realmente la de un Raphael de Valentin Sí, una especie de contrapartida masculina de lo que mi madre representa" (75). Giancarlo represents a male counterpart of Claudia and this fact opens up the possibility of their relationship; Guillermo is able to relate sexually to his friend, whereas such a possibility with Claudia would be impossible. Delving deeper into the nature of this relationship, it is evident that what Guillermo encounters, ultimately, is a love of himself; just as his first personal contact with his mother was a discovery of his own face in that of Claudia, in Giancarlo who is a reflection of Claudia, he also finds himself. Guillermo himself describes their first sexual contact in narcissistic terms:

" ... creo seguir tus pasos y quizá sólo escucho los míos ... amor de mí mismo, al entrar por fin a esa recámara helada ... amor distante ... consolación de esa ausencia rescatada por un sentido gemelo del narcisismo ... lenta inmersión en el lecho ... hermosa oscuridad, amor velado, premio del calor ... ardor maravilloso de un tacto prohibido, pasión sin fin de mi cuerpo insatisfecho ... " (104). Giancarlo is a part of himself--the part he has never allowed himself

to affirm. In Guillermo's words: "Y observando tu posesión, tu seguridad, el paso de zorro que me precede como una sombra, siento otra vez la torpeza de mis movimientos, la inconfesable tortura de la comunicación, el anhelo desgraciado de la soledad. Toda mi negación está en tu manera de caminar. En tu manera de estar" (96). Giancarlo is his other half, his double and a mirror image. Both are "delfines," dependent children of rich families; both are lacking the father figure--Giancarlo's father is dead; Guillermo's is almost non-existent for him. Both have lived childhoods full of unusual fantasies. Whereas Guillermo fashioned worlds of paper dolls, Giancarlo made them of stuffed cloth. Picturing the two of them in their early years, Guillermo strengthens his identification with his Italian friend: "Siento ... un dolor y una ansiedad remotos: salón vacío de juegos y consagraciones y dentro de él un niño de mi edad, tú, aquí, y yo en aquella casa del tacto ausente" (97). They are twins, spiritual brothers who complement each other; as Giancarlo states: "¿Camaradas, Guglielmo? ¿Hermanos? ... Gemelos, Guglielmo: Apolo, dios del sol y su cuate antagonista, Dionisos, el conductor de almas" (107). This is another borrowing from Greek mythology to elucidate the contrasting life styles of Giancarlo and Guillermo. The former is of course associated with Dionysus, the dark, ecstatic wine god most symbolic of eternal rebirth; Guillermo,

with Apollo, giver of laws and aloof from men. Interestingly enough, these gods were, in fact, brothers, both sired by Zeus, born in jeopardy and raised in seclusion; further, both are associated with the dolphin (delfín).¹⁰

Conclusion

Zona sagrada, Carlos Fuentes' fifth novel (published in 1968), represents a radically new focus in both form and content. Thematically, Fuentes situates the novelistic action within the neurotic mind of one protagonist. The individual's responsibility towards the society in which he lives is absent. The author's first three novels reflect an intense desire to understand the society of the twentieth century. In this endeavor a critical attitude has prevailed. Aura, his fourth work, although not concerned with social commentary, nevertheless deals with a universal theme--man's desire for freedom in light of his mortality. Zona sagrada is basically a psychological study of one man's struggle to retain a sense of identity, seen in steady disintegration. However, the treatment of the theme is almost entirely within the behavioristic school of modern psychology. Whereas in previous novels characters developed within the framework of classical archetypal forms, evident in Zona sagrada, is a deterministic treatment. Gone is

the transcendental dimension of man so characteristic of creations such as *Ixca Cienfuegos* and *Artemio Cruz*. The focus of this novel is radically reduced and concentrated within the narrow confines of one man's neurotic and autistic view of the world. To a great degree there is no "ambiente," no definite history or society to orient the character. In all his previous works, with the exception of *Aura*, the author has been concerned with depicting man within his circumstance, his history and his society. In *Zona sagrada* the narrowness of the world in which the character plays out his fictional personality is reflected in the narrative structure.

Structurally, Fuentes limits his point of view by having the narrative material presented in a pseudo-epistolary form. Guillermo Ramírez Nervo, as the protagonist of his own narration, writes to a close friend, Giancarlo Adelphi, relating his gradual disintegration as a person. The use of the second-person narrative has been a source of constant experimentation for Carlos Fuentes. Unlike the ethereal use of this narrative point of view in *Aura*, its employment here is precise and evident. It consists simply of one character addressing another. In spite of this limitation Fuentes, through the use of imagery and mythology, is able to extend the range of the epistolary

technique. The imagery, especially the animalistic imagery as well as the mythology analogy, becomes a source for character portrayal. Thus, Fuentes is able to present the form and structure of the mental illness which Guillermo undergoes. It is this ability to capture subtly a mental process of identity deterioration which makes Zona sagrada a worthy novel.¹¹

NOTES

¹ Carlos Fuentes, Zona sagrada (México, 1967), p. 3. Page numbers will immediately follow subsequent quotes from this edition.

² Richard M. Reeve in his thesis discusses the possible sources for the use of the second-person narrator (pp. 247-252). Perhaps of the many precedents he lists, Michael Butor's La modification (Paris, 1957) is the most likely.

³ Robert Mead Jr., "Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's Angry Novelist," Books Abroad, XXXVIII, no. 4 (Autumn, 1964), 380-82. For this critic the "unreal" quality of this work has a natural explanation: "The narrative is almost entirely 'unreal,' meaning that it takes place within the fantasy of the protagonist" (382). This explanation would make the entire narrative substance a kind of interior monologue. From the evidence examined I see no reason to support Mead's interpretation. Furthermore, no additional understanding is gained by supposing that his voice is some sort of "alter ego." Mead's phenomenological explication would put Aura in the same category as Alice in Wonderland and the Wizard of Oz where all the fantasy is attributed to dream phenomenon. The claim made in this thesis is that Fuentes creates a new world, not a mere extension of the protagonist's mind.

⁴ Donald A. Yates, "Green-Eyed Alter Ego," Saturday Review, Nov. 13, 1965, pp. 103-04.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard Trask (New York, 1961), p. 37.

⁶ Nelson Marra, "México, una literatura en movimiento," Temas, núm. 114 (Oct.-dic., 1967), 28-32. Marra is the only critic to see the centrality of the womb fixation in this novel. Unfortunately in his brief but insightful article he only sketchily alludes to this topic. "Y allí está la visión del útero sagrado,

ordenándolo todo, procreándose y devorándose a si mismo como una larga parábola de destrucción y creación" (p. 30).

⁷ José Manuel Díaz, El Rehilete, XX (junio, 1967), 57-58. This item first came to my attention in Richard M. Reeve's extensive bibliography in the November issue of Hispania, 1970. This researcher reports that Sr. Díaz relates plot development in Zona sagrada to the "thread of Adriana" myth. I gather that this allusion to Greek mythology refers to the thread Ariadne provides Theseus in order to find his way back from the Labyrinth.

⁸ Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. II (Baltimore, 1955), 373.

⁹ Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York, 1940), pp. 30-31, 49.

¹⁰ Graves, Myths, p. 373.

¹¹ Although Zona sagrada does not offer the complexity of some of Fuentes' other novels (i.e., La región más transparente and La muerte de Artemio Cruz), in spite of this the evaluations rendered on this novel vary widely. For some of the very negative appraisals see:

Carlo Cocciolo, "La familia Burón y Zona sagrada," Siempre, núm. 720, 12 abril, 1967, 14-15.

Anonymous, Política, VIII, 167-168 (abril, 1967), 54.

Jaime López-Sanz, "Zona sagrada," Revista Nacional de Cultura, XXIX, 180 (Uruguay, abril, mayo, junio, 1967), pp. 9, 194.

Carlos González Vega, "Zona sagrada de Carlos Fuentes," Imagen, II (Caracas, junio, 1967), 21.

Ramón Xirau, "Zona sagrada de la realidad a la magia," "La cultura en México," Siempre, Vol. 721, 19 abril, 1967, p. x.

CHAPTER V
CAMBIO DE PIEL

"There are only one-
hundred people in the
world; the rest is
done with mirrors."

Stephen J. Macdonald

Cambio de piel, after five years in the making, was published in August of 1967. As a novel it is Carlos Fuentes' most ambitious and perplexing creation. Critics of this novel in their search for its comprehension have taken recourse to metaphors and similes borrowed from the contemporary theater scene.¹ Terms such as "happening," "fiesta," "ritual" and "pop art" are frequent in their vocabulary. There is some justification for such labels in a work which proliferates in images borrowed from the modern world of entertainment. All these are intermingled with extensive treatment of the German concentration camps in the 1940's contrasted with parallel historical periods around the world: Greece, Buenos Aires and Mexico. Finally, the reader is exposed to a kind of Happening towards

the end of the novel which acts as a dramatic recapitulation of the main plot lines of the novel and its corresponding characters. But in spite of the apparent chaos and spontaneity reminiscent of the happenings of our day, the metaphors borrowed from modern experimental theater do not reveal the rich nature of Cambio de piel. As metaphors they may adequately describe the personal response of the reader to this complex work, but as a means of understanding it they fail; in fact they interfere. For Cambio de piel is neither drama nor ritual nor dance, but literature, and more specifically it is a novel, a work of fiction.

Whenever one is talking about the creative process, and especially in connection with Cambio de piel, terms like "subjective" and "objective" often create ambiguities that cloud the understanding of the nature of art. All forms of artistic expression are originally thoughts, intuitions or feelings within the creator (subjective) that take on the configurations dictated by the media employed: colors, language, sound, etc. (objective). Within this process, the artist may choose to emphasize one aspect over the other. The novelists labelled as "objectivists" strive to render an absolute and pure objective picture of perceived reality (phenomenology). Cambio de piel moves in the other direction; it is pure interiorization of both the objective and subjective nature of creativity.

This is exactly why the novel becomes a view of the intimate relationship that a novelist (Narrador) has to his characters, his history, and all the elements that go into the makeup of a novel. Cambio de piel is an intimate dialogue of reciprocal creation that exists between the Narrador and his creations: Elizabeth, Javier; Franz, Isabel; the Monks.

The complexity of Cambio de piel is primarily due to a multiplicity of flashbacks revolving around the four main characters and the will-o'-the-wisp nature of the narrator who acts as an actor, a witness and an omniscient voice to the main action. Beneath this complexity the general plot line is deceptively simple. Two couples--Elizabeth and Javier, both in their forties, the latter's mistress, Isabel, and Franz Jellinek, also in his forties--are traveling between Mexico City and Veracruz via the roads connecting Xochichalco and Cholula. The entire action takes place during the day and evening of Easter Sunday, April 11, 1965. This action is paralleled as the Narrador travels by means of the expressway headed for the same destination. A group of six hippies (the Monks) also joins the others in Cholula where the ancient Aztec ruins are found. This simplicity of three parallel actions is complicated and enriched by a revelation of the nature of the relationship that exists between the two couples as well as between

the Narrador and the Monks. Elizabeth, a Jewish exile of Russian descent, and her husband Javier, a Mexican has-been author now employed as an obscure writer for the United Nations and as a part-time teacher at the University, descend into their own private hell in which long-silenced remorse and grievances are revealed. There is also Isabel, a twenty-three-year-old rebel who rejects her family's wealth, and alternates sleeping with Franz, the Sudetan German-Czech who reveals his role in the Nazi extermination of the Jews, and with Javier, her middle-aged professor. The use of flashbacks combined with a kaleidoscopic effect of fragments from conversations, are techniques that add to the complexity of the novel. It is the narrator's role which makes this novel a veritable labyrinth of fiction. The narrator, or Narrador as he identifies himself, acts as a father confessor to the two female characters in conversations recorded or recalled by him; at other times he is the omniscient author who acts as a central intelligence within the work itself; finally, and most perplexing, is his active role within the narrative sequence: he is at once a lover of both Elizabeth and Isabel, and acquaintance of Javier and Franz, and has come to know the Monks. The facts are ambiguously handled to suggest that perhaps he is an accomplice to Franz Jelinek's murder or execution. This homicide which takes place

at the heart of the Cu (the pyramids of Cholula), like the rest of the novel, has many possible interpretations.

Cambio de piel, for all its experimentation and intricacy, is not without precedent within the narrative art of its author, Carlos Fuentes. The perspectivistic employment of the narrative point of view within the confines of a single novel is clearly foreshadowed in La región más transparente and in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. Furthermore, the ability to create a fantasy world replete with the cohesiveness and density of reality itself had been manifested in his novelette, Aura. The important themes such as freedom, the problem of identity and death, found in his previous five novels, are again central to Cambio de piel.

Juxtaposed to this sense of continuity within the novelistic creations of this author, Cambio de piel reflects a distinctively new approach to the construction of the novel. The innovations in this novel reaffirm the conviction that a work of art must not only be a witness to the society from which it grows, but also must take on new and revolutionary forms of novelistic expression. The thematic, structural and stylistic elements of the novel, though organically related to his previous endeavors, take on a new dimension within the world of imaginative literature.

Its eclecticism is apparent, in fact it is one of the novel's major accomplishments. However, the autonomy of Cambio de piel is in no way compromised for it stands as one of his most artistic accomplishments and one of the most cogent statements of political, moral, social and philosophical import.

Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts. The first section ("Una fiesta imposible") is rather short (pages 9-21). The action narrated takes place on the day that all of the main characters arrive at Cholula. The arrivees consist of Javier and Elizabeth Ortega, Franz Jellinek and Isabel, Javier's mistress. Also arriving are the Monks, in an old Lincoln, and the Narrador, who arrives by Greyhound bus. Juxtaposed to their entry into Cholula, the ancient land of the dead, are images of Cortés' arrival at the same location and his assassination of Moctezuma's emissaries who were hoping to turn back the Spaniard and prevent him from entering Tenochtitlán. All these events are narrated from the observer point of view. The story-teller is reviewing how they all arrived in Cholula.

The third part ("Visite nuestros subterranos," pages 365-442) continues the narrative sequence established in the first part (pages 9-21). Here we discover that the arrivals of the Monks, the four main characters and the Narrador are not mere chance but are all inter-

related. The Monks with the help of the Narrador, have come to execute Franz Jelinek for his role in the Nazi crimes against the Jewish people. The execution takes place but four different versions are given. In one, a volcano causes the walls of the Cholula pyramid to kill Franz and Elizabeth, leaving Javier and his mistress, Isabel, free; subsequently, Javier kills Isabel. In another version, Javier, sensing the rivalry of Franz--since he was sleeping with both Javier's wife and mistress--kills Franz. The other version is that Jakob Werner, one of the Monks, executes Franz; the final implication being that the Narrador, himself, is responsible for the Sudetan German's death. As these four alternatives are presented we have a long flashback to explain how and where the Narrador has come to know the six Monks (pages 378-434). Apparently one evening, perhaps the night before April 11, 1965, the Monks have been brought to the Narrador's house. The Monks, having been told all the Narrador knew about Javier and company, proceed to carry out a mock trial of Franz and dole out the parts which they play while they spend some time in the Narrador's house. Following are some frenzied and nightmarish experiences in Mexico City, a bordelo, finally ending up at the Narrador's house where they manifest their decision to execute Franz. After this flashback, we are brought back to

Cholula where all the characters are present or mentioned with the exception of the supposedly executed Franz Jellinek. The Narrador, feeling a sense of alienation from everyone, provokes a fight with a mariachi group who move forward to thrash him when the narration stops and switches abruptly to a different and final scene. In the last four pages of the book, the Narrador, aliases Xipe Totec and Freddy Lambert, is confined to the insane asylum of Cholula; addressing Elizabeth in the second person, he bids farewell to her when the book ends.

The second part of the novel ("En cuerpo y alma," pages 23-364) is a conglomeration of flashbacks which for the most part are given in dialogue forms as the four main characters--Javier, Isabel, Franz and Elizabeth--exchange the stories of their lives as well as sharing each other's beds. Also, the women are presented in extended conversations with the Narrador who is ultimately responsible for all that is narrated and presented in this second part. The main vehicle of presenting the life histories of the four protagonists is the use of flashback and conversation; the action of the novel is thus slowed down and almost eliminated. Externally, the four are driving in a small Volkswagen to Cholula. Their meandering, loose and confused sense of direction is somewhat like the apparent structure of this part. The Narrador, in contrast, travels directly to the

place of designation--symbolic of his ultimate control of the material narrated. Thus, this second part of the novel acts to fill in all the background that is missing in the first and third sections of the book. The second part, in contrast to the other two parts, reveals the internal reality of the characters involved and the history of their lives which has brought them all to the Cholula ruins on April 11, 1965.

Narrative Point of View

The multiple, elusive nature of the narrative point of view as a point of reference for understanding Cambio de piel has been all but ignored by the few critics who have given their attention to this work.² On the whole they have been content to describe the narrative sequence of the novel or have dealt with some of the basic ideas somewhat abstractly by divorcing them from the novel's impressive formal aspects. There are two very sound arguments for a study that takes as its point of departure the task of raising the fundamental question: Who tells the story?

First of all the history of the novel in the twentieth century is characterized by widespread experimentation related to the form and structure of fiction. One of the formal aspects, and perhaps the most important, is the narrative point of view. Wolfgang Iser was one of the first of many critics to recognize the

importance of this structural unit.

La elección de un narrador ficticio en las narraciones enmarcadas es simplemente una intensificación de la situación inicial de todas las narraciones, es decir, de aquel trío formado por el narrador, la materia y el público. Se da en todas las obras narrativas. La relación del narrador con el público y con la materia (objetividad) se denomina actitud narrativa. Su exacta comprensión es de máxima importancia para la interpretación de la obra. La actitud narrativa que cada autor adopta está en la más íntima relación con el estilo de la obra; al mismo tiempo, surgen aquí determinadas exigencias técnicas ...³

The perspective from which a story is told is an immediate source of knowledge for the critic. First of all, it is necessary to know who narrates the story in order to evaluate both the psychic and aesthetic distance between the narrator and the work. A novel narrated from the first person (the protagonist-narrator) such as Zona sagrada would be very different if written by an objective observer (narrator-witness), or by an involved party (narrator-participant)--Claudia for example in Zona sagrada. Furthermore, the narrator's attitude toward the characters and the events changes according to the perspective from which they are related. Likewise, the scope of information and intelligence varies with the type of narrator responsible for presenting the fictional material.

The second argument for the importance of point of view relates to the narrative art of the author

under study, Carlos Fuentes. In our chapters dealing with his previous novels, the importance of the narrative point of view has been seen. Indeed Fuentes' most innovative approaches to the problems of fiction are specifically related to his constant and varied experimentation with the narrator's role within a work of fiction. In his five previous novels there are five different narrative modes used; at times he repeats one mode (i.e., the second-person narrator) with subtle but important differences. Understanding the relationship of the narrative form to the total meaning of the novel has been the central key to understanding the ethical as well as the aesthetic values inherent in Fuentes' works.

In dealing with Cambio de piel the question of who tells the story is inescapable. The reader is faced from page to page with an apparently disjunctive use of the narrative point of view. The narrator is at first an observer, then omniscient, then a participant in the action, then a recorder of the events told to him by the characters. This apparent chaos has led the reviewers of this work to either ignore the problem or to hypothesize some very elaborate and complex schemata. Julio Ortego in La contemplación y la fiesta, in an attempt to make some meaning of the narrative perspectives, does an admirable job in

understanding the multiple levels of reality and fantasy involved.⁴ But this critic does not succeed in convincingly identifying the would-be apocryphal Narrador, aliases Xipe Totec, Freddy Lambert.

In Cambio de piel the author's presence permeates the entire novel from beginning to end. The writer uses the convention of the fictional author in the first section of the novel ("Una fiesta imposible" pages 9-21), as well as in the second ("En cuerpo y alma" pages 23-364) and in the third ("Visite nuestros subterráneos" pages 365-442). He is called Xipe Totec, Toltec god of penitence. Finally, the Narrador identifies himself in the final lines of the novel as he bids farewell to Elizabeth de Ortega: "Adiós, dragona. Y no olvides a tu cuate ... (Fdo.) Freddy Lambert."⁵ This Narrador relates the entire contents of the novel using a most unusual and perplexing narrative point of view. Unlike the traditional, nineteenth century novel, and unlike the objectivist novelists, the Narrador is both outside and inside the narrative events that constitute the work of fiction. In bridging this dialectic of life and fiction, reality and fantasy, he employs every possible narrative perspective available to him.

As an omniscient narrator he is capable of knowing and relating simultaneous events. The Narrador

displays this capacity throughout the novel. Very early in the narrative sequence he reveals that he knows what the four main characters have said. This is done while he speeds towards Cholula in a special deluxe bus and while they (the four) drive on a different road towards the same city of ruins, Cholula, the place of the dead for the ancient Aztecs. "Y mientras ustedes decían estas pendejadas, yo viajaba en un galgo de lujo por la supercarretera a Puebla y leía algunos folletos de turismo ... " (34). There is in the narrator's voice a certain ironic sarcasm that is made possible in this case by his omniscience. The value judgment implicit in "pendejadas" clearly indicates the distance he has to the characters, a distance attributable to his omniscience.

Furthermore, the yo indicates that the narrator, though omniscient, is also an inhabitant of the world which he narrates. He is at this point a participant of sorts in the world of fiction. This sense of the narrator's participation in the world of the story he tells is further enhanced by the fact that a good portion of the novel is written in direct address to Elizabeth and Isabel, or Dragona and Novillera as he calls them. This use of the tú narrative, of special appeal to Carlos Fuentes, is primarily directed to Elizabeth. By the use of this direct address, a fusion of internal and external planes of narrative dimensions

takes place. The narrator further closes the gap of Olympian omniscient distance by actually occupying the same place and time dimensions as do the characters. The role of the witness-narrator accomplishes this approximation when the Narrador, the Monks and the two couples enter the town of Cholula.

Los vi cruzar la plaza hacia San Francisco, el convento, la iglesia, la fortaleza rodeada del muro almenado, antigua barrera de resistencia contra los ataques de indios, y entrar a la enorme explanada. Tú, Elizabeth, te hiciste la disimulada cuando pasaste junto a mí, pero tú, Isabel, te detuviste, nerviosa, y lo bueno es que nadie se fijó porque todos estaban admirando el espacio abierto, uniforme, apenas roto por tres fresnos, dos pinos y una cruz de piedra en el centro y al fondo el ángulo recto de la iglesia y la capilla. (17)

This distance between the narrator and the characters is further shortened when we learn that not only does the narrator personally know the characters, but that he is on intimate terms with both women. He has in fact slept with Elizabeth when, as Freddy Lambert, the cab driver, he has helped her take the inebriated Javier home: "Sí, dragona, hablaste como él aquella primera noche en tu apartamento en México: hablaste de él, como él, para él, aunque yo tuviera mi cabeza de gato medio metida en tu pescado y tu marido durmiera medio birollo en la sala" (131). Furthermore, the narrator implicates himself in the plot to execute Franz Jellinek, the Sudetan Nazi architect. At midnight of Holy Saturday he steps into the corridor

after having used the youthful Isabel to extricate from Franz a confession of his participation in the extermination of the Jews at Terezien.

--Vístete. Vístete rápido.

Te levantaste de la cama, novillera, tarareando. Franz rió forzadamente, inquiriendo con el entrecejo.

--Vamos a la pirámide.

--Pero si ya son las doce de la noche
--Franz consultó el reloj pulsera.

--Mejor. A esa hora salen las brujas. Vístete rápido. Voy a avisarles a Javier y a Betty.

Pusiste en el tocadiscos, para variar, Anytime at all, mientras te volvías a vestir con el traje de Chantung amarillo, sin nada debajo, y saliste descalza al pasillo, con tus sandalias doradas en la mano; cerraste la puerta y me abrazaste.

--¿Todo listo?

--Sí. Ya viste que descompuse el coche.

--Muy bien. ¿Ellos ya están avisados?

--Están aquí mismo, en un cuarto. En cuanto los vea salir los seguimos. (363-64)

The phrase "Ellos están listos" is a reference to the Monks, six hippies who on the previous evening have come to visit the Narrador at his home in San Angel in Mexico City. During this visit, which comes late in the novel, we learn of Isabel's role as well as that of the Monks. "Cuando me buscaron y nos pusimos de acuerdo en todo esto, Isabel los llevó a mi casa Isabel les dejó en la puerta de entrada y se fue. --Tengo que ir con el Profe a ese rascuache motel donde me lleva. Chao. Te fuiste, novillera" (378-79).

In this will-o'-the-wisp ability to permeate all the levels of the plot, another ironic twist is

added. Elizabeth, Dragona, as well as Isabel, Novillera, in their conversations with Javier and Franz, make indirect references to the Narrador which are missed by the men but are subtly understood by the reader.

"--Sí. Eso. ... Quieren a las mujeres para un acto rápido. En el fondo los machos mexicanos son onanistas. Si pudieran hacerse el amor a sí mismos, lo haría.

La mujer es una cosa, un estorbo necesario Me dan asco. El machismo mexicano es un homosexualismo disfrazado. El deseo secreto de cada bigotón prieto de estos son las enchiladas con cold cream, como dice un cuate mío" (123). The Narrador, knowing she is referring to him, quickly replies: "Gracias, mariscal. Te leo bien claro. Latins are lousy lovers" (123).

One of the effects of the multiple perspective method is to give the narrator a certain distance from the events and characters presented. He is not committed as a narrator to any given perspective and in fact the weighted sense of irony is a result of the interplay between perspectives, the interplay of realities. But in spite of the aloofness implied in this method, the narrator is invariably involved in the events. This is most apparent in his reaction to the six hippies, the Monks. La Pálida becomes a source of concupiscent emotions: " ... Pálida sin hombre, me estás poniendo más cachondo, tengo una erección bárbara ... " (390).

The group is also a source of ennui: "Suspiro y quiero bajar. Si esto se pone demasiado claridoso, me voy a aburrir. Yo vine aquí por el misterio. Por una aproximación al misterio que quede después del falso misterio de la analogía y la oposición" (389-90).

Ultimately the Narrador feels a sense of helplessness to prevent Franz Jellinek's execution at the hands of the Monks as he pleads for his life, for forgiveness. "Ya no les impido el paso. Me pego a la pared y les permito descender por la escalera de caracol. Trato de distinguir, al tacto, sus presencias, al olor. Quisiera detener a la Pálida y tocarla. Explicarle. Preguntarle, ¿qué hizo Franz?, ¿qué les importa? Ahora no" (432). The narrator, in spite of his ethical feelings, is moved to join the group of hippies in an effort to recover his lost youth. "No supe o no pude pedir más para detenerlos, dragona. No quise pedir más, es la puritita verdad. Me venció el entusiasmo de una participación y la conciencia de que voy que chuto para la cuarentena. Yo iba a ser joven con ellos, dragona. ¿Tú no hubieras hecho lo mismo que yo? Ibamos a prolongar nuestra juventud" (433).

The multiplicity of the narrative perspectives creates an almost palpable feeling of interiority--of hermeticism as Ortega y Gasset might say--which is broken deliberately on one occasion when the author intimates

with the reader in a fashion reminiscent of older novels like Tristram Shandy. During the "happening" scene La Pálida, alias Jane Fery, undergoes a transformation from the blond American that she is to a dark Semite through the use of cosmetics. At this point, the narrator breaks the line of thought and addresses the reader: "Amable lector: ¿sabes que los gringos gastan cada año en cosméticos una suma igual al presupuesto nacional de los Estados Unidos . . . Mexicanos?" (404). An intentional rupture of the narrative point of view thus occurs as the narrator refers to a dimension outside the novel--the reader. This adds another complexity to the novel since, in a way, the author recognizes the existence of the reader within the world of the novel, or stated anti-thetically, the entire inner world of the novel is placed within the world of the reader when the narrator steps outside the novel to address him.

The Narrador, who is the narrative voice heard throughout, on several occasions admits the creative role which he plays within the entire fabric of the novel. Late in the evening when the Monks decide to execute Franz Jellinek the Narrador alludes to his powers: "Sólo sé que las razones no son convincentes. Y que yo soy el Narrador y puedo cambiar a mi gusto los destinos" (431). More proof of his responsibility

for bringing forth the world of Cambio de piel is his possession of all the artifacts he claims he found in a trunk. Among these things are letters and books written by a young couple in love, obviously Javier and Elizabeth Ortega. The dummy of Shepelbrucke and other articles pertaining to exiled Jews come from Franz Jellinek's past. The man the Narrador claims sold it to him, "aquel viejo hebreo me lo vendió barato. La policía lo había sorprendido espiando en los excusados públicos" (43), is a character drawn from Elizabeth's past. Her father, Gerson Jonas, a policeman, arrests such a voyeur in the subway bathroom.

In spite of the evidence that the Narrador, also called Freddy Lambert and Xipe Totec, is ultimately responsible for the creation of all the characters and events within Cambio de piel, there is equal evidence to show that he is but a chronicler of these events. From beginning to end Elizabeth has been supplying the Narrador with extended, detailed information about her relationships with Javier and Franz. The Narrador seems almost totally dependent upon her for information. In a conversation which sounds more like an interview, the Narrador extracts from her what appears to be extensive trivia:

--A que no recuerdas en qué la escribía
Javier ...

--En arameo, para que la pudiera leer J.C.
I don't care if it rains or freezes, long as
I've got my plastic Jesus ...

--No, en qué clase de papel, o cuaderno, quiero decir ...

--¡Uy! Es de lo más ordenado y previsor. Siempre viaja con sus cuadernos de escuela, cuadriculados. (82)

--No había luz eléctrica. ¿Qué hacían en la noche?

--We played footsie, Mr. District Attorney. Oye, así no vamos a ningún lado. Este es un momento muy lírico, muy poético, y tú quieres hacer inventarios, tú ... (83)

Furthermore, Isabel, Novillera, as has been seen, has been working with the author to gain further knowledge about Franz. In a moment of confusion as to the identity and motivations of the Monks the Narrador reveals his limited knowledge and power. "Tú me dirás quiénes fueron, novillera. Tú buscarás a Franz para que te cuente todo, antes de que sea demasiado tarde. Contigo completaré el expediente de mis memorias" (433). This statement is most surprising since previously he has stated that he has the power to change destinies. The Monks themselves are, according to the Narrador, his own creations: "Ahora, dentro de este venerable Lincoln, no quiero perder la encarnación de los seis seres que me rodean: no quiero admitir que, si mi voluntad no los sostiene, esos seis rostros serán una red transparente de circulaciones: de transfiguraciones" (408).

In summary, the creator of the world of fantasy is at once a participant in that world. The creator, in this case a fictional creation himself, is dependent

upon his creatures for the very substance from which he casts them. Thus the duality between creator and creature is destroyed in a reciprocal creative activity.

Interior Duplication in Cambio de piel

The inclusion of the artist within the world of his creation follows a tradition that has been operative in Hispanic letters from the Libro de buen amor to the present. As a technique it emerges in painting at the height of the Renaissance. One has only to think of Las meninas by Velázquez, the Adoration of the Magi by Botticelli, or the Arnolfini Marriage Portrait by Jan Van Eyck. In all three the painter projects himself into the world of art and stands within the work gazing enigmatically at the viewer. Carlos Fuentes, in Cambio de piel, not only places himself within the internal workings of the novel but in addition reveals that Cambio de piel, along with its content--plot, characters, events, language and ideas--all reside within the imaginative powers of his creator, the Narrador. In a moment of crisis in which the six hippies, the Monks, become threatening, he reveals the dual role he plays with his creatures. He is their inventor who in turn is being affected by them; they are created and creative; their lives and their creator are both a perplexing unit of object and subject. "Empiezo a reír, dragona. No sé si los seis monjes

están infectados por lo mismo que condenan. Te juro que ya no sé si sus desplantes teatrales son auténticos o si son la caricatura de la vida que les atribuyen a ustedes. Sólo sé que las razones no son convincentes. Y que yo soy el Narrador y puedo cambiar a mi gusto los destinos" (431).

The process of internally creating a world of fantasy within a world of fantasy is not mere craftsmanship or ironic play. Implicit in the use of this technique of interior duplication is a vision of philosophical import. What the author does in successfully employing this technique is to resolve the false dichotomies that exist between the material and the spiritual world, between art and life. The novel thus becomes a metaphorical hypostasis of reality in which all dichotomies are resolved in its inclusive harmony. The rejection of Manicheanism explicitly made in Cambio de piel in favor of a synthesis, a unity, is one of the most important philosophical issues raised in the work and as such permeates all related historical, socio-political and psychological dimensions of man.

A close reading of Cambio de piel discloses that the Narrador in bits and pieces identifies himself as Carlos Fuentes. The introductory statement made for Part II ("Cuerpo y alma") reads as follows: "No estuve allí: cita de una carta dirigida por el Narrador a

su abuelo tedesco, muerto en 1880, socialista lassalliano expulsado del Reich por el Canciller de Hierro. Carta no recibida" (23). This particular biographical datum pertaining to the Narrador is presented almost verbatim in Into the Mainstream by Luis Harss. Speaking of Carlos Fuentes' ancestry, they say: "Mounting the paternal family tree we find globetrotting Germans and Canarians. There was a great-grandfather from Darmstadt, a Lasallian Socialist who exiled himself under the Bismark regime and landed in Mexico to plant coffee in Veracruz. That was around 1875." These quotes, one from the novel, the other from an interview with Fuentes, bear such a close resemblance that one suspects Fuentes of a certain amount of playfulness in revealing his identity as the Narrador. There are a few other clues of identity to support the idea that Fuentes is borrowing from Into the Mainstream and other articles written on him and his works. For example, the Narrador in Cambio de piel sports a moustache (page 341); he lives in the barrio of San Angel in Mexico City (page 413) in an old colonial structure with an impressive corkscrew staircase (page 415). All these facts are either well known or are to be found in interviews. El Narrador, on a few occasions, is referred to as a middle-aged beatnik and nihilist (page 73), epithets not uncommon in the literary reviews

Carlos Fuentes' novels have received. All this evidence indicates that Carlos Fuentes deliberately identifies himself as the Narrador and, in so doing, becomes a part of the interplay of reality and life, of fact and fiction.⁸ He is at once a creator in the real world and a creator in the world of fiction: both object and subject of his own novel. Fuentes, the Mexican novelist of Cambio de piel, creates a Narrador who in turn takes responsibility for the writing of Cambio de piel.

Just as the author Fuentes becomes a character within his own novel, Elizabeth and Javier are co-creators of the novel. Elizabeth, as one of the Narrator's creatures, is made very much in the image of her creator. She more than any other character reflects the Narrator's will to fuse fantasy and reality. The reader discovers that much of what she relates to the Narrador is invented. Her identity as an American Jew and her trip to Greece are stories which are told in great detail to Javier, Franz and the Narrator, as if they were lived experiences told in the form of nostalgic memories.

--Bueno, había lámparas de acetileno. Toma nota.
 --Un diez y diploma. Te graduaste, Dragona.
 ¿Escribías a tu casa? ¿A Gerson? ...
 --¿Estás loco? ¿No te acuerdas?
 --Pero es que aquí tengo un sobre. ...
 --Dame eso. ¿Dónde lo encontraste?
 --En un viejo baúl, ¿quihubo? ...
 --Avenida Amsterdam 85, Colonia Hipódromo, México D.F.

--¡No! ¡No tienes derecho! Todavía no.
¿Dónde encontraste el baúl? (84)

The Narrador replies that he bought it from an old refugee Jew in a flea-market. It is a trunk filled with " ... cajas amarradas con listones, fetos en alcohol, muñecas distripadas, bombines, cellos, álbums de fotografías, banderas nazis, rollos de película antigua, discos rayados, guijarros, ceniceros, libros desencuadrados. Con qué escribir una novela" (86-7). Again the Narrador exerts his independence as the creator of the novel just at the moment when Elizabeth is spinning the fabric of her own dream creation. This trunk is the same one that is taken out at the end of the novel in order to examine artifacts which are part of the characters' lives.

Elizabeth creates a world with all the characters including the Narrador. At one point he, the Narrador, states that her invention of the Grecian interlude is a mirage which is going to destroy not only him but other characters in the narrative. "Y no están porque Delos es un espejismo, con todo lo que parece contener; porque sólo existe para ti y tú me quieres contagiar tus sueños y tus ritos y arrastrarme a este espejismo, a mí, a Javier, a Franz ... " (261). But the Grecian fantasy, a time of complete union between her and Javier, works its magic spell on all the characters. Javier as well as the Narrador totally accept

this fantasy for, in spite of its irreality, it reveals the truth; it reveals Elizabeth. The Narrador relates to Elizabeth the motive for her Grecian dream. Through it, she manages to recreate her youth and love.

Vuelves a ser joven y ahora puedes amar de verdad, a través de tu fantasma que eres tú, con toda la experiencia, la nostalgia, el deseo retrospectivo que no pudiste tener en la juventud. Sí, sólo poseemos nuestros deseos cuando dejamos de desearlos. Algo así. Por ahí. Javier lo escribió. Fue su segundo libro. Un cuento de veinte cuartillas que publicó en una plaquette hermosa. ¿Por qué le contaste esa historia?
(174)

This indirect reference to Aura leads us to the process of interior duplication of a work of fiction within a work of fiction. Elizabeth is a fictional character who creates a story that turns out to be a novel written by Javier and also by Carlos Fuentes. The novel is no other than the beautifully printed Aura written by Carlos Fuentes in 1962. The way in which Elizabeth conjures her dream of youth is described by the Narrador in a way suggestive of Aura herself. "Convocas tu propia juventud. Gracias a un esfuerzo sostenido, doloroso, casi mortal de la imaginación, logras reencarnar tu juventud, no en tu propio cuerpo sino separada de ti: tu fantasma carnal" (174). Elizabeth as a dream-spinner who pulls the other characters within her love fantasy is also the victim of a book written by Javier. The book is significantly

entitled El sueño, published in 1937. The Narrador reveals to her the power of this book over her.

Y yo lo sé, Elizabeth, porque leí ese libro, El sueño. El primer libro de Javier. Yo puedo leerlo, ¿ves?, porque no soy su cómplice y no busco, como tú, mi propia imagen en esos versos, porque no me enamoré de él a través de su poesía, como tú, que creíste que estaba dedicada a ti aun antes de conocerle, como si Javier te hubiese adivinado desde su adolescencia, como si escribiendo cerca de las lluvias del verano en un patio oscuro de la ciudad de México, él ya se hubiera comunicado contigo en la sala pequeña y mal iluminada de una casa judía, en Nueva York. (269)

Javier also possesses the power to create other characters and does so in spite of his belief that silence is the only answer an author can have to the impossibility of capturing the totality of experience. Javier creates a fantasy in which Elizabeth comes to him almost as a total stranger when they were students in New York. Elizabeth in turn repeats the story of her appearance in his room clad only in panties and raincoat to the Narrador: "--Es que ... bueno, él estaba dormido; Javier quiero decir; había llovido toda la tarde y yo tomé el subway hasta Flushing Meadows y Javier estaba dormido en un motel y yo abrí la puerta, empapada, ¿ves? cubierta con ese impermeable ... " (52); "--Entonces me hiqué sobre la cama. Y Javier me sonrió. Alargó las manos y me desabotonó el impermeable. Yo no traía más que las pantaletas debajo, ¿ves?" (53). Javier, in an effort

to recapture his youth with Isabel, has her re-enact this fantasy. Thus, what began as a fantasy originated either by Javier or Elizabeth, becomes a real enactment. Isabel tells the Narrador: "--¡Más chispa! Me regaló unas pantaletas. Y me obligó a ponerme su trinchera encima y a salir del cuarto, tocar, entrar y verlo haciéndose el dormido y luego, cuando me acerqué a él, me desabotonó y me quitó la trinchera y ahí me quedé en pantaletas. Me amó y nos dormimos" (55).

Man, Art and Society

Philosophically, the Narrador, a surrogate figure for Carlos Fuentes, states that man is inexorably bound to a dualistic, contradictory and paradoxical nature of reality. The error has been to take one dimension of the dialectic nature of man and the way he perceives reality, history, society, personality and creativity, and assert it absolutely and separately above its other half. Plato is thus seen as the culprit who initiates, in Western thought, the obsession of postulating one aspect of the total as the total itself. Plato initiated the dichotomy of Good and Evil, Real and Unreal, Beauty and Ugliness, Body and Spirit. For Plato: "The World of intelligible Ideas contains the ultimate realities from which the world of sensible things has been patterned."⁹

Pérez de Ayala, in his masterpiece of ironic interplay

of fantasy and reality, Belarmino y Apolonio, states a similar view:

La doctrina de don Amaranto es refutable, y no menos defendible; y otro tanto la de Escobar. Y en resolución, todas las opiniones humanas. El error es de aquellos que piden que una opinión humana posea verdad absoluta. Basta que sea verdad en parte, que encierre un polvillo o una pepita de verdad. Cuando un buscador de oro dice que ha encontrado oro, no da a entender que se haya apoderado de todo el oro que guardan las entrañas de la tierra, sino eso, que ha encontrado oro, un poco de oro.¹⁰

Unlike Ayala's epistemological and metaphysical concerns, Fuentes sees this process of folly, the fragment taken as absolute, as leading man through all the atrocities and alienation characteristic of Western society. The Narrador, after giving a panoramic view of the dialectical ups and downs in history, states:

Mira a dónde fuimos a parar. Candy y Lolita, la torutra y el horno crematorio, los procesos de Moscú y el asesinato de Trotsky, Bahía de Cochinos y los perros policía contra los negros de Montgomery, use y consume y luzca bella, mi Pepsicoatl. ¿Te das cuenta, dragona? Todo se nos ha ido en inventarle dobles a Dios. Ahí está el punto, si quieres cotorrear-me. (309)

The fact that throughout history man has embraced the good as the absolute has led him to persecute those outside his beliefs. The Narrador, very much in sympathy with the "outsider," the radical, the nonbeliever, the "evil," the man outside the society, reflects on the nature of those who pursue the extermination of those who live outside the absolute faith. "En

todo caso, me joden todos los Sherlocks de la historia que, lupa en mano, se lanzan a la caza del culpable" (159). The Greeks are the archetypal hunters of the other, the alien, the monster who does not conform to what they think to be a part of the Natural Order. Greek mythology, according to our Narrador, is a history of the extermination of the monster who is but the other half of the Hero, the protector of the Natural, the Good and the Just.

Entonces que hagan chicharrón en la silla tostadora a ese Al Capone de la antigüedad, el sangrón Heraclio que con el asesinato torció el rumbo de la naturaleza y nos dejó sin el león y la hidra y el toro y los rebaños y los caballos que eran la otra posibilidad de la naturaleza que hoy nos contempla indiferente cuando no recelosa de que volvamos a llamar héroe al cómplice de lo unívoco, al mal llamado héroe que quisiera conformarnos con la simplicidad antropomórfica. (158)

To deny the monster, or the hero, Cain or Abel, is to deny the multiplicity and unity of the world, as well as the nature of man, who is both simultaneously and dynamically multiple and all-inclusive.

Pero ahí tienes: los héroes antiguos inventaron la literatura porque obligaron a las fuerzas naturales a esconderse y reaparecer disfrazadas y de allí la épica, la lírica, la tragedia, la psicología y los dramas morales que son resultado de una lucha, un asombro, un divorcio, una masturbación y una ambigüedad entre el falso héroe limitador y las auténticas furias que se niegan a levantar los tennises y reaparecen donde menos se piensa en vez de ser, como antes de Orestes (ese antes que circula en nuestra memoria nocturna) parte del orden aceptado de una naturaleza proliferante e inclusiva. (159)

For the Narrador, religious and political dogma are the result of mistaking one fragment, one perspective for the whole and opposing all other possibilities. According to the Narrador, man has failed to recognize that dogma and heresy, orthodoxy and unorthodoxy, are part of the same process; that one cannot exist without the other and that history has been an endless struggle to capture one aspect of this eternal dialectic when in fact it is endless and ever the same, yet always different.

Abusado, mi Florencio. ¿A poco crees que nomás describió un poder aislado y frío? Qué va: te digo que se las sabía todas, y que frente al mecanismo de los meros trinchones había esa mucho dialéctica, chico, que dicen mis cuates cubanos que son los que ahora están al bate: pues la virtud procrea la paz, la paz el ocio, el ocio el motín, el motín la destrucción, la destrucción el orden y el orden la virtud y de ahí p'al real y la galería de espejos. (286)

In this cyclical view of history and society, the Narrador does not fall into the trap of offering a synthesis, for man can not subtract any fragment of the totality and postulate it as absolute. Javier, who like the Narrator ponders this dilemma, is fully aware that man can not embrace either of the two poles of the duality, nor can he postulate a synthesis of the two. "Ah, entre escapar y participar, sólo nos queda escoger nuestra enfermedad, nuestro cáncer personal, nuestra parodia de las grandes síntesis" (108). There is of course in this philosophy the total abnegation

of truth as something absolute, either as fragment (the individual) or as a totality (the society). This nihilistic view of history and society leaves individual man on the precipice; all his actions are thus divested of any transcendental meaning, since all dogmas are illusions of the whole, beliefs that have led man to the terrors of the twentieth century. In this existential void, in this nothingness, what is man to do?

For the Narrador, the rebel is the only one who enjoys a moment of freedom, illusory as it may be. It is only in opposing the Establishment, the Dogma of the times, that man fulfills his being. "Te digo, dragona, que un dogma tiene que engendrar volando su herejía correspondiente para que exista una ilusión de libertad que es, quizás, lo más cerca que se puede estar de la libertad" (285). The rebel has to give up any vision of a utopia on earth and realize government is not a structure organized for idealistic ends but is the result of man's struggle for relative and fragmentary power. The rebel, the revolutionary, must then realize the nature of those in power and oppose them, be they a collectivist or fascist force.

Pero del otro lado de la barrera, cada monosabio tiene que asimilar cómo son las cosas en vez de hacerse tarugo y sólo será libre si entiende a las claras y yemas cómo lo zumba el mofle al privilegio del poder. Sólo así puede darse cuenta de que su libertad y su revolución sí pueden ser permanentes, en cualquier ocasión y frente a cualquier mastodonte que le avienten. (286-87)

Revolution, here equated through the dialectical process to change, is the nature of the world. "La revolución permanente es la heterodoxia permanente, no el momento luminoso, pero aislado y condenado, entre dos ortodoxias; la revolución permanente es la conquista diaria del margen excéntrico de la verdad, la creación, el desorden que podemos oponer al orden ortodoxo"

(287). Thus the modern rebel, a man for whom God is dead, and for whom there are no possible absolutes, must act as an individual affirming his will in the void of nothingness. Man, though not committed to any dogma, must oppose all dogmas, all structures of thought and society which claim truth as their absolute domain. Existential "fear and trembling" results in the individual's decision to oppose the "established truth" and from the terrible realization that his own decision also lacks the substance of any transcendental norm. Hence man becomes a tragic hero surrounded by the frail images reflected in the mirror of his Being. Yet the Narrator makes a call to arms to all would-be rebels to oppose the Establishment before it is too late, before man is swallowed by the totalitarian and capitalistic forces of the world. "Chóquenla, Fedor Mijáilovich y Lev Davidovich, que ya nos va quedando menos tiempo que a las sombras de los nagueles cuando apunta el día, y todavía no damos color, todavía

nos pasan el espejo por la cara y de plano no refleja nada" (287).

The Narrador condemns the "liberals" of the thirties who ironically enough include his creations --Javier, Elizabeth--and also his creator, Carlos Fuentes, all in their forties. They are condemned for believing their dream of democracy and equality was a natural phenomenon that would descend upon the earth bringing with it a paradise. They are also condemned for not opposing the forces at work in their society, Nazism and Capitalism.

Within the body of the novel Christ, the Beatles and the Narrator's own creations, the Monks, represent the true rebels who, in their opposition to the established status quo, affirm the unity of men, for they transcend all the dichotomies that have made man turn against man. The Narrador playfully ponders what would have happened had Christ not opposed the Pharisees as well as the Romans, the rulers of the Spirit as well as those of the Body.

¿Qué tal si el güerito J.C., nuestro primer rebeldazo, hace las paces con Roma y los fariseos y se dedica a jugar al tute con Iscariote como en una película de nuestro mero Buñueloes o le entra al comercial jabonero con Pilatus Procter & Gamble? ... Imagínate que J.C. hubiera maniobrado como el PRI o LBJ: ahí estaría todavía en Israel, metidito en su provincia y el Nuevo Testamento lo hubiera escrito Theodore White: "The Making of a Saviour, 32 A.D." No; el heredocolombino no era cuadrado; era bien

cintura porque nos estaba inventando un nuevo sistema nervioso y por eso era peligroso y pervertido desde el ángulo de los apretados.
(263)

Christ, as an example of the individual who: " ... vive de sus riñones, el hip, se los juega cada minuto y al hacerlo concilia los opuestos, integra las cualidades de la vida y no se deja paralizar por una prohibición" (263), is an exaltation of the individual will against the forces that would suppress man under a given dogma or creed. "La historia del Güero Palomares es la historia de la energía individual, apocalíptica, como única salvación verdadera ... " (263).

The Beatles have become the new Christs, synthesizing all the history that goes before them, destroying old creations, sacred and profane. They are a part of the whole youth movement to destroy the old and create the new through ritual, dance and art. They, like Christ, represent for the Narrador an apocalyptic force that will free the Western world from its relentless struggle to make one dogma prevail over all others; to exterminate and exploit those who do not embrace the Establishment at any given historical moment.

... cantan, liberándonos de todos los falsos y fatales dualismos sobre los que se ha construido la civilización de los jueces y los sacerdotes y los filósofos y los artistas y los verdugos y los mercaderes y Platón cae ahogado y rendido y enredado en esas melenas y mesmerizado por estas voces y pisoteado por este ritmo en el que los Beatles saltan, liberados, hasta su cielo y descienden lentamente, como Anteos, a tocar la nueva tierra

donde ellos no son hombres ni mujeres, buenos ni malos, cuerpo ni espíritu, materia ni substancia, esencia ni accidente: hay sólo la danza y el rito, la fusión y la máscara creciendo continuamente alrededor de todo, la máscara floreciente de Arcimboldo que es su ser y su nada, su momento único visto desde un helicóptero que abarca la totalidad en la que mueren las esquizofrenias del dualismo greco-cristiano-judío-protestante-marxista-industrial ... (237)

The Monks and in particular Jakob Werner, become subjects of analysis for the Narrador. Unlike the rest of the Monks, Jakob's life is directly related to Franz Jellinek's past. Hanna Werner, a Jewess, was rejected by Franz when he discovered she was pregnant by another man. His lack of effort to save her from extermination has caused her son, Jakob Werner, to appear as one of the Monks and, in a mock trial held in the Narrator's home in Mexico City, condemn his mother's sweetheart and assassin: "Yo, Jakob Werner, nacido en el año cero, condeno a Franz Jellinek, nacido hace dos mil años" (431). The youth movement, represented by the hippies and more specifically by Jakob Werner, is viewed rather ambivalently by the Narrador. While they represent the new rebellion against the forces of the Right, they also make it very clear that he, the Narrador, can not be a part of them since he belongs to those liberals who spent their youth in the 1930's. Furthermore, the Narrator sees that the seed of their own undoing is present. He fails to see how they can justify executing Franz

Jellinek, for in so doing they deny their own credo of freedom for all. "Quisiera reírme de ellos, decirles que me han mentido. ¿No han dicho que se la juegan solos? Han dicho que aceptan la vida y que todos, de alguna manera, somos culpables" (431). After Franz Jellinek's real or fictional execution, the Narrador raises the question of whether these heralds of a new day of freedom are able to distinguish the symbolic execution of the old world as an act of justice without any contamination of vengeance.

Abrazaba [Jakob] a la Pálida como si todo lo que hiciera en nombre de todos. La prueba individual podría ser la única prueba ejemplar, capaz de sobrevivir al holocausto. Pero si su mirada quería decirme esto, yo también quise ponerla a prueba y preguntarle, sin hablar, dónde se terminaba la venganza pura y simple y dónde se iniciaba el acto libre, individual y, otra vez, ejemplar, cometido para advertir, para significar fuera de la vida de Jakob Werner. (436)

The Narrator's inquiry is soon answered when he provokes a group of mariachis into violence. Jakob Werner, like all mankind, also falls prey to the need to extend beyond the limits of justice and continue the blood bath as he pulls out the sacrificial knife with which he executed Franz. It now becomes a weapon to defend himself against all threats. "Todos sonrientes y cruzados de brazos. Ya no vivan tan engreídos con este mundo traidor. Tomé un puñado de cacahuates y los arrojé a la cara de uno de los músicos Jakob se pone de pie violentamente y saca la navaja

ensangrentada del portafolio negro" (437). The Narrador is thus suggesting that even the rebel has the possibility and the likelihood of becoming the executioner and tyrant he opposed. Within the dialectic of good and evil all men possess both capacities. The only thing for a rebel to do is to participate in the revolution, for it is only during the acts of rebellion that one finds moments of freedom.

The fact that each man contains all possibilities is illustrated by the fact that Franz Jellinek, the architect of the crematorium at Terezien prison, is very much the complementary half of Javier. Dialectically they contain each other. Franz is the man of action who does not contemplate the meaning of life and his actions, in contrast to Javier, who is incapacitated by a sense of futility, obliterating his being through inaction. Franz voices an opinion concerning women which is exactly the opposite view held by Javier: "Yo no le exijo a ninguna mujer que sea de tal o cual modo. Dijo que sería una locura" (32). The romantic, idealistic view of love is not part of Franz's makeup. Courage for Franz is more an immediate response than a source of meditation. His participation in the atrocities committed in the concentration camp is revealed almost as if he were responding automatically without realizing the nature of the crimes being committed. On their way to Cholula, Franz twice reveals

the contradictory nature of his personality. The first instance is presented when a herd of bulls blocks the travellers' way from fording a river bed. Without fanfare, Franz goes after the lead bull, using Elizabeth's shawl as a cape. The danger is totally absent from his mind. The other occasion occurs when they stop at a German restaurant; before long, Franz is singing German songs and becomes so emotionally involved that the rest of the group is surprised. This contrasts sharply with his apparent indifference to Urs Von Schnepelbrucke's fate. This deformed dwarf had come into Franz's life during his school days. Schnepelbrücke, who strikes up an acquaintance with Franz and his roommate Ulrich, repairs broken dolls for a living and paints scenes of Prague as an avocation. When Urs Von Schnepelbrücke dies, Franz and Ulrich, totally indifferent to him as a human being, stuff his cadaver into their refrigerator with the hope of surprising their friends at a graduation party. Franz's indifference to death and human suffering prevails throughout the war.

Javier, who is Franz's double, although never required to participate in or witness the atrocities of the war, nevertheless displays an indifference to the suffering of others. Time and again he remains aloof to the human predicament. The day he finds the body of a young student at his doorstep, Elizabeth

is thoroughly shaken by its presence while Javier uses this as a pretext for philosophizing about the nature of death and the killer. In Greece when Elena, a woman who served Javier and Elizabeth, is being harassed by the restaurant owners who wish her to sell her figs at some other island, it is Elizabeth who comes to her rescue while Javier ignores the situation completely (page 144). Thus the only difference between Franz and Javier is the historical moment. Placed in similar circumstances Javier would have acted very much like Franz. Franz, like Javier, also rejects the presence of a baby in his life. While Javier participates in the decision to have Elizabeth undergo an abortion, Franz rejects the Jewess, Hanna, when he sees that she is pregnant (page 360).

For Franz, the revelation of the inhumanity of the Nazis comes during the defeat of the Axis forces in Eastern Europe. As the army flees they leave behind old men and children to fight the last battle (page 304). Franz senses the farce and the lie of heroism which somehow had been a sustaining force during all the atrocities. With the death of a twelve-year-old boy who was helping him escape, he finally breaks down.

Y por primera vez en toda la guerra Franz gritó también, se detuvo allá arriba, buscó un auxilio engañoso y corrió entre los vilanos, hacia el cuerpo de Ulrich, corrió convocando algo,

urgiendo a la tierra que pisaba, a los vilanos desprendidos por la brisa, al sol mismo, que le regalaran a ese niño un poco de la vida indiferente que todo eso quería proclamar y también los dos soldados avanzaban hacia ellos cuando Franz se hincó junto al cuerpo de Ulrich y levantó su cabeza del río y le besó la sien y la mejilla y los dos soldados norteamericanos llegaron con sus botas cortas hundidas en el lodo y uno se hincó también y meneó el casco y dijo:

--Goddamit. Just a kid. ...

Franz cayó llorando sobre la espalda de Ulrich. (306-07)

It is at this point that guilt becomes overwhelming. Heroism becomes the source of all that is evil and Franz considers that the only act of true heroism would be to obliterate the self, to become less than human. "No quiso ver o enterarse y sólo sintió que el único patriotismo digno de una medalla era el patriotismo de hundirse en la tierra y servir de carretera o sembrado o abono y perderse bajo las ruedas de los camiones y los tractores, para siempre" (305).

The Role of the Writer in Cambio de piel

The role of the writer faced with the mystery of the plurality of a single universe is as difficult and ultimately as non-transcendental as it is for the political or social rebel. Cambio de piel as a novel of reciprocal internal creators--El Narrador and the would-be writer, Javier--is an effort to transcend the dualities of life, especially that caused by the subjective-objective nature of fiction. Thus Fuentes

creates a fictional writer, El Narrador, who invents the events narrated. But of greater interest is the fact that Javier, himself a product of the Narrator's imagination, is dramatically involved in the dilemma of a plural universe in which man can apprehend or express only its fragments. This is a particularly difficult problem especially for the author who feels a sense of responsibility toward his fellow men.

Javier, a fictional character of the Narrador, in turn Fuentes' fictional storyteller, ponders the impossibility of capturing the immediacy and totality of experience.

He writes in his notes: "Triste paradoja, que a fuerza de querer expresarlo todo, darle un sentido a todo, acaba por vaciarlo todo de sentido, acaba por darse cuenta de la inexpresibilidad de todo a través de esas formas frías y artificiales de la literatura" (196).

Ultimately, this leads Javier to a type of literary suicide or, less than that, to total silence which he justifies in the following manner:

Cómo desde nuestros primeros años juntos intuí eso: la significación de este tiempo es restarle significación al tiempo. Eso es hoy ser Byron. Cada intento de responder al tiempo con un libro, un cuadro, una partitura es hacerle el juego a una época que no merece nada. Toda la obra debe quedar dentro de uno mismo, sin exteriorización, sin la debilidad de entregar a quienes no lo merecen algo que sólo puede ser valioso mientras no se comparta: esa es su condición. (197-98)

The society destroys the author one way or another.

If he succeeds, he becomes a part of the establishment since his books become marketable objects of consumption; if he fails, in the eyes of the society it amounts to silence. This makes Javier totally pessimistic and thus he states that silence is the only answer.

The Narrador and Carlos Fuentes obviously have chosen the exact opposite of Javier's position. They have chosen not to be silent, but to attempt to capture the immediacy of experience. In this way they refuse to either serve the totalitarian governments or the capitalistic states. The Narrador writes although he, too, is well aware of the paradox which moved Javier to silence. He rather playfully states his desire to write all the activities of the Monks during their evening with him while at the same time recognizing the difficulties of attempting to capture the experience itself. "Y yo sólo quiero escribir, un día, lo que me han contado. Bastante es lo que me dicen y escribirlo significa atravesar todos los obstáculos del desierto. Toda novela es una traición, dice mi cuate Pepe Bianco, encerrado entre pilas de libros en su calle de Cerrito allá en B.A." (407). A book, a novel, being a fragment of a fragment, is false. The Narrador wonders why anyone would wish to give himself over to such an apparently futile task; in the tenacity to realize a book the author becomes more and more outlandish, more and more distanced

from the truth. "¿A qué viene esa puñalada trapera de escribir un libro para decir que la única realidad que importa es falsa y se nos va a morir si no la protegemos con más mentiras, más apariencias y locas aspiraciones: con la desmesura de un libro?" (407). For the author, writing becomes an act of rebellion against the absolute truth: death. Death as a reality surrounds all mankind and thus the "lie," literature, is its other mask, a desperate affirmation of life.

Si la dejáramos, la verdad aniquilaría la vida. Porque la verdad es lo mismo que el origen y el origen es la nada y la nada es la muerte y la muerte es el crimen. La verdad quisiera ofrecernos la imagen del principio, anterior a toda duda, a toda contaminación. Pero esa imagen es idéntica a la del fin. El apocalipsis es la otra cara de la creación. La mentira literaria traiciona a la verdad para aplazar ese día del juicio en el que principio y fin serán uno sólo. Y sin embargo, presta homenaje a la fuerza originaria, inaceptable, mortal: la reconoce para limitarla. (408)

To opt for silence like Javier would be to open the doors to death, to allow it to make man into its image: nothingness. "No reconocerla, no limitarla, significa abrir las puertas a su pureza asesina. Si no, mamá grande, todos seríamos idénticos al excremento: ésa es la Verdad" (408). Thus the Narrator expresses a similar attitude to the rebel. To remain silent would be to invite death and allow the Right, the Establishment, to impose upon all men a unidimensional world, one in which freedom and, by analogy, creativity would perish. Man in the face of nothingness must

affirm his will and choose, knowing that his choice will have no transcendental value at all. He denies, as Sartre would say, his nothingness.

Porque, cuatacha, si te pones a monologar sobre la calavera de Yorick, resulta que la duda del Danés es la única manera de afirmar la meritita verdad: que somos y no somos, fuimos y no fuimos, seremos y no seremos, ya somos y ya no somos: now you see me, now you don't. O sea: que también hay un no ser al que quisiéramos jugar y que en cada instante, llenos de terror, o risa, o locura, nos está convocando. (57)

Thus, for the Narrador the attitudes towards art and society, the art of writing a novel and social commitment, have the same existential roots as well as the same response. They are a negation to death and to those forces in the world which limit the freedom of their fellow men.

Cambio de piel ironically represents the attempt on Carlos Fuentes' part to represent a unified vision of reality in which the dimensions of reality and fiction, art and life, fact and dream are harmoniously united, a world in which the novel is, itself, a microcosm of the universe.

Part three: "Visite Nuestros Subterráneos": Happening

In the introductory statements mention was made of the possibilities of evaluating this complex novel within the canons of the contemporary theatre scene. Hinted at were parallels that might exist

between this work and the Happening, a popular theatre form in America and abroad. These parallels, as well as the differences that may exist between the Happening and Cambio de piel, merit close scrutiny.

Before initiating such a comparative study, a brief presentation of the events in Part Three of Cambio de piel seems in order. During the evening hours of an April night a few days before the execution of Franz Jellinek, the Narrador, alias Freddy Lambert, receives his bizarre visitors at his home in San Angel, Mexico D.F. The visitors, two young women and four young men, refuse to identify themselves by name with the exception of the one who is dressed in Ivy-League garb, Jakob Werner. All wear hippie clothes (or it is also suggested that they may be costumes from their car trunk, which is filled with the same attire). It is apparent that all of them have been smoking marijuana. The Narrador, who feels sympathetic towards the young, strikes up an affable relationship with them and tells them all about Javier and Elizabeth. At this point the Pálida decides to hold a mock trial in which they will play different roles; she decides to play Elizabeth. The person to be tried in proxy, Franz Jellinek, will be played by the tall blond-haired Boston Boy, also called Güero or Barbudo. A Negro girl dressed in Black from head to toe, Morgana, will

be the presiding judge, while the young black man, Hermano Tomás, ironically decides to be the defense attorney, and Rosa-Correosa opts to play the role of Javier. The trial begins and Hermano Tomás pleads innocence for Franz. With this they leave the Narrador's home continuing the trial in the streets, arriving at a candy store where Güero is harassed by some children who call him Christ and threaten the group with handfuls of stones. The Monks and the Narrador go out onto the expressway where a cellophane bag of urine thrown from a passing car hits Tomás as he carries forth his defense arguments. The six actors and the spectator, the Narrador, then get into the car, continuing the defense arguments until they arrive at a gas station where La Pálida, in the role as a witness for the prosecuting attorney, drenches the others with gasoline and threatens to light their clothes. From here they enter a brothel run by a grotesque woman called La Capitana. They are shown to a room and La Capitana wishes to provide them with the services of the establishment but is confused by El Rosa's long hair and pink pants. She proceeds to remove his pants and, totally amazed at his physical endowments, initiates a raffle among the prostitutes to determine who will make love with him. During this time all the Monks and the Narrador remove their gasoline-soaked clothes while the Judge, Morgana, and Rosa

copulate and carry on the trial simultaneously. The raffle is then completed and much to the dismay of the participants, the towel girl, Elenita, has won. Out of humility and not wishing to offend the prostitutes, she half-heartedly tries to settle for less but El Rosa-Correosa insists and proceeds to make love to her in a gigantic mahogany bed. At this point all the spectators--the Monks, the prostitutes, and the Narrator--get into bed and indulge in an orgy. El Rosa turns on the light and all scamper. La Pálida now begins to ask for her children--the child that Elizabeth and Javier aborted as well as the children exterminated by the Nazis represented by Franz. The Show is apparently over when La Pálida goes back to the bed and is followed by Morgana, the Judge, the black girl who is now pantomiming the movements of a spider with her hand while La Pálida pantomimes the fly with her vagina. At this point all the spectators fall to their knees and masturbate. When the digital manipulation is finished the unexpected occurs. La Pálida feigns labor pains and produces a bloody rag and wire doll. There follows a sense of amazement and the "child" is given to Elenita to take care of with warning from La Pálida to guard the baby, to keep it from those who would kill it. The Monks and Narrator return to the car and speed down the highway until they are pulled over by a motorcycle cop. Franz (Rosa-Correosa) answers

the policeman's questions as if he were still pleading his case. Finally the Narrator pays the officer the bribe and they are on their way again. They return to the Narrator's house where Jakob Werner extracts from his businessman's briefcase a supply of hallucinogen mushrooms of which all except the Narrator partake. At this point the Narrator feels estranged from the group and somewhat threatened. In a move to distract them he goes to a steamer-chest and begins to remove all the articles that have been used by various characters in part II of the novel. They examine the articles, and don some of the garments. The Narrator unwraps a puppet-dwarf, Urs Von Schnepelbrucke, which he operates. Franz (Rosa-Correosa) strikes up a conversation with this dwarf who had met Franz and his roommate, Ulrich, during their schooldays at Prague before the war broke out. The Narrador begins to get carried away with the role of the puppeteer and attempts to woo the Pálida for himself. Jakob Werner prevents this promising her love and a bond of comradeship against all forces of oppression. The Pálida, now also named Jane Fery, vomits goat's testicles and for a moment regresses into childhood. The Narrator returns the puppet to his trunk and the trial ends. Jakob Werner condemns Franz Jellinek to death. The Narrator pleads for mercy on the behalf of Franz but seeing their unrelenting will he desists, wishing to attempt to seduce

La Pálida and to be a part of their youth. They leave his house without his being able to prevent them in spite of the fact that on several occasions he has stated that he is the Narrator and is thus responsible for the fate of his creatures.

These then are the events which will be examined to verify whether they qualify in part or in toto as a Happening. Allan Kaprow, perhaps the world's best-known master of the theatre art form known as the Happening, in an article "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," describes the "nature of Happenings . . . analytically--their purpose and place in art."¹¹ Some of the basic characteristics, according to Kaprow, are the following: "A happening does not select a given location for its enactment. The most intense and essential happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, in natural surroundings and in the street. . . . Usually they are performed for a rather select or limited group of people who participate . . . in some way with the event, flowing in and among its parts."¹² This participation, like the rest of the happening, is characterized by its spontaneity and thus is open to chance. The results may be such that "even things that are unpleasant" result. There is a fine line of "nervousness" that grows out of the feeling that one is about to witness the unexpected--even danger. Another important

characteristic is "that a Happening has no plot, no obvious 'philosophy'" and furthermore, "a Happening will frequently have words, but they may or may not make literal sense. If they do, their sense is not part of the fabric of 'sense' which other nonverbal elements (noise, visual stuff, actions, etc.) convey."¹³ The rationale behind this art form is that it attempts to " . . . partake wholly in the real nature of art and (one hopes) life."¹⁴ The Happening is an art form which brings art into a closer contact with life and reality. "Thus a Happening is rough and sudden and it often feels 'dirty'. Dirt, we might begin to realize, is also organic and fertile, and everything, including the visitors, can grow a little in such circumstances."¹⁵ As an art form, because of its unpredictability, it runs a real risk of failing, of not "making it good every time."¹⁶ And finally the pleasure derived from a successful Happening is its impermanence, its own inability to repeat itself.

It is immediately evident that one can establish some parallels between the technique of handling action in the Happening and in the third section of Cambio de piel. The action does take place in natural, everyday surroundings--the Narrator's home, the 'venerable' Lincoln, the streets of Mexico City, and the brothel on La calle del niño perdido. Furthermore, the viewers

(the Narrador, the members of the bordeló) do mingle in the action. The outcome of the action is in part unknown to both reader and Narrador who often repeats that he doesn't know what will happen next. The spectators are in effect subjugated to a series of pleasant and unpleasant experiences and even to some danger. For example, they might have been stoned by the street urchins, or ignited in their gasoline-soaked clothes. These are all abundantly demonstrated in the events that take place during the Monks' visit to the Narrator's house.

But in spite of all this a close examination reveals that the events of the novel are radically different from a Happening, so different that one could not refer to this section of the novel as one. The crucial point of departure is the fact that the Happening has no plot and no discernible philosophy which gives meaning to the action. Though the actions seem improvisory, spontaneous and given to pure chance in Cambio de piel, part III, they conform almost perfectly to the total meaning of the work. The action can be divided into two planes of meaning. On one level the Monks are playing roles of recognized people. They are involved in action that is highly codified and understood by any layman: the proceedings of a trial. The other level is not as obvious but nevertheless

is part and parcel of both the first level (the trial) and the rest of the novel.

An examination of the so-called "unexpected" events of the action reveals a deliberate attempt at symbolism, an attempt to reflect material dealt with previously in the novel. When the Monks enter the street and the urchins see the Christ-like physical appearance of the Barbudo (Franz), the reader is not surprised for the Narrador has gone to great lengths to prove that every man contains the devil as well as the angel within him. Jakob Werner, the prosecuting attorney, in his accusation implies a similar interpretation. "Yo, Jakob Werner, nacido en el año cero, condeno a Franz Jellinek, nacido hace dos mil años" (431). The gasoline episode, for all its apparent spontaneity and unrelatedness, serves to anticipate future action within the same bizarre evening as well as reflecting events related in the second part of the novel. La Pálida, who hoses the others down in this episode, creates a commotion that allows the Narrador a view of her underthings. This excites his concupiscent nature. The impossibility of the Narrador to initiate a relationship with her is part of the thematic material of the total work for he realizes that he can no longer be young again. La Pálida's threat to ignite her gasoline-soaked companions previews her question: " ... ¿qué me han dado, qué me

han dado a cambio de mi amor, ¿dónde están mis hijos?" (399). This query implies the guilt borne by Javier and Franz for her abortion as well as for the extermination of her Jewish children.

The outlandish fornication scene, in which all the characters indulge, for all its elements of fantasy, is nevertheless integrated into the meaning of the work through its imagery.

Estoy sofocado, junto, bajo, entre, sobre los cuerpos y me aterra la ausencia de risas, la cadavérica solemnidad de nuestra pirámide sin tactos, la máscara salvavidas del idioma inglés en boca de las cariñosas honeybunch, cherry-blossom: cuando el Rosa-Correosa apagó la luz, todas las manos huyeron de las pieles ajenas, la oscuridad les arrebató el placer profesional y las manos se refugiaron en la propia piel protectora ... (397)

The pyramid image has been used to characterize Mexico and by analogy the world; it is a form that depicts the exploitation of the weak by the powerful. "--La pura pirámide, dragona. ¿No admiras la estética de la construcción? En México todo se hace en forma de pirámide: la política, la economía, el amor, la cultura ... " (162). This pyramid of living flesh stands in direct contrast to the pyramids of the dead and thus becomes part of the dialectic of life and death. "El aire se iba haciendo denso, sofocante: la piel sentía un vaho caluroso a medida que se penetraba al centro de la pirámide, al núcleo escondido de la primera fundación" (368). Within the iconography found in the

pyramid itself this cycle of life is depicted: "--El rojo es el color de la muerte, el amarillo de la vida --dijo Javier, escudriñando el friso desde un ángulo estrecho--. El chapulín traía vida y muerte. Como todos los dioses mexicanos, ambiguos, pensados a partir de un centro cosmogónico en el que la muerte es condición de la vida y la vida antesala de la muerte ... "

(369). The rather stark scene of lesbianism is in itself fraught with symbolism which contrasts with the ideas implicit in the pyramid as a symbol of exploitation. The union that takes place here is described as one in which:

... La Pálida sigue inmóvil ... seguramente porque necesita el desorden y la humillación que el mismo amor necesita, porque sabe que toda violencia real es impasible, que todo caos auténtico ofrece el espejo de la claridad, que toda virtud es la suma de sus pecados ... ese temblor ligero revela a la presa que quiere ser presa para que la violencia esperada sea la paz final y merecida--o quizás porque sabiendo que va a ser cazada, la víctima desea, por lo menos, que su sacrificio sea libre: el movimiento imperceptible es el signo de ese encuentro de la voluntad y el destino. (401)

The union takes on further meaning when La Pálida symbolically bears a child. La Pálida, playing the Jewess Elizabeth, reaffirms the central theme of the novel. Life goes on no matter what, and her children (Javier's child or the Hebrew offspring) will never be eliminated as long as she exists. This birth, then, is an integral thematic and structural part

of the novel. La Pálida, Elizabeth, becomes a mother-earth figure, a life force which negates death.

--¿Dónde están mis hijos, malditos? ¿Creen que han ganado la partida porque mis hijos están muertos? ¿Creen que estoy sola? ¿Piensan que mi vida ha muerto con mis hijos muertos? ... --Mierda. La vida no se deja joder. La vida sólo se puede negar a sí misma, desde el tuétano. Nada la puede tocar desde afuera. ¿No los han visto esta misma noche, vendiendo refrescos y jugando rayuela en el polvo? ¿No los volverán a ver mañana, silenciosos, desnudos, revolcándose con los perros, junto a los arrozales, en los campos de batalla? (404)

The dangers, the stark unexpected scenes are integral parts of the novel. There are other people and objects which make their appearance during the activities of this bizarre night. Among these we find Urs Von Schnepelbrücke, Franz' strange dwarf friend who enigmatically dies in the second part only to appear as a puppet in the hands of the Narrator. Elenita, the towel girl in the brothel, reincarnates the servant girl Javier and Elizabeth had in Greece during the forties. There are objects which are also transposed from the past, most notably the mahogany bed in the bordello. The Narrador for some reason feigns ignorance of this bed's history, but he knows that it once belonged to Javier's mother and that in fact the bordello was once Javier's parents' house. The bed, or a very similar one, was also in possession of the dwarf.

Perhaps the most important object to appear

during the night of the Monks' visit is the old steamer trunk. Javier and Elizabeth once possessed this (or a similar) trunk filled with drawers into which they put all their written fantasies. During the novel, the author continually refers to objects which on the night in question are extracted from it. Frequently the Narrator insinuates that the objects it contains provide sufficient material for a novel. The Monks themselves, when in doubt as to background material during the mock trial, have recourse to the chest's contents for verification.

--¿Qué puedes saber? --el Barbudo se incorporó--. ¿Qué puedes saber tú, que eras un niño, que no pudiste hablar con nadie, quién te contó? Ese no fue tu tiempo. No puedes conocer ese tiempo. Eso estaba olvidado, perdido por siempre ...

Jakob soltó a la Pálida y empezó a abrir los cajoncitos de nuestro mundo, a tomar con el puño esos papeles, dragona, que llevan años sin que nadie los toque, a regarlos por el piso y arrojarlos al aire: --Todo está escrito. No hay nada que no haya sido escrito, legado, memorizado en un pedazo de papel. Aquí. Y aquí. Y aquí. (429)

The Narrador also feels that all mysteries are to be solved by consulting the all-inclusive steamer trunk. Doubting the soundness of the Monks' condemnation of Franz, he senses that the chest might reveal the real reason for their decision. "¿Qué hizo Franz, por favor? ¿Qué hizo Franz? Debe decirlo una carta o un libro que no leímos en alguno de los cajones que no se abrieron. Son demasiados cajones. No

tenemos tiempo" (432-33). The chest represents, within the world of the novel, one example of the union between the microcosm and the macrocosm; it is only a fragment (a chest) but at the same time the whole novel. This synthesis of fragment and totalness is the very heart of the philosophical hypostasis that permeates the book. Javier, a fragment within the novel, is also a part of the total; furthermore, he is a writer of a novel called Pandora's Box which is in effect Cambio de piel. Likewise, the events narrated during the Monks' visit are a microcosmic reproduction of the whole novel; it is at once a new and unique phenomenon and it repeats the narrative events that preceded its existence. If the events seem unexpected, fantastic, or without plot, it is only a superficial semblance. They, like the rest of the elements in the novel, are caught in the dynamic arrangement and disarrangement of a cosmos in perpetual flux.

The Fate of the Writer

The last four pages of Cambio de piel are most perplexing. We find that the Narrador is telling Elizabeth, Dragona, of her visit to him in the insane asylum in Cholula. The reality of her visit is questionable. It is possible, but he is not sure, that she is also an inmate of the institution. The implications of his confinement in an insane asylum are

various. First of all, there is the implication that the creator of a fantasy may end up being its victim. The reciprocal creation that prevailed between the Narrador and his creatures that inhabited the world of Cambio de piel may have turned against him, blaming him for the death of Franz, and he in the process of relating pretty much the same material of Cambio de piel by way of explanation was deemed mentally unbalanced and confined. There is some evidence for this interpretation. After the execution the Narrador becomes fully aware that his world of illusion which he and those of the 1930's lived through is no longer valid. The novel itself, the Narrador states, is an effort to annihilate the past, that which he was.

"Quiero liquidar esos años, los de mi nostalgia infantil y adolescente, compuesta de todas estas películas y encabezados de periódicos y notas rojas y discos rayados. ... Yo no tengo más ... " (433). On the other hand, it is clear that he feels that he cannot be young again. The alienation that he feels from the Monks is augmented when he realizes that neither the Pálida nor any one young woman can be truly his. "Y los seis rostros me observan con esa sorna, el rostro negro ... El divino rostro pálido, sin cejas, con pintura de un naranja borrado, de la joven Elizabeth de la vida eternamente intolerable y eternamente digna de ser vivida" (437). This alienation is intensified

when the peasants and even the animals stare threateningly at the Narrador, the one ultimately responsible for all that has happened since he is the creator.

"Me miraban ellos, cuando me puse de pie, y me miraban las mujeres de rostros oscuros, envueltas en rebozos, descalzas, embarazadas, y me miraban los perros adormilados, infestados de pulgas, con los hocicos blancos" (437). It is at this point that the Narrador feels totally alienated from all who surround him.

Todos sonrientes y cruzados de brazos. Ya no vivan tan engreídos con este mundo traidor. Tomé un puñado de cacahuates y los arrojé a la cara de uno de los músicos ...
... a ese mariachi con bigotes tupidos, con el movimiento de una pantera negra, que soltó la guitarra y avanzó hacia nuestra mesa para que yo le arrojara otro puñado de cacahuates y los soldados se llevaran las manos a las pistolas y las panzonas cubrieran a los niños con los rebozos y los perros corrieran renqueando, con sus patas dobladas y a veces amputadas y sus grandes manchas secas en la piel y los soldados sacaran las pistolas y también corrieran hacia la cantina bajo el portal donde los cuatro músicos se disponían a partirnos la madre, a rajarnos la piel . . . (437)

One can well imagine the absurdity of an official police investigation into the death of Franz, in which the Narrador would try in vain to vindicate himself by retelling the same material used for Cambio de piel. Such an explanation might well lead to his commitment to an asylum.

Another interpretation of the Narrador's confinement in an insane asylum is more symbolic. The

Narrador, as a writer of novels, is a prisoner to the society in which he lives. The writer is for all practical purposes a madman whose ravings are quieted by giving them the trappings of success or by destroying them; either way he is totally at the mercy of those in power. This echoes much of the arguments presented by Javier in relationship to the writer's options in society. For him silence is the answer; for the Narrador the silence is imposed by the society.

Another plausible cause for the Narrador's madness is the fact that he is ultimately responsible for any deaths that may have taken place. There is reasonable proof that Franz was executed and probably by the Monks. The Narrador, in his desperate desire to make meaning out of his youth by investigating all he could about Javier, Elizabeth and Franz, is lead to play the role he detests--that of Sherlock Holmes hunting down the culprit. One can almost hear his words echo in the loneliness of his cell. " ... me joden todos los Sherlocks de la historia que, lupa en mano, se lanzan a la caza del culpable" (159).

On another level these cryptic pages may be symbolic of the creator's relationship to his work, to his creatures. After the novel's end, which might be symbolically viewed as death, the author returns to his isolation and separation. Literature, the

novel in particular, may then be an attempt to become a part of humanity, a desire to participate in the wholeness of man. The creation as such goes on, like Elizabeth and the love she shares with Javier, but it is an existence separate from the creator. The parallels between a work of art and offspring are not totally without substance, for a child is a continuation of the father who sired him but at the same time he is separate from him. This image of the child may explain the final words. In and of themselves they appear to be totally beyond comprehension.

El perro amarillo está terminando de devorar al niño enmascarado. No conozco el rostro del niño, pero estoy seguro que debe ser muy triste. Nuestros niños sólo ríen con las máscaras puestas. Las máscaras ríen por ellos, máscaras de azúcar, dulces calaveras: la muerte está viva y es el teatro guiñol de estos niños de ojos tristes que se reconocen en la calaca porque la calaca será suya antes de que dejen de ser niños. Pero el perro amarillo y babeante de Cholula va a terminar su merienda, va a hacer trizas esas vendas sucias que aún lo atan y luego, Dragona, y luego . . . Sé que su apetito no está satisfecho. Adiós, dragona. Y no olvides a tu cuate . . . (Fdo.)
 Freddy Lambert. (441-42)

Dogs have almost imperceptibly been present throughout the novel and a close study reveals that for the Narrador they have a symbolic meaning within the work. The very first page of the novel makes reference to the dogs' presence when the main characters enter the town of Cholula, just as they were present when Cortez entered this city on the way to Tenochtitlán (page 11). The same dogs are present in the last scene previous to

the Narrator's presence in the asylum (page 435). Javier as a child remembers a set of pictures of a child disturbing a sleeping dog and then the dog chasing the child up a tree (page 68). In Greece he takes in a dog during the rainy season and keeps him under the bed (page 232). A constant relationship established is that of a child and dog. Franz, in a nightmare, sees dogs used to kill babies (page 303). The same image mysteriously reappears at the novel's end (above quote). On two occasions the description of the dogs stresses their "ojos rojos y amarillos" (435), and on one occasion when Javier steps into a patio he discovers a rotting "perro amarillo, agusanado rígido, con la piel llena de costras de sangre coagulada y la boca abierta" (47).

El Güero Barbudo, one of the Monks, gives us the last meaningful clue to the meaning of the Narrador's final words. Throughout the comings and goings of the Monks, on the night of their visit to the Narrador, this character carries a bundle with him which he takes out and puts into the trunk of the car. The noises coming from the writhing bundle combine a child's cry and a dog's whine: "Gruñido y llanto" (219); "ruido de voces y gemidos" (387); "vivo y gruñente" (434). Finally, in his last conversation with Elizabeth (Dragona) the Narrador identifies the emanating sounds as "Los aullidos de animal y los llantos de niño" (440).

It is this bundle of life which Elizabeth extracts from the car trunk where the body of Franz was placed. The Narrator sees her as saving something precious, perhaps life or the beginning of life. "Regresaste, dragona, como siempre, a donde estaba tu hombre, junto a la cajuela cerrada, donde otra piel se pudría a cambio de la que tú habías salvado. Siempre tendrás a quién cuidar, mi bella judía de los tristes ojazos grises" (441). This bundle symbolically suggests the struggle between life and death, the child and the dog. Elizabeth, the mother figure who affirms life amid its absurdity, takes the package and places it on the steps of the asylum where we find the Narrador. The hungry dog who will not be satiated may be a reference to the forces that destroy life. On the other hand, it may be the rebel who will oppose all the life-denying powers of the world. The novel ends with an enigma which merits the words spoken by Javier in regard to the Mexican gods. "--El rojo es el color de la muerte, el amarillo de la vida . . . El chapulín traía vida y muerte. Como todos los dioses mexicanos, ambiguos, pensados a partir de un centro cosmogónico en el que la muerte es condición de la vida y la vida antesala de la muerte ... " (369).

Conclusion: Cambio de piel, A Novel of Expiation

Cambio de piel represents a courageous examination

of man's consciousness by confronting him with the ethical question of who is guilty for the millions murdered in the thirties and forties. The moral posture of the author, through his surrogate figure, the Narrador, raises this all-important question with the desire neither to condemn nor to forgive, but to understand. The quest for comprehension of the horrors obligates the "Inquisitor" to examine the whole of Western history and the nature of man. Juxtaposed to the ride to the Cholula ruins (symbolically the origins of man) and to the internal quest for meaning for the four characters' lives, the Narrator places events from past history in which man condemned, tortured and executed those who were outside the pale of his beliefs. He includes the atrocities of the Church towards those deemed as heretics and witches, and the extermination of thousands of Jews in the fourteenth century. History itself can not explain the crimes of the twentieth century for they go as far back as the persecution of Christ and his followers.

The difficulty has been the Manichean belief that evil, whatever form it may take, can be extinguished from the face of the earth. The result has been that those in power have accepted this belief, established what they believed to be the Good or Virtuous and the Evil, and proceeded to persecute those preordained

to be evil. According to the Narrador, this type of acting and thinking is the result of perceiving reality in terms of an atagonistic dualism, a procedure for which he blames the Greeks, in particular Plato. Once man saw the world as an either-or proposition, he made a choice and from there attempted to deny the existence of, or to eradicate, the opposite of the two poles of the dualism. This fatal error is a failure, according to the Narrador, to see that reality is by its very nature a unity. Evil exists along with good, and one engenders the other; furthermore, one can not exist without the other. The evil has resulted whenever man has taken a fragment from this total and dialectical reality and has insisted upon its totalness or absolute nature. Man combines both the virtuous and the evil and all that lies between in a dynamic yet inclusive way. This leads our Narrador to conclude that all men were guilty for the extermination of lives, the Nazis as well as those who permitted it to happen. Furthermore, the extermination was a human act of which all men are capable. Javier, simply because he did not live the historical moment in which the Nazis were cast, can not feel himself free from their guilt. He too chose against life, through the abortion he urged upon his wife, Elizabeth.

Cambio de piel, in asking for understanding of the Nazis, appeals to the higher law of human life.

All is permitted as long as it affirms life and is opposed to death and nothingness. This modified Nietzschean sense of the individual totally free to choose his fate is in spirit the Christian axiom, "Condemn the sin but not the sinner." Jesus, the Narrador argues, came to redeem the sinner not the redeemed. The world then needs to redeem itself by recognizing the dialectic nature of man, his ability to be a life-giving or a death-dealing force in the world. For the Narrator, man must embrace man, with all his potentials toward the good or evil, and accept him always rebelling against any force in power which would exterminate his freedom of thought and action. Elizabeth and Javier come to realize that both are guilty not only of the death of their potential child, but also of those who died at the hands of the Nazis. All are guilty, even those who act for justice's sake, because of their humanity. Javier enters a new life (a change of skin) when he accepts his guilt and the fact that Franz is his other self.

The Narrador, in the face of man's paradoxical nature, his capacity for good and evil, affirms that the individual is the only source of salvation. The individual must oppose all forms of government and ideology which make a claim to possess absolute truth. The individual as a rebel and a revolutionary must never cease to fight against any form of oppression.

This will to revolution is his only posture in spite of the fact the oppression will always exist some place, some time. This fight is in itself the goal of the Rebel, his illusion of freedom, those moments in history which the Narrator terms as: "Una revolución destruye un statu quo y crea otro. Eso es todo. Pero en medio hay momentos muy padres. Y eso sí que es todo" (163).

Love, itself involved in the dialectic, requires of the two partners the acceptance that both are also part of humanity and thus open to acts of love or hate; both parties must accept both roles in order to love the humanity within them. Jakob Werner, furthermore, in addressing La Pálida, suggests that two people who accept their paradoxical nature can also move through life opposing all forms of tyranny and oppression.

... tú y yo fracasaremos, desearemos, volveremos a desear, tú y yo iremos hasta el final de todas las viejas contradicciones, para vivirlas, despojarnos de esa vieja piel y mudarla por la de las nuevas contradicciones, las que nos esperan después del cambio de piel, Jeanne, tú y yo nos la jugamos solos, sin herir a otros hombres, cara o cruz, Jeanne, cabeza o cola, águila o sol. (424)

Thus love, if it accepts the contradictions of man, can be a saving strength to assume a life-affirmative posture to all in the world that would deny life.

The artistic complexity of Cambio de piel is the objectivization of these beliefs. Carlos Fuentes creates a work which denies and rejects a meaningless

world by an act of creativity, with a work which insists on order in the midst of chaos and total meaninglessness. The richness of the internal working of Cambio de piel reflects this paradoxical and dualistic nature of man, a creator in the face of a totally destructive cosmos. His is at once omniscient and limited. The complexity and unity of the narrative point of view in the novel are an attempt to recover the unity of man. Man is both object and subject and Cambio de piel represents an artistic effort to eradicate a dualistic view of man and his world. Reality and fiction, fact and fancy, good and evil, are all negated as separate forms of existence, while at the same time they are affirmed within a reciprocally inclusive view. Thus, in Cambio de piel the multiple images of man are really different dimensions of one man--humanity.

Of all the novels studied, Cambio de piel becomes the best one for the study of the creative process of the novelist. The fusion of the artist with his creation suggests the possible relationship of Fuentes to life in general. Art, then, is a dialogue between fantasy and reality. The image of the writer, revealed in the study of Cambio de piel, is very different from either that of the realist who wishes to render "reality" per se and from the creator of fantasy. Literature is a fusion of both fantasy and reality, two sides of the same coin which the author attempts to capture in

his work.

Cambio de piel, perhaps Carlos Fuentes' best work of fiction, is an open call for revolution against all forces or governmental systems that deny the life of freedom to its people. The author's position toward art and society, the art of writing a novel and social commitment, have the same existential roots. This attitude of open and constant rebellion is based on the philosophical principles that there are no absolutes to guide the destiny of man. Furthermore, the tragic history of Western man that has led to Auzlitz and Hiroshima, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam, has been the result of a given group in power which believed it possessed truth as an absolute. Man, nature, life and reality for the author are part of the total nature of Being. Man is both good and evil, a creative as well as a destructive force. Faced with a world without a God or any other absolutes, man must affirm his freedom in behalf of life and the liberty of others. Art is one way of accomplishing this for it is an attempt to create a reality in spite of the all-encompassing and unavoidable reality which is death. The truth is death and nothingness. Art, as a form of rebellion, denies our nothingness, creating in the void a positive act of creation. Thus art and social commitment are based on the realization that man is inescapably mortal,

inescapably a part of nothingness and then, only in rebellion, can one assert one's meaning, one's freedom, by opposing all the forces of death, be they metaphysical or existential.

NOTES

¹ Anonymous, "A Change of Skin," "Pop Polemic," The Times Library Supplement, III, 481 (Nov. 14, 1968), 1270.

Julio Ortega, "Carlos Fuentes: Cambio de piel," La Contemplación y la fiesta (Lima, 1968), pp. 71-85. "Cambio de piel, la mayor novela de Carlos Fuentes, es un vasto collage pero sobre todo es un happening. El mismo proceso de montaje y simultaneidad del collage aparece en esta novela como acción, como improvisación que convoca la fiesta y su teatralidad" (p. 71).

² George McMurray, "Cambio de piel, an Existentialist Novel of Protest," Hispania, LII, 1 (March 1969), 150-154. This essay represents an effort to summarize the thematic content of the work. Unfortunately, it merely skims the all-inclusive existentialist themes. In part this is unavoidable whenever a critic neglects to relate form to structure, the ideas to the narrative form of the novel. At the heart of the novel, it seems to me, is the relationship that exists between creator and creature, a phenomenon that can not be fully understood in this novel without a close scrutiny of the form: the relationship the Narrador has to the four main characters.

³ Wolfgang Keyser, Interpretación y Análisis de la Obra Literaria (Madrid, 1958), pp. 314-315.

⁴ Julio Ortega, "Cambio," pp. 71-85.

⁵ Carlos Fuentes, Cambio de piel (México, 1967), p. 442. Page numbers will immediately follow subsequent quotes from this edition.

⁶ Leon Livingstone, "Interior Duplication and the Problem of Form in the Modern Spanish Novel," PMLA, LXXIII (Sept. 1958), 393-406.

⁷ Luis Harss, Into the Mainstream (New York, 1966), pp. 280-81.

⁸ Esperanza Figueroa Amaral, Review of Cambio de piel, Revista Iberoamericana, XXXIV (1968), 366-69. It is interesting to note that the authoress states: "No hay en la novela nada improvisado; tampoco hay detalles de roman a clef, críticas de que se ha hecho a Fuentes en el pasado" (368).

⁹ Dagobert D. Runes, ed., "Platonism," Dictionary of Philosophy, (New Jersey, 1967), p. 237.

¹⁰ Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Belarmino y Apolonio (Buenos Aires, 1944), p. 109.

¹¹ Allan Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," The Modern American Theater: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., Alvin B. Kernan (New Jersey, 1967), p. 122.

¹² Ibid., p. 123.

¹³ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this thesis has been to demonstrate the relationship between form and content in the novels of Carlos Fuentes. More specifically, the objective has been to identify the basic issues within the novels, especially those of ethical and moral import, and to demonstrate how they are given narrative structure and form.

Carlos Fuentes' first novel, La región más transparente, published in 1958, in spite of its many literary accomplishments, fails both in artistic structure and as a statement regarding the society it describes. Basically, the problem with this work is that Fuentes fails to find an adequate voice, internal or external, either through a character or through the narrator's point of view. As a result, the lack of unity both mars the work and blurs the author's commitment.

La región más transparente does express concern for the downtrodden (Macehualli) and reveals an intense preoccupation with Mexico's past and destiny. Furthermore,

Fuentes, in his attempt to capture the meaning of Mexico, creates a work rich in characters whose internal lives lend a wide variety of perspectives to the meaning of their country. It is through characterization that the author manifests his skills in incorporating many of the psychological-literary devices that are intrinsic to the novel since authors such as Joyce, Faulkner and Woolf. In addition to the multiple perspectivism of the work, Fuentes extends its transcendence through the use of Aztec mythology, by far his most worthy contribution in this extensive analysis of what it means to be a Mexican.

The mythic patterns, especially those related to Rodrigo Pohl, Federico Robles and Norma Larragoiti, are skillfully wedded to the general plot lines of the work without being obtrusive or contrived. However, the mythic treatment accorded Ixca Cienfuegos is both overburdened and confusing. The centrality of his role in the lives of the characters and his semi-omniscient powers make Ixca the pivotal figure in the novel. As a result, much of the failure to construct a coherent novel thematically and structurally, is due to the reader's evaluation of this creation.

In spite of Fuentes' inability to wield skillfully a double sword, that is to make revolutionary social statements through a revolutionary form of the novel, this work is important. First of all,

it seriously raises questions of political and social import in a country where the Revolution and all its implications has become mere rhetoric, a vehicle for empty political propaganda. Secondly, it is Fuentes' point of departure in his search for a balance and harmony of form and content.

If La región más transparente fails to present a unified voice or ethical position because of its extreme fragmentation, Las buenas conciencias fails for the opposite reason. The latter, a novel narrowly focused on one character's struggle against the pharisaical hypocrisy of his family, his church and his society, contrasts sharply with the broad panoramic and fragmentary view of a whole society. Las buenas conciencias represents the effort to overcome the ambiguity of ethical position, evident in his previous work, by delivering his ethical judgments through direct expository prose, thus destroying the fabric of fiction.

Fuentes, in his desire to criticize the hypocrisy of a bourgeois Christian society, sacrifices characterization and plot development. Furthermore, in robbing the characters of their autonomy, he insults the intelligence of his reader who, after reading La región más transparente, had expected to participate more actively in the reconstruction and understanding of the novel. Characterization thus deteriorates into a process of telling the reader his interpretation of what the

personages ought to be; there is very little that is revealed by the characters themselves through thought or deed. The main characters are deliberately stereotyped from the beginning of the work and straight-jacketed to such a degree that the reader is not even presented a good story. Many passages of straight exposition actually are closer to the essay form than to fiction.

Thematically, Jaime Ceballos' rebellion and idealistic vision of the Christian man make for potentially good story material. At rare times Fuentes reveals that he sensed the possibilities of such thematic content, as in the fifth chapter of the novel in which he deals with the intricate and convincing relationship established between an adolescent's sense of social awareness and his sexual awakening in conjunction with the complex influence exerted on the boy's mind by the elders who wish to mold him in their own image.

It is also to Fuentes' credit that his characters are not steeped heavily in Octavio Paz' interpretation of the Mexican psyche, as was the case in La región más transparente. Here this ideology is replaced by the simple but potentially winsome sentiment, "No man is alone," a sense of brotherhood which was one of the many ideals of La región más transparente and is to appear again in his future novels.

By almost any critical standard posited, Las buenas conciencias is a poorly executed novel and a discouraging follow-up to the ambitious and vigorous La región más transparente. Nevertheless, with the former novel the dialectics implicit in writing a novel which satisfies both ethical and artistic ends is met head on. La región más transparente represents an obfuscation of the author's message by the proliferation of characters and their individual Weltanschauung. Las buenas conciencias is an example of the opposite case: the author's presence dwarfs the human dimensions of his creatures, relegating the plot to the background while he pontificates on the evils of a corrupt society. Summing up, these two novels comprise the two extremes: a novel rich in the most current literary techniques but devoid of a central unifying commitment, as opposed to an aesthetically impoverished work in which social commitment is translated into mere pamphleteering.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz is remarkable for its delicate balance between artistic form and social commitment. As a novel it has the historical range of La región más transparente while retaining the intensity and depth of character analysis attempted in Las buenas conciencias. Gone are the diffuseness and opaqueness of the first and the moral overcommitment which blocked the novelistic possibilities of

the second. In this work the demands, aesthetic as well as ethical, are resolved by the creative use of the narrative point of view. La muerte de Artemio Cruz presents not only the life and death of one individual but also the historical life of one nation, Mexico, and finally the life of universal man. This multiple but unified focus is executed by a narrative structure which utilizes corresponding tripartite voices. The yo, through a stream-of-consciousness technique, reveals the concrete sentient man dying in the present while he reviews the meaning of his life. The él voice utilizes the omniscient author's point of view and concentrates on the protagonist's past life while intrinsically relating him to the meaning of Mexican history, especially since the Revolution. The third narrative perspective, the tú in direct address, relates the individual, Artemio Cruz, to the totality of Mexico and the universal nature of man. The interplay of these three voices, far from dispersing the focal point of interest, is directed to an inner core, the life and death of the protagonist and the meaning therein for the concrete existential man, his history and his participation in humanity.

The distribution of the narrative sequence is another of Carlos Fuentes' finest accomplishments. The moribund protagonist embarks upon a journey to his origins in a desire to find meaning in his life.



For the reader there is a sense of reliving the protagonist's life through a reenactment of his past as it relates to Mexico and the world. In a sense, all the narrative material is structured in such a way as to involve the reader in the reconstruction of the past in reverse order so that at the novel's end the birth and death of the protagonist terminate the cyclical pattern of the narrative sequence.

The use of mythology, evident in La región más transparente, adds another dimension to the main character's transcendence as well as solidifying and clarifying the ethical statement. Artemio, a creation parallel to the goddess Artemis of Greek mythology, and the chingón, a Mexican archetypal character, embody the life of the conqueror-exploiter, the man who lives for himself rather than for others.

Implicit throughout the novel is the condemnation of the man who denies to live for anything other than pleasure, power and self-satisfaction, as opposed to living and surrendering one's destiny for the sake of others. Existentially, Artemio Cruz always had the opportunity to choose to live for others; historically, he invariably denies this freedom. The idea that "el hombre no está solo," also one of the basic themes in La región más transparente, is given thorough treatment in this novel. This internalization of the important moral questions involved in

conjunction with the use of history, mythology and existentialistic precepts makes Fuentes' moral concerns clear to the reader without interfering with the unity and integrity of the narrative form.

Aura, Carlos Fuentes' fourth novel, stands in sharp contrast to the overt concern with social and ethical issues. It is a work of pure fantasy. The historical and social setting is abandoned for a fantastic excursion into the world of the occult. The use of the tú first appears, almost imperceptibly, in La región más transparente, becoming one of three major narrative modes in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, and finally the only narrative voice employed in Aura. The use of the tú, as in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, is crucial to the form and content of the novel. The author neither identifies himself with the source of the voice (the speaker) as in La región más transparente, nor does the voice become a part of the protagonist as in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. In the latter work, the tú voice is, metaphorically speaking, the higher conscience of the protagonist addressing himself as "other." Furthermore, the far-reaching references to history and universal man are totally suppressed in Aura. The familiar form of address in Aura refers to no one and to everyone: the reader, the author, the protagonist. Here the personality of the protagonist (Felipe Montero) is substituted for an ephemeral sense

of personhood which exists in the spiritual world of the eternal return.

Zona sagrada, Carlos Fuentes' fifth novel (1967) is essentially the fictional treatment of a young man's identity crisis. Through the use of the epistolary form, the protagonist's written confessions to an intimate friend, the author is able to capture the dynamics of a steadily disintegrating sense of personhood. This direct form of address, the tú, so prevalent in his other works, allows the reader to eavesdrop on the thoughts, fears and feelings of the main character without author intervention. The focus of the novel is thus reduced to the narrow confines of a man's neurotic and autistic view of the world. In contrast to all his previous novels (with the sole exception of Aura), where history and society situate the protagonist, the character of Zona sagrada lives out his fate within the limitations of his psyche. To overcome in part this limited perspective Fuentes makes marginal use of imagery, Greek mythology and chapter headings to present a broader character portrayal of the speaker, Guillermo Nervo.

This novel contrasts markedly with his previous works in that there is no discernible concern with the individual's relationship to his society or history. The treatment of character lacks the transcendental quality so prevalent in his previous novels. The rather

heavy-handed use of psychology gives this novel an unexpected behavioristic plot development. Despite the unusual nature of Zona sagrada, the author nonetheless deals with the search for identity, a theme common to all his novels. Present also is Fuentes' abiding interest in freedom--in this case it is the freedom to be oneself, to be an integrated human being.

In contrast to La región más transparente and La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Fuentes experiments very little. There is a clear departure from his desire to present a revolutionary work within a revolutionary form. This "psychological" treatment of the main character of Zona sagrada, with its deterministic overtones, contrasts almost violently with the magical and metaphysical qualities prevalent in his other works, especially Aura.

Cambio de piel, Carlos Fuentes' most ambitious and perplexing work, examines man's responsibility and guilt for the torture and execution of the Jews in the nineteen-thirties and forties. The source of man's inhumanity to man, as Fuentes defines it, is the Manichean trap that has led mankind to believe that evil, in whatever way it is identified, can be eliminated. It is interesting that mythology is not an intrinsic part of the novel as in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, La región más transparente, and Aura.

Here Fuentes looks into the nature of man for his answers rather than to history or archetypal forms. For our writer there will always exist a group of men who, believing themselves to be the possessors of absolute truth, will attempt to restrict, imprison and eliminate the freedom of others for the sake of keeping their beliefs in tact. Cambio de piel, more than any of the other novels, is a call for open rebellion against all institutions and governments that would limit and dictate the destiny and freedom of man. Art is also a form of rebellion against the same threatening organizations. Furthermore, art is a rebellion against the one most menacing limitation: death. It is a positive act of creation against death and nothingness.

The artistic complexity of Cambio de piel is the objectivization of these beliefs. Carlos Fuentes creates a work which denies and rejects a meaningless world by an act of creativity. The internal workings of Cambio de piel reflect the dualistic nature of man, a creator in the face of a destructive cosmos. The complexity and unity of the narrative point of view in the novel are an attempt to recover the unity of man, at once its object and subject. Reality and fiction, fact and fancy, good and evil are negated as separate forms of existence, while they are accepted

within a reciprocally inclusive view. Thus, in Cambio de piel the multiple images of man are really different dimensions of one man, humanity.

Cambio de piel becomes the most radically revolutionary of the novels in both its social commitment and its form. Statement and form are based in the realization that man is inexorably mortal and that only in rebellion can one assert one's freedom--only by opposing all the forces of death, be they social, political or existential in nature.

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