Constructing the "New World" in the Works of Carlos Fuentes

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CONSTRUCTING THE "NEW WORLD" IN THE WORKS OF CARLOS FUENTES

ANN McBRIDE-LIMAYE

The development of Mexican culture was a cross-civilizational process. Through her sixteenth-century conquests in the western hemisphere, Spain imposed history on the New World, and in effect she created the New World. Of course it is well to remember that there were two Old Worlds, indigenous and European, two different forms of hegemony, two displaced orders which would combine to produce a colonial mestizo culture, a mixed-blood culture born of the forcible cross between indigenous Aztec and Spanish civilizations. Mestizaje (miscegenation) is the central fact in the New World, a fact which calls up an inevitable chain: the Spanish conquest of the Americas recalls the Spanish reconquest of the Iberian peninsula and the resulting expulsion of the Moors and the Jews. Where the conquest of the Americas would result in a violent cultural fashion, the reconquest had led to a tragic fragmentation of cultures.1 This fragmentation reflects the rupture that would transform itself into a new episteme, a new order of things, i.e., that of the Medieval world turning into the Renaissance world which is the period of the birth of Spain, Spanish literature and Latin America. At this point, words become separated from things and language acquires new powers. Since it is the novel which best reflects this rupture and fragmentation of Spanish cultures and history, i.e., Cervantes's Don Quixote, Carlos Fuentes and other Latin American writers such as Alejo Carpentier believe that it is the novel that can be a vehicle of reconciliation between Spain and her former colonies, between the Old and New Worlds.2 As Fuentes states in his Don Quixote or the Critique of Reading: "Cervantes realized that in this world, words are the only possible place worlds can meet" (21). In effect, Fuentes's works embody the problematic of the Latin American writer in relation to the rest of the world: his texts constitute an attempt to synthesize the disparate orders of Mexico and, by implication, Latin America as a whole.

Thus, the "idea of the New World" is a powerful metaphor made up of a stable signifier, "New World," and succession of socio-political and geographical referents. The term "New World" can be understood as a series of possible worlds, a series of "New Worlds" including: a) the pre-conquest European dream of utopia, b) the post-conquest reality of
fragmentation which mirrored the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula just alluded to, c) the post-colonial reality where an autonomous new world begins to create itself and the cultural fusion of the mestizo cultures is apparent, and d) the twentieth-century verbal reality, i.e., the dream of utopia filtered through the nightmare of history. Throughout this process of definition the Latin American New World remains an invention, a series of possibilities, a textual reality, a verbal object defined by the writers of the European metropolis up until the early part of this century. 3 In many ways the New World has remained a place of continual definition. Questions that Fuentes’s novels raise about this process of redefinition are centered on the problematic of language and language in culture. When history and literature are separated, what does the term “New World” mean? How does language signify? What are the meanings of identity and origins? The sum of these questions seems to be: what are the possible meanings of history in a “New World?”

Fuentes maintains that the novel of Latin America creates a new language, a history, a relation with time and an identity. First, for him the Latin American writer’s ambivalent attitude toward the Spanish language is a result of the attraction of a tradition of grandeur coupled with the fact that it is the language of the conqueror. The writer’s task then is to expand and revitalize a borrowed language and overcome a type of verbal colonialism (Fuentes, Conversación). Second, for Fuentes, Latin American literature creates a history which serves to unmask historiography as interpretation. Truth is hidden behind the facts of history such that, in the words of Gabriel García Márquez’s statement in El otoño del patriarca (The Autumn of the Patriarch, 1975): “Siempre había otra verdad detrás de la verdad” [There was always another truth behind the truth]. In this view of the fictional quality of official history, the truth of fiction is necessary: a multiplicity of stories produces history. Fuentes states his case in his Don Quixote: “Art gives life to what history killed. Art gives voice to what history denied, silenced or persecuted. Art brings truth to the lies of history” (p. 44). For him Mexico is an imaginary space whose history he has dreamed and invented. 4

Fuentes recognizes that the phenomenon of hegemony, or the political and civil relationships between the ruler and the ruled, is fundamental to the problem of an understanding of history. Knowledge and power reproduce each other: “El poder se funda en el texto. . . . Sólo lo escrito es real” [Power has a textual base. . . . Only what is written down is real] (Terra Nostra, 610-611). In this sense history is the discourse of power wherein exclusion and selection rules are made to establish and maintain
the cultural hegemony of the metropolis. Thus, the separation of history and literature was of the greatest consequence in the colonies. By 1531:

there was an official prohibition against the printing or circulation of novels in the Spanish colonies of the New World, a prohibition which continued right down to the end of colonial times. . . . Censors qualified to grant licenses for the printing of this sort worked only in Spain. This meant that the novelist, after laboriously fashioning the manuscript by hand, would have had to send his only copy off to Spain by ship (Langford, 2-3).

Then, should the copy suffer a fortunate fate in its sea voyage, the author, if still alive, might have it back in hand in several years, only to face the prohibition against printing documents in the colonies.

Third, the new Latin American novel will overcome the "dead" time of historiography and create a new relation with time, the time of Jorge Luis Borges's fictions, the time of Gabriel García Márquez's magically real worlds. In order to capture the Latin American reality, time must be manipulated to create a mosaic of past-present-future in order to reveal truth (Mead, 234). The problem of spatio-temporal orders is particularly complicated in the Mexican reality, since according to Fuentes:

En México coexisten por lo menos cuatro tradiciones históricas. Las concepciones míticas y cósmicas indígenas. La tradición romana de la legitimidad y la continuidad. . . . El individualismo epicúreo y estoico que nos aisla de la comunidad. . . . El positivismo empírico y racionalista tomado de Inglaterra, Francia y los Estados Unidos, cuyas caretas morales y filosóficas esconden el interés particular de la clase burguesa. . . . (Fuentes, Tiempo mexicano, 39).

Four distinct times or historic traditions coexist in Mexico: the indigenous mythic conception; the Roman tradition of legitimacy and continuity; the Epicurean and Stoic ideals of individualism, which isolate one from the community; and rational positivism from England, France and the United States whose mask of morality hides its bourgeois class interests (Durán, 219).

Since no one of these traditions has ever entirely realized itself, the four types of encoding will maintain themselves unresolved in a parallel configuration until a fifth tradition, which Fuentes describes as "la Utopía fundadora" (the founding Utopia), can realize itself in a context where community values will take precedence over the interests of the powerful.

Finally, Fuentes refers to the "new" Latin American novels as sites wherein the writer's task is to reexamine the indigenous, colonial and European worlds in order to reinvent history and produce works which create cultural identity (Nueva novela hispanoamericana, 98). Fuentes has formulated the basis of the relationship between history and fiction as follows:
Toda novela, yo creo, por fuerza, nace de la historia, tiene su sede en la historia, pero al mismo tiempo la trasciende. Es el instrumento que nos permite salir de la historia para verla, a fin de no ser esclavos de ella. En este sentido creo que la novela es un instrumento precioso de la libertad. Es un instrumento que nos permite imaginar y dirigir nuestra propia historia.

I believe that every novel is, of necessity, born from history and originates in history, but at the same time it transcends history. It is an instrument that allows us to get out of history and to see it so we are not slaves to it. In this sense, I believe that the novel is a precious instrument of liberty. It is an instrument that allows us to imagine and direct our own history (Goytisolo et al., 312).

To characterize Fuentes's historical project we can say that the ideas of two Mexican critics are central: Octavio Paz suggests the possibility of writing creative history, and Alfonso Reyes provides the method to produce it, i.e., the use of reliable evidence and a disciplined imagination to create more accurate accounts of the New World in order to correct fallacious accounts that constitute the "fable of America." These fictional histories will seek to overcome the questionable facts of historiography as well as other types of fictitious history, and to recover and construct a more accurate version of the New World, a New World created from a fusion of European and non-western civilizations. This "second history" will replace the official version which is a humiliating nightmare of colonialism for Latin Americans (Sosnowski, 96). Yet, Fuentes does not seek a New World autonomous from the Old, in fact he denies separate spheres: "No admito la división del Atlántico" [I do not take into account any division the Atlantic Ocean makes] (Goytisolo et al., 313). The project of constructing new fictional histories can claim legitimacy in Aristotelian and in Crocean terms due to the fact that history as the narration of the real falls inside art as the narration of the possible. 6

In his fictive construction of the New World Fuentes's novels can be read as meditations on myth, history and fiction as categories in the problem of knowledge. The works are chapters in the epic of a creative Latin American history and in each of the novels the reader views an evolving New World from a different vantage point. La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear, 1958) portrays a Mexican capital that is still an Aztec capital: Mexico City is Tenochtitlan, capital of the New World. La muerte de Artemio Cruz (The Death of Artemio Cruz, 1962) depicts how one man embodies the contemporary mestizo reality, as well as the history of Mexico. Terra Nostra (Terra Nostra, 1975) shows how the Spanish metropolis and colonial New World were created as doubles. Finally, Una familia lejana (Distant Relations, 1980) demonstrates how Mexican reality reabsorbs its Old World roots, specifically its
French roots, and locates itself in a narrator/author, who is named “Carlos Fuentes.”

History and ideology coincide as the discourses of myth, history and fiction inform one another and power legitimizes and exercises itself verbally. In this study we are using Michel Foucault’s theory of the relationship of discursive formations to non-discursive domains and his concept of an “archeology of discourse” to elaborate the novels’ genealogies, as well as to outline the particular configurations and deformations that combine in the construction of versions of the New World. In addition, the analysis focuses on the discovery and description of what Yuri Lotman and B. A. Uspensky have called a “semiotic mechanism of culture,” a phenomenon that works to implant new historical facts in the general consciousness, and thereby to create new “words” in the cultural/ideological language.

In Fuentes’s terms: “Cuanto es pensado, es. Cuanto es, es pensado” [Whatever is thought, is. Whatever is, is thought] (Terra Nostra, 528).

Heredia and Historia

Fuentes’s “second history” of the New World is composed of a complex of language and blood, of novels that embody evolving relationships between heredia (heritage/inheritance) and historia (history/story). Both heredia and historia are types of memory and persistence since nature and language are orders of duplication (Said, World, 138). (See Figure 1. “HEREDIA AND HISTORIA IN THE WORKS OF CARLOS FUENTES.”) Heredia, a surname in Spanish, suggests two meanings: inheritance involves a duplication of the past in the present, a “handing-down intact”; heritage indicates a synthesis, a mixing of blood and tradition and may be either a form of revenge or of welcome return (Davenport, 26). Historia is evident in both of its meanings as well: history (events/facts) and story (mimesis), such that it is a plenitude of stories that constitutes history. In his play Todos los gatos son pardos (“All Cats Are Gray”), the title referring to the fact that all conquerors are alike, the author explains “No es sino la historia de dos historias” [It is no more than the story of two histories] (p. 14).

Whereas heredia consists of a non-discursive domain, historia is constituted of discursive formations. In the domain of heredia origins, and therefore identity, of the European are located in the father and the paternal blood line; the process of elaboration is one of filiation and genealogy. For the mestizo origins are located in the mother. In historia
Fig. 1 HEREDIA AND HISTORIA IN THE WORKS OF CARLOS FUENTES

HEREDIA ----------- Indigenous & European ----------- HISTORIA
(Non-discursive Domain) (Discursive Formation)

inheritance                  heritage
(duplication)                (synthesis)

revenge                      welcome return

origins                     identity
father (European)            mother (mestizo)

filiation

blood line (blood)
genealogy

time: plenitude/present-communion

history                      fiction
(events/factors)              (mimesis)

history------------------- stories

beginning/family/identity

affiliation

narrative thread (word/language)

archeology of discourse
time: chronology/past-present-future/solitude

MYTH
TRANSFORMATION

HEREDIA                     CULTURAL FUSION                     HISTORIA
(blood)                     (words)

NARRATOR

(HEREDIA/HISTORIA)*

*No one knows the ending in terms of either ontogeny or phylogeny.

the formations are made up of words and language that form the narrative thread; beginnings and identity are located in community and family linkages, in affiliations. The temporal aspect of heredia is one of plenitude and communion in an eternal present; in historia chronology is in motion in past-present-future sequence resulting in the possibility of solitude. In Fuentes’s novels one discovers a myth transformation—whereby heredia and historia result in a cultural fusion embodied in the narrator.
The Architectonics of the Construction of the 'New World'

Perhaps the discourse of Fuentes's novels can be best described as a palimpsest of the New World. As such the discourse is made up of layers of history and fiction presented in simultaneous fashion: neither text nor culture is self-contained, but rather they are profoundly connected. These orders of discourse are analyzed as composite formations in which the principles of discontinuity, adjacency and complementarity are central organizing principles in Fuentes's amalgamation of indigenous codices, European chronicles, colonial accounts, historical treatises and literary works. The author becomes a maker of myths that give form to human history; history is made comprehensible through fictional forms (Oviedo, 21). The work of the critic, then, is like that of the archeologist, a tracer of genealogies, a dealer in the problem of knowledge who examines composite formations (texts) with an eye to refusing accepted cultural unities. The critic deciphers palimpsests with the full knowledge that, regarding the palimpsest of the New World, behind every sign there is always another sign.

Octavio Paz defines what 'vision of the world' means in Fuentes's work as follows: 'El mundo no se presenta como realidad que hay que nombrar, sino como palabra que debemos decifrar... clases sociales, las épocas históricas, las ciudades, los desiertos, son lenguajes (Corriente alterna, 47) [The world is not presented as a reality to be described, but as a language to be decoded... Individuals, social classes, historical periods, cities, deserts are languages (Lane, 42). If one examines the specific aspects of the possible worlds constructed in these novels the outlines of the creation become apparent. The specific aspects are: narrative dynamic between the New and Old Worlds, changing identities of the New and Old Worlds, the status of the characters and the narrators, temporal principles and the resolutions that give shape to the particular possible worlds. (See Figure 2. THE ARCHITECTONICS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE "NEW WORLD".)

In Fuentes's work, the dualities, which are major axes of the early novels, transform themselves in the later novels to produce new formations:

*duality*
- life-death
- sacrifice-opportunism
- origin-destiny
- past-present
- masculine-feminine

*synthesis*
- memory (fiction)
- survival/persistence
- cycle
- future
- androgynous being
FIG. 2. ARCHITECTONICS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE “NEW WORLD”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NARRATIVE DYNAMIC</th>
<th>La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear)</th>
<th>La muerte de Artemio Cruz (The Death of Artemio Cruz)</th>
<th>Terra Nostra (Terra Nostra)</th>
<th>Una familia lejana (Distant Relations)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dualities</td>
<td>dualities→synthesis</td>
<td>dualities→triplicities</td>
<td>dualities→fusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW WORLD</td>
<td>contemporary Mexico</td>
<td>post-colonial Mexico</td>
<td>fictive re-creation</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD WORLD(S)</td>
<td>Aztec world</td>
<td>France, Spain, Aztec world</td>
<td>Spain of Philip II</td>
<td>France &amp; Aztec world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMORAL PRINCIPLE</td>
<td>synchronic panorama, layering of time</td>
<td>diachronic view, fragmentation of time</td>
<td>cyclical time scheme</td>
<td>fusion of disparate time frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARRATOR</td>
<td>conscience</td>
<td>conscience/consciousness</td>
<td>chronicler</td>
<td>“Fuentes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTERS (DOUBLES)</td>
<td>masks</td>
<td>archetypes</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESOLUTION</td>
<td>present mirrors past</td>
<td>death mirrors life</td>
<td>New World is mirror</td>
<td>mirror will regain lost image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>continuing quest for national identity</td>
<td>personal death &amp; birth of myth</td>
<td>of Old World</td>
<td>fusion of dead &amp; living selves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The only duality that will not transform itself is the one that runs: twin-double-other-mirror-Venus-Quetzalcoatl, a star that is its own double as morning and evening star. This duality is irreducible, a disguised kind of unity, and does not allow for a synthesis.\(^9\)

*La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear, 1958)*

Written at a time of great concern with the problem of national identity in Mexico, *La región más transparente* embodies a denial of temporal succession and therefore of history, making heritage the only reliable mark of succession. The narrative dynamic is one of duality: the Aztec past and the post-Revolutionary Mexico of the 1950’s wherein the collective protagonist, Mexico City and its inhabitants, presents itself in a kind of synchronic panorama made up of parallel times which co-exist. The past is alive in the present, and therefore can be used to explain the present and explore the problem of mestizaje.\(^10\) The narrator, Ixca Cienfuegos, is a journalist whose name is an emblem of his mestizo identity: “Ixca” is Nahuatl for the Spanish asar, “to roast”; “Cienfuegos” is Spanish for “a hundred fires.” This persona is preoccupied with the Aztec idea of sacrifice which is congruent with the Christian idea that one life can be sacrificed to infuse life into another. In the Aztec tradition the sun and the people have a compact: people must be sacrificed daily so that the sun can go on living, warm the earth and in turn keep the people alive.\(^11\) Ixca believes that since the conquest there have been two symbols: “el del origen y el del destino .. . siempre dos, el aguila reptante, el sol nocturno.” (260-261) [that of the beginning and that of destiny .. . Always two, the impeached eagle and the nocturnal sun] (Hileman, 211).

The characters are masks that have two aspects, one contemporary Mexican and the other from the Aztec pantheon: principally we see Ixca as Quetzalcoatl, the creator god and god of wind, and his mother Doña Teóndula Moctezuma as Coatlicue, the earth goddess of birth and death (Salgado, 232). The mestizo society these characters are a part of has a
great mimetic quality. This society made a revolution and engaged in a search for origins, authenticity and ultimately its identity; however, at the same time, it continued to value and imitate European and North American cultural patterns. In his study of the novel, Daniel de Guzmán has recognized that “...every one of the principal characters is sacrificed and to some aspect or other of myth...” (96); and Lanin Gyurko has described these “ostentatious” characters as using “the mask of social, moral or intellectual distinction a means toward an end...” (287).

The novel shows how in the search for Mexican identity there are those who negate the Indian past and others who glorify it. The Indian lost his identity, while the Spaniard knew fully well who he was, and the mestizo born of their sexual union was caught in the middle, identifying emotionally more with the violated Indian mother than with the Spanish father. Regarding the Anglo-Saxon models: “Siempre hemos querido correr hacia modelos que no nos pertenecen” (264) [We’ve always tried to imitate models that are foreign to us] (Hileman, 218). Thus, the question seems to be one of which model to imitate to achieve authenticity. Perhaps a nation born through miscegenation in the sixteenth-century will be able to find her origin by looking ahead to the day when the race mixing is complete. At that point the mestizo may be able to create his own beginning and originality, an idea elaborated by José Vasconcelos in the early years of the twentieth century.

Whether Mexican identity is to be found in the indigenous past, in the colonial period, in the years of the struggle for independence from Spain, in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century epoch of the Díaz regime, or in the early years of the Revolution (1910-1917), is an enigma: “Quetzalcoatl y Corteses el turbides y Juarezes y Porfríos y Zapatas, todos son nudos en la garganta. ¿Cuál es nuestra verdadera eficie? ¿Cuál de todas?” [Quetzlcoats and Corteses and Iturbides and Juarezes and Porfríos and Zapatas, all are lumps in our throats. Which is our true image? Which of the many?] (La región, 268). Whether or not the Mexican identity can be found separately in any of these sites remains questionable. But, paradoxically, since for the mestizo origins will be realized in the future, there is a great sense of questioning and indeterminacy in this society. The novel opens and closes with the incantation: “Aquí nos tocó. Qué le vamos a hacer. En la región más transparente del aire” (11,460) [Here we are. And what are we going to do about it? Where the air is clear] (5,376). Alfonso Reyes had asked a similar question in his “El presagio de América: El destino de América,” “Ya tenemos des-
cubierta a América. ¿Qué haremos con América?” (vol. 11, p. 57) [We have discovered America and now what are we going to do with America?] (Ramsdell, 86).

The quest for national identity is embodied rather than resolved in this novel, but it is clear at the end that the Mexicans have not surrendered to forms imposed from without. Fuentes clarifies his novelistic statement and insists on purely indigenous roots, in contradistinction to other forms of Latin American national identity, when he recognizes that:

although the conquering Spaniards carried the day, Mexico, because of its particular political and historical makeup, has given the final victory to the conquered. That’s what the statue of Cuauhtemoc means. In Lima you have the statue of Pizarro, in Santiago that of Valdivia (Harss and Dohmann, 284).

Le muerte de Artemio Cruz (The Death of Artemio Cruz, 1962)

In Le muerte de Artemio Cruz we can observe a complex vision of Fuentes’s continuing exploration of Mexican identity as heritage merges into history, blood line into family, and we come to know a dying man whose personal history recapitulates his country’s. The narrative traces Cruz’s career from his mestizo origins as a nameless orphan, and through an unscrupulous climb to power given a series of fortuitous events centered in the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. The character serves as a key to the archive of the larger events making up the world of the novel, and is thus a kind of historico-fictive interface. The dualities of La región más transparente now find the possibility of synthesis in terms of time as well as of voice and of space: the past-present dichotomy is transformed into an ironic future-past: “ayer volarás desde Hermosillo. . . .” [Yesterday you will fly from Hermosillo. . . .] (13). A second-person voice who speaks in this ironic future past is added to the first and third-person voices: together the three voices constitute the persona of Artemio Cruz.

The text is a conflation of myth and of many types of novels including the political, the historical and the experimental. Like the history of Mexico, it is a discontinuous narrative filled with ambiguity, juxtapositions, gaps and ellipses where cause and effect are reversible. The New World of this novel is that of post-colonial Mexico with references to the period of the conquest, and images of the Spanish conquest are places at the beginnings of Cruz’s rememberings as he goes to the conquest of his own new world, death (36). The Old Worlds are three: the Aztec world, Spain, and France. Here the New World begins to affect the Old: when
Artemio Cruz’s son Lorenzo fights and dies in the Spanish Civil War we see an example of the New World infusing life into the Old World. A type of supra-narrator arranges the achronological fragments of narrative which make up the novel and provides a diachronic view. The refusal of chronology means that the reader must participate actively in reconstructing the possible worlds of the New World as the author creates a fictional version of Octavio Paz’s essay on mestizaje and identity, *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude)*.

The characters are for the most part doubles as well as archetypes with “symbolic” names. The novel is a locus for a number of informing myth patterns encoded in contemporary social myth which serves to define and enhance the narrative, as well as to provide cohesion by means of an abstract model. Myth patternings from the Greco-Roman, the Judeo-Christian, as well as the indigenous, colonial, and post-Revolutionary Mexican societies are in evidence. Again, the determining factor is the idea of syncretism, i.e., the fusion and transformation of nearly congruent elements.

The proper name of the focal personage, Artemio Cruz, is itself tremendously rich in associations. The text puts forth no reason for the choice of the given name; the surname is that of Artemio’s mother, Isabel Cruz. As we read the text we become aware of the Greek goddess Artemis in her many avatars and attributes. Artemio becomes increasingly androgynous in the course of the narrative: on his last day of life he refers to his *parto*, his giving birth to his death, the cause of which he sees in his swollen abdomen. Other aspects associated with the various versions of Artemis appear: she is Apollo’s twin (Artemio’s twin dies at birth, 315); her worship is centered on the sacrifice of substitutes (Artemio believes that he owes his life to the sacrifice of other lives); she is served by eunuchs (Cruz, embodiment of *machismo*, seems to require total self-abasement of those who serve him); she is conventionally depicted accompanied by dogs (Cruz is associated with dogs in numerous episodes); and she is portrayed with a cross (*cruz*, in Spanish) in a Persian avatar. Artemis, the principal lunar deity, is often paired with Luna (Selena), a lesser figure who stands for the moon as physical object, whereas Artemis embodies the life-giving and controlling lunar properties. This association is made between Artemio and his uncle-companion, Lunero in the text (Cirlot, 81).

Cruz’s surname suggests the idea of juncture implicit in the symbol of the cross which, in turn, suggests two antithetical meanings in terms of the narrative: transgression and union. As a *mestizo*, Cruz incorporates
the three dominant racial strains in Mexico: white, black and Indian. On the one hand, his mother is a mulatto born of a transgression between black slave and white master; her son is born as a result of a similar phenomenon, i.e., her rape by the *mestizo*, Atanasio Menchaca. On the other hand, the Christian cross symbolizes the beneficent union of cultures brought about by the first religious order to arrive from Spain, the Franciscans, but is likewise the emblem of the *conquistadores* who subjugated an indigenous people in its name. The interpretation of the cross as the tree of life as well as the tree of death is played on in the text as well.

The myth of Eros and Echo is used as a substructure for the "beautiful lie" of Regina, Cruz's lover during the early stages of the Revolution. They meet by a pool of water in which they see each other's reflection. Later on, after making love, their words echo one another's: "porque ambos eran la misma cosa y decían las mismas palabras: —Ahora soy feliz" [because they were the same thing and were saying the same words: "Now I am happy"] (68). After Regina's execution by Federal troops, Artemio thinks of her for a moment as the Ariadne who guided him through the labyrinth of war. Three of Ariadne's aspects are included in the characterization: the sea shell, the small ears, and the guiding thread. Cruz's wife Catalina is another Echo figure, but her visage is unapproachable "en el frío reflejo del agua" [in the water's cold reflection] (93). When she shuts Cruz out of her life, she "dies" to him in effect, becoming then identified not with Ariadne but with the beautiful, unreachable Venus (116).

Artemio aptly characterizes himself as dichotomous in personality when he thinks of the Janus-like quality of Mexican culture resulting from the disparities among the Indian-Spanish-*mestizo* cultures, and between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Artemio is an Odysseus figure in his quest as well, and is preoccupied with tricking people for his own gain or enjoyment. He gets his Nausicá (Lilia) and spends time with her by the sea where he speaks of his yacht as "plowing" (surc[ando] the ocean (157).

Cruz is identified with Aeneas in three descents into the underworld: those of the cave during the Revolution, of the abandoned room to which he is brought blind-folded, and of the brothel. Artemio will take part in the founding of a new politico-economic order in the company of beings named Saturno and Cerbero. The second-person narrator is a Virgil-like figure who leads Artemio through the narrowing circles of his private
inferno, as Fuentes has noted; and of course the number three structures the entire text (Jara, 174).

In terms of the Judeo-Christian tradition Cruz is seen both as Adam and as Moses: he is “Adán sin padre, Moisés sin tablas” [A fatherless Adam, Moses without tablets] (103). His uncle-companion Lunero considers putting the infant Artemio into the river for safekeeping and to wait for the infant’s return as a great and powerful man as recounted in the “white man’s stories of the ancient king” [como el rey antiguo de las historias blancas] (285). Artemio is referred to repeatedly as el desconocido (the stranger), and he proves to be the outsider who becomes the usurper in the folklore tradition.

As in La región más transparente, numerous deities in the Aztec pantheon are in evidence in the narrative, but Fuentes’s use of myth is much more subtle in this text than in the earlier novel. Here the gods are not merely masks but complex attributes. The most prominent of these figures are Coatlicue, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl and Xipe Totec. Artemio is repeatedly associated with serpents and serpentine imagery of Coatlicue’s skirt and with the dim reflecting surfaces of Tezcatlipocas’s smoking mirror. Cortes was taken for Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent and god of wisdom, upon his arrival in Veracruz in 1519, due to his fair skin and beard and the fact that the god was destined to reappear at that time and initiate a new “sun,” a new cycle of time. Thus, when Cruz is told on his death bed: “caminarás a la conquista de tu nuevo mundo” [you will walk to the conquest of your own new world] (36), he is being identified with Cortés and Quetzalcoatl simultaneously, and he becomes a kind of synthesis of the two orders: the European and the Indian. Xipe Totec, “Our Lord the Flayed One,” embodies a corn seed sprouting forth from its husk in the spring. In sacrifices to Xipe Totec, a victim was flayed alive and the god’s chief priest dressed himself in the skin in order to reenact the process of the growing seed bursting forth. Markings of this deity are in evidence in Artemio’s entrance into Puebla in the month of May (36ff). He feels that he comes there with the life of his dead comrade, Gonzalo Bernal, added to his own. Again, the syncretism of the two histories, i.e., the passion of Christ and the ceremonies of Xipe Totec, provide the analogues for the fictive personage.

The three most important post-conquest Mexican myth figures prominent in the text are: La Chingada, La Muerte, and La Malinche. La Chingada names the figure of the original violated whore-mother of the conquest period: Artemio is literally an hijo de La Chingada, son of the
Great Whore, a common appellation in Mexican slang. "La Chingada es el jeroglífico bautismal de Artemio que repite la figura mitica de Tezcatlipoca, el dios de la incertidumbre y la corrupción del poder que trae al exterminio de su pueblo" [The Whore-mother is Artemio’s baptismal sign that stands for the mythical figure of Tezcatlipoca the god of uncertainty and corruption who brought about the extermination of his people] (Jara, 208). In addition the term La Chingada is a synonym for death personified, the popular folk figure of La Muerte. La Malinche was the name given to an Aztec noblewoman who served as translator and mistress to Cortés until he abandoned her to return to his Spanish wife. La Malinche’s name survives in the expression malinchismo, an excessive admiration of the foreign, a trait which is a significant part of Cruz’s personality.

Subsuming these myth patterns are the myths of the French existentialists, principally those concerning the nature of choice. In the end Cruz discovers a truth of El laberinto de la soledad, that his death mirrors his life and that death is a realm of possibility (Paz, 58). At his death Cruz will transcend his physical and moral limitations in a new world which exists in an ironic future beyond history and fiction. Where Ixca Cienfuegos, the Quetzalcoatl figure in La región más transparente, had no memory and began anew each day, Artemio Cruz is memory incarnate. However, although he is able to discover how every sign leads to another, he is unable to discover the meaning of his memories; rather, he embodies a new myth, the myth of the Revolution.

Terra Nostra (Terra Nostra, 1975)

In Terra Nostra, a text of multiple histories and heritages in continual transformation, we are shown the failure of the world of historical facts and events at the time of the decadence of Spain and the birth of the New World, such that the New World was condemned to repeat the fate of the Old World (743). In a commentary on this work the author explains that: "Terra Nostra poses the question of what happened to Spanish culture after it destroyed its Jewish and Moorish heritage. The book reflects on the fate of Europe in America, on what happened when Europeans crossed the ocean and found something they had not known before. They could think of nothing else but to destroy this unknown" (Fuentes, Hispania, 415). The novel is an attempt to reconcile the two Spains by going back to a time period when that reconciliation might have been possible. Of this attempt Fuentes writes in his companion essay to Terra
Nostra, Don Quixote or the Critique of Reading: “The three dates that constitute the time references of the novel [are] . . . 1492, 1521, and 1598” (23). He then goes on to explain the significance of those dates: a) 1492: discovery of the New World by Columbus, and the fall of Granada signaling the defeat of the Arab colonizers of the Iberian peninsula and the expulsion of the Jews—events which combined to fragment the Spanish order, b) 1521: the fall of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and the defeat of the democratic spirit of the comunero rebellions (popular uprisings at Villalar), and c) 1598: the death of Philip II.

Once more Fuentes sets out to create the New World and this time he adds versions of an apocryphal past and an apocalyptic future on the basis of memory and hallucination. This is the kingdom of the possible where the dualities of the earlier novels metamorphose into triplicities, the most important being life-death-memory and past-present-future: “Vida, muerte y memoria: un solo ser” [Life, death and memory: a single being] (402); and “El presente nunca dejó de ser pasado y está siendo futuro” [The present never stopped being past and is becoming our future] (485). In re-creating the New World Fuentes becomes the narrator of the pre-conquest codices and manuscripts, of histories of New Spain and of existing works of literature and criticism; in this he does what the narrator of his novella Aura, Felipe Montero, had hoped one day to do.14

Perhaps the most startling invention in this text of simultaneous conflation, transformation and reversibility is the fictionalizing not only of historical personages (“Philip II” is an amalgam of the historical Philip II, Charles I and Ferdinand), but of fictional characters as well: Don Quixote and Don Juan exchange fates for part of their “lives,” and La Celestina has a New World avatar (Pedens, 5). The text brings these characters back into history, not by merely citing them, but by further elaborating them, perhaps thereby working out a new category in the relation of history and fiction. The characters’ personae proliferate in this text: “one person can be many persons” (Fuentes, Hispania, 415). The Pilgrim-Explorer of the Spain of Philip II is “Mediterranean man” (360), as well as Huitzilopochtli/Tezcatlipoca (the dark god of the smoking mirror) and the old man of memory (401). This pilgrim encounters a world of nature and people his language is inadequate to describe.

Time becomes a marriage of the time of the gods and of humans, i.e., a circle with an arrow passing through it (399). A chronicler named Cervantes records the multiple stories embedded in the cyclical time scheme of the text. Fuentes frees himself from conventional narrative constraints of plot/time/person/history/geography in order to create a new
reality based on rules that find their origin in the multiplicity of discursive formations that crisscross and inform one another in the moment they are read. As for the history of the Old World repeating itself in the New, Fuentes justifies his own historical project by maintaining that he will narrate and thereby create the uncreated, "Sabiendo lo que no fue, sabremos lo que clama por ser. . . . La historia sólo se repite porque desconocemos la otra posibilidad de cada hecho histórico: lo que ese hecho pudo haber sido y no fue" [Knowing what did not happen, we will know what cries out to be. . . . history only repeats itself because we disregard the other possibility of every historical fact: what that fact could have been and was not] (567). The resolution comes in the form of a metamorphosis, in the creation of an unnamed androgynous being, perhaps an avatar of the Aztec creator god/goddess Ometecuhtli. This creature, who will unendingly fertilize itself, comes at the time of the millenium (2,000 A.D.) and will overcome at last the curse that made the New World a mirror of the Old.

Una familia lejana (Distant Relations, 1980)

In Una familia lejana, a novel of filiation and affiliation, the dualities culminate in a con/fusion of the Old World of the Aztec empire and France, and the New World of Mexico. Una familia lejana represents a culmination in Fuentes’s verbal elaboration of the New World, in his intricate tracing out the interrelationships of the indigenous and the European heritages and histories. The title of the novel is immensely allusive, the “distant, far off family” is named “Heredia” and the characters are avatars of one another. The “familial” interrelationships are complex: Hugo Heredia, a renowned Mexican anthropologist, wants to preserve the truth of the Aztec past and to serve the memory of his dead French wife, Lucie, and their son Antonio. He travels to Paris with his one remaining son Victor, a young man who finds his French counterpart in a youth named André Heredia. André’s father, also named Victor, is a colonial Heredia from the Caribbean branch of the family and a seeming villain who held the major speaker in the novel, a French aristocrat named Branly, hostage for a time. In the present tense of the novel Branly is telling the tale of his captivity to a man called “Carlos Fuentes.” Branly seeks to understand the events by narrating them; at the same time he forbids his listener “Fuentes” to narrate the tale which we are reading.

It is important to note that it is the Frenchman Branly, a man without descendants, who unites the Mexican Heredias with their French colonial
relatives, in geographical terms as well as in political and cultural heritage. In one sense the novel is a testimony of the displaced Latin American intellectuals’ love for Paris and includes a litany of Alexandre Dumas, Paul LaFargue, Jules Laforgue, Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), and Jules Supervieille (120-121). A central figure in the list is José María de Heredia (1842-1905), the French Parnassian poet born in Cuba. Hugo Heredia believes that Paris, capital of the Old World of French culture, is the final homeland for all of these creative artists because love for and allegiance to France “‘saves us Latin Americans from our ancient subordination to Spain and our more recent subordination to the Anglo-Saxon world” (Pedens, 169) [nos salva a los latinoamericanos de la vieja subordinación hispánica y la nueva subordinación anglosajona] (163). The suggestion is that this love for France is largely due to the fact that France, unlike Spain, allowed its vanquished orders to persist. Yet Fuentes insists that, for the Latin American writer, the fact of mestizaje means the necessity to know both Descartes and Quetzalcoatl.

A shift in hegemony becomes apparent in this text, i.e., the New World of dream and upheaval has impregnated the Old World of nightmare and continuity, leaving its impression on the Old World for all time. In fact the narrator maintains that in the Napoleonic era Spain was actually located in her colonies. The dispersed heritage turns out to be both a welcome return and revenge; and the Noble Savage turns out to be a complete fiction, the mestizo is the reality. The resulting fusion takes place in many sites and on many levels: in culture, geography, person, identity, voice and ideology. As Guy Davenport has pointed out, in Una familia lejana, one finds a fusion of the intuitive and the logical, of nature and culture, the primal and the derivative (26). In La muerte de Artemio Cruz “Mexico could be tied by threads of gold to the Antilles, to the Atlantic and eventually to the Mediterranean” (Hileman, 270) [México . . . atad[o] por hilos dorados a las Antillas al Océano y mas allá, al Mediterráneo] (278). In the geography of Una familia lejana the “Mediterráneo throws itself on the beach at Veracruz” (Hileman, 103) [el Mediterráneo se cansa y sale a la playa de Veracruz] (102). Two separate individuals named Heredia, Victor and André, are merged into a single physical form, and the narrator “Fuentes” finally is identified as “Heredia”: “La identidad se borra, y todos son Heredia, un nuevo hombre” [Identity erases itself and everyone is Heredia, a new man] (Campos, 41).

This “Fuentes/Heredia” discovers a double truth. First, he recognizes that each individual has a living and a non-living self and that these selves
change places at the time of apparent death making life and death halves of single sphere (Paz, El laberinto, 155). Second, he realizes that history is generational, and that “nobody knows the whole history/story” [(n)adie recuerda toda la historia] (214) because he is living out but one of the possibilities of a life and of a story. Thus, in Una familia lejana Fuentes effects a kind of alchemical transformation resulting in the amalgamation of heredia and historia into the narrator who embodies a cultural fusion of blood and language. The centrality of the teller of tales is thereby restored, and the narrator becomes once more an epic voice as a culture becomes the sum of fictions it tells about itself (Culler, “Problems in the Theory of Fiction”). Finally, it is the narrator who must recapture the past, preserve memory and truth, and who ultimately is charged with the creation and re-creation of the world.

Conclusion

“Did we discover them or did they discover us?” [¿Nos descubren ellos ... O les descubrimos nosotros?] (384), the Pilgrim wonders in Terra Nostra. In this construction of the New World Fuentes implicitly restates that question in each of his works. In the end, what does Fuentes demonstrate? His work, an ongoing reaction to Alfonso Reyes and Octavio Paz, especially to El laberinto de la soledad, shows that Europe transformed itself in the New World and Spain was swallowed up: “Venus, Hesperia, España, Serpiente de Plumas, Espejo Humeante: un solo nombre” (484) [Venus, Hesperia, Spain, Plumed Serpent, Smoking Mirror: a single name] (Pedens Terra, 485). There is unity in apparent multiplicity: everything is related, a truth of both the Aztec world and of the world of Una familia lejana. The works display the outlines of the following development of the New World: a mute version of the Aztec world persisted, the violence of the conquest and the long impotent but racially fermenting world of the mestizo maintained vigor during the long sleep of the colonial period; finally, with the coming of the primordial and rapacious times of the Revolution, Mexico was born. The post-revolutionary period is one where Mexico’s identity problem becomes crucial and then fades as Mexico becomes more sure of her centrality in the Latin American World and the world of nations.

In his verbal creation of the New World Carlos Fuentes uses fiction, a form of verbal memory, to change the definition of the “New World” in the culture’s definition of itself. In the official history the Old World anticipated a utopia and created a colony. In creating his “second his-
tory" Fuentes is affirming the centrality of the word in defining, creating, redefining and recreating the New World which is now a "post utopia." Fuentes seems to be in agreement with Foucault's idea that discourses, be they historical or fictional, have the privileged status of autonomy; however, unlike Foucault, Fuentes seeks to restore the sovereignty of the narrator as creator and as depository of histories. In a semiotic sense, books may well be signs that speak of signs which in turn speak of things, as Umberto Eco has described in Il nome della rosa (The Name of the Rose); however, it is only the writer, a mix of blood and language, who can create on the conceptual level, who can name, confer identity, make transformations and construct possible worlds.

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NOTES

1. In the Sosnowski interview Fuentes comments on the centrality of the conquest in the Mexican experience: "el hecho más traumático y que sigue muy vivo, es la conquista de México" [the most traumatic event, and one that is still very much alive, is the conquest of Mexico] (78). Paz makes reference to Toynbee's idea that at the time of the conquest: "Por si misma Mesoamérica era un mundo histórico" [by itself Mesoamerica was an historical world] a world made up of "un conjunto de pueblos, naciones y cultura autónomas, con tradiciones propias, exactamente como el Mediterráneo" [a complex of autonomous peoples, nations and cultures, with its own traditions exactly like the Mediterranean] (El laberinto, 82). In this world the Spanish form of hegemony would amount to a simple substitution for the "Universal Empire" (Toynbee's term) that the Aztecs had established in the area. The interpretation of the conquest as a mirror of the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula, an idea central in Fuentes's works, is addressed in A. Reyes's "El presagio de América," 16, and 0. Paz's "Conquista y colonia," El laberinto, 89.

In this essay English translations are my own where no translator's name appears.

2. See M. Foucault's Les Mots et les choses for an account of this new episteme. Ino Ross has described this phenomenon as follows:

It is the episteme, the order of things as it is obscuresly perceived and not verbalized. The scientists living during the same period share unconsciously a common episteme, a common experience of the language as spoken, of the natural creatures as grouped, of the exchanges as practiced. . . . The episteme is the hidden part of the cognitive culture. It contains the structures according to which things are ordered (131).

Fuentes cites Foucault's text in his bibliography to Don Quixote or the Critique of Reading and makes the following reference to it:

[T]he Medieval epic is part of an order where words and things not only coincide: they are a reflection of the Divine Being (14) . . . . The forces unleashed by . . . . [the] myriad turbulences slashing against the foundation of medieval orthodoxy would almost certainly have come to naught without the scientific revolution (17) . . . . Copernicus gave unorthodoxy and multidirectional thought the space it needed (18).
See R. González Echeverría for a discussion of the novel as a vehicle of reconciliation between the two Spains, the phenomenon of the novel and companion essay in Latin America literature, and the presence of A. Carpentier's ideas in Fuentes's works.

3. Alfredo Roggiano speaks of the New World beginning at the end of the colonial period in the early nineteenth century (1). Reyes calls America a land of invention presaged in the most ancient poetry as both threat and promise, and he credits Columbus with using the term “New World” to refer to the Antilles, a term geographers of the time would eventually be convinced to use as well (“Ultima Tule”, 11-12 and 54). The regionalistic novels of the first half of this century, e.g., Rómulo Gallegos’s Dona Barbara (1929), were heavily allegorical works where the natural world overwhelmed its human inhabitants.

4. The comment on Mexico as an imaginary space was made in the context of the interview with Bill Moyers. Said’s work on the roles of colonialism and imperialism in the production of critical discourse is germane to an examination of the Fuentes oeuvre. See “Discrepant Histories” and The World, the Text and the Critic, title essay, 31-33.

5. The idea that the discourses of knowledge and power produce one another is elaborated by numerous critics, viz., M. Foucault, Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish), A. Gramsci, Quaderni del carcere (Prison Notebooks), J. Franco (131), and Fuentes himself refers to Gramsci’s interpretation in “Conversación.”

6. Octavio Paz’s characterization of history informs the work of Fuentes, especially Fuentes’s idea of a “second history”: “La historia tiene la realidad de una pesadilla; la grandeza del hombre consiste en . . . transfigurar la pesadilla en visión, liberarnos . . . por medio de la creación” (El laberinto, 94) [History has the cruel reality of a nightmare, and the grandeur of man consists in . . . transforming the nightmare into vision, freeing us . . . by means of creation] (Kemp, 104). The comment by Alfonso Reyes can be found in Aponte, 65. Commentary on B. Croce’s views of history and narration can be found in Collingwood (190-194).

7. Although Fuentes’ entire oeuvre centers on the construction of the “New World,” these novels were chosen for analysis as they clearly show transformations in the relationship between the New and Old Worlds. Cambio de piel (A Change of Skin, 1967) was not included in the analysis because it is more concerned with simple reversibility of time and multiplicity of personality than with the elaboration of the New World. The dramas were omitted since they do not have the same narrative dimensions as novels and therefore cannot be analyzed as the same type of “possible world”, i.e., alternative propositional sets (Stalnaker).

Luis Leal cites Toynbee on the relationship of history, fiction and mythology: “History, like the drama and the novel, grew out of mythology” (A Study of History, 44). Then Leal goes on to note that: “The novels of Fuentes, with some exceptions, can be considered as mythical approaches to history, or creative history” (3,6).

8. Fuentes addresses himself to the problem of how power exercises and legitimizes itself verbally in the Sosnowski interview, 78-79. An account of the world and the text as mutually informing orders is to be found in Said’s The World the Text and the Critic and “Discrepant Histories and Revised Fictions.” For a description of the use of “archeology” in discourse see M. Foucault’s L’Archéologie du savoir, especially Part 4, La Description Archéologique” (175-255), as well as E. Said’s Beginnings, (290-297, 308-310). Zunilda Gertel has explored the phenomenon Y. Lotman and B. Uspensky call the “semiotic mechanism of culture” (Lotman, 214) in her work on Terra Nostra.

9. See Terra Nostra for examples: 152, 395, 402, 477, 485 and 491. “As the Precious Twin [Quetzalcoatl] is the aspect of Venus as Morning Star who lifts the Sun out of the
darkness. This god was also the Power of Kingship . . . and was also a god of the winds and the breath of life” (Burland, x). See Schaffer’s article on the use of the double in Fuentes.

10. Mexico City was built on the site of Tenochtitlan in the “clear air” of the central plateau. Alfonso Reyes traces the use of the phrase “la región más transparente” [the transparent region of the air] from the words of Father Manuel de Navarette through A. von Humboldt, “Ultima Tule,” 16. With La región más transparente Fuentes begins to explore the problem of mestizaje.

11. It is a matter of some note that the dualistic Aztec cosmology, readily subsumed the legends, myths, gods and heroes of the peoples they conquered in toto, and effectively rewrote the earlier elements into its own canon. The Spanish would follow this practice and elaborate a system of syncretism, e.g., sanctioning “idols behind altars.”

12. According to J. Rutherford, the Revolution can be divided into four ages: 1900-1910 incubatory; 1910-1917 destructive; 1917-1940 consolidatory; and 1940 to the present, legal changes in social and economic structures, and the realization of the “Betrayed Revolution” by the official political party of Mexico, the PRI, El Partido Revolucionario Institucional (“The Institutionalized Revolutionary Party”), which has been in power since 1929.

13. The density of mythic aspects which inform the title character’s name became especially apparent to us during the preparation of the concordance we made to words and levels of narrative in the novel.

14. See Gertel (71), for an account of how post-conquest texts are transformed in Terra Nostra (458-468): H. Cortés letters, Cartas de relación; D. Muñoz Camargo’s history, Historia de Tlaxcala, and B. Sahagún’s renderings of the experiences of the conquered populations in the codex, Códice florentino.

15. See Una familia lejana for sources: 102, 104, 114. Compare the elaboration of heredia in this novel, 160-162, with that in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, 286. Jorge Ruffinelli has elaborated the great extent to which the novel is autobiographical.

16. Vico’s idea of history as being generational, i.e., produced on the human procreative model, seems to inform the narrator’s conclusion here (Said, The World, 112).

17. “Mexico City, where intellectuals of all political tendencies may express their opinions freely and exchange all the insults they wish, has become the cultural capital of the continent” (Riding, 40).

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