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## Social protest in three novels of Carlos Fuentes

Jane Hamilton Rule  
*University of the Pacific*

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Social Protest in Three Novels  
of Carlos Fuentes

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of the Pacific

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Master's Degree in Inter-American Studies

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by  
Jane Hamilton Rule

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This thesis, written and submitted by

Jane Hamilton Rule

is approved for recommendation to the Committee  
on Graduate Studies, University of the Pacific.

Department Chairman or Dean:

Malte A. Payne

Thesis Committee:

Graziela de Uteoga Chairman

Malte A. Payne

John Crowder

Dated May 7, 1975

## PREFACE

Carlos Fuentes is one of Mexico's current fiction writers and to many he is controversial in that he delves into several of Mexico's great preoccupations: the Revolution, the search for lo mexicano and the future for this growing country.

This thesis is an endeavor to expose and explain Fuentes' views on these and other social topics as seen in three of his novels: La región más transparente, La muerte de Artemio Cruz and Cambio de piel.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

"Ponerlo todo en tela de juicio, caso por caso, momento por momento, es la única manera de participar en la historia."<sup>1</sup>

The above quote typifies the belief which Carlos Fuentes has and demonstrates so astutely in his works. With this idea as his trademark, Carlos Fuentes has become recognized as one of the brightest stars on Mexico's literary scene, and most assuredly with good reason. Not only is he a fairly prolific writer--six novels and two collections of short stories in thirteen years--but also he is known for his endeavors to create a new Mexican novel through experimentation in style and plot. Fuentes has attempted to do away with the traditional, and in its place, to substitute something innovative, not only in style, but also in language. Before examining the various occurrences of social protest in the novels of Carlos Fuentes, let us examine the man.

Carlos Fuentes gives his birthdate as November 11, 1928, in Mexico, although others are of varying

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<sup>1</sup>R. G. Mead, Jr., "Carlos Fuentes, airado novelista mexicano," Hispania, L, 2 (May, 1967), 230.

opinions.<sup>2</sup> One such piece of information is given by George Maynes who learned that Fuentes was born in Panama but has desired to keep his Mexican identity.<sup>3</sup> Fuentes was born shortly after the close of some of the most fierce Revolutionary fighting in Mexico but was isolated from much of the violence because of his father's position. His father, Rafael, served in the Diplomatic Corps throughout the Western Hemisphere and Europe. According to one source, the conditions in Mexico during Fuentes' first years were the following: "There were unsettled conditions, reconstruction, a neglect of rural problems, spiritual and cultural re-awakening, government revitalization and expropriation of foreign oil interests."<sup>4</sup> Fuentes' life was, of course, influenced by these conditions in Mexico, but not so greatly as if he had been part of them. He was allowed to live a rather cosmopolitan existence due to the nature of his family, perhaps missing the scene which Roberto Fernández Retamar describes:

. . . vive del lado de acá de la insurgencia  
romántica cuando la revolución en su país está

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<sup>2</sup>Carlos Fuentes, Cambio de piel (México: Editorial Joaquín Mortez, 1967), Jacket.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Mark Reeve, "The Narrative Technique of Carlos Fuentes, 1954-1964" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967), p. 32, citing George E. Maynes, "The Corruption of Mexican Society as seen by Carlos Fuentes" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Texas Western College, 1964), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Raymond D. Weeter, "The Modern Novel of the City of Mexico" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of California, 1965), pp. 16-18.

institucionalizada. Hace tiempo que no entran en la ciudad mexicana tropas campesinas para marchar al palacio del gobierno. Entran, en cambio, negociantes norteamericanos a anudar lazos con la nueva casa dirigente, hecha a menudo de generales enriquecidos.<sup>5</sup>

In later life, however, Fuentes was to protest these very conditions.

During the middle 1930's he was in Washington, D. C., again because of his father's service in the Diplomatic Corps. At this time Fuentes became fluent in English. He may have had difficulty maintaining his mother tongue. He began his education in the Cook Public School in Washington, D. C.<sup>6</sup> After several years, his father was transferred to Chile where he (Carlos) and his sister attended an English school, the Grange, in Santiago.<sup>7</sup> At this time Fuentes himself recognizes the fact that he was drawn not only to reading great works of English and American literature, but also dabbled in writing. This interest in American literature in particular carried over to later life and his writing. However, even at this early time (in the early 1940's) he managed to have some of his writing published in a local newspaper.

Rafael Fuentes' next assignment began in 1944 in Argentina. After a short time in that country, Fuentes and his sister were sent to Mexico to continue their education,

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<sup>5</sup>Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Carlos Fuentes y la otra novela de la revolución mexicana," Casa de las Américas, IV, 26 (octubre-noviembre, 1964), 123.

<sup>6</sup>Reeve, loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 33.



and possibly renew their ties with their homeland. Here Fuentes attended the Colegio de México and studied law at the Universidad Autónoma de México.<sup>8</sup> At this time Fuentes began to frequent various social circles in Mexico and was known as a member of the International Jet Set. He also became known for his curious stories of "franco sabor simultaneísta, dadaísta y snobista."<sup>9</sup> From his experiences with this group in particular come the personages he portrays at his various Jet Set cocktail parties, such as Bobo. In addition, this group supplies him his acute knowledge of the adventures of high society.

Later Fuentes was to study law at the Instituto de Altos Estudios Internacionales in Geneva but lost interest in obtaining his title as lawyer and returned to Mexico, again perhaps to reestablish his identity as a Mexican.<sup>10</sup> After his return he seemed to draw away somewhat from the concerns of the International Set, as though alienated, and he became more concerned about the problems of Mexico.

An important influence now for Fuentes was Octavio Paz, who had a philosophical preoccupation with the problems of Mexico. Paz began to influence Fuentes' concept of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Reeve, op. cit., p. 34, citing Daniel Dueñas, "Carlos Fuentes, de niño bien a novelista de los habitantes del Distrito Federal," Hoy, CVIII, 1 (7 mayo 1958), 78.

<sup>10</sup> Aurora M. Ocampo de Gómez, Diccionario de escritores mexicanos (México: Centro Estudios Literarios, 1967), p. 91.

Mexican culture. A manifestation of his disassociation with the International Set and his alliance with Paz was his interest in helping new writers and in developing his own literary career. Apparently anxious to see the end of older, more traditional schools, he became a member of the "Fantásticos contemporáneos" and along with other young writers such as Juan Rulfo, Juan José Arreola, and Rosario Castellanos, associated himself with the new trends in Mexican literature.

As an extension of his involvement in this innovative group he later founded the Revista literaria de México in conjunction with Emanuel Carballo. This magazine served as a springboard for apprentice writers.<sup>11</sup> He collaborated on the leftist magazine Siempre! in Mexico and wrote articles for Vogue and Holiday in the United States. Perhaps because of his marriage to actress Rita Macedo, Fuentes at this time had a lively interest in the cinema and wrote a number of screen plays.<sup>12</sup>

Fuentes was editor of another magazine, El Espectador, and has since been an active contributor to several other Mexican periodicals such as Ideas de México, Política, and Revista de la Universidad de México. Of the latter Fuentes said:

. . . [it] stood for the rejection of localism, of

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<sup>11</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 2.

the picturesque, of chauvinism, and the parochialism of Mexican literature. Politically it stands for a rejection of every ideological a priori, an interest in tiers monde, freedom of judgement with regard to the United States as well as the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup>

Fuentes has arrangements with publishers in about fifteen foreign cities and consequently he is a rarity in Latin America because he is able to live from his writings, a feat not accomplished by many other writers in Latin America today.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to his writing for periodicals, Fuentes is very interested in film-making, a growing industry in Mexico. His name has been linked with the productions of the Spaniard, Luis Buñuel. Fuentes has written screen plays for Buñuel, among these El acoso, based on a novel by Alejo Carpentier.<sup>15</sup> In all of his literary involvements Fuentes has attempted to become part of a new trend in Mexican literature.

The new trend in Mexican literature is a subject for considerable discussion. First of all, as Fuentes himself certainly realized, the traditional romantic or realistic stories no longer served the purpose of a changing Mexico. That is, a nation in flux, Mexico's need for expression through its letters was greater than before. Rather than

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<sup>13</sup>Luis Harss and Barbra Dohmann, Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 309.

<sup>14</sup>Reeve, loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Claude Couffon, "Carlos Fuentes y la novela mexicana," Cuadernos, XLII, 2 (mayo-junio, de 1960), 67.

adhering to time-worn styles and methods, the new generation of Mexican authors knew of the need for a new expression:

"La literatura mexicana se encuentra actualmente en una época de fermentación sin precedente y de producción prolífica en todos los géneros."<sup>16</sup> Out of this fermentation has grown a type of literature which has as many names as authors--magical realism, fantasy, cosmopolitanism, and so on. Likewise it also has a myriad of appearances.

The significance of this new literature is not its name but the fact that it exists and does so with both quality and quantity where previously there was a void. Hopefully the past fifteen or twenty years have not been merely a mirage, but rather a substantial beginning for new kinds of works that can grow out of Mexico--a country developing in so many ways. Where once before there were only one or two names, such as Azuela or López y Fuentes, which could be recognized outside of Mexico, today there is an ever increasing number of widely read authors including Fuentes, Castellanos, Dávila, Paz and others.

The modern literature of Mexico has many interesting characteristics. It is existentialist to a certain point. It uses not only slang expressions of Mexico and the United States, but also tosses aside taboos of the Church on language. It runs the gamut of vulgar words and sexual inferences. Much of this literature is concerned with the City of Mexico itself as the heart of the country. It

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<sup>16</sup>Mead, op. cit., p. 230.

describes in detail, without prejudice, all classes and situations not only in Mexico itself, but in other countries of the world. Fuentes fits into this literary movement and fulfills what is a need for the country--a need for openness and innovation:

Entre las figuras literarias nacionales actuales, Carlos Fuentes se destaca como una de las más discutidas y probablemente la más polémica. Como sucede tantas veces en la historia humana, esta distinción se debe a la tendencia que tiene de afirmar sus ideas con claridad y vigor, y a su propensión de presentar su propia versión de la realidad tal como la concibe, sin importarle mucho las consecuencias de sus palabras.<sup>17</sup>

Because of the fearless quality of this literature, in many cases it has taken the form of social protest. Although some critics disagree that Fuentes' writings show protest, on reading his works one cannot help but see the many social inequities exposed by the analytical works of this novelist:

La verdad, nos parece, es que Carlos Fuentes es un observador agudo, inteligente, y sensible de la situación humana de estos años tan difíciles, un contemplador--participante tan pronto a censurar el acto anti-humano del comunismo como a reprobar una agresión contra la libertad del hombre por parte del capitalismo.<sup>18</sup>

It would be unfair to say that Fuentes' novels are of social protest and leave it at that. Surely his approach is most memorable, though not necessarily enjoyable at times because of his complex and obscure techniques. He employs

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<sup>17</sup>Mead, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

many devices which he has discovered in the works of such American authors as John Dos Passos and William Faulkner. Among these are interior monologue, second person narration and flashbacks, as well as historical data, foreign phrases, techniques from movies, detailed descriptions (as though from an Orozco mural) and music.

This man, Fuentes, educated in several countries including Chile, the United States, and Switzerland, and fluent in the languages of these countries uses this education to the fullest, not only in his collections of short stories such as Los días enmascarados and Cantar de ciegos, but also in his many novels--La región más transparente (1958), Las buenas conciencias (1961), La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1962), Aura (1962), Cambio de piel (1968), and Zona sagrada (1969). Although most of the action is centered in Mexico, Fuentes refers to people and places foreign with the reference level of one cognizant of these places, particularly in Cambio de piel.

Fuentes is aware of the influences of other authors upon him. According to Emanuel Carballo, Fuentes is a non-realist, but in an unusual way because he finds his reality not in the everyday, but in the probable. "En sus textos, todo es verdad, menos el texto conjunto . . . su realidad es, pues, de esencias y no de circunstancias."<sup>19</sup> Fuentes admits that he is interested not only in the fantastic but

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<sup>19</sup>Emanuel Carballo, El cuento mexicano en el siglo XX (Mexico: Empresas editoriales, S.A., 1964), p. 71.

in the fantasmagoric as well, and relegates this to his early readings:

Siempre he tratado de percibir detrás de la apariencia fantasmagórica de las cosas una realidad más tangible, más maciza que la realidad evidente de los días. Esa preocupación es producto de mis lecturas infantiles muy dadas a gustar autores como Robert Louis Stevenson y Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the above named influences, Fuentes states, and it is evident to the reader, that he has felt the influence and to some extent has copied the styles of James Joyce in Camus, Sartre, and Proust in addition to those mentioned before.<sup>21</sup>

As for political beliefs, Fuentes shows marked leftist tendencies. He has been closely associated with the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional. Because of his visits to Russia and his interest and visits to Cuba he has been looked upon unfavorably by the State Department of the United States. In his writings he aligns himself against the capitalist way rather than in favor of it. In Fuentes' eyes "the single bright spot in Latin America is Cuba,"<sup>22</sup> perhaps because of the nature of the Cuban Revolution and the continuous reaffirmation of its ideals as opposed to the Mexican Revolution, which Fuentes believes is dead because

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<sup>20</sup> Emanuel Carballo, Diecinueve protagonistas de la literatura mexicana del siglo XX (México: Empresas editoriales, S.A., 1965), p. 427.

<sup>21</sup> John K. Hutches, "Literary Life South of the Rio Grande," Saturday Review, (February 25, 1967), 43.

<sup>22</sup> Weeter, op. cit., p. 129.

of the loss of affirmation of its purpose, especially in regard to the lower classes. Fuentes does not consider himself a Communist but feels a definite debt to Marxism. He prefers to think of himself as a spokesman for the third person, "that is, of the neutral nations who wish to be independent of both the Eastern and Western blocks."<sup>23</sup> He is not unusual in his stand, for it is understood that many of the young writers in Mexico today are either liberal or leftist. It just seems that Fuentes is more vociferous than some of the others. The reason behind this political feeling is these young writers' observations of events which have indicated lack of fulfillment of the revolutionary ideals of distribution of wealth among the people. In particular they have seen the entry of monied foreigners who have bought their way into the country through natives who were willing to sacrifice these ideals for wealth. These young writers have become disillusioned with what they have seen. Some believe that Mexico emerged from the revolutionary period much the same as it entered it--with a large impoverished lower class and a minority wealthy upper class. They feel that in addition to the economic problems, Mexico also has an obsolete, inadequate governmental structure.

Lastly these writers feel that there has been a "failure of family, church, and school to fulfill their

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Reeve, op. cit., p. 36.



minimum obligations to Mexican youth."<sup>24</sup>

Thus Fuentes has taken his place in Mexican literature as a conscience for Mexican liberals who are concerned for the destiny of their country and hope that through exposure, conditions will change. Yet Fuentes is not concerned only for Mexico's well-being. Because he is well-traveled and educated, his point of view is much broader and more cosmopolitan:

. . . (Oscar) Lewis da evidencia en un artículo sobre Pedro Martínez que Fuentes ya se acerca más a preocupaciones no sólo por el bienestar del pueblo mexicano, sino también por problemas básicos de la existencia humana.<sup>25</sup>

Fuentes has learned that the world encompasses more than Mexico, but he is still preoccupied with Mexico's problems and has learned these problems are not necessarily a conflict between man and his world but "al contrario, de su fusión."<sup>26</sup> Fuentes is not afraid to speak his mind, and, as many writers today, he tries to catch the present moment and look to the past only to examine what may be its contributions to or distractions from the present. He, much to the chagrin of some other contemporary Mexican writers, obviously feels that an author has a two-fold purpose: that

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<sup>24</sup>George R. MacMurray, "Current Trends in the Mexican Novel," Hispania, LI, 3 (September, 1968), 536.

<sup>25</sup>Donald Moody Logan, "El concepto nacional en las novelas de Carlos Fuentes" (Doctoral dissertation: Texas Technical College, 1963), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup>Peter G. Earle, "Camino oscuro: La novela hispano-americana contemporánea," Cuadernos Americanos, CLII, 3 (mayo-junio, 1967), 207.

of being creative and imaginative and that of furthering social progress in some manner, if only by speaking his mind. Fuentes has suffered the consequences of speaking his mind, for to date he has been called "a Communist sympathizer, if not actually a Communist."<sup>27</sup>

Likewise he has from time to time been unpopular with his countrymen because of his criticism of the country, yet he is recognized by authors, philosophers, and politicians as an acute observer of the scene and has done a great deal to awaken interest in Mexico in his fellow Mexicans. Because Fuentes is so recognized by many, it is possible to view three of his novels in particular as sources of social protest or criticism. The novels chosen for discussion are La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear, 1958), La muerte de Artemio Cruz, (The Death of Artemio Cruz, 1962), and Cambio de piel (Change of Skin, 1967). These three novels are in reality from slightly different epochs of a changing and growing Mexico, yet, in each some of the same elements of social protest may be seen. Along with these three major novels, aspects of several other of Fuentes' works will be mentioned from time to time. Among these other works mentioned are Los días enmascarados (The Masked Days, 1954), Cantar de ciegos (Stories for the Blind, 1964), Las buenas conciencias (The Good Conscience, 1961), Aura (Aura,

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<sup>27</sup>Robert G. Mead, Jr., "Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's Angry Novelist," Books Abroad, XXXVIII, 4 (Autumn, 1964), 380.

1962), and Zona sagrada (The Sacred Area, 1966).

There is a difference between a novel and a book of history, the line between subjectivity and objectivity, the line between fiction and fact. The novel is "the intuitive capturing of life in terms of human motivation and response or lack of it, while history is the rational observation of cause and effect."<sup>28</sup> The above quoted article of Valdés goes on to note that literature, by means of critical analysis and interpretation can give insight into accepted patterns of thought of any given social group, as well as insight into its unconscious spiritual ideas, social ideologies and inner social groups.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, as in Fuentes' works, the characters not only carry out the author's purpose of being creative by portraying certain roles and developing the story, but the characters also help carry out the author's second purpose which is, according to Fuentes, that of a social critic. The characters "become identified with a particular social phenomenon and thus carry the extra-literary burden of protest . . . ."<sup>30</sup>

The only problem with the assumption of this dual role by the characters is that it has tended to create a stereotype in Latin American literature which, until around

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<sup>28</sup>Mario J. Valdés, "The Literary Social Symbol for an Inter-related Study of Mexico," Journal of Inter-American Studies, VII, 3 (July, 1965), 386.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

the 1930's, was the downtrodden poor Indian who was mistreated by the white boss and was betrayed in many ways by society. Through constant repetition of this stereotype, this literature began to fail in its conveyance of a social message. Then the need became apparent for a new literary approach. Fortunately a new group of writers arose shortly after the 1930's and as a consequence of this group the following occurred:

. . . the trite plot of the futile attempt to conquer adversity has given way to an exploration of the very roots of the human condition as the will-to-be of each man clashes, unites and develops with those who share his world.<sup>31</sup>

Two precursors of this change might be Mariano Azuela, Los de abajo (The Underdogs, 1915), in which there surely is such a stereotype of the downtrodden, but in which also the violence of man is contrasted with the serenity of nature, or Don Segundo Sombra (Shadows on the Pampas, 1926) by Ricardo Güiraldes, in which man looks inward instead of outwardly clashing violently with society.

Carlos Fuentes is a writer who is capable of using the literary social symbol as discussed by Valdés because of his widely diversified characters who expound Fuentes' philosophies. Fuentes is able to criticize socially through his peculiar kinds of characters representing every type, from an upper echelon "swinger" to the lower type Indian who clings to his past, yet is looking for his present and his

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 390.

future. He is one of those writers who:

. . . existe hoy en Hispanoamérica un grupo de escritores de obras de imaginación que a través del análisis psicológico y existencial están tratando de definir el sentido de su cultura y de su ser nacional.<sup>32</sup>

There are many types of social protest and many areas which an author may attempt to explore. Fuentes delves into many of these. One aspect of social protest which is dealt with in this thesis is Fuentes' belief that the Revolution has been betrayed and consequently has failed. He criticizes the Revolution through many of his characters, both of upper and lower class. Fuentes also explores the search for Mexican identity, especially in La región más transparente. The United States of America, as well as other foreign interests are found to be at fault, not only in their own domain, but because of their influence in Mexico. Finally, social injustice, inequality, cruelty and inhumanity--universal concerns--are held up to the reader's examination through Fuentes' skillful eye. The following three chapters seek to illustrate the nature and depth of Fuentes' social concerns.

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<sup>32</sup>Luis Monguió, "Nacionalismo y protesta social en la literatura hispanoamericana," Cuadernos, 58 (marzo de 1962), 47.

## Chapter 2

### LA REGIÓN MÁS TRANSPARENTE

La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear, 1958), was Fuentes' first novel after having written a book of short stories called Los días enmascarados (The Masked Days) in 1954. While his short stories had received small acclaim, his first novel was hailed as a tremendous success by most critics. By some it was called a psychological novel<sup>1</sup> of social protest because it deals with the misery and alienations present specifically in Mexico City in 1951.

Perhaps the style of this book was in itself a form of social protest because he certainly employed techniques which were not common to Mexico's literary scene at that time. In this novel, as in later ones, he employed devices such as flashbacks, selections from contemporary headlines, advertisements, popular songs and newspaper articles. He also made some very unflattering descriptions of the inhabitants of the various social classes in Mexico City and, as a result, he caused quite a stir.

The title of this book La región más transparente comes from a book by Alfonso Reyes in which he states that

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Joseph O'Neill, Jr., "Psychological Literary Techniques in Representative Contemporary Novels of Mexico" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Maryland, 1965), p. 5.

the Spanish conquistadors said upon seeing the Valley of Mexico: "Viajero: has llegado a la región más transparente del aire."<sup>2</sup> It seems, however, that Fuentes uses this title rather ironically or sarcastically because he does not see Mexico City as a place "where the air is clear" but rather as a place clouded by social ills. Thus he has written this novel for the purpose of unclouding the atmosphere and returning to La región más transparente:

Quiere que México alcance identidad para que el concepto nacional sea menos confuso y para que tenga menos contradicciones. Para seguir este concepto, hay que regresar al origen.<sup>3</sup>

The controversial nature of this novel has caused it to receive many and varied opinions, not always good. Unfortunately for Fuentes it has even been attacked as an act of plagiarism. Although Fuentes may expound the ideas of others, he is not necessarily guilty of plagiarism. His words are his own. One critic in particular says it is possible to find ideas taken from El laberinto de la soledad by Octavio Paz as well as other ideas from Samuel Ramos and Leopoldo Zea on as many as sixty pages of the novel.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein an article by José Vázquez Amaral notes that

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Mark Reeve, "The Narrative Technique of Carlos Fuentes, 1954-1964" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Moody Logan, "El concepto nacional en las novelas de Carlos Fuentes" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1965), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Eulogio Cervantes, "Carlos Fuentes y el plagiarismo," Examen, 25 (septiembre-octubre, 1961), 75.

Octavio Paz has said this of Fuentes' novel: "It is an ambitious work in the worst possible sense."<sup>5</sup> At any rate, Fuentes himself admits that he agrees with Paz in his evaluation of Mexico's ills and says of the novel:

Where the Air is Clear is the first of a series of novels designed to give an extensive and interwoven panorama of Mexican life. It depicts the black part of Mexico, a Mexico that is now dying and being swept away by a vigorous younger generation. The ideas expounded in it are not the ideas of the alienated intellectuals of Mexico trying to find excuses for a situation from which they could find no way out.<sup>6</sup>

Amaral in addition insists that Manuel Zamacona, a character in La región más transparente, is in fact a characterization of Octavio Paz. He also feels that critics have been afraid to be truthful about Fuentes' novel--in reality it is not worthy of praise it has received. This is, however, just one man's opinion.

The weight of criticism of this novel has been extremely favorable for Fuentes for several of the previously stated reasons: its audacity of language, its strength of character and its novelty of style. This novel delves deeply into the social strata of Mexico City, a city which is changing so rapidly that it scarcely knows where to go and finds itself without guidelines. The novel is considered an "imaginative portrayal of the many faces of an emerging society, an honest and vigorous attempt to unravel the social

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<sup>5</sup>José Vásquez Amaral, "Mexico's Melting Pot," Saturday Review, XLIII, 47 (November 19, 1960), 29.

<sup>6</sup>Carlos Fuentes, "South of the Border," Saturday Review (Letter from Fuentes in answer to José Amaral), XLIII, 51 (December 17, 1960), 27.



complexities of contemporary Mexican life."<sup>7</sup> As Fuentes himself states:

So I think that La región más transparente reflected--intentionally, though without any attempt to expound personal theories--the excessive and somewhat mythical preoccupation over nationality, ancestry, and patrimony rampant at the time in Mexico.<sup>8</sup>

In his attempt to reach the desired end of unraveling the complexities of the city, Fuentes has used the literary social symbol or symbols which have been previously explained. The literary-social symbol can be valuable only if it is real and Fuentes is cunningly able to make most of his characters very real to the reader, with perhaps a few minor exceptions. One such exception to reality is Ixca Cienfuegos who tends to float around in the novel as if unattached to either the present or the past. At times he is a ghost, at other times a predecessor to the modern-day hippie. Even though all his characters are not flawless, one critic holds that Fuentes is superior to American novelists of the time because his characters "think as well as feel. They are aware of the depth of their depravity--and to this extent have a tragic dimension."<sup>9</sup>

These characters are nearly always from modern

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<sup>7</sup>Gerald Kelly, "Kaleidoscope Effects," Mexico Quarterly Review, I, 3 (Summer, 1962), 212.

<sup>8</sup>Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 292.

<sup>9</sup>Seldon Rodman, "The Heroes Must Fail," New York Times Review of Books, November 13, 1960, Sec. VII, p. 45.

Mexico City and represent all levels of society and all levels of decency and corruption. Fuentes fabricates protagonists who have had a great deal of difficulty in facing the task of becoming part of modern Mexico. He feels that many Mexicans have had the same problem of adjustment in reality and one solace for them is the fact that they are not alone in their search. Through this search the Mexican Revolution, once betrayed, can still progress.<sup>10</sup>

There are four elements of Mexican society which are minutely examined. These are "the Mad Social, the Brutal Business, the Painful Intellectual, and the Downtrodden Poor."<sup>11</sup> Each of the characters on the various social levels is unmasked and shown to have some sort of true identity which he has kept hidden from others and himself. This self-deception on the part of the individual causes him to become locked into a situation or social group which he may dislike or not wish to contribute to but from which he finds it difficult to extract himself. Nationally speaking this caused the Mexican to seek false goals for himself and his country. Fuentes criticizes this same concealment in another novel, Cambio de piel. In La región más transparente each character is helped with his unmasking by Ixca Cienfuegos who provokes each character to do some soul-searching. "Ya cada quien es quien debe ser, tú lo

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<sup>10</sup>O'Neill, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>11</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 210.

sabes."<sup>12</sup>

As a representative of the "Brutal Business" class, Federico Robles is one of the nouveau riche. Robles is a rich banker in Mexico City who has gained his position because of his shady dealings during and after the Mexican Revolution. He is brought to his downfall by losses from land speculation and destructive slander from his enemies. Fuentes created this character from his knowledge of many prominent men in Mexico who made their fortune from the Revolution and by doing so betrayed the ideals and true cause of the Revolution as viewed by some. Robles is much like another of Fuentes' protagonists, Artemio Cruz. He (Robles) has manipulated people for his own selfish gains and those of his wife, Norma, but arrives at the conclusion that only his money has been of importance to others. Fuentes is again pointing the way to self-deception being a detriment to the person and on a larger scale to the nation.

One of the persons most greatly influenced by Robles is his wife, Norma Larragoiti de Robles. She has married this man for his money and status and has lived to regret it. Her marriage resembles that of Artemio Cruz and Catalina in La muerte de Artemio Cruz with its lack of affection and lack of mutual respect. Much of this again occurs because of the dissimulation involved. Norma regrets her past, her upbringing, the fact that her mother is of Indian ancestry,

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<sup>12</sup>Carlos Fuentes, La región más transparente (México: Fondo de cultura, 1958), p. 398.

and, consequently, Norma is left with very little to comfort her. Fuentes seems to portray a parallel between Norma and many Mexicans. He goes on to explain Norma's climb up the ladder of social success only to find that her position on that ladder depends solely on her husband's achievement. He is depicting a grim future for individuals who have emulated Robles' deceptions and, perhaps, a grim future for Mexico itself if it does not recover the Revolutionary ideals when Robles loses everything and, in the process, so does Norma. She later becomes a human sacrifice to the life and spirit of Mexico when she is burned in her mansion. Through this sacrifice Fuentes points out the need for Mexicans to give up their phony deceptions for the sake of an enduring country with high ideals for all.

Another central character of this story is Benjamín de Ovando. He is from an extremely well-to-do family who lost everything in the Revolution. Benjamín seeks a position with Robles. Fuentes makes an obvious effort to differentiate between the feigned, acquired dignity of Norma and the real dignity of the de Ovando family. At the same time he attempts to show the insecurity of Norma's position in relation to the security of the de Ovando family. This security is not financial, but based on tradition and respect.

Manuel Zamacona is the young, "Painful Intellectual" who is as deeply concerned with Mexico as is Fuentes. It is Zamacona's character which frequently comes under fire as being a borrowed personage (see page 2 of this chapter).

Zamacona is obviously a disciple of the philosophy of Octavio Paz. To further complicate the plot of the story, Zamacona is the illegitimate son of Federico Robles. His character is important because of the philosophy he expounds and because his end may represent a philosophical end for Mexico--useless, wasteful, and tragic.

Hortensia Chacón is an important person in the life of Robles. She is a blind woman for whom Robles has promised to care since the death of her husband. Robles finds comfort in the presence of Hortensia, a genuine person, and she, in turn, loves him. In fact, like Artemio Cruz, Robles seeks his love elsewhere, rather than in his home. Unlike the women in Artemio's present life, Hortensia lives only for Federico.

Roberto Régules, a lawyer, is an enemy of Robles who desires to damage his career and reputation. He in part may represent the intellectual who wishes to see no one benefit from ill-gotten gains, especially where the Revolution is involved. He gladly contributes to Robles' downfall.

The "Downtrodden Poor" are represented in many characters by Fuentes. He obviously feels a great empathy for these people and likes to explore the causes and effects of their position. Among the "Downtrodden Poor" it is possible to find tipos or pelados (two names given to young members of youth gangs who use violence as their protective mechanism). In the story these include Gabriel, Beto, and Tito who are very suspicious of outsiders. As a result,

they hate gringos yet envy them their possessions and affluence. These pelados try to put up a good front by using rough and obscene language and mannerisms and they "live in constant fear of being discovered."<sup>13</sup>

Gladys García is also a part of the lower class. She is a prostitute in the city and lives in a dream world in which she is not a prostitute, but a respectable person--a salesgirl. In many ways she seems to embody the spirit of the poor in Mexico in that she is poor and lower class, wishing for a new position or change, yet doing nothing about it except dreaming.

The "Mad Social" is represented by such people as Cuquis and Bobo. Their life is nothing more than a continual round of parties and petty gossip. The most important element in their lives is this shallow hedonistic existence on which they spend their energies. None are spent for the betterment of the people or the nation.

Of course there are other characters; perhaps the most important is Ixca Cienfuegos, an embodiment of Mexico's Indian ancestry. He acts as a purveyor of the future of Mexico, an all-seeing eye in the story. He enters into the lives of each character, draws out, and influences each character in a specific way. Ixca believes, through the influence of his mother, Teódula Moctezuma, that Mexico will

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<sup>13</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 207.

find its salvation in a "return to the past."<sup>14</sup>

Propone dos caminos para la salvación de México y para la tranquilidad del mexicano. El uno es exaltar y encontrar de nuevo lo pasado en la vida indígena. Esto lo simboliza Ixca Cienfuegos, uno de los personajes de esta obra.

. . . Esto se contrapone con lo que expone el poeta Manuel Zamacona quien arroja el peso muerto de las civilizaciones pre-hispánicas. Zamacona prefiere no ver lo que ha pasado. Su visión se dirige hacia el futuro.<sup>15</sup>

Both Ixca and his mother represent the unchangeable past in Mexico--the ancestry which still so greatly influences so many people, even in the modern metropolis of the Distrito Federal.

As a vehicle for social criticism or protest, La región más transparente presents a vast panorama of ills which have in the past plagued Mexico and which were present at the time of its publication in 1958. Through his wide variety of characters in various social positions, Fuentes presents opinions on many topics.

In this novel Fuentes protests against Mexico's loss of identity and its over-emphasis on such elements as machismo, the term used to describe the aggressive, insensitive, violent male. Fuentes seeks to show that Mexico has two pasts which could act as a firm foundation for modern Mexico, but he points out that one past, the Indian past, is

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<sup>14</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>15</sup>Lino García, Jr., "Las obras de Carlos Fuentes" (unpublished Master's thesis, North Texas University, 1966), p. 44.

at times shamefully downtrodden, and the other past, the Mexican Revolution, has been betrayed and forgotten by many. To prove his first point he refers to the philosophy of Octavio Paz, expounded by Manuel Zamacona. As Paz himself states:

But to save himself, the Indian had to resort to dissimulation and lying--defense mechanisms characteristic of all subject peoples, which have persisted in Mexico. Consequently, the Mexican excels at the dissimulation of his passions and himself and lying plays a decisive role in our daily lives, among high and low alike.<sup>16</sup>

The Mexican makes constant reference to La Chingada, the violated one. The point here is not only to relate women's weakness to that of La Malinche, but also the weakness of the Aztecs to the Conquerors. According to O'Neill, Fuentes is attempting to show that Mexico has forgotten its primary role of appeasing the gods. This appeasement would have assured the continuation of the world.<sup>17</sup> Fuentes obviously feels that Mexico's only path to the future involves the recovery of the past. He stated: "-Que no se puede ser más que esa voluntad original, que todo lo demás son disfraces."<sup>18</sup>

A part of the recovery of the past for Fuentes would include the reuniting of the various social groups. Fuentes

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<sup>16</sup>Daniel James, "Neighbors with an Alien Complex" (a review of Octavio Paz, Labyrinth of Solitude) Saturday Review, XLV, 14 (April 7, 1962), 34.

<sup>17</sup>O'Neill, op. cit., p. 349.

<sup>18</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 360.



shows, through the obvious differences in his characters, that the divisions in society are destroying Mexico and its identity. This has occurred through the energies devoted to class rivalry. He reflects upon the fact that many people live as though in separate worlds, each unresponsive and unresponsive for the other. The solution would be the crossing of class barriers in an effort to reach out to other people. The existential philosophy is obvious in that premise. The existentialist believes that what each man does is related to the continuing existence of mankind. Because man in Mexico has gone in many directions and has ignored his past and his fellowman, he has lost out in his relationship with the gods and also has lost sight of his purpose for the future: "Perdemos la cuenta, Ixca. Todos los días aquí como son iguales. Polvo o lluvia, un sol parejo, nada más. ¿Qué cosa puede resuscitar este mundo parejo, Ixca?"<sup>19</sup>

Some of Fuentes' Marxist tendencies appear in his protest, especially in regard to the needs of the masses, the macehuales as he calls them, to make a sacrifice if Mexico is to succeed in winning its struggle for identity:

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 contemporáneo del mundo, el único pueblo que aún vive con los dientes pegados a la ubre original. Este conjunto de los malos olores y chancros y pulque viscoso y carne de garfios que se apenusa en el lodo indiferenciado del origen. Todos los demás caen, hoy, hacia ese origen que sin saberlo los determina; sólo nosotros hemos vivido siempre en él.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.; p. 250.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 367.

Fuentes attempts to show the solution to the problems of Mexican identity through his protest against the devisiveness of the class system, the hypocrisy of the modern rich and the shame of the lower class. He shows that the modern Mexican is egotistical and materialistic, like the pelados who never want to be shown for what they really are. They are constantly hidden behind a facade.

Están perdidos los mexicanos en una cultura a la cual le falta una orientación clara a hondas raíces nacionales, y a la cual se sienten atraídos por un complejo resplandeciente de valores, metas, y actitudes en su mayoría extranjeros (europeos y norteamericanos) y, por lo tanto, difíciles y muchas veces imposibles de asimilar.<sup>21</sup>

The above words are from an interview with Fuentes. The same idea is expressed in the novel:

¿Qué cosa es el sentimiento de inferioridad sino el de la superioridad disimulada? En la superioridad plena, sencillamente, no existe el afán de justificación. La inferioridad nuestra no es sino el sentimiento disimulado de una excelencia que los demás no alcanzan a distinguir, de un conjunto de altas normas que, por desgracia, no acaban de funcionar, de hacerse evidentes o de merecer el respeto ajeno.<sup>22</sup>

Along the same lines Zamacona points out this aspect of Mexico's identity crisis by his thesis that "Mexico lost its identity in its pathological aping of foreign customs and cultures."<sup>23</sup>

Fuentes finds fault with other aspects of Mexico

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<sup>21</sup>R. G. Mead, Jr., "Carlos Fuentes, airado novelista mexicano," Hispania, L, 2 (May, 1967), 231.

<sup>22</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup>Harss and Dohmann, op. cit., p. 288.

besides its identity crisis in this period. He comes to grips with some facets of the Mexican personality besides those already discussed. In addition to dealing with the false nature of the Mexican personality as shown to the world at large (dealt with as a part of identity), Fuentes finds that the Mexican is impractical in his desires for material possessions or ideological change. In this novel he states, "Todo lo mexicano es sentimentalmente excelente, aunque prácticamente sea inútil."<sup>24</sup> The Mexican is also impractical in the masks he maintains to hide his true self: "The masks of indifference, stasis, introversion, suspicion, hypocrisy, courtesy and resignation are intended to hide the despairing solitude which the Mexican feels today."<sup>25</sup> He is impractical because his masks often cost him a great deal of energy and denial of self.

Constantly in line for its share of criticism is the political system of Mexico, including the current government organization. Fuentes finds fault with the one-party system because he sees it as a mask with which the government is deceiving the people. He feels that the party, known as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional since 1946, should do away with the tapado system (This is the practice of naming the official candidate in advance and then electing him), and allow free choice.

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<sup>24</sup>Fuentes, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

El candidato del P.R.I. llegará, como siempre, a ser Presidente. No es ese el problema. Lo que el pueblo quiere, y lo querrá cada día más, es que el candidato definitivo no sea escogido, a su vez, por un conclave de ex-Presidentes.<sup>26</sup>

This is reiterated in the following section of the novel:

Lo que rechazo es la somnolencia que el "partido único" ha impuesto a la vida política de México, impidiendo el nacimiento de movimientos políticos que pudieran ayudar a resolver los problemas de México y que podrían ayudar a resolver los problemas de México . . .<sup>27</sup>

The backwardness of the country is blamed not only on the políticos but also on the intellectuals, who, in the words of Zamacona "son los marxistas más tontos del mundo, o los que creen que es importante hacer una obra en serio aunque sean aislados, que mancharse en una vida pública tan estúpida y mecánica como la nuestra."<sup>28</sup> Along the same lines, Manuel Zamacona, the philosopher, says, "Nuestra vida cultural vive en un perpetuo statu quo . . . Dentro de diez años éste será un país dominado por los plutócratas, tú verás."<sup>29</sup> As one researcher so aptly put it: "The agony of her people is over the supra-dimensional dichotomy between her cultural heritage and her burgeoning socio-economic fabric."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 360.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>30</sup>Norman Joseph Luna, "In the Land of Xipe Topec" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Colorado, 1969), p. 53.

Unlike many protesters, Fuentes offers solutions to the identity crisis, to the problem of class and to certain other social ills. His answers may be too simplified for the complexity of the problems. These answers are embodied in three men and their final outcome in the story. Robles represents a solution to Mexico's problems of identity in the present. That is he fails in his efforts at capitalism and must come to the reality of giving up his affluence. In turn he must become a real person whose life is not controlled by the dollar. He must contribute to society through himself and not his money.

Zamacona's solution is for the future. It involves building the country on new ideas and abolishing the old ways entirely. To Fuentes this idea does not seem functional.

Cienfuego's solution is through the past. Mexico should not deny its heritage but should build upon it and in that way resolve its identity crisis.

Mexico City is criticized by Fuentes, although his object may be more universally directed at other cities. First of all, through such characters as Norma Larragoiti de Robles, Robles himself and the members of the Jet Set, Fuentes shows the inhumanity which comes about at the constant search for material pleasures and possessions stimulated by city life. He reiterates that the city brings about more spiritual loneliness through its multitudes.<sup>31</sup> Much as

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<sup>31</sup>O'Neill, op. cit., p. 400.

rebels of today in many parts of the world, Fuentes blames the loss of spiritual togetherness, personality and individuality on the city. As a result, Fuentes' view of Mexico City is not favorable. As in other works, he pictures the City as a place full of dust and filth--an unfit home for anyone. Much as the narrator in Fuentes' novel Cambio de piel describes the streets of Cholula and the streets of Mexico City, Fuentes says the following:

La avenida semejaba una cornucopia de basura: rollos de diario derelicto, los desperdicios de los cafés de chinos, los perros muertos, la vieja hurgando, clavada en un bote, los niños dormidos removiéndose en la nidada de los periódicos y carteles. La luz del más tenue de los cirios de fúnebres. Del Caballito a los Doctores arrancaba un ataúd de asfalto, triste como una mano tendida.<sup>32</sup>

. . . que el rostro de Cienfuegos descendía sobre el suyo, igual que la lluvia sobre los montones de basura hinchada, sobre los techos de lámina y azoteas de tezontle y pavimientos de la ciudad. Y como las calles, ese rostro se tragaba la naturaleza y la mataba, como las calles . . . .<sup>33</sup>

There are other examples of the way Fuentes feels about the city, but they may be summed up on one word--decay. Fuentes sees what is happening in the modern city as the moral and physical decay of an earlier people and place. He really does not offer his solution to this problem, except that again he advocates acceptance of inherited ways. It is in his analysis of the City that we find the irony of the title, La región más transparente. It is

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<sup>32</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 121.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 249-250.

obvious that in Fuentes' eyes the place is not where one can find the clearest air, either socially or spiritually.

La región más transparente is a place for more social protest concerning the Mexican Revolution. Fuentes grew up in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution and as a young intellectual he believed in the Revolution. As mentioned before, Fuentes believes that the Revolution has been betrayed, again by the wealthy, by the businessmen and the middle class. Fuentes opines there is widespread disillusion on all levels regarding the Revolution:

Por desgracia, la nueva burguesía mexicana no ve más allá de eso, su único deseo, por el momento, es apropiarse, cuanto antes los moldes clásicos de la burguesía capitalista . . . Pero, ¿qué vamos a hacer cuando todo el poder real emanado de la Revolución se ha entregado, volupuosamente, a las cosquillas de un creshedonismo sin paralelo en México?<sup>34</sup>

For Fuentes, because it was a bourgeois revolution, it was not a popular revolution. Because the middle class has not assumed the Revolutionary goals, for Fuentes it has failed the Revolution from which it came:

Este momento, en el que el mexicano deja atrás su fe dinámica en la Revolución y se enfrenta con la incertidumbre de un destino personal es el eje de la novela, el momento transparente.<sup>35</sup>

In Fuentes' criticism of the Revolution he sees such men as Federico Robles as the very men who have silenced the believers and workers in the Revolution. He says:

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<sup>34</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup>Luis Andrés Murillo, review of Carlos Fuentes', La región más transparente, Revista Iberoamericana, XXIV, 47 (enero-julio, 1959), 195.

Esa nueva plutocracia no ha tenido su germen en el trabajo, sino en el aprovechamiento de una situación política para crear negocios prósperos; y su temprana creación frustró, desde arriba, lo más puro de la Revolución.<sup>36</sup>

He feel that this type of wealthy, important man gained because of the Revolution and has turned his back on it. Men such as Robles did not believe in the ideals of the Revolution enough to deny personal gain. Even today Fuentes finds that it is a "small group apart of selfless intellectuals who work to improve the lot of the poor."<sup>37</sup> The enrichment from the Revolution was in the upper and the middle class. The loss was in the failure to advance the poor. Somewhat despairingly one prisoner of the Revolution in Fuentes' book said: "Nada va a cambiar."<sup>38</sup>

An equally great failure of the Revolution is found in that the middle and upper classes see the event as somewhat of a success and use the Revolution as a stepping stone to even greater benefits. As Robles tries to make everyone believe: "La revolución ha desarrollado plenamente sus metas, en todos sentidos."<sup>39</sup>

Because city life tends to diminish the role of religion in everyday life, Fuentes avoids the issues to a great extent in this novel. Ixca Cienfuegos and Teódula

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<sup>36</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 274.

<sup>37</sup>Raymond Weeter, "The Modern Novel of the City of Mexico" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of California, 196-), p. 136.

<sup>38</sup>Fuentes, La región más transparente, p. 136.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 271.



Moctezuma represent an adherence to the ancient Indian religion. He indicates in this novel as well as in Cambio de piel that the Catholic religion would not have enjoyed such great success if it were not for the importance of the ancient religions in the lives of the people. He does not advocate a return to human sacrifice but that credit should be given to the religious heritage that was present in Mexico. He believes that the Catholic church has presented religion to many people in the wrong way. This is reflected in the words of a member of the Jet Set:

Oye, y los pinches curas de México, y el pin-chí-si-mo catolicismo mexicano. ¡Pero que tomadura de pelo viejo! Pero si esto es grave, querido, si ser cristiano de veras--o budista de veras, si tú quieres-- es un problemón . . . .<sup>40</sup>

European and North American interests are targets for Fuentes' protest in this first novel, although not to the great extent they are in his other works. Like José Enrique Rodó of Uruguay in Ariel (1900) and many other Latin American authors, Fuentes advocates that Mexico should not copy the United States and should steer clear of any more European entanglements. He emphasizes the desirability of nationalism through his character Zamacona when he states: "Siempre hemos querido correr hacia modelos que no nos pertenecen, vestirnos con trajes que no nos quedan, disfrazarnos para ocultar la verdad."<sup>41</sup> This relates to the fact that Fuentes believes that the Mexican has relinquished his mexicanidad in order

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

to emulate in materialism and economic life the nearest model, the United States of America. Fuentes appears to blame a part of the failure of the Revolution on the United States. He believes that the attempt to copy the way of life in the United States was made too fast and the Mexican was unable to grow into his own "modern" role.

According to Fuentes, Mexico has been emulating a stagnant order--that of capitalism. Two powerful examples of his lack of esteem for the United States are the following:

¿Piensa usted por ejemplo, que la nación más rica que ha conocido la historia, es una nación precisamente feliz? No es, por el contrario, una nación presa de un profundo malestar espiritual?<sup>42</sup>

No resulta bastante contradictorio que en el momento en que vemos muy claramente que el capitalismo ha cumplido su ciclo vital y subsiste apenas en una especie de hinchazón ficticia, nosotros iniciemos el camino hacia él?<sup>43</sup>

He fears that the problems of industrialization, urbanization and modernization brought on in attempt to mirror the United States will leave Mexico in worse conditions than before the Revolution.

Thus in La región más transparente Fuentes protests against the betrayal of the Revolution, the inability of the Mexican to find himself, the emulation of the United States and other foreign interests, the dehumanization of the city, and the existing political system in Mexico. The next

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

chapter will deal with some of these same subjects in relation to the novel, La muerte de Artemio Cruz.

## Chapter 3

### LA MUERTE DE ARTEMIO CRUZ

Another social protest novel set in the city of Mexico is La muerte de Artemio Cruz. Published in 1962, it is another of Carlos Fuentes' major works. It also represents somewhat of a change in the philosophy present in La región más transparente. It deals less with the problem of Mexican identity and, in the words of Raymond Weeter, helps the Mexican to gain self-confidence and pride in himself and his country.<sup>1</sup> Once again the city plays a great part in Fuentes' novel, for it is here that Fuentes finds his ideas and characters and where he chooses to use the literary social symbol.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz is an interesting book technically and in content. The novel is written from three points of view: yo, tú and él, just as La región más transparente was written from the points of view: the past or ancestry, the present or patrimony and the future or nationality. In Artemio Cruz the yo depicts the debilitated body on the sick bed as well as the most recent events of his life.

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond D. Weeter, "The Modern Novel of the City of Mexico" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of California, 1965), p. 26.

Soy esto. Soy este viejo con las funciones partidas por los cuadros desiguales del vidrio. Soy este ojo. Soy este yo. Soy este ojo surcado por las raíces de una cólera acumulada, vieja, olvidada, siempre actual.<sup>2</sup>

The tú represents a future that the yo will never see or be part of. It is sort of sub-conscious future state which describes the way Artemio wants to feel but may not live to do so. "Tú te sentirás orgulloso de ti mismo, sin demostrarlo. Pensarás que has hecho tantas cosas cobardes que el valor resulta fácil."<sup>3</sup>

The él in the story is the vivid past of Artemio. It is a past which Artemio desires to relive and does so in his mind and through the él. The él deals with his early life, deeds and love:

(1913; DICIEMBRE 4)

El sintió el hueco de la rodilla de la mujer, húmedo, junto a su cintura. Siempre sudaba de esa manera ligera y fresca: cuando él separó el brazo de la cintura de Regina, allí también sintió la humedad de cristales líquidos.<sup>4</sup>

The story is written as a view of a dying man, Artemio Cruz. It is his perception of the past, through precisely dated episodes, the present, and the future. Cruz represents the illustrious, wealthy Mexican for whom the Revolution was a stepping stone to success and riches. He "embodies the tragic contradictions of a revolution which

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<sup>2</sup>Carlos Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz (México; Fondo de Cultura, 1962), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

stopped being essentially revolutionary far too soon."<sup>5</sup> Artemio stands, in many respects for Mexico itself and some of the changes it has undergone since the Revolution: thus he represents Mexico's past, present, and future.

The main characters in the novel are the three Artemios and the persons who are woven into his life. Catalina is his wife who accompanies him throughout the novel physically, and yet spiritually and emotionally is extremely distant from Artemio. She is embittered because of the way Artemio entered her life. Catalina has sworn revenge by depriving him of the kind of love he wants and needs:

Para Artemio Cruz, Catalina significa un testigo al que hay que destruir a la vez que respetar. Sabe que en ella tiene un testigo rencoroso de sus actos, un testigo que, sin embargo, lo pudo haber redimido.<sup>6</sup>

There was a time when Catalina could have changed Artemio's life if she could have given him the love he needed. She remained aloof, however, because of the promise she had made to herself. Artemio and Catalina, from that time on, continued on two parallel but different courses.

Don Gamaliel, Catalina's father, plays an important role in Artemio's life because he too could have changed the

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<sup>5</sup>Alexander Coleman, "A life retold," rev. of Carlos Fuentes' Death of Artemio Cruz, New York Times Book Review, November 28, 1965, Sec. VII, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Joseph O'Neill, "Psychological-Literary Techniques in Representative Contemporary Novels of Mexico" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Maryland, 1965), p. 441.

course of that life. He is representative of the large landholder who should be affected by the Revolution but tries not to be, like the large landholder, Don César, in Balún-Canaan by Rosario Castellanos: "-Ah, pero el viejo ahí sigue igual de taimado, sin dar su brazo a torcer. Prefiere morirse a renunciar, lo que sea de cada quien."<sup>7</sup> But Artemio plays a game--a clever one--and in doing so takes over the landholdings of Don Gamaliel and, included in the deal, his daughter Catalina.

Gamaliel represents the declining, landed aristocracy which controlled so much of the land prior to the Revolution. Artemio becomes a part of the nouveau riche who will be the aristocracy in Mexico. The difference between Don Gamaliel and Artemio not only can be found in the way in which each acquired his wealth but also in each one's view of his position in life. Artemio could never have felt this way about himself:

El viejo se imaginaba a sí mismo como el producto final de una civilización peculiarmente criolla: la de los déspotas ilustrados. Se deleitaba pensándose como un padre, a veces duro, al cabo proveedor y siempre depositario de una tradición del buen gusto, de cortesía, de cultura.<sup>8</sup>

Artemio's role was that of a rich man who plotted and thought of only his own wealth and success, in a much different way than Gamaliel. Gamaliel thought of his workers

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<sup>7</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

as children and thus felt that he owed them the debt of a father to some small degree. Artemio felt no debt to anyone. As the young stranger who comes to the Bernal home, Artemio says this of the situation:

Vamos entregándole esas tierras a los campesinos, que al fin son tierras de temporal y les rendirán muy poco. Vamos parcelándolas para que sólo puedan sembrar cultivos menores. Ya verá usted que en cuanto tengan que agradecernos eso, dejarán a las mujeres encargadas de las tierras malas y volverán a trabajar nuestras tierras fértiles. Mire no más: si hasta puede usted pasar por un héroe de la reforma agraria, sin que le cueste nada.<sup>9</sup>

Gamaliel represents the old order which lived by tradition, while Artemio is the traitor to Revolutionary ideals. It is Artemio who pretends to fulfill a duty to the Revolution when, in reality he is only filling his own pockets. This is a criticism that Fuentes makes of many people--especially those who were hypocritical as was Artemio.

There are other characters in this novel who are of importance because of their influence on Artemio's life, yet Artemio is the center of the novel.

The social protest in this novel is not directed so strongly at the search for lo mexicano as it is at the Mexican Revolution and its betrayal. As stated before, Fuentes feels strongly that the Revolution is over and that one reason for its death is the loss of its ideals. This novel has been called tragic because the point of the story is "the betrayal of the Mexican Revolution by one of its sons

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 54.



to self-aggrandizement and foreign interests."<sup>10</sup> It is pointed out in the story that one important factor in the failure of the Revolution was a lack of faith in it at the time. In fact, Gonzalo Bernal, Catalina's brother, says to Artemio that he is glad he is in jail and does not have to choose sides because "¿Cómo podía estar con Zapata o Villa? No creo en ninguno."<sup>11</sup>

Fuentes is the champion of the masses, the campesinos (peasants) who have been used by the Revolution. He believes that such men as Artemio Cruz could not have come to power, to their present position, without having used the lower class people. In other words these people made Cruz what he is--an example of the wealthy upper class in Mexico--yet they remain in poverty. In this regard, then, the Revolution failed. The Revolution did bring about changes such as the growth of the middle class, the return of some land to the poor, and some government reform, but Fuentes believes that its failure also is found in the fact that it ceased to be Revolutionary. Perhaps it is Fuentes' Marxist tendencies which cause him to believe, along with other young intellectuals, that many of the events of 1910 were ineffectual and the "true Revolution" is yet to come, a "goal for the future

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence H. Klibbe, "A Review of The Death of Artemio Cruz," Books Abroad, XXXVII, 1 (winter, 1963), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 194.

of Mexico . . . tinged with Marxist ideals."<sup>12</sup>

Cruz himself realizes at the time of his death that he has betrayed the Revolution. He still feels himself important to Mexico. He feels as though he has not done anything wrong. He gloats in fact over his good fortune:

. . . y le repetirás a Padilla los pasos que integraron esa riqueza. Préstamos a corto plazo y alto interés a los campesinos del estado de Puebla, al terminar la revolución; adquisición de terrenos cercanos a la ciudad de Puebla, previendo su crecimiento; gracias a una amistosa intervención del Presidente en turno, terrenos para fraccionamientos en la ciudad de México . . . .<sup>13</sup>

Fuentes believes that people such as Artemio will always exist in Mexico, as well as in other parts of the world. He sees Artemio not only in his role of young lieutenant during the war, but of an exploiter of the beaten aristocracy and the downtrodden poor. He feels that Artemio has passed through many of the same stages as the country itself and that he is openly facing his destiny, in much the same way that Mexico must face its destiny. "Artemio Cruz. Así se llamaba, entonces el nuevo mundo surgido de la guerra civil; así se llamaban quienes llegaban a sustituirlo."<sup>14</sup>

Artemio himself is nearly a man without a country for he despises the poor and merely uses Mexico as a tool

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<sup>12</sup>Mildred Adams, "The Time of Life Lies Between Paralysis and Frenzy," rev. of Carlos Fuentes, The Death of Artemio Cruz (Farrar, Straus), New York Times Book Review, May 24, 1964, Sec. VII, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

with which to become rich. He is unidealistic in many respects. He was thus while fighting in the war. He fought for something in which he did not believe--certainly very self-demoralizing. Cruz himself says: "Una revolución empieza a hacerse desde los campos de batalla, pero una vez que se corrompe, aunque sigue ganando batallas militares, ya está perdida. Todos hemos sidos responsables."<sup>15</sup>

According to Richard Mark Reeve, Cruz is identified with Mexico's most reactionary president, Plutarco Elías Calles, and with foreign dictators such as Batista and Trujillo. He despises the reform-minded Mexican president, Lázaro Cárdenas.<sup>16</sup> He feels this way because of the fear of losing his holdings and power in Mexico if too many reforms are brought about. He sides with the foreign dictators because of the possibility of gaining or losing holdings in their countries. Artemio has lived and created for the material things in life, even at the expense of the Revolution. His allegiance consequently is to those material things and not to any man who may threaten them.

Besides protesting the betrayal of the Revolution, Fuentes protests the upper class in Mexico City. He has lived and worked in Mexico and has seen the occurrences of which he speaks in the novel. Perhaps during their youth

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>16</sup>Richard Mark Reeve, "The Narrative Technique of Carlos Fuentes, 1954-1964" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967), p. 101.

these young aristocrats like Cruz were idealistic, but their entry into the business world has caused them to be "corrupt, immoral, and hypocritical."<sup>17</sup> Artemio has risen in the business world through bribes and corruption and although he admits the complexity of Mexico's problems, he is not willing to share the guilt for them in his own mind. In one part of the novel he speaks of what will be inherited by those who come after him, and Fuentes does not depict a very pretty picture of Mexico's future:

. . . 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 engomenados, 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 uñas: tengan su México: tengan tu herencia . . . .<sup>18</sup>

Since such a large portion of this novel deals with the Mexican Revolution it is possible to continue citing references to it and to the failures of the upper class. In addition to what has been stated previously, there are several other approaches to the discussion of the Revolution. Fuentes indicates that the Revolution may have been a failure not only because of betrayal and lack of strength of resolve, but also because of the following:

Nos hemos dejado dividir y dirigir por los con-

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>18</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 277.

cupiscentes, los ambiciosos, los mediocres. Los que quieren una revolución de verdad, radical, intransigente, son por desgracia hombres ignorantes y sangrientos. Y los letrados sólo quieren una revolución a medias . . .<sup>19</sup>

In other words, the people who strongly believed in the true revolution were not the intellectuals. They were often uneducated men or semi-educated men who saw wrongs being done and were going to right them in the most effective way they knew. The more educated people had only a partial interest in the Revolution and soon ceased to support it, especially if they had gained materially.

The masses were involved in the fighting much more than any other group, not only because of numbers but also because of the fierceness of their desire for change. Ultimately, these people lost out on many benefits for which they had been fighting:

Lo malo era que la mayor parte de la población andaba en armas y casi todos eran campesinos, de manera que faltaba quien se encargara de aplicar los decretos del general. Entonces era mejor que le quitaran en seguida el dinero a los ricos que quedaban en cada pueblo y esperaran que triunfara la revolución para legalizar lo de las tierras y lo de la jornada de ocho horas.<sup>20</sup>

The people were betrayed also, then, by their own zealousness and their blind faith that the leaders would fulfill the decrees. Fuentes believes that these leaders were neither clever enough nor good enough to do so.

This story does not get too involved with Fuentes' own political beliefs but rather reflects his "strong commit-

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 194-195.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

ments to social reform."<sup>21</sup> Some have gone so far as to state that the writing of Artemio Cruz would not have been possible had it not been for the recent stimulus to reform of the Cuban incident for which Fuentes has great sympathy:

No parece exagerado sugerir que se escribió desde la revolución cubana; que ese enjuiciamiento duro, y esa presentación de conjunto de la revolución mexicana, se ha hecho posible por la presencia en el continente de otro acontecimiento histórico que, estando vinculado a esta última, representa, sin embargo su superación cronológica y sobre todo estructural . . . .<sup>22</sup>

Fuentes' belief that the Revolution has failed and his criticism of the upper class are only two aspects of Mexico which he examines. He sees that many of the problems confronting Mexico today are a result of a poor system of values--not just of the wealthy, but everyone. Don Artemio's saving grace may be that he admits his value scale and believes it is right for him. His value scale would, of course, esteem most highly power and wealth. Others do not necessarily have Artemio's honesty and, while they mouth idealistic philosophical slogans, they are realistically seeking only the same goals: "¿Quién tendrá la honradez de decir, como yo lo digo ahora, que mi único amor ha sido la posesión de las cosas, su propiedad sensual? Eso es lo que quiero."<sup>23</sup> This dishonesty on the part of certain sectors

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<sup>21</sup>Luis Harss and Barbra Dohmann, Into the Mainstream (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 299.

<sup>22</sup>Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Carlos Fuentes y la otra novela de la revolución mexicana," Casa de las Américas, XXVI, 4 (octubre-noviembre, 1964), 126.

<sup>23</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 139.

may be seen in the picture of Mexico in the nineteenth century with "su clero negociante, su perpetuo carnaval político, y su gobierno en deuda permanente . . . ." <sup>24</sup> A corrupt government and a money-hungry, landholding clergy would indeed cause mistrust among the people. Artemio recalls government corruption in the past and present as Fuentes himself must. Small wonder that Artemio feels no remorse for his own actions when he has seen governments corrupted and doing much the same as he does:

El viaje a Sonora lo habrás hecho en automóvil-Volvo 1959, placas DF 712- porque algunos personajes del gobierno habrían pensado ponerse muy pesados y tú deberías recorrer todo ese camino a fin de asegurarte la lealtad de esa cadena de funcionarios a los que has comprado--comprado, sí, no te engañarás con tus palabras de aniversario. <sup>25</sup>

A man like Artemio is not likely to capitulate to a government which has been manipulated for years by wealth and power.

Fuentes sees the Mexican government as being extremely concerned with outside interests which are able to manipulate the government to a certain extent. Men like Artemio are entangled in foreign interests and use their connections to put pressure on high officials:

Sí, sí, sí. Qué bueno que nuestros ideales coinciden con nuestros intereses, ¿verdad que sí? Y otra cosa: hable usted con su embajador, que ejerza presión sobre el gobierno mexicano, que está recién estrenado y medio verdecito todavía. <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 291.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

Artemio finds it easy to associate with North Americans because they represent to him an ideal--a goal of which he hopes he is representative:

. . . admiras su eficacia, sus comodidades, su higiene, su poder, su voluntad y miras a tu alrededor y te parecen intolerables la incompetencia, la miseria, la suciedad, la abulia, la desnudez de este pobre país que nada tiene . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps because of this envy for the United States which Artemio felt, but which Fuentes does not feel because of the corruption he sees here, Artemio wished to avenge himself. For this reason he is ready to take advantage of the North Americans and ready to force them into some kind of surrender to him, thus enriching his own position. What a thrill it must have been for Artemio to be able to bring to submission some magnate representing the "Colossus of the North":

. . . y él sonrió y les ofreció dos vasos con whisky y les dijo que podían explotar el azufre hasta bien entrado el siglo XXI, pero que no lo iban a explotar a él ni un sólo minuto del siglo XX y todos brindaron y los otros sonrieron mientras murmuraban en voz baja s.o.b. una sola vez.<sup>28</sup>

One critic says that of all foreigners portrayed in Fuentes' novels:

. . . the North Americans are undoubtedly portrayed in the worst light . . . . As businessmen in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, they are ruthless in their attempts to exploit the country and are shocked when Artemio wants several million dollars to serve as a frontman . . . .<sup>29</sup>

It must have been shocking to some Yankees to find corruption equal to their own in their Mexican counterpart--and uncom-

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>29</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 135.



fortable for them to find out that Artemio could deal with them in an obstinate way. Even though the United States' interests despised Artemio and he hated them in return, both realized they were doing one another a favor:

. . . compra de acciones mineras y creación de empresas mixtas mexicano-norteamericanas en las que tú figuraste como hombre de paja para cumplir con la ley; hombre de confianza de los inversionistas norteamericanos; intermediario entre Chicago, Nueva York y el gobierno de México; manejo de la bolsa de valores para inflarlos, deprimirlos, vender, comprar a tu gusto y utilidad . . . .<sup>30</sup>

Fuentes goes on to enumerate the rise of Artemio and his interdependence with the hated, yet envied North American.

The North Americans are not the only foreigners with whom Fuentes finds fault. He blames many of Mexico's problems in this novel on the Spaniards. A part of the Mexican make-up--their inability to show their real identities to the world--is blamed on the Spanish heritage: ". . . el nuevo mundo llegó con ellos, con un frente de murallas austeras para proteger el corazón sensual, alegre, codicioso."<sup>31</sup>

Because of the Spanish tendency to hide the real, the Mexicans have never been able to outgrow their own natural introversion. Even in their religion Fuentes finds that the Mexican has been unable to give up his Aztec past and live totally in the Christian world to which he supposedly adheres. The problem is greatest because the Mexican, in Fuentes' eyes, is hypocritical. He denies his own past rather than develop-

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<sup>30</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

ing himself on the basis of it. He pretends to accept the Spanish past. "Dicen que hay un ídolo escondido detrás de cada altar."<sup>32</sup>

The poor Indians have not outlived their heritage while men like Artemio find that Christian ideals as presented in Mexico are not for them. Men like Artemio seem to have the church as hacendado (patron) but do not believe its story. Artemio has created his own religion and finds the presence of the priest at his death bed disturbing. Artemio's religion consists of the powers he has won and the possessions he has received:

. . . Eso sí es ser Dios, ¿eh? ser temido y odiado y lo que sea, eso sí es ser Dios, de verdad, ¿eh? Dígame cómo salvo todo eso y lo dejo cumplir todas sus ceremonias, me doy golpes en el pecho, camino de rodillas hasta un santuario, bebo vinagre y me coronó de espinas. Dígame cómo salvo todo eso, porque el espíritu . . . .<sup>33</sup>

Artemio does not believe that his salvation lies in the traditional religion and neither does Fuentes. He will not find it in Mexico's Indian past because Artemio does not look back. His salvation then must lie in his honesty with himself and the fact that he faces the reality of what his life has been. One important aspect has been that he has looked ahead and relied on himself--the self-made man--even though in doing so he was cheating his countrymen:

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 no

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

había vuelto a mirar hacia atrás. Desde entonces quería saberse solo, sin más fuerzas que las propias.<sup>34</sup>

In this novel, as in La región más transparente, Fuentes speaks with sympathy for the full-blooded Indian of Mexico. Although his emphasis is certainly not on a return to the past, he feels that the Mexican must recognize his past before he can fulfill his destiny. Fuentes champions the Indian and blames many of his problems on the middle and upper class Mexican: "Never once is he (the full-blooded Indian) pictured as a sub-human; in his poverty and suffering his is a stoic noble being."<sup>35</sup> Fuentes has had a full-blooded Indian play a relatively important part in several of his novels: in Las buenas conciencias it was Juan Lorenzo; in La región más transparente it was Ixca and Teódula; in this novel it is Tobías. Tobías is a Yaqui with whom Artemio served in the Army. Tobías not only represents the noble savage, but, again, the person most betrayed by the Revolution. Artemio at first looked upon Tobías as a thing, not a person, until the moment when:

Su mejilla se detuvo junto a la de Tobías y por primera vez, con una fuerza que lo obligó a retirarse, sintió la presencia de ese rostro que nunca había sido más que una plasta oscura, aparte de la tropa, más reconocible en la integridad nerviosa y rápida de su cuerpo guerrero que en esta serenidad, este dolor. Tobías tenía un rostro, él lo vio.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>35</sup>Reeve, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>36</sup>Fuentes, op. cit., p. 187.

It was shortly after this incident that Artemio came to realize the kind of treatment the poor Indians had been receiving. He found that they were fighting not for glory but for land. In Fuentes' opinion the government was deceiving the poor Indians by taking the land from the large landholders and giving it to the North Americans. This is a biased opinion on Fuentes' part as land distribution to the Mexicans, although slow initially, has indeed accelerated through the presidency of Cárdenas and up to the present. Initially, however, the wealthy Mexican got the land and used it in money-making schemes. This is Fuentes' view as expressed through the Indian, Tobías:

--Cuenta cosas. De cómo el bogierno les quitó las tierras de siempre para dárselas a unos gringos. De cómo ellos pelearon para defenderlas y entonces llegó la tropa federal y empezó a cortarles las manos a los hombres y a perseguirlos por el monte. De cómo subieron a los jefes yaquis a un cañonero y desde allí los tiraron al mar cargados de pesas.

El yaqui hablaba con los ojos cerrados . . . .<sup>37</sup>

Passages such as this show sympathy for the Indian, especially in the part of the book in which Tobías helped Artemio escape from the fighting--the Army. Later Artemio turned his back on this sympathy and the Indian for his own gains. He bought up small farms for small amounts of money and used these lands to manipulate himself to even greater wealth. Artemio overlooked the well-being of others for his own. In the words of his Indian over-seer, Ventura: "Yo le

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

guardo su secreto. Yo ya sé que las buenas tierras de don Pizarro ya se las anda usted vendiendo a unos colonos a cambio de lotes allá en Puebla."<sup>38</sup> These are lands which Artemio pressured don Pizarro out of by keeping farmers from using his mill, thus causing him financial difficulties.

Artemio's past and present life have been influenced by women. Fuentes criticizes women in his novels as well as criticizing the way they are treated. There are two women who have the greatest effect on Artemio's life: one is Regina, his lover, and the other, Catalina, his wife. Fuentes sees Regina as the sort of ideal woman who loves a man both spiritually and physically, who supports him and does not use devices to control him.

Catalina, on the other hand has sworn revenge to Artemio for ridding her of her lover Ramón. She is Don Gamaliel's daughter and came to Artemio more as a purchase than as a bride. Her revenge is to not show Artemio any feeling. She makes love to him and bears his children but does not show affection. Catalina may represent to Fuentes the Mexican woman who is merely a front for her husband. She plays the role of the respectful, adoring wife outwardly, while inwardly she shows him no support. Thus, the husband searches for other romantic entanglements. Fuentes shows Catalina, as he shows other women in his novels, kneeling before a crucifix and expending her efforts in the direction

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

of religion rather than her husband and family: "El quedó solo e imaginó, la imaginó de hinojos, frente al crucifijo de marfil, cumpliendo el último acto que la desprendía . . . ."39 Catalina represents the coldness in Artemio's life and, in his death, her only concern is their child and the location of Artemio's will. She cannot concern herself with the manner husband. Hardheartedly she says, "No sabemos si has dejado testamento. Quisiéramos saber dónde . . . ."40

Artemio Cruz is a Mexican in search of self. Even though he is financially powerful, he still inwardly lacks what Fuentes feels many Mexicans lack--self-esteem, self-identity. He thus uses the front of machismo. As in other novels, Fuentes finds fault with the fact that success itself has not been enough for Artemio Cruz. He has had to continue proving to himself that he is macho, not only in his conquests of women such as Lilia and Laura, but also in his business dealings. Artemio does not believe what Fuentes finds to be true--that "the macho is an utter fake."<sup>41</sup> Certainly Artemio is courageous. In Artemio's view:

Pensarás que has hecho tantas cosas cobardes que el valor te resulta fácil. Sonreirás y te dirás que no, no, no es una paradoja: es la verdad y, acaso, hasta una verdad general.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>41</sup>Keith Botsford, "My Friend Fuentes," Commentary, XXXIX, 2 (1965), 65.

<sup>42</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 14.

His courage is not fully developed in his own mind. For this reason he boasts through his macho disguise. His dependency on wealth and his own insecurity keep Artemio from escaping this pretense. Artemio represents the Mexican who saps his own energies by dissimulating his true identity behind the guise of machismo. Fuentes' hero then is a backward one:

. . . existe solamente en sentido inverso, es decir, en el continuo contraste entre el protagonista como es, iluso o desengañado pero desviado en su propósito, en la vida y de su entereza moral, y el héroe que pudo ser.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps this is why Teresa says to the priest who is trying to comfort Artemio in his last moments: "¡Déjelo, Padre, déjelo! No ve que nada podemos hacer. Si es su voluntad condenarse y morir como ha vivido, frío y burlándose de todo . . . ." <sup>44</sup> Artemio seemed cold and mocking because he felt his own inadequacy. His feeling of inadequacy has come because he abandoned the fight in which he had taken part--the Revolution. Not only did he give that up, he built his life around material things rather than on the feeling of fulfillment he may have received from pursuing and helping achieve the goals of the Revolution. Thus it is too late for Artemio Cruz to either contribute to the Mexican people by upholding the Revolutionary ideals or to find his own self-worth through the knowledge of his contribution. That is why

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<sup>43</sup>Peter J. Barle, "Camino oscuro: La novela hispano-americana contemporánea," Cuadernos Americanos, CLII, 3 (mayo-junio, 1967), 211.

<sup>44</sup>Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, p. 56.

Artemio's death is his only fulfillment: "Su salvación, al contrario, ha sido su muerte. Lo importante en la vida de Artemio Cruz es lo que pudo haber sido; es lo que puede ser el pueblo mexicano."<sup>45</sup>

Thus Fuentes does have hope for the Mexican people. Artemio represents Mexico, and the protests in this novel--against the betrayal and failure of the Revolution, against the mistreatment of the Indian, against the interminable exercise of machismo complex, against the vested foreign interests, against the role which many women have assumed in Mexican life--are those which Fuentes hopes modern Mexicans will hear. He hopes that they will change those conditions which are mutable. He feels that a new Revolution would benefit if the Mexican would understand what Fuentes feels happened as a result of the Revolution of 1910.

In the subsequent chapter some of the same kinds of protest and others will be examined in relation to another of Fuentes' novels, Gambio de piel. Fuentes' interest in modern Mexico as it is contrasted with Cortés' Mexico is analyzed in this novel. One result of this interest is Fuentes' view of the Spanish heritage and the effect it has had on the Mexican mentality today. As in the present chapter, Fuentes' interest in the search for lo mexicano and the role of women is examined.

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<sup>45</sup>Donald Moody Logan, "El concepto nacional en las novelas de Carlos Fuentes" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1965), p. 69.



## Chapter 4

### CAMBIO DE PIEL

The sixth novel of Carlos Fuentes, Cambio de piel (Change of Skin), is considered by some to be his most significant.<sup>1</sup> Again Fuentes employs many interesting techniques in his writing. Among these are flashbacks, historical sequences, myths, slogans, advertisements and music. All of these form a mosaic which requires, to say the least, extremely concentrated reading. According to Fuentes he was attempting to fit into the modern style of bombarding your audience. He says of this novel: "Quisiera que Cambio de piel se leyese, como dice McLuhan, que se integra una imágen de televisión, a razón de tres millones de estímulos por segundo."<sup>2</sup>

The four protagonists in this story are Javier, Elizabeth (called Dragona), Franz and Isabel. They live in Mexico City and are enroute to Vera Cruz. Due to malicious mischief done to their car, they are forced to spend the night of April 19, 1965, in Cholula. Their adventures con-

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<sup>1</sup>George R. MacMurray, "Cambio de piel, an Existentialist Novel of Protest," Hispania, LII, 1 (March, 1969), 150.

<sup>2</sup>José Miguel Ullán, "Un salto mortal hacia el futuro," Insula, XXII, 245 (abril, 1967), 13.

cern the area around Cholula in the past and present. The entire book deals with the thoughts, feelings, actions and passions of these people as narrated by one slightly insane taxi driver named Freddy Lambert. Freddy is "an aging nihilist, a middle-age beatnik, a rebel without a cause who is pushing forty."<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth is a Jewess who married Javier approximately twenty years before and is now concerned with the disappearance of her former ardent love and passion. Javier, who feels himself a failure, at one time published a volume of Mexican poetry, but has since resigned himself to writing reports for the United Nations. His only claim to fame is the poetry, and he constantly refers to it. Franz is a Sudeten German with a guilty conscience. He aided the Nazis during World War II as an architect and designed concentration camps and the ovens which were used to kill the Jews. Isabel is a young woman of the world, openly defying her wealthy parents. She is searching for meaningful experiences that may round out her character. Freddy has followed them to Cholula. In his company are six American hippies called the Monks. As the narrator, Freddy leads the reader through the lives of the four main protagonists.

Fuentes received the Premio Biblioteca Breve for this novel in 1967. To some, the awarding of this prize to Fuentes for this novel was an error. One reason may be that

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<sup>3</sup>Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 309.

Cambio de piel represents another step away from the traditional Latin American novel. To one harsh critic of Fuentes and of the Premio itself, the novel is definitely a step away from perfection in literary form:

No dejemos de señalar que sobresale por el babelismo idiomático empleado por su autor. En efecto, contiene esta novela nada menos que 12<sup>4</sup> líneas completas en inglés, 22 en latín, 19 en francés, 9 en italiano, y 3<sup>4</sup> en alemán, amén de mexicanismos y argentinismos . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Fuentes has chosen the title Cambio de piel for a very good reason. He is drawing an analogy between the need for man to change his reactions according to the reality in which he lives, much as a chameleon changes his color according to his surroundings. He is showing the need for Mexico to rid itself of the rotten, the useless, the decayed existence to make room for a new Mexico and the changes which must accompany it. His "changes of skin" include not only philosophical and psychological changes, but also physical changes. Fuentes, through his use of flashbacks and intermingling of events, says this of the story:

Preferiría hablar de un trayecto, sí, de una circunvalación en la que el paso histórico de la cacería medieval de las brujas a la cacería moderna de los judíos, o el paso físico del agora de Delos a un cuarto de baño de hotel, quisieron decir que el uno vale el otro, en el sentido de contaminarse, reactivarse.<sup>5</sup>

Cambio de piel operates as a vehicle for social protest of many kinds. It particularly is a vehicle for Fuentes

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<sup>4</sup>Ignacio Iglesias, "Novelas y novelistas de hoy," Nuevo Mundo, XXVIII (octubre, 1968), 88.

<sup>5</sup>Ullán, op. cit., p. 13.

to criticize Mexico itself. The story opens with a description of Cholula as it was when Cortés entered it compared to its condition on April 11, 1965. Cholula was an important city for it was the site of the seven-layered pyramids to the Aztec Gods. The reader first sees a picture of misery in Cholula as it is today:

Pero alrededor de ellos, en estas calles polvosas, sólo pululaba una población miserable: mujeres de rostros oscuros, envueltas en rebozos, descalzas, embarazadas. Los vientres enormes y los perros callejeros eran los signos vivos de Cholula este domingo 11 de abril de 1965. Los perros sueltos que corrían en bandas, sin raza, escuálidos, amarillos, negros, desorientados, hambrientos, babeantes, que corrían por todas las calles, rascándose, sin rumbo, hurgando en las acequias que después de todo ni desperdicios tenían: estos perros con ojos que pertenecían a otros animales . . . .<sup>6</sup>

The misery of Cholula today is contrasted violently with the kind of misery which Cortés saw on his arrival in the same city:

Desde el caballo, Hernán Cortés apreciaba los baldíos y aguas donde se podría criar ganados pero mira también, a su alrededor, la multitud de mendigos que corren de casa en casa, de mercado en mercado, de muchedumbre descalza, cubierta de harapos contrahecha, que extiende las manos, masca los elotes podridos, es seguida por la jauría de perros hambrientos . . . .<sup>7</sup>

Fuentes is directing his protest at two aspects of Mexico's psychology today. One aspect is that in every area towns are recognized on the basis of their importance to Mexico's past, rather than on some other merit. Secondly,

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<sup>6</sup> Carlos Fuentes, Cambio de piel (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

he emphasizes the fact that Cortés saw exactly what our four travelers see four hundred and fifty years later. He feels that is a sad commentary on progress and makes many references to the fact that the lower class people often are without teeth, their stomachs swollen from malnutrition, there are flies everywhere and dogs in the slums lead about the same life as the people. Fuentes carries this over to his description of the poor sections in Mexico City also. He is saying in essence that all of the cities are faced with the same problems and are not succeeding in remedying the situation.

The Mexican today, according to the author, is the hijo de la chingada (the son of the violated one). This makes reference to the fact that Doña Marina, or Malinche, the Indian woman, became Cortés' woman and, by helping him with information, hastened the Aztec defeat by Cortés:

Una vieja desdentada penetra en el aposento de los españoles y aparta a Marina. Le ofrece escapar con vida de la venganza de Moctezuma . . . . Marina agradece . . . y llega hasta Cortés. Revela lo que sabe.<sup>8</sup>

Octavio Paz discusses this name in his book The Labyrinth of Solitude where he says that the expression refers to "strangers, or bad Mexicans,"<sup>9</sup> yet he goes on to say that all Mexicans merit this name because they are "sons of Eve."<sup>10</sup>

Fuentes examines the fate of the Mexican and finds

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>9</sup>Octavio Paz, Labyrinth of Solitude (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

that his problem is one of having bemoaned his Spanish heritage as well as the loss of his Aztec background. Fuentes believes that it is time for modern Mexico to cease looking to its past for justification of his modern situation (especially if his situation is bad). He believes that the Mexican must accept his past and change his current situation since he cannot change history:

¿O de veras cree alguien que hubiera sido mejor derrotar a los españoles y continuar sometidos al facismo azteca? Cuauhtémoc era el Baldur von Shirach de Tenochtitlán. Más sabias que él, las mujeres indias se dejaron hacer. Cólera eterna para la fatalidad: hemos regresado.<sup>11</sup>

As a modern Mexican and a man of the world Fuentes views Mexico realistically, at times as more of an outsider than a native son. He comes to some sad conclusions about its strengths and weaknesses. There can be no doubt that Fuentes loves his country, appreciates it, but wants to strengthen it. Fuentes sees that Mexicans feel the need to compensate for something which they think is lacking:

Javier miró hacia las nubes veloces: el cielo mexicano que es y debe ser hermoso para compensar un poco, como tu insistente mar griego, Elizabeth: hay tierras que dejadas a sus propias fuerzas, no durarían un día: necesitan el espejo del cielo--México--o del mar--Grecia.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that Fuentes is saying that in Mexico the sun shines in sympathy for what it sees--the poverty, hunger and filth. The beauty of the country itself cannot hide the

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<sup>11</sup>Fuentes, Cambio de piel, p. 415.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-37.

situation.

His critical journalistic ability is able to analyze the Mexican not only historically, but also socially, psychologically and sexually. As Elizabeth, who is fondly called "Dragona" by the narrator, says to Franz one day during a love-making scene;

Me gusta hacer cochinas en México. Me imagino la cara de todos estos hipócritas . . . ¿Sabes que la abuelita de Javier hacía el amor con un camisero que tenía un agujero bordado? Y ella y el abuelo, antes de amarse, se hincaban frente a una veladora y decían un versito que me enseñó Javier . . . "No es por vicio, no es por fornicio, es por hacer un hijo en tu santo servicio" . . . Te digo que es el país más morboso y falsamente puritano del mundo.<sup>13</sup>

Fuentes is demonstrating the hypocrisy of the old order, of the old morality. Through Elizabeth he discusses his attitudes about sex, about the modern Mexican and machismo, and the place of woman in society today. As defined by Octavio Paz, "one word sums up the aggressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability and other attributes of the macho: power . . . . He opens the world; in doing so, he rips and tears it . . . ."<sup>14</sup> Fuentes' interest in machismo in Cambio de piel is different than in La muerte de Artemio Cruz and La región más transparente. There he protested against what the Mexican believes should be lo mexicano and his conception of machismo as an important part of that. Fuentes felt that machismo was detrimental to the Mexican. Here he links machismo with a kind of homosexuality:

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup>Paz, op cit., p. 81.

En el fondo los machos mexicanos son onanistas. Si pudieran hacerse el amor a sí mismos, lo harían. 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 [sic] son las enchiladas con cold cream, como dice un cuate mío.<sup>15</sup>

Along the same lines Fuentes is able to find fault with the Mexican woman, partially because of her direct relationship with La Malinche, but also because of the position to which she allows herself to be relegated. This position, although powerful in some respects, forces her to take a lesser position outwardly to the man. As a consequence, this is damaging to both the man and woman. Her self-esteem suffers in situations such as that of Catalina in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. He suffers because he feels himself impotent to a certain extent and to overcome this must make a show of power--machismo.

Las mujeres aquí hacen creer que son dominadas . . . --Y son ellas las que dominan. Creo que las mujeres mexicanas han inventado el mito del machismo para regañar a los hombres . . . Para compensarlos de su sometimiento a la madre, la mujer, las esposas devoradoras que imponen sus valores femininos, los únicos valores que dominan en México.<sup>16</sup>

Many of Mexico's problems, according to Fuentes, go directly to the fact that Mexico is matriarchal and that el macho is a myth fed to the men like candy to make them feel inferior when in reality they may not be. Fuentes is saying here that men are puppets run by women. In this novel he

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<sup>15</sup>Fuentes, Cambio de piel, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 180.



implies that women in Mexico have maintained their position not on the basis of merit, but on the basis of myth. This myth must be dissipated before the Mexican man can ever attain his goal. This ideal may be true strength or it may be mastering his own soul instead of the mask of machismo.

Along with sexual hypocrisy and a disproportionate belief in machismo, Fuentes finds that the Mexican is too subservient to his fellow men. The Mexican seems to, again, be offering an excuse for some deficiency for which he feels he must compensate. Through Elizabeth, the Jewess from the United States, this becomes apparent:

La detestable cortesía que esa noche noté por primera vez, cuando tocaste la puerta de la recámara con los nudillos: el eterno "¿se puede?", como si temieras sorprenderme, o iniciaras la ronda de tu primera novia, sobre todo como si quisieras halagarme con un respeto que nunca te pedí . . . todo era parte de esta cortesía decorativa, monótona, con la que ustedes aman establecer contrastes para su eventual brutalidad . . . .<sup>17</sup>

The courtesy dissimulates the brutality of the macho, the violator. Both the subservient attitude and the brutal one are psychological cover-ups for some feeling of inadequacy on the part of the Mexican, according to Fuentes.

Fuentes feels that the Mexican has not advanced in his social growth because his cover-ups cause people to be uneasy around him. They fear that he is being dishonest in his dealings. Consequently Fuentes feels that foreigners view the Mexican people suspiciously. Fuentes says that this judgment by others has caused repression in the Mexican's

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 134-135.

social growth (the Narrator speaks):

. . . como si estos millones de seres oscuros, con su pasividad intolerable, con su violencia atroz, con sus sonrisas sin alegría, con su tristeza a carcajadas, brutal, rencorosa, fueran todos adivinos, magos que sonríen con ironía ofensiva al darse cuenta, en un simple encuentro callejero, en un simple cruce de miradas, de alguna muerte mezquina, de algún destino tan sombrío como el de ellos que cargan en su mirada, en sus manos callosas, en sus labios gruesos, tantos siglos de humillación y de venganzas frustradas.<sup>18</sup>

Fuentes believes that the Mexican philosophy has much to do with its problems today. Not only does he believe (as shown in La región más transparente and La muerte de Artemio Cruz) that there is an oppressive interest in the identification of la mexicanidad and the struggle to attain machismo, but also that Mexican's have an overwhelming preoccupation with death. Fuentes believes that this prevents them from living a full life. He displays his ideas in this area in Cambio de piel in a scene in which Elizabeth and Javier are returning home after a party and come upon a cadaver. This body is of a Mexican student with his face in a pool of blood and a knife in his stomach. The following quote emphasizes that too much importance is given to death:

. . . que su muerte era el hecho más . . . importante de su vida. Seguro, dragona. Cómo asesinar, o ser asesinado, era hacerse parte de un bien, de un valor que esa otra vida, la de la respiración y la digestión y el movimiento, no le habían procurado.<sup>19</sup>

Fuentes is criticizing the fact that death, to many Mexicans is the easy way out. He reaffirms this in another part of

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

the novel by implying that fear of living prevents many Mexicans from succeeding in their lives. As Javier says, "Somos tiesos, pero por puritito terror."<sup>20</sup> For Fuentes, many Mexicans are the living dead because they accomplish little and spend their time awaiting the inevitable.

Later in the novel Fuentes again speaks of death in Mexico as the desired and successful end to life for the Mexican and therefore a drain on his will to achieve. He is inflicted with a sense of hopelessness:

Esperas que el fracaso te aplaste, pero no que el éxito te mate. La chingada te da las dos cosas. El fracaso si te atreves a seguir vivo y la recompensa si te dejas matar. México es una nuez, para que me entiendas. Y nada más porque es el único país que no ha matado a sus dioses. Todos, hasta los cristianos los mataron para poder adorarlos. Sólo aquí andan sueltos, burlándose, poniéndolo todo de cabeza, haciendo héroes de los traidores y paradigmas de los rateros.<sup>21</sup>

Fuentes protests that the Mexican manner of speaking is reminiscent of a desire to keep the truth hidden. The art of dissimulation in language is used not only by the macho, as stated before, but by others in an effort to hide the truth. To some this language maneuver has seemed courtesy, but to Fuentes it is a flaw. Language is a result of the total way of life and reflects again that the Mexican is afraid to live in the open and to face the present or future candidly. His language like his philosophy turns inward:

Entonces el idioma se vuelve a entender, las alusiones, los chistes, esa manera de hablar sin referirse directamente a las cosas, como si todo

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

quemara la lengua, todo fuese prohibido y secreto y necesitara ser emboscado por palabras lejanas porque la palabra directa es peligrosa y exige su amortiguador, su diminutivo, su albur.<sup>22</sup>

Fuentes shows that the Mexican speaks around what he wants to say, even to the point of telling jokes about serious issues and changing names and references in order to obscure.

Fuentes uses the character of Ofelia, Javier's mother, to demonstrate the innate desire of the Mexican to maintain a facade to the real world--again a Mexican custom which Fuentes identifies as traditional. Ofelia exemplifies this in the following way:

La mujer de cincuenta años con rostro de niña compungida le diría después que nada importaba sino esa decisión de mantener las cosas aunque sólo una apariencia estuviese a nuestro alcance:--no ibas a andar por ahí en una escuela de gobierno, sin preparación para la vida, sin modales. No.<sup>23</sup>

For Fuentes Mexico is filled with many Ofelias--those who attempt to perform the old rituals as if nothing has changed. He feels that the Mexican is afraid to remove his facade, afraid to face up to the good and bad of his heritage, and even more afraid to face his many possibilities for the future. This native is a wandering soul, borrowing ideas and not appreciating his own culture or willing to live with his own heritage:

México es una máscara. No tiene otro sentido este país. Sirve para ocultarnos del mundo de lo que dejamos atrás. Ah, dragona, este sólo es un lugar de exilio para los extraños, no una casa propia . . . Tú también eres prisionera del país. Tan prisionera y tan enamorada

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

ya de tu máscara, que si se rompiese, la luz te cegaría.<sup>24</sup>

Religion has played an important role in Mexico in the past and its role has been changing more and more in recent years. Catholicism is the predominant religion of Mexico's inhabitants today. Since the Mexican Revolution, Catholicism has played a more diminishing part in Mexican life. In Cambio de piel Fuentes discusses religion in contemporary society. Religion today in Mexico bears little resemblance to the Roman Catholicism brought by the Spaniards. It is not the orthodox authoritarian religion of old and modern youth no longer follow the teachings of the old church. One reason may be that the church has failed to change recently. It has become stagnant. Consequently, people are turning to more unorthodox expressions of faith or are simply failing to express their faith. Fuentes criticizes the church for having lost its appeal:

¿Qué tal si el güerito J.C., nuestro primer rebeldazo, hace las paces con Roma y los fariseos y se dedica a jugar el tute con Iscariote como en una película de nuestro mero Buñuelos o le entra al comercial jabonero con Pilatus Procter & Gamble? Lo que no le reconocen al Güero claveteado es que fue el primer sicópata, el primer tipo verdaderamente désordenado de la historia, que hoy andaría moto y en moto y bailarí watusi no más para darle en la chapa a los beatos . . . .<sup>25</sup>

Fuentes thus indicates that it is fairly difficult for religion to present its case to the people, especially the youth when it has been unwilling to come to any kind of reckoning

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

with the demands of modern life. He says that religion has lost touch with its own reality and its own purposes. It is not human and fails to communicate with the people.

Fuentes reaffirms this feeling of stagnation in other modern institutions. In his opinion, one such institution in Mexico is the P.R.I. (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). In the United States, he feels such a problem is found in the Presidency and a large portion of the government:

Imaginate 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.<sup>26</sup>

Fuentes is saying that Jesus Christ and other people who have desired change, perhaps including himself, are found undesirable. They want to change existing institutions but many people involved with the institutions resist, while clinging to the status quo. In this particular paragraph, Fuentes may be referring not only to the governmental aspect but also back to the Revolution and his desire to see a re-birth.

Fuentes also seems to be saying that one problem with the Catholic church and with other institutions is that they have not constantly had people criticizing them--heretics--and this has caused the stagnation:

Te digo que una ortodoxia es tan fuerte y tan débil como las heterodoxias que tratan de ponerla caliente.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Un dogma sin herejía no es tal dogma . . . .<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the other criticisms Fuentes makes through this novel, he again touches upon the Mexican Revolution. While Cambio de piel does not concern itself to a great extent with the Revolution per se, it does attempt to draw a parallel between the tragedy which Fuentes believes has occurred in Mexico and the tragedy at Auschwitz.<sup>28</sup>

. . . --Hace quince años era una ciudad divertida . . . . It was a brash, sentimental, low-down world. --Fíjate que era lo último que quedaba de la revolución, antes de que se adecentara--¿Sigues creyendo que la revolución fue traicionada? --Sí, pero sólo porque es inevitable . . . . Una revolución destruye un statu quo y crea otro.<sup>29</sup>

Fuentes believes that although the Revolution brought about some change it also brought with it another status quo which lulled many people into inaction.

Thus in this chapter Fuentes' criticism of various social and political institutions has been discussed. Other aspects of Mexican life have been dealt with in Cambio de piel and in this thesis. They include the Mexican search for what is lo mexicano and the place of religion in Mexico today. The final chapter reviews the content of the protests found in La región más transparente, La muerte de Artemio and Cambio de piel.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>28</sup>Norman Joseph Luna, "In the Land of Xipe Topec" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Colorado, 1969), p. 86.

<sup>29</sup>Fuentes, Cambio de piel, pp. 162-163.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have dealt with various aspects of social protest in three of Carlos Fuentes' major novels, La región más transparente, La muerte de Artemio Cruz and Cambio de piel. All three of these novels deal with Mexico and its problems and weaknesses as well as its strengths and virtues. Each novel is from a slightly different time period although the time span in reality is only slightly less than a decade. Each novel deals in its own special way with the criticisms which Fuentes makes.

In the discussion of La región más transparente, it was pointed out that Fuentes chose his title because he sees Mexico City clouded by any number of social ills. He has used explicit descriptions of the various social types of Mexico City to make his point. In his protest of the class situation in Mexico, he also lets it be known that in his eyes the Revolution has been betrayed. Several of the various social types are held responsible for this betrayal: the "Mad Social" and the "Brutal Business" especially are to blame.

In this novel Fuentes criticizes the conditions in which the poor live. He has found too large a contrast



between the middle class and the poor and has made an effort to expose this to the reader. The poor Indian in particular has been forced to put on a mask in order to survive. His survival depends on the renewal or rebirth of revolutionary ideals and the fulfillment of these ideals by the people of all classes. It calls for the Mexican people to dispense with the existing class structure and work as a group for the betterment of the country and each other.

Fuentes feels that Mexico needs to recognize and identify with its past in order to be stronger in the future. He refers especially to the fact that the Indian must not be denied. In not denying any facet of the population, he hopes that the entire country will benefit from a feeling of commonweal.

Keeping this in mind, Fuentes arrives at the conclusion that Mexico would also benefit if it did not mimic foreign nations. In particular he refers to the United States as a country which the Mexican should wisely not emulate. His reasons are many but especially he feels that the United States has passed its apogee and is in a decline. Why then would a country like Mexico want to follow its pattern? Fuentes feels that the country loses its mexicanidad by copying other nations. The greatest improvement for Mexico, according to Fuentes, would be for it to grow in its own special fashion, copying no one.

In this novel Fuentes has criticized Mexico City for being a stronghold of violence and filth. He feels the City

fosters many social problems and causes stagnation in the social climate.

La región más transparente has dealt principally with the City, its people and their social problems and their lack of concern with the Revolution.

In his second novel, La muerte de Artemio Cruz, Fuentes discusses some of the same aspects of Mexico, but in a different way. His greatest criticism in this novel is of Artemio. Artemio is the symbol of the wealthy businessman who profited from the Revolution, thus betraying it. He not only looked to the United States for his model, but consorted with businessmen from the United States in his own attempt at wealth. Men like Artemio are to be criticized because of their lack of concern for the poor, especially the Indian. Artemio's only thought is to preserve his own wealth.

This novel also reflects Fuentes' sympathy for the Cuban movement and social reform. He finds that the middle and upper classes did their share to destroy the progress which the Revolution was making. He feels that it is difficult for people to have faith in a government which is chosen by the monied of the country.

North Americans are Artemio's ideal because of the way they live. He admires the cleanliness and the costliness of North American life. He also admires the way North Americans maneuver with wealth and power. His admiration has lead him to emulation of the businessmen from the United States with whom he deals. Fuentes has not found this a

virtue. The ultimate success for Artemio goes a step beyond imitation. It is his success in outsmarting these same men.

The Mexican tendency to introversion and dissimulation is criticized by Fuentes. A part of this introversion is the denial by the Mexican of the value of his Indian past. Fuentes feels that most Mexicans attempt to ignore their heritage because they are living in a modern society which disclaims this heritage. The Mexicans are often so intense in their desire to hide their heritage that they even deny their own family ties. Artemio has done this even though the Indians in his past have been helpful to him.

Women play an important role in these three novels of Fuentes'. Not only are the women characters important but the points made by Fuentes are critical. According to Fuentes' representation of women in these books, they have been enclosed by tradition in a role which is as fruitless for them as it is for the people they affect. Mexican women devote too much time to the Church. The energy which is not directed toward religion is used for maintaining a facade. Little effort is used for their own development and the amplification of their place in society.

While women are involved in their own type of role-playing, Mexican men use machismo as a crutch. They attempt to hide any weakness or defect through a show of machismo. It protects the insecure and weak with the guise of strength and brutality. This protection keeps the Mexican static in society and prevents him from discovering his true self or

the real lo mexicano. Artemio Cruz has relied on this dissimulation throughout his life.

Fuentes' protests in his third novel, Cambio de piel, have followed his previous trends. In this novel, in particular, he has criticized the unending existence of a great deal of poverty in Mexico. He points out that even in the most modern cities huge slum areas are found and are not effectively dealt with. He links this to the inability of the Mexican to "change his skin" and keep pace with modern times.

In this novel he has dealt with the hypocrisy of the old order and the old morality. Machismo is dealt with as a sort of homosexuality. He infers that the Mexican woman is in part to blame for the preoccupation with machismo. Both sexes assume false roles outwardly and, consequently, the self-esteem of each sex suffers. In the same vein Fuentes talks of the subservient attitude of many Mexicans. This pose also alters the self-concept and frequently is a facade for violence. These two hypocritical aspects have hindered the Mexican social development.

The Mexican preoccupation with death is seen by Fuentes as the choice of the "easy way out." He shows that many Mexicans willingly give up their lives because they feel there are too many obstacles to overcome in life. This distorted concern may relate to the continuing presence of poverty and great class distinction because it deters progress in overcoming these problems. Manifestations of this

prepossession are suicides, homicides and alcoholism as depicted in each of these three novels.

Those who do not turn to death as their escape may look to religion. Fuentes criticizes Catholicism in Mexico and in today's society in general for not keeping pace with the current culture. He shows that in his estimation traditional religious institutions do not have much to offer to a person living in the last half of the twentieth century and as a result the youth, in particular, turn away from them.

Carlos Fuentes is recognized throughout the Spanish-speaking world as an author of unusual talent. As stated before, his books are published in other languages. His name is mentioned simultaneously with other well-known Mexican and Latin American authors such as Arreola, Castellanos and Márquez. Critics in Latin America and Spain generally have praised highly or scorned his works. He is recognized in his own country as a part of the vanguard of novelists who deal effectively with the problems of Mexican society:

Después de Arreola y Rulfo, y emergiendo del último grupo de narradores--Rosario Castellanos, Josefina Vicens, Luis Spota, Sergio Galindo, Jorge López Fdez--el más notable es Carlos Fuentes (1929) . . . . Zambullido en las corrientes de la novela experimental, de Joyce y Faulkner en adelante, Fuentes representa los procesos mentales de sus múltiples personajes y entrecruza las series de acontecimientos.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States he has been given special atten-

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<sup>1</sup>Enrique Anderson Imbert, Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana, II (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 1961), pp. 335-336.

tion also because of his innovations in technique and subject matter. From the time his works first appeared he has been considered one of the most notable exponents of the new Latin American novel.

Fuentes is a very gifted author. His novel reflects the confusion of Mexican society and the chaotic soul of the Mexican, whose conscious mind quivers in a world of continuous change while his subconscious is fixed in a profundity of myths and superstitions.<sup>2</sup>

He has been the subject of numerous articles and dissertations in the United States again because of his treatment of Mexican social problems in a unique fashion:

A esta época actual pertenece Carlos Fuentes, el novelista más destacado y el mejor representativo de los sentimientos progresivos del México actual.<sup>3</sup>

Fuentes therefore has a widespread reputation as an author of novels of social protest and as one who is unafraid to counter traditional literary trends with innovative techniques.

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<sup>2</sup>Arturo Torres-Rioseco, Aspects of Spanish American Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup>Antonio Pages Larraya, "Tradición y renovación en la novela hispanoamericana," Mundo Nuevo, Num. 34 (abril, 1969), 24.

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