

## A COMPARATIVE RE-EVALUATION OF CARLOS FUENTES' *LA MUERTE DE ARTEMIO CRUZ* AND NORMAN MAILER'S *WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?*

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Two of my favorite novels from the 60's —era of social protest, consciousness-raising, and change in both the U.S. and Mexico— were Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). Both novels were well received in their respective cultures by liberal intellectuals who applauded the projected anti-establishment political perspectives. *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* enjoyed six reprintings before 1970, and its first English translation was published in 1964. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* had six editions before the end of the war in 1973, and its first Spanish translation was published in 1971.

The readers in both cultures (in particular those of the university campuses) were obsessed during that era by political causes: in Mexico, rupturing the stagnant and monopolistic power position of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (in power since 1929 as Partido Nacional Revolucionario, since 1937 as Partido Revolucionario Mexicano, and since 1946 under its present name); in the U.S., ending their government's imperialistic involvement in Vietnam (since 1945, but officially since 1964). These two novels, written by two already acclaimed writers, echoed the new intellectual voice with innovative and dynamic literary techniques.

The response in traditional academic circles to this new wave of "politically relevant" novels was guarded. To judge the quality of these novels (apart from their overwhelming reception), they said, would require the conservative and safe test of time —the same test presumably applied to Shakespeare's and Cervantes' works. Doubtless, it was in this context that one critic allegedly asked Fuentes if he thought his novel would still be read in 200 years. Fuentes' alleged response was "I hope not" —a response we can assume Mailer would have made to the same question— hoping that their novels would inspire a consciousness strong enough that history would no longer require these particular criticisms.

Twenty years have passed —a bit short of 200, but sufficient I think to make an initial assessment of the impact created on the respective histories by these two

once-popular novels. Of course the U.S. is no longer in Vietnam, but it is in Nicaragua; and the PRI is approaching new elections from a still healthy advantage. Have these novels had no importance in the collective political consciousness of the post-60's era? Mailer's novel is all but forgotten, and Fuentes' 60's masterpiece seems to be more highly esteemed now in the U.S. and Europe than among Mexican intellectuals. Rather than conclude that literature does not affect history, I would like to re-think these two works and see if their artistic perspective in the context of time reveals any shortcomings in the 60's revolutionary mood.

The two novels, in addition to thematic similarities, have corresponding technical similarities that may be an important index to the point of view underlying all other elements.

The narrative structures of both Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* are based in a play of multiple narrative voices or perspectives which coax the reader away from marking a quick positive identification of the narrator, but which ultimately prove to be one perspective —the protagonist's— in direct communication with the reader.

Mailer's protagonist/narrator, D. J., comes on strong as the Disk Jockey of America<sup>1</sup> broadcasting from Dallas "to tell you (reader) what it's all about". His dialect is hip 60's, obscene, and disrespectful of America's national images. The narration then jumps to an omniscient third person form as it relates a scene —description and conversation— between D. J.'s mother and her psychoanalyst. Again the language is obscene, hip 60's, disrespectful, but also it takes on traits of Southern and Texas dialect as the two, along with the omniscient narrator, present a verbal collage of Texas heritage, discuss D. J.'s father, D. J.'s friends, and D. J. But in a few more pages, the omniscient narrator condescendingly announces that he is D. J. and that he's put one over on the reader (who should have recognized him from the language, since his mother is a Southern lady and "she don't talk that way"). The pattern is repeated, the language flits from hip 60's to Spanish to Black dialect, all the while obscene and obviously D. J. who again teases the reader that maybe he isn't who he said he was (son of a Texas corporation executive), but a Black from Harlem "pretending to write a white man's book". Just when his crediointy as a reliable narrator is waning, he makes a last brief play to ask the reader if he can be sure he is really reading, etcetera, and moves on to relatively straight third-person narration for the remaining three-fourths of the novel. But, still, any illusion of objectivity is denied by the narrator's brief introduction to each chapter, designed to set the reader's mind to a prejudiced perspective.

Fuentes' protagonist is presented from a three-way perspective, "yo", "tú", and "él", and all are Artemio Cruz. The narration begins from inside the protagonist's consciousness, in first person narration, and the reader is made to share the intense self-awareness —both physical and intellectual— which characterizes Artemio's

<sup>1</sup> Mailer's and his protagonist's use of "America" meaning the United States is an appropriate metaphor for the attitude that allows the usurpation of the entire hemisphere by one nation.

dying moments. In this section, his self-pity is exceeded only by his desire to survive, as he has for 67 years, at the expense of everyone else in his career. The "tú" narration which follows appears to be an omniscient voice examining, from a somewhat more objective perspective, the reality surrounding the protagonist and the ideological context in which occurred the decisions and events of his life. The tone is accusatory, reminding Artemio of the contradictions between his actions and the ideals he championed. The "él" narration takes the more traditional detached perspective of an omniscient storyteller, and relates with chronological attention the relationships and historical sequence from the protagonist's birth to the moment of his death. In this perspective, narrative judgement is suspended, and the reader is forced to participate, forming his/her own. The technique, "yo", "tú", "él", "yo", "tú", "él", etcetera, is repeated throughout the narrative, pulling the reader in and out, from empathy for the protagonist to disgust, again to empathy, etcetera, and at the moment of death recalling the three perspectives into one: "...si él soy yo ...si tú fue él...si yo soy los tres..." And the reader is denied an independent perspective.

In Fuentes' narrative as well as in Mailer's the reader's attention has been manipulated between following what seemed for one moment an amorphous omniscient narrator who controlled both the action and the perspective and the next moment following a single narrator whose conclusive identity embodies and speaks for all the perspectives. In both novels the result is the same. The pretense at multiple perspective proves illusory and ultimately reduces to one. Furthermore, by the use of "you" in both narratives the implied reader is drawn into the communication. Whether it's D.J. calling the U.S. reader "Asshole" or Artemio Cruz calling the Mexican reader his brother in "la orden de la chingada", the effect is that the protagonist has assumed omniscience, and the reader's perspective, too, has been pre-empted.

The reader is drawn into the narrative not only technically but also historically. The actions of both narratives are deeply rooted in the historical circumstances of which they are a product. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* addresses itself in the title to the important historical question of the 60's, but ironically does not directly mention the issue again. Instead, D. J.'s narration focuses on his experiences on a hunting expedition to Alaska. Vietnam as an issue remains subliminal, but the association will reveal itself as the narrative develops.

On a symbolic level, hunting is made the U. S. expression of power as the hunter demonstrates with sophisticated guns his technological superiority over nature and other men. An entire chapter ("Chap Five") is devoted to the description of the guns and equipment bought by the hunters: D. J.'s executive father and his friends Pete and Bill, D. J. and friend Tex, and the guides. The guns correspond appropriately to the hunter's social status. While Rusty (D. J.'s father, "the cream of corporate corporateness") has a "404 Jeffrey on a Mauser Magnum action with a Circassian Walnut Stock... a custom job by Beisen with Zeiss Zielklein 2 X on Griffin 8 Howe side mount...", etcetera, the others have a borrowed, a factory-made, or a remade gun. Pete, an overeager management assistant, when invited by executive Rusty,

sold his Jaguar XKE and some stocks and bought a gun big enough for “African rhinoceros-hippo-elephant...”, expensive but inappropriately pretentious for this expedition. The strategy for tagging a bear was hired from “Big Luke Fellinka and his assistant Ollie the Indian Water Beaver”, the exclusive Alaskan hunting guides for wealthy, important North Americans like Charley Wilson (the head of General Motors, known for his comment “What’s good for GM is good for America”), Roger Blough (head of the Ford Corporation and advisor to President Eisenhower), and former FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover. The guides, like the guns, were appropriate to one’s social status (“...he wouldn’t even take Senators”).

More fundamental to Mailer’s thematic question is the power association made in the narrative between Vietnam, the hunting trip to Alaska, the U.S. government, and the international corporate adventures headed by D. J.’s executive father, his executive friends, and their Texas corporations. South Vietnam and Alaska<sup>2</sup> in the late 50’s were both targets of U.S. imperialism; the multi-national corporations played an important part in motivating U.S. power expansion; and Texas in the 60’s, with NASA and LBJ, was quickly becoming the center of U.S. corporate leadership and of political alliances between these corporations and the federal government.

“Chap Two” and “Chap Three” of the novel are a verbal collage of familiar corporate and political images which anchor the narrative in the concrete circumstances and actual power plays of the 50’s and 60’s. The activities surrounding the fictitious Rusty are sufficient to make his corporate image stereotypical and credible. “Setting up operations” for his corporation in other countries, making contributions to the CIA and FBI, the John Birch Society, the Warren Commission Boosters, the Republican Party, the President’s Thousand Dollar Club, and the Dallas Cowboys, Rusty is described as having a physical appearance somewhere between Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge.

The fictitious set-up in Alaska for the “John Foster Dulles types” resembles the pattern of imperialism familiar to anyone who knows a nation dominated by foreign corporations. In such a nation certain elements of the population find themselves in a position to take personal economic advantage of the foreign intrusion and respond by offering for sale whatever services or goods they have that may be of use. In the case of Mailer’s Alaska it was tour guides, organized hunting trips into the northern wilderness, deluxe bars and motels, “rooms with a foam rubber mattress, pink tile bathrooms, and Venetian blinds”, and further comfortable facilities located conveniently from Fairbanks to the interior as far as the Arctic Circle, with Piper Apache planes to span the distance between.

Those who are successful in marketing themselves eventually form in these nations a nucleus of small entrepreneurs. They are incorporated into a national bourgeoisie, aligned from the start with the international economic network, which responds to the demands and ideology of the buyer by imitating and reproducing within the nation the pattern of imperialism. Like Big Luke Fellinka and Ollie, the newly

<sup>2</sup> Alaska, along with Hawaii, was incorporated officially into the United States in 1959.

formed national bourgeoisie becomes the instrument of imperialism and turns to the interior for the undeveloped resources, and offers what is available to the foreign market. The elite serves the elite (remember the images: Rusty, the "cream of corporate corporateness", and Big Luke who won't "even take Senators"), and the hunting trip becomes a metaphor for U.S. imperialism.

Unlike Mailer's novel, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* does not deal overtly with any such historical question, but instead seems to center on the story of an individual. However, the action revealed in the chronological account of Artemio Cruz' life parallels the history of Mexico from the popular revolution of 1910 through the political restructuring and the compromises of the following decades to the externally financed industrial development of the 50's and 60's. In establishing the historical references underlying the protagonist's life and death, Fuentes' narrative, like Mailer's, satirizes the course of contemporary history.

Like Mailer, Fuentes made his protagonist respond to stereotypical, and therefore credible, images. This was achieved by a detailed, objective account ("él" narration) of the protagonist's life and his fictitious participation in real dates and events (each "él" section of the narrative is dated to correspond to actual important dates in Mexican history). Artemio Cruz fought in the Revolution on the side of the rebel peasants against the government troops of Porfirio Díaz. By the end of the war, Artemio had established a pattern of opportunism. Upon the sacrifices of others, he had managed to survive up to and through the revolutionary crisis. The illegitimate child of a mulatta servant and her white landowner patrón, Artemio Cruz had grown up on an hacienda in rural Mexico. His maternal uncle, Lunero (also a family servant), had saved Artemio's life at birth by hiding him from the paternal Menchaca family who forced his mother to flee. Lunero raised the child Artemio as his own, providing for his survival even after the downfall of the Menchaca family, its landholdings, and its wealth. The security of his childhood world ended when Lunero was taken away, presumably by government troops at the start of the Revolution, and Artemio was left to fend for himself.

By the end of the Revolution, Artemio's self-sufficiency and mania for survival had become apparent. The lives of several revolutionary companions and of his woman, Regina, had been sacrificed to the Revolution, but Artemio himself managed to survive. By the 20's, the decade of social restructuring, Artemio had managed to put himself in the position of directing land reform projects for the peasants. Ironically he himself was now the owner of a large hacienda, of the Indians who worked it, and of their eternal debt payments. He had acquired it all by marrying the daughter of a rich landowner whose idealistic son had joined the peasant movement and ended up in prison with Artemio. Leaving the young idealist to be assassinated, Artemio managed to bargain for his own life, made his way to the hacienda, preyed upon the family's tragedy, and through marriage assumed the inheritance that would have gone to the dead son.

The Revolution of 1910 appeared socialistic in ideology; it overthrew the tight socio-economic control of the 19th century urban, Europeanized, positivistic bourgeoisie and projected a redistribution of the national wealth to the rural,

non-landed working class. The struggle, however heroic, was relatively chaotic and consisted of several opposing factions led by chauvinistic men like Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza (with whom Artemio fought). By the 40's, the center of the rural-based revolution had moved to Mexico City, out of the hands of the peasants and into the hands of a new class of urban bureaucrats — a new national bourgeoisie. The power had merely changed hands, leaving the landless peasants for the most part still landless. During these decades the official party of the Revolution secured its hold on the nation's socio-economic structure and initiated programs of industrial development. To prevent foreign ownership and expropriation of Mexican industry, the law stated against any foreign investor owning more than 49% of a corporation. However, the means for circumventing these restrictions have been widely known; and, in fact, since the 50's Mexico has opened its arms to increasing U.S. imperialism and foreign corporate investment.

After the 40's, Artemio Cruz, the literary representative of Mexico's new bourgeoisie, worked his way into an important position in Mexico's industrial development program. He was the head of a newspaper, a front-man for a Mexican-based U.S. corporation, had money in foreign banks and investments all over Mexico in hotels, factories, railroads, etcetera, made high interest loans to peasants, and was a close operator with government officials in foreign financial deals.

The effects of U.S. imperialism are obvious in the narrative as well as in history. Mexico, like other Latin American nations and like Mailer's Alaska, reflects the general pattern of imperialism. The U.S. bourgeoisie (corporate and political) has seduced the post-revolutionary Mexican bourgeoisie into compromising national resources and development for a small share in the international profits. The urban-based Mexican bourgeoisie, in order to uphold the supply of exploitable resources, turns the imperialistic pattern against the rural population, exacting from them their labor and their share in the national product.

In terms of the Revolution, this concentration of power in the hands of the few is justified on the basis of expedient economic development — the same "survival" mania that motivated Artemio Cruz' decisions and compromises. The effect is widespread in history as well as in Fuentes' fiction. Artemio Cruz has imitated the tastes and attitudes of the foreigners. He uses foreign consumer products (owns a Volvo and drinks Canada Dry mix in his whiskey), expresses disgust at the rural element, and in fact, at whatever is Mexican ("la incompetencia, la miseria, la suciedad, la abulia, la desnudez de este pobre país que nada tiene") and laments the "error geográfico" that he was born in Mexico instead of north of the border. He conspires with U.S. businessmen (the Mr. Corkery conversation) to prevent attempts to nationalize Mexican industry which would cut off profits to the respective bourgeoisies. His wife and daughter are fans of Joan Crawford, and his friends participate in the world of the international jet-set: Paris, New York, Acapulco, Switzerland, Rome, American ambassadors, profit, and conspicuous consumption of material goods. Mexico, like its fictitious representation, has been converted physically and socially to correspond to the images of U.S. imperialism,

and the agent is the national bourgeoisie aligned for decades with the international economic network.

In addition to the narrative structures of the two works, the language and its images are an important index to the historical reality and to the perspective through which it is presented. Language is a direct manifestation of relationships between people and with the world; and, in this context, a study of the scatological and taboo sexual emphases which characterize both novels may add an important dimension to the assessment of the novels and their historical significance.

A symbolic association between anality and the economic manifestations comes from the theory of Norman O. Brown in his book, *Life Against Death: the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*.<sup>3</sup> Brown's thesis is that one's obsession with material objects is a manifestation of a psycho-sexual need to retain and preserve the products of one's existence. In an economic system that frustrates the enjoyment of the product of one's own labor, the choice is to turn upon the self and seek enjoyment from other physical functions. Bodily waste products—in particular, feces—become thus equated with money, both being by-products of one's existence and both being a substitution for the authentic representation of one's creative labor.

Likewise, according to Norman O. Brown, lust for power is a psycho-sexual need unfulfilled by the economic structure that is not collective and that denies open self-expression and creativity to most of the population. Again, one turns for fulfillment to secondary manifestations of power such as violence, aggression, and the already mentioned substitute material objects which display one's existence. Sexual functions, according to Brown, in addition to waste products and money, can be such an expression. To violate or aggress sexually is to display power over another human being. It is a natural human need to express one's creativity and communication through physical labor and through copulation, but when the natural way of expressing this need is denied by opposing socio-economic forces, the substitute expressions—money, feces, the penis, guns, or the words and symbols that represent—are made a fetish.

In Artemio Cruz' language as narrator there is obscenity, an obsession with body parts and functions, and descriptions which evoke images usually offensive to one's senses, but the frequency and intensity is sporadic. It appears that the protagonist is most fond of simple anal obscenity when he is discussing business deals. (These conversations had been recorded and are being played back to Artemio in the hours preceding his death.)

"Chingar" is the salient image of Artemio Cruz' power. One section of the "tú", accusatory style narration is a diatribe of this verbal representation of sexual power. The "tú", as established by the omniscient narration of Artemio Cruz, is everyone from the fictitious protagonist himself to the reader, and all are being

<sup>3</sup> Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1959.

accused of participating in the Mexican national expression. “TÚ la pronunciarás: es tu palabra: y tu palabra es la mía... resumen de la historia...” All are the victims, and all are the violators. In this perspective, Mexicans are the “fucked” children of the “fucked” Indian woman Malinche, “fucked” by the Spanish conquerors, and are what they are historically because “supiste chingar y no te dejaste chingar” (violator), and because “no supiste chingar y te dejaste chingar” (victim). Both ways the reference is clearly historical, and in the context of the novel, the reference is also clearly one of economic dependence. Mexico’s history and its economic structure have been violated first by the Spaniards for three centuries, then in the 19th century by the French and British, and in the 20th century by the United States. In response, the national ruling class, to maintain its power legitimacy, violates the country’s own natural resources and labor power, so the Mexican bourgeoisie is at the same time the “fucked” and the “fucker” —the victim and the violator— in the international power structure.

The image is an expression of the stereotypical relationship that Artemio Cruz has formed with other human beings and with the world. He is what he is because he knew how “to fuck” and he didn’t let himself “get fucked” by others. Opportunism was the pattern of his sixty-seven years —women, peasants, business partners, and his son Lorenzo who was killed in 1939 fighting in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the Spanish people for economic liberation. All these characters had been, in a sense, led to sacrifice by Artemio while he managed to survive.

“Sobreviví” was another often repeated word which reinforced the image that Artemio Cruz had made his life a fetish. Only just before his death did he begin to admit that the people he had loved (Lunero, Regina, and Lorenzo, etcetera) had lived the life and died the death consistent with their ideals, while his life in spite of survival had been an illusory, uncreative representation —like money and feces.

His power, too, was illusory. In the hours before his death, Artemio Cruz, no longer able to express his usual form of power, turned his fetishism upon his own body. His acute awareness of his body in the throes of death is in the “yo” narration and effectively draws the reader’s empathy. At this moment Artemio Cruz is penis, eyes, eyelids, breath, face, sweat, muscles, nose, cheekbones, lips —an old man whose senses are dead, who urinates without knowing, hears without being able to speak, and who can see but cannot focus. At this moment he knows that his survival, therefore his power, was an illusion. When death, the end of the narration, is imminent, the reader’s empathy is again pulled in to share the pain of the stomach gases and fluids that won’t pass but that build up and throb and finally flush out the other end, vomited in blood and bile. Artemio Cruz, in his own words, ultimately becomes a victim, and the reader whose empathy has been pulled into the fetishistic indulgence symbolically dies with the narrator (“...te traje adentro y moriré contigo... los tres... moriremos... Tú... mueres... has muerto... moriré).

The language of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is predominantly obscene with a challenging variety of anal and genital images. Norman O. Brown can be cited



again, and all the power associations are there: the words, the guns, the hunting trip, the stuffed trophy fetish, aggression, imperialism, and money (in corporate form). D. J., by his own admission as narrator, is an expert in word power while his father, Rusty, leads in the other power manifestations —he heads the hunting trip, he has the best gun, he has the highest position in a Texas corporation that manufactures porous plastic cigarette filters which may or may not cause cancer (“but the surveys are inconclusive, and besides, fuck you!”).

The narrator immediately associates scatological and anal images and plastic (his father’s product), and plastic becomes to D. J. the image of America’s fetishism. It is artificial and indestructible and has been a symbol of North American consumerism and pollution since the 50’s.<sup>4</sup> D. J. in the narration has categorized the political and corporate heroes according to rank: “Great Plastic Asshole”, “High-grade Asshole”, and “Medium-grade Asshole”. G.P.A. is the “mysterious hidden mastermind” who runs the country and “who’s got a plastic asshole installed in his brain whereby he can shit out all his corporate management of thoughts”. H.A. and M.A. are his minions.

“Fuck you!”, from both D. J. and Artemio Cruz, captures the tone of corporate responsibility to the people —to wit, the lust for power, profit, and survival. In the word lies the attitude of Rusty and his hunters, led by Big Luke, as they consider patterning their attack on nature “like aerial bombardment in the last Big War”. The sole concern is to get a big bear which they will stuff and preserve as a fetishistic monument to their power. In the word (“chingar”/“fuck you”) lies the attitude behind the production of plastic —quick production for quick profit. The people are left with the side effects —artistic sameness, mass-produced pollution, and obsessive consumerism. In the word lies the essence of human relationships —to wit, the relationship between Rusty (“the Highest-grade Asshole in America”) and his son, D. J. Whether they’re playing football in the yard or boasting about the bear killed by the father-son team, the relationship is based on aggressive competition and ultimately is sacrificed to a win. In the word lies the attitude of the bourgeoisie as it justifies its economic leadership over the marginalized classes and its obsession for making that position permanent and legitimate. Like Artemio Cruz’ survival and power fetish, the ruling class represented in both novels is its own fetish as it seeks to extend its legitimacy beyond the natural evolution of social processes.

The narrators’ obsession with scatological and sexual images, in terms of Brown’s theory, seems to be an appropriate reflection of their distorted psycho-sexual character; but, to the authors, the use of obscene images was not, we have to assume, their own expressions of psycho-sexual needs, but rather an effective dramatization of the nature of imperialism and of the international bourgeoisie which maintains the system. The associations between obscenity and the

<sup>4</sup> Mailer discusses the symbolic cultural implications of plastic in “Talking of Violence”, *20th Century*, Winter, 1964-65, p. 109.

corporate image are obvious in both Mailer's and Fuentes' novels. Both are products of a historical period in which the corporate ruling class has usurped the politico-economic structure and denied authentic creative power expressions to the other sectors of the population and (if historicist logic is accurate) ultimately to itself. Power, then, has taken a peculiar form of material fetishism projected onto the politico-economic structure and onto individual morality.

An obsession with obscene language and images and a propensity for relating everything to a bodily function was a current of the 60's. For those youth and intellectuals who participated in the 60's anti-war and civil rights protests, the motive behind obscenity was complex. Certainly, we must consider that perhaps it was an expression of their own psycho-sexual frustrations—an anti-power thrust; but, in addition, the motive was iconoclastic—as one manifestation of the effort to defame the morality system of the Establishment and therefore its legitimacy. Another motive was to identify symbolically through language with the marginalized sectors (working class, Blacks, the uneducated, etcetera) for whom linguistic iconoclasm was a tradition and (intentional or not) may have been the only available expression of protest.

D. J., in tune with the Voice of America image that he claims for himself, must epitomize this verbal iconoclasm in order to establish his authenticity. In addition to simple obscenity, D. J. was also obscene in violation of sacred bourgeois cultural images: the juxtaposition of Shakespeare and Batman as storytellers, Christ in a toothpaste tube. Mother as cunt and ass “getting cunt tickled and fucked by all the Class 1 Dongs in Paris and London”, Father as penis “exploding hot piss, shit and corporation pus”, God keeping the eternal accounts on electronic tape, Biblical history depicted as “the asshole belonged to Egypt... and the penis was the slave of the Hebes and the Brews”, astronauts “swimming in orbits of dehydrated processed food shit”, not to mention the large scale iconoclastic comparison of U.S. foreign policy and free enterprise to genitalia.

Language, as we have seen in the case of these novels, can be an accurate expression of historical reality and of human relationships. Its power to project and even transform reality is known not only to the ruling class which always defines its institutions—public education, the media, advertisements, family structure, political power, etcetera—by the careful manipulation of words and images,<sup>5</sup> but also to advocates of social change like Fuentes, Mailer, and the 60's intellectuals. Likewise, language in the hands of the marginalized sectors could be an instrument for socio-political change.

However, the crisis suffered by the 60's Establishment was not caused by the abuse of language and of the morality structure; nor, as we can see now, was it made worse by this ideological play. Instead, the 60's crisis was brought about by economic deficiencies and was ultimately quieted by economic manipulation and

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion of political legitimacy consult Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975.

police (not verbal) power from the ruling class. Language is an important tool for change, as are other basically ideological elements, but it cannot be a serious motivating factor for change unless accompanied by concrete economic solutions.

As it was, the tactic of the intellectual rebels, sincere as it might have been, was merely confusing to the marginalized groups who could not understand why these young people (mostly from a bourgeois background) would choose to imitate a language that was not theirs or to imitate a life style that was, for all practical purposes, less easy. The marginalized classes did not want help that could only seem condescending; instead, they wanted a higher level participation in the available socio-economic structure —i.e., the education which would allow them access to the full power of language and the economy.

The consequential ruling class backlash of the 70's —the cancellation of education, health and welfare programs in the U.S.— ultimately hurt the economic position of the marginalized sectors, while the bourgeois youth and intellectuals have reintegrated themselves into the Establishment.

When D. J. imitates the dialect of Blacks or of the working class, he does not create a new, multiple perspective, but is still one narrator —a bourgeois youth— merely playing games with marginal perspectives. How can we know? D. J. himself chides us for our confusion: "it's easier for D. J. to imitate a high I.Q. Harlem Nigger from time to time, since D. J. knows New York... than for a Harlem Nigger ever to know all this secret Texas shit". The economic reality, not the linguistic one, speaks loudest. D. J., like most of the 60's protestors, assumed the perspective of the marginalized sectors by imitating their language and culture, perhaps because it was easier than fighting to elevate the marginalized sectors to an authentic political participation.

It is not my primary interest to probe Mailer's or Fuentes' intentions, but rather to examine the class perspective of the authors and the results of the literary techniques in these novels of social protest, and to question their strength against the time-proven strength of the ruling class.

Both Norman Mailer and Carlos Fuentes are from unquestionably ruling class, intellectual positions. Mailer was a professor of English, and Fuentes was the son of an ambassador and himself the Mexican ambassador to France under President Echeverría. In spite of this position, both authors have written dozens of political essays which presume to speak from the perspective of the marginalized sectors of their respective societies. It is likely that most politically conscious, progressive readers recognize the relevance of the images, techniques, analyses, and to a certain extent, the implicit solutions for the political crises.<sup>6</sup>

For example, on the concrete side of social protest images presented in these

<sup>6</sup> The following are among the works useful for references to the authors' ideological perspective: Norman Mailer, *Advertisement for Myself*, New York, Putnam Publishing Group, 1981; *Cannibals and Christians*, New York, Pinnacle Books, 1981, and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*; Carlos Fuentes, *Casa con dos puertas*, México, Joaquín Mortiz, 1970, and *Tiempo mexicano*, México, Joaquín Mortiz, 1972.

novels: Fuentes depicts his protagonist, a former revolutionary and now a solid bourgeois leader, as an old man whom his social colleagues call "the mummy", who gives an elaborate party only to sit back and lord his power image over the guests, refusing to communicate with them, and who dies of edema and poor circulation — nice metaphors for a stagnated economic power. Fuentes and Mailer use a narrative technique and concrete historical images that force the reader (likely in the 60's to have been a bourgeois intellectual) to recognize his or her involvement in the historical perspective and that deny the reader any false sense of independence. Fuentes uses images surrounding his protagonist that directly implicate U.S. foreign investment in the expropriation of Mexico's resources and gross national product. Mailer hits upon what he has described in his essays as the totalitarian characteristic of U.S. socio-political values. Mailer and Fuentes make effective use of language to satirize the obscene abuse of power by the international corporate bourgeoisie. Mailer asks the reader a direct political question in the title and (by not answering it himself in the narrative) forces the reader to think politically and to formulate his/her own answer. Mailer and Fuentes satirize the exploitative invasion of the rural, underdeveloped area (Alaska and rural Mexico) by the urban bourgeoisie.

All these are valid images in the context of the 60's legitimation crisis and social protests, but the authors do not escape completely the framework of their bourgeois ideology. Since the novels seem to express (as did the 60's protests) a perspective asking for serious social change benefiting the marginalized sectors, it is ironic that neither novel shows any concrete action toward economic change that would directly involve the marginalized sectors. Even though Mailer in one of his essays mocks "liberal rhetoric" as one of the bourgeois "con games", his novel as well as Fuentes' may have been little more.

For example, characteristic of bourgeois rhetorical social protest: Mailer and Fuentes show fine literary talent in a technique that involves the reader in the national bourgeois guilt, but they speak to us and for us with the presumption that all readers are bourgeois and all are guilty. Mailer produces in language a cultural collage of the North American social structure, but it's all done by a bourgeois youth who does good imitations and pretends omniscience ("D. J., the Voice of America, here to tell you what it's all about"). Fuentes produces a historical collage of the Mexican structure, but it's all from a bourgeois perspective. The narrators of the two novels claim all the perspectives just as do the bourgeois political and corporate leaders who claim legitimate majority rule, when in fact the bourgeoisie (either Mexican or U.S.) is not a majority. Mailer, in a commentary about Vietnam, suggests that the war was caused by a certain mentality, "the same mentality that produces plastic" — a fine analogy, but what about economically motivated imperialism? And how do we change the mentality? Fuentes strongly suggests that the ruling class crisis was a result of psychological or spiritual disintegration on a national scale, rather than a result of the socio-economic disintegration intrinsic to a class society. Mailer, in an essay, says that what we need is action, but his example in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* of creative action is a retreat that D. J. and his friend Tex

make alone, away from the older hunters, to rediscover their origins in Nature. All the action in Mailer's and Fuentes' novels is in the hands of bourgeois agents (as was most of the 60's protest), as if to suggest that the marginalized sectors are incapable of acting or speaking for themselves. Mailer and Fuentes seem to recognize that bourgeois "con games" are condescending to the marginalized sectors and only make it harder to identify the ruling class, but apparently neither has reached far beyond his own class perspective.

Perhaps the most telling element of their ideology is the solution implicit in the narratives that revolves around a romantization of the past (both narratives are retrospective) and a search for cultural or species origins. A psycho-spiritual interpretation of the thematic stuff—in both Fuentes' and Mailer's work—is made quite clear in both the works and in other essays by the authors.

The central scene to Mailer's solution has D. J. and Tex stealing away from the hunters' cabin at night to explore farther into the Northern Wilderness. Their experience is a communion with Nature and with each other, both spiritually and physically. Their unity with Nature—the virgin wilderness and their close brush with Death—not only makes them part of the "Universal Mind", but also purges their need for obscene language and their need for the other substitute power symbols (guns, etcetera). For the one night, their relationship becomes sexual (Mailer is careful to emphasize that both are otherwise archetypically masculine) and symbolically repeats the puberty-to-manhood self-discovery ritual. This union between the two and with Nature magically opened their psyche to unconscious primal memory. According to theory, such a reencounter with their origins would regenerate energy and creative power supposedly repressed by centuries of civilization.

Fuentes' literary solution is the same. With the "yo"-“tú”-“él” narrative technique, he simulates a regeneration of psycho-historical memory. The “yo” narratin is in present tense, expressing the anguishes of impending death; the “él” narration in past tense, recovering the repressed memories of Artemio Cruz' and Mexico's formative history; and the “tú” narration is a future tense based on past references (“ayer volarás desde Hermosillo...”) which tends to pull the voice out of chronological time and into a universal dynamic pan-time. This is the voice which seems to be the most omniscient—it scolds, accuses and levies judgement not only on the protagonist but also on the reader. Until the moments before his death, Artemio Cruz had isolated his existence in the present and had negated past memories that were his guilt. In the narrative technique, the “tú” voice serves as a link between the past, present, and future perspectives, and its rhythm sets the perspective in motion pulling it back and forth between the conscious and the forgotten until it reunifies the psyche of the stereotypical protagonist. The regenerated dialectic is between history (“él”) and the present (“yo”), rural (“él”) and urban (“yo”), origins (“él”) and death (“yo”), the collective (“él”) and the individual (“yo”). Just at the moment of death, the retrospective memory process reaches back to the moment of his birth, and the two moments are united in symbolic universal

awareness. Again, according to theory, this union of opposites would regenerate energy and creative power to the psyche.

The same philosophy characterized some of the modernists and surrealists of the early 20th century. To them, language could become a political tool to awaken images and instincts lost to mankind in the processes of modern civilization. The use of irony, reality-associated nouns with verbs of violence and change, supposedly created a psychological-spiritual dialectic between conscious and subconscious images. The idea has been echoed by a number of writers since the 20's, but for the most part the original project deteriorated into simple escapist art. And to Mailer, "real power" was in D. J.'s ritual awakening; and to Fuentes, unity was in death.

Without denying proper respect for psycho-spiritual unity (and for all corresponding superstructural changes) and especially for the early 20th century concepts of avant-garde art, one must take a more critical look at the political perspective of these authors. Jorge Luis Borges said that reality is fiction —meaning that the reality we know is just one of the infinite number of possible reality structures— and therefore it can be changed, expanded, destroyed, etcetera, but the question is, can anything be changed by a manipulation of words and images? Only a relatively idealistic bourgeois would suggest that power is a state of mind, as Mailer does, or would romanticize the indigenous culture of poverty, as Fuentes does. Norman Mailer has suggested as a solution to the violence that everyone in America seek adventure to act out his passions, and Carlos Fuentes has suggested that Mexico needs to rediscover its indigenous past. Even though Fuentes' suggestion may seem more practical than Mailer's, the implication in both plans is to unify the peoples by a means other than economic. It seems unlikely that a serious artistic expression created by a member of a marginalized sector would romanticize a cultural unity not based in economic restructuring. Perhaps it was this kind of false alliance formed in the 60's between bourgeois intellectuals working with ideal solutions and the marginalized sectors working for practical and immediate solutions, that led to the decay of the movement and to the eventual restoration of ruling class legitimacy.

The deterministic resignation that ended the decade also ends the two novels. In *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* it is the "tú" narration —the unifying future tense based in the past— that by its very function lays out the course of the Revolution from birth to death. Unfortunately for the marginal class, the death image is not for the whole bourgeoisie, but only for the generation nourished on the ideals. There are, in the novel, ample stereotypical figures of the new bourgeois generation who are more than prepared to resume Artemio's duties with none of the burden of old ideals. The protagonist may have had his moment of truth and his being was purged, but he dies and the ruling class lives on. The reader, from the retrospective narration, knows the outcome from the title and is conditioned to the perspective of historical fatalism.

The moment of narration of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is two years after the spiritual experience in Alaska. D. J. is narrating from the Dallas family mansion

during a party given for him the night before he leaves for Vietnam. The time perspective is from present to past. From the language and the narrative attitude, the reader knows beforehand that the purification experience didn't last. D. J. and Tex go off to Vietnam, and "hot dam" —the Establishment lives on, healthier now for its diet of protestors.

The cynicism is a natural part of the bourgeois tautology. If the ruling class is in charge of the economic balance and at the same time directing its own problem-solving system, its legitimacy is maintained in an amicable power play between the mirrored conservative and liberal elements. This is the power play we have seen in history —in the contest between the conservative and liberal elements of the bourgeoisie one side always claims to be speaking for the marginalized sectors. But, like in the novels, we discover that what appears to be multiple voices is deception and ultimately reduces to one (bourgeois) voice.

The good liberals like Fuentes and Mailer, in an effort to understand why their projects for real socio-economic change resulted ineffective, sink into a psychomystical analysis and become prophets of revolutionary doom. Their singular bourgeois perspective (like the one of their protagonists) never brought them to consider revolutionary impetus coming from outside their own class. Instead, if these novels are an indication, it would seem that the bourgeois liberals have chosen to preserve their own revolutionary experience —even in its failure— in book form, to pass along the written word to the 70's and 80's that "revolution doesn't work because..." With the failure of their creative revolutionary activity, the intellectual bourgeois agents turned to the substitute expression —the words that represent the authentic activity, and made them a fetish. Their words made a fetish, as well, of their failure and their cynicism. In refusing to give way to a natural historical evolution and to the revolutionary perspective of the challenging sectors, the 60's liberals have tried to preserve a dead perspective as a monument to their decade, and in this way they merely participated in the legitimacy fetish of the ruling class. Like their narrative voice, they have pre-empted all the perspectives.

In both novels we find an important expression of the 60's —its passions, its energy, and its projects for social change; but perhaps in the novels' presumptuous bourgeois voice and conclusive cynicism we also find a clue to their shortcomings —why *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* did not inspire lasting consciousness and change, and therein perhaps a clue to the shortcomings of the 60's projects for social change.