History, archetype, and ambiguity in Carlos Fuentes' "Old Gringo"

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HISTORY, ARCHETYPE, AND AMBIGUITY

IN CARLOS FUENTES' OLD GRINGO

By

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Old Gringo (1985), a novel by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes (1928- ), provides a study in history through literature that includes a spectrum of historically grounded material, archetype, and myth. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the author's use of archetypes and myth in combination with historical fact produce an accurate historical portrayal for the indicated time period (1913-14) and place, northern Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. Further, that these archetypes, specific to the Mexican Revolution, are reliable composites for historic portrayal.

The strictly historical aspects of this novel have been verified by comparison with historical research and biographies. Fuentes' fictional timeline has been compared with these sources and fictional deviations noted.

The writer's biography has been reviewed leading to consideration of certain repeated characteristics that arise in Fuentes' writing, for example: a heightened cross-cultural awareness and a strong socio-political voice. A condensed chronology of Mexican writers from turn of the century to the early fifties is included to indicate influences that have affected Fuentes.

In terms of technique, the use of allusion (knots of meaning), broken time frames, and emphasis on man's ambiguous nature are investigated in the novel. Fuentes also employs symbols, in this case, the female antagonist who represents the naive and moralistic stance of the United States in opposition to Mexico.

Ambiguity is also considered in relation to the main theme in the novel. As a result of acknowledging the innate ambiguity and duality of humans, thematic variations arise, in particular, the doomed cycle of Revolution.

The included research has led to the conclusion that Fuentes' novel Old Gringo with its multiple facets, technically and thematically, does provide an accurate socio-historical portrayal for Revolutionary Mexico, 1913-14. The resulting disjointed collection of character portrayals, quijotesque in style, goes beyond regional history and into a realm of universal.
"No, no, please don't ask about this author here." and the clerk disappeared behind a curtain. I stared across the counter. Perhaps I had misunderstood.

For several weeks I received the same answer or a Sphinx-like stare. Often this was followed by a spray of mindless conversation to cover the awkward moment. No one seemed to know much about Fuentes or be willing to admit so if they did.

Finally, a stalwart looking woman in a small bookstore in Chillán, Chile took me aside. "Mister, this has been prohibited material, Fuentes was censored... only black market. He's one of those."

Before this episode the writing of the Mexican author Carlos Fuentes had intrigued me. In 1990 I read _La muerte de Artemio Cruz_ for a survey class of contemporary Latin American authors. He was included in a section dealing with revolution. I was interested in the technical variety and unusual perspectives that Fuentes chose. It was at this point that I seriously began looking for a Fuentes piece that would be manageable for historical and literary analysis. _Old Gringo_ seemed within reason and
displays many of the attributes that make Fuentes writing a challenge to read and decipher. So began the adventure, digging into the endless materials that pertain to Fuentes. My experience in Chile was repeated many times during the year. It was a firsthand experience with the controversy that Fuentes and his literature have generated. The experience intrigued me even more.

History through literature is a Fuentes passion that provides a foundation throughout this novella. Larger than life archetypes rise from the dust of history and breathe new life into this dramatic narrative of the Mexican Revolution. The title of this work foretells of the potential struggle between history and literature. Yet part of the magic of Fuentes is his technique for weaving history, myth, and archetype into powerful fiction that does not compromise any of the basic components. This is history that reveals man's ambiguities and thus provides a rounded historical portrait of the characters. For the Fuentes character it is natural to live the historical, the archetypal and the mythical life simultaneously, not as separate endeavors on the written page. Fuentes is bent on delivering more. In *Old Gringo* the character Tomás Arroyo becomes obsessed with ghosts of his past life at the hacienda where he...
was raised. He cannot escape his past; living a myth of return, and reconnects into a circular continuum of self destruction. Fuentes shows the reader that the Revolution is in danger at its very inception. Today's revolutionaries will become tomorrow's new *Porfiriato* to fulfill a destiny of abuses, power struggle and corruption that continue the cycle.

Arroyo stands in contrast to the old gringo who serves as the pretext for the novel. The old gringo/Ambrose Bierce has crossed into Mexico in 1913 to encounter his end. In his wake, as in the documented life of Ambrose Bierce, is his own bitter myth spun from his vituperative and acerbic journalist's tongue. But instead of succumbing to a pattern of errors from the past, the old gringo launches into a quijotesque-style recreation of personal myth. He finds the release that he had sought and new life.

The historical content of this text has been analyzed by comparison with recognized sources. This was done by identifying a series of historical events in the novel employed by Fuentes as basic structure and aligning them with historically based accounts. The characters themselves are considered from historical, archetypal, and fictional perspectives. The old gringo as the famous novelist Ambrose Bierce, for
example, is identifiable throughout the text. Bierce's beliefs and habits that arise in Old Gringo are consistently found in biographies. Fuentes' repeated allusion to Bierce's works and intertextual knitting of Bierce fragments provide more identifying evidence. The book has several Mexican revolutionary archetypes that lead double lives: each reflects a unique part of that history and plays the fictional role assigned by Fuentes, replete with details of daily life. Some of these archetypes are woven into, primarily, the potent myth of Villa: revolutionary caudillo. Tomás Arroyo on a three-fold scale: clearly fulfills part of the Villa myth, is deeply enveloped in his own fulfillment of the myth of return, and plays an important role in helping the old gringo recreate his personal myth.

The following briefly outlines chapter content:
To establish a base of reference for the author's beliefs there is a brief biography of Carlos Fuentes. This focuses on highpoints most pertinent to the creation and interpretation of Old Gringo. There is a short overview of Mexican literature from the turn of the century with emphasis on authors that have influenced Fuentes. Also included are Fuentes' critical views concerning change in Latin American literature during the last half of this century. Specific concerns are the flexibility of language and
character ambiguity.

The following section compares actual Mexican chronology of 1913-14 to the author's fictional chronology in the novel *Old Gringo*. Various levels of character representation are also considered: historical, archetypal and fictional. There is a progression from the very historically based Bierce into characters that are made whole with the addition of their archetypal and mythical components.

As a final segment more detail is provided specifically on the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. during 1913-14: American intervention, Villa's activity along the border and anti-gringo sentiment. Harriet Winslow as a symbol of the American moralist stance is discussed in contrast to Tomás Arroyo.

The analysis of Fuentes' characters in *Old Gringo* presents a sort of bridge. One end of the bridge has footings in the history of the time period. The opposite side rests in fiction, created by Fuentes. The middle of the bridge represents the archetypal. They are irremediably interconnected. The word "irremediable" is used because traditionally the study of history has fallen on one side of this bridge. Deviations into fiction has been seen as tampering with the historical justice: events and
people portrayed in fiction have not been done justice. Fuentes asks the reader to see the contortions, change of heart, the perverse and picayune details that have changed the course of history.

Fuentes has been the subject of innumerable studies. Some of the most interesting are the investigations into history, style and critique that Fuentes himself has written: *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969), *Tiempo Mexicano* (1971), and *Valiente Mundo Nuevo: Épica, utopía y mito en la novela hispanoamericana*, (1990). These provide a deep and consistent insight into the mechanics of Fuentes' writing over the years. Perhaps one of the most illuminating approaches to appreciating Fuentes is by reading other authors from the so-called *boom* era. Books by Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Julio Cortázar in combination with some precursors like Juan Rulfo and Alejo Carpentier provide a substantial base for contrast and comparison. The overlapping elements and complementary techniques reveal interesting connections that allude to what these men have contended for decades: it's all one novel.

I would like to thank Dr. Manuel Machado Jr., University of Montana, author of *Centaur of the North*, among other volumes, who has provided
indispensable guidance in unraveling the Mexican Revolution and remarkable endurance in editing this study. Also, thanks to Dr. Ramón Corro, University of Montana who has patiently led me through many literary adventures over the years.
Table of Contents

I. Fuentes: A Look at the Man and His Innovations ................................................1

II. History and history .................................................................................................29

III. The American Posture ...........................................................................................71

IV. Conclusions ............................................................................................................84

VIII. Bibliography .........................................................................................................87
CHAPTER I

Fuentes: A look at the man and his innovations

*Old Gringo* (1985) a novel by the Mexican author Carlos Fuentes, provides a condensed study of this author's compound vision, technique and innovations.

The novel focuses on U. S. and Mexican relations during the tense time period of 1913-14. Mexico had been torn open with revolution. The United States stood by uncomprehending and threatening. The novel uses archetypes from Mexican revolutionary history in contrast with two Anglo characters from the United States. One happens to be based on the famous American writer Ambrose Bierce (1841-1914?), hence the title: *Old Gringo*. Fuentes uses historical footing, archetypal characterization, and varying points of view to engage the reader. Added to this is the all important element of ambiguity (to have two or more meanings; not clear; vague\(^1\)) applied to the actions, thoughts and deeds of Fuentes' characters. This is ambiguity that provides the reader with interpretational alternatives, aside

from portraying more life-like characters. The ambiguity works as a tool for Fuentes to annul time, space, and personality, propelling the character toward the mythical.2

Additionally, the novel is a synthesis of Fuentes' postmodernist art that has kept an eye to the models of the past while blazing new pathways of experimentation. Old Gringo is an amalgam of writing styles from the palette of Mexican revolutionary literature and post revolutionary technique. For example, Tomás Arroyo is a rounder form of Mariano Azuela’s Demetrio Macias. Martín Luis Guzmán's books contain some of the same events found in Old Gringo. (Rudolfo Fierro taking shots at fleeing prisoners in El águila y la serpiente and the William Benton affair in Memorias de Pancho Villa.3) The mythic return and disconnected feeling that surrounds the Miranda hacienda are certainly reminiscent of Juan Rulfo's Comala. This blending of the old and the dramatically new is part of the style. Fuentes has forged all of this into a powerful, short burst of fiction and

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history that reveals the complexities of those involved in the Revolution.

To better understand Fuentes' literature it is important to provide some background on the man himself. This chapter will look at Fuentes as a hybrid cosmopolitan man whose work has been influenced by years of travel and study. This has made him an alien at times even in Mexico. Fuentes' unusual upbringing and nearly fanatical pursuit of *lo académico* have created a piercing, flashy genius who is just as likely to appear at an educator's conference in Havana as at a highbrow diplomatic cocktail party in D.C. As a result of Fuentes' upbringing and passions, cross-cultural perspectives have become a part of nearly all his writing. This fits well with the Fuentes method of exposing dualities and ambiguities: themes are often seen from many theoretical and cultural perspectives.

This chapter provides a short chronology of Mexican literature beginning with the turn of the century and proceeding to the time when Fuentes began publishing. Fuentes is known for tailoring an eclectic type of novel that draws from many styles from throughout the literary world. Keeping an eye to the
influence of Mexico's literary past this chapter presents the author's dictates for a new direction in fiction writing. Fuentes' critical writing has clearly defined the author's direction and hopes for Latin American narrative. His ideas on revolutionary language, character portrayal, and history through literature are also included to shed more light on his unique constructions.

Fuentes is a cross-cultural razorblade, exposing hidden fears and dualities wherever he may touchdown. In some ways a literary Fidel Castro, he can quickly draw spiny responses from conservative corners. Unsavory affiliations with the left have painted Fuentes, at least, as a leftist sympathizer. His direct connections to politicians and writers from Cuba and Nicaragua, for example, have put him in a dubious camp. Even when Fuentes has aligned himself with a party or philosophy, his loyalty may manifest itself in unforgivable fashion by re-focusing criticism back at the group and himself. In his own Mexico, the PRI has suffered the Fuentes scrutiny for decades. He has been ardently critical of many aspects of western modernization/materialism and continually reminds his readers that man is replacing the past with false and meaningless icons. (Quetzalcoatl versus
Additionally, he has a marvelous gift for summarizing, or perhaps better said, for simultaneously drawing many things into focus, quite often in the most outrageous terms. At times Fuentes, man of the world, must pay a price for being so verbally capable. He has so rankled American bureaucrats with his views on U. S. interventionism in the 1960's, that he was barred from entering the United States and labelled an "undesirable alien." Through 1988 Fuentes was required to apply for a special visa to enter the United States. For non-literary critics, such as the U.S. State Department, it has become increasingly difficult over the years to dismiss Fuentes. His clout as an internationally renowned author has made it hard to ignore him. He travels in the spotlight. Fuentes' participation in the arena of world politics is, partly, a manifestation of his commitment to movement and change as an author. At home or abroad he is likely to ripple the waters. One writer observed: "It is tantamount to treason for a Mexican writer to achieve success among Yankee readers. It is considered gauche for a North American novelist to be involved in
politics. And in Washington, that supremely insular town, it is still a scandal for an intellectual or, God forbid, a celebrity, to defend the Sandinistas."\(^4\) This is a triple condemnation for Fuentes, who has done it all and more.

The tendency to disturb, shock and jarringly juxtapose carries from his physical world to the fictional. Fuentes scatters provocative scenes throughout his work, such as the teenage protagonist masturbating in a church from the novel *Las buenas conciencias* (1959), a lengthy monologue on fecal matter in *Christopher Unborn* (1987) or Harriet's thoughts concerning Arroyo's penis in *Old Gringo*. The meaning behind such acts: anticlerical, anti-establishment, or symbolic, exists on a wheel of interpretation. The readers may choose the interpretation and level they wish to engage. *Old Gringo* is a history of the Mexican Revolution, it is a Freudian encounter between four people, it is a story that symbolizes U. S. - Mexican relations in 1913-14. Much like the Borgesian idea of metatextual interaction, the Fuentes model provides multiple routes for the reader. Fuentes has referred to this aspect as the "potentiality" of the novel. This

potentiality places the reader in the position of co-creator, an idea that Fuentes has taken from the writing of Milan Kundera. He goes on to modify the idea with Mikhail Bakhtin's version of potentiality that the novel is an open genre where there is unending dialogue between men and women. "The novel permits us to see that we are in an unfinished world," says Fuentes.5 These are important considerations from the author's point of view, as one looks at the archetypal, mythical, and symbolic levels of dialog in Old Gringo.

Among the more well-known of the Latin American verbose, Fuentes can expound at length about topics that have been his obsession for decades. He has produced an astonishing quantity of written word in the form of critical essays, reviews, short stories, screenplays, novels, and, more recently, television broadcasts. Fuentes has created a verbal barge that will not be detained. He is a loud barking watchdog, not just in Mexico, but in issues he perceives threatening to human rights, open (intervention-less) political process and fledgling democracies.

The Fuentes' themes throughout his unique brand of fiction

are carved from universal material. They are often cloaked in a Mexican Revolutionary theme, or events connected to the Conquest of the New World. The thematic strands deal with abuse of or longing for power (oligarchies in the Americas) and the resulting revolutions to bring about change. . . always to contain a gestating seed of corruption for the future. Hence the Fuentes cycle. The powers may be in the form of church hierarchy, entrenched wealthy families that form a nation's privileged few, or multinational corporations that have descended on Latin America.

As stated, Fuentes transcends borders and is a citizen of the world. He divided his youth between schools in the United States, South America, Europe and Mexico. His father, Rafael Fuentes Boettinger, worked as a diplomat for the Mexican government and traveled extensively. In 1934 Carlitos began primary school in Washington D.C. and would study with the privileged sons of diplomats and businessmen until 1940. The Fuentes' moved from Washington D.C. to Chile in 1941 and young Carlos studied in the well known Grange School of Santiago. This was to be Fuentes' first real immersion in the Spanish language
where he began to experiment with writing in the idiom that would become his baseboard for the future. In addition he rubbed elbows with young literati like José Donoso who also attended the Grange at that time. At home in Santiago he read his early writing endeavors to David Alfaro Siquieros, one third of the famous triumvirate of Mexican muralists, who himself happened to be in "honorable exile" for his implication in Leon Trotsky's murder.

In order to pursue the diplomatic career of Carlos' father the family spent six months in 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina (an important short stop, so says Fuentes, because he lost his virginity and became a tango aficionado) and shortly after returns to Mexico. Carlos at this point begins to strengthen significantly his skills as a young writer in Mexico. In 1950 the future author travels to Geneva, Switzerland, to study at the Institut de Hautes Études Internationales. The author's cosmopolitan view becomes a literary residual. In 1988, in an essay titled "How I Began to Write" published in a compendium of essays on multicultural literacy, Fuentes stated:

Reading, writing, teaching, learning, are
all activities aimed at introducing civilizations to each other. No culture, I believed unconsciously ever since then, [childhood] and quite consciously today, retains its identity in isolation; identity is retained in contact, in contrast, in breakthrough.6

Owing to the fact that he comfortably expresses himself in four languages and commutes easily between them linguistically, Fuentes is a linguistic amphibian. Again, there is evidence of this aspect throughout his writing. In Old Gringo the barrage of foreign words and phrases is not an important part of the prose. But, the reader must consider that Fuentes has very much demonstrated his extensive knowledge of English and Spanish throughout the novel. The careful manipulation of fragments from Bierce's works, usage of norteño dialect in the Spanish version and interesting incorporation of the word "nahual" (a nahuatl indigenous term7) are evidence of Fuentes' linguistic forté. The Fuentes written landscape is dotted with foreign words and phrases through which the author tugs and pulls the reader. For

7 Fuentes, Old Gringo 116.
one moment the reader may be on land, on familiar linguistic turf, but in the duration of a sentence could slip into a slough of cognates or other word-laden mire.

The Fuentes cosmopolitan view has not been necessarily appreciated by fellow countrymen. As Fernando Benítez commented in "Prologue to the Works of Carlos Fuentes" published in 1973: "Carlos see Mexico with the cold eyes, amazed and implacable of a foreigner. That new and pitiless way of seeing things determines that his novels can become part of the sequence established by D. H. Lawrence, Graham Greene and Malcolm Lowry."

Hence Mexicans have found him to be the enfant terrible who has picked away at the sacred scab of the Revolution in relentless fashion for the last forty years. Fuentes has not been afraid to peek into forbidden chambers, namely political ones. He revealed the unsavory union between revolutionary ideal and the savvy político lover resulting in the birth of intrinsically greedy and corrupted children. These children have the propensity for devouring their parents at birth. At times disturbingly

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8 Benítez 52.
precise in his apocalyptic prognostications, Fuentes has foreshadowed, forewarned, foretold, and downright impaled accurately the political and social trends. (Dramatic cases in point would be the *Frente Zapatista* as seen in *Christopher Unborn* and monumental corruption within the PRI, same work.) As such, Fuentes emerges more perspicacious than most commentators. His acumen for maintaining parallel perspectives focused on history, current events, and the near future have made him a formidable soothsayer.

Critics, both in and out of Mexico, are not so easily impressed, however. In the Stephen Talbot interview the following comment appears about Enrique Krauze who has frequently criticized Fuentes: "... Krauze condemns Fuentes as a 'guerrilla dandy,' a combination of Pierre Cardin and Che Guevara, who merely uses Mexico as a theme, distorting it for a North American public."⁹ (In reference to the book *Gringo Viejo*) Krauze, unfortunately misses a crucial point with this criticism. A strength of Fuentes' writing is the capacity for multiple interpretations, in all directions. The addition of ambiguity, a

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⁹ Talbot, 22.
basic human facet, according to Fuentes, provides that distortion can be a method of enhancement.

Along with other fine writers in Mexico, Fuentes represents a dramatic break with the style of the times. The new generation, *el boom*, the post modernists, or whatever the term that best describes Fuentes' treatment of fiction, it turned out to be a fresh perspective of old terrain. Through the years Fuentes has insisted that he not be categorized or placed in a genre of writers. He contends that what he has to say should be the focus. Undoubtedly the Fuentes approach began to fill a void where there was need for something new. How was this connected to work that had been previously done in Mexico?

Twentieth century literature of Mexico can be seen as a result of experimentation and consolidation. The turn of the century literature was dominated by the realism and documentary tendencies of writers who had painstakingly transcribed the events of the ending century.

Looking at the spectrum of Mexican literature beginning with the *Ateneo de la Juventud* (1909) and moving to the present it is clear that categorizing authors by style has always been
difficult. This is partly owing to the dramatic social upheaval in
Mexico with its focus being the intense years of conflict from
1911 to 1917.

In pre-Revolutionary Mexico at the turn of the century there
was a diverse group of writers and intellectuals known as the
*Ateneo de la Juventud*. Their work was a mixture of classic style
and the urge toward new forms. From this original group only a
few would survive the chaos of the times either intellectually or
physically. Literature of the Mexican Revolution spans a period
that begins with pieces written during the beginning conflicts,
around 1911, and continue up until about 1940. This span is
divided into two groups. The first, authors writing before 1925,
are considered the formational stage, writers still stuck in
documentary writing. After 1925 there is more variety and a
definite tendency away from the journalistic documentary style.
An important figure emerged from the first group of writers.
Mariano Azuela (1873-1952), a doctor from the state of Jalisco
would become one of the most famous literary names associated
with the Mexican Revolution. Azuela with his novel *Los de abajo*
(1915), was one of the first to break from the patterns of the
past. In reference to Azuela's writing one author has said:

... they are perhaps of even greater importance as one of the first serious and sustained attempts by a Spanish-American novelist to break away from the slavish imitation of European styles-- which had doomed the Spanish-American novel, with few exceptions, to inferiority throughout the nineteenth century-- and to describe the reality around him in a fresh, original, direct way.10

Fuentes and Azuela are frequently compared in the areas of style, historical depiction, and theme. According to Luis Leal, in general, Fuentes acidly criticized the documentary style of the turn of the century. However, he has given Azuela a positive review because of what Fuentes terms "the introduction of ambiguity" into the Mexican protagonist and a subsequent view of the Revolution that avoided a roseate tinge.11 This ambiguity that Fuentes admires is to be found as a major tool in his own writer's

palette.

In fact, Fuentes dedicates an entire chapter to Azuela in a fairly recent collections of critical essays titled *Valiente Mundo Nuevo* (1990). The chapter dealing with Azuela goes into a lengthy discourse on epics and gradually narrows into the specifics of Azuela’s work. Fuentes makes this observation:

Mariano Azuela, más que cualquier otro novelista de la Revolución Mexicana, levanta la pesada piedra de la historia para ver qué hay allí abajo. Lo que encuentra es la historia de la colonia que nadie antes había realmente narrado imaginativamente. Quien se quede en la mera relación de acontecimientos "presentes" en Azuela, sin comprender la riqueza contextual de su obra, no la habrá leído. Tampoco habrá leído a la nación como narración, que es la gran aportación de Azuela a la literatura hispanoamericana; somos lo que somos porque somos lo que fuimos.12

From about 1925 onward into the thirties there is a space

of literary calm in Mexico, from which there appear novels of the Revolution. (Fuentes is born in 1928.) The prose of this genre is generally known for the great variety of technique and approach to theme, if not for being polished examples of narrative. Some take up their cause from a fixed point of view, notably, from the ethnic perspective of *el indio* or perhaps the impoverished *campesino* during the upheaval.

Others will focus through selected vignettes. For example the author Nellie Campobello caught wisps and glimpses of the maelstrom from a child's point of view resulting in a uniquely fractured look at the Revolution. Campobello's unusual perspectives break the pattern of linear chronologies, placing more focus on the individual's isolation and fear.

The forties see a new type of author, who stands away from the lengthy explosions and repercussions of the Revolution and has shed some of the strings that restrained theme. Agustín Yáñez (1904-80) and José Revueltas (1914-76) broach new territories in terms of style and theme. What many critics have called weaknesses in the work of both men: inconsistency, incomplete plot structures, and contradictions, are more akin to
Fuentes' idea of depicting real history. Real history, *a la Fuentes*, involves portraying people in their struggles fraught with indecision, passion and capriciousness. These are elements that comprise the life fabric. From the turn of the century to the forties there seems to have been a gradual evolution toward the form that characterizes Carlos Fuentes, that being, as he so often states, the utter ambiguity, duality and contradictory nature of not just individual men but the entire human historical scenario.

From this point on, the composite of styles and thematic tendencies provide important fragments for the Fuentes repertoire. From the fifties Juan Rulfo's mystical and magical *Pedro Páramo* certainly plays a part in Fuentes' creative evolution. Fuentes has called Rulfo "el novelista final" because *Pedro Páramo* brought to an end a variety of lingering genres in Mexico and opened the way to modern narrative. This new style of narrative includes an obligation to re-imagine the past.13

Fuentes has also carved a new role for the emerging Latin American author, coinciding with the publication of his first novel, *Las buenas conciencias* (1958). Fuentes' ideas revolved

13 Fuentes, *Valiente Mundo* 172.
around the image of writer with a set of inherent obligations and duties, not just a typewriter and deadlines. Fuentes' intellectual eruptions coincided with those of other authors in the Americas. It was the right time and tension for what became known as the generation of "el boom." The boom group and literature of that period has been deemed a contrived phenomenon by some non-member intellectuals of that time. This phenomenon was considered a money making scheme deftly manipulated by a few globetrotting literati. For whatever reasons that coalesced the group, Fuentes steadfastly followed his own pattern and designs. Three important elements continue to survive from the boom: an acute historical awareness, a strong socio/political voice, and tremendous variation in style. In an interview at the University of Notre Dame in 1980, Fuentes declared about the boom:

... a generation that is not a generation. In reality, there is a profound coincidence at a certain moment in the literature of Hispanic America; I would say that it is a great arc that begins with Borges and still has not finished. We have not seen its final consequences, but at the same time the works produced in these
years, let's say between 1950 and 1980, are not isolated, or without predecessors, as if born from spontaneous generation.\footnote{14 José Anadon, "Entrevista a Carlos Fuentes," \textit{Revista Iberoamericana} 123-124 (1983): 621.}

At the end of the interview Fuentes comments that he does not have a particularly favorite work from his years of writing, owing partially to the fact that it is all one book, in his mind, and the essays, stories, and novels are chapters or pieces thereof. This alludes to the idea, often posited by Fuentes and his contemporaries, that all Latin American authors are writing in the same book.

The popularity of novels that lean toward modern societal portrayals that team with "the public's taste for gossip, for the sensational, for the behind-the-scenes glimpses of public figures" formed part of the Fuentes' view in the late fifties and early sixties.\footnote{15 Ibid. p. 388} This too has been historical depiction for Fuentes. The past on line with the present. The time is right for what must occur in Mexico, that being a cosmopolitan view part native and part hybrid. This will focus on Mexico and
Mexicanness (lo mexicano) to deliver a hated and at the same time much sought after message. In Where the Air is Clear (1958), Fuentes accomplished this with the juxtaposition of ancient Mexico (Ixca Cienfuegos/Doña Teódula) and the new products of the Revolution (Federico Robles/Norma Larragoiti: los popis). Fuentes' novel will drag Mexico, with the help of the boom phenomena, into trendy Latin American writing of the twentieth century. In discussing Fuentes at this point it is only natural to include Gabriel García Márquez, Mário Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, and a number of other prominent literary individuals. These authors, from several countries, formed the boom group. At times they were referred to as the "mafia" of popular writers.

Much criticism has been leveled at the collective group for having generated their own successes. Undoubtedly the media and mutual endorsement did not hurt the promotion of their works. In retrospect the works of the boom period are seen as innovative, experimental and transitional. Putting aside their distaste for men of the boom, even the most strident critics have had to admit that the masterful amalgam of styles, techniques, and flexible intellect are the distinguishing characteristics of
members in this elite group.

Fuentes advocates certain criteria for original expression in the written medium and lives up to his self-set criteria. Fuentes has remained constant in his declarations throughout his career concerning the author's obligations and how these should be manifested in writing.

In 1969, eleven years after publishing his first novel, *Las buenas consciencias*, Fuentes brought many of his ideas to a convergence and published a group of essays titled, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. The book is significant because it deals with Fuentes' revolutionary approach to bending language, technique and theme in his writing. Fuentes transcends the place and time of his characters and focuses on the universal, the dualisms and ambiguities of life. Certainly this has been a key to the author's success throughout the world. The lessons often apply to all men, not just Jaime Ceballos in Guanajuato, Artemio Cruz in Mexico City, or Tomás Arroyo in Villa's army. Fuentes has made this observation:

... our history has been more imaginative than our fiction; the writer has had to compete with
mountains, rivers, jungles, deserts of superhuman dimensions. How can we invent more fantastic characters than Cortés and Pizarro, more sinister than Santa Anna or Rosas, more tragicomic than Trujillo or Batista? Re-invent history, tear it from the epic and transform it into personality, humor, language, myth: save the Latin Americans from abstraction and place them in the human kingdom of the accidental, variety, impurity: only the writer in Latin America can do this.16

This passage implies the tremendous responsibility felt by Fuentes. The implication is the re-invention of history based on existing historical figures. Each character has a tale to tell, how will this be released and enhanced by the author?

And so, more specifically how has Fuentes broken with the traditions that led up to his genesis within the Mexican literary scene? Revolution seems to be a key word throughout. He does not advocate throwing out history, just rewriting it. Fuentes' revolutionary approach to the use and revamping of language is a

frequently encountered topic. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* deals in part with the potential power of words. He addresses the necessity of choosing "the new word" to provide building blocks for a new and liberated style that will help compose this revised history. Fuentes saw the word in itself capable of moving the "academic pachyderms of the Spanish lexicon."\(^{17}\) This could be achieved with what he cited as knots of meaning that coexist in a word and spill into other centers of allusion thus leading to new and varied interpretations.\(^{18}\) As one reads the prose of Fuentes' novels it becomes apparent that he assumes the sophisticated reader will simultaneously incorporate all of these knots of meaning into interpretation of the text. The reader must be functioning on multiple layers of meaning to grasp the full portent of words, phrases, and paragraphs. Although *Old Gringo* was published in 1984, Fuentes has not changed his ideas of the multi-representational aspect of words and narrative.

In *Old Gringo* there are many possibilities for analysis of words, frases and events. In chapter six, for example, a section


deals with the opacity of Arroyo and the transparency of Harriet. Aside from a possible reference to race, there is the idea of transparent and dark as shades of innocence or lack thereof, as reference to relations between the U. S. and Mexico, or the contrast of man and woman. In chapter ten Arroyo tells Harriet about the hacendados castrating bulls. Castrating bulls carries the significance of dominating the campesino, of even taking away his reproductive liberty. This represents the maintenance of power in the imbalanced system of peonage. Is this the U.S. dominating its southern neighbor? Arroyo's name is used in Spanish and English, Tómas Arroyo-Tom Brook. At one point Harriet thinks that, as a sexual reference, this is a good name Arroyo. There are many possibilities for digression.

Fuentes reaches a crescendo with this style of writing in *Christopher Unborn*. Through the monologue of the embryo Christopher, the author speaks to this topic:

I should allow all exterior voices to clash like storms within my solitary discourse (listen: here you can hear the politico, the lover, the ideologue, the comic, the powerful, the weak, the child, the intellectual, the
illiterate, the sensual, the vengeful, the charitable, the personage, but also history, society, language itself: the barbarous, the corrupt, the Gallic, the Anglic, the latic, the pochic, the unique, the provincial and the catholic: listen your mercies please pay attention.)\(^\text{19}\)

The multiplicity of voices, meanings, and possible interpretations have been and remain a hallmark of Fuentes' work. This is one reason that some critics, such as John Brushwood in the article "Mexican Fiction in the Seventies: Author, Intellect, and Public," have relegated Fuentes to the land of exclusivist writers. Brushwood discusses the innovations in the narrative of Carlos Fuentes and then goes on to question the accessibility of such reading to the public. At one point, referring to the overwhelming number of allusions found in Fuentes-type writing and the author dominated features of the narrative technique, Brushwood says: "The result is an 'in' type of novel that makes a few readers feel very cozy and the larger public feel very

In *Old Gringo*, Faulknerian flashbacks, Joycian stream-of-consciousness passages and juxtaposition of unattributed character thoughts could confuse the reader. They are intended more to approximate the disjointed thinking and emotions of individuals involved in struggle.

This chapter has dealt with biographical information about Fuentes, the man, so that his writing may be better understood. Fuentes was fortunate to have had a rich and varied education. Certain aspects of this background continue to surface in the writing: cross-cultural references and allusions, a thorough linguistic knowledge, and a strident socio-political conscience.

Fuentes has been placed chronologically in the spectrum of Mexican writers. There are references to some authors, such as Mariano Azuela, who have been influential precursors to Carlos Fuentes. There is emphasis on the boom in Latin American literature which signaled the emergence of a group of writers that defied classification.

Finally, some technical intricacies have been addressed:

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word knots, various levels of allusion and juxtaposition of time frames. Fuentes has employed ambiguity as a character trait that ultimately produces more rounded and realistic historical figures. This is a significant aspect of the Fuentes style of history through literature. Ambiguity has traditionally been considered the enemy of accurate history, Fuentes now employs it to create a more humanistic history. Arroyo has not been allowed to live out the archetype of the ideal warrior. He succumbs to his own dark side, his own opacity, which will not allow him to see beyond the Miranda hacienda.
CHAPTER II

History and history

Subtly delivering history through good fiction is a centuries-old art. It has been trendy during this decade to pretend that this is a new phenomenon. Carlos Fuentes fits into the history through literature continuum because he is a master at weaving threads of fiction through the warp of history. His works are the result of a communion between history and art. Through a powerful triumvirate comprised of a lifelong fascination with history, the constantly evolving skills of a fine writer and stylistic daring, Fuentes provides a very engaging study. Fuentes continually challenges himself, as is evident in the author's writing, and characteristically goes one step further. In the interview with José Anadon, Fuentes commented:

When one feels satisfied he won't want to write anymore. I am always unsatisfied, totally, and for
me this is fundamental, as an impetus to continue writing. Besides, I believe that I am unconsciously always looking for the writing to be imperfect. It could be because imperfection provides the the opportunity for risk. If one is not capable of taking risks when writing I believe that the works may turn out more perfect, because perfection is judged from a previously established model. The element of risk, that is fundamental for me in literature, one gets from imperfection.21

Attempting to typecast the historical fiction that Fuentes produces is a frightening task. Luis Leal, an icon in the world of Hispanic literary criticism, has perhaps best summarized the portent of Fuentes' writing:

In general, then, it can be said that the narrative of Carlos Fuentes swerved strongly at the beginning toward the historical, and strongly after 1969 toward the mythical, but never in a pure form. His idea of history, however, is not that of an empirical historian

21 Anadon 630.
but goes beyond fact to a reality that includes myth and legend, so important in the shaping of the Mexican mind. Quite often he shapes the lacuna of the historical record with oral history, legend or myth; and although it is based on a collection of facts, the mythical consciousness of the author is ever present before the facts are verbalized. Certainly, in Mexico the most famous historians have been myth makers.22

The novel *Old Gringo* seems to be a healthy portion of both the slightly less than empirical history and the composite myth/legend that have more formed the people's living history.

It is possible in this short two hundred page novel to see two simultaneous historical tracks: the disappearance of Ambrose Bierce (being of course, the old gringo) into the maelstrom of the Mexican Revolution in the year 1913 and the trajectory of the Mexican Revolution itself with its own chaotic whirlwinds. One of those whirlwinds turns out to be the young General Tomás Arroyo who serves Fuentes significantly as a part of the myth/history component. The principal female protagonist,

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22 Leal 15.
Harriet Winslow, has many functions in the work, although as a historical figure is not as prominent as other characters. There are others who, although playing seemingly small parts: *la garduña*, Pedrito, Inocencio Mansalvo, and *mujer con la cara de luna*, the significant fabric, the textured weave comprising the people's myth. Or, what may by many be considered the real history of the Revolution.

With a less calculating eye the reader can look at *Old Gringo* as the colorful exploits of the well-known sardonic American author Ambrose Bierce. This then is the chronicle of his border crossing in 1913 and the possible events in "the opposite side[s] of a deep chasm." Fuentes uses the familiar historical background of Ambrose Bierce which can be gleaned from Bierce biographies and collected correspondence between family and friends. (It should not be overlooked that the author, near the end of the book, using interior monologues from Tomás Arroyo and Harriet Winslow identifies the old gringo as the writer Ambrose Bierce.²³)

The book is littered with Bierce quotes that fall either from

²³ Fuentes, *Old Gringo* 192-93.
his own earlier writing or are taken from correspondence. For example this well known quote appears in *Gringo Viejo*: "To be a Gringo in Mexico--ah, that is euthanasia!", which was taken directly from a letter Bierce sent to his niece in 1912. At one point in the book the old gringo is plodding along a dirt road in tow of the Arroyo entourage and muses:

. . . muttering to himself stories he had once written, cruel stories of the American Civil War in which men succumb and survive because they have been granted a fragmented conscious: because a man can be at once dying--hanging from a bridge with a rope around his neck--and watching his death from the far side of the creek: because a man can dream of a horseman and kill his own father, all in the same instant.24

In this citation there are two allusions to material from Bierce's short stories. In one, a man is watching himself being executed. This is taken from *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. The other, comes from the image of a soldier's father on horseback. This alludes to *Horseman in the Sky*.

24 Fuentes, *Old Gringo* 139.
In fact Fuentes uses Bierce's writing throughout the novel to give historical breath of life to the old Gringo. As Drewey Wayne Gunn so painstakingly documents in his article "A Labyrinth of Mirrors: Literary Sources of The Old Gringo/Gringo viejo" published in the "Revista de Estudios Hispánicos," there are excerpts from or allusions to Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, The Devil's Dictionary, Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, and references from several short stories dealing with the Civil War, among others. These allusions are not necessarily made by the Old Gringo himself, but in the text may be part of the action behind the main characters or occur in dialogue between characters. For example, there are several references to hogs eating cadavers in the novel, that are actually allusions to a story written by Bierce ("The Coup de Grace"). So, Fuentes paints the setting in his book with scenes from Bierce's short stories. This is an intra-textual twist that is characteristic of Fuentes prose.

Fuentes has given many direct and indirect pointers to the historical identity of the Gringo Viejo as Ambrose Bierce. This is

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26 Gunn 66.
Fuentesque: an in-depth identification puzzle that goes on with reader and text. This can be ignored or engaged on many levels. Fuentes has not made this part of his writing essential to the enjoyment of the story. If one considers all the possible references to Bierce's writing and other trivia that are included concerning the old crumudgeon, there are two levels of Bierce identification going on simultaneously. One is working on a literary level beyond most readers, and is assuming that the reader will have a broad knowledge not only of Bierce's books, but of literature in general. Fuentes also provides enough information, in a more direct fashion, to clearly identify the old gringo as Bierce without keying into the body of obscure literary clues.

Ambrose Bierce's melancholy and roundabout departure from the United States in 1913 is historically documented (American journalists dogged his every move until he crossed into Mexico.) and, as seen, he is brought to life by Carlos Fuentes upon setting foot in Mexico as the fictional character the old gringo, who lives novelistically thanks to the words of Ambrose Bierce.

Looking at two of the better known biographies of Ambrose
Bierce, *Portrait of Ambrose Bierce* by Adolphe de Castro and *Ambrose Bierce the Devil's Lexicographer* by Paul Fatout, it is possible to piece together the old man's departure from the United States as seen in *Old Gringo*.

The biographies provide ample ground, as is also common historical knowledge, for Bierce's disappearance into Mexico. Fatout writes in the chapter titled "Distance from Hell--1913":

Later in November the traveler moved on to El Paso, where international relations were so friendly that crossing the border was comparatively simple. Moving across to Ciudad Juárez, Ambrose was cordially received and given credentials as an observer attached to Villa's army marching to Chihuahua. By November 28 he was some thirty miles south of Juárez, riding hard through hot days and being chilled by cold nights.27

This citation adds credibility to two more suppositions about Bierce's activities after crossing the border. As the reader discovers in *Gringo Viejo*, the old gringo hooks into Villa's army

27 Fatout 317.
and remains in northern Mexico, at least through the end of November in 1913. This is complemented by the De Castro biography with information that he gleaned from correspondence from Bierce to friends and family, De Castro adds:

The fact remains that he went to Mexico. He joined the army of the revolution against Huerta and was in the battle at Ojinaga--- he and Pedrito, his "arms-bearer" and companion.28

Aside from De Castro's assertion that Bierce was in Mexico, there is also the connection with Pedrito, who appears in the novel Old Gringo as none other than, Pedrito, a young campesino in Villa's army.

Fuentes patterns the old gringo according to memorable details known about Ambrose Bierce. There are references to Mr. Bierce's blue eyes, his aversion to shaving cuts and fear of dogs. In addition, Bierce was apparently a decent marksman, as noted in the last letter sent from Mexico in December of 1913.29 Also, Fuentes has used the knowledge of his marksmanship and

experience in the U.S. Civil War as a member of the Indiana Ninth Infantry Division to fashion the scene where the old gringo meets Tomás Arroyo and nails a peso cleanly through the eagle as part of his initiation ritual. Fuentes goes further into the war memory of Bierce with the old gringo's fictional actions by providing the scene where he confronts the *federales* single handedly. At the same time he imagines/hallucinates meeting his own father on the battlefield in Fayetteville.\(^{30}\) Fuentes goes one step further creating the image of the old gringo's father falling dead from his horse and labelling him as "the horseman in the sky," employing the title of a well-known Bierce novel. All of this is an intricate mesh that shows, not only some real life basis for the fictional old gringo, but also Fuentes' familiarity with Biercian literature. All of these aspects can be encountered in one or both of the mentioned biographies. Bierce's attractive and stately appearance is mentioned in both biographies and also played upon in *Old Gringo*. This begins at the point where the old gringo crosses the border and is hosted by a couple for one evening. The old gringo suspects that his host may be jealous and does not

\(^{30}\) Fuentes, *Old Gringo* 54.
allow his wife to venture forth to temptation.\textsuperscript{31} The old gringo has romantic potential: evidenced by his Freudian-tinted relationship with Harriet Winslow. The biographies mention Bierce's well preserved state as an old gentleman and contend that, except for his white hair, he appeared younger than his years.

The aforementioned real life characteristics of Ambrose Bierce are mirrored in the fictional life of the old gringo. Surveying a scene between Arroyo and Harriet the old gringo thinks to himself:

She was conceding to Arroyo what was Arroyo's, the old man told himself, drunk from his military exploits the resurrected literary worm, his desire for death, his fear of disfiguring death: dogs, knives, the memory of another's pain when it becomes his own; his fear of dying choked by asthma; his desire to die by another's hand. All these thoughts at the same time: "I want to be a good looking corpse."

The theme of death and suicide are part of the old gringo's

\textsuperscript{31} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 13.
\textsuperscript{32} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 92.
dialogues and interior monologues throughout the book. They were also topics dear to Bierce. Gunn refers to the interesting usage of an idea from a Bierce essay entitled "Taking Oneself Off," saying:

Bierce [had] lucidly argued for people in certain untenable and irrevocable situations suicide is not only justified but even a duty to be performed with pride.\(^\text{33}\)

All of these references provide pretext for the old gringo's crossing into Mexico in search of that final end based on Bierce's documented beliefs about honor, suicide, and death in general. In *Old Gringo* there is a dialogue between Arroyo and a captured Federal colonel. As the old gringo listens, Fuentes has the two men converse about bravery and death:

"Of course, the law," said Arroyo, with a sad steady gaze." But I am asking you which is more important, the way we live or the way we die?"

The officer hesitated a moment. "Put that way, of course it is the manner in which one dies."

\(^{33}\) Gunn 68.
The old man said nothing, but he mulled over the words that might have been Arroyo's honor code and which the old man could, if he chose, take as being directed at him.\textsuperscript{34}

Fuentes' fictional rendition of the old gringo meeting his death in the desert is not too different from the actual biographical suppositions. Up to this point, the two biographies are basically in agreement concerning the crossing into Mexico, and Bierce's probable involvement with the fight in northern Mexico. (Fatout, however, dismissed De Castro's dramatic version and went on to create a list of his own theories concerning the disappearance and death of Bierce.) De Castro discusses the journalistic flights of fancy that appeared in the years after Bierce's disappearance. In De Castro's book there are two chapters entitled "Ascertaining the Truth" and "I Visit Villa." These chapters rally some tidbits that lend to piecing together the overall puzzle. Concerning De Castro's visit to Pancho Villa's hacienda in Canutillo in 1923, there is a photograph of a letter from Villa to De Castro. Pancho Villa declines the proposed visit

\textsuperscript{34} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 85-86.
from De Castro. In any event, "knowing the Mexican character" well enough to call Villa's bluff, De Castro proceeds to Canutillo.35. After a supposed game of cat and mouse with el general, De Castro began to close in on the real topic he sought to investigate, "Slowly as a surgeon feels for the hidden ulcer, I felt my way to the bit of information I wanted. . ."36 Ambrosio Bierce's name finally surfaces and Villa is supposedly to have commented, "We have no patience with traitors. . ."37 Connected later in the book to the declaration, " . . . he wanted to join Carranza. . ."38 This was followed by the ominous statement, ". . . and we put him out."39 De Castro contends that Villa also stated in the Canutillo meeting, " . . . he was a good military man, the old drunkard. . ."40

Fatout says the meeting between De Castro and Villa was improbable. He goes on to list the evidence that he has collected:

By that time [1918] Bierce was reluctantly presumed dead, though the facts were a mystery. Out of Mexico

35 De Castro 333.  
36 De Castro 335.  
37 De Castro 337.  
38 De Castro 377.  
39 De Castro 337.  
40 De Castro 325.
came a new story. A traveler reported that an American of the Bierce description was said to have served with either Villa or Carranza, and that he was shot by a field commander for reasons not stated. During the next year, 1919, another version was produced by a man named George F. Weeks, who said he got his story by chance from a Mexican officer in Mexico City. After the break between Villa and Carranza in [1914]1915 [sic], said Weeks, General [Tomás] Urbina, one of Villa's commanders occupying Icamole, picked up Ambrose Bierce and a Mexican transporting a machine gun and ammunition on four mules. Urbina, getting no satisfactory explanation from either man, summarily shot both.41

The two biographies agree to the extent that Bierce most certainly entered Mexico at the end of 1913 and quite probably met a violent end in northern Mexico while with Villa's army. Fuentes does not go further than these assertions, although he compresses the chronology from the last known correspondence

41 Fatout 321.
from Bierce dated December 26, 1913. The old gringo falls to a rather hasty fictional demise in the novel, which considering the chaos of the times and the old man's temperament, seems the most probable of all. The rapid trajectory of Fuentes' novel is consistent with the first of four theories that Paul Fatout provides at the end of his biography. He states: "... having joined Villa's forces in December, 1913, he was killed in action at the siege of Ojinaga, which was captured on January 11, 1914."\(^4\)

Another interesting bit of anachronistic interweaving between history and fiction is the use of the execution and re-execution of William Benton in February of 1914 committed by the Villa gang. Part of this episode has been fictionally incorporated into the death of the old gringo.

Benton, a cattle rancher of Scottish origin, had married a Mexican woman and was living in northern Mexico at the time of Villa's northern campaign. Benton's cattle were seized as provisions by the Villistas. Benton confronted Villa in Juárez and his actions were interpreted as outright support for Huerta: treason. Villa's renowned henchman, Rodolfo Fierro, had Benton

\(^{42}\) Fatout 325.
dig his own grave and then reportedly smashed the Scotsman's skull with a shovel. To cover the unfortunate business Villa later ordered that the body be exhumed and shot to appear as if a legitimate execution had been carried out.43 In Old Gringo there are two similar events that evidently have origin in the Benton history. One occurs when the old gringo is shot by Arroyo in a moment of rage concerning the all important papers of ownership to the Miranda hacienda.44 Later, toward the end of the novel, Arroyo is ordered to exhume the gringo and take the body to Camargo for re-execution.45

As a final note on famous incidents incorporated into Old Gringo, the Versailles Room full of mirrors in the Fuentes book is also based on a known account that involved mirrors. Zapata's troops upon entering Mexico City ransacked homes of the wealthy in December of 1914. The Mexican Times is said to have reported how Zapata's troops were fascinated with seeing their own

44 Fuentes, Old Gringo 162-63.
45 Fuentes, Old Gringo 174.
reflections in the elegant mirrors of these homes.\textsuperscript{46} Here too, the chronology has been distorted. This actually occurred months later than its placement in the Fuentes time line. However, as with the Benton incident, the timing is not as important as the novelistic value.

Fuentes has been accused of collapsing time to expedite a fictional scenario. The rearrangement of time and simplification of some cultural aspects do not always paint an accurate history. This does, however, place more emphasis on certain incidents and impacts the reader as the author may have intended. Ultimately it is the author's prerogative. This is Fuentes' re-interpretation of history into historical fiction. Here, for the sake of knowing the degree of historical veracity in this novel, major deviations are indicated.

Luis Leal in his article "History and Myth in the Narrative of Carlos Fuentes" states throughout that the Fuentes' texture in writing is one created from "the interaction between history and myth"\textsuperscript{47} or "the combination of two narrative modes, the realistic

\textsuperscript{47} Leal 3.
(historical) and the mythical." Leal asserts that Fuentes has gradually abandoned almost entirely any documentary style and rather has focused on the mythical bases of what is now called history. It is impossible to consider Fuentes writing without keeping in mind the mythical. Fuentes repeatedly returns to myth: the personal, on the level of the pueblo and the universal. We are shown in Old Gringo that "dreaming is one's personal myth," with continual allusion to the larger living, mythical picture at hand. And, there is certainly a progression from the documented portion of Old Gringo, founded in Bierce that smoothly blends into the mythical side of the book which revolves around Arroyo and the Revolution. As the following elements are considered from a historical perspective: Bierce/el gringo viejo, Arroyo/Villa/the revolution, and the composite characters (la garduña, mujer con la cara de luna, Coronel Frutos García, etc.), realistic history fades and lo mítico becomes the dominating perspective. (An interesting point to consider is that the old gringo is in pursuit of a new myth, to leave behind the realistic/factual sterility of his journalistic past and once again participate in the only activity

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48 Leal 4.
49 Leal 5.
that redeemed him mythically: war. To die, for the old gringo is to re-seek an abandoned status, to replace the sterile.)

Bierce has been the focus. As he converts into the old gringo in the border crossing, the reader is thus pulled in the Revolutionary time strand. This span of time to be considered begins again with Bierce's crossing into Mexico at El Paso and into Ciudad Juárez in the last days of November, 1913. The first Mexican that the old gringo meets tells him that "the fighting is thick around there [Chihuahua]; that's Pancho Villa's territory." Villa was working on taking control of the Chihuahua region in March of 1913 and was busy consolidating his power during the last two months of that year. In fact, one of the things Villa actively pursued was the confiscation and redistribution of land. In the book *Centaur of the North* by the author Manuel Machado there is a clear documentation of events from that time period. Included is material that deals with the Terrazas family:

Even more odious to Villa than Spaniards were Mexicans who had exploited the people through the hacienda and its concomitant peonage. In

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Chihuahua he zeroed in on the Terrazas clan. Unmistakably the pretext for Arroyo's siege of the Miranda hacienda is taken from a historical context. It is also be an epithet for the all-consuming rage of Arroyo in *Old Gringo*. And, in fact, when Bierce was entering Mexico in late 1913, the Terrazas would have been suffering a number of humiliations and family calamities. The gringo viejo would have quickly encountered Villa troops, such as Arroyo and his band, who were dismantling the old hacienda system in northern Mexico. (The Arroyo group is almost quijotesque in composition, like the inhabitants of the old inn in *Don Quijote*; they form a good representation of the revolutionary life from that era.)

Villa had formally occupied Chihuahua City on December 8, 1913. The Terrazas property was confiscated and occupied shortly after. The last correspondence from Bierce, the December 26, 1913 letter, was mailed from Chihuahua and spoke of an impending trip to Ojinaga with observations of fighting all around the Chihuahua vicinity. There were indeed many people fleeing to Ojinaga at that time, especially those of Spanish origin who

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51 Machado 78.
feared reprisals or deportation.\textsuperscript{52}

The chronology seems fairly consistent between fiction and documented history for the last months of 1913. However, the events at the Miranda hacienda and final departure by Arroyo's group to catch up with Villa would have had to span nearly six months in order to match the historical dates.

Perhaps least credible is the amount of time that the group would have had to spend at the Miranda hacienda itself. The central unraveling of theme takes place in the hacienda, however, where there are digressions into the past lives of several characters which lend a dream-like texture to the time spent there. (Shades of Comala.) The villistas have been absorbed by Arroyo's dark brooding and inability to break away from the past. Fuentes prolongs any resolution until the death of the old gringo; which releases all to carry on with their destinies.

Considering the other side of this dream space, however, the famed telegraph conversation between Villa's General Herrera and Carranza took place, in actuality, during June of 1914. The event is referred to in \textit{Old Gringo}, where Villa takes credit for

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{52} Machado 44-45.
having called Carranza *hijo de puta* by having had Herrera send such a telegram, which is not historically correct.\(^5\) Herrera, "a loyal but impetuous villista, one of Villa's generals, is reported to have sent the missive while holding a gun to the head of the telegraph operator."\(^5\) In the novel, Villa feigns to not know the words *hijo de puta*, and therefore says he could not have really sent such a message.

In the fictional tale the old gringo has died and there is a hazy period between his exhumation and the official execution by Villa in Camargo. This second execution, as previously examined, does not jibe with history, but is Fuentes' usage of the William Benton incident to embellish his own tale.

Thus, Villa is not in Torreón, as history had him in June of 1914, but instead Fuentes has placed his Villa in Camargo. It is in Camargo, in the fictional account, where Harriet Winslow arrives to pick up the old gringo's body. It is also at this point in the Fuentes chronology where newspaper reporters hound Villa about the famous telegram incident but also his emerging rift with Carranza (the timing would be correct, historically) and ask

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\(^5\) Fuentes, *Old Gringo* 171.
\(^5\) Machado 92.
him about his dismissal from the campaign against Zacatecas. As is historically correct, the novel indicates that Carranza would send the Arrieta brothers to Zacatecas as the main force.\textsuperscript{55} In the later part of June Villa's forces were also present in Zacatecas. The Arrieta brothers had not been able to complete their mission, thus frustrating Carranza's plan for excluding Villa. In fact, Villa had saved the campaign in Zacatecas with a strong blow to the \textit{federales}.

In the Fuentes novel there are also references at this same point to Veracruz. Earlier, Harriet Winslow has been asked (in a repetitive stanza-like style) if she noticed what was happening in Veracruz upon her arrival in Mexico and as she made her way to the Miranda hacienda.\textsuperscript{56}

The invasion of Veracruz occurred April 20 of 1914 and would place Harriet Winslow's above mentioned episode sometime after that date. This also means that the old gringo was shot by Arroyo in the beginning of May, if we follow the fictional chronology. Trying to make the Fuentes chronology fit history in this space between April and the end of June 1914 becomes

\textsuperscript{55} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 170-72.
\textsuperscript{56} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 98-99.
difficult.

With a few deviations: namely the literary manipulation of the Benton incident and Zapata's mirror episode for the sake of novelistic discourse, Villa's location in Camargo instead of Torreón, and certain actions attributed to Villa that in life were carried out by subordinates, it appears that the two chronologies, stretched side to side are quite similar. The Fuentes novel even makes ominous reference to possible reprisals against U.S. citizens:

"We'll kill a few gringos all right," said Villa with a ferocious grin, "but in good time and when I decide."57

Villa is remembered as Doroteo Arango in Old Gringo (memories of la mujer con la cara de luna 58 ) from events surrounding the Villista occupation of Durango. Villa exists in the literary present of the text through interviews and the execution of Arroyo. The Fuentes' Villa warns that Americans will be attacked in the future. Villa: past, present and future in Old Gringo falls into a historically verifiable chronology of what occurred in the trajectory of Villa's northern campaign.

57 Fuentes, Old Gringo 187.
58 Fuentes, Old Gringo 154.
Villa is also absorbed into the character of Arroyo, the mythical/historical figure who is the central protagonist mover in the novel. (Or, is the opposite true? The reader naturally connotates Arroyo with the *gran general*, he is shadowed by Villa's fame, an extension of Villa.)

The reader is introduced to Arroyo (alter ego of Villa) at the beginning of Chapter Four. The old gringo arrives at Arroyo's encampment saying that he is searching for Pancho Villa. The reply from those crowded around is:

"¡Villa! ¡Villa! ¡Viva Villa!" they shouted in chorus,

until a soldier in a sweat- and dirt-streaked yellow sombrero yelled, laughing, from the roof of the baggage car: "We are all Villa!"  

The villista harmony line represented the spirit of the Revolution for most men. The declaration of "we are one" is especially potent in relation to Arroyo, the archetypal revolutionary leader/caudillo. For Tomás Arroyo it becomes a noose. On one hand, Arroyo molded well into the macho power figure for which Villa was the die. There were not to be exceptions from the basic

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mold, on the other hand. Tomás was expected to comply with the expectations of a revolutionary caudillo; sloppy executions and tinkering with gringos did not constitute part of the plan. Near the end of the book Harriet reflects on a conversation with Arroyo concerning this unspoken code of conduct:

"...I am fighting. Those are my orders. But"--

Arroyo laughed--"Pancho Villa hates anyone who thinks about going home. It is like treason, almost.

I have gambled heavily by taking the Miranda hacienda and remaining here."\(^{60}\)

The northern phase of the revolution was dramatically personified in Villa. Villa's fight for change and the overthrow of tyranny is embodied in the many men and women who were swept into participation. Tomás Arroyo was selected to lead and uphold the responsibilities of such a position. There are three versions of Villa that form this caudillo image in \textit{Old Gringo}. They can be superimposed: the recognized Villa of history, Villa as a revolutionary leader prototype (legendary at times) and Villa as expanding archetype and myth. The latter includes the Arroyos,

\(^{60}\) Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 198.
the Herreras, the Fierros and a number of other Villa spin-offs who help bring the Revolution to fruition. Fuentes has justifiably collapsed these three components, at times, into the character of Tomás Arroyo. There is certainly character blending in the book between Arroyo and the fictional/historical Villa.

Throughout the story there is transference from Villa to Arroyo. Arroyo's entourage of luxurious rail cars wrested from the wealthy, filled with fighting men, soldaderas, and prostitutes was certainly a colorful part of Villa's military campaign. Villa, in life, did control the Northwestern Railroad near Chihuahua City in 1913 and earlier, in March of 1911, had taken over the Northwestern and Mexican Central Railway.61

Villa was an attractive man, known to have courted many women. Arroyo as the central fictional character embodies this macho attractiveness. It works for Fuentes. Arroyo seems to have been a strong, charismatic leader to his followers, although filled with ambiguities that made his a truer human portrait than history has done with Villa. Through the character of Arroyo, Fuentes is able to de-mythify, cleaning away some of the dazzle

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61 Machado 20.
and revealing more of the man. At one point Harriet and the old gringo watch Arroyo from a distance:

    Arroyo was speaking to the people, moving rapidly and moving with authority among them. The gringos were watching him from a distance, but they saw him in close detail: cruel and tender, just and unjust, vigilant and lax, resentful and self-confident, active and lazy, modest and arrogant: the quintessential Latin Indian.62

The Villa-warrior archetype has been modified by Fuentes. A fatal addition has been framed into Arroyo: the decline into the pathos of hatred. The prolonged stay at the Miranda hacienda and degeneration into the bitterness of his past indicate that he suffers from an inability to escape from this past.

The hacienda system permanently damaged many who were in its servitude in a variety of ways. Perhaps one of the less considered is how the pattern of power within these hacendados became thoroughly entrenched in the mind of the campesino. Akin to slaves who were suddenly emancipated after the Civil War in

62 Fuentes, Old Gringo 184.
the United States, many campesinos were unprepared mentally for the prospects of liberty. The complex pattern of debt and indenture, although hated by most who suffered its indignities and abuses; had nothing to replace it. The absence of this fierce point of hatred, *el hacendado*, so focused upon for generations of campesinos, actually created a vacuum of sorts when the revolution rearranged the social landscape in Mexico.⁶³

Arroyo also seems to lack faith in his returning *compañeros'* capacity to fill the void created by the lack of *el hacendado*. His attitude is condescending and paternal with regards to his people. Arroyo now takes the place of the *hacendado* with a smoking ruin as his symbolic inheritance. The precious papers of title that are the false hope and obsession for Arroyo are the final vestige of legitimacy from the hacienda. In the end, he empowered the papers to such an extent that his future will be dramatically affected. The old gringo dies for attempting to destroy them. Harriet is alienated. Arroyo must die by Villa's order.

The archetypal characters in the cadre of fighting men in the novel *Old Gringo* represent the sturdy warp that supported

⁶³ Rutherford 185.
the revolution. They collectively and individually form a truer,
more common sense voice that belie the mundane grit, struggle,
and death. These characters appear like a chorus throughout the
book. Their observations are simple and pure in form. In
comparison to Arroyo these characters seem freer of the pressure
to perpetuate *el caciquismo* or genuflect to it. One author
contends that:

... it is safe to say that in all probability the
fighting masses will, in fact, be principally derived
from the lower classes of society. There are three
distinct groups: the agricultural workers or peasants,
the industrial workers or proletariat, and the rejects
or outcasts of society, or the mob.\(^6^4\)

John Rutherford makes this observation after a painstakingly in-
depth review of the literature of the Mexican Revolution that
spans roughly 1911 to 1960.

There is special emphasis on the novels of Mariano Azuela.
Rutherford combines the summary of this novelistic content with
the substantiated history of the revolution. His work then looks

\(^{64}\) Rutherford 183.
at Mexican society of the revolutionary period as reflected in its own novels, checking for commonalities, inconsistencies, social myths and legends. He divides society of the period (1910 to 1917) into three basic groups: the intellectuals, the leaders and the fighting masses/middle leadership. There is also a rather lengthy chapter that deals with anti-revolutionaries including rural and urban élite, foreigners, the church, the army and the lower-middle class.

Considering the history of the period and this distillation by Rutherford of the main body of Mexican Revolutionary novels, the Fuentes characters that populate *Gringo Viejo* reflect the times. These characters, archetypal figures, are basically representational of the the groups that Rutherford outlines. There are four solid figures to consider that coincide with the revolutionary profiles mentioned in Rutherford's text. They are: Inocencio Mansalvo, representative of the agricultural worker/peasant group, *Coronel* Frutos García, and *la mujer con la cara de luna* from the proletariat/merchant group (lower level científicos), *la Garduña*, a prostitute who is a member of the outcast.
The position of intellectual seems to be a shared responsibility, with no true intellectual figure present. (A true intellectual figure would be one whose function in the Revolution is basically a mental one, as opposed to physical.) Coronel Frutos García is mentioned as Arroyo's all-important reader. The old gringo, as a Fuentes twist, at times, seems to have a clear vision of the spirit of the Mexican and his revolution. The voice, spoken through the old gringo, at times, is a thinly disguised Fuentes. Fuentes' insights, having lived on both sides of the Río Grande, are too knowing for the old gringo character. There are many references to the old gringo's own Civil War experiences, which had helped form his perspectives. Fuentes has taken a straightforward approach to highlighting the role of each of the above mentioned members of the fighting class. This is achieved by having each character give a short personal summary that is an explanation of why he or she chosen to participate in the revolution. These are historically relevant monologues because they place the characters within the framework of participants in the revolution. These distilled personal portraits are found in chapter nine of The Old Gringo and begin with Inocencio Mansalvo:
Me, I don't like the land, señorita. I would lie if I told you that I did. I do not want to spend my life stooped over in the fields. I want the haciendas to be destroyed; I want all the people who work the land to be free, so we can work wherever we want, in the city or in the North—in your country, señorita. And if it is not to be so, I will go on fighting forever.

No more stooping for me; I want men to look me in the face.65

Representing a significant part of the revolutionary force in the northern campaign campesino blood had made it possible for haciendas and ranchos to function and profit. Arroyo frequently refers to the silent and long-suffering peons of the Miranda hacienda. "We made love and we gave birth without a sound . . .," Arroyo tells Harriet at one point.66

Colonel Frutos García is from the merchant class. He comments to Harriet in his short biography:

But look at me. I am the son of a merchant. Ask yourself how many like me have taken up arms to

65 Fuentes, Old Gringo 63.
66 Fuentes, Old Gringo 62.
support the Revolution, and I am talking about professional people, writers, teachers, small manufacturers. We can govern ourselves, I assure you, señorita. We are tired of a world ruled by the caciques, the Church, and the strutting aristocrats we've always had here.67

La Luna is also from this class, telling her story to Harriet Winslow, she states:

... she had been brought up that way, decent, not too wealthy but with enough to be well-off, her father a grain merchant, her husband a moneylender in that same little town... 68

La Luna tells Harriet about her growing awareness of the lower classes. She began to see a side that formed much of her Mexico. La Luna began to resent the false institutions of her class and questions the inequities between rich and poor. Her husband, "a blood sucking leech" is executed by Villa's men (Villa is just emerging from his former cattle rustling status as Doroteo Arango.) She saves Arroyo from the federales and joins him, thus

67 Fuentes, Old Gringo 63.
68 Fuentes, Old Gringo 150.
becoming a soldier's woman.

La Garduña is a tragic character who was caught in the turbulence of the Revolution and landed amongst the soldiers as a prostitute. Her parents were killed by "armed men from the hacienda" for attempting to protect a small piece of land as their own. Fuentes describes her as "--an appalling whore from Durango who'd attached herself to the troops, the only professional among the many decent women following the forces."\(^{69}\) She represents the dispossessed of the Revolution.

Luis Leal mentions a technique found in the literary analysis of Northrop Frye, called \textit{displacement}. Displacement is described as a technique for adapting literature to accommodate myth. This indirect mythologizing becomes what the reader knows as history, "thus the movement away from myth is the movement toward verisimilitude."\(^{70}\) This is a move toward disguising myth so that it can believably pose as history. This technique is important in looking at the archetypal characters found in the novel \textit{Old Gringo} and how they fit into the historical

\(^{69}\) Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 18.

picture.

As previously mentioned, there is a progression in Carlos Fuentes from the old gringo who is based in a fact-anchored past into the portrayal of characters where there is less displacement and more representation of *lo mítico* from Mexico's past. Tomás Arroyo falls on the dividing line between mythical and a verified character. The group of four figures considered archetypes seem more in the mythical world. They appear and disappear in the milieux of the Revolution, adding bits of color or historical blocking to the story.

What has Fuentes done to accomplish displacement in his novel? Luis Leal points out several methods that have been used in the past by Fuentes. In the popular short story "Chac Mool" Fuentes uses what Leal calls "motifs", or known geographical locations in Mexico, in addition to man-made structures and recorded historical events. The protagonist writes about these known historical events in his diary.71 "Thus Fuentes skillfully blends the historical and the mythical into a continuous narrative form . . . ," according to Leal.72

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71 Leal 5.
72 Leal 6
In *Old Gringo* there is evidence of the *norteño* dialect, that serves to linguistically set the place. (This is found in reading the Spanish version, *Gringo Viejo*, where it is more obvious that Fuentes has attempted to use northern Mexican Spanish.) Fuentes places the characters in the Chihuahuan desert, state of Chihuahua, in northern Mexico. There is a hacienda that must be dismantled as befits the policies of the Villa campaign. The loci are all appropriate for the historical time period and situation. The supply of rancheros and campesinos from the north of Mexico who wanted to participate in the reconstruction of the antiquated and oppressive *sistema de hacendados* became the patterns for the archetypes that emerged. An appropriate historical structure has been created for the Mexican revolutionary male caudillo archetype.

Arroyo fits into the schema well, portraying some of the legendary characteristics of his jefe: a powerful macho charisma, acumen in strategic technique, an innate knowledge of how to interact with and control his comrades, ruthlessness for the sake of the cause, and an uncanny survival instinct. Arroyo is also fulfilling the myth of eternal return in a coming back to beginning
that proves fatal. "We all have dreams, but when our dreams become our fate, should we be happy that they've come true?" Arroyo asks Harriet as he talks about his spiritual paralysis at being back at the hacienda.73

For the old gringo/Ambrose Bierce there is also considerable evidence of displacement technique, since he also has mythical elements. Displacement is achieved by multiple sayings, definitions (from The Devil's Dictionary), allusions, or transposed scenes that come from Bierce's actual writing or correspondence. Certainly the American version of this man's myth continues to live in this document. This myth speaks to the American reader, identifying the journalist before the actual historical placement identifies him as Bierce. His legendary cantankerous attitude, sharp tongue, and wry intellect have perpetrated the myth into fictional life. The old gringo sought to escape the powerful myth of bitterness that boiled around him in the United States. It begins to fade at the border with the old gringo firmly clutching his copy of Don Quijote. Instead the old gringo begins generating a new mythical image as he crosses the

73 Fuentes, Old Gringo 129.
border. This is fueled quickly by his battle antics. The *pueblo* is amazed at this daring and quest for death, their tongues are set quickly to spinning the mythic yarn.

Fuentes provides with this fiction an opportunity to peek behind the old and corroded mythical mask that Bierce wore for most of his life. With the old gringo, and likewise Arroyo, the reader is able to penetrate this mythical mist and discover an ambiguity-ridden, flesh and blood man who happens to be in search of a new myth for himself. The old gringo will die *en media res* in the dust of his new path. Arroyo reaches the beginning point at the Miranda hacienda, but dies with the burning papers. He is not able to correct the fatal bend in his warrior myth and cannot resurrect himself mythically as the old gringo has done.

In this chapter each character has been looked at in the light of historical probability. Do the characters fulfill an accurate historical role as Fuentes has portrayed them? The old gringo/Bierce, Arroyo/Villa, and the archetypal group of revolutionaries (two men/two women) have been considered. They all have an historical structure as base. The old gringo and
Arroyo have a significantly detailed historical structure superimposed throughout the novel. This chapter has also provided a short comparative view of the chronology of the Mexican Revolution 1913-14 with the fictional time line that Carlos Fuentes uses in *Old Gringo*. It is a probable time line set amidst identifiable historical events: Villa's campaign in northern Mexico that focuses on Chihuahua and the impending move on Zacatecas by the northern division create a believable time frame.

The end of this chapter deals with the slide from probable/verifiable history to examination of the other half of each character: the archetype. A sketch of each archetype has been suggested with special emphasis on Arroyo, who is archetypal of the revolutionary leader. He is also simultaneously expanding the myth of Villa and living a very personally destructive myth of return. The old gringo is dragging his old mythical baggage to Mexico and on a quest for death generates life into a new myth for himself. To accommodate these mythical structures and the archetypes associated with them Northrop Frye's concept of displacement is briefly discussed. This is then
applied to the novel in an attempt to see if Fuentes has employed the technique to place myth on even keel with history in *Old Gringo*.
CHAPTER III

The American Posture

Between September 1913 and June 1914 the diverse and often antagonistic sentiments that underscored U. S.-Mexican relations erupted into public view. This time frame roughly corresponds to the dates that encapsulate the quixotic adventure concocted by Fuentes.

It would be safe to say that Woodrow Wilson's moralistic stance significantly complicated relations with Mexico. In both countries many people remained mystified and confused by his emerging stance toward the southern neighbor. On the other side of the Río Grande was General Huerta who refused to succumb to this moral steamroller from the North. In addition Huerta attempted to quickly cleanse his hands of the ugly spot left from the execution of Madero. Wilson judged this all as adding up to a "bad revolution," falling short on his moral yardstick.

Huerta's regime in Mexico was not granted de facto recognition by the United States as had been customary with
other governments who struggled into existence. Instead, President Wilson sought to verify that there would be a government that pursued a democratic and constitutionally paved path, that this could be a "good revolution." Huerta did not appear to be doing as he should. On March 11, 1913, Wilson announced that there would be no sympathy for those who "seek to seize the power of government to advance their own personal interests and sentiments."\(^7^4\)

From any perspective, Mexico was in a disastrous condition. Revolution had the country torn apart with internal chaos. Woodrow Wilson's myopic vision prevented him from better understanding the southern neighbor. "He assumed that the Mexican nation, though at a less advanced stage, was basically the same as the Anglo-Saxon ones; by some quirk of circumstance Mexicans spoke Spanish instead of English . . .\(^7^5\)" Henry Lane Wilson, Ambassador to Mexico at the time, had been implicated in the death of Madero. He was no help to the President and, in fact, had vigorously supported Huerta.

\(^{7^5}\) Cline 140.
Following a bizarre chain of events between the United States and Mexico the port of Veracruz was taken on April 21 of 1914 by American military forces. The invasion episode at Veracruz would almost be humorous in the details of its contrived absurdity, if it had not meant the death of over three hundred Mexicans and nineteen American servicemen.\textsuperscript{76} The customs house at the port was firmly in American hands, and Mexico responded in xenophobic rage.

The general population of northern Mexico shows no great animosity toward the United States as reflected in \textit{Old Gringo}. This appears to be historically accurate, remembering that Villa was dominating the north at that time. His arms and ammunition were coming from sympathetic suppliers in the United States. At that point in time there seemed to exist a mutual respect between this curious revolutionary caudillo and United States citizens along the border.

Villa enjoyed perhaps the most favorable light of any political figure in Mexico during the tension filled period that led to the Veracruz invasion. Villa had a special relationship with

\textsuperscript{76} Cline 160.
the American press at that time. As he trotted up and down northern Mexico chasing *federales*, Villa was portrayed as a sort of modern day "Mexican Robin Hood; a liberator of the downtrodden." While the press may have found Villa's antics amusing, the border authorities watched with concern.78

Referring to the biographies of Ambrose Bierce, there is no mention of anti-American activities in the final correspondence sent from Mexico. In fact, quite the opposite:

He proceeded on to El Paso and passed across the line into Juarez. Officials received him cordially and gave him his credentials to accompany the army. On December 16, 1913, he was in Chihuahua, Mexico, and a letter from Juarez relates that he had just ridden in from Chihuahua to post it. It was sharp weather but he was enjoying the life.79

Harriet and the old gringo are not targets for anti-American sentiment. There are comments and instances that reflect tension between the two countries. Harriet is aware that there

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77 Machado 120.
78 Machado 83.
has been an American invasion in Veracruz. At one point she ponders a series of questions that are either a flashback to a previous conversation or a subconscious preoccupation that haunts her. At the time she is desperately working to save la Garduña’s dying child and allows her mind to wander to avoid the grim reality of the tasks at hand:

"Did you have any difficulty when you disembarked, Miss Winslow?"

"Did the occupation authorities poke and pry, Miss Winslow?"

"Did you realize that the walls of the city are also pockmarked by recent cannon fire from gringo warships, Miss Winslow?"\(^8^0\)

The text indicates that Harriet enters Mexico through the port of Veracruz. But it seems unlikely that Harriet would have actually disembarked in Veracruz almost immediately after the American occupation. It is also improbable that Harriet would have merited a special escort of two United States Marines from the port to the train station. It is also unlikely that traveling

\(^8^0\) Fuentes, *Old Gringo* 99.
from Veracruz to Mexico City to Chihuahua would have made sense logistically. All of this is heavy-handed Fuentes. However, it does make the reader aware of American intervention in Mexico and places the symbol of naive America in the heart of tension at that time. Fuentes cannot resist this final question found at the end of the litany: "Did you understand anything that was happening in your back yard, Miss Winslow?"81 America, did you have any idea?

Fuentes highlights the Veracruz invasion again near the end of the novel. Villa is besieged by journalists as he prepares to join other generals on the move toward Zacatecas, June 1914. One asks his opinion of the situation in Veracruz and Villa replies: "An unwelcome guest and a dead man both stink after two days."82 At the end of a paragraph long diatribe against the Veracruz invasion Villa goes on to declare: "... it seems to me that when gringos aren't too smart for their own good, they're plenty dumb."83 Although it is known that Villa felt the Veracruz fiasco would work in his favor, it was not for love of the United

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81 Fuentes, Old Gringo 99.
82 Fuentes, Old Gringo 177.
83 Fuentes, Old Gringo 172.
States that he supported the American occupation.

The role of Harriet Winslow symbolizes the uneasy relations between the two countries. Fuentes has used Harriet to represent the archetypal culturally ignorant American. Harriet's naive and one-sided views, covered with a moralistic patina smack of Woodrow Wilson's Latin American policies. Harriet insists on teaching the children about the sin of presumption so that they will not stare at themselves in the room of mirrors. She organizes men to rebuild the hacienda. There is cultural incomprehension: she does not realize the significance of the situation and is unable to shed totally the American blinders. Woodrow Wilson's equally simplistic solutions for putting Mexico's house in order had the same results.

At one point Arroyo violently seizes Harriet's arm because she refuses to call him a general. She yells: "... you are not a general. No one appointed you. I am sure you named yourself."\textsuperscript{84} President Wilson's diplomatic arm had also been abruptly seized by a poorly behaving Mexico. This further indicated that Huerta was venal and unidealistic, having come to power through less

\textsuperscript{84} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo}
than respectable methods.\textsuperscript{85}

Woodrow Wilson continued to bumble through the events of that spring, 1914, finally being saved from this endless morass by Huerta's resignation in July and surrender to the Constitutionalists. Harriet on the other hand, living in daily contact with strife and change begins to drift out of her \textit{Ugly American} role and into a phase of awareness. Fuentes saves Harriet from the black hole of ignorance, to some degree, by placing her in contact with the Mexican people in the Chihuahuan desert. She does not cross into their world. Instead, she stands on the safe side of the frontier in her mind that prevents her from truly experiencing Mexico. Toward the end of the novel, after she has seen it all in Mexico, she thinks herself irremediably apart, observing from a separate plane, those people of Mexico.\textsuperscript{86}

The sexual tension between Arroyo and Harriet can be seen as a further portrayal of Mexican and United States foreign relations. Arroyo aggressively (and reluctantly) pursues contact with Harriet. Equally Villa had played charmer and aggressor along the U.S./Mexican border. Harriet submits, uneasily, to this

\textsuperscript{85} Cline 142.
\textsuperscript{86} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 197.
very different and disturbing character who cannot be ignored. But, when Harriet changes the course of action, namely performing oral sex on Arroyo, he refuses to submit to her. Mexico as a whole, and Villa specifically in the north, proved equally confounding and unyielding to control from the United States. Villa frequently penetrated United States territory along the border for arms trade. Villa did not respect the boundary and did not properly submit to the conventions of authorities at that time.

The complex power struggles in Mexico disturbed and confounded the United States. The country's behavior did not fit into tidy organization or methodical steps that could lead to a constitutionally democratic future. Between Mexico and the United States (Arroyo and Harriet) there existed little middle ground. The United States had arrived in a starched linen skirt meeting Mexico clad in blood spattered fatigues. It was not destined to be a picnic.

There is, however, recognition of differences but not necessarily respect or comprehension. Fernando García Nuñez states in his article:
Harriet y Arroyo. Los dos perciben las diferencias nacionales como defectos, no como posibles indicadores de la otredad. La oportunidad de Harriet y de Arroyo de convivir uno con el otro, bajo el hostigamiento constante del Gringo viejo, les hace cambiar de actitud: ambos reconocen la idiosincrasia de cada cultura.\footnote{Fernando García Nuñez, "Notas sobre la frontera norte en la novela mexicana," \textit{Cuadernos Americanos} 2:4 (1988) : 159-168.}

Perhaps that was the best possible outcome. The gringos witnessed the chaos of revolution but still complained about the food, were uncomfortable without ritual bathing, and failed to perceive the importance of Mexican religious icons.

The old gringo represents a less naive American with a more studied perspective of Mexico. This does not make him, necessarily, any more comprehending. At one point the old gringo is used as an important mouthpiece to comment on the phenomena of \textit{mestizaje} in Mexico:

\begin{quote}
Open your eyes, Miss Harriet, and remember how we killed our Redskins and never had the courage to fornicate with the squaws and at least create a half-
\end{quote}
breed nation. We are caught in the business of forever killing people whose skin is of a different color. Mexico is the proof of what we could have been, so keep your eyes wide open.\textsuperscript{88}

However, he is using Mexico in his desire to fulfill his own destiny and assumes that Mexicans in general will quite predictably comply. He too has a disconnectedness that will not be bridged.

Rutherford's study on Mexican society in this time period documents anti-American feeling. There had been considerable anti-American activity just before the Revolution which continued through the revolutionary years. Foreigners had been granted a very privileged position under Porfirio Díaz, and Rutherford includes this popular epigram attributed to the the year 1910: "blessed are the Yankees for theirs is the Republic of Mexico."\textsuperscript{89} (Rutherford: 269) The phenomena of extranjerismo, or the unfair competitive advantage of foreigners over nationals, exclusion from regular scrutiny under law, and the "excessive protection" afforded them by their diplomatic agencies was

\textsuperscript{88} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 76.  
\textsuperscript{89} Rutherford 269.
considered one of the impetus for the Mexican Revolution.\textsuperscript{90} A number of variations underscored the theme of \textit{anti-gringuismo}. For example, there is \textit{nordismo}. This phenomenon emphasized the excessive influence of the United States on northern Mexican border populations which resulted in a new breed of ultra-aggressive \textit{rancheros} who differed greatly from other Mexicans. Additionally, there existed a general feeling that Mexico was being stirred up by the United States with the express purpose of causing sufficient imbalance as to require intervention and take over. Mexico was to be annexed to the United States. Some alleged: ". . . the revolutionaries were agents of United States imperialism."\textsuperscript{91}

There is a mutual lack of understanding throughout the book, reduced by the gradual development of almost grudging respect for each other's idiosyncrasies. The view in \textit{Old Gringo} is omniscient, with a focus, at times, through the memories of Harriet Winslow. Her ruminations show some moderation and change in attitude. She has not been able to leave the events of 1913-14 in the past. "Now she sits alone and remembers," says

\textsuperscript{90} Rutherford 270.  
\textsuperscript{91} Rutherford 271.
an omniscient narrator. Mexico has become a mental retreat, while physically she resides in the safer United States. Harriet confesses toward the end of the novel:

Arroyo, I know, I have not looked at all of your people,
I wish I had, I have certainly missed something, what have I missed? . . . Yet I have learned. I am making an effort, I swear it. I am trying to understand all this, you, your country, your people.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{92} Fuentes, \textit{Old Gringo} 190.
CONCLUSIONS

The focus in this thesis is Fuentes' unique delivery of history through literature, analyzing the novel *Old Gringo*. This investigation is meant to demonstrate that the type of historically based fiction Fuentes produces is an enhanced and, in some aspects, truer version in comparison to more obtuse, purely historical writing. This is the result of applying techniques such as: disjoint chronologies, highlighting the versatility of language, use of symbol and allowing Mexican cultural archetypes to surface as part of history.

The novel has been considered from two perspectives: historical value and technical construction. The historical aspect dominates in this paper, with the literary considerations scattered throughout. Through the process of historical analysis of the main characters the focus has gradually changed to what has traditionally been considered more literature-based. This is, in a way, precisely Fuentes' thrust in his method of history through literature. The reader is taken on a ride from solid ground into the realm of myth and archetype. The reader is asked
to participate with and accept as real this new historical view.

There is no question that Fuentes deviates from the verified chronology of Mexican history pertaining to this period of 1913-14. There is skeletal structure, however, that maintains the basic chronology of Villa's revolutionary activities. Fuentes has embellished this structure with components traditionally seen as anti-historical. This creates a dramatically new mini-overview of the Revolution in terms of archetypal characterization, mythic discourse and ambiguity ridden figures. These figures fulfill their historical obligations, following the accounts of that time period, and go on to convince the reader that they were, indeed, real people.

Fuentes also strays from complying with a fixed mythical/historical thematic sequence. This is not just a story about relations between the U. S. and Mexico or just a warrior myth that focuses on a derailed revolutionary. It does tend to steer away from predictability and into ambiguity. Hence, there is not a didactic structure forcing the reader to acknowledge a particular moral stance or excessive bent toward a type of experimental fiction. Instead, the harmony of all the elements:
historical base, diverse technique and multi-level thematics create a novel that can be engaged on many levels. In essence, this novel is a large scale example of a "knot of meaning" that has been Fuentes' linguistic focus for many years. This is revolutionary language at work, talking about the revolution.

The mechanics of fitting all these things involves the risk of creating an impenetrable piece of literature. This has not happened in Old Gringo. Fuentes' multi-cultural perspectives afford him the ability to gauge his creation from many viewpoints. He pushes the limits, but does not drag the reader into the dark. The use of displacement, for example, interlaces the archetypal/mythical into the historical. Fuentes also continually highlights universal themes that readers recognize from their own lives. This also fulfills another Fuentes goal, to expose the simultaneity of time: past, present and future. Fuentes emphasizes, through Tomás Arroyo, the theme of the bad seed. The Revolution is doomed to repeat what it seeks to escape; it is in the process of fulfilling this fate in the novel. The characters are speeding toward the disintegration of the PRI in December of 1995. . .
BIBLIOGRAPHY


