Language, mythology and structure in "Cambio de Piel" by Carlos Fuentes

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LANGUAGE, MYTHOLOGY AND STRUCTURE IN
CAMBIO DE PIEZ BY CARLOS FUENTES

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Since the publication in 1967 of Cambio de piel by Carlos Fuentes, the novel has suffered from a lack of objective critical analysis. Because it was written by one of the best-known Latin American writers of today, the book does deserve serious consideration and evaluation. While the novel has created much controversy in Mexico and abroad, few critics seem fully aware of its implications.

Although simplicity is not a valid criteria of artistic merit, many critics have denied the excellence of Cambio de piel because it is a difficult book to comprehend. It is a complex and demanding novel that the reader must decipher, reread, and meditate in order to appreciate. The novelistic structure of this work is inverted and fragmented; thus the structure itself serves to augment the total effect of complexity. It is this very complexity which has caused many critics to underestimate the work and overlook its significance. Among the criticisms are these statements that the novel is "... fatigoso, deliberadamente oscuro," ("Nuevo libro de Fuentes," El Universal, "Revista de la Semana," October 22, 1967, p. 3) and that "Un tedio espeso invade al lector desde las primeras páginas y terminarla de leer significa una proeza de constancia ..." ("Otra mala novela de C. Fuentes," Diners Club de México, No. 39, February, 1968, p. 52). One critic writes that the novel should not be taken seriously for it is full of tricks "... and these tricks play

Some of these criticisms may be true and yet they do not deny the merit of the work. The purpose of this study will be to examine what Fuentes' literary goals were and to what degree these goals were obtained in *Cambio de piel*.

The author of this novel is one of the most prolific and controversial personalities of Latin American letters today. With the 1968 publication of *La región más transparente*, his reputation as a major Mexican novelist was established and each subsequent work has been widely read in his native country and abroad.

Born in Mexico City in 1928, Fuentes is virtually a living encyclopedia of contemporary Western culture. Many of the great names of Spanish American literature—both historically and currently—have spent part of their lives outside of their countries, and Fuentes is no exception. The son of a Mexican diplomat, he lived and studied in Washington, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Geneva as a youth and his later travels have extended to myriad other Western cities. From this cosmopolitan perspective, Fuentes views his Mexico and eloquently serves as a critical conscience for his country. "Es una manera que sólo el artista puede conseguir: echar raíces a la distancia sobre la propia tierra." ("Situación del escritor en América Latina," *Mundo Nuevo*, No. 1, p. 9). He now prefers to live abroad, "... a respirar aire puro, a tomar perspectivas." ("Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 6).

While *La región más transparente*, which constituted Fuentes' debut as a novelist, incorporated new literary techniques, this work was followed the next year by *Las buenas conciencias*, a traditionally structured novel dealing with provincial Mexican life. Literary innovations abound in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), a document of post-revolutionary Mexico.
The same year witnessed the publication of *Aura*, a brief novelette of 60 pages which exhibits still greater complexity. His most technically complex work, *Cambio de piel*, was first published in the summer of 1967 and is already enjoying its fourth printing. It has been widely translated and is well known in Europe. This novel was then followed by two brief works: *Cumpleaños* and *Zona sagrada*. A progressive evolution of modern literary techniques is evident in his work.

Fuentes is not confined to one genre, however. He has published two collections of short stories: *Los días enmascarados* (1954) and *Cantar de ciegos* (1964). Nor are his talents limited to the field of narration. He is a prolific literary critic as witnessed by the scores of articles he regularly contributes to periodicals and newspapers throughout the world. As one of his bibliographers writes, Fuentes in the past two decades has "... produced over one hundred articles on diverse topics: literary, art, and motion picture criticism; current events; and a wide range of general cultural, political, and economic subjects. Keeping up to date on Fuentes' bibliography is an overwhelming task since one is likely to find his pieces in such varied journals as *Life en español*, *Mito* (Bogotá), *Mundo Nuevo* (Paris), *Holiday*, *Show*, *Commentary*, *Book Week*, *PMLA*, and even *Vogue*!" (Richard M. Reeve, review of *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* by Carlos Fuentes, *Hispania*, No. 53, May, 1970, p. 347).

His experience with cinematography constitutes an exciting study in itself; an adaption of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is among his achievements in this field. Cinematic practices abound in his works and clearly reflect his desire to utilize all the techniques available to an artist today. The year 1970 witnessed Fuentes' début as a playwright; his plays *El tuerto es rey* and *Todos los gatos son pardos* were both performed during the year.
Poetry, then, seems to be the only genre which this author has not cultivated, nor does he write literary criticism of poetry. Yet his record shows that he has proven himself as a varied artist in the novel, short story, essay, drama, and cinema. The essence of his work fails to evoke a feeling of compassion in the reader, for Fuentes is profoundly aware of the follies and stupidities of our time. He is an artist who understands his era well, and he knows that mankind--and Mexico--needs a scourge rather than a pacifier. He employs nearly every technique and genre available to him to communicate his keen observations and emotions. But he is most active in the field of the novel, for he agrees with J. M. Domenach that the present masterpieces of the Latin American novel are "... 'las mitologías sin nombre ... anuncio de nuestro porvenir'." (Carlos Fuentes quotes J. M. Domenach, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, 2d ed.; p. 98).

**THEORY OF THE NOVEL**

In 1969 about a dozen of Fuentes' essays of literary criticism were compiled and published in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. Another collection of literary essays was published a year later entitled *Casa con dos puertas*. The critical consideration with which he has constantly weighed the works of other authors is reflected in the objective professionalism of his own works, and has undoubtedly aided in the maturing of his art. Carlos Fuentes is a literary theoretician. In attempting to evaluate a work by him, then, his theory of the novel must be considered first.
The views expressed in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* are especially relevant; an examination of these should shed great light on an understanding of the novel being considered in this thesis. *Cambio de piel* is a criticism of the traditional, bourgeois novel and the society which it reflects. Fuentes observes that the Latin American novel was preoccupied with *la naturaleza*, and literary creativity received little other impetus: "... se los tragó la montaña, se los tragó la pampa, se los tragó la mina, se los tragó el río." (*La nueva novela*, p. 9). From this era evolved the literary conflict of *civilización* versus a *barbarie* which stifled creativity. This struggle seemed incapable of resolving itself, and the novel was caught in the static reflections of naturalism, a school which sought only to describe reality and not to affect it.

But within this reflection of reality, dictators and the exploited masses became ever increasingly noticeable and the writer found himself obliged to denounce this injustice, defending the exploited and documenting the reality of his country. The novel then had the purpose of improving the lot of the Ecuadorian farmer or the Bolivian miner. (*La nueva novela*, p. 12).

The twentieth century, however, witnessed a change from these relatively clear-cut conflicts to a dialectic complexity that demanded new approaches and new literary techniques to express and explore the new reality. When industrialism, alienation and social revolution began to affect the Latin American scene with ever increasing rapidity, the traditional novel was seen to be a static form within a static society which refused to recognize these changes and their implications. (*La nueva novela*, p. 13).
The novel was too bound by the immediate reality and could only reflect it. "Esta realidad inmediata exige una lucha para ser cambiada ... " (La nueva novela, p. 14). This lucha was introduced into Latin America by the Mexican revolution whose novels " ... por encima de sus posibles defectos técnicos y a pesar de su lastre documental, introducen una nota original en la novela hispanoamericana: introducen la ambigüedad." (La nueva novela, p. 15). And Fuentes adds that in the novels Pedro Páramo and Al filo del agua, this ambiguity was incorporated into a universal context for the first time.

In Latin America there has traditionally been a conflict between pure literature and socially-committed literature; the distance between the two is now growing smaller, as evident in Cambio de piel. Social criticism is implied throughout the novel, but the criticism is implicit rather than explicit. Thus Fuentes avoids the open propagandizing and explicit moralizing that mars many previous novels of Latin America, such as the so-called novela de tesis.

While Latin America is now experiencing an evolution of the novel, some critics alarmingly refer to the so-called international crisis of the novel. Fuentes cites the Italian Alberto Moravia's statement that "El novelista, desnudo en medio de la decadencia de su arte--pareja a la decaden-cia del mundo burgués que lo nutrió--sólo podría ser el testigo de esa decadencia ... " (La nueva novela, p. 17). Fuentes, however, has no intention of standing by as a witness to the demise of the novel, for this would mean ultimately witnessing the demise of individual liberty and creativity, ceded to the structured bourgeois world of industrialization. Fuentes and many of his fellow Latin American writers feel too great a responsibility
to humanity to allow this, so they take an active role in the resuscitation of the novel. The novel will not die, but its bourgeois form will, according to Fuentes: "... la muerte del realismo burgués sólo anuncia el advenimiento de una realidad literaria mucho más poderosa." (La nueva novela, p. 17).

This reality is currently being expressed "... en la capacidad para encontrar y levantar sobre un lenguaje los mitos y las profesiones de una época cuyo verdadero sello no es la dicotomía capitalismo-socialismo, sino una suma de hechos—fríos, maravillosos, contradictorios, ineluctables, nuevamente libertarios, nuevamente enajenantes—que realmente están transformando la vida en las sociedades industriales: automatización, electrónica, uso pacífico de la energía atómica." (La nueva novela, p. 18). Contemporary novelists who are making meaningful contributions to this new creation are returning to the poetic roots of the novel, utilizing language and structure to invent a second parallel reality which allows space for lo real through the use of myth.

The inspiration for this thesis is Fuentes' statement that "Hoy ... la novela es mito, lenguaje y estructura." (La nueva novela, p. 20). The bourgeois novel failed due to its incapacity to create renewable myths, and man must have myths or a society which will allow him the possibility of useful mythic creation. Latin American novelists are engaged in overcoming this crisis of the bourgeois novel by positing in its place a new novel that is capable of creating a fiction which explores new worlds, new possibilities, and new myths. Miguel Ángel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez are two writers who have overcome the limitations of an opaque reality and made it transparent by employing myth and language.
Besides the absence of a viable mythology, Fuentes adds that the new Latin American writer notices "la falta de un lenguaje" and for him, "Inventar un lenguaje es decir todo lo que la historia ha callado. ... Esta resurrección del lenguaje perdido exige una diversidad de exploraciones verbales que, hoy por hoy, es uno de los signos de salud de la novela latinoamericana." (La nueva novela, p. 30). Fuentes himself in Cambio de piel makes great use of slang—the most vital form of any language—and of foreign words and expressions to give new potential to the Castilian language which was imposed upon Mexicans by their Spanish conquerors and which has now petrified into the language of the bourgeois.

The traditional novel is seen by Fuentes as a synchronic genre, for it reflects an established order and an unchanging structured hierarchy. The new novel, on the other hand, is a diachronic genre which opposes the synchronic by creating a disorder instead of a structure, a disorder out of which can arise a new order, a change, a process, a promise: "El lenguaje, en suma, de la ambigüedad: de la pluralidad de significados, de la constelación de alusiones: de la apertura." (La nueva novela, p. 32).

On the one side, then, is the synchronic quality of the traditional novel which is structured, an ordered system. On the other side is the anachronous quality—the temporal and spatial complexity—of the new novel, which posits change and process. Through la palabra, these two can be fused to create a new possibility, a creative synthesis. In Cambio de piel, Fuentes creates a structure and then puts it in conflict with process, to create a tension between the two. He has created a confrontation of change and structure, renovation and tradition by means of la palabra and el lenguaje.
Thus *Cambio de piel* is a novel which would not exist without the element of language as a protagonist. Language represents the chaotic liberty of the new "open" novel.

Fuentes says that literary works should lead from one field to another, promise a new reality or exploration of *lo real*. "Nunca he ocultado mi desdén por las obras cerradas, de pretendida autosuficiencia y de segura reducción. Son los coágulos—el aviso de muerte—de la circulación cultural." (*La nueva novela*, p. 49).

It is a new narrative totality when the fiction fictionalizes itself, by means of a language which is a reflection of language. Fuentes is not simply trying for novelty; he is trying to revitalize the novel art by suggesting new possibilities and new responsibilities. The novel has passed from a work that is made before hand to a work that is being made as we read it: "Terminado, el libro empieza."

*Cambio de piel* is an open-ended work. The second reality of this book begins upon terminating the first. When the reader realizes that Freddy the narrator-personage is also Freddy the "demented" author the book begins again, once his duality has been thoroughly revealed. In this way *Cambio de piel* resembles *Cien años de soledad* when "... Melquíades, cuya aparición como personaje, cien años antes, resulta idéntica a su revelación como narrador, cien años después." (*La nueva novela*, p. 59).

What Fuentes calls the structure or ordered hierarchy of language is not totally separable from novelistic structure, especially in the new novel. A distinction can be made between the two for the purpose of analysis

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but they are integrally related and do complement each other. In *Cambio de piel* structure is language: the various possibilities of the open novel are created linguistically, i.e. through language. The ordered language of the traditional novel leads to a traditional structure, while the open novel dictates the destruction of that ordered hierarchy of language. The "real" structure ultimately is formed in the reader's mind from the linguistic elements given by the author; the structure in an open novel is not a given prescribed by the author.

In *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, Carlos Fuentes does not expand as much on structure as he does on language and mythology, because structure is merely one aspect of language. His statement that "Hoy ... la novela es mito, lenguaje, y estructura" must not be forgotten. In the following chapters this thesis will attempt to evaluate what the principle values of the new novel may be, and how completely *Cambio de piel* follows Fuentes' own definition of the new novel.
CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE

As Fuentes has stated, the new Latin American novel is very dependent on novelistic structure. Traditional structure is questioned and frequently subverted in the search for more expressive forms. Innovations in this field are certainly not unknown to the contemporary Latin American novelist, as evident in Rayuela by Julio Cortázar and Pedro Páramo by Juan Rulfo, as well as in several of Fuentes' own earlier works, specifically La región más transparente and La muerte de Artemio Cruz.

The innovative structures of the "new" novel are directly related to a more complex vision of the nature of reality. Borges maintained that one's vision of reality is ultimately a subjective vision in the mind of the beholder, narrator, or reader. The reader must not take the novel to be a definitive version of reality, for such static versions can allow no new versions to be created. Therefore, the structure must be "open."
The writer asks the reader to participate in the "recreation" of the novel, to create his own version of reality.

Thus form is directly related to function in the new novel, for form imitates the chaotic and open-ended form of reality itself. But fiction must not be confused with reality; it only reflects reality, offering the writer and reader the opportunity to question reality and seek new dimensions.

Linear narration is replaced frequently in the new novel by a more complex temporality. The structure and techniques employed by Fuentes in Cambio de piel result in the constant conflict and subsequent
fusion of chronological and psychological time; this conflict complicates a basically simple plot. Rather than being divided into chapters, the novel consists of Part I of 11 pages, Part II of 353 pages and Part III of 75 pages. Each of the three parts is preceded by a cryptic annotation of half a page. These "epigraphs" are the words of Freddy the Narrator; Fuentes admits they are somewhat autobiographical in nature, and yet this detail is not of foremost importance.

In the epigraph to Part I entitled "Una fiesta imposible," Fuentes hints at the complexity of his work and its unorthodox nature. But he seeks the reader's acceptance: "... para empezar a cantar pide permiso primero." (p. 7). Fuentes' preoccupation with "la novela abierta" is evident from the very first page of the novel. He begins the book with an epigraph, a device which usually goes at the end, and he writes, "Terminado, el libro empieza." (p. 9). Upon terminating, the narrator asks permission to begin. The entire epigraph is a chain of paradoxes and it sets the tone for the rest of the book. He tells the reader of the nature of the novel, and implies the obligation of the reader. The reader will have to participate actively to solve these literary riddles: this is the time referred to as "la hora del lector." Carlos Fuentes needs the "lector-macho" of Julio Cortázar. The reader is an interpreter who helps organize the chaotic parts and create the final form. The choice of fête or catastrophe implies that the reader must create his own reality; he is given the various possibilities.

As Fuentes says, "I have an idea of the public in Mexico, but I want this public to think more, to participate more, not just to receive what I give them, but to have them as a coparticipant, as a co-creator with me." (Juan Loveluck, "Intención y forma en La muerte de Artemio Cruz," La nueva narrativa hispanoamericana, vol. 1, (January, 1971), p. 107).
The seemingly autobiographical nature of the epigraphs is especially evident in Part II entitled "En Cuerpo y Alma."

"No estuve allí": cita de una carta dirigida por el Narrador a su Abuelo tedesco, muerto en 1880, socialista lassaliano expulsado del Reich por el Canciller de Hierro. (p. 23).

Fuentes himself explains during an interview:

... hay en todo esto una oscura evocación mía: una parte de mi familia huyó de Alemania a Veracruz durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Mi bisabuelo era un socialista lassaliano de Hesse-Darmstadt inconforme con el régimen de Bismarck. (María Luisa Mendoza, "Carlos Fuentes habla de Cambio de piel y de otras pieles," El Día, "El Gallo Ilustrado," No. 289, p. 3).

In imagining the past of a person, a family or a people, the recreation of it is always fictitious or subjective, since the recreator--writer or reader--was not there. "No estuve allí." (p. 23). The "genes mutantes" imply change and the existence of several possibilities. Fiction is fictional and, in quoting Tzara, Fuentes is warning the reader not to fall into the trap of regarding it as reality: "Tout ce qu'on regarde est faux." (p. 23). Everything is fictional, in that it is our own subjective version of reality. In the Foucault quotation Fuentes again underlines his warning that the fiction described in books can never be reality but only a likeness of it: "Et puisque cette magie a été prévue et décrite dans les livres, la différence illusoire qu'elle introduit ne sera jamais qu'une similitude enchantée." (P. 23). Fuentes is warning the reader before the body of the novel not to accept it literally as reality.

On a symbolic level, the third epigraph--"Visite nuestros subterráneos"—may be an allusion to the most intimate spaces of individual psyches, the places where all the elements of chaotic reality are ordered by the individual for the purpose of creating one's individual
realities. In this final section, the preceding fiction is dissected, interpreted and finally destroyed by the role-playing of the Monks, who in turn disappear into nothing, like the fictional characters they are. After this, the fictitious nature of the narrator, Freddy Lambert, is itself revealed. There is a fiction within a fiction within a fiction, out of which the reader must make his own version of the novel. These "mutant genes" are the imagination of the individual creating his own version of reality.

The poem by Octavio Paz symbolically gives us the basic elements of reality—water, trees, wind—in a certain static relationship. Then water flows and assures life to living elements; and the sky—the imagination, the desire for the ideal—comes to the lips. Thus the desire of all possibilities is expressed in language, especially in the language of the poet. Through language, the human being constructs his subjective version of an ideal reality.

The third epigraph reflects the contemporary novelists' desire to return to the poetic roots of his art. The entire novel can be considered an explication of the brief poem by Octavio Paz; and Fuentes is embarrassed because it has taken him hundreds of pages to express the thoughts contained within a few lines of Paz's poetry: "... los poetas saben decirlo todo en tan pocas líneas ..." (p. 365).

Cambio de piel begins as an epic of the 16th century, with the arrival of Cortés and his Spanish conquerors at Cholula and their initial contacts with the Indians of the area. Moctezuma's reception of Cortés and his Indian mistress, Malinche, and the terrible battle which follows when the Spaniards attempt to destroy the Aztec idols are simultaneously evoked
along with the portrayal of squalid Cholula on Easter Sunday, 1965. The fusion between the two epochs is perfect: paragraphs from the two diverse periods alternate harmoniously, with snatches of dialogue floating between the two serving to give unity. These serve as reader cues; the technique utilizes quick "cuts" from one scene and one era to another. It is clearly a cinematic technique that Fuentes incorporates into the novel.

With the simultaneous contrasting of Cholula at the time of the conquest and Cholula in 1965, it is evident from the very outset that Fuentes has every intention of introducing several dimensions of time. The situation which is created in Part I becomes more complex as the work progresses; various planes of time are superimposed upon one another so that the result is a static sense of time. A static sense of history is also created; Fuentes himself refers to the book as an "Estatua de la Historia". ("Situación del escritor," p. 11). In the present moment, memory and the past are as vital and real as the present, for they still have existence.

At first glance, Part I seems almost like a false start when viewed in relation to the rest of the book. It is an impressive literary achievement, but its relation to the rest of the book is not immediately evident. Although barely touched upon by critics, the achievement of this section is a very effective superimposition of past and present. The two tenses are brought together and made static, interwoven and finally made dependent upon each other. A new tense is born, which is neither synchronic nor diachronic, but a combination of both, and in a sense it is timeless.

It is uncertain whether Freddy is talking to the two couples in the third person plural of Ustedes or speaking of them with the ellos form when
he says, "... sólo vieron calles estrechas y sucias ..." (p. 11). But
his immediate presence as narrator-character is quickly seen in all its
confusion as he says, "Sí, sí, ya sé ..." (p. 11) and addresses his
characters by tú:

Tú, Elizabeth, te hiciste la disimulada cuando pasaste junto a mí,
pero tú, Isabel, te detuviste, nerviosa, y lo bueno es que nadie
se fijó porque todos estaban admirando el espacio abierto ... (p. 17).

The alternating paragraphs, however, take place during Cortés'
conquest and are clearly narrated in the third person. They are written
in the present tense, which gives them immediacy and credibility. The
tense employed in the two simultaneous situations is the guide which
informs the reader of which epoch Fuentes is writing: the events con­
cerning Cortés are written in the present tense while the 1965 events
of the two couples are written in the preterite. The Cortés events seem
closer to the reader; the 1965 events by comparison are seen at a distance
and are to some extent ambiguous.

The paragraphs in which Freddy speaks in the first person alternate
with the Cortés passages, and then with descriptions of the Cholula Indians
worshipping on Easter Sunday at the pyramids. These seem to transcend time:
they could occur within a few years after Cortés' conquest, and they could
be occurring in 1965. Fuentes has managed to bring the past forward to meet
the present, and to push the present back to meet the past. The two tenses
are joined together fluidly by the Indian worship scenes which seem to
transcend time and create an "Estatua de la Historia." The reader is wit­
nessing a place, Cholula, which has no time; it knows no movement of time,
for it is static. This quote is used by Fuentes to describe Cholula in
the 20th Century, but it does not differ from the situation of four and a half centuries ago:

... la muchedumbre descalza, cubierta de harapos, contrahecho, que extiende las manos, mastica los elotes podridos, es seguida por la jauría de perros hambrientos, lisos ... (p. 12).

There is a repetition of words and images which tend to blend the eras together. There is a similar fusion with the sacrificial urn which is now used as a baptismal bowl in a Catholic church. Inherent in this depiction is a negation of the concept of linear progression of time and history. Fuentes says, "No hay progreso histórico ... . "Hay un simple presente perpetuo, la repetición de una serie de actos rituales." (Delia Iragorry, review of Cambio de piel, Siempre, "La Cultura en México," No. 844, August 27, 1969, p. vii.)

At times the past and the present are very violently and unsubtly joined together, as when the song of the Indian worshippers breaks into the mod strains of a tune of the Monks:

Para que comió
la primera casada
para que comió
la fruta vedada

I'll give you back
your time (p. 20).

Part I ends with the arrival of the six Monks at Cholula, with Freddy as chauffeur. It is important in the structure of the work that these six characters are not seen again until Part III of the book, nearly 350 pages later. They are presented to the reader at this point so that they will not be complete strangers when presented again much later as the actors of this fiction. A point of tension is created and it goes unresolved
until the end of the book:

"Oye hombre: así lo asustamos más," el muchacho alto se desarregló la cabellera lacia.
"¿Es aquí?" preguntó la muchacha de las cejas depiladas ... "Apuesta tu alma," dijo el negro. (p. 21).

And the whimpering which will reappear at the end of the novel is introduced:
"Yo sólo escuché el gruñido y el llanto unidos, inseparables, que quise localizar en el cofre del automóvil." (p. 21).

Part II treats the two couples who are traveling from Mexico City to Veracruz on Easter Sunday, 1965, and are forced to spend the night in Cholula when their car breaks down. Javier is an apathetic Mexican perpetually nauseated with his own mediocrity. From his childhood he remembers bickering parents and failing financial security; as a grown man he has only the publication of one small book of poetry to his credit. His wife Elizabeth is a Bronx Jewess whose greatest asset was her youth and an encyclopedic knowledge of movies that she escaped into as a young girl. An expatriate Czechoslovakian, Franz is the epitome of the existentialist blame and responsibility study. Although he loved a young Jewish violinist in Prague, he offered no resistance when commissioned to design the crematorium that would inevitably put her and thousands of others to their death. Conscience-stricken after this experience, he flees to Mexico and sells Volkswagens. He shares "la novillera"—his 23-year-old mistress Isabel—with Javier, which debt he collects by periodically sleeping with Javier's wife, Elizabeth, "la dragona." The pasts of these characters are revealed through flash backs and the omniscient narrator Freddy Lambert.

Part III contains several possible endings. It may be that Franz and Elizabeth are crushed beneath the weight of the pyramid's landslide.
Javier and Isabel, the two Mexicans, may escape and return to the hotel, where Isabel shows signs of becoming another Elizabeth and Javier swiftly strangles her. Franz may be executed by the Monks who have followed the group into the monument, or by the son of his dead Jewish girl friend. The reader may also conclude that all have escaped except Franz who had to be punished for his war crimes in the mock trial carried out by the Monks, and that the narrator Freddy is confined in the Cholula insane asylum which is visible from the pyramids.

As a lonely prisoner, Freddy entertains himself by baptizing himself with two names: the first name of Frederick Nietzsche and the last name of Louis Lambert, the impossible character of Balzac. (Florinda Friedman, review of Cambio de piel by Carlos Fuentes, Sur, No. 311, p. 106). This may point up the fact that Freddy Lambert is also a fiction—a fictional being who has created his own fiction and that of the novel. But finally, the reader is obliged to conclude that none of this has happened; it is all fictitious, serving the purpose of making the reader question all of his neat versions of reality in the effort to find a viable version.

AMBIGUITY

Carlos Fuentes values ambiguity and the disorder which it makes possible, for out of this disorder a new more vital order may evolve, Cambio de piel calls into question the entire concept of "characters." Fuentes has not created these characters in order to tell a story: Freddy Lambert has created them from old movies and books of the Thirties to amuse himself as he sits in the insane asylum.
There is great ambiguity in the fact that while centuries of
time are covered in the minds of the characters, less than 24 hours have
actually transpired in the fiction created by Freddy Lambert. The present
loses the nature it has in the traditional novel, and there results a cease­
less flow into the past. It does not follow, however, that there is an
evolution into the future; tension arises not from the chronological events
that occur during the stay in Cholula, but rather from the recalling or
revelation of background material that occurred in the past.

There is a similar ambiguity in the treatment of space. Although
the couples never cover more than a few dozen miles during the narration,
in their memories they traverse parts of Western and Eastern Europe, North
and South America. The spatial magnitude of this work has not been achieved
in the traditional ways of traditional realism, but is rather the result of
the vicarious experiences of Freddy Lambert. This traversing of thousands
of miles coupled with the transposition of various dimensions of time make
the book an epic of modern Western man's experience.

It becomes extremely difficult to distinguish between the memories
created by Freddy and the false ones which Elizabeth idealizes for herself.
Freddy has imagined her very existence, but Elizabeth is a character with
enough autonomy to invent a fiction of her own, such as the peaceful farm
of the Mendelssohn's or the idyllic isle of Falaraki. On a more immediate
level of reality, it is the Monk actors who are adding their own embellish­
ments to the fiction. The Monks are satirizing the characters of the novel,
but even the Monks are fictitious creations of Freddy's imagination. Yet
Freddy is also a fiction.
The character Freddy Lambert constitutes a source of great confusion for the reader of Cambio de piel throughout the first parts of the book. For those who have read Aura and La muerte de Artemio Cruz, it is not too surprising when Freddy as Narrator calls the two women characters by tú, yet the similarity with the two former novels fades as he begins to address the group as Ustedes, acting both as an omniscient witness who appears to have known the characters since childhood, and then sometimes actually entering into the plot as another character. At times he is easily confused with Franz and Javier, and even with the two women, or with all of them at once. Florinda Friedman states that his function is to "... negar a los personajes 'para que literariamente existen', es decir, para instituirlos como puros ente (sic) de ficción." (Review of Cambio de piel in Sur, No. 311, p. 105).

As narrator-author, Freddy has set his characters going like Caligari set his sonámbulo off to fulfill his desires. But just as the sonámbulo takes on a life of his own, so do the characters pass beyond the control of Freddy and assume lives of their own in the active imagination of the lector-macho.

Richard Reeve maintains that Freddy Lambert can also be confused with Carlos Fuentes himself: Freddy says he has wanted to write a book, and also that he is about forty years old. ("Carta abierta a C. Fuentes a propósito de Cambio de piel," La Cultura en México, Siempre, 769, p. xi). "... El Narrador podría ser todos (los personajes)," declares Fuentes in his interview with Rodríguez Monegal, and he does not reproach Monegal's statement that the Narrator must not be confused with the author himself. ("Situación del escritor," p. 10). Indeed, by keeping himself distinct from the Narrator, Fuentes is underscoring the fictionality of the novel.
Ambiguity has a literary function: it not only increases the open aspect of the novel but it also increases the fictitious nature of the work. It questions the readers' assumptions about reality, for reality itself is ambiguous. Thus, ambiguity is more realistic than predetermined structures of reality.

EVALUATION

The story of the two couples and their pasts is developed so minutely and in such copious detail that it does virtually weigh heavily on the reader. It is this aspect of the novel that has met with the most criticism. Many question whether or not this abundance of detail was necessary or desirable. In an interview with the author, Emir Rodríguez Monegal says: "Me parece que toda la primera parte abusa tal vez demasiado de los detalles del realismo concreto de cada situación y por eso mismo, al lector le cuesta bastante ... llegar hasta el momento en que puede empezar a atar los subterráneos hilos de la historia." Fuentes justifies this abundant use of concrete detail of Part II when he questions of Monegal whether "... la segunda parte puede sostenerse sin toda esa espesura de la primera parte." (Rodríguez Monegal, "Situación del escritor," p. 12).

Fuentes takes 353 pages to create his fiction in the first parts of the book, only to destroy it in the latter part. The characters "... no han sido más que manipulaciones de un monstruo que parece ser el Hacedor ..." (Gustavo Saine, "Cambio de piel, el más alto monumento literario de la historia de México," Siempre, "La Cultura en México," No. 769, p. ix). It can be suggested that he should have drastically revised the first parts, that half of the accumulation would have sufficed, that he was not controlling
his natural weakness for verbosity, but rather he let it control him and thus the book. But Fuentes maintains that it was necessary, as when Elizabeth is trying to create a mythology from immediate objects such as films, streets, suits, etc. There is a whole world of very substantial and opaque things with which she tries to construct her reality. Even though the prose style at times is extremely heavy, the novel becomes poetic. It evokes possibilities of the "novela abierta" but it does not state a traditionally closed structure.

Cambio de piel is not a very compact work for this would minimize the author's intent. Every narrative theme demands its own form and system of treatment. Fuentes admits "Soy consciente de que una y otro son desagradables para mucha gente, se alejan demasiado de los ideales de pureza estética. Pero a mí me gustan las manchas y el riesgo. No me agrada repetir lo que ya sé hacer ..." ("Situación del escritor," p. 14).

In her perceptive review of the book, Florinda Friedman notes that the past, instead of actually serving to create more believable and concrete characters, only serves to annihilate them by failing to create a third dimension which serves to give them solidity. (Florinda Friedman, review of Cambio de piel, Sur, No. 311, p. 105). Because many of the scenes and remembrances are taken by Freddy from old movies, they do not seem quite convincing. "Están sacados de películas de los años 30; ... de películas de John Garfield ..." ("Situación del escritor," p. 13). They are Freddy's version of these past realities. "... están bañados por cierta nostalgia cinematográfica, e incluso deformados por ella." (Mendoza, "Carlos Fuentes habla de Cambio de piel y de otras pieles," p. 13).
Because of the structure of this work, we realize only at the end that the characters are virtually memories or premonitions of themselves. If this material had been presented first, the entire impact would have been lost. The reader would not be caught in the fictional web, for there could have been no final revelation. Throughout the book, Fuentes creates a reality that the reader accepts, and then it is destroyed. In this technique are reflected some of Fuentes' most profound views on the novel, literature and art in general. He creates the bourgeois novel and then reveals it as being terribly static, unimaginative and inadequate. *Cambio de piel*—like *Rayuela*—is a novel that doubles back on itself in self-criticism and allows various possible versions. Fuentes has created the destruction of the novel within itself. A novel is written and then it is rewritten. "Terminado, el libro empieza." (p. 9).

Because Freddy does sometimes enter into the novel as a character, the reader cannot grant him supernatural powers, so he is left wondering how he possibly can be omniscient. This again underscores the fictionality of the work. The suspense created by withholding Freddy's real function is sustained until Part III. Seeing the Narrator act as a character blurs the line between "reality" and fiction. It creates two levels of fictional "reality" and therefore it is ultimately a questioning of reality. The reader is forced to create his own reality out of the possibilities, since it is not given to him. This is the "openness" of the new novel. Freddy is virtually a writer involved as a character in the fiction that he is creating; he steps into the action and then retreats to control the characters again. His two roles help to increase the fictional identity of every character, and they increase the fictional nature of the total work.
Carlos Fuentes is not the first writer in Latin American fiction to employ this innovation in structure, for it is evident in the works of Borges and Cortázar. Yet Fuentes does employ this innovation effectively. Not only are the traditional roles of protagonist and character challenged, but also the actions of the Narrator. He defies a bourgeois filing away or labeling. He is rather like Unamuno who created the character of Augusto Pérez and then destroyed him to remind him that he was still his creator and that he had not given him an existence of his own. There is a difference, though. While Unamuno is the Narrator, Carlos Fuentes is not the "Narrator" of Cambio de piel. Ultimately, Fuentes destroys the Narrator also. Perhaps in a sense the final Narrator is the reader, who puts it all together.

Freddy appears to survive the other four characters of the novel; it appears that he has indeed succeeded in giving them a fictional existence and then in various ways, with multiple endings, he has managed to destroy any certainties about that existence, leaving the reader to create his own version of it. Just as the characters, episodes, places and violences are permutable and interchangeable parts of a grand mosaic, so are the deaths and the story endings interchangeable. The reader is allowed, or even obliged, to choose his endings, for there are several options.

Rather than create a traditional novel with a formal conclusion, Fuentes--with his obsession for "la novela abierta"--has left the reader several possible endings, several possible alternatives, and this third part acts to destroy the rest of the novel in order to make its absolute fictitiousness perfectly clear. The result of these various possible endings is a complete disintegration of the traditional novel, as the novel dissolves into alternatives and the reader is left holding nothing definite or resolved.
Prior to this change of skin, Freddy appeared to be a cab driver who had bought a steamer trunk full of Javier's and Elizabeth's momentos and from these had created his bourgeois fiction, assigning the various roles to the Monks. Fuentes' method is to tear down the traditional novel form, rebuild it as fantasy in its creator's head, then completely destroy it again. This destruction and disorder hints at the possibility of its rebirth.

Carlos Fuentes speaks of the pure fictionality of his work; Cambio de piel is a fantasy created in Freddy's mind and then its validity is destroyed when we see him locked up in an insane asylum. But one must not forget that Freddy's existence and likewise the existence of the asylum are only fictional. Freddy's madness is the creation of fictions, and the psychiatric staff of the institution is trying to make him abandon these fantasies. "Cuando alguno de nosotros, para su desgracia, habla, ellos se ríen y dicen que es pura imaginación ... Entonces no te dan de comer, dragona, para que no tengas pesadillas indigestas." (p. 439-440). Fuentes has envisioned a new Christ suffering for the sins of the world, but the authorities feed him and put him in a padded cell to restrain his anguish. This is a conflict of the individual's private feelings against the world, the historical conflict between a man and his reality. As Fuentes says, "... la imaginación es idéntica a sus deseos, y estas imágenes son sólo la aspiración de mis personajes; es decir, su única libertad posible." (Iragorry, review of Cambio de piel, p. vii).

In this sense, Freddy Lambert, although a fiction, symbolizes the new writer, and in this way only may he be identified with Carlos Fuentes, and with the other writers who insist on the fictional nature of fiction
and its ability to make us question reality. Freddy Lambert may also be
the reader, in the sense that the latter also must use his imagination to
question reality and to create his own new versions of it. Only in this
way can one escape the confining limitations of old, exhausted, bourgeois
realities and create new realities. The world resists this; it is the
prison-like insane asylum. Freddy Lambert may really be the only sane
one, and thus the writer and the 
lector-macho may also be the only sane
ones, finding the only possible freedom in their imaginations.

The universal effort to distinguish between lo real and lo
irreal, strongly reminiscent of La vida es sueño by Calderón, is an
important aspect of this novel. While the traditional novel gave a
false and limited picture of a supposed reality, the new novel shows
that art can be a means of deforming reality—through such techniques
as chaotic narration—in order to arrive at a new and more viable reality.
Freddy's perceptions seem to lie on many distinct planes of reality: the
epigraphs carry the most verisimilitude; the baúl and the Monks and
Elizabeth's visit to Freddy in the asylum seem feasible; while the flash-
backs which are employed to extend the spatial and temporal territory of
the novel seem apocryphal despite the fact that they are heavily documented.
On the most remote level of reality are events such as the one dealing
with Jeanne Fery: "Sería la imagen de Jeanne Fery que ayer fue exorcizada
en Mons: ... Jeanne ha estado poseída por ocho demonios entre 1573 y 1585." (p. 107).

These varying levels of reality are Fuentes' attempt to depict the
complexity of our world; there is no definitive norm of reality that is
adequate and thus the "novela abierta" is of critical importance.
versions of reality must be created if men are to free themselves from the official bourgeois reality which at the present time is showing its moral bankruptcy; it is a moral bankruptcy in the sense that it offers no real meaning for existence.

As José Emilio Pacheco writes, thematic renovations call for modifications of form. When an author abandons the themes of yesterday and attempts to express a more complex and contradictory reality than that which preoccupied other writers, he has to look for new forms and structures which allow for this expression. ("La hora del lector," Revista de la Universidad de México, No. 16, 12, p. 19). The success of Cambio de piel is largely dependent upon structure, an instrument that modern novelists are transforming into a very flexible and creative form. It is one of the literary resources that must be exploited to its fullest. The structure complements the content, for only at the end of Cambio de piel do we fully appreciate the work; the open structure is the thematic meaning of the novel. The intentions of the author determine the structure to be used. Thus it is neither arbitrary nor capricious.

Readers of today must be receptive to this type of innovation, to this progressive narrative complexity. Although Cambio de piel may not satisfy former conceptions of what the novel should be, as many of the new novels may fail to do, it ought not to be judged merely a failure. The critic must examine just what it is that the author has proposed to do, and to what extent he has succeeded in obtaining his goal. It has been seen here that structure is an integral part of the whole of Cambio de piel; thus Fuentes' definition that the new novel is "mito, lenguaje, y estructura" has been satisfied so far.
CHAPTER III

MYTHOLOGY

The myth is of critical importance to the new Latin American novel because it possesses the capabilities of negating dead and oppressive history, thus leading towards a new and vital sense of lo real. A mythology should have the power of presenting productive ideals, but the myths of Mexico have been oppressive ones that only serve to augment the power of the traditional bourgeois.

While Mexico abounds in myths, they serve largely to exercise a negative force upon the people. La Malinche, el machismo, and el sacrificio are largely negative ideas which give rise to suspicion, fear and mistrust. Mexico suffers from a lack of renewable myths; the ones she has now are solidified, unchanging and not fruitful. The bourgeois novel and the bourgeois society in their centuries of dominance have failed to supply this vital quality.

The Aztec civilization, which was capable of providing her people with gripping and demanding mythologies, has been flattened by the structured society and religion of the conquerors. There are still tell-tale signs of the once great indigenous mythologies, however:

Mojaste los dedos, dragona, en una de las dos enormes pilas bautismales a la entrada. Te vi sonreir ante esa incongruencia fantástica: no eran sino urnas de piedra indígenas, viajas, labradas, corroídas, antiguos depósitos de los corazones humanos arrancados por el pedernal en los sacrificios de Cholula. (p. 19)
The sacrifice mythology is a strong theme in Cambio de piel, for it appears in Part I in the Cortés era and it is present at the conclusion of the book, when Franz is sacrificed beneath the pyramids at Cholula for his war crimes. "Es el sentido mexicano de la novela. Por eso culmina ahí," states Fuentes. ("Situación del escritor," p. 11).

The myth of Xochicalco is a preoccupation of Javier's poetry for it promises continuity: " ... el friso de Xochicalco es una sola serpiente un círculo de serpientes, sin principio ni fin ... " (p. 38). And Freddy observes that Xochicalco does represent something that mankind desires: "Se me hace que todos queremos cerrar nuestras vidas, saber que el círculo ha concluido ... " (p. 65).

Cambio de piel is a manual of modern mythology; there are innumerable concepts which appear as mythologies in this book. Machismo is seen as a myth when Javier says: "Creo que las mujeres mexicanas han inventado el mito del machismo para engañar a los hombres." (p. 180). Machismo has an accompanying myth, that of the man who possesses one woman and yet feels compelled to still search for La Mujer. Javier's wife Elizabeth must pretend to be a stranger at a party so that Javier may feel excited by her: "Como si yo fuera, otra vez, la extraña. Una mujer por conquistar. Una mujer nueva. Una mujer por descubrir." (p. 243). And Javier describes this myth which holds such a grip on him: "Mi estela ática, lejana e inmóvil, pausada e inasible, circunspecta y total, mujer que podía contener todos mis deseos de variedad, mi poligamia mental ... " (p. 257).

All of the four principal characters have created personal myths to help them accept their existence. Javier has fabricated the story that he works for a television station, but he is actually a minor United Nations
bureaucrat who also does some teaching. Franz lives in an illusion of justification, attempting to convince himself that others cannot judge him guilty. Isabel has filled her world with Coca Cola and pop records: "Es que sin mi tocadiscos portátil, de plano no viajo. Y a donde llegue en seguida pido mis cacas." (p. 147). PepsiCoatl is the closest thing to an indigenous myth that has ever touched her life.

Elizabeth is the character most obviously involved with a contemporary mythology. In Part II, an incredible amount of detail is employed to create a past for Elizabeth. She is supposed to be a character for whom Freddy is constructing a past, and he uses every possible minute detail in an attempt to give her fabricated past validity:

Sentiste sobre el rostro ese calor húmedo, mezclado con los olores que siempre asociarías a B.A., la nafta de los automóviles argentinos, que no se parece a ninguna otra gasolina del mundo y que es el olor más seguro de la ciudad, más que el de las tiendas y los restaurantes, olor de linos y lanas y cuero, olores de pizza recalentada, de parrilladas, de chorizo frito, de chinchulines, el leve olor de los helados recubiertos de chocolate y por encima, o dentro, de todo, el olor que viene de las dársenas del puerto: alquitrán, carbón, vapor, carne congelada ...

This is only a small fraction of the abundant detail which Freddy utilizes to amplify various periods of Elizabeth's life. But even the other characters realize that there is an apocryphal quality about her story, and are not interested in helping create her fiction. While playing dominoes with Javier, Elizabeth attempts to elaborate on her fictitious honeymoon in Greece:

-¿Cuánto tiempo pasamos en Falaraki?

Because of her constant efforts to create a past and a viable mythology for herself, Elizabeth is the most pathetic personage in the book. She is forever caught up in her lies and has to revert back to her fictions to be sure that she even exists. As Fuentes writes, this is "La creación de
un lenguaje novelesco como prueba del ser." (La nueva novela hispano-american, p. 65). She never realizes herself as a person and for her the world never seems real: "... el mundo se llama Paramount Pictures Presents." (p. 85).

Cambio de piel is a criticism of the traditional novel and the static society which it reflects; it is also a criticism of one of the principal mythologies of our time: the Hollywood cinema. This mythology of the cinema pervades our lives, but it is not productive. The wrong ideals are being emulated, for they are the shallow ideals of the movie world of the Twenties and Thirties at a time when Hollywood's function was to distract America from her misery.

In depicting this mythology of the film, Fuentes has included in the center of the Spanish language edition of Cambio de piel two sections of pictures which are extracts from old movies. In the first section are pictures of John Garfield, John Barrymore, Joan Crawford and an unidentified picture of a bearded actor. The second section of pictures begins with a photograph of the wicked Dr. Caligari and his sonambulant Cesare from a 1920 German expressionist silent film. This is followed by a street scene which could be from any one of scores of war movies; Joan Crawford gripping the bars of her prison cell finishes the illustration. These pictures have not been touched upon by critics, apparently, yet they are the material with which Freddy constructs his fictions. They could be the blueprints for his characters. They constitute Elizabeth's mythology, while Javier still looks to Greece for his mythology. Yet these film personalities are nearly as insignificant now as Freddy's characters: few old people, even people who have spent their entire lives in the movie theatre business, can identify these pictures today.
In attempting to depict the falseness of this contemporary mythology, Fuentes has devoted entire long paragraphs of *Cambio de piel* to nostalgic lauding of the past greats, whether of the United States of America or foreign film companies:

Proyectaban, sin anunciarlas, de sorpresa, viejas películas argentinas que te divertían mucho. Melodramas terribles, con muchos tangos, con mucha nostalgia de la belle époque del Centenario, con mucho folklore de los barrios portuarios ... haber venido ... a ver películas, Floren Delbene, Tita Merello, *Tres hombres del río*, Nini Marshall, Esteban Serrador, Santiago Gómez Cou, *Los ojos más lindos del mundo*, Enrico Muñó, Angel Magaña ... (p. 125).

The shallowness of the film stories is evident in this passage:

A Marlene Dietrich, claro, la descubriste en *El ángel azul*, eso lo recordabas hoy, hace un momento, ahora, con Emil Jannings, donde ella se sentaba a cantar a horcajadas, con un sombrero plateado y las medias negras; no, nunca actuaron juntas ella y la Garbo. La Garbo entró envuelta en zorros al Gran Hotel donde John Barrymore fumaba y se paseaba con el pijama de seda negra ... (p. 133).

When Franz is trying to tell Elizabeth of finding the dead dwarf in his room, she consistently relates this reality with films she remembers:

... Ya lo sé. Ya lo vi. Caligari y el sonámbulo se pierden en un laberinto blanco. No tienes que contármelo, Franz, ya lo sé ....... ¡Ya lo sé! ... ¡Ya vi a Nosferatu, sin edad, bajar de cabeza, como una lagartija, por los contrafuertes del castillo! (p. 141).

Even Isabel, upon entering Cholula, compares the countryside with what she has seen before in films: "Parece paisaje de película del Indio Fernández ... " (p. 261). The good way to die is compared with " ... morirse joven como James Dean y John Garfield y Dylan Thomas y Brendan Beehan ... " (p. 264).

Every conceivable object of today is seen in relation to its
counterpart in the cinema:

¿Quién inventó el teléfono?
Don Ameche.
¿La luz eléctrica?
Spencer Tracy.
¿Los servicios de prensa?
Edward G. Robinson. (p. 316).

Fuentes is not making a blanket condemnation of the film industry; he is criticizing here the traditional and static form that falsely depicts reality, and encourages people like Elizabeth never to pass beyond the trivia of adolescence.

While Fuentes shows very plainly the negative contributions and the limitations of the mythologies which affect Mexico today, he posits no alternative in their place. He presents a libertine "pop mythology" which would be "La verdadera libertad de aceptar todas las posibilidades del hombre." (p. 387). In Cambio de piel, there are innumerable pop songs, newspaper articles, public figures, etc., which are referred to as "clásicos." There is an entire "pop-pourri" of contemporary events which are lent a certain amount of importance simply by being named repeatedly. Yet there is in the novel an implicit criticism of this pop culture which is a constant, shallow movement: "Alumbra su cigarrillo de mota y ahora sí nos vamos al largo viaje, hombre, a volar alto, locos, escarbando, hechizos, ritmeando, con eso vamos, vamos, vamos, que la carretera es muy larga." (p. 434). The pop mythology is the equally bankrupt successor to Hollywood culture; it also is a product of bourgeois culture. Fuentes is calling for a "new man"—whole, entire, and heroic—who can confront and overthrow the petty, comfortable myths of the modern Western world and dare to live with uncertainties which are also new
and viable possibilities or alternatives. This also involves communication and communion among the solitary men such as Octavio Paz describes in Laberinto de la soledad, whose ideas Carlos Fuentes does follow.

A society without a viable mythology is at the nadir of its existence and yet in Cambio de piel, "Parece que asistimos a una enorme desmitificación ... Prevalece el mal." (Gustavo Saine, "Cambio de piel, el más alto documento literario," p. ix). The existing mythologies are seen to be inadequate and yet Fuentes suggests no alternative to replace them. He only documents transient and novel phenomena that do not suffice. The burden is on the reader to determine what constitutes a viable and applicable mythology for our times. Of the multitude of possible choices, the reader must select priorities and attempt to construct a mythology for himself.

With special reference to the Mexican reader, Fuentes is implying that he has the task of taking part in a collective imaginative effort to cast off the old, indigenous and colonial mythologies, as well as the new imported ones from Hollywood and the international pop culture. Then Mexico will be in a position to create new mythologies which are viable for Mexico and her people. In the 20th Century this problem has preoccupied many Mexican writers, and Fuentes himself can provide no easy answer. But the purpose of the novel is to make his countrymen stop deluding themselves with versiones caducas of reality in order to confront the problem heroically.
CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE

According to Carlos Fuentes, the most urgent undertaking of the Latin American writer is to destroy an old language of the bourgeois, create a new one and make the novel the vehicle for this change. "Carpentier, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa, Sarduy, García Márquez, Lezama Lima, Cabrera Infante, Donoso, Sainz, Fernández, Puig han centrado la novela latinoamericana en el lenguaje porque para un hispanoamericano, crear un lenguaje es crear un ser. El hispanoamericano no se siente dueño de un lenguaje, sufre un lenguaje ajeno, el del conquistador, el del señor, el de las academias." (La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 81).

The Latin American novelist can be a true radical by criticizing the traditional language of Latin America which was the base of complacent certainties. The writer and the language he chooses can change the structure of language into discourse, event and process which can lead to the creation of a new language with new possibilities of expression. Carlos Fuentes creates a linguistic reality with the structure of the typical bourgeois novel. Then he makes language double back on itself and question that structure. Poking holes into this structure and raising new possibilities constitutes the discourse. Static and apparently concrete events form the structure; the process comes in fragmenting, rearranging, questioning and destroying those structured events. Reality, or an approach
to it, may lie between the linguistic structure and the linguistic questioning. This is why language cannot really be separated from structure in *Cambio de piel* except as we have done for purpose of analysis. Once they are analyzed separately, they must be viewed as a linguistic whole. It ultimately all becomes language constantly questioning itself, as it strives to approach reality. Fuentes writes:

De esta manera, la literatura asegura la circulación vital que la estructura requiere para no petrificarse y que el cambio necesita para tener conciencia de sí mismo. Ambos movimientos se conjugan de nuevo en uno solo: afirmar en el lenguaje la vigencia de todos los niveles de lo real.

Esta función, la más evidente pero también la más compleja de la literatura, es posible con particular intensidad en Hispanoamérica porque nuestro verdadero lenguaje... está en proceso de descubrirse y de crearse y, en el acto mismo de su descubrimiento y creación, pone en jaque, revolucionariamente, toda una estructura económica, política y social fundada en un lenguaje verticalmente falso. (*La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, pp. 94-95).

In discussing his own work, Fuentes states, "He elegido personajes, argumento y situaciones insignificantes para conceder una absoluta libertad a lo único que me importaba: el lenguaje." (Corrado Stajiano, "El provocador cosmopolita," trans. by Alaide Foppá, *Excelsior*, Nov. 5, 1967, p. 3). Freddy Lambert is in the act of creating a reality which is pure fiction, and language is the tool which he employs in rich, heavy detail. But Freddy will not develop into a great novelist; he is the bourgeois novelist that Fuentes criticizes throughout this work. In his attention to language and trivial detail, he has created vague characters which he remembers from other past fictions. He is the bourgeois novelist par excellence; his imagination is bankrupt.

Because of their literary insignificance, the characters suffer a lack of strong identity, and doblaje abounds. It is no coincidence that
Isabel and Elizabeth bear two forms of the same name; they can be the same woman. "Cada personaje es otro, él y su máscara ... " (p. 309).

The women are interchangeable; Freddy Lambert " ... está potenciando en Elizabeth posibilidades de Isabel y viceversa. ... Elizabeth es lo que Isabel puede ser y que no debe ser al mismo tiempo." ("Situación del escritor," p. 10). While the two women constitute one pair of doblajes, Franz and Javier constitute another: "Cambio de piel es una novela sobre inminencias románticas: el mundo definido por la percepción individual es aberrante y puede conducir a la poesía o al crimen; a Javier o a Franz, que son dos rostros del mismo sueño." ("Situación del escritor," p. 11).

This pervading sense of doblaje is largely dependent on the ambiguity of the linguistic structure involved. Freddy's address to "la novillera" indiscriminately blends with his dialogues to "la dragona."

And while Freddy Lambert endlessly presents episode after episode to create a concrete past for his characters, all the episodes are permutable. The work is like a large mosaic, and all the pieces of the mosaic—the characters and the episodes and the violences—are interchangeable pieces. They share a common ambiguous identity. The violence of the Germans against the Jews, the violence of the black hoodlums against Elizabeth's brother—all these things share a common identity, for they are one ingredient that Freddy's literary recipe consistently calls for. Freddy is caught up in the pattern of the bourgeois novel and he does not have the imagination to create a new novelistic reality.

His recipe likewise calls for sexual passion. He mates Franz with Isabel, he mates Franz with Elizabeth, he mates Javier with Isabel and then
with Elizabeth, experiencing and measuring the artistic validity of the various possibilities.

At one point near the end of the book Freddy seems to mate Javier with Franz in the temple:

Franz abrazó a Javier para luchar; Javier abrazó a Franz para acercarse a él; los cuerpos se trenzaron y la lucha y el acercamiento, la tensión entre la fuerza y la debilidad se disolvió, les dije que se disolvió, en la mirada, en los brazos, por fin entre los muslos y los vientres unidos, apretados, mientras los dos hombres se mantenían abrazados en ese terrible contacto que negaba su intención, en ese abrazo de violencia que se convertía en renuncia, de odio que se transformaba en deseo ... (p. 370).

This fusion is symbolic rather than sexual. Such a union between Javier, the passive idealist, and Franz, the active realist, could create an entire and whole man.

In Cambio de piel, Fuentes is busy using language to illustrate the fragility of reality. He pokes at reality, and what seems to be real falls into a fiction created by the author Freddy. What we take to be reality may only be the invention of another being; this theme is strongly reminiscent of "The Circular Ruins" by Borges, and even dates back further than that in the Hispanic literary heritage to Calderón in La vida es sueño. In fact, the proposed title of this novel was El sueño. Fuentes beautifully expresses the ephemeral quality of reality and fiction in the words of Elizabeth: "Parecemos un recuerdo o una premonición de nosotros mismos. El espejo no refleja nada." (p. 142).

Cambio de piel is a relative to Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, in that it curiously explores the act of literary creation. Fuentes has in fact referred to Pirandello as "el ángel negro que vuela sobre mis sueños." (Corrado Stajiano, "El provocador cosmopolita," p. 4). The purpose of Cambio de piel, though, is to criticize the bourgeois novel and
show its inadequacies. Fuentes highly values the concept of "la obra abierta," the work which spirals into new regions of ever wider and deeper dimensions and significance. The novel created by Freddy which deals with the two couples at Cholula is not a great story; the fact that it is a novel within a novel lends to it greater significance. The reader wonders what other possibilities may lie beyond this creation.

Carlos Fuentes felt a great preoccupation with "pop art" during the creation of this novel, and has indeed created "pop-lit" with the writing of Cambio de piel. "Pop-art" attempted to lend artistic validity to the common-place; food molds of plastic found their way into art museums. "Los procedimientos de Cambio de piel han nacido de esa intención de legitimar toda la vulgaridad, el exceso y la impureza de nuestro mundo, de quitarles el mal olor peyorativo que permite a nuestras 'aristocracias' alzar la nariz al cielo." ("Situación del escritor," p. 14). By legitimizing all this, instead of excluding it from "reality" as bourgeois cultural ideals do, it can then be examined and questioned. Otherwise, essential parts of reality are ignored, and therefore cannot be evaluated. Pop art is a symptom of the breakdown of typical bourgeois mythologies; thus Carlos Fuentes' preoccupation with it. It was exactly this vulgaridad that caused Cambio de piel to be censured in Spain, "Por la abundancia de palabras soeces y por la morbosidad de las descripciones." ("Fuentes y la censura española," Mundo Nuevo, No. 17, p. 90). This illustrates the typical bourgeois moral attitude and blindness which Fuentes struggles against.

Because Cambio de piel is a novel which exists largely to explore the possibilities of language as an instrument for knowing reality, Fuentes has in the first parts of the novel attempted to create an impenetrable
reality similar to that of the bourgeois novel, and then to puncture it with the force of language in the third part.

... yo concibo la literatura como una especie de encuentro de resistencias entre el lenguaje y la realidad. Por ello parto, quizás, con un plan, parto de presentar una realidad casi o totalmente opaca, impenetrable, y de hacer el ensayo de penetrarla para llegar a lo que quiero decir, de no evadirme de esa dificultad. ("Situación del escritor," p. 12).

The real problem is capturing reality in language, but never placing too much faith in the ability to do so. There is a continual questioning of reality. In other words, it is as Monegal says, "... para transformar la realidad lingüística misma de la narración." (Narradores de esta América, Vol. I, p. 32). With language Fuentes builds a reality which is as heavy as the pyramids of Cholula, and then he crushes his characters and the entire novel with its weight. The bourgeois novel destroys itself. Fuentes lets it weigh down heavily on them and their very existence, and then they are sacrificed to it in the third part when the pyramid suffers a landslide which crushes the characters with its weight. This constitutes an admirable unity of form and content which is the basis of art, and it is the basis for the validity of Carlos Fuentes' method of structuring the novel. This achievement has not been acclaimed by the critics, but it is the justification for the espesura of the first parts. Fuentes had to create a pyramid of language with which to match the monumental dimensions of the Cholula ruins. This is a layered pyramid, with one temple inside the other. In the novel there are layers of "pseudo-reality" which must be peeled-off like old skin: Cambio de piel.

Various critics have commented on the similarity of Cambio de piel to ancient Latin satires, because it is very full of detail. Fuentes admits
that he did indeed reread a great deal of Juvenal and Persio as he was involved in the writing of this novel, as well as the profoundly critical prose of Quevedo. As Fuentes has always attempted to create a language more vital and rebellious than the language of the Mexican middle class, he admits that "... es muy oportuna la referencia a los satiristas latinos, cuyo propósito era desagradar y negar la coartada sentimental a los lectores." (Mendoza, "Carlos Fuentes habla de Cambio de piel y de otras pieles," p. 3).

While traditional authors wrote fiction that pretended to reflect reality, Fuentes has written fiction that makes no pretense of reflecting reality, but rather of questioning it. As he says, "Cambio de piel is "... una ficción radical ... la única manera de entender esta novela es si se acepta su ficcionalidad absoluta ... Es una ficción total." ("Situación del escritor," p. 10).

In Cambio de piel, Carlos Fuentes is attempting to show the falseness and corruption of that which is traditionally accepted as the Latin American literary language. This structured language has led to a closed culture, rather than one open to change. "Súbitamente nos damos cuenta de que el lenguaje ... se convierte en la única respuesta posible a la logomaquia del poder. Es la única posibilidad de darle a la realidad otro sentido, puesto que en nuestros días la realidad es palabra." ("Situación del escritor," p. 20).

Great significance is given to the speakers' words in Cambio de piel: the speakers themselves have an awareness of language. Freddy says of Elizabeth and Javier: "... soltando las riendas de las palabras
que nunca, ni tú en la vida ni él en los libros, se habían atrevido a
decir ... " (p. 132). And Elizabeth likewise speaks to Javier: "Sólo
tus palabras léperas en español, las más soeces en inglés, a veces el
trueque de idiomas, sin saber por qué, para decir lo mismo, ... " (p. 132).

The eclectic and free use of foreign idioms is one of the exam-
ples of Fuentes' linguistic licence in this book. The Spanish narration
unexpectedly breaks into Latin, or Italian, German, French, or English.
The words of English speaking personages will frequently be given in
English:

... uno se hincó también y meneó el casco y dijo:
Goddammit, Just a kid.
y el otro, de pie, cortó cartucho y dijo:
We were just practicin'. It was just target practice ... (p. 307).

Freddy frequently expresses himself in French. Foreign languages
are employed to further create the atmosphere of the moment and to augment
the universal focus of the work. Coarse Mexican slang is very effectively
used, to give it recognition as a valid form of expression:

Fégale; dale; zúmbale; chíngale; en la torre; calabaza; por el culo,
por el chiclés; por el mende usté; al quebracho; al niño jotorás;
salecoros, güey; patéale los aguacates; rebáñalo; párchalo; échale
un espirucho; ... (p. 115-116).

As Fuentes explains, "A mí me ha interesado mucho utilizar el lenguaje
del proletariado mexicano en Cambio de piel porque tiene una carga mágica

In his attempts to revitalize the Castilian language which has
been imposed upon Mexico, Fuentes is aware of the historical implications
of this attempt. Literature can be a tool of revolution and radical change;
a new language and the possibility of a new reality is the justification
of Cambio de piel. It is the raison d'être of this work. Upon considering
the criteria of Carlos Fuentes' definition of the new novel—that it be language, myth and structure—it can be seen, then, that *Cambio de piel* does exist largely for the resuscitation of the Latin American language, and thereby, of the Latin American imagination.

**CONCLUSION**

*Cambio de piel* cannot be tidily filed away with a definitive label. The work is many things: it is a criticism of the traditional bourgeois novel; and it makes serious comments on contemporary mythologies and traditional novelistic structures and language. In the labor of constructing this novel, Carlos Fuentes was true to his literary ideals stated in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. The work is an anti-novel, a critique of the traditional bourgeois novel. This is the justification of the structure, which cannot therefore follow traditional patterns.

The work is indeed ambitious in scope, for Fuentes has tried to portray the essence of 20th Century society in all its chaotic and controversial complexity. Through the use of apparent flashbacks, the fragmented spatial and temporal dimensions of the novel are extended to vast dimensions, and then reduced again into the fiction created by the caged imagination of Freddy Lambert.

While *Cambio de piel* is a socially-committed work, it also has poetic qualities. Fuentes strives to evoke rather than state, leaving the reader to create his own reality. While he is keenly concerned with the evolution of literature and is a theoretician on the alchemy of art itself, Fuentes is not a writer who can divorce himself from the realities of his times. In his works there is an undeniable effort to deal creatively
and artistically with contemporary society. This fusion is of significant value and has made recent Latin American literary achievements more respected abroad than they were in the past. Cambio de piel ranks among the recent works in which this fusion has been successfully attempted. When compared with the nationalist or indigenous works of the past, it is clear that Cambio de piel does exemplify the maturing of the novelistic art in Latin America.
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