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The New Face of Mexico Seen through *The Crystal Frontier* by Carlos Fuentes

by

Paul E. Kasper

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Maarten Van Delden,
Associate Professor,
Chair Hispanic Studies

Beatriz González Stephan,
Professor, Lee Hage Jamail
Chair in Latin American Literature

José Aranda,
Associate Professor, English Literature

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ABSTRACT

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Building upon the historical foundations of Mexican identity assembled by his contemporaries, himself and his predecessors, Carlos Fuentes does his best to render the new face of Mexican identity in his recent novel, *La frontera de cristal.* Several of its characters stand out as literary embodiments of border theory. These characters not only serve as a description of the author's views of this new reality but also as cautionary tales of what might result from globalization and the neo-liberal market. This thesis will display how these characters are representations of Fuentes's conjecture about the outcome of our present NAFTA-era politics and provide interpretations of some of his characters' fates.

FOREWORD

When the citizens of Mexico cross the border into the United States in search of a new life, they for the most part legally and culturally continue being Mexican. Over time, cultural idiosyncrasies from each nation mix to form different cultural makeups. It is interesting to note the different outcomes of these mixtures and the way the thinkers on the subject of Mexican identity portray this culture as affected by that of the immigrants' new home.

The careers of the three Mexican writers, Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, form an unavoidable part of the discourse on Mexican identity. Consequently, their writings can be seen as making up and maintaining a tradition. In *La jaula de la melancolía,* Roger Bartra devotes an entire chapter to an imagined debate on the subject of Mexican philosophy. In this chapter, Bartra makes extensive use of the thoughts and opinions of Paz and Ramos, as well as many other Mexican writers, thus proving their importance in this area of discourse. Many of the themes begun by Ramos were taken up and molded by his succesors Paz and Fuentes. Within this discourse we can see an evolution of Mexican identity and also the identity of the Mexican immigrant.

Their tradition is merely an angle from which Mexican identity can be viewed and therefore they are not the only lenses through which we can see this ever-changing

topic. However, for some reason most other Mexican writers have used Ramos's, Paz's and Fuentes's work on the subject of Mexican identity as a sounding board or a point of departure. This is why I have decided to use their thoughts on the subject of Mexican identity which I will show evolve into what it is today throughout this thesis paper.

This paper will begin with Ramos and demonstrate how, throughout the course of these three writers' oeuvres, the topic of Mexican identity has been progressively more affected by social phenomena such as immigration and globalization. Such observable facts have made the identity of the Mexican and the Mexican immigrant a highly dynamic topic which is in constant need of revision and completion. This is exactly why I have chosen to show several of Fuentes's works and the characters they contain; because he has kept these characters updated with each new trend in history and theoretical discourse.

His recent novel *La frontera de cristal* is geared toward a newer version of Mexican identity which is that of a population that is in closer contact with the United States. His new prose falls into step with many of the border theorists and argues with/implements their ideas in the forging of his characters and story lines. This is accomplished by creating characters that embody the growing field of border theory or the geographic regions of the border itself.

Border theory has exploded since the 1990's and much thought and work has been contributed to its definition. Against the backdrop of all of this theory, at times we can see Fuentes using his fiction and the products of border theory to take a predominantly unenthusiastic stance on the outcome of our shrinking planet. In other instances he poses a positive solution to the contact/clash of cultures.

When looking at Fuentes, it is important to recognize at least two writers, Néstor García Canclini and Gloria Anzaldúa, whose work forms a central part of the discourse on the border, and its shifting role in the era of globalization. The subject of Mexican identity is closely connected to border theory due to the reaction of Mexican citizens to the superpower to the north. The Mexican, who has to leave his home, family and ultimately his way of life to seek what the U.S. can offer and Mexico cannot, must submit him/herself to a culture which is in many ways the polar opposite of his/her own. The theories of Canclini and Anzaldúa, which are in my opinion a product of the growing number of Mexican immigrants, speaks metaphorically and physically of the divide between Mexico and the United States and we will later see how Fuentes's fiction sets up a dialogue with these two thinkers and the problems and solutions they pose.

Finally, it is clear that Fuentes is utilizing one of his and Paz's favorite topics, death, to pass judgment on his characters and their actions, which gives the reader a possible direction for globalization and its offspring. One of the many products of globalization is hybrid identity which results from the closer contact between cultures

due to technological advances in transportation and communication. Aside from unearthing the foundation upon which *La frontera de cristal* rests, this thesis will use its characters and the theory they embody to demonstrate a new face of Mexican identity and Fuentes's cautionary tales about the country's future and the dangers of the course it is presently taking.

As I have previously stated, this thesis will demonstrate Fuentes's preoccupation with Mexican identity and illustrate his incorporation of border thought into the making of his characters and landscapes.

I.
Background of Mexican Immigrants as Seen in Mexican Literature

First it is important to demonstrate how the subject of Mexican identity became what it is today. I will take the simple approach of following the river beginning with one of its sources Samuel Ramos, leaving many of the other tributaries out of the picture so as to insure brevity.

SAMUEL RAMOS
El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México

The first text to be discussed in relation to my topic is *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934). It is a precursor to Paz and Fuentes and also a significant piece in the discourse on the subject of the Mexican character. One thing to keep in mind when looking at Ramos's description is that in his epoch, essences were thought to be what lie at the core of every culture and thus the best way of mapping the vast territory of a culture's identity. Looking for the kernel of the Mexican character confined Ramos' description to the geographic center of his country.

In his search for the essences of Mexican identity, Ramos uses elements of the psychoanalytic theory of the German psychologist Alfred Adler to arrive at his rough copy of the Mexican temperament. Ramos compares Mexico to an adolescent, following Adler's conception of the adolescent as someone who feels inferior to his parents and older siblings. In making this comparison, Ramos is suggesting that Mexico suffers from an inferiority complex with regard to its "parents," the

modernized nations of the world, such as France. Another of these nations was and is the United Status, a constant navigational device brought into play in the exploration of Mexican identity. Lacking the modernity and stability of the U.S. and other modernized nation-states, the Mexican character was described by Samuel Ramos as exhibiting the irrational and brazen behavior of the adolescent.

The title of his book, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México,* is very descriptive of the identity Samuel Ramos renders for the Mexican populace. His portrait is very flat. The way he goes about this is a topographic mapping of Mexican society and discussing several traits of each one of its social levels in the chapter *"Psicoanálisis del mexicano."* He begins with the lowest rung of the Mexican social order, what he refers to as the *pelado* and proceeds to censure him describing him as follows, "*representa el deshecho humano de la gran ciudad. En la jerarquía económica es menos que un proletario y en la intelectual un primitivo."* (54) Later he ends up at the "*Burgués mexicano"* in which he describes the only form of Mexicanness that he finds acceptable. He goes on to explain the differences between the two ranks by noting an expression used by the latter, *"¡Pareces un pelado!"* This expression is used to communicate that one is acting in a crude form. A closer look demonstrates how Ramos goes into detail about this behavior.

There are several valuable insights in his description that I have noticed as persisting into the present. One of these persistent aspects is the *disfraz* or the disguise which

Paz would later refer to in his essays as *máscaras*. This is an important concept in Ramos's work given that it informs the reader of what lies beneath the surface of the shell of Mexicanness. Ramos claims that all of the bad aspects of the Mexican character which are displayed by the *pelado* such as violence, *machismo* and foul language are disguises for the inferiority the Mexican feels towards the "more mature" nations of the world. It is interesting to question whether these disguises should just be taken on a personal level or if one could also apply them to the realm of public and foreign policy. Many questions could be answered if Mexico's approach to solving its problems were interpreted as outcroppings of these masks. One that could be easily applied is the *machismo* of the Mexican government which manifests itself in corruption and an almost total disregard for the nation's underprivileged.

This primal stage of the rendering of Mexican identity has a direct bearing on the later texts of the genre because of its description, however dreary and negative, of the Mexican character. In it can be found the seeds of symbols that would be taken up by authors like Paz and Fuentes and expanded upon in their literature. It is also useful in that the Mexican working class, from which would be drawn the main candidates for emigration, have the beginning sketches of their identity in this text. This makes for a large task to be taken up by the successors of Samuel Ramos. Firstly, they had to expand upon the small foundation of identity he had left behind. Next, they had the more difficult job of finding and buttressing the positive aspects of Mexican identity in the areas of society where Ramos had only found negative. Also lay before them

the task of criticizing that which Samuel Ramos had seen as merely positive, the Mexican bourgeoisie.

OCTAVIO PAZ

The extensive career of Octavio Paz is probably best known for his unbounded explorations and mapping of the Mexican character in his collection of essays, *El laberinto de la soledad,* which was first published in the year 1950. In defining the Mexican character, he often uses the United States as a measuring device by which he could quantify the different internal and external aspects of his own nation. He also exhumes and employs some of the devices, which Samuel Ramos had found in his earlier explorations; therefore Paz owes quite a bit to the foundation (however paltry), which Ramos had left behind. In an interview with Claude Fell, Paz described Samuel Ramos's remarks on the Mexican character as being,

> of a psychological nature and he was greatly influenced by Adler, the German psychologist and more or less heterodox disciple of Freud. Ramos centered his description on the so-called 'inferiority complex' and what compensated for it: machismo. Although not entirely wrong, his explanation was limited and terribly dependent on Adler's psychological models. (331)

One of the themes Paz would expand upon is the *disfraz* which he would translate into the *máscara* or the mask in English. Other major tools which Paz had first described and would begin appearing throughout the trajectory of Mexican identity are the *fiesta* and death. All of these elements of Mexican cultural identity were again taken up and expanded upon by Fuentes. This section will provide a description of some of the tools of Paz that are useful in the reading of Carlos Fuentes's version of Mexican identity: *máscaras*, the *fiesta,* death and his spreading of Mexican identity across the border to include the Mexican immigrant.

The *disfraz* of Ramos being converted into *máscara* acquires more weight and connotations as Paz expands on this leitmotif of Mexican identity. It is interesting to note that he uses this topic to explore love and how it can be impeded by the *máscara.* We can draw a direct connection between the way Paz describes this basic human emotion and the interrelation of Mexicans and Mexican immigrants and their North American neighbors. In the chapter "*Máscaras mexicanas*" from his book of essays *El laberinto de la soledad,* he finds that,

> *El amor es una tentativa de penetrar en otro ser, pero sólo puede realizarse a condición de que la entrega sea mutua. En todas partes es difícil este abandono de sí mismo; pocos coinciden en la entrega y más pocos aún logran trascender esa etapa posesiva y gozar del amor como lo que realmente es: un perpetuo descubrimiento... (177)*

It is useful to view the relations of our neighboring nations through this lens. The dealings between the characters that Fuentes has set up in his novel *La frontera de cristal* refer back to this sentiment of passage through the type of mask Paz has just described. The masks according to Paz are used as defenses or protective walls that block the outer world's passage into what is really the true face of Mexican identity. He finds that, "*El mexicano siempre está lejos, lejos del mundo y de los demás. Lejos también de sí mismo.*" (177)

Other than in love, Paz sees the *fiestas* of his country as an instance in which his subject can be viewed without the *máscara.* His descriptions of these instances are positive in that he describes them as a time when the hermetic Mexican can coexist with the other members of his community. For Octavio Paz the Mexican *fiesta* is a celebration of life that allows the citizens of the small towns of Mexico a chance to come together, let their guard down and experience "*ese baño de caos...para*

provocar el renacimiento de la vida." (187) Interestingly enough, Paz makes use of his essay *"Todos santos Día de Muertos"* to describe what Ramos called the *pelado* in a more positive light as if he were arguing with Ramos for the value of the lower classes. In the essay, Paz describes how the poor remain poor because of the expense of their *fiestas*, thus showing how they esteem the sense of community over material gain.

It is equally interesting that in this chapter Paz also chooses to speak of the attitude of indifference the Mexican population has toward death. He describes this lack of concern as a natural outcome of the chaos, which proceeds from the spirit of the fiesta, which is in itself a mere distillation of life. Paz makes a good point when he observes this tendency in the Aztec culture in his essay "*Todos santos día de muertos*",

> *vida, muerte y resurrección eran estadios de un proceso cósmico, que se repetía insaciable. La vida no tenía función más alta que desembocar en la muerte, su contrario y complemento; y la muerte, a su vez, no era un fin en sí, el hombre con su muerte la voracidad de la vida siempre insatisfecha.* (190)

Later on in the ongoing project of rendering the Mexican experience, Carlos Fuentes would combine these two essential characteristics of the Mexican social reality, death and the *fiesta*, to make available his observations of the Mexican immigrant back in his homeland.

The essay "*El pachuco y otros extremos*" is provocative and greatly informative because it is the first example among the writers of this thesis in which its writer

follows the Mexican subject into the United States in order to sketch a more complete identity by taking the subject out of its natural surroundings. The concept of identity is fascinating when its subject is rendered in the setting of another country's population due to the extra lenses and mirrors of another culture and its surroundings, which are added to the microscope through which the subject is viewed. This new more highly defined observation produces more angles from which to view the subject such as how he relates to a dominant culture that is not his own. These foreign surroundings also serve as a third variable in the depiction of identity which is functional in seeing how the Mexican character reacts to certain circumstances such as these other cultures and if his identity remains stable in new circumstances. A clear example of the results of this cultural experiment can be seen when Paz refers to the assimilation process of the Chicano in noticing,

> *Esta mexicanidad- gusto por los adornos, descuido y fausto, negligencia, pasión y reserva- flota en el aire. Y digo que flota porque no se mezcla ni se funde con el otro mundo, el mundo norteamericano, hecho de precisión y eficacia. Flota pero no se opone; se balancea, impulsada por el viento, a veces desgarrada como una nube.* (147)

This view of Mexican identity in the setting of another would later be employed and explored by Carlos Fuentes as not only a means of delivering a literary rendering of the Mexican in a foreign environment but also chronicling the effects of immigration and globalization and how they change lives and cultures.

Some of Samuel Ramos's ideas from his scant rendition of Mexican identity are brought to light and expanded upon in the oeuvre of Octavio Paz. His work can also be seen as some of the most important and earliest border thought given that he inflated the scope of Mexican identity to include what was occurring with the other,

los chicanos, across the border in the United States. The mixing of cultural identities and their possible contamination or ultimate loss would become the next topic in the discourse on identity.

Paz often wrote about what Néstor García Canclini would later take on as one of his central themes, modernity and its threat to the cultural individuality of Latin-American nations. He, like his predecessor Samuel Ramos, painted Mexico as an adolescent whose maturity could only be found in the modernity that was enjoyed by nations like the United States which had its roots in, "*la Democracia, el Capitalismo y la Revolución industrial y nosotros en la Contrarreforma, el Monopolio y el Feudalismo.*" (156) The paradox lies in the fact that Mexico will have to sacrifice many of her own cultural mores in order to attain the level of modernity "enjoyed" by other nations. Many of these cultural ways of life: community, family and rural livelihoods that are the backbone of Mexican identity will be lost in the nation's pursuit of a more contemporary society and a more fruitful economy.

NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI

According to border theorist Néstor García Canclini, modernity and ideology are spread in many ways due to information's ability to travel at higher speeds than in the past. What he finds interesting is that there are "current power relations lead by a dense network of economic and ideological structures whose headquarters is not in a single nation." His concept of deterritorialization speaks of the detachment of cultural practices from the "geographical and social territories" that contained them in a past that can be characterized as less mobile. This "new-found" mobility can be witnessed in the migrations of peoples and the symbolic markets whose products constantly influence and change the colonial populations they reach. He claims that, "the most innovative reflection on deterritorialization is unfolding in the principal area of migrations on the continent—the border between Mexico and the United States." (231)

How do these new circumstances affect the issue of identity? As we see with Octavio Paz's description of the pachuco in Los Angeles, Mexican identity can no longer be confined to a certain geographic space. The essences of Ramos and his epoch are today broken into countless pieces that make identity and culture more complex issues. In Canclini, like we began to see in Paz, we see the essences formed as simplifiers being diluted by geographic diversity and the movement of people. Identity, being geographically static in the past, is now a product of different

deterministic factors such as being part of a minority and often not looking, speaking or acting like the majority.

He observes that identities meld in contact zones along the border and form hybrids in the chapter "Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers." In doing so, Canclini, like Octavio Paz, turns his gaze from Mexico City and the centrism of their predecessors. But instead of going all the way into the United States, he cites examples from Tijuana, which he refers to as, "along with New York, one of the biggest laboratories of postmodernity." (233) It was, Canclini explains, in this contact zone, Tijuana, that, "North Americans came to elude their country's prohibitions on sex gambling and alcohol." (234) It is interesting that his argument includes how the two sides of the border exist in relation to one another, one providing for the shortcomings of the other side.

Canclini cites an interesting example of this quest for otherness with a donkey in Tijuana that is painted to look like a zebra. American tourists pay five dollars to have themselves photographed on this hybrid animal which is surrounded by symbols of Mexico such as cacti, volcanoes, etc. that cannot be found in the borderlands. Canclini points out that,

> it also refers to the myth that North Americans bring with them, that it has something to do with crossing the border into the past, into the wilderness, into the idea of being able to ride horseback. (236) [1]

[1] The notion of riding horseback will later be discussed in the section of *La frontera de cristal.*

This intercultural contact, which is captured in this painted burro is a definite example of one way that the Mexicans along the border play up their exoticism to cater to the notions of tourists.

Canclini like Octavio Paz shifted the focus of Mexican identity away from the central plateau and into a region, which reflects the globalization around the world. In doing so, he shows not only how cultures share aspects and interact but also how they view each other through the lenses of their preconceived notions.

Canclini's view of the border areas as regions where the two cultures share and enjoy the presence of one another is one of the main points of discourse in *La frontera de cristal.* In this novel, one can witness the struggle between cultural identity and the rival that Canclini has proposed for it, modernization. In his book *Culturas híbridas,* he proposes a positive observation of the hybrid culture that forms along the border. This hybridization force has clearly taken root in a very negative way in *La frontera de cristal.* Leonardo Barroso, one of the novel's main characters (and its least culturally Mexican), is a symbol of unconstrained capitalism that destroys his family line with the blinding greed he embodies.

Barroso, who is depicted as living in a Norman-Tudor style home and often behind the wheel of a Lincoln, is just one of the ways in which Fuentes plays out a battle between Mexico's heritage and her struggle for modernity in his latest novel. He has done this by demonstrating what would happen if Mexico turned her course

completely into the direction of the free-market system and left behind the positive aspects of her cultural identity. Other characters play other aspects of border theory out in other directions.

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

Proceeding from a completely different set of circumstances than the previous list and description of authors, Gloria Anzaldúa opens a unique window on the issue of Mexican and Chicano/a identity. Her book *Borderlands/La frontera* from the year 1987 illustrates this difference, or in her words *otredad,* and informs its reader of the many obstacles and boundaries that exist alongside the cultural distinction focussed upon by her male predecesors. She sees a divide between herself and the men who have dominated discussions of Mexican identity. Hers is an extremely valid perspective that provides a counterbalance to the other authors in this thesis. This is a result of her being a native of the region she writes about and thus she has grown up within the many facets that surround and determine life along the border.

A lesbian in rural South Texas understandably has many more motives to feel separated from her surroundings than do the previously mentioned authors who all have a firm connection to Mexico City. Anzaldúa points to these differences as the physical separation between herself and a white male-dominated culture. Another source of pain along the border is how the Hispanic looks toward the Anglo-Saxon sector of the population for their model of success denying the value of their own and especially that of the female. In doing so many of the immigrants scorn and hence are tricked out of their ways of life according to Anzaldúa. This is one of the many reasons for her description of the border as an "open wound."

The difference between her vision and Canclini's of the borderlands is this very wound. Her descriptions of the strife and divisions between the different racial groups seem to portray them as mortal wounds and therefore negative. Her work is valuable though in that she combines the folk stories from her region, such as *La Llorona,* to explain problems that emerge from the coexistence of two cultures in one area. In *Borderlands/La frontera* she lacks the historical vision to see her situation as something that has occurred throughout history. The border changes and diaspora that have gone on throughout the course of European and Asian history would be a good example of this same phenomenon. Canclini is more upbeat in his interpretation of the zones in which cultures come into contact.

Anzaldúa's poem "We Call Them Greasers" from *Borderlands/La frontera* is a great example of this point. It is a truthfully grating description of how the land along the border was taken control of by Anglo settlers. It is rife with the rape and plunder that have surrounded almost every takeover in history and tells the moving tale of how the "native" population was forced from its land and way of life. It is a good distillation of her work given that it shows no hope for the wound of this takeover to be healed or how its pain could be directed into a positive direction.

Is this divergence a result of the authors' two completely different set of circumstances? By reading her poetry and opinionated prose, one can realize that Anzaldúa's childhood was difficult due to the dissimilarity she experienced as a result of her surroundings.

Many characters of *La frontera de cristal* can be viewed through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa's experience along the border. We can even notice an embodiment of her thought in a homosexual character whose life is portrayed by Fuentes as curing the "open wound" of the U.S.-Mexico border. The reader can thus observe the influence *Borderlands* has wrought upon the capital's thought. In the next chapter (specifically in the section on the chapter *La pena*), I will show how Fuentes responds to Anzaldúa's questions of *otredad* and its result, the failure of the chicano/a or Mexican immigrant to have weight in a white-dominated culture.

CARLOS FUENTES

"Each city receives its form from the desert it opposes..."
Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

While I do not claim to know the entire ouvre of Carlos Fuentes, I am familiar enough with it to observe several recurring themes that are keys to understanding his country, the United States and their interactions. Immigration and the relations between the two nations have shown up in a large part of his work and this section will highlight this fascination in three of his novels.

The first to be discussed is his first novel, *La región más transparente,* in which a small, but noticeable ammount of attention is given to the Mexican emigrant, Gabriel. Many of Fuentes' thoughts upon the subject can be interpreted through the actions and fate Fuentes creates for him. For the next example, I will jump to the middle of his career to show a mirrored crossing and what opportunitites it provides the author in *Gringo viejo.* Finally, I will jump to several chapters of *La frontera de cristal,* one of his more recent novels, to show how his interest in immigration and the relations between our neighboring countries has grown enough to provide the material for an entire novel.

II.
Fuentes's Nascent Interest in Mexican Immigration as Seen in *La región más transparente*

All the way back to his first novel *La región más transparente*, Carlos Fuentes has felt it important to include characters who have come into contact with the other side of the U.S.-Mexico border. The character Gabriel, who plays the role of the typical *bracero* in Fuentes's first novel, does not occupy much of the dialogue or importance in the novel's message. Nevertheless, he is important because in him we can view Fuentes's nascent interest and treatment of a member of Mexican society who chooses to leave his land behind in search of the opportunity that exists north of the border in the United States. Fuentes will return to this theme throughout his career and the role of this key character will increase in importance in his novels in proportion to its importance in the reality of the Mexican social makeup. This section will demonstrate how Fuentes formed his perception of the figure of the *bracero* through the works of his predecessors (and maybe his time in the United States), and how this character is the medium for a negative view of Mexico in his first novel, *La región más transparente*.

Firstly, it is important to realize that Fuentes spent a great part of his childhood in the United States, Washington D.C. to be exact and has continued to frequent the U.S. since. D.C. is not nearly as rich in Mexican-American influence as is Los Angeles where Paz spent a portion of his youth (being a city with a population of Mexicans

second in size only to Mexico City). Despite his geographic location, living on the other side of the *Río Bravo* certainly ignited Fuentes's interest in the reality of a foreigner, the relations of the two countries and how the Mexican citizen is affected by such a dominant force as the United States. As a grammar school student in the U.S., he began to realize that, "the history of Mexico was a history of crushing defeats, whereas I lived in a world, that of my D.C. public school, which celebrated victories, one victory after another..." Later in the essay, he expounds on his feelings of alienation by saying, "The shock of alienation and the shock of recognition are sometimes one and the same. What was different made others afraid, less of what was different than of themselves, of their own incapacity to recognize themselves in the alien." (7) What can be more easily proven is the literary heritage from which Carlos Fuentes derived his focus and subject matter.

The origins of the *bracero* that Fuentes portrays in this novel can be traced up his Mexican literary bloodlines through Octavio Paz to Samuel Ramos, due to his unavoidable descriptions of the Mexican spirit (however restricted its scope and rendering). While Ramos did not mention the *bracero* in his essay *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*, he did spend time mapping out the psyche of the *pelado* or his take on the Mexican working class, which would later show up in Fuentes's portrayal of the *bracero*. Ramos's description of the *pelado* was rife with negative aspects such as the *machismo*, cursing and violence (all of which he referred to as *disfraces* or disguises, precursors to the *máscaras* which Paz used to refer to the outer layer of Mexican identity). All of these behavioral layers can be witnessed in

the main scene "*Maceualli*" of *La región más transparente* in which Fuentes portrays his first version of the Mexican immigrant Gabriel.

This scene takes place during Mexico's Independence Day celebration of September 15th. Fuentes affords himself a space to describe his version of the fiesta and death by having many of the novel's characters in their natural environments on this holiday. Not only Gabriel, but many other significant characters from across the novel's social spectrum, such as one of the intellectual characters, Manuel Zamacona, die at this point in time.

Aside from that of Ramos we can notice Octavio Paz's influence in Fuentes's character Gabriel and the scene that surrounds him. In the section titled *Maceualli*, Fuentes sets a carnivalesque scene in which Gabriel *"se lanza(n) al exterior"* to use a key concept from Paz's "*El pachuco y otros extremos.*" Gabriel's section also contains many references to another one of Paz's essays, *"Todos Santos Día de Muertos"* in which Paz describes the Mexican *fiesta* as being a time for the populations of Mexico's towns and cities to take a break from the societal norms and briefly go about without their masks of *soledad.* As I said in reference to Ramos earlier we can see the *bracero* and his *cuates* celebrating the 15th of September by being on their worst behavior. During the time of *fiesta*, according to Paz, the norms of the country and religion do not assert their control. Paz also employs this essay to demonstrate how, in Mexico "*muerte y vida son contrarios que se complementan.*" (190) Here again we witness how similar the two texts are as Fuentes takes

advantage of this scene to have Gabriel murdered in a very incidental way. His shooting is an off-hand detail of the chapter that occurs as he is walking out of a bar late at night. Fuentes renders this murder as devoid of meaning as no more text is spent on its significance throughout the remainder of the novel. This frivolous treatment of death directly points to the way we have just seen Paz describe the Mexican attitude toward death which are most likely results of the sacrificial traditions of the Aztecs and the Mexican Revolution both of which made the face of death omnipresent. More time will be spent analyzing this trivial death later in this section, but first I think it is important to go into more detail concerning its surroundings and background.

The title of this chapter "*Maceualli,*" which is an Aztec word meaning servant or subject, refers to the modern-day working-classs characters who are its protagonists. It may also function as a synonym for the word *pelado* (for the word is to be found almost countlessly throughout this chapter). Fuentes, like Paz, often demonstrates the vestiges of Aztec social phenomena and structures in the Mexico of the present. This occurs in this chapter as Fuentes takes up the situation and theme of the *fiesta* with the aim of exalting these working class inhabitants of Mexico and display a fraternity that cannot be witnessed in the posh *soirees* of the wealthy. Here we can see Fuentes diverging from the thought of Samuel Ramos by describing the interaction between the *pelados* as admirable and downplaying the validity of the bourgeoisie by parodying it. Lanin Gyurko describes this lack of fraternity as exercises in "collective pretentiousness" in his article "Identity and the Mask in Fuentes's *La región más*

transparente." The dense air of the parties of the wealthy is countered by the playful series of events in which the group of working-class Mexican bond in such a brotherly fashion. Gabriel displays this fraternity when referring to his friends as "*broder*" and Fuentes takes advantage of this to demonstrate his gradual assimilation into the culture of his adopted home, the United States.

As I have mentioned before, I see many of Fuentes's vignettes to be mere fictitious versions of Octavio Paz's essays upon identity. In *El laberinto de la soledad* Octavio Paz describes the fiesta which Fuentes has chosen for Gabriel's sacrifice,

> *Ciertos días, lo mismo en los lugarejos apartados que en las grandes ciudades, el país entero reza, grita, come, se emborracha y mata en honor de la virgen de Guadalupe o del general Zaragoza. Cada año, el 15 de septiembre a las once de la noche, en todas las plazas de México celebramos la Fiesta del Grito; y una multitud enardecida efectivamente grita por espacio de una hora, quizá para callar mejor el resto del año.* (Paz, 151)

This quote is a good introduction to my next subject, the sudden death of Gabriel, the rapidness of which makes it seem frivolous. Why did Fuentes choose to kill off the character that would be so important in the future of Mexico? Approximately two decades later in his book *El espejo enterrado*, Fuentes informs his public that, "*las remesas de los trabajadores migrantes en los Estados Unidos, que suman 4,000 millones de dólares al año y son la segunda fuente de divisas para México, después del petroleo...*" (366-367) Could it have been his lack of foresight, some form of literary justice towards a segment of the population that betrays Mexico or merely an incidental detail in Fuentes's fiction?

Carlos Fuentes, being the creator/destroyer in the realm of his own fiction, gives and takes life and I do not think that he does it blindly or without raison d'être. Maarten Van Delden provides an interesting approach to this question by pointing out Fuentes's possible motivation (or lack thereof). He refers to an interview in which Fuentes characterizes Mexico as being existentialist, "*avant la lettre.*" He later concludes that, "Fuentes's comment suggests that the scene of Zamacona's death in fact illustrates the existentialist quality of Mexican life." (12) Just two pages later, Van Delden brings up the fact that, "this juxtaposition of death and celebration is clearly designed to recall the ancient Aztec belief that human sacrifices are necessary to ensure the continuity of life." Van Delden sees this dualistic approach as telling of the tension between the existentialist and mythological nature of the novel.

One possible reason that I imagine for the death of the *bracero* character in *La región* is that Fuentes wishes to show the lack of bearing the absentee Mexican has on the reality of his national character. This death could also be a representation of the resentment Mexican citizens feel toward the abandonment of Mexico by Mexican immigrants. We could also interpret the brief life of Gabriel against the backdrop of a strong Mexican economy of the 1950's. Having so much economic growth to mirror that of the United States, Fuentes could be using Gabriel's character to personify Mexican immigration as a whole. In this instance Gabriel's brief life could be Fuentes's false conjecture about the future of the Mexican exodus. A final possibility is Fuentes portraying the *braceros* return to Mexico solely to celebrate in the time of *fiestas*, conspicuously spend their money and finally die.

Another aspect of Fuentes's depiction of the *bracero* is an important sentiment expressed by Gabriel. In his comparison he contrasts México with its more prosperous neighbor to the north. In one paragraph the circumspect *bracero* berates the landscape of Mexico by saying that there, "*no crece nada, mientras al otro lado...*" (Fuentes, 317) We can look back to the *paisajismo* of the Spanish Generation of '98 to realize that when landscapes are mentioned, we should see them as being descriptions of the nation as a whole. This negative attitude about an implacable landscape characterized by the lack of arable land is ripe for interpretation. The first interpretation I can see coming from this sentiment of the *bracero* is the literal meaning of the phrase: the vast majority of Mexico being a desert makes for a very small distribution of wealth in an agrarian society--this dry reality making for one continual "Dust Bowl" migration northward into a land abundant in fertile fields.

Another interpretation that is not so literal is that of the lack of economic opportunity and upward mobility. The growth mentioned by Gabriel could refer to the fact that the people of his stratum rarely grow economically in a country where meritocracy has never taken the reins from aristocracy and nepotism. Is Fuentes expressing his own opinion here or is this his way of reflecting the views of his countrymen? Taken from an agrarian perspective, Fuentes can be seen as sympathizing with the *campesinos* of his nation and thus pardoning them for its abandonment. This pardon is only brief as the *bracero* character of *La región más transparente* is quickly

murdered and made into one of the many fallen characters of the novel whom Fuentes chooses to kill off as part of his vignette set in Mexico's Independence Day Celebration of September 15.

Finally, Gabriel's name is much too suggestive to pass up. Fuentes is definitely aware of its evocative weight due to his use of it in his autobiographical essay "How I Started to Write" when he says, "even if the Angel Gabriel had announced me as a future Mexican writer..." (4) Being the same as that of the angel who summons all to heaven, I read this choice of name to be a comment on the growing popularity of migration which can be seen in Mexican and U.S. history throughout the latter half of the XXth century and on into the next. Keeping the character Gabriel's comparison of Mexico and the U.S. in mind, it is easy to imagine him as summoning all of his *cuates* whom he envisions as "tired, poor, huddled masses" to a country which was born into the fruits of modernity.

On the subject of Mexican identity, Fuentes seems to be taking issue with Ramos in this chapter. His inverse descriptions of the *pelado* and the bourgeoisie are interesting to note in the trajectory of the genre. Here again Gyurko's unmasking of Fuentes's work proves useful in that he connects the many masks across the social spectrum of Mexican identity. However, unlike Gyurko's trans-societal mask, I see this chapter as more of a veneration of the working class fraternity in response to its grotesque rendering by Samuel Ramos.

In this novel we see Fuentes's embryonic interest in the Mexican immigrant. This concern is a product of three determinants: his personal experience as a foreigner, a continuation of the literary discourse with reference to Mexican identity and the necessity of capturing a mushrooming social phenomenon that would continue to grow throughout the rest of his career. It is no wonder that his later novels and essays are a reflection of this growing trend. What is interesting is that, as his literary representation of the Mexican immigrant grew, so did their diversity in his work. Gabriel is just a representation of the working-class immigrant (and a meager one at that). He shows up in the novel just long enough to sing the praises of the United States, throw money around back home, criticize Mexico and die. Later Fuentes's fictional oeuvre would provide a more spherical representation of all strata of Mexicans as border crossers and these representations would question the influence the two cultures have upon one another.

III.
Fuentes' Inverse View of Immigration as Seen in *Gringo viejo*

As previously mentioned, the oeuvre of Carlos Fuentes is rife with literary scenes that contrast México and North America. In 1985 he published *Gringo viejo* a novel which provided him with the opportunity of juxtaposing characters of the two nations on the battlefields of the Mexican Revolution. This juxtaposition uses men of equal merit but of different cultural backgrounds. Hence the novel offers a detailed diptych of two warriors from either side of the border and a chance for its author to draw comparisons using the two portraits. In this section I plan to show just how Fuentes uses the mirrored crossing of the North American in order to arrive at new observations of the two distinct/similar cultures and how his interest in immigration has persisted throughout his writings.

The main character is Fuentes' conjecture of what happened to Ambrose Bierce, a war journalist for William Randolph Hearst and an accomplished veteran and chronicler of the American Civil War. The story begins after his actual disappearance at the U.S. border and fictionally joins up with a faction of Villa's forces led by General Tomás Arroyo. Many times over the gringo says that he prefers death in war than to die in his native land. The beginning of the second chapter begins with the sentence, "*El GRINGO viejo vino a México a morirse*" and goes on to include colonel Frutos García declaring, "*Ellos, los gringos, sí...se pasaron la vida cruzando*

fronteras, las suyas y las ajenas ---y ahora el viejo la había cruzado hacia el sur porque ya no tenía fronteras que cruzar en su propio país." (13)

This crossing and its rationale definitely attach themselves to the American stereotype of the pure, more essential and antiquated form of life that exists in México. We can see its resonance in later works by Fuentes. The lawless chaos of the revolution which the gringo crosses into utterly contrast the world of order and bureacracy which he leaves behind and constantly criticizes throughout the novel. We can also note an inverse immigration into the chaotic México of this era with the character of Harriet Winslow. Her search for a new direction in life is highly reflective of Fuentes' (and Canclini's) depiction of what Americans go to México to experience. The following quote, sums up this desire, "*Llegó como institutriz a una hacienda que ya no existe, que nunca vio, a ensenarles el inglés a niñitos que no conoció, ni supo cómo fueron, o si existieron siquiera.*" (64)

Another point Fuentes makes with the two dichotomous characters is that corruption and monopolies exist on both sides of the border. General Arroyo goes to great lengths to describe and denounce what he sees the revolution as destroying, aristocracy. Fuentes has imbued his character with the irony of the Mexican Revolution in that he himself is living much like those he is seeking to flush out. This irony is exposed in the scene in which his American lover, Harriet Winslow, is trying to help the peasants reconstruct the palacial hacienda where Arroyo has spent almost all of his life and is now headquartered. He vengefully orders her not to do this and

she points to the fact that he is living *"en un pullman diseñado para los Vanderbilt."* (62)

This greed and selfishness is counterbalanced two chapters later when the gringo is recounting some of his experiences to Harriet. In this episode he tells of an instance in which he was called into the office of the *"gran corruptor y desfalcador"*, Leland Stanford. (71) Stanford apparently wanted the gringo, a principled journalist, to stop revealing all of his underhanded dealings and offered to write him a check claiming that, *"Todo hombre tiene un precio."* Fuentes takes this chance to renounce corruption by giving his hero the action of demanding the price of all of the public lands that Stanford had stolen in order to attain a vast ammount of his fortune, $75,000,000, an ungodly sum especially in that era. His literature takes up the task of pointing out the overstepped boundaries of the powerful again and again.

In *Gringo viejo* we can also witness Fuentes's growing concern for the movement of peoples across borders. The obvious example is that of the gringo who goes down into México to die. This alter-immigration is very popular amongst a growing population of American retirees who make México their final stopping point in life. We also can see Carlos Fuentes making a statement of the future of México and the future of his own portraiture of it when he says with General Arroyo's voice to Harriet Winslow that, *"Quiero que se destruyan las haciendas y se deje libres a los campesinos, para que puédamos ir a trabajar donde quiéramos, en la ciudad, o en el norte, en su país señorita."* (66)

Published in 1985 this novel can be said to be written just about in the middle of Fuentes' career. It is further evidence of two of his major themes, immigration and the contrasting identitites of North America and México.

IV.
The New Face of Mexican Identity As Seen through *La frontera de cristal*

An Overview Using Two Chapters: *"Las amigas"* and *"La pena"*

Building upon the historical foundations of Mexican identity already assembled by his contemporaries, himself and his predecessors, Carlos Fuentes does his best to render the new face of Mexican identity in his latest novel, *La frontera de cristal,* which was first published in 1995. By saying new face I mean that globalization has made for a new, more international identity that is in need of a portrait. The version written by Fuentes is more three-dimensional than those of his predecessors in that he has included a wider assortment of examples of Mexicans who journey outside the physical limits of Mexico into the United States and other parts of the world. These border crossers are from a multitude of bends and folds of society and consequently find themselves portrayed in very distinctive circumstances, both positive and negative. The title also acts as the central metaphor of the novel. *La frontera de cristal* centers on the invisible barrier which serves as an obstacle for the relations: between the citizens of the neighboring nations, between the various planes of society and finally between the neighboring nations themselves. This intangible barrier manifests itself differently in every one of the nine stories, sometimes it is a set of clichés, sometimes it is a set of social norms. Most often Fuentes chooses to render this limiting constraint as impenetrable, but on one occasion he allows for its perforation.

As I said earlier, this novel gives a vast array of examples of the Mexican who travels into the United States. Fuentes begins at the cusp of society rendering the owner of *maquilas* along the Sonora-Arizonan border. Throughout *La frontera de cristal*, Fuentes works his way through the social order of each nation in order to bring to light the various intangible barriers that get in the way of mature dealings between humans and nations. To facilitate his rendering of the societal spectrum of both nations, Fuentes breaks the novel into nine stories and then interrelates all of his novels' characters much like Joyce did in *Dubliners* or Faulkner did in *Go Down Moses*. This type of interrelation (juxtaposing characters of different nationality and social class) makes for varying perspectives on identity and a view of how the different figures interact amidst the different obstacles that are the products of differences in nation, race and social standing. Sometimes Fuentes writes a positive outcome to these encounters, but most often he renders the relations pessimistically in order to uncover the various impediments and demonstrate their hindering effect upon social evolution.

This section will analyze two chapters of *La frontera de cristal*: one which exemplifies the positive outcome of relations between U.S. citizens and the newly-arrived immigrants, "*Las amigas*" and one which renders a negative outcome, "*La pena*." By doing so I can produce an overview of the novel in order that the next section, which focuses in on one chapter, can be seen in the context of the stories which surround it.

The first example I will share falls on the positive side of Fuentes's newest take on Mexican immigration. It appears at the end of the story "*Las amigas*". Here Fuentes juxtaposes a patient, working-class Mexican woman with the difficult world of a wealthy aristocratic Chicago widow. I say difficult because part of the main character Miss Amy's problem is that she is trapped inside a fortress of hateful stereotypes. The other part of her problem is that her isolation and loneliness (*soledad*) have manifested themselves in the very revulsion which justifies her clichés.

The story begins with the topic of these various stereotypes which are making it difficult for her and her nephew to replace the last maid she estranged with her spiteful behavior. A long list is given of each ethnicity and the various devices Miss Amy has formed to disrespect and mistrust each of her servants. By setting up this list of maids, their ethnicities and Miss Amy's criticism of each, Fuentes cleverly constructs himself a canvas upon which he can paint the panoramic mural of U.S. immigration. By contriving this chronological panorama he generates for himself the opportunity to place into perspective each of the different waves of immigration and the reasons the U.S. natives had for rejecting them. The rejection of immigrants in the U.S. is nothing new; there was even a political party in the first half of the 19th century, the Know Nothing Party, whose entire platform was constructed around the creation of anti-immigration policy. We can witness the same sentiments resonating in today's Minutemen who seek out illegal immigrants and their employers to uphold the laws that would prevent this relationship if they weren't overlooked.

At the end of Miss Amy's long list (and Fuentes's mural) is the Mexican immigrant (mirroring the latest wave of economic refugees). A new solution in the form of a Mexican servant is proposed as the next in a long line of abused housekeepers by her nephew, Archibald. It is here that Fuentes complicates the plot *and* his argument with a comment on exploitation as Archibald is portrayed as a bachelor, *conquistador* attorney who shops in Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods for his, *"novias... Ya había agotado los barrios ucraniano, polaco, chino, húngaro y lituano."* (168)

Miss Amy's response to her nephew's suggestion is that Mexicans are known to be *"holgazanes"* or idlers and a quarrel about the fortress of her clichés ensues with her nephew. In her own defense Miss Amy says, *"te prohíbo que toques mis clichés, sobrino. Son el escudo de mis prejuicios. Y los prejuicios, como la palabra lo indica, son necesarios para tener juicios."* (167) She then claims that at her age nothing can change her. Fuentes implements this unyielding stance to shed light upon the sector of red-blooded Americans whose irrational traditionalism stimulates anti-immigration policy and attitudes. Josefina ironically comments upon this unjust phenomenon within her own ethnicity when she remarks, *"Los que llegan primero no quieren a los que vienen detrás. A veces somos injustos entre nosotros mismos. No nos basta que otros nos maltraten."* (169)

It is easy to see the metaphor of the assimilation process within the scheme of this story. Throughout it, the barriers of stereotypes and cultural difference gradually

dissolve as Miss Amy, a personification of the traditional American establishment, is slowly liberated from the fortress of her trivial prejudices by Josefina's perseverance and industry and her own elderliness, which has caused her need for increasing outside help. Octavio Paz crystallized this idea in one sentence from his 1986 essay "*Arte e identidad.*" In it he demands that America recognize the difference that exists in her populace by saying,

> *De una manera sucinta pero no inexacta la situación puede reducirse a esta disyuntiva: si los Estados Unidos no construyen una democracia multirracial, su integridad y su vida estarán expuestas a graves amenazas y terribles conflictos.* (535)

All of the tension that is produced by the prejudice of Miss Amy and its obsolescence which is demonstrated by the enthusiasm of Josefina appears to be a fictitious summation of the previous quote. Here Fuentes and his predecesor coincide in their global view of immigration and the time it takes for immigrants to fully assimilate.

This chapter, which ends with an appreciative embrace initiated by Miss Amy, provides an optimistic outlook (or a positive conjectural outcome) for the relations between the established Americans and the newly-arrived Mexican immigrants. It is a rare example of the passage through Fuentes's metaphorical crystal frontier which only takes place after a superfluous conflict which can be compared to the assimilation process of newly-arrived immigrants.

On the other side of this Manichaean scale is the story, "*La pena.*" Dealing with the next social rung down from Leonardo Barroso, this story tells the story of the young Mexican Juan Zamora who crosses the border into the United States to study medicine at Cornell. *"La pena"* is much more complex than *"Las amigas"* in that Zamora's background and personal relations are much more elaborate than are Josefina's. I will divide the story into three sections: Juan's background, his host family in the United States and the affair which he has while away from his homeland. This will simplify the story's significance and help the reader focus on my topic: the relations between immigrant and native.

Firstly, it is important to know that the main character Juan's father was an attorney for Leonardo Barroso while the latter was a *diputado* in Mexico's congressional office. Adhering to the strict values he had learned in law school, where he had learned that "*la abogacía era una profesión honorable*" (41), Juan's father Gonzalo never took enough advantage of his position to allow for his family's financial security after his own death. Full advantage in this case is how Fuentes describes the corrupt side of Mexican politics and how a quiet minority (*los chingados* to borrow a term from Paz) is opposed to it. This being so, Juan's mother had to ask Leonardo Barroso for the money to send Juan to Ithaca for med school. The story of his father's resistance to corruption sets the stage for Juan's own failure in the United States.

A large part of the plot centers on Juan's relations at his adopted home with his host family. Fuentes has chosen the surname of Wingate for the family and describes its members with the help of countless stereotypes. Everyone in the U.S. has come into contact with a family like the Wingates. They are well to do, boring and have conservative views concerning the U.S.-foreign relations they learn about by watching President Reagan on television. Juan Zamora reads into the desires of the Wingates and falsely paints himself as coming from the Mexican equine-savvy aristocracy which echoes Canclini's myths that the North Americans have of what lies south of the border. Zamora paints this classic landscape so as not to shatter the Wingate's image of Mexico or his own. He completes this image by living a continual lie and thus the family never realizes that he too comes from an upper middle class family very much like their own. One big difference to be noted is that the Wingates are portrayed as being a part of the war machine in Latin America while Juan comes from a past that is impervious to corruption. Here we have another version of the barrier between the citizens of the U.S. and Mexico. This time the barrier is preserved by a lie, which perpetuates the archaic/*atrasado* stereotype of Mexico. It demonstrates a lot about Americans' perceptions of Mexico and her potential as a world player. If Americans can conceive of nothing more than a land which is still trapped in the days of corrupt feudalism and courtliness, we will not be able to take Mexico seriously as a possible peer in world economics.

This is not the only part of Juan's stay at Cornell which is characterized by his inability to pass through the crystal frontier. At school Fuentes describes Zamora's

relations with the American students as awkward mainly due to their cultural difference but in part due to the fact that Juan is, "*un muchacho demasiado tenso, asustado, inseguro.*" He has trouble fathoming the habits of the American students in that they are always dressed sloppily and use no table manners despite their well to do upbringings. When he finally falls in love with a classmate and seems to have passed through the barrier into an intimate friendship, he quickly becomes aware of the *cara doble* of Puritan ethics. It is here where the reader can practically read the words of Gloria Anzaldúa set into a different set of circumstances than the Chicana lesbian from South Texas. Eight years later, Fuentes answers the issue of *otredad* proposed by Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/La frontera* first published in 1987.

Just as he does in the chapter titled "*La capitalina*" (as I will demonstrate in the next section) Fuentes incorporates the use of metaphor to crystallize common notions about power struggles. Having fallen in love with a young man nicknamed Lord Jim (all metaliterary colonial connotations of this name left alone) Juan Zamora is introduced to the world of intimacy, albeit taboo and temporary intimacy. Jim's falseness can be perceived through a comparison of his diatribe and his actions. In one instance he delivers an invective about the religious right, defining North American morals and their falseness by saying, "*espantoso disfraz de bondad y su perpetua, inviolable santidad política y sexual.*" He later goes on to bring the Wingates into the story as part of the faction that stands in the way of his and Juan's happiness. But in the end he terminates his seemingly smitten relations by deserting Juan so as to return to Seattle and marry a girl of whom his parents approve. In her

article *"Fuentes fronterizo"* Debra Castillo sees Juan's betrayal as signifying Fuentes's agreement with Gloria Anzaldúa (as he also does in his own essay, *"México y los Estados Unidos"*) about the border being an open wound. She goes on to say, "As a logical extension, the character in *Frontera de cristal* most closely associated with the wounded border is the gay former Cornell medical student, now a physician, whose function is to take cognizance emblematically of '*la enfermedad de la frontera.*'" (273) This is in reference to a later story in the novel in which Juan is a doctor who spends much of his time volunteering in the poorer neighborhoods along the border. I see Juan Zamora's character much the same as Debra Castillo, but I will elaborate on this later in my section on the characters that embody border theory and the chapter "*La capitalina.*"

What I do see as relevant to this chapter is the way Fuentes chooses to push the *otredad* of Anzaldúa into a positive direction. This is accomplished by writing the person who has been made into a social paria in both societies, Juan Zamora, as turning into a positive, healing figure for both. We can see his healing along the border on two levels. The first is that of the surface in which *médicos sin fronteras* and other NGO's (nongovernmental organizations) are working outside of the political sphere to improve conditions along the border. Another level of Juan Zamora's healing can be read beneath his medical profession. This is of the individual who maintains and creates peace where there is conflict. Fuentes uses the character of Juan Zamora to provide an optimistic cure to the suffering rendered in Anzaldúas *Borderlands/La frontera.*

I would like to conclude this section with a commonality between the previously discussed chapters. Both seem to focus in on the aspect of the work ethic in the United States and contrast it with its absence the further south one goes. In "*La pena*" Juan Zamora is informed by Tarleton Wingate that he has his daughter babysitting so as to, "*inculcarles la ética de trabajo protestante*" while in "*Las amigas*" Miss Amy explains that her father moved to, "*Luisiana para enseñarles a los lánguidos sureños a hacer negocios.*" It is important to take into account the speaker in both instances, both very waspy and arrogant, neither producing much if any empathy in the reader. Another important aspect of these two phrases is that it is always directed toward the south. In the first case we have an American telling a young Mexican and in the second, there is a direct reference to the stereotypical languor of the southern regions, New Orleans which was once controlled by the Spanish. In the next section, we can see what happens when this protestant work ethic is combined with the cut throat business practices of the Mexican *chingón.* It is in this combination where we can see Fuentes's hypothesis about one of the possible outcomes of hybridity.

The New Face of Mexican Identity as Seen through the Characters of "La capitalina"

Published a year after NAFTA was signed, *La frontera de cristal* clearly has the agenda of fictionalizing this new epoch in relations between the two nations. In this chapter I will focus in on the first story of the novel, which I believe to have the most reflection of this new political situation. It is also an interesting piece in the puzzle of Mexican identity due to the fact that several of its characters stand out as literary embodiments of border theory in that they are part of this new hybrid culture which enjoys influences from both sides. These characters not only serve as a description of the author's views of this new cultural and political reality but also as his own cautionary tales of what might result from globalization and the neo-liberal market. This chapter will display how these characters are representations of Fuentes's conjecture about the outcome of our present NAFTA-era politics and provide various interpretations of some of his characters' tragic fates.

The first story to be analyzed is "*La capitalina*" which, being the first of the novel has an introduction to many of the recurring themes that reappear throughout its nine stories. In her article "*Fuentes Fronterizo*", Debra Castillo stated that in this novel, "he [Fuentes] addresses powerful economic trends through fictional representations of typical actors in this political drama." (3) By disassembling the chapter, each character can be seen more clearly and a better view of its significance can be established. Each character represents not only an archetype from the spectrum of

Mexican identity, but also a tendency in its social makeup. Some of these tendencies are not new inventions at all. Fuentes has often used Octavio Paz's essayistic studies upon identity as outlines for his fictional characters and Paz drew upon the ideas of his predecessors as well.

The first of these recurring themes is the progressive, idealistic Mexico that remains most often in the shadow of the powerful and corrupt. Fuentes has often given this theme a literary embodiment, and in this book Leonardo Barroso is the lion-esque representative of the archetypal *chingón,* a personification of greed. Octavio Paz used this term to describe the powerful Mexican and contrasted it with the *chingado* who is subject to that power. In the following passage from *El laberinto de la soledad*, Paz draws a manichaean schema of personal relations in his country:

> *El verbo chingar—maligno, ágil y juguetón como un animal de presa—engendra muchas expresiones que hacen de nuestro mundo una selva: hay tigres en los negocios, águilas en las escuelas o en los presidios, leones con los amigos. El soborno se llama 'morder'. Los burócratas roen sus huesos (los empleos públicos). Y en un mundo de chingones, de relaciones duras, presididas por la violencia y el recelo, en el que nadie se abre ni se raja y todos quieren chingar, las ideas y el trabajo cuentan poco. Lo único que vale es la hombría, el valor personal, capaz de imponerse.* (216)

In this passage from *El laberinto de la soledad,* Paz is using the everyday terms of his nation to explain how its citizens interact and assign roles, such as the lion amongst friends and the eagle in the schools. It is clear that he is taking verbal aspects from the popular sphere and applying them to the entire society with the objective of explaining how his entire nation functions socially. In his interview with Claude Fell, Paz recognizes that, "Nietzsche taught me to see what was behind the words...He guided me in exploring the Mexican idiom: If words are masks, what is behind

them?" In this chapter we can see how Fuentes uses these masks to observe this very dichotomy of Mexican social phenomena, and applies it to his own era. The principal character in *La frontera de crystal* is a perfect fit for the personification of this *chingón* archetype. His name is Leonardo and his name is not all that distinguishes him as a truly predatory animal.

How is it that these two complex authors, Paz and Fuentes, can arrive at and agree with such a simple dualism? Is this dualistic approach to Mexican identity a commentary upon Mexico's want for a substantial middle class? Would the ascendancy of Mexico's power be more just if there were a populous and educated middle class?

In his article "Estrategias para entrar y salir de la globalización en *La Frontera de Cristal* de Carlos Fuentes," Hugo Méndez-Ramírez neatly fits into the fashionable border dress by stating that this chapter focuses on the nostalgia caused by the shifting cultural epicenter of Mexico from the capital to the borderlands. When I say nostalgia I mean that Hugo Méndez-Ramírez sees Michelina and the economic interests of the nation moving toward the northern borderlands and Fuentes's eulogy for the past, in which existed the Paris-like center of his nation. While this claim probably aids him in arriving at a clean solution to his argument, I don't think that it is quite the *main* point that Fuentes wishes to convey. I do agree with the importance he places on Michelina's character, but the story of a betrayal within a family stands out as the main course of action while the theme of nostalgia merely serves as a

decorative subplot. This betrayal is a literary manifestation of the problem mentioned in the previous paragraph. An analysis of three characters of *La frontera de cristal*, and a look at several other works by Fuentes, point clearly towards the author's opinion about the soundness of the Mexican power structure and its questionable ascendancy.

Allow me a paragraph to summarize the course of action in the most important of the novel's chapters, "*La capitalina.*" Leonardo Barroso, a powerful owner of *maquiladoras* along the border, arranges the marriage of his son Marianito to his own goddaughter, the beautiful and aristocratic Michelina, who comes to the border from Mexico City at the invitation of her godfather and future father-in-law. It is interesting that Fuentes goes to great lengths to inform his reader of Michelina's *pre-porfiriato* heritage and manners, while revealing nothing of Leonardo Barroso's family background. By saying *pre-porfiriato* heritage, I am referring to the fact that Michelina's family is part of a *vieux regime* whose prominence dates back about 3 regimes further than that of the Mexicans in power at the time the story takes place. Various details such as Michelina's physical description, the fact that she previously had a French lover, the fact that she pleads to her lover Leonardo Barroso, "*no me hagas mujer*" (a clear reference to Mexico's struggle with modernity being that she,Michelina/Mexico wants to remain a child and not participate in the adult world of global capitalism), and her name's almost-anagrammatic similarity to Malinche (notice there is only one extra i), point to her being a symbol of the geographic nation-state of Mexico. Upon arrival, she crosses the border into the United States

with her future husband Marianito and witnesses his lack of virility. The details of this display are shrouded in a dialogue between father and son which plays heavily upon the opposites of light and shadow.

More play with light ensues as Fuentes portrays the border-dwelling characters in this chapter with an insatiable envy of the other side—in a party scene tinted with infernal afternoon reds he adorns the materialistic *fronterizas'* fantasies with Stetson-topped cowboys, high fashion and snow-topped mountains of the United States. It seems that these ladies cannot wait for globalization to save them. The envy of the other side displayed by these women and their dialogues embodies the lighter side of the pain which comes from Gloria Anzaldúa's *"herida abierta."* Later in the chapter, Michelina and her future father-in-law Leonardo begin an affair which will continue throughout the remainder of the novel until their joint deaths in the final chapter. This is one of the many betrayals that occur throughout the novel.

The infidelity within the Barroso family is clearly Fuentes's allegorical take upon the power structure and its ascendancy in Mexico—complete with a lionesque victor who makes off with the prize he has fetched for his son, the beautiful and aristocratic Michelina--symbolic of Mexico. From her golden-chained Chanel purse to the beginning three words of the second part of the chapter that describe her, "*Viajada, guapa, sofisticada"* Fuentes implements Michelina's character to encapsulate all that is desired by those who lust for power in Mexico. Leonardo Barroso is not above this lust and cuckolds his idealistic son Marianito, while this symbol of innocence

powerlessly rusticates in the family's rancho. The disloyalty between father and son is a definite reminder of another duality, the almost impenetrable border between the progressive youth and his conservative elder. This Manichaean dichotomy also brings to mind how greed maintains an upper hand over progress.

In the final chapter, after the joint death of Michelina and Leonardo, the narrator commands Michelina to, "*habla, Michelina Laborde, deja de gritar, piensa en tu marido el muchacho abandonado, el heredero de don Leonardo Barroso.*"(297) It is evident that Fuentes is pessimistically questioning the ascendancy of Mexico's leadership and how easily Mexico falls into the hands of the greedy by showing Michelina's death next to her lover/father-in-law who was just, ironically enough, chewing out an underling about *stolen goods* and comparing the plunder to revolutionary times just minutes before his own death.

The progressive youth mentioned above is symbolized by Marianito, Leonardo's rightful heir who spends his time listlessly in the country poring over his books as his father crosses the *frontera* with his wife and Michelina, who would have borne an heir for Marianito, the symbol of Mexican idealism if his father had not greedily taken her for his own. We can easily compare Marianito to the Mexican intelligentsia whose utopian ideas fuel reform after revolution after reform, but whose lack of foresight and perseverance make it hard to maintain or even realize the beauty of which they had dreamt. All of his time studying cannot prepare Marianito for the desire he will have to combat in the time when he will have the chance to realize his

dreams in the realm of action. This seems to mirror several of the idealistic regimes which have come to power, one of which is captured in the life of Federico Robles in Fuentes's first novel *La región más transparente*. Robles is rendered as being part of the Mexican Revolution and slowly becoming one of those whom he had sought to overthrow--another power-hungry businessman who has much in common with his predecessors of the *porfiriato*—a 30+ year dictatorship which can be defined by its economic growth and loss of many Mexican resources to foreign investors. All the way back to his first novel, we can observe Fuentes's fascination with the border between idealism and unbridled capitalism.

Emilio Uranga comments on Mexican humanism and the ethics of the nation in his essay "The Mexican and Humanism," by noting, "Being a Mexican, then, does not mean, if one penetrates, right into the marrow of his being, a peculiar nationality, but the quality of being human. In a certain way his libertarian efforts, like the Reform and the Revolution, are copies of the struggle for the human to which the Mexican finds himself committed, a struggle which he takes up with such *originality*, that from this root other qualities sprout as genuine offshoots and not as tumours to be eradicated." (162) In this light, it is hard to conceive of Leonardo Barroso as being a Mexican or even human.

Other than his misconduct and his violent death, very little of Barroso's life is revealed throughout the rest of the novel in which Leonardo Barroso's character continues to show up. What *is* made known all points to the greed that he embodies

and the end products of such a life. His hybrid identity is portrayed throughout the novel as we see him taking full advantage of the *lasseiz faire* on both sides of the border in order to form a more perfect fortune, but for what? Killed and robbed by another greedy pimp, Barroso isn't able to pass his fortune down to a more idealistic generation. Although Fuentes sings the praises of NAFTA in his book of essays *Un Nuevo Tiempo Mexicano,* he seems to revere more highly the rare moments in which the reign of idealism is seen on both sides of the border such as that of Cárdenas and Roosevelt. This is evident when he writes,

> Throughout the administrations of Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas, between 1925 and 1940, the army and the church were brought under control, the central government established its authority over rebellious military leaders, enormous advances were made in health, education and communications, a *modus vivendi* was reached with the United States during the Roosevelt administration... (43)

What I hope to have conveyed in this chapter is how Fuentes uses the betrayal within the Barroso family to comment upon how greed is passed down from one *nouveau riche* ruling class to the next. Fuentes portrays the hybrid Mexican Leonardo Barroso as having no other restrictions upon his business dealings other than the crooks who can steal it from him when their time comes. By doing so he is displaying the crippled role of idealism in our time. This is the latest edition in his commentary on Mexican identity and it seems to be tending toward a view similar to that of Néstor García Canclini in which the border regions are places where cultures mix and a new hybrid culture filled with the benefits of both sides is forming. Leonardo Barroso is definitely an example of this hybridity, but it seems as if he incorporates an age-old, universal greed into a new, more liberal system of government. His entire character pessimistically reads as if the ruling classes never make any significant social or

political progress on either side of the border.

In an interview titled, "Cultural Landscapes" from the year 1999, Carlos Monsiváis expressed his opinion about the politicians of Mexico. When asked by David Thelen if Mexican leaders have developed new ideologies and practices," he replied that they "have a religious attitude to the free market, an economic fundamentalism." This theme is unmistakable in this latest novel, *La frontera de cristal* as Carlos Fuentes has implemented characters that undeniably embody the singular pursuit of economic progress, almost insensitive to all other causes.

Leonardo Barroso, being a hybrid character, has traded all of his good Mexican characteristics (such as the love of family) for the ability to earn money like the *gringos*. He has betrayed his family in order to appease his desires. His hybridity can be seen in his surroundings: the Norman-Tudor style home in which he lives, the liberty-print pajamas in which he sleeps, the Lincoln in which he drives across the border, etc. If we take this behavior to the level of metaphor and combine it with Monsiváis's view of the free market, we can see how Barroso's actions mirror those of his own country. The *maquiladoras* are only once again impoverishing the rural zones and moving Mexico's population away from rural districts toward the border areas with the hope of helping out Mexico's economy as a whole. Later in the interview, Monsiváis goes on to say, "And Mr. Zedillo, to dispel any doubts, every other day recites his belief: 'Poverty in Mexico is the result of the populist regimes.' Not of capitalism, not of corruption and impunity, but the result of atheism

concerning the Free Market."

Marianito Barroso and Juan Zamora are shown as the impotent meek who peacefully wait to inherit the earth. We often see these two inhabitants of the shadow lands taking the back seat to the masters of capitalism like Tarleton Wingate and Leonardo Barroso. What I said before about Marianito also applies to Juan Zamora and the husband of Josefina Pérez; these characters are Fuentes's take on the Mexicans who are trying to improve themselves whether by learning English, reading or learning medicine to help others. His character's benevolent deeds are highly reminiscent of non-profit organizations like Sin Fronteras which aid many of the immigrants and those who have come into hard times along the border. It is interesting that these characters have all been allotted the role of *chingado* in an attempt by Fuentes to demonstrate the negative aspect of modern border reality.

Debra Castillo points out that, "The northern Mexico borderlands are consistently drawn as absolutely empty and entirely without interest, except for the narrowly defined self-interest of greedy *maquiladora* plant operators." (9) This quote shows another modern manifestation of the *chingón/chingado* duality that does not seem to be changing with the help of NAFTA. Wingate's Mexican counterpart Leonardo Barroso has not left the key ingredient of American success, the protestant work ethic, out of his formula. Another thing these two share is an unbridled greed which does not ethically require Barroso to put day care into his *maquiladoras* or Wingate to ethically approve of what his defense contracts facilitate. As far as Leonardo Barroso

is concerned Canclini's hybrid culture (Barroso being Fuentes's model of a hybrid Mexican) is not very utopic.

CONCLUSION

Throughout these texts, there are clearly recurring themes as each author maps the character and identity of the two nations. Each shows a sense of dearth of one identity when it looks to the other side. Each of these wants is the opposite of what the one who wants it has.

Samuel Ramos begins by illuminating what he sees as Mexico's inferiority complex with respect to the modernized nations of the world and displays how this complex shrouds itself in the negative aspects of his culture. His essential renderings point to the Mexican working class as the main bearer of the *machista* cloak which he points out as the main compensatory disguise. While negative and one dimensional, this description is inescapable given that it furnished the following authors in this thesis something to draw from and with which to argue.

Octavio Paz left a more positive footprint on this subject and, as far as this thesis is concerned, began the framework for a transnational/chicano identity. His explorations of the Mexican character unearth many of the powerful symbols, such as death, the mask and the fiesta that are still employed and held as fundamental in its understanding. He also paints his subject in a more positive light than did Ramos by revering the relations of the lower classes and also giving them a more detailed description. His work is also more reflective of Mexican society, culture, the identities it produces and the topic of this thesis because of his work's central contradiction, the want of both modernity and a return to the past. The conundrum of

modernity as embodied by North America and the agrarian past as seen in "Old México," is much of the problem that the Mexican immigrant confronts in his assimilation into our extremely capitalist society. His endowment is therefore highly recognizeable in the work of his successors.

Néstor García Canclini continued the explorations upon the subject. His work goes to the zones of contact like that of Paz, but he remains on the southern side of the border in order to stay closer to the purer gray area of the cultural contact, where Americans briefly step into "Mexican reality" and Mexicans are more often bombarded with products of North American culture. In this contact zone his writing portrays a positive hybridity that is derived from the proximity both cultures enjoy along the border.

Understandably, the only native of the border in this thesis has a less upbeat rendition of her border experience. Gloria Anzaldúa portrays the contact zone as an open wound that shows no sign of healing. In her writing there can be seen an unbalanced value for the white race and an undervalued sense of identity within the chicano/a population. Her writing shows some positivity when it dreams of what chicano/a identity could become.

This thesis has shown how Carlos Fuentes has melded all of these ideas into his fictional characters throughout an oeuvre that spans about half a century. His narrative often presents refreshing solutions for the problems the Mexican immigrant

faces and renderings of how the two cultures interact.

If U.S./Mexican relations improve, it will have to begin on the individual level. I see the work of Carlos Fuentes as aiming at this goal and therefore see his characters as cautionary tales and role models of how identity and its products, the relations between the peoples of the two nations should and do maintain themselves. His work is a very powerful culmination of the thought of the many facets of our cultural heritage and mainly that spelled out in the historical and theoretical framework cited in this thesis. I therefore see his characters and work as a key to the puzzle of the relations between the United States and Mexico. I also see his plots as reminders of how both societies could improve.

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