

SAME VOICES, OTHER TOMBS: STRUCTURES OF MEXICAN GOTHIC

DJELAL KADIR
Purdue University

Bodies are visible hieroglyphs. Every body is
an erotic metaphor and the meaning of all
these metaphors is always the same: death.

Octavio Paz, "Mask and Transparency"

Octavio Paz' statement which I take here as the epigraph of this essay refers to the work of a fellow Mexican, Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962).¹ Another Mexican novel, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955),² proves a justifiable companion to the context of Paz' assertion. Transposed to a discussion of the Gothic in literature, the epigraph takes on more specific significance. The premise of Paz' statement points to early Medieval art and the genesis of the Gothic as aesthetic phenomenon. As a poet, Paz is not wont to overlook the significance of his words. His terms beg to be read in the light of their etymons. The statement that "Bodies are visible hieroglyphs" clearly implies the hieratic quality of bodies as signs of an invisible reality. The implication in Paz' premise points to Plato's hierarchies. Even more emphatically, however, it points to those early Christian Platonists who saw the sensuous in an analogous relationship to the divine, a view in which Gothic art would find its genesis. That momentous occasion, according to art history, takes place at the turn of the first millennium as Abbot Suger of Saint Denis communed alternately with architect and God to construct the first Gothic Cathedral not far from Paris.³

With its conclusion, the epigraph implies a transition from the analogical value of corporeality and spirit to a metaphorical relationship in which body, the visible sign, ultimately signifies death. The erotic nature of the metaphor should not be overlooked. In its denouement Paz' affirmation parallels the historical evolution

of the Gothic as artistic value in contemporary literature. As a sacred sign (hieroglyph) and erotic metaphor, the body is image, representation. The transmutations of that image which passes from hieratic symbol to Thanatos are a function of the changes which befall Gothic art, taking it from celestial sphere to a profane and temporal condition of human fate. The progression may be summed up as a passage from *imago dei* to *imago regis* to *imago mei*. In its geometric configuration the process resembles a funnel with a movement toward the narrower dimension, in short, a vortex. As an erotic metaphor, the transition presents itself as one which moves from love of the Divinity to love of King (the Christ), to love of self, in short, narcissism.

Geometry as an antechamber of horror reveals its fearful presence in this process. What spiraled heavenwards in its embodiment of the infinite, has arrived at a diametrical inversion. The sacred edifice which was Gothic by virtue of representing the infinite on Earth and strove in its sublimity to undo through mystical union the analogous relationship between itself and the Divinity no longer reaches upwards. The gaze has turned inwards and the heavenly spiral has become a vortex, the awesome geometry of an all-devouring maelstrom. The mystic, the architect, and the poet have come to the realization that infinity lies within. As a result, the analogy between the sensuous and the divine is obliterated. While the transition from analogous value to metaphor may mean the attainment of a mystical union, it also implies the dissolution of hierarchy. For metaphor implies not correspondence but similitude and, consequently, the capacity of the metaphorical values to substitute each other and/or to conjoin in synthesis in order to create a new phenomenon. In a doctrine of analogy, on the other hand, the terms are not interchangeable and for the analogical relationship to persist its terms must remain distinct. The representation can not become the represented. Metaphor maintains the capacity for "revertibility." As is the case in geometry, it maintains a true converse value. Metaphor strives not only to reflect but to become its primary object. The ultimate success of this goal means the fusion of metaphorical terms into a single new sign. Once the passage from the doctrine of analogy to metaphor is achieved through the realization of this potentiality, we have the transformation of Gothic into its present form. While it might appear that the di-

ametrical inversion of the spiral into a vortex represents an aberration, in truth, it is a logical culmination of an historical process. It should not surprise anyone then that Gothic, that sublime, spiritual geometer of the twelfth century, should find its rebirth in the "age of reason," the eighteenth century. In this palingenesis, however, the doctrine of analogy cedes its primacy to metaphor. Herein lies the difference between the Cathedral of Abbot Suger and Mary Shelley's Promethean creation.

In literary history, the passage from the sublime to the awesome, from diaphaneity to horror and dungeon is clearly marked. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) signals the birth of the Gothic novel. While the genre has suffered aberrations, a legitimate form, albeit an evolved one, persists.

In his *After the Lost Generation*⁴ John W. Aldridge rejects the existence of new American Gothic. Irving Malin presents a case for it in *New American Gothic*.⁵ Theirs, I suspect, is a family quarrel from which I prefer to abstain. At the risk of compromising neutrality however, it must be said that Malin delineates certain "themes" and "images" whose interaction defines the new Gothic in fiction. These images consist of the *room*, the *voyage*, and the *mirror*. The corresponding themes are *confinement*, *flight*, and *narcissism*. The usefulness of these categories can not be disputed. Whether Malin's discussion of Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, J. D. Salinger, Flannery O'Connor, John Hawkes, and James Purdy proves the case for new American Gothic, I prefer to leave to his branch of the family to ascertain.

In a subsequent article entitled "Gothic as Vortex: The Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, and Styron,"⁶ J. Douglas Perry adds *structure* to Malin's "theme" and "image" categories. The corresponding structures supplied by Perry are concentricity, predetermined sequence, and character repetition. Summed up in a simple table, Malin's and Perry's categories look as follows:

<i>Image</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Structure</i>
room	confinement	concentricity
voyage	flight	predetermined sequence
mirror	narcissism	character repetition

Northrop Frye tells us that archetypes in literature are basically a problem of structure rather than historical origin and that this

problem "suggests that there may be archetypes of genres as well as of images."⁷ Given Frye's postulate, the genre of the Gothic novel as archetype must maintain its paradigmatic and defining structures and images across cultural lines. Such a conclusion is felicitous for it can be noted that Frye's observation is confirmed by the case of Mexican Gothic viewed in the light of those basic images, themes, and structures which define the "new American Gothic." Transformations in those basic categories by virtue of their transferal to a different socio-cultural context are inevitable. These transformations in no way alter the "generic archetype," however, as I hope will become apparent.

The Argentine Jorge Luis Borges maintains that the novel issues from allegory; that our modern prose genre is realized when we pass from "fable of abstraction" to "fable of individuals."⁸ Allegory and the doctrine of analogy share a close affinity by virtue of their common goal, which aims at reconciling disparate elements: the particular with the universal, the individual with the species, the concrete with the transcendent. Thus, just as in passing from analogy to metaphor the fundamental coordinates in each relationship remain the same, something of the allegorical persists in every novel. "The individuals proposed by novelists," Borges tells us, "aspire to be generic (Dupin is reason, Don Segundo Sombra is the Gaucho)."⁹ In view of the persistence of this duality, I would like to propose two sets of coordinates for the Mexican Gothic: One founded in the socio-cultural context which defines the literary tradition of the Mexican novel; the other, based on the immediate elements with which these works are constructed. The differentiation here is to a great extent artificial, particularly in view of the inextricable interweaving of Mexican socio-cultural reality and the Mexican novel. I propose the two sets of structures, nonetheless, for the sake of anticipating the erroneous impression that the works under scrutiny are purely allegorical or that their characters are purely metonymic.

The first of these categories could be viewed as spanning a linear or horizontal axis and, thus, constituting diachronic coordinates. The second set could be considered as a vertical axis and, therefore, as the synchronic correlative of the first. This dichotomy permits the disclosure of both the historical constants in Mexican culture as well as the individual and paradigmatic instances which

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the authors utilize to weave an archetypal episode of that cultural reality. In a simple table, I would summarize those categories which define the Gothic genre in the Mexican novel as follows:

Diachronic coordinates:

<i>Image</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Narrative Structure</i>
History	Time	Incubistic
Politics	Revolution	Thematic recurrence
Death	Power	Ritualistic

Synchronic correlatives:

<i>Image</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Narrative Structure</i>
Masked Self	Solitude	Monologue (detached)
Fiesta	Disclosure	Enthymemic
Woman	Machismo	Character repetition

Critics and observers of Mexican culture¹⁰ repeatedly have noted that the Mexican, for whom, as Octavio Paz observes, "death and birth are solitary experiences,"¹¹ is engaged in an obsessive dialectic with death. For the Mexican the polar points of the life cycle eternally converge as he finds himself to be the battle ground of a ceaseless dialogue between body and death, an expressive dialogue of inward illumination which articulates itself in a rhetoric of silence. In its muted voice it deepens the tomb of taciturnity, transforming it into a metaphor for death and its solitude. Birth, the solitary experience at the other pole, is overshadowed and repressed by a feeling of shame founded in a violent conception of conquest. The Mexican sees himself as the illegitimate fruit of that violent union between the conquering European and the violated Mexican mother. The rhetoric of silence then represents the Mexican's attempt to muffle his own inescapable history, embodied by him in his very existence and corporeality. Death means eternal freedom from history; it stands for ultimate timelessness and a state without want. While death is the ultimate experience of solitude, it also represents a transcendence from the dialectic of history. Thus the statement by Paz that "Every body is an erotic metaphor and the meaning of all these metaphors is always the same: death." While death might be the ultimate meaning of this "erotic metaphor," it is not an end but part of a process in the Mexican Gothic. As a geometric configuration which spirals

concentrically trapping man in its vortex of silence and solitude, death has no finality. In its timelessness it becomes infinite. History which traps and confines the Mexican in time, simply metamorphoses into a-historicity. Its masks, however, as Juan Rulfo's work clearly shows, are transposed with it into death's infinite solitude.

Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* are an artistic embodiment of the Mexican's dialogue between body and death. To use Frye's dichotomies, as verbal structures these works are possessed of rhythm (narrative) and pattern (significance). By the nature of their structures their rhythm becomes ritual. By virtue of the timelessness achieved through the cyclical repetition of their narrative, their patterns of imagery become revelatory, epiphanic illumination. In so far as these works transcend to ritual and oracular image, they synchronize rhythm and pattern, thus becoming *myth* and archetype. The archetype re-enacted by these works is Mexican history become myth. The character of this myth manifests a close affinity to another, more universal archetype: Narcissus. However, while Narcissus was not aware that the image he contemplated in the fatal pool was his own, the Mexican is acutely cognizant that the present which reflects his image is the culmination of his entire history in the immediacy of the self and of the moment. As Octavio Paz observes, "Man [...] is not *in* history: he *is* history." ¹²

That uniquely Mexican brand of death is the crux of the two works under scrutiny. *Pedro Páramo* is narrated from the grave; *Artemio Cruz* from a deathbed. In the first work the pattern dominates narrative by the disclosure that what we have listened to is a momentary, "posthumous" conversation overheard from the grave. Even though the sequence of events spans many years, the pattern of images suddenly emerges as immediate when the narrative is reduced to momentary revelation. *Artemio Cruz* follows the same course. The narrative consists of simultaneous rather than sequential revelations as the hero relives in "simultaneity" the events of his life in the hours before his death. In both instances, incident becomes a hieroglyph which stands before the hero and the reader and begs to be deciphered. In that instant, death and birth converge; the apotheosis of solitude and the rhetoric of silence crystallize into a pregnant stasis where nar-

rative ceases and communication becomes inexistent. There the Gothic irony surfaces, grinning like a death-skull: Perception of one's image (self-awareness) proves to be tantamount to self-negation. The structural culmination in silence and immobility serves to accentuate the horror of the whirlpool that pulls the characters into its inescapable void.

J. Douglas Perry points out that while the maelstrom of Edgar Allen Poe regurgitates its victim, there can be no re-surfacing from the modern Gothic vortex. Georges Poulet observes that "A sort of temporal circle surrounds Poe's characters. A whirlpool envelops them, which, like that of the maelstrom, disposes its funnel by degrees from the past in which one has been caught to the future in which one will be dead."¹³ This "closed time," Perry asserts, can be applied to modern Gothic with slight modifications. The modifications necessary for its application to Mexican Gothic are even less than slight. One only need substitute *history* for *maelstrom* and Poulet's statement bespeaks the predicament of the Mexican with clear accuracy. The past is sealed and its history seals the future as well.

Like Robin Molineux of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" before him, and Joel Harrison Knox of Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* after him, Juan Preciado, the hero of Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is a young man in pursuit of self-knowledge. His search, like that of his counterparts to the north, converges on the family. He seeks out his father whom he has never known except for the man in the acrid recollections of his now dead mother. Juan Preciado's pursuit leads him, rather precipitously, into an enchanted geography, the infernal town of Comala where "The heat shimmered on the plain like a transparent lake" (p. 2). Comala lies at the end of a long tortuous descent: "We left the warm air up there and walked down into pure heat without a breath of air in it. Everything looked as if it were waiting for something" (p. 3).

The plunge downwards is also a voyage back in time, back into history where Juan Preciado will encounter his identity wrapped in the haunting and violent past of his parents. Time and geography close in when Juan discovers that his arrival has been anticipated and the inhabitants of Comala who receive him are ghastly phantoms. The identity quest and the descent into the hell

hole are closely linked from the very beginning; the Gothic vortex which will deepen even further confronts the young man from the outset. Those who lead and receive him into Comala are asphyxiatingly close to him and will emerge as beacons to his search for identity. Abundio, who leads him down, is his half-brother. He proves to be more than that. He has already accomplished Juan's goal well beyond the latter's expectations of assuaging the bitterness of his abandoned mother. Abundio, as we discover in the final pages, is a parricide; as the murderer of Pedro Páramo, their father, he has avenged every woman wronged by the violence of the patriarch. Juan's mother had extracted a promise from him on her death bed that he would avenge the treatment accorded them by his father. Thus, Abundio represents an alter-ego for Juan. This enigmatic incubus opens the circle of the novel. He will also close it with the bloody dagger still in his hand.

The woman who receives Juan into Comala (as Juan discovers, actually the ghost of the woman) is Eduvigis who, by all rights, according to her account, should have been his mother. (She substituted for his actual mother in his father's bed on their wedding night since the moon did not favor the bride that night. Pedro Páramo was too drunk to even attempt to notice the switch.) Juan is taken back to his pre-conception, to the violent conquest and despoliation of his mother by the machismo and raw power of his father; back to his conception and should have been conception; back in time and down in geography to what could be that enchanted geography which James Joyce, in another context (the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*), called the "all wombing tomb."

Juan Preciado's incursion into history and into the ominous time and geography of Comala is reflected, refracted, and repeated in theme, character, and narrative structure with such rapidity that the concentric effect seals irrevocably all possibility of flight from the Gothic whirlpool. His identity crisis is reflected in the obsessed soliloquy of his father which becomes a recurring leit-motif, as do the lyrical recollections of his mother, the restless soul of Eduvigis, which can find no solace in having arrived at this underworld through suicide, and in the disquieting "innocence" of Dorotea. A series of mutually reflecting dualities, furthermore, emerges in the novel: Juan Preciado's descent into Comala is mirrored in the lowering of Susana San Juan by her father into the

pit of a mine shaft to search for gold. She only finds a death skull and its skeleton. Juan's quest has its echo in the ideal and pursuit of Dorotea with whom he now shares a tomb. Pedro Páramo's lyrical recollections of his adolescence and love for Susana San Juan are echoed in the lyricism of Dolorita's memories and Susana's eroticism. Dorotea, in her role as procuress of women and young girls for Miguel Páramo, has her counterpart in Filotea, who fulfills the same function for his father. The novel itself is in fact divisible into two complementary parts, as a few critics have already pointed out.¹⁴

The pullulation of solitudes and masked creatures, each trapped in the unfulfilled yearnings of its own and, literally, in the tomb of its individual "existence" is augmented with every name the reader encounters. All these creatures partake of the same crisis and grotesque disfiguration. They are all united by an organic chain; linked in a mutually destructive need for each other. Each in some way elucidates the story of Juan Preciado's past and the character of his father; each contributes to the formation of his identity and to the figure of Pedro Páramo, whose name literally means "barren plain." Every one of these creatures embodies to some measure the essence of Pedro Páramo. To that extent, Rulfo's protagonist is not merely an individual figure but a collective hero. He finds his reflection in the totality of all those under his domination. While he exercises the violence and prerogative of power over them, he also mirrors their unfulfilled yearnings which become transformed from hope to grotesque spiritual mutations. Susana San Juan, the only woman Pedro Páramo had desired in vain, emerges as his true antagonist. In so far as she too is an embodiment of the vulnerable, the open, and the collective womanhood of Mexico, she becomes his true counterpart. While she remains inaccessible, she cannot escape the need to be desired by Páramo. Her eroticism and earthiness is as narcissistic as the power and machismo of Pedro Páramo.

Irving Malin views the family unit as the *microcosm* of new American Gothic.¹⁵ The distortions created by the monstrous there, he claims, are more readily apparent and shocking. In *Pedro Páramo* these disfigured relationships are equally powerful. Susana San Juan's relationship to her father is ominously unclear, his paternity ambiguous. She always addresses him as Bartolomé, his

first name. The incestuous brother and sister, condemned to wallow in the mire of their sin, turn slowly into mud and slime. The murder of Pedro Páramo by his son, Abundio, marks the culmination of family disintegration, if there ever existed a family unity in this world of orphaned bastards and forsaken offspring of violence.

Violence is the only flight from confinement. As Paz points out, the Mexican tears off his mask and protective shell like a volcanic eruption. The revolt is a disclosure, a baring of self, a frenetic fiesta, a blood bath. Pedro Páramo and Abundio simply re-enact that ritual. Páramo's father fell a victim to violence; so did his favorite son, Miguel. In the frenzy of that revolt and eruption, the repressed energies break loose. The powers of darkness explode and the Mexican finds a momentary transcendence in the frenzy of chaos and its destructive energy. And here, too, the novel's narrative structure follows suit: it becomes enthymemic — only one of the premises operates in the syllogism of normal behaviour. Repression and the reality principle are muted, suppressed into nonexistence. Accordingly, in the final part of the novel the world is seen through the distorted mind and eyes of Abundio. With alcohol gnawing at his brain and years of suppressed rancor flashing in his eyes and on his dagger, he stumbles into the ignominious act. His perspective becomes ours in those moments of hallucination in which all order breaks down, time becomes confused and the individual is transformed into a blind, irrepressible force that signifies death.

The structure of Juan Rulfo's novel bespeaks Octavio Paz's assertion that the meaning of the body as erotic metaphor is ultimately death. The bi-partite construction of the work elucidates the dialogue between the two terms of the metaphor. Up to page sixty-five (in the eighth printing of the work), the reader "accompanies" Juan Preciado in a descent which leads to the grave. That progression is, in fact, only a function of the narrative, for the reader becomes aware that the voices and narrated events have originated there all along. Once the geometric spiral downwards has been sealed ("Yes, Dorotea, the murmurs killed me"), the narrative voice and point of view change. The subjective echoes and murmurs of conscience become an omniscient, third person narrative voice. Now that the whirlpool has reached its culmination

by irrevocably enveloping the hero in its maelstrom, there, in the timelessness of death, the meaning of the entire process can be revealed; the progressive stages, the circle of history which has disposed the hero from past to future into a peroration of death can now be explained.

The remaining sixty-four pages of the novel constitute a new narrative. This second part of the work sets into motion a "new" cycle in which the reader, along with the hero, witnesses the spiraling events which culminate in the narrative present. By the end of the first part, the novel achieves a reverie of silence, "an incommunicable state of consciousness," to use Frye's term; for what we have *listened to* (not "read" for this part of the work is pure utterance, spoken and not written) is a series of murmurs, echoes and haunting voices of the dead who utter not to communicate, but to carry on their incubistic soliloquy. The two parts of the novel emerge as mutually reflecting, concentric circles. The hero finds the lineaments of the self-knowledge he seeks in the first part within the history which is revealed by the second part. Like the two terms of a metaphor, the two parts of the work join to produce the synthesis of a Mexican myth revealed here as a Gothic paradigm.

Equally paradigmatic in this respect is Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. "I must have white water to navigate," its hero exclaims, "distant targets, enemies to repel. Ah, yes. In the eye of the whirlwind. No: calm doesn't interest me" (p. 80). Artemio Cruz marks the epicenter of this whirlwind whose "eye" is none other than the hero's own consciousness and its febrile gyrations. The frenetic celerity of self-cognizance and reflection maintains the concentric motion and prevents the imminent dive into the ultimate abyss, the plunge into the whirlpool which is forever impending. Fuentes' novel begins with a shattered world whose hero lies in a catatonic state. From there, Artemio contemplates the multiple fragments of himself and of his life as they spin through the mind-eye of memory and recollection. As the circle closes in with the convergence of birth and death, the fragments of time and being join to reconstitute a whole which nosedives into the maelstrom, never to resurface: "The three, we . . . will die. You . . . die, have died . . . I will die" (p. 306).

One of the epigraphs Fuentes uses for his novel is from the *Essays* of Montaigne: "The premeditation of death is the premeditation of freedom." Montaigne's statement bespeaks the metaphorical value of the work. The world of the novel and its hero are the hieroglyph, the metaphor itself. Artemio Cruz premeditates not death, but being: his body, the corporeal and spiritual self whose ultimate meaning as erotic metaphor signifies death. That "premeditation" process embodies the vortex and its whirlpool. The hero's bodily sensations cede their primacy to mental images and reflections: mirror images as well as meditative and historical recollection. What Artemio Cruz experiences in the hours before his death is a chapter of Mexican history and the life of a man within it. More significantly, however, the hero's life represents a mythical reenactment of that history made incarnate through metaphor. In the process, Cruz becomes more than an individual facing death and emerges as an archetypal Mexican hero. The images, themes, and structures employed by Fuentes to achieve that archetypal metaphor embody those elements which I have delineated as paradigms of Mexican Gothic.

Disintegration of the individual and his world is a requisite of the Gothic in literature. The Gothic process is composed of the aberrations in self-identity and human interrelationships. The anomalies and marvelous distortions amongst different spheres of experience, the grotesque and the heteroclitie stem from the individual's attempts at re-integrating a fragmented cosmos and a shattered identity. Such fragmentation and attempted reconstitution mark the itinerary of the hero in Fuentes' novel. In his catatonic state Artemio Cruz perceives a shattered image of himself and his world: "I am this, this I am: old man with his face reflected in pieces by different-sized squares of glass . . . I try to remember my reflection: face cut up by unsymmetrical facets of glass, the eye very near the ear and very far from its mate: a face distributed among shimmering mirrors" (pp. 4-5). Time and identity, so inextricably interrelated, lose all sense of unity as well. The hero experiences his life not in any logical order but in a frenzied isochronism in which all time and incidents co-exist: "No: someone else, someone different, someone in a mirror in front of his sickbed, the bed of someone else. Artemio Cruz: his twin. Artemio Cruz is sick, he does not live. No, he lives! Artemio

Cruz did live once. He lived several years. Years, not years. No, he lived several days. Days, not daze. His twin, Artemio Cruz, his double. Yesterday Artemio Cruz, he lived only a few days before dying, yesterday Artemio Cruz, who is . . . I am I, and yesterday" (p. 7). In his scrambled world, Cruz plunges into the confines of a unique time and solitude. What he articulates from there in his incubistic monologue is our only means of delineating the configurations of a man, his history and features of his mask. As the protagonist affirms in his soliloquy: "You will become the images of your imagination, like an empty wrinkled wineskin . . . insisting on remembering what will happen yesterday" (pp. 9-10). Within this confused time, historical events become inevitable certainties, just as the acts and fate of the hero become predictable. In their predictability and recurrence, all deeds acquire the character of ritual. The life of Artemio Cruz enacts one complete cycle in the predetermined sequence of recurring events which, through their accretion, define the character of Mexican history. That history emerges in the novel as isomorphic. In his clairvoyant hallucinations, the protagonist perceives Mexico in its many superimposed and hardened cultural layers: Amerindian, Christian European, and African. Cruz, son of a mulatto peasant woman and a white *hacendado* is himself a genetic syncretism; an embodiment of that cyclical process of violent conquest and despoliation, destined to re-enact the cycle by violating and ravishing others.

Just as the cyclical nature of Mexico's history produces an enclosed world, so the individual experience results in a self-encased, protective solitude which hides behind a mask of invulnerability and hermeticism.¹⁶ When all "enemies" have been repelled and the fortress of the self has been "secured," then the true battle begins and there the white water and its whirlwind crest to a zenith. On this score, Carlos Fuentes manifests his affinity for one of the great masters of inner darkness and demoniacal cruelty, Henry James, who, Martha Banta observes, "knew the traditions of the Gothic novel well."¹⁷ To those traditions James added "the terrors of a new Gothicism which—like the new psychology of the period—revealed the self as victim of its own self-villainy."¹⁸ Artemio Cruz bespeaks the universality in the Gothicism of his author's predilections as he perceives in a fit of clairvoyance his final predicament: "taking the risk successfully until

no enemies are left: and then you will become your own enemy, that the proud battle may go on: all others conquered, there will remain only yourself to be conquered: you will step from the looking-glass of still water and lead your last attack against the enemy nymph, the nymph of passion and sobs who is daughter of gods and mother of goatlike seducer, mother of the only god that has died in man's time: from the looking-glass she will step too, mother of the Great God Pan, nymph of pride and again your double, your double, your last enemy in the depopulated land of the victims of your pride" (p. 86).

The clammy, haunted underworld elaborated by Juan Rulfo in *Pedro Páramo* has given way in Fuentes' novel to a worse horror: the dark, necromantic and menacing chambers of the psyche. While the outward trappings of Gothic yield to a psychological Gothicism, bringing Fuentes into closer affinity with what Irving Malin and J. Douglas Perry delineate as new American Gothic, the basic themes, images, and structures I have postulated for Mexican Gothic still persist. Unlike the mythological archetype, the Mexican Narcissus retains his acutely menacing self-consciousness. Thus, Artemio Cruz as *persona* is cognizant of the potential connotations of his own name, as the passage just cited would indicate. His identification with the *hubris* of his mythological namesake, Artemis, as well as the link to the Christ King (Cruz — Cross — Christ: "the only god that has died in man's time") are unmistakable. The consciousness of his own villainy is in direct relation to his spirituality. In this respect Cruz seems to understand his own Gothic nature as a grotesque aberration of the sublime. Beyond identifying Cruz as an epitome of the neo-Gothic, his self-awareness would indicate that Fuentes, knowingly or not, depicts his hero with the adumbration implicit in a statement of Henry James's father: "Our experience of the spiritual world," writes the elder James, "dates in truth only from our first unaffected shiver at guilt."¹⁹ Such an experience in the life of Artemio Cruz will become admissible in recollection alone, in those moments before his death in which the mask is shattered, and memory, on the doorstep of oblivion, lays bare the solitude, power, and impregnability of the hero. Only when death becomes a mirror for life, like all mirrors, an unforgiving and unequivocal eye, will the hero and the reader glimpse what has lain hidden behind the im-

penetrable mask that good Mexican form demands of the virile. The guilt choked by Artemio Cruz when, as a thirteen year old boy, he shattered his uncle's face with a double-barrelled shotgun trying to protect Lunero and the paradise of childhood ("Your innocence will die, not at the hands of your guilt, but before your enormous surprise" [p. 295]); the guilt muted upon abandoning a comrade to die in battle, at negotiating his own life with that of a cell-mate whose inheritance and sister he would appropriate; the guilt suppressed at seeing the only woman he ever loved dangling from a hangman's noose will suddenly overwhelm Cruz mercilessly. In each instance he will feel the ire and rancor that nourished his frenzied sallies in the face of incalculable odds; that same silent fury which he first experienced behind the weight and power of the exploding shotgun ("Fury because now he knew that life had enemies and was no longer the smooth flow of the river" [p. 295]). Now, when all battles have been won and enemies have been silenced; now when he gazes into the unforgiving mirror, the rancor of his fury becomes its very own object and as it devours itself, Artemio Cruz, its battlefield, looks into the heart of his conscience: "You will bequeath the futile dead names, the names of so many who fell that your name might stand: men despoiled of their names that you might possess yours: names forgotten that yours might be remembered" (p. 269); "those dead names: Regina ... Tobias ... Páez ... Gonzalo ... Zagal ... Laura, Laura ... Lorenzo ... I think about it and ask myself ... without knowing ... so that they may not forget me ..." (p. 263).

In the Mexican syllogism where the two premises for machismo are the stoic suffocation of sentiment and the mask of invulnerability, the second premise becomes inoperative here, giving way to an enthymeme in which the poignant self-identity of the hero breaks through as the hermetic mask is rent. Like the characters of Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, Artemio Cruz finds a meaningful, albeit menacing reflection of his life in his death. The obsessive preoccupation of Fuentes' hero with the hitherto masked, solitary self and its spirituality in the face of death may be explained in part by Octavio Paz's affirmation that "Our [the Mexicans'] deaths illuminate our lives. If our deaths lack meaning, our lives also lacked it."²⁰ The second epigraph from Calderón's *The Great Theater of the World* which Fuentes adapts for his novel reveals as much:

Men who come to the surface
Cradled by ice
Who return through graves
See what you are . . .

Artemio Cruz, the bastion of power, must extend the domination he exercised over others in life into his final hours. Power must also find its reflection in death if it is to have meaning. Thus, as he endures the physical pain of his collapse, he does so mutely, without the slightest response to those around him. He in fact plays on their altruistic as well as selfish preoccupations. He does not reveal whether he has left a will. When he finally does, he sends his wife and daughter scurrying to search in the wrong place. His only diversion from pain and recollection in those final hours consists of listening to the tape recordings of his business dealings and political machinations. Nothing of what is, has been, will be Artemio Cruz must be left out as the many fractions of his life complete the hieroglyph. Above all, the many faces of the Narcissus and those in whom he found the reflection of his character and countenance must come into sharp focus. The result is a legion of character repetitions reflected in a gallery of multi-faceted mirrors—the hero's memory—all of which reflect and define the protagonist. The most striking of these is his son Lorenzo who dies in battle, a death Artemio Cruz thinks he himself should have died many years earlier. Lorenzo's memory, along with that of Regina, evokes the most poignant leitmotifs in Cruz' recollection. Each of these images constitutes a type of inheritance. They all died so that he could survive. They range from his father, Atanasio, who was hacked to death by machetes on the day of Artemio's birth, to the comrade in whom he saw himself but whom he left to die on the field ("He tried to push away that pain-twisted face with open mouth and closed eyes, tangled mustache and beard no longer than his own. With green eyes, the man could be his twin" [p. 69]). Teresa, Artemio's daughter, emerges as his unmistakable successor. Although a woman, Teresa comes forth as the aggressor rather than the victim, the "closed" rather than the "open"; the despoiler rather than the despoiled. She manifests the spirit of her maternal grandmother who spent the last thirteen years of her life shut up in her private world of past glory and power rather than admit defeat; whose last utterance as she collapsed under the

weight of her hundred years and the slash of a whip was a rancorous: "Chingao."

As the cycle closes, Artemio Cruz sees himself as "animal who foreseeing your death, sings your death, talks it, dances it, paints it, remembering before you die, your death" (p. 270). He thus arrives at the primal point where the two extremes of solitude, birth and death, converge: "You will be the boy-child who goes to the land and finds the land, who leaves his beginnings and encounters his destiny, today when death is the same as beginning and ending and between the two, in spite of everything, is strung the thread of freedom" (pp. 271-272). As the narrative thread takes us to that primeval time and geography, we discover that Artemio Cruz, his power and dominion notwithstanding, has been a jester all along, a *persona* of a destiny he was predetermined to enact by forces infinitely stronger than himself. We discover what the centenarian grandmother knew all along by "the reason of blood." The boy-child Artemio Cruz, whom she only saw through her window for thirteen years, would re-enact the ritual of Mexico's history: "his flesh, my flesh, moving about, another life like Ireneo and Atanasio, another Mancheca, another man like the men they were . . . I have known that he is mine when you have not even seen him. Blood understands . . . without eyes, touch . . ." (p. 289).

Like the fated men of the darkest Gothicism, Artemio Cruz was marked from birth, destined for the irrevocable whirlwind and its devouring white water. Blood, like the mirror, does not lie.

NOTES

¹ Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962). References are to Sam Hilman's translation, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964) and will be cited in the text by page number.

² Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955). References are to Lysander Kemp's translation, *Pedro Páramo* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959). Subsequent references cited in the text.

³ Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, Bollingen Series XLVII (New York, 1956). And Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

⁴ John W. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1951).

⁵ Irving Malin, *New American Gothic* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962).

⁶ J. Douglas Perry, "Gothic as Vortex: The Form of Horror in Capote, Faulkner, and Styron," *Modern Fiction Studies*, XIX, 2 (1973), 153-167.

⁷ Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 12.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, "From Allegories to Novels," in *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 154-157.

⁹ Borges, p. 157.

¹⁰ See, for example, Paul Westheim, *La calavera*, trans. Mariana Frenk (México: Ediciones Era, 1971); and Jesús Angel Ochoa Zazueta, *Muerte y muertos* (México: Set/Setentas, 1974).

¹¹ Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959). References are to Lysander Kemp's translation, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 196.

¹² Paz, p. 25.

¹³ Cited by Perry, p. 155.

¹⁴ Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo," *Revista Mexicana de Literatura*, I, 1 (1957); Mariana Frenk, "Pedro Páramo," *Universidad de México*, XV, 11 (1961); Hugo Rodríguez Alcalá, *El arte de Juan Rulfo* (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1965), pp. 113-125.

¹⁵ Malin, Chapter III.

¹⁶ Paz, Chapter II.

¹⁷ Martha Banta, "The House of the Seven Ushers and How They Grew: A Look at Jamesian Gothicism," *Yale Review*, LVII (October, 1967), p. 65.

¹⁸ Banta, p. 65.

¹⁹ Cited by Banta, p. 62.

²⁰ Paz, p. 54.