

TERRA NOSTRA AND THE REWRITING OF THE MODERN SUBJECT

Archetypes, Myth, and Selfhood

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*Abstract: This article argues that one of the most important contributions of Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* is its rewriting of the modern subject. Through its metafictional dimension, the novel seeks to change the legacy of the recoding of subjectivities begun in the Spanish Golden Age. More specifically, it is through the construction of its characters and the way in which the latter depend on, and grow out of, the structure of the novel that Fuentes revises modern individualist conceptions of the subject. Although critics have tended to privilege the novel's realm of myth (understood as transcendent and timeless), this reading depends on the novel's evocation of a Marxist narrative of culture as struggle driven that Carlos Fuentes never loses from sight. The novel's structure arguably promotes a diachronic understanding of history into which both the mythic and material strands feed. Myth, in this reading, is a consciously embraced worldview that grounds, and dialectically informs, this vision of history rather than shying away from it.*

An overall critical consensus has evolved around *Terra Nostra* with regard to its mythic dimension: myth, cyclical time, and timeless moments are viewed as dominating the novel's historical framing, expressed through the well-known key dates of 1492 (the "discovery" of America, the conquest of Granada, the publication of Antonio de Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* and the edict of expulsion of the Jews), 1521 (the fall of Tenochtitlán and the *comuneros* rebellion), and 1598 (the death of Felipe II).¹ It is argued that specific historical facts and dates become mobile signs that, once detached from history, take root in the present of the fictional text (Gertel 1981).² Indeed, it is true that the novel erodes the ideologies that historically produced linear narratives of progress (e.g., Auguste Comte's positivism).

However, this article takes a different route to explore how myth and the transformed signs are reinscribed into a broadly sketched (diachronic) historical background that evokes the emergence of capitalism and a history of class struggles,

For John King.

1. *Terra Nostra*, it is argued, privileges a mythic expression over history in such a way "that time and space lose their differentiating power" (González Echevarría 1985, 92); it seeks to achieve simultaneity (Ibsen 2003) and privileges timeless moments of desire over history (Espina 1996–1997); it is composed of circles and spirals and suppresses causality and chronology (Simson 1989).

2. A more recent study claims that *Terra Nostra* does not refer to any real historical background but only to its own genesis and dismisses criticism that does not share this viewpoint as "positivistic" (Kieren 2005, 93). The effect of breaking the ties between reality and the text is that the novel loses its critical dimension and can offer no commentary on the writing of history or the formation of Western culture.

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as well as the correlative formation of new forms of selfhood as evoked through the novel's revisiting of three key texts of the Spanish Golden Age.³ This is not to dismiss the mythic dimension (or the novel's deconstruction of evolutionary linearity and "progress"), but rather the opposite: in *Terra Nostra*, myth is not merely content or an abstract dimension that shies away from history but rather, in the manner of the European modernists of the beginning of the century, a consciously embraced mythopoeia that grounds a self-conscious worldview (see Bell 1997).⁴ Myth and history are therefore interdependent in the novel, and their relation is structured by the dialectic between history (dominated by class struggle) and the imagination, between the theoretical realm based on Giambattista Vico's understanding of history and the political realm based on Karl Marx's vision (see Zamora 1989).

Although the novel embraces a variety of interpretations of reality (including spiritual, philosophical, and political), this article argues that one of the most important contributions of the work—its revision of the modern subject—actually disappears from sight if we ignore the stubbornly visible Marxist narrative, as this revision must be read against the understanding of culture as struggle driven and the larger narrative of capital that Fuentes never loses from sight, even as he deconstructs realist conventions of linearity.

It is here useful to recall Jameson's (1981, 138) argument that the historical role of the rise of realism was the "secular 'decoding' of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens." Jameson explains that "populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism." Through the metafictional dimension of *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes seeks to change the legacy of the often-forgotten first modernity that contributed to the "epistemic, moral and political foundations of modernity" (Castro-Gómez 2008, 272; Dussel 1992); he seeks to change the legacy of the recoding begun in the Spanish Golden Age. I argue that it is through his construction of character and the way in which the latter depends on the structure of the novel that he revises modern individualist conceptions of the subject as autonomous, rational, and self-determining.

THE MEMORY THEATER, MYTHOPOEIA, AND HISTORY

Throughout his career, Fuentes (1976, 95) has emphasized the necessity to "re-invent" history. In *Terra Nostra*, an entire chapter is devoted to Valerio Camillo's "memory theatre," which functions as a synecdoche for the novel (Ibsen 2003) and

3. As Rafael Montano (2006, 65) points out, for Carlos Fuentes, the period between 1492 and 1598 "goza de un valor ontológico particularmente importante, porque durante este período se formó o se consolidó una serie de discursos cuya continuidad ha sido significativa y formativa para la cultura iberoamericana"; the characters of his novel must therefore not be read psychologically but in relation to this investigation of discourses. Montano's study offers many excellent new observations, but in contrast to my own sense of the novel, Montano sees it as opposed to a dialectical understanding of the relation between art and economy.

4. Carlos Fuentes is of course familiar with the work of many European modernists, in particular D. H. Lawrence.

offers an analogy for its efforts to transform our thought structures through the reformation of archetypes and the opening up of history to lost possibilities. As has been well documented, it is based on the Renaissance scholar Frances Yates's (1966, 37) investigations of the Renaissance memory theater constructed by Giulio Camillo, in which Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic influences converged to transform the classical rational art of memory into a system that claims to be based "on archetypes of reality on which depend secondary images covering the whole realm of nature and of man." Camillo's theater reverses the arrangement of a normal theater, as there is only one spectator, standing on the stage, and gazing at the striking images in the auditorium. Camillo made extraordinary claims for the theater, which he described to his contemporary Viglius Zuichemus as a "built or constructed mind and soul" (qtd. in Yates 1966, 132); according to him, it connected the mind of the spectator to the universe and the divine, enabling him to "remember" the entire cosmos and to move upward and downward through creation.

Fuentes's description is closely modeled on those of Yates, with the important innovation that what Valerio Camillo's theater seeks to offer is a Borgesian or complete version of history that includes events that could have, but never have, happened (Montano 2007). The novel thus provides a model of how it should be read. At the novel's apocalyptic end in 1999, Celestina and Polo Febo (who has just read the same novel as the reader and, like Cervantes, possesses only one arm) are the last survivors of humanity. Celestina (a character of the novel Polo has read) has the capacity of transmitting memory through a kiss, and she thus transports Polo into the memory theater, and the novel's narrative becomes his own. Polo realizes that history had been offered a second chance but ended up repeating itself with merely some details changed. Yet the novel ends with Celestina and Polo's sexual act that unifies them into a hermaphrodite and offers a new mythic foundation to history. It thus suggests a new start that would be based on those opportunities that were rejected, notably the pluralist heritage of Spain, represented by the character referred to as Mijail-ben-Sama, Miguel, and Michah (his names reflect his triple Arab, Christian, and Jewish identity).

As Ibsen (1993, 120–121) has observed, the role of the spectator in the memory theater is offered to the reader, who "is invited to reconstruct and make sense of the barrage of images presented in the novel through the activation of his or her own capacity to recollect these images and to correlate them with the transtextual reserves brought to the act of reading."⁵ The text thus seeks to alter the reader's thought structures to induce a different vision of the past that would be based on the values of diversity, community, and tolerance and on a foundational myth of a hermaphrodite creator rather than a patriarchal unique God the Father. This seems to suggest that the transformation of the ego needs to precede both social transformation and the reformulation of history. However, this emphasis on the imagination and the implied attempt to alter the reader's conception of reality actually stands in dialectical relation to his reconstruction of history and the self

5. Or, as Swietlicki (1981, 61) writes, "The Theatre of Memory may be seen as the key to unlock the world from the confines of circular history."

within the novel itself (despite the fact that this is obviously not a “traditional” historical novel).

In his theoretical writing, Fuentes (1990, 32) refers to Giambattista Vico (1688–1744) when he sets out to undermine the pseudouniversalist, exclusivist conception of history as “inexorable march” toward the future. Defined against this imperialist version of “universal” history, Vico’s theories stand out because of their emphasis on difference and his refusal to view history as a narrative of progress. According to Fuentes (1990, 35), Vico views history as “un movimiento en espiral, en el que los progresos alternan con factores recurrentes, muchos de ellos negativamente regresivos.” Conceiving of history in theoretical terms as a narrative not of evolutionary progress but of spirals does not necessarily imply a blanket rejection of a diachronic understanding of historical reality but rather a rejection of particular narratives and narrative conventions, such as the Euro-imperialist narrative of cultural evolution. As one might expect from the author of studies such as *El espejo enterrado* (a cultural history of Spain and Latin America), *Terra Nostra* does not completely dismiss diachronic time (evoked through the historical and metafictional frames).

It is true that Fuentes (1990, 18) has consistently emphasized the interrelation of past, present, and future: “Recordamos aquí, hoy. Pero también imaginamos aquí, hoy. Y no podemos separar lo que somos capaces de imaginar de lo que somos capaces de recordar.” Myth enables an imaginative rethinking of the foundations of historical narrative, a transformation of how we read the past to alter our understanding of the present and open opportunities for the future. For Fuentes, Vico’s assertion that history is made by us (rather than God) produces a moral obligation: “Since we made history, we have to imagine history” (qtd. in Ibsen 1993, 51). The most interesting aspect of the novel, then, is how this understanding dialectically informs the novel’s narrative of the emergence of capitalism through archetypes that evoke this larger process and, more specifically, its reworking of character and forms of subjectivity as expressed in literary archetypes of the Golden Age. Like in the memory theater, the individual reader is presented with archetypes, which are, however, of a cultural rather than a spiritual nature and that enter the text only to be rewritten. If these cultural archetypes of modern bourgeois individualism contribute to shaping the way in which we view the world and ourselves, then Fuentes is attacking the stuff modern mythopoeia—the modern worldview—is made of. This emphasis on changing mental structures does not, however, advocate a belief in the precedence of ego transformation over social transformation; in fact, the novel demonstrates precisely the necessity of both by combining the rewriting of character with the examination of the lost opportunities of history represented most powerfully by the comuneros revolt that was, according to the historian Maravall (1979), the first modern revolution.⁶

6. The revolt led by Toledo was the product of the long-standing conflict between the cities and the nobility. It spread to most of the cities of Old Castile and included four cities in the province of Ávila. A revolutionary junta and an army were formed to support the cause, which was to alter the relations to the king, “maintaining that the kingdom stood above the king and that the junta represented the kingdom” (Lynch 1991, 57).

METACTIONALITY, GOLDEN AGE SPAIN, AND THE MODERN SUBJECT

As the “boom novel par excellence” (Gyurko 2007, 199), *Terra Nostra* offers a “grand narrative” based on a Marxist perspective on the emergence of capitalism (Boling 1984) and a reflection on the correlative “rise of reflexivity and . . . the expansion of a secular viewpoint” (Resina 2006, 291). Most literary and historical figures and events that occur in the novel are situated in time between the dates of 1492 and 1598, roughly spanning the Spanish Golden Age, with the third cardinal date being 1521, the date of the comuneros rebellion. In other words, the text returns to the period when capitalism emerged as a world system, the “first” modernity, during which contemporary forms of subjectivity were beginning to be formed. Its cultural manifestations include Fernando de Rojas’s *La Celestina* (1499; often considered the first European novel), Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (part 1, 1605), and Tirso de Molina’s play *El burlador de Sevilla* (1630), which according to Ludovico, contain the destiny of their history. Literature, Fuentes (1976, 93) writes, does not only express reality, but also constitutes “una nueva cosa en el mundo.” The rise of the novel has often been attributed to the England of the eighteenth century, a time when the realist novel “had come to seem extraterritorial” in Spain with the reinforcement of class barriers and the blocking of social aspirations on which the novel form thrives (Resina 2006, 297). However, as Resina (2006) points out, this may be read as an attempt to erase the novel’s Spanish predecessors—such as the genre of the picaresque characterized by an “aggressive realism” (291), or the self-reflexive *Don Quixote*, the last “scion of the Erasmian spirit in Spanish literature” (298) in the Spain of the Counterreformation.⁷ Interestingly, *Terra Nostra* does not feature a picaresque character, which may perhaps be linked to the fact that the picaresque novel is quite an orthodox genre, in which the individual “lacks the power to alter the cosmic order in which society is inserted” (Resina 2006, 300). Or, as Fuentes (1976, 31) puts it, the picaresque hero’s exclusive focus on the present is impoverishing: “para ser un presente pleno, requiere un sentido del pasado y una imaginación del futuro.”

Terra Nostra’s abundant metafictional references point us to, among other texts, the three canonical works mentioned earlier; they are cultural expressions of the emerging modern subject and display the tensions produced by the transition from feudalism to a mercantilist order. Enabled by greater class mobility and the influence of Erasmian thought toward the end of the fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth century, a “new ethics of the autonomous subject emerged in works like Fernando de Rojas’s *La Celestina*” (Resina 2006, 301), a text in which “the exemplary voices of medieval morality are defeated by money, passion and sex interest” (Fuentes 1992, 84). *Celestina* may thus be read as the “representante . . . del naciente egoísmo capitalista” (Montano 2007, 103). As Watt (1997, 122) notes in *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Don Juan and Don Quixote are

7. Fuentes (1976) shares Resina’s (2006) reading of *Don Quixote* and emphasizes its “critique of reading” (see *Cervantes*). The critical spirit is, for Fuentes (1976, 101), the most important feature of modernity: “la modernidad no puede creer en normas invariables sin sacrificar el espíritu crítico que su legitimación.”

individualists with “exorbitant egos; . . . [they] decide to try to do something no one else has done; and they pursue their choice at any cost . . . [and] seek personal fame or glory”; they “operate without any regard whatsoever to ‘race, people, party, family or cooperation.’”⁸

The first part of the novel (“El viejo mundo”) deals “with the shifting power relations as sixteenth-century Spain experienced the transition from feudal society toward an emerging capitalism” (Anderson 2003, 59). The history of late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish society and the position of the laborer-vassal within it is complex and uneven, but Fuentes’s depiction is less concerned with accurate details than overall historical trends.⁹ One of the prime conditions for capitalism is the confrontation between two classes: the “free” workers, who do not “form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc.” and the owners of the “conditions for the realization of their labour” (Marx 1976, 874). In *Terra Nostra*, the workers’ deprivation and the history of their expropriation plays a large role in the episodes relating to the construction of the Escorial and leads up to the rebellion of the comuneros portrayed in the third section and central to the novel as a whole. The rebellion in fact took place some forty years before the construction of the palace, and yet by rearranging history in this way, Fuentes has made these events into symbols—archetypes—of a larger process of historical change fired by class struggle. The former inhabitants of the lands on which the Escorial is being built have been dispossessed for the construction of the palace and are now day laborers: “el señor los ha dejado sin más sustento que un jornal. Y es más fácil quitarle dinero a un sueldo que arrebarle fanegas a una cosecha” (Fuentes 1991, 164).¹⁰ Money, as an alienated form of payment, is more easily manipulated than the measurable harvest production of farming.¹¹ Several episodes in the novel lament this move from a system based on barter to one of abstracted monetary relations.

The near absence of an identifiable middle class in sixteenth-century Spain is reflected by the fact that all work for El Señor rather than a middle-class capitalist. Historically, the weakness of the middle classes was due to diverse factors: a social structure still based on land (owned almost exclusively by the church and the nobility), a “social prejudice against trade” on the part of the nobility, and a resultant aspiration to “invest their money in a landed title” on the part of the merchants (Lynch 1991, 148), as well as the ousting of Castilian manufacturers in the colonial markets from the 1550s onward by foreign merchants because of the

8. Don Quixote and Don Juan have acquired an afterlife that has even further enhanced their status as “individuals”: they were taken up by many of the European Romantics, whose poetry centers on writing the individual’s subjectivity. This emergence of the writing of individual subjectivity coincided with the emergence of class consciousness and the formation of the bourgeoisie and its ideology in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

9. Boling (1984) argued that *Terra Nostra* offers a Marxist version of history and a critique of positivism. Abeyta (2006, 41) offers a good analysis of this section couched in the theoretical language of Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida; especially interesting is his reading of the novel’s representation of the “divorce between *words* and *things*,” from the perspective of Foucault’s *Les mots et les choses* (see also González Echevarría 1982).

10. Hereafter, all citations to *Terra Nostra* refer to this 1991 edition and include only page number.

11. See also Abeyta’s (2006) chapter “The Displacement of Land as the Visible Referent of Power.”

price rise in Spain that had resulted from the influx of precious American metals. Yet the incipient class of merchants is nevertheless represented through the character of Don Gonzalo de Ulloa (the *comendador* of Molina's *El burlador*). He is here rewritten as a capitalist merchant with international trading connections and the only apparent benefactor of the change.¹² Although in sixteenth-century Spain merchants like Don Gonzalo were a clear minority (Lynch 1991), the archetypal *comendador* functions not only as a commentary on sixteenth-century Spain but also as a critique of future developments.

Rejecting the feudal, fantastical world in which Felipe's mother seeks to prolong her line indefinitely through the resurrection of corpses, Don Gonzalo—essentially the anti-Don Quixote—announces the reign of the Enlightenment ideologies of reason and progress: “Razón llamo mi deidad, sentidos despiertos, rechazo del misterio, exilio de cuanto no quepa en el seguro arcón del sentido común, donde lógica y ducados acumulo, conllevadas en felices y provechosas nupcias” (430). Reason and progress are ultimately subordinated to money, as this quote suggests. The circulation and accumulation of capital is amoral, used indiscriminately to fund wars, industry, or palaces; money itself becomes the ultimate value for the merchant, the protocapitalist and epitome—or rather, caricature—of the bourgeois modern self. To sum up, then, although the perspective on history offered by *Terra Nostra* cannot be compared with that of the traditional historical novel, it does nevertheless construct a clear and ideologically charged vision of the history of capitalism, and it is against this background that the construction of character must be read.

STRUCTURE, CLASS STRUGGLE, AND MILLENARIANISM

The twin focus on subjectivity and the emergence of global capitalism is expressed most clearly in the way in which the novel's structure and its construction of characters are interlinked: the novel is organized around two rebellions in which all of the main characters are directly or indirectly implicated, and the narrative significantly starts on July 14, 1999, the 210th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. This points us to the heart of Fuentes's attempt to reform the characters of major works of fiction of the Golden Age. Fuentes revises literary characters that have become literary archetypes over time to alter their legacies. Yet although Don Juan is never allowed to become more than a negative, repetitive stereotype employed to formulate a critique of rampant individualism, Celestina is transformed into a communal character, a new model of selfhood, positively seeking to alter the existing social order. Celestina as well as Ludovico—the two central lower-class characters—are involved in both of the revolts, which are firmly set within a Marxist narrative of class struggle, into which the mythic strands of the

12. The figure of Don Gonzalo is not far from real life, as Lynch's (1991, 147) description of the merchant Simón Ruiz illustrates: Ruiz was “corresponding ceaselessly with the greatest merchants of Lisbon, Antwerp, Lyons, and Genoa, and he was well known in the entourage of Philip II. Beginning from about 1550 as an importer of Breton linens, he gradually extended his operations and acquired sufficient capital to speculate—with enormous success—on the exchange; by 1576 he was lending money to Philip II and was participating in numerous *asientos* for the payment of the army in Flanders.”

novel also feed.¹³ The three youths—marked by a cross on their shoulder blades and possessing twelve toes, characteristics that signpost them as millenarian messiah figures—are also centrally linked to rebellion. Most important, although the characters whose appearance is linked to the revolts recur and develop over time, the aristocratic characters are compressed representations of various royals from different generations and countries, thus representing the sterile stasis embodied in *Terra Nostra* by the Escorial.

The narrative of the dispossession of the lower classes is structured around two rebellions. The first is represented in part 1 in the chapter “Aquí y ahora” (the massacre that occurs in its wake is described at length in part 3 of the novel). The title refers to the millenarian movements (which subscribed to the belief that collective salvation was imminent, terrestrial, total, and miraculous; Cohn 1963) and, within the realm of the novel, to the slogan shouted by the flagellant masses during the apocalypse evoked at the beginning and end of the novel. It is the future Señor, Felipe (whose real identity is known only to Celestina), who convinces Simón, Pedro, and Ludovico that utopia is to be found not across the seas but “aquí y ahora” (187). He attracts other millenarian groups inspired by Joachimite prophecies (which predicted that the third age, the age of the Spirit, was imminent) and leads them to his father’s castle, which they loot (the poor crusaders that Cohn [1963] describes similarly looted towns on their way). Shortly after, they are all massacred by Felipe’s soldiers, with the exception of Felipe’s original travel companions. Although this rebellion, which is here portrayed as spontaneous and without any specific political program, is thus suffocated before it can take off, it nevertheless is important to recall the positive role ascribed to the millenarian movements by Fuentes (1976) in *Cervantes*, where he sees them as forces of a heterodox pluralism that undermine the medieval orthodoxy.

In the novel, this emphasis on the epistemological dimension is combined with an emphasis on the social conditions out of which these movements arose: poverty, the growth of the cities, social insecurity, a shift to uncontrolled capitalism that left workers exposed to the forces of the market and the destruction of medieval social hierarchies (Cohn 1963). The movements are shown to feed into the social revolution portrayed in part 3 of the novel, which is more organized and meditated than the first. Structurally, this rebellion is the climax of the third part (it is even preceded by a countdown of seven days that correspond to chapters), and perhaps even the book as a whole, as all the chapters in the “Old World” contribute to the lead-up to this episode, which also functions as Felipe’s final rejection of the “second chance” that Ludovico seeks to offer him. This symbolically becomes the moment at which Spain rejected its pluralist heritage in favor of a narrow-minded nationalism based on the “purity” of blood, as well as the rejection of the possibility of eliminating oppressive social hierarchies. After the

13. As Fuentes (qtd. in Fell 2001, 147) states in an interview: “Mi información —más que mi formación política— la debo al contacto con el marxismo, pero no en cuanto dogma absoluto o reductor —sino en cuanto método de interpretación de determinados fenómenos de la vida histórica y llamado de libertad e integración de posibilidades humanas. El marxismo no es, ni pudo ser la vida. Es una interpretación, rica y parcial, de la existencia, que se niega al negar su relativismo dialéctico y pretender a una totalidad dogmática.”

rebellion (which resulted in the killing of the workers and the members of the junta, as well as a mass exodus of characters to the “New World”), Felipe slowly dies, rotting up inside, and we are presented with a few glimpses into a violent (Spanish and Mexican) future, more shocking for its resemblance to reality despite the grotesqueness and marked by the unchecked legacy of Felipe’s regime and the failure of the revolution.

Fuentes’s choice of the comuneros rebellion in 1520–1521 as a central structuring episode rests on the importance of this particular historical uprising. Its defeat constituted a severe setback to the democratization of Spain, and thus also America, as Fuentes (1976) argues. In “La rebelión,” Fuentes introduces actual historical material from letters in italics, in which the revolutionary junta seeks to realize a new order in which the king would be “sólo un elemento” (757). He includes sections that voice their revolutionary demands for land redistribution.¹⁴ In the nonitalicized sections of the chapter, Fuentes emphasizes the contributions of the millenarian groups to the rebellion, including the Waldensians, the Cathari, and the adepts of the Free Spirit. The chapter’s emphasis on both the spiritual and the social revolutionary forces as feeding into the moment that represents Spain’s chance of a social revolution is reflected on the level of the novel as a whole by the dialectical relationship between a Kabbalist portrayal of the transmigration of souls and the materialist formation of the communal Celestina that will be examined later on.¹⁵

Fuentes’s representation of the role of millenarian or apocalyptic thinking in social revolution is nuanced and changes over the course of the novel. Maarten Van Delden (1998) argues that, although Fuentes is critical of apocalypticism in his political writing, in his fictional writing it occupies a positive role because it is defined against oppressive orthodoxy.¹⁶ It is true that in the novel the revolutionary millenarian movements fulfill “a key role in the slow undermining of the monolithic edifice of medieval ideology” (Van Delden 1998, 131), but in the apocalyptic future evoked in the opening and closing chapters, their role is significantly more negative.¹⁷ In the first chapter, Saint-Sulpice Cathedral in Paris in the year 1999 is the site of resurrection of the mass flagellant movements (based on Cohn’s [1963] descriptions). To Polo, these evoke the “last solution” of Fascist Germany

14. “La línea de inclusiones sucesivas ha sido: las cartas de los comuneros, [Prudencio de] Sandoval, [Antonio] Ferrer [del Río], [José Antonio] Maravall, *Terra Nostra*” (Rodríguez Carranza 1990, 166).

15. As Swietlicki has demonstrated in some detail, the mythic strand associates the millenarian movements with heretical aspects of Kabbalist thought, evoked most powerfully through the novel’s use of number symbolism and its insistence on the mystic number three; one might here think of the three youths marked by crosses that link them to flagellant movements, whose members wore uniforms with crosses (Cohn 1963), as well as through the transmigration of souls (Swietlicki 1981).

16. This would go against the thesis of Cohn’s influential book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, in which millenarian movements are considered precursors of fascism’s Holocaust and the crimes committed in the name of communism.

17. I would there agree with Abeyta (2006) that Van Delden (1998) overemphasizes the positive aspect of millenarianism in *Terra Nostra*. However, in his critique of Van Delden’s evaluation of utopianism in *Terra Nostra*, Abeyta conflates millenarianism with the utopian images projected onto America as well as with the revolution. Although there are links between these different strands of thought and social movements, they are overall very different in application, impact, and ideological background, and Fuentes’s analysis is nuanced in its treatment of them.

and ordered evil; the flagellants' pronounced amorality ("oh crimen cuántas libertades se cometen en tu nombre," 64)—historically related to the adepts of the Free Spirit's belief in freedom from morality (Cohn 1963)—thus take on worrying dimensions, further emphasized in the last chapter, in which apocalyptic thought becomes linked to an untrammelled capitalism and in which the masses are killed by the rich to solve the problem of overpopulation.¹⁸ Some of these tendencies emerge in the depiction of millenarianism in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but their impact and scope are different.

CONSTRUCTION OF CHARACTER AND SELFHOOD

The failures of the millenarian movements partly account for changes in Celestina's character. She evokes the transmigration of souls but also allegorizes a continuous subaltern perspective on history. The scenes of revolt have a structural importance that emphasizes their crucial impact on the construction of character. Swietlicki (1983) has suggested that the youths are psychological doubles of El Señor; and González Echevarría (1985, 92) states, "Don Quixote, Don Juan, Celestina, and the shipwrecked youth project various facets of the split matrix-figure Philip."¹⁹ However, this absorption of the other characters into the "matrix-figure Philip" not only attributes too much importance to El Señor but also misses important differences between the different forms of selfhood that these characters represent.

Felipe, who is an almost continuous presence in the novel, represents the persistence of the structures of the old feudal order and, as such, his own construction of selfhood, as well as the novelist's construction of him as a character, do not emphasize his individuality and difference from other aristocrats (although there is a difference between him and the workers) but rather stress how the individual's role within society is determined by the legacy of the past. Felipe is very aware of the importance of external displays of power that confirm his position within the dynastic line, thinking of himself as a member of the ruling class rather than as a self-contained individual: "mi presencia está transida por el poder que represento y el poder me traspasa porque, siendo anterior a mí, en cierto modo no me pertenece y al pasar por mis manos y mi mirada, de mí se aleja y deja de pertenecerme; no basto yo, no basta el poder, hace falta el decorado, el lugar, el espacio que nos contenga y nos dé una semblanza de unidad a mí y a mi poder" (431). This explicitly stated awareness of his construction of subjectivity itself arguably derives from a modern understanding of selfhood, as the narrative perhaps somewhat uncomfortably interprets a conjectural premodern consciousness

18. "La plaga moderna fue programada: se salvaron, en nuevas ciudades esterilizadas bajo campana de plástico, algunos millonarios, muchos burócratas, un puñado de técnicos y científicos y las escasas mujeres necesarias para satisfacer a los elegidos" (909).

19. Swietlicki (1983, 94) writes, "Psychologists tell us that partisanship in socio-political attitudes can result from personality fragmentation as a means of dealing with one's own inner tension and insecurity." She consequently has no difficulty seeing characters in extremely different social positions as mere doubles of one another, as if the realm of politics and history were only an extension of the psyche.

from a modern perspective. The mode of subjectivity inhabited by the preindividualistic subject is perhaps more elegantly expressed through the construction of the character, as Felipe is an amalgamation of various different kings: "Felipe . . . although primarily modeled after the pious and autocratic Felipe II, who ruled Spain from 1556 to 1598, also represents, among others, Fernando el Católico, whose reign witnessed the voyage of Columbus, the expulsion of the Jews, and the fall of Granada, and Carlos V (1517–1556), under whom took place the conquest of Mexico and the Comunero revolt" (Ibsen 1994, 111–112). All the aristocratic characters are treated in this way, as Ibsen has documented. The best analogy for this is offered in the novel itself, when Isabel seeks to construct a new companion for herself out of different pieces from the corpses of dead kings, an enterprise that is monumentalist (to borrow Friedrich Nietzsche's term), elitist, and unable to incorporate change. All the royal characters display an obsession with the past, often bordering on necrophilia, and a resistance to change; most of them either bear the traces of the incestuous degeneracy of the aristocratic line, which functions as an easily deciphered critique of the effects of the perpetuation of their power. The *Dama Loca*, for instance, despite the amputation of her limbs, accidents, and even her own death, does not "die," and her specter haunts the New World in the imagined future, whereas Isabel's grotesque companion-corpse comes to life as a bizarre version of Francisco Franco. The recurrence of the royal characters in the glimpses of the future renders explicit the continued legacy of oppressive social hierarchies, in a ghostly-gothic registering of the unevenness of capitalism.

In contrast to this conjectural feudal form of subjectivity, the modern bourgeois form of subjectivity emphasizes the autonomy of the individual. Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Celestina evoke a conception and construction of self and character that are the polar opposite of Felipe's. Yet, having noted that difference, it is necessary to examine how Fuentes alters the legacy of these characters. It is through a rewritten *Celestina* that he offers a new form of communal subjectivity based on transmitted subaltern memory; and it is through the three youths—who metamorphose into, or encounter, Don Quixote, Don Juan, the pilgrim, and the idiotic prince—that he offers a critique of the emergent bourgeois subject and the ideologies on which it is based. The positive version of *Celestina* bears little resemblance to the character by Rojas. In Fuentes's rewriting, she is composed of three women: the first plays a role in the revolt and ensuing massacre, the second in the revolution, and the third appears during the apocalyptic beginning and ending.

The first *Celestina* is traumatized and literally scarred by feudal oppression: she is raped by the first Señor on her wedding day in accordance with the feudal seigniorial right to his female vassals' virginity; unable to cope with the experience, she leaves her husband, burns her hands in an open fire to drown out the pain, and is raped again by two old men in the forest. Her voluntary sexual adventure with the younger Felipe and Ludovico in her quest for a utopia of limitless and free sexual expression—free of responsibility, memory, and the past—seems to offer respite from her troubled state and links her to the movement of the Free Spirit, who saw guiltless eroticism as a sign of spiritual emancipation

(Cohn 1963).²⁰ However, the younger Felipe's betrayal not only ends this utopian dream but also emphasizes Celestina's complicity in the events, as she had given preference to the realization of her timeless utopia rather than warning the others about Felipe's true identity. The first Celestina remains unrepentant, perhaps to defend the value of her failed utopian dream that stripped people of their past and social status; nevertheless, she thus also promotes an antisocial, amoral blindness to the rest of the world.

Significantly, the other two Celestinas are different: their sexual encounters always result in a rehistoricization through the transmission of memory via a kiss. Yet it is out of the failure of the first Celestina that this communal character is born. After having escaped from the castle with Ludovico—taking with them the first of the three children bearing the mark of the cross that transforms them into potential messiah figures—and after having borne the second one herself, she again resorts to burning her hands in the open flame, evoking this time a vision of the devil. As in many rewritings of Satan—most notably during the Romantic period during which he became a heroic figure of rebellion against the established order—the devil is here not associated with evil but, as the archetypal rebel and individualist, reveals to her the falsity of “este atroz orden masculino” (636) based on the suppression of the myth of the original androgynous creator and the necessity for transmitting her memories to another woman of the next generation. The second Celestina, whose lips are permanently tattooed from the transmission of the first Celestina's memory, thus becomes the repository of subaltern memory and her character emphasizes the need to historicize. In turn, she transmits memory (not only her own personal memory) to other characters. One may here also note that the tattooed lips link this historicizing gesture to the mystical tradition (Ibsen 1994), emphasizing yet again the integration of the mythical and historical strands.

In contrast with the male characters, Celestina, then, “represents a process of continuity” (Ibsen 1994, 118). Yet the difference between the Celestinas has overall not been sufficiently emphasized.²¹ It is the second Celestina who, unlike the traumatized first Celestina, is socially aware; she is critical of what she interprets as “[el] derrumbe de un mundo cruel y . . . la lenta construcción, en su lugar, de otro mundo, igualmente cruel” (196). While the second young Celestina carries the first Celestina's legacy henceforth—dressed as a man to avoid the sexual exploitation of women by the feudal lords—the first Celestina slowly transforms into Rojas's bawd. Other characters begin to recognize her as Celestina, and when she reappears many years later at the Escorial, she has no recollection of her earlier life and has become the shrewd go-between, swayed by her own self-interest and happily assisting Felipe in getting rid of his potential opponents. Celestina, the bawd,

20. The link between sexuality and the Free Spirit's belief in spiritual emancipation is parodied in the chapter “La hermana Catarina” (which offers a satirical rewriting of the fourteenth-century tract *Schwester Katrei*). In its own idiosyncratic way, the chapter illustrates Cohn's (1963) observation that the adepts of the Free Spirit, unlike other millenarian groups, were not really social revolutionaries but intent on their own spiritual salvation.

21. See Simson's (1989) *Realidad y ficción en Terra Nostra de Carlos Fuentes* for an account that does bring out the differences between the different Don Quijotes and Celestinas.

thus turns into a symbol for the exhaustion of the utopianism of her own youth (which from the start had been conditioned by her traumatic experiences) and a symbol of the exhaustion of these individualist modes of being that are replaced by the postindividualist communal character constructed through memory.

Ibsen (1994, 118) refers to the young Celestina's recurrence as constituting a "mythical, cyclical, female history," a reading proffered as one of several possible interpretations by the novel itself when the devil rejects linear time in favor of a supposedly female realm of mythic and simultaneous time. Yet despite these gestures toward the mythic, the novel's structure, its emphasis on the transmission of memory, and the difference between the Celestinas nevertheless promote a diachronic understanding of history into which both the mythic and material strands feed. In contrast to Durán (1980, 155), who writes that Juana, Isabel, and Celestina "jointly combine all the positive and negative features which Jung associates with the anima figure," I want to argue that in *Terra Nostra* mythic archetypes are historicized and grow out of particular moments; they are not timelessly mythic.

The three shipwrecked youths formulate a warning against historical amnesia and a rampant individualism, at the same time that they incarnate the hope for revolutionary social change. All three are centrally linked to the revolts and the threat of the oppressed multitude. The three youths are all born, conceived, or abducted at the time of the first revolt; their meeting after twenty years is supposed to take place on July 14 on the Cabo de los Desastres, and they are all in the palace during the days before the comuneros revolution. At least two, possibly three, are the offspring of rape. In other words, the threat of revolution is literally produced by patriarcho-feudal oppression. The second Celestina links their appearance to the change from a feudal to a mercantilist society and to the plight of the oppressed, the dispossessed, and the displaced.

Ludovico's interpretation of the existence of three youths slightly differs from hers; his often privileges the realm of ideas rather than material conditions, believing that ideas need to return to realize their as-yet-unfulfilled potential. Ludovico sees in them a mode of selfhood that is open to the world, non-self-sufficient, and not an end in itself: "Una vida no basta. Se necesitan múltiples existencias para integrar una personalidad. Toda identidad se nutre de otras. Nos llamamos solidaridad en el presente. Nos llamamos esperanza en el futuro. Y detrás de nosotros, en el ilusorio pasado, vive, latente, cuanto no tuvo oportunidad de ser porque esperaba que tú nacieras para dársela" (734). Clearly, this differs from those modes of subjectivity offered by the epitomes of individualism evoked in the novel and, in terms of literary history, presents us with an interesting reversal of a Balzacian focus on the individual to represent all of society metonymically. Selfhood is here constructed with an emphasis on the realm of ideas rather than material reality; the youths incorporate humanity's desire for freedom from oppression, renewing itself after each defeat. Yet *Terra Nostra* also points to a danger potentially inherent in Ludovico's thinking, as its homogenizing tendency (embodied by the flagellant movement) is contrasted with Celestina's less unified but organic resistance in chapter 1. Although Fuentes's novel clearly incorporates many different strands of thought, the structure tends to emphasize the youths' emergence out

of material conditions while simultaneously positing a transcendent human need for freedom.

However, contrary to all these portents, the three youths are no revolutionaries and fail to incarnate that communal mode of being in a positive way. In fact, one is "adopted" by the Dama Loca as the reincarnation of the first Felipe and the second turns into a pleasure-hunting, apolitical, and antisocial Don Juan. Only the third offers his dream of America to Felipe, which, as Ludovico and Celestina hope, may represent a new utopian beginning pregnant with possibilities (which Felipe promptly rejects). It is significant that the narrative links the youths' failure to their lack of memory. All three are first introduced into the narrative as shipwrecked youths without an identity or memory of their past. In European literature, the narrative of the shipwreck that precedes the encounter with other lands has been a stock element since the times of classical Greece. In Fuentes's version, however, they land in their own land of origin, seemingly offered the possibility of a new start. However, as soon as they awake, they are immediately picked up by the Dama Loca and Isabel, who impose an identity and certain patterns of behavior on them. It is their lack of memory that makes them vulnerable to the two women's endeavors to shape them into their own respective fantasies (this reshaping takes on very literal dimensions, when the first youth has his face and body reshaped by Barbarica to transform him into the dead Señor). Trying to second-guess what the Dama Loca might expect from him, he turns himself into a grotesque parody of the royal heir.

Through the first youth, then, the novel offers yet another critique of the aristocratic feudal mode of selfhood and its anachronicity. The second youth is imprisoned by Isabel in her chamber as her lover; to her, he is no more than "un cuerpo cuerpo, sin palabras que lo prolonguen" (348). When he eventually stands up to her, this seeming emancipation is diminished by the fact that he is really only acting out her unvoiced desire to show to the world an image of the vices of men to liberate women from Eve's guilt. Don Juan, then, rather than being a character that epitomizes the autonomy of the individual is turned into a mere prolongation of Isabel's will. One could argue that this throws into doubt the very concept of a self-sufficient autonomous individuality, because, as the episodes of the shipwrecked youths demonstrate, every human being is born into what Bourdieu terms a *cultural field*.²² Don Juan is further deprived of his individuality, because many copies appear in the narrative, something that corresponds to a postmodernist, rather than early modern, approach to character. Deprived of memory, this continuation of the same personality lacks the positive potential of Celestina. One could argue that the proliferation of character, which challenges the notion of a stable self, approximates a postmodernist aesthetic that falls short of the reconstitution of an identity.

Yet Fuentes's Don Juan not only questions the possibility of an autonomous

22. Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002, 21–22) offer a useful and concise definition of this term: "A cultural field can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorize certain discourses and activities. But . . . [cultural fields . . . are made up not simply of institutions and rules, but of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices."

individualism but also formulates a more specific critique, as the model offered by Don Juan lacks historical memory and social responsibility. Like the original character, Don Juan defies all bourgeois or courtly moral codes and is reduced to a stereotypical mode of behavior that is self-centered and exploitative. The negative and antisocial implications of this mode of selfhood come most clearly to the fore when Don Juan travels to the New World, where he fathers many children, recalling the historical fact of the Spanish colonialists' rape of many indigenous women. Out of the positive questioning of the feudal order grew something different: "un individualismo feroz, divorciado de la sociedad pero dependiente del gesto externo, la actitud admirable, la apariencia suficiente para justificar, ante uno mismo y ante los demás, la ilusión de la singularidad emancipada. Una rebelión espiritual que termina por alimentar lo mismo que decía combatir: el honor, la jerarquía, el desplante del hidalgo, el solipsismo del místico y la esperanza de un déspota ilustrado" (912). The positive challenge to feudalism and its oppressive hierarchies has been usurped (a recurrent theme in the novel). Through Don Juan and the idiotic heir, the threat of revolt has been neutralized.

The character of Don Quixote is treated in a different manner and evokes an alternative tradition as a literary model. Don Quixote predicts that one of the youths will live his future, but this prediction is never fulfilled. Although the youth who encounters Don Quixote is sympathetic to him and partakes in his "folly," Don Quixote (a harmless version of Felipe and his anachronism) does not seem to offer a model for the three youths when they return from their dreams shortly before the comuneros revolution. Don Quixote reveals that he was himself Don Juan in his youth and turned into Don Quixote only as a consequence of his selfish actions that resulted in the death of his lover and her father. Instead of the eternal damnation that awaits the original Don Juan after his deadly encounter with the stone statue of his victim's father, Fuentes's Don Juan is condemned to being Don Quixote. In other words, the exhaustion of the character of Don Juan results in his transformation into a character that sees the surviving specters of the feudal order invisible to others. Specters of feudalism are, of course, omnipresent in the novel as a whole and even reappear in different shapes in the chapter that narrates the Mexican future, thus suggesting the survival of oppressive structures into the present.

However, one also needs to look beyond a literal reappearance of Don Quixote. As has been noted, the supposed author of the book represented within the novel itself (or at least one of them) is the chronicler (who is Cervantes: he has written two books, "la crónica del caballero de la triste figura [. . .] y la crónica de los últimos años de nuestro soberano" [892]). In other words, Cervantes's vision is transposed onto the book as a whole, of which the appearances of Don Quixote function as reminders. Yet whereas in *Don Quixote*, an aesthetic of the quotidian replaces the miraculous that exists only in Don Quixote's head (Resina 2006), thus prefiguring the rise of realism in the nineteenth century, *Terra Nostra* challenges realism's certainties by opposing an aesthetic of magic realism—or perhaps an archetypal realism—that serves as an expression and critique of the unevenness produced by capitalism. As such, one might argue that it is qualitatively different from a postmodernist aesthetic despite bearing some of its traits. His rejection

of realism does not translate into antirealism but rather taps into a Cervantean ante-realism, into a resurrection of an alternative tradition “dentro de la modernidad que valora la duda, la ambigüedad el pluralismo de los valores” (Van Delden 2002, 84).

To conclude, I want to return to my opening point that, overall, the evaluation offered collectively by a large number of critics has been somewhat skewed. As De la Campa (1999) has pointed out, poststructuralism and deconstruction have dominated Latin Americanism as a field since its institutionalization in North America. As a consequence, even though the individual articles are often excellent, they overall emphasize predominantly one element of a complex, admittedly contradictory, and therefore richer novel. Articles that have gone the other direction—such as Becky Boling’s (1984) article on Marxism and positivism in *Terra Nostra*—have often been met with silence, as if they constituted a dead end. Although Fuentes’s oeuvre is complex and not always easy to categorize—at times he clearly does privilege words, discourse, and myth over material conditions—let us here recall that he is also the author of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and, to take a later example, *La frontera de cristal* (1996), in which we clearly find a strong emphasis on class and global capitalism. There is thus a clear shift in Fuentes’s aesthetics from *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (written by a young supporter of communism at a time when two-thirds of the globe was nominally communist) to *Terra Nostra* (published more than a decade later, when Cuban communism no longer enjoyed the unremitting support of all Latin American intellectuals). The former was typical of its times in its openly Marxist politics; its exploration of the penetration of U.S. capital at the expense of social justice for the lower classes; the continued legacy of imperialism; and the focus on the dialectic between the universal and the particular, on class struggles, and on the necessity of political democracy as a basis for social progress.

Yet the regional and global political context had clearly changed by the 1970s with the increasing restraints on intellectual liberty in Cuba that escalated in the Padilla affair in 1971, the proliferation of military dictatorships in the Americas, of repression, torture, disappearances of political opponents, and widespread political corruption. In Mexico, democracy had suffered a severe blow with the Tlatelolco massacre of October 1968 and the Corpus Christi massacre of June 1971. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that *Terra Nostra* is much more baroque, more concerned with transcendent realms, and less explicit about politics. Yet the Marxist narrative of class struggle refuses to disappear and, I would argue, actually continues to function as the (only partially visible) master narrative that subsumes and enables the moments of transcendence and the book’s mythic recurrences. It is thus in a sense a work that beautifully intuits and condenses a turning point in global history, when metanarratives (and more specifically, Marxism) were driven underground—or debunked, depending on the perspective. Given that the poststructuralist consensus seems to have started to come under attack in recent years, perhaps it is time to reopen the door to examining Fuentes’s work in the light of his clear and enduring concern with the material basis of injustices.

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