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TOWARDS ZONA SAGRADA

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Z*ona sagrada*, written by Carlos Fuentes after the main bulk of *Cambio de piel*, with which it has much in common, but before its conclusion, is a dizzying theatre of representation. A realist narration of life in Mexico in the fifties and sixties¹ and the relationship between Guillermo and his actress mother Claudia Nervo, readily identifiable as María Félix, is combined, overlaid, and in the third part replaced, by a far less traditional discourse. This other writing embodies the new sensibility and attitudes towards meaning and representation emerging in the sixties, and inseparable from cinema and structural anthropology.² From at least the time of *Las buenas conciencias* the struggle for language in Fuentes's work (issues of originality, authenticity, and influence) has been played out within the family in the oedipal manoeuvrings of the Freudian «Family Romance». Whereas Jaime Ceballos in the earlier novel sought an absolute, pristine language, «otro idioma que no sólo refleje sino que pueda transformar la realidad»³, Guillermo, inseparably actor and writer, demented victim and tyrannical director of *Zona sagrada*, has a different view of the novel: «Y un libro no nos remite a un significado: un libro es. Un libro no se hace para que nos reconozcamos en él.»⁴ The anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, the articles of Susan Sontag on cinema, camp and interpretation, and parallel essays by Alain Robbe-Grillet are essential in grasping the new direction in Fuentes's work.

Non-literary forms of representation jostle rather frantically throughout the text commenting on themselves, each other, and the story, which is in turn a kaleidoscopic metaphor for its own status within signification. Paintings, myriad versions of the devouring Claudia Nervo, photographs of Mito's cultural heroes and major contributors to the novel's intertextuality such as Charles Baudelaire,⁵ pin-ups and religious images, the paintings of

Signorelli as «gestador solitario» (164, one of the many in the novel), the delirious montages of Giancarlo facing the fading Renaissance frescoes clammer from every wall. Myth, ritual and game, equated and opposed⁶ — Claudia has «un pie en el rito y otro en el juego» (46)— arc omnipresent: from the football matches in Mexico and Positano, to Mito's funeral rites for the young birds in Chapala, the use of dolls, effigies and sweaters in complex magical chains, and the version and counterversion in conversation and cinematic performance of classical myths, especially that of the *Odyssey*. The return of Ulysses to Ithaca in Homer's version becomes a cipher of traditional narrative order and closure. Cinema is similarly present in different ways: Claudia is a movie star, and we see her son Mito obsessively watch sequences from her movies and comment on them, caught in a labyrinthine game of mirrors between his own narcissism and the many projections of his mother: in her films, in her protégée Bela, in images of the French actress Sarah Bernhardt and in the many fierce roles associated with her such as Salomé. These mirrorings Mito perhaps uses to avoid a dangerous approximation to a real woman who may lie behind the reflections. Towards the end of the novel the mythical and the cinematic come together when a demented von Stroheim⁷ directs Claudia and Giancarlo in a grotesque performance of the murder of Ulysses at the hands of his son Telegonus, a performance which is at the same time part of the plot of the novel.

Zona sagrada was partly written and set in Italy, and Federico Fellini is a fertile presence in the novel. The epigraph form *Giulietta degli spiriti*, «Ma chi non ha bisogno della Mamma» (11), a dismissive reply by a detective to a trite Freudian statement by a psychologist in the film, is little more than a homage, and an obviously overdetermined and trivializing reference to the theme of incest. The ritualistic and crowd scenes in the novel seem to derive their surreal energy and oneiric absurdity from Fellini. The scene in Giancarlo's castle Madonna dei Monti, with its chilling chiaroscuro of light and sentiment and its description of the rotting frescoes could well be inspired by the drunken rituals in the party in the «vecchia villa» in *La dolce vita*, where Marcello strikes a match to illuminate a gallery of female portraits, and Maddalena imitates these likenesses. Important too is the example of the disconcerting play in Fellini's films, especially *Otto e mezzo*, between the supposed portrayal of real life and the performance and reworking of that life in cinema, seen both from outside on the set and in the semi-finished form of clips and trials. This technique, facilitated by the fact that Claudia is an actress is effectively translated into the novel. Non-realistic scenes, such as the ritual murder, the transformation of Mito into a dog, presumably by Claudia-Circe, or his pursuit as an animal or blindman through the labyrinth-womb of the Paris metro, which in a more conventional novel would be naturalized and subordinated to psychological realism by being explained as nightmare, hallucination, metaphor, etc., are here given

the same status as other narrative elements. In a nice comment on Fellini's inversion of the priorities of role and actor, Fuentes has «un bandolero italiano vestido como Marcello Mastroianni» (169).

Another reference to Fellini seems to show Fuentes's recognition of the role of film in breaking down the barrier between popular and high art: «schifoso Fellini que convierte a Boticelli en Madrake el Mago» (28). In *Zona sagrada*, Fuentes has not written something which, in the style of Puig's *Boquitas pintadas* or *El beso de la mujer araña*, can be read as either high or low art. What he often does is to use cultured references in the style of pop art icon or catchword, with the effect of divesting them of any depth of resonance as *mise en abyme* or key to intertextual readings. Claudia's court of starlets, or Erynnnes, for example, are given mythologically significant names in a pointedly unsignifying fashion, e.g. Ifigenia, Hermione. Reference to their fashion accessories are given the same status by contiguity with quotations from Nerval's «Artémis» and Baudelaire's «Hymne à la beauté»: «las largas medias iluminadas por rombos color naranja: ¿eres la primera o la última? ... tus brazos desnudos, Ute, bronceados, ¿vienes del cielo profundo o descendes del absimo, belleza?» (119). Such signifiers come close to being pure surface. Some critics have questioned Fuentes's attempt to translate cinematographic technique into the novel, pointing out the clear difference between the linguistic sign and the filmic image, which signifies little outside itself.⁸ This is clearly the case, as Fuentes is aware, and the momentary silencing of connotation achieved is in itself a signifying gesture, pregnant with intent. Contiguity of high and low sometimes gives way to replacement in the same space: Mito's photograph of Baudelaire by Nadar is replaced in its frame by one of Elvis Presley, while his recording of *Rigoletto* is forcefully replaced in the turntable by the bolero «Luna que se quiebra», in the same way that the mythically connoted love between Claudia and her symbolic son Giancarlo is replaced by the altogether coarser coupling of Mito's maid Gudelia and Jesús.

Conceptual oppositions such as that between low and high art are often given a spacial and visual expression in the novel, in a way which Mito for one associates with the cinema: «Claudia pasa por la pantalla y no hay, para mí, diferencia entre el espacio y el pensamiento» (157). In *Madonna dei Monti*, for example, the renaissance frescoes of decaying angels are already dual, suggesting beginning and end: «una forma final ... de feto y cadáver, de útero y tumba» (98). These frescoes face the montage of Giancarlo which combines rotting pigs' head with condoms and the images of «las vampirasas mudas» such as Francesca Bertini (99). This combination of bits and pieces from a pre-existing signifying code into a new configuration is an instance of the *bricolage* given great prominence at the time in Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée sauvage*.⁹ The «frescos gemelos» (101) suggest both the twinning of Giancarlo and Guillermo and are an eloquent embodiment of the struggle

in the novel between «el arte que heredaste y el arte que creaste» (103), traditional art with a great sense of temporal depth and an art of instant combination which abolishes temporality, the space of the sacred and that of the profane. In *Cumpleaños*, the palace of Capodimonti and that of Diocletian in Split facing each other across the Adriatic embody in more specifically architectural terms a similar dichotomy between opposing notions of meaning: theocentric, classical univocality against palimpsest, layering and combination: «El Palacio de Diocleciano en Spalato es la moderna ciudad dalmática de Split: los corredores, allí, son las calles; las plazas públicas, los patios; las basílicas imperiales, los templos comunes; las cocinas del monarca, las fondas del pueblo.»⁹ Capodimonti, on the other hand, is an «inmenso cubo de piedra cuyas cámaras circulares desembocan, indefectiblemente, en un patio solitario, rodeado de ochos murallas sin ventanas. Pero desde allí, situado en el centro del patio desnudo, sí se observa la eternidad mutante de los cielos» (C 25). The house in which most of *Cumpleaños* takes place tantalizingly combines elements of both spaces, as it does dogma and heresy, the individual author and the Borgesian rewriter. *Zona sagrada* is also split between two rival zones, ambiguously sacred and profane: Claudia's house and that of her son Mito. Just as Claudia herself is associated with Immaculate Conception and self-fecundation, the light in her zone is timeless, pure origin, a denial of development: «esa luz ... no llega a esta estancia con el signo evolutivo que queremos concederle a todas las cosas vivas. ... Esta luz se refracta desde un cuarzo incandescente, original y sin tactos o visiones anteriores a él» (117). In comparison with the dissolving mineral light of Claudia's house, that of Mito is vegetable and animal, it has grown, has a history, has developed from previous models: «... mi naturaleza. Ha crecido como una selva; ... lo que he logrado a partir de ti, de una vieja fotografía del apartamento de Sarah Bernhardt, de un viejo volumen de la Salomé ilustrada por Beadsley; mi continuidad está aquí» (30). I suspect that the complexity of such spatial games, at which we have arrived from the example of Fellini's cinema, is a complexity specific to literature, and to the novel as devourer of foreign discourses.¹¹

It seems to be the intent of *Zona sagrada* to dissolve the oppositions in space, signification and temporality sketched out above, many of which seem to respond to the axis surface/depth. In a novel like *Zona sagrada* of shifting locations and identities, no item comes fixedly to embody these oppositions, which constantly shift, relocate, dissolve. Elements such as the songs of the Beatles and the Sirens change meaning almost within one sentence. In the first few pages, for example, the Sirens are presented as «una sola imagen», as «risk» — «te arriesgas», as «esos seres que quisieran romper el orden natural» of epic resolution, and associated with Giancarlo against Mito, who is «distráido por la belleza, el juego, la vida». «Estás

perdido en la imagen única de las islas; yo, distraído con todos los accidentes de la playa» (6). Almost immediately, however, they come to represent exhaustion and renunciation: «el canto de las sirenas que sólo es escuchado por quienes ya no viajan, ya no se esfuerzan.» With the Beatles, there is a similar slip in appreciation: «el nuevo tacto», «el sonido nuevo» quickly becomes «la melancolía de un reposo biengañado, la bella fatiga», only to end up signifying «ese apetito satisfecho de ... regüeldo y esperma» (118). As we shall see later, the superimposition of all the versions of a myth, in which any one reading is partial and meaningless, is taken from the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss. To the «official», Homeric version of Ulysses's encounter with the Sirens Fuentes adds the version of Kafka in «The Silence of the Sirens» and that of Julio Torri in «A Circe» in which the Sirens did not sing: «Las sirenas, esa vez, sólo esa vez, no cantaron» (6).¹² Later Giancarlo says that Ulysses «escucha el canto de las sirenas y sucumbe ... se quedó en las islas» (183).

Susan Sontag, with the keenest of antennae for the new sensibility of the sixties, brought out the revindication of surface as a vital trend in film, the *nouveau roman*, and «camp». In the context especially of the cinema, the dyad face-mask, face-soul is reversed or dissolved: «Our manner of appearing is our manner of being. The mask is the face» (18). In «Godard's *Vivre sa vie*», she quotes the phrase from his *Le Petit Soldat*, which Fuentes use as epigraph to his chapter «Cinta de plata» (152): «To photograph a face is to photograph the soul behind it. Photography is truth. And the cinema is the truth twenty four times a second» (201). She takes the lesson of *Vivre sa vie* to be «that freedom has no psychological interior» (205). Whereas Mito mostly subscribes to this view of film and prefers his mother Claudia on celluloid almost to the real thing, rather like in Cortázar's «Queremos tanto a Glenda», he sometimes takes the opposite position: «Puedo mostrar tu alma última: la que no te han robado las cámaras» (167). In this he comes closer to his double Giancarlo, who listens in the Sirens to «la parte escondida de la naturaleza» (5). Interpretation for Sontag was «reactionary, stifling, poisoning our sensibilities»; it makes art tame and manageable, and is seen as a «revenge of the intellect upon the world». The difficulty of *Zona sagrada* is designed to make interpretation of the novel virtually impossible. Sontag heads her seminal essay with a quotation from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*¹³, which Fuentes quotes twice in *Zona sagrada* (90, 157): «[It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.] The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.»

Oscar Wilde seems to be an important model for Guillermo's aestheticism: Beardsley's illustration of his *Salomé* is yet another version of his mother, while Giancarlo seems to seduce Guillermo in Switzerland by changing his reading habits in much the same way as Lord Henry does to Dorian by sending him what is probably a volume by Huysmans', *À Rebours*

or *Là Bas* (which Fuentes quotes in an epigraph). Giancarlo in a bookshop takes Mito's hand from the copy of *Great Expectations*, one of the models of *Las buenas conciencias*, which he was about to buy, and leads his hand to the decadent satanism of the «lycanthrope» Pétrus Borel and to François Villon, whose «Ballade des dames du temps jadis» tells of one of yesteryear's beautiful queens, «neiges d'antan», Marguerite de Bourgogne who murdered her lover of one night Buriden and threw him into the Seine. Guillermo insists on casting Claudia and her co-star the «galán» in this role of Buridán (25). Dickens, and emblematically *The Cricket on the Hearth*,¹⁴ seems to represent in *Zona sagrada* literature as a mask of the darker truths. Sontag sees Wilde «between the old-style dandy and an anticipation of the democratic esprit of camp», which she memorably defines in a reformulation of Walter Benjamin's essay title: «Dandyism in the Age of Mass Culture» (289). Camp, like other phenomena studied by Sontag, denies depth: «the lens of camp, which blocks out content» (281) and is absolutely incompatible with the humanism of the «tragic spirit». Fuentes's text in itself is far too self-conscious and aggressive to be camp, except perhaps in its simultaneous espousal of the mass culture and the erudite, which «transcends the nausea of the replica» (289). The taste of Guillermo for Art Nouveau Decoration, on the other hand, is certainly camp. Indeed the decoration of his «encantada gruta» (30-1) seems to have sprung to some extent from Sontag's check-list of camp objects and taste: Tiffany lamps, Guimard, Aubrey Beardsley, Ronald Firbank, «lighting fixtures in the form of flowering plants, the living room which is really a grotto» (279). Other elements in his room come from that of the proto-dandy Des Esseintes. The latter's celebrated description in *A rebours* of the Salomé by Gustave Moreau in his room and Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*¹⁵, is superimposed intertextually on Mito's fixation on Beardsley's Salomé,¹⁶ replicating, again, Lévi-Strauss's recording of myth as the sum of all its versions.

Fuentes through Mito, in one of the uncharacteristic programmatic statements in the novel, which help the reader, but go against its own spirit somehow, is clear that his loving descriptions of the sinuous surfaces of his room is an aggressive gesture against traditional spiritual depth: «describir y redescibir como la única burla que nos queda: los inventarios, los catálogos son la ironía final con la que se puede contestar a todas las historias gastadas, a todos los personajes vencidos, a todos los significados vacíos. Los objetos, que son el reino de las apariencias, se vengan del mundo impalpable, espiritual, que antes nos sojuzgó» (67-8). M i t o s ' s other model dandy is Baudelaire, a line from whose «Sed non satiata» he uses as an epigraph, and whom he quotes throughout. From Baudelaire's dandy he takes the ideal of appearance and impassivity: «Viviré y dormiré, Baudelaire, frente al espejo» (93).¹⁷ Clothes and make-up are stressed, in the Baudelaire he quotes, over nudity: «La mujer y su ropa, una totalidad

indivisible» (133)¹⁸; the «oeil maquillé» is the «fenêtre ouverte sur l'infini»¹⁹ («las ventanas que dan sobre el infinito» 107). It is important to note, however, that in Baudelaire, this love of artifice and surface, is accompanied by an obsession with and a horror of the bestial, the natural, woman as nature: «La femme est *naturelle*, c'est-à-dire abominable».²⁰ Love is seen as penetration, opening, wounding: «Fue Baudelaire quien comparó el acto de amor con una tortura o con una intervención quirúrgica» (26).²¹ It is in this spirit that for once Mito desires to break out of the surface, the safe aestheticizing gaze with which he defends himself from both his mother and her projection Bela, from mirrors, behind a car windscreen, in front of a movie projector, in his reflection in the Gucci shopwindow in Rome, and the promise which comes with unfulfilment. In an extraordinarily violent passage, his vision suddenly lurches beyond the «piel mentirosa»: «perfume, brillo en movimiento, piel como papel de seda, mujeres pálidas ahogadas en el satán: tubo de excrecencias, mucosas blandas, pulmones teñidos de tabaco ... quisiera amarlas desolladas, como realmente son, sin la piel mentirosa, sin el perfume volátil, pura organización de las corrupciones, depósitos de semen inútil. Caguen, putas» (70).²²

It may be useful to link this passage in which another sort of «piel mentirosa», literature, cannot for once defend Mito from the animality which he loathes, but constantly toys with in dogs, baby birds, ants, dogs, spiders. From his bed he suddenly senses the hostile presence of the animal: «Que otras presencias husmean y palpitan en la oscuridad ... sólo su aura. Pero es olor de sangre seca y metálica. De cicatrices que no se cierran. De pelambre húmeda y erizada. De anos rojos» (136). He attempts to exorcize that presence through conjuring up fiction, his collection of decadent and camp books, the fictions perhaps of *A Cricket on the Hearth*: «imagino los libros de la misma cabecera, los libros inevitables, *Les caves du Vatican*, *À Rebours*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Quest for Corvo* [AJA Simons], *Cardinal Pirelli* [Ronald Firbank], como si su propia existencia ficticia pudiese disipar la de la otra ficción, inmediata: mediatizarla. Es inútil» (136). As he puts his hand out, he touches «la carne húmeda, los belfos espumosos» (137). In a similar vein, though Claudia embodies image and style for Mito, he is also aware that she herself has a seemingly animal dimension beyond the shiny surface. Whereas her lovers have invented her fictional nature, «inventar en defensa propia tu fábula», she devours and castrates because she will not accept any fiction: «mi madre devora porque no admite la ilusión y castra porque su vida es más violenta que tus lentos sueños» (26).

As Sontag suggests, perhaps the most radical champion of the surface against depth, humanism and the «tyrannie des significations»²³ in the arts of the sixties was Alain Robbe-Grillet, in films like *La Dernière Année à Marienbad* with Resnais, his now virtually unreadable novels, and,

importantly, his essays, which Fuentes seems to echo in *Zona sagrada*. For Robbe-Grillet film should serve as an example for literature. There, things are not just a meaningful prop in a world of humans, but physically present and visible in their own right for the first time: «S'il arrive encore aux choses de servir un instant de support aux passions humaines, ce ne sera que temporairement, et elles n'accepteront la tyrannie des significations qu'en apparence —comme par dérision— pour mieux montrer à quel point elles restent étrangères aux hommes» (RG 24). As literature follows the example of film in refusing anthropomorphism, «la surface des choses a cessé d'être le masque de leur coeur» (RG 27), and the novel achieves «la destitution des vieux mythes de la profondeur» (RG 26). Mito, in his description of his room, far more sensuous than anything in Robbe-Grillet, echoes the philosophy of the Frenchman: «la sala existe para ser descrita, no vivida ... el mundo externo debe vengarse de esa negación de años, de esa pretendida profundidad psicológica que se complace en negar la única realidad, la de las superficies» (116).

Robbe-Grillet's rhetoric is explicitly anti-humanist. Notions such as nature, humanism, tragedy (the title of a seminal essay) and even the absurd, much in vogue at the time, serve the «récupérer» anything which is different from man, bring it back into the «réalité profonde» and «unité cachée» of a humanized world. If reality breaks out of the grid imposed by language, and breaks the lens, the notion of the absurd is there «qui absorbera cet encombrant résidu» (RG 21). The notion of tragedy is similarly seen as the «bénédiction du mal», «Car la tragédie ne comporte ni vraie acceptation, ni refus véritable. Elle est la sublimation d'une différence» (RG 67). While the notion of the tragic is explicitly, though not univocally important in *Cambio de piel*, a whole strand of *Zona sagrada* clearly denies it. The gaze in *Zona sagrada* is antihumanist insofar as it dehumanizes to the point of turning humans into an object among objects, though admittedly the process has more of witchcraft and magic about it than the bracketing out of meaning attempted by Robbe-Grillet. Guillermo wishes, for example, to trap his mother in his room and «entonces, momia de polvo, podré contemplarla entre los demás objetos» (92), and enjoys in the same room, «sentirme un objeto más» (30).

At another point, Mito's antihumanism seems to echo that of the structuralism of the period in the wider sense: «Se puede dejar al hombre y abrirse a un nuevo conocimiento. Conocer al hombre puede ser, dentro de muy poco tiempo, sólo una intención curiosa y envejecida» (165).²⁴ In this he coincides with the Foucault of *Les Mots et les choses*: «L'homme est une invention dont l'archéologie de notre savoir montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine.»²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss in his answer to criticisms of Sartre wrote in *The Savage Mind*: «So I accept the characterization of aesthete in so far as I believe the ultimate goal of human

sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man» (247). Octavio Paz, in an essay on Lévi-Strauss published in the same year as *Zona sagrada* and quoted by Fuentes in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* of 1969, puts his ideas in an altogether more dramatic form: «La naturaleza humana, ya que no es una esencia ni una *idea*, es un concierto, una *ratio*, una *proporción*. / En un mundo de símbolos, ¿qué simbolizan los símbolos? No al hombre, pues, si no hay sujeto, el hombre no es el ser significado ni el ser significante. Es hombre es, apenas, un momento en el mensaje que la naturaleza emite y recibe». ²⁶

There are two rival forms of anti-humanism in *Zona sagrada*. One is akin to the accumulation of versions of a myth and the multi-directional readings of Lévi Strauss, the versions of the myth of Ulysses, the multiple identifications of Claudia, the delirious metonymic chains which span continents, centuries and species, and which dissolve any identity: «Disuélvete, Claudia linda, ... disuélvete en todos los espejos de mi soledad» (156). The other is the discovery or fear, already alluded to, that beyond these mirrors there is a deep but animal or monstrous reality. As Mito towards the end of the novel follows Claudia and Giancarlo through the Garden of Monsters in the Orsini castle at Bomarzo near Rome, the large stone statues of monstrous forms are seen as announcements of a new mode of being: «Las criaturas de Bomarzo, que aún no son nada, son, a pesar de todo, un anuncio, borroso, imperfecto, fatigado, de las otras realidades que nos esperan» (165).

The monstrous and the human, surface and depth, development against transfiguration are just a few of the many oppositions and contradictions in the novel. Perhaps the most basic of these is birth and death, which persistently haunts the text: «los fetos y los cadáveres» (6, 98) are constant companions. Mito wanders his house obsessed with the extremes of «Belén y Gólgota, [en] los claustros desnudos del principio y del fin» (41); Signorelli's figures in the murals of Creation and Apocalypse «dan la espalda al antiguo temor de nacer y morir» (164). Claude Lévi-Strauss's description of the role of myth may help to see how Fuentes's text mediates these contradictions. For the anthropologist «l'objet du mythe est de fournir un modèle logique pour résoudre une contradiction» ²⁷; «C'est une sorte d'outil logique, destiné à opérer une médiation entre la vie et la mort» (LS 243). As the opposition is real and actually irreconcilable, new versions of the myth are constantly generated in a spiral movement until the point of exhaustion.

Lévi-Strauss's thought on the myth provides the novelist with powerful strategies against authority, originality, influence, anteriority. A myth is seen as the sum of all its versions, none of which is seen as more primitive or authentic than another. Freud's version of the Oedipus myth takes its place alongside that of Sophocles: «La méthode nous débarrasse donc d'une

difficulté qui a constitué jusqu'à présent un des principaux obstacles au progrès des études mythologiques, à savoir, la recherche de la version authentique ou primitive. Nous proposons, au contraire, de définir chaque mythe par l'ensemble de toutes ses versions. ... On n'hésitera donc pas à ranger Freud, après Sophocle, au nombre de nos sources du mythe d'Oedipe. Leurs versions méritent le même crédit que d'autres, plus anciennes et, en apparence, plus 'authentiques'». (LS 240)

The urge to break with the origin, to become one's own source can be detected in much of Fuentes's work. The dizzying accumulation of myth on myth in the novel contributes to the breaking of any notion of origin or anteriority: the versions of the Sirens and of Salomé for example. The master myth, which Fuentes takes as the symbol of narrative closure and at the same time of paternal authority is that of Ulysses, his escape from the transformations and dangers of Circe, his return to the faithful Penelope and his endless repetition of his story to his bored family. This story is endlessly fragmented and repeated throughout *Zona sagrada*, and reflected more or less grotesquely in most of the characters: Guillermo's father was a travelling salesman who returned home only to be abandoned by Claudia-Penelope; Giancarlo's father was a war hero who did not return home, but stayed with his Circe: «El viejo ha de haber aprovechado la guerra para quedarse con una puta en Trópolis y salvarse para siempre de la tradición, la familia, mi devotísima madre, un palacio destartado» (105). Claudia takes the roles of Circe, Penelope, Hermes, even Ulysses, often simultaneously. The most significant version is probably given in the ritual filmed in Italy, where in an alternative version to Homer's, given in Graves *Greek Myths* and elsewhere, Telegonus turns Oedipus, slaughters Ulysses and marries Penelope. His half brother Telemachus marries Circe.²⁸

Linked to the Oedipal murder, in its denial of paternity, genealogy, succession, is the obsessive presence of birth and especially self-fecundation and immaculate conception. Claudia is insistently linked with immaculate conception: she brings Guillermo out of the house-womb in «la época de los robachicos, tan puntual como la época de la Purísima Concepción» (18), while the connotations are more of witchcraft when Mito describes her voice as a «concepción solitaria», adding that she is able to «concebirme con su voz» (20). Michelet in *La Sorcière* talks of the witch's «conception solitaire», whereby she conceives the devil.²⁹ The mouse, often associated with the demonic, which Claudia keeps in a glass container may be linked to this complex.³⁰ Hermione gives a luridly mythological version of Claudia's self-fecundation: «Se fecundó a sí misma para no estar sola. Se fornicó con el falo del viento, la perra madre, y parió a la serpiente y con la serpiente se dedicó a gozar y la serpiente creyó ser el verdadero creador pero ella ... le hundió el cráneo con una patada ... y lo exiló a las negras cavernas del negro mundo» (173). This complex is clearly linked to a denial of the

past, of development and to the affirmation of an absolute present. The already delirious Mito, at the beginning of the third part, has similar thoughts: «El primer hombre, el verdadero, el todopoderoso, el que pudo concebirse a sí mismo, por fuerza debió ser andrógino, fecundarse, parir a su primer hijo. No hay otra realidad de la génesis» (161).

Close to the androgyne is the notion of conceiving oneself from one's mother, becoming one's own father or perhaps the father of one's double. Something of this seems to be involved in a series of extraordinary sequences, involving Mito and Claudia in various chains of displacement. Two involve Mito's maid Gudelia and her lover Jesús, a parodic version of Claudia (further suggested by the similarity of the names Claudia and Gudelia) and Mito (often associated with Jesus Christ).³¹ In an appropriation skilfully analyzed by Severo Sarduy,³² Mito borrows a sweater from Claudia which in its perfume brings Claudia's phantasmal presence, and gives it to Gudelia who passes it on to her coarse lover Jesús, who stains it on his bicycle delivery round, and delights Mito, who imagines him making love to Gudelia while wearing it with his prominent belly protruding from under it. It is curiously Jesús who receives Claudia's presence here, rather than Gudelia, but Mito is certainly a chain in this bizarre network. When Mito becomes the canine witness of Gudelia and Jesús's lovemaking in his flat (replicating that of Claudia and Giancarlo), he is again deeply implicated. When he sees the photograph of Sarah Bernhardt (another avatar of Claudia), now trampled on the floor, with the dog at her feet, he addresses the dog as Baudelaire (now replaced in his frame by Elvis Presley) did his reader: «Mon semblable, mon frère» (189). Gudelia attempting a reconciliation with her lover uses the term «chucho», diminutive of Jesús and a slang word for dog, to effect an instantaneous identification of the two men: «Ay Chucho, si ya sabes que soy tu vieja».

More complex and more explicit is the Christmas day sequence in *Madonna dei Monti*. Mito's rediscovers his ideal vision of Claudia, as «la figura ... querida, la de la silueta de reloj de arena» (91) in the old Italian posters of actress like Francesca Bertini: «las fotografías acartonadas de mujeres con figura de reloj de arena» (99). What could be read as a scene of sodomy between Giancarlo and Mito follows: «Tu mano acaricia mi hombro, detrás de ti» (99). Immediately Mito is seen to have slept, sexually, with a female or male doll: «La muñeca —o el muñeco— de trapo de color de rosa seguía durmiendo, despatarrado, junto a mí» (100). As he wakes, where he would have expected an «estampa religiosa» he finds a poster of Francesca Bertini in a leopard skin, whom he venerates as the Virgin Mary: «Dios te salve Francesca, llena eres de gracia: me hiqué en la cama y uní las manos cerca de la piel de leopardo que cubría el cuerpo de la Bertini.» As he mentions her virgin birth, Claudia-Francesca-Mary is again associated with Giancarlo: «Y bendito sea el fruto de tu vientre... / Repetiste tu nombre

desde el marco de piedra de la puerta» (100). As the sequence continues, Giancarlo, faun-like in a Napolconic tunic, dances with and seems to penetrate a pregnant, overstuffed doll («esas muñecas preñadas» [102]).³³ And yet it is Giancarlo who gives birth: «Te alejaste de la muñeca, rodaste, permaneciste boca arriba, con las piernas abiertas, arqueado, apoyado en los codos. Y el parto —nunca sabré si pude decirlo era ...» (103). The maze of reflected penetration, pregnancy and birth between Claudia-Francesca-Mary, Mito, Giancarlo, and the masculine and feminine dolls is almost impenetrable.

The scene is similar to that in *Cambio de piel*, when la Pálida gives birth to a porcelain Infant Jesus,³⁴ but perhaps even closer to *Aura* where Felipe, having had his feet washed like Christ by Mary Magdalene, under the watch of a dark crucifix, makes love to Aura, with arms spread like the Crucified. The next day, he realizes that «la concepción estéril de la noche pasada engendró tu propio doble».³⁵ What was born in Italy to Mito-Giancarlo in *Zona sagrada* is clearly related: the «ser que regresa cada vez que lo olvidan, del ser que antes ha muerto, y morirá siempre, de tarde en tarde, para no parecer un monstruo» (103). Mito through Claudia-Francesca-Mary-Giancarlo has engendered his own double, himself as double in Guillermo-Giancarlo. This self-genesis symbolically effects what the text throughout has sought: the liberation from the fixed signification of the paternal order, dependency, and depth.

And yet, though Mito and the text gain a sort of autonomy, the reference to the monstrous again suggests the other side of the surface, the animal depth. Again Lévi Strauss may provide a key to understanding the function of the duality engendered by Mito, his forming a pair of twins with Giancarlo: Romulus and Remus, Castor and Pollux, Cain and Abel, Telemachus and Telegonus and most insistently, Apollo and Dionysus: «Hermanos nacidos de una misma madre. Gemelos, Guglielmo: Apolo dios del sol y su cuate antagonista, Dionisos, el conductor de almas» (107). For Lévi-Strauss the pair of twins, dual gods and other family pairings form an essential function in the mediation between the poles of the contradiction which it is the role of the myth to resolve.³⁶ The duality engendered by Mito reflects that which fatally splits Claudia, in turn the repository of the oppositions which we have discussed as shaping the novel: Claudia as two-dimensional screen icon, self-made creation living in a perpetual present, and as a woman with the traumatic history of humiliation and struggle which she screams out behind a closed door and which Mito initially refuses to acknowledge and accept: «Renuncié al conocimiento de mi madre. No quise admitir lo que sabía» (156). But Mito comes to desire to reveal the soul behind the surface which he has been at pains to deny elsewhere: «Puedo mostrar tu alma última, la que no te han robado las cámaras» (167). The missing or hidden dimension of Claudia is expressed in characteristically

hyperbolic mythical language, as an amalgam of Beauty and the Beast and the Creator and Lucifer: «la Bella se ofrece y reta al príncipe a descubrir a la Bestia, a la hermosura corrupta, al cadáver exquisito que se esconde en ella: al monstruo manchado y obsceno que, a su vez contiene la segura resurrección de la Bella ... no hay acto de creación sin un hermoso ángel caído que refleje la belleza perdida de mi madre cuando ella se complete en la imagen de la muerte y asuma el horror probable» (154).

Giancarlo-Guillermo's giving birth to himself as the «ser que ... morirá siempre ... para no parecer un monstruo» is a dramatization of this process. The relation between the two reflects and mediates the duality in Claudia. Mito in an increasingly demented fashion takes on the responsibility of «saving» Claudia: «Yo soy, yo seré siempre, el ángel caído de tu creación» (156). As the beautiful Giancarlo becomes Claudia's lover, Mito is sadistically chased by him through the original labyrinths of the Paris metro network and takes on more and more animal, viscous, monstrous attributes: «el terror físico de sentirme menos que un animal conocido y catalogado: el otro ser, nonato, de los laberintos originales» (162). His ultimate self-sacrifice for his mother, or his ultimate punishment at her hands as Circe, is literally to become the «bestia» as he turns into a dog, replacing his mastiff Faraón.

NOTES

1 Andrés Avellaneda, in «Mito y negación de la historia en *Zona sagrada* de Carlos Fuentes» (*Cuadernos Americanos*, 175:2, 1971), p. 243, establishes the chronology of the novel.

2 In *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México, Joaquín Mortiz: 1980) p. 20, he writes that «la nueva novela se acerca cada vez más a la poesía y a la antropología».

3 *Las buenas conciencias* (México: FCE, 1972), p. 119. Jonathan Tittler, in his article «Cambio de zona/Piel sagrada: Transfiguration in Carlos Fuentes», in *World Literature Today*, 57:4, 1983, pp. 585-90, also notes this phrase. See my article «Family Tradition and the Individual Talent in Carlos Fuentes' *Las buenas conciencias*», in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, LXII, 1994, pp. 359-380.

4 *Zona sagrada* (México: Siglo XXI, 1976), p. 156. Page references to this edition will be given in the text in parentheses. See also the following phrase from Susan Sontag's «On Style» in her *Against Interpretation* (London: André Deutsch, 1987), p. 21: «Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing not on the world but in the world.»

5 Some of the quotations are attributed, such as «Ausente, podría repetir para ella las palabras de Baudelaire, la tontería, la bêtise [sic], es siempre la conservación de la belleza» (92). The phrase comes from «Choix de maximes consolantes sur l'amour», *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1980), p. 315. Future references to Baudelaire will be to this edition. Andrés Avellaneda, pp. 247-8, mentions the role of the Baudelairean dandy, and identifies a number of quotations.

6 There is a similar play in Cortázar between game and ritual. The child's game of hopscotch of the title of *Rayuela* replaced the original title *Mandala*, with its connotations of sacrality. Note Oliveira's insistence on «evitar como la peste toda sacralización de los juegos» (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1969), p. 44. For Johan Huizinga, games and ritual are virtually indistinguishable in form, as are the «campo de juego» and the «lugar sagrado». See *Homo ludens* (Madrid: Alianza-Emecé, 1972), p. 22. For Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, game has a disjunctive effect in that it starts with the symmetry of competitors and ends with winners and losers, whereas ritual conjoins in that it postulates asymmetry between the sacred and the profane, faithful and officiating, etc., and by structural means proceeds to a merging. See *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfelt & Nicolson, 1989), p. 32.

7 Frank Dauster's «The Wounded Vision: *Aura*, *Zona sagrada*, and *Cumpleaños*» in Robert Brody and Charles Rossman, eds., *Carlos Fuentes: A Critical View* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 114.

8 See Liliana Befumo Boschi and Elisa Calabrese, in *Nostalgia del futuro en la obra de Carlos Fuentes* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1974), pp. 122-3.

9 See *The Savage Mind*, pp. 16-22

10 *Cumpleaños* (México; Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 24. Further references to this novel are given in the form (C 24) in the text.

11 This function, attributed to the novel by Bakhtin, is attributed to film by Susan Sontag: «Cinema is a kind of pan-art. It can use, incorporate, engulf virtually any other art: novel, poetry, theater ...», «A Note on Novels and Films», in *Against Interpretation*, p. 245.

12 In the short piece «A Circe», Torri has Ulysses say: «Como iba resuelto a perderme, las sirenas no cantaron para mí», in Octavio Paz et al. eds., *Poesía en movimiento: México 1915-1966* (México: Siglo XXI, 1975), p. 406.

13 *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 29.

14 Mito talks of his favorite writers: «sobre todo Dickens y la imagen que me capturó, la del Grillo en el hogar y su prodigioso mundo de una fábula inventada por el padre para que el hijo [sic] nunca conozca la verdadera realidad: una realidad que ese niño, ciego, no tiene por qué conocer» (72).

15 *A rebours* (Paris: Editions Pasquelle, 1968), pp. 83-6 and 240-1.

16 Beardsley made the illustrations for Wilde's *Salomé*, written for Sarah Bernhardt. See Mario Praz *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp. 312-7. Praz is an excellent source of material on the archetypes Fuentes is using and on the Decadent movement in general. See especially the chapters «La Belle Dame sans merci» and «Byzantium».

17 «Mon coeur mis à nu», p. 406.

18 «La femme», in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, p. 809.

19 «Eloge du maquillage» in *Le peintre*, p. 811

- 20 «Mon cœur mis à nu», p. 406.
- 21 «Fusées», XI, p. 395.
- 22 Reminiscent of the final lines of Paz's «Las palabras»: «Chillen, putas», in *Poemas (1939 - 1975)* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981), p. 69.
- 23 «Una voie pour le roman futur» in *Pour Un Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 24. Henceforth references to this work will be given in the text in the form (RG 24).
- 24 There is also an echo here of *Rayuela*, chapter 62.
- 25 *Les Mots et les choses*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 398.
- 26 *Lévi-Strauss o el nuevo festín de Esopo* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1993), p. 120.
- 27 C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1984), p. 254. Future references to this work will be given in the text in the form (LS 254).
- 28 See also Lanin Gyurko, «The Myth of Ulysses in Fuentes' *Zona sagrada*», *Modern Language Review*, 69:2, 1974, pp. 316-24.
- 29 Michelet, *La Sorcière* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1952) vol. I, p. 9.
- 30 See J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) p. 272. This seems to be confirmed by the role of the «mur» with Isabel in *Terra Nostra*.
- 31 For example, in the «Y» shape he forms with his own legs (93), an image of the cross, while his mother is repeatedly identified as the Virgin Mary.
- 32 , «Un fetiche de cachemira», in H Giacomani, ed., *Homenaje a Carlos Fuentes* (New York: Las Américas, 1971), pp. 261-73.
- 33 There are echoes here of Manuel Mujica Lainez's, *Bomarzo* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1973). Towards the beginning of the novel Pier Francesco Orsini relates how his brother Girolamo, next to naked, and described as a «fauno colérico» (p. 31), dresses Pier first as a «bufón» and then as «Francesca» to feign marriage with him. Later, Silvio de Narni makes dolls, «dos muñecas de estopa» (231), to gain the affection of Julia Farnesea and Porzia. See pp. 249-54 and 316. Mito (165), shadowing his mother and friend, visits the garden of monstrous stone forms in Bomarzo in Italy described in Mujica Lainez's novel.
- 34 *Cambio de piel* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974) p. 457.
- 35 *Aura* (México: Era, 1976), p. 51.
- 36 See *Anthropologie structurale*, pp. 248-51.