One of the recurring and most pervasive motifs in the narratives of Salman Rushdie and Carlos Fuentes is their characters' obsessive search for selfhood. This search reflects, and at the same time is reflected by, India's México's struggle for cultural identity in a postcolonial world. Although both nations have formally achieved political autonomy, their cultural lives are still dominated by their former colonizers in Western Europe and, in the case of Mexico, also by the new hegemonic power, the United States. Third World writers feel a need to establish their own voices amid the powerful influence of these cultures. But they face a dilemma: They are forced to use the language and literary structures of the very cultures they are trying to subvert. Post-colonial writers react to this paradox by appropriating the inherited modes for new subversive ends and by recovering what remains of the neglected native literary tradition.

Both *Midnight's Children* and *Cristóbal Nonato* discuss this dilemma in similar terms, although they arrive at somewhat different views of what to do about it. At the level of plot, the parallels between them are particularly striking. In Rushdie's novel, the protagonist (and storyteller)
is born at midnight on August 15, 1947 at the very moment when India became an independent nation; the I-narrator of Fuentes's novel will be born at midnight on October 12, 1992, the 500th anniversary of the so-called “discovery of America”. The significant births of both characters confer on them the fantastic power of a transindividual consciousness — a power that the authors use to portray the apocalyptic realities of their respective societies.

In my analysis of *Midnight’s Children* and *Cristóbal Nonato* I will draw on Benedict Anderson’s concept of nations as “political imagined communities” and Fredric Jameson’s reading of Third World texts as “national allegories”. On the one hand, Rushdie’s and Fuentes’s works thematize, and frequently parody, concerns about national identity in postcolonial societies; on the other, they associate these concerns to the problems of writing. All narrative levels in the two novels are pervaded by the dialogism which Bakhtin considers characteristic of the novelistic genre. Likewise, their aesthetic foundation echoes the Bakhtinian penchant for the polyphonic novel — Bakhtin’s ideal kind of discourse, where opposites are mingled and the sacred is profaned. Within their own novelistic traditions, both Rushdie and Fuentes assert that literary texts are open and unstable. Rushdie claims to have his roots in the Indian oral narrative tradition, Fuentes in such original narrative traditions as “national allegories”.2 Other concepts I will comment on are: Jameson’s discussion of Weber’s view of prophecy; Hutcheon’s definition of historiographic metafiction; Iser’s theory of the aesthetic response; Siegel’s study of the Indian comic tradition; Foucault’s distinction between “total history and genealogy; and Bakhtin’s historical poetics.

could be explained in the light of Fuentes’s eagerness and ability to absorb, either consciously or unconsciously, all new literary and cultural trends — which has led him into (at least) a few contradictions. Paradoxically, the presence of Latin American “magic realism” in Rushdie’s works has become a recurrent topic in recent literary criticism. See, for example, Durix (1985), Galván Reyula (1984) and Sangari (1987). It is not my intention to make value judgments on this matter, but to point to the analogies whenever they are relevant.

3 Regarding the traditional conception of nationalism and literature in India see Gokak (1989), Ch. 6 (“The Nation, the State and Contemporary Indian Literature”). According to Gokak, “the earliest feature of a nation is probably its tribal origin. The word “nation” is close to the word “Natio” which means “a kinsmen” (1989:55). Gokak’s point of view follows a line of thought that tends to obliterate any distinction between the modern nation-states and the etymological meaning of the word “nation”. The goal of this tendency is to naturalize, and even sacralize, the origins of nation-ness by placing it in a remote and legendary past. This manipulative tradition, as well as the fictionality of discourse are alive in the very most recent trends of contemporary metafiction.

The first section of my essay focuses on how the two novels under discussion problematize Anderson’s and Jameson’s postulates regarding nationalism; in the second chapter I will analyze the role of metaphors and describe the production and reception of the literary work; the third part deals with Rushdie’s and Fuentes’s literary dialogism, as it is expressed in their reflections on intertextuality and the comic tradition.

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC: INDIVIDUAL DESTINY AND HISTORICAL FATE

In his essay “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel”, Bakhtin defines the chronotope as a unit of analysis for studying text according to the temporal and spatial relationships expressed in a particular genre (1981:84). A genre, in turn, is conceived as a model system that works as a simulacrum for reality. The formation of a genre and the ways in which it changes over time depend on the socio-historical milieu in which it arises and functions. Likewise, the notion of simulacrum is intimately associated with the concept of nation proposed by Anderson. Unlike the traditional view of nations as ancestral and natural communities, for Anderson, “nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind” (1983:13).3
The role of literature, and especially that of the novel, was crucial in the formation of national consciousness in eighteenth century Europe. Along with newspapers, the novel served as a homogenizing force and became at the same time a specular device for projecting the community as a unified, though artificial, whole. In the nineteenth century the Latin American countries looked to the novel more urgently, as a means for the expression of their utopian ideal — their need to define a national consciousness independent of their colonial overlords. Allegory was of vitally important in this enterprise, from Lizardi's *El periquillo Sarmiento*, the very first Latin American novel, to the novels of the Mexican Revolution. All these works have a tendency to make characters represent particular social strata and to follow a plot outlining the development of a nation-state. Modern Latin American novelists considerably expand this goal. Instead of providing a Manichean transposition of reality, these writers prefer to create worlds mirroring their goal of social transformation. As Franco suggests, “... en la novela del boom se cumplia el concepto del autor, ya que no sólo designa al escritor de una novela, sino a la novela misma funcionando como modelo sobre el que se refleje el proyecto utópico de la...”

of nation/ness, have been thoroughly studied by Anthony Brennan in Ch. 1 of his dissertation (1987:1-63).

4 Synthesizing Anderson’s and Bakhtin’s theses, the *chronotope* of the nation would be defined as an imaginary entity which gets spatialized through a narration within a span of time. The novel is, therefore, the genre in which the imagined community looks into itself (Franco 1989).

5 According to Franco, Fernández de Lizardi brought a change to the writer’s relation to authority (1986:1255). In this view the author arrogates a prophetic role to himself, which permits him to dogmatize about historic reality and to legitimize his didactic discourse. Franco attributes this phenomenon to “una sociedad unida por el libro y guiada por maestros-ideólogos quienes fundaban su autoridad en el acceso a los libros” (1986:1253). This kind of society will become the perfect soil for a tradition which leads up to Fuentes: that of the writer as a “cultural hero” of the nation.

formación de una nueva sociedad en las margenes de la vieja” (1983:314).

Allegory is the most classic manner of representation in the Indian tradition. This tradition is based upon the Hindu myth of Maya, according to which the sensory world is just a facade concealing and revealing at once a more profound and essential order of reality. Though Rushdie, in interviews, and in the novel itself, refers pejoratively to it as “the Indian disease”, he admits that he suffers from it himself. He denies writing in the classical allegorical fashion, but the novel is nevertheless structured according to allegorical patterns. The key to understanding this apparent contradiction is parody. As Ron Shepherd points

6 “Allegory is as old as the Vedic literature. The Vedas contain the metaphorical use to imply immaterial or abstract notions through concrete objects” (Aggarwal 1988:vii). See also Brook’s interview with Rushdie: “... almost all great classical Indian literature has been allegorical in its form” (1984:61).

7 As T.M.P. Mahadevan points out in an essay on “The Vedic Philosophy”, “the term Maya itself appears in the *Rig-veda* and in the *Upanishads* in the sense of ‘illusion’, ‘appearance’. The Svetasvatara speaks of God as the wielder of maya (mayin). That the world production is a marvel and is like unto magic is what is signified by the term maya. The world appearance is Maya and the supreme reality is Mayin” (Latif 1979:45). According to this acosmic view of nature, God is conceived as a magician and creation as a prodigious magic. The subject attains self-realization only after accepting that the creation is nothing but Maya, that is, after assuming the fictiosity of the world.

8 “Is this an Indian disease, Saleem asks, ‘this urge to encapsulate the whole reality? Worse: am I infected too?’” (75). All Rushdie quotations come from *Midnight’s Children* (New York: Avon, 1980). See also the interview conducted by David Brooks (1988:61).

9 In my commentary I will frequently use three interrelated concepts that are essential for an adequate understanding of Rushdie’s and Fuentes’s relation with their literary traditions: parody, pastiche, and hybridization. As far as “parody” is concerned, I will follow Linda Hutcheon’s description of this paradoxical mode “as signaling ironic difference at the heart of similarity and as an authorized transgression of conventions” (1989:x). Unlike pure parody, “pastiche” is defined by Jameson as a form of imitation without irony or criticism, which does not conform to a norm, it is a kind of “blank parody” that is enhanced by “the disappearance of the individual subject” in postmodern societies (1984:64-5).
out, Rushdie builds up “a quasi-allegorical world which is reminiscent of classical Indian allegory but also a parody of it” (1985:166).

Praised or despised, the use of allegory is a reality in postcolonial literature. Stephen Slemson even writes about a generalized revival of the allegorical mode in recent years. In defining allegory as “a process of significational in which an image in a literary text is interpreted against a pre-existing master code or typological system” (1988:162), Slemson implies that this mode of cognition has manipulative potential. In fact allegorical thinking was used during the colonial period as a mode for representing imperial enterprises, yet Slemson argues that in the context of postcolonial culture this trend of writing can be used to challenge our inherited notions of history. Allegory is here seen as a scenario for the struggle between colonial discourse and postcolonial counter-discourse. The task of the latter lies, for Slemson, in “subverting this association between allegory and imperialism and in reappropriating allegory to a politics of resistance” (1988:163).

Fredric Jameson has thoroughly studied the allegorical mode of writing and its role in the formation of a national consciousness in a peripheral context. For Jameson, “all third-world texts are necessarily... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (1986:69). In considering the close relationship between the personal story and that of the community, Jameson tries to differentiate post-colonial from capitalistic discourse. A sense of community may have been banished from capitalistic societies, but it still exists and is an ideal in Third World countries. Unlike capitalistic discourse, which shows “a radical split between the private and the public”, third-world texts “project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (1986:69).

Although both Cristóbal Nonato and Midnight’s Children seem at times to contradict Jameson’s postulates (Rushdie frequently mocks the figure of the national hero), they conform to some extent to the patterns that Jameson sees in the allegorical spirit. In his view, this spirit “is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of multiple polysemy of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol” (1986:73). His is...
doubtlessly a new concept of allegory, bearing little relations to the mechanical dynamics of the Western traditional modes. Similarly Fuentes and Rushdie favour in their narratives the open, the heterogeneous, and the hybrid. But instead of maintaining the Jamesonian correlation of "the subjective", "the public", and "the political", the two novelists undermine it; their protagonists attempt to unite the three levels, but their effort is full of conflict and achieves at best mixed results. What Fuentes and Rushdie do in relation to Jameson's view of Third World literatures is to problematize the relationship between the individual and his historical context.

Rushdie establishes the connections between individual story and collective history at the outset of Midnight's Children. After being prophesied, the protagonist's birth, at the precise instant of the Indian independence, will mark him for the rest of his life: "I had been mysteriously hand-cuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country" (3). Saleem, the narrator-protagonist starts his account with the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. In the description Aadam's physical appearance and the events of his private life, the novel inaugurates a pattern of cyclical motifs, images and metaphors — one of the book's most characteristic stylistic features. Aadam Sinai

India, the new myth — a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God. Salman Rushdie (1982:130)

is presented as a patriarch evoking the god Ganesh, because of his preternatural nose (8). The picture of the god will be completed during the course of the novel with the last member of the genealogy, also named Aadam, whose grotesquely huge ears mirror those of the elephant-headed god (560).

Every event in the lives of Saleem's family has a counterpart in the history of India and Pakistan. Saleem himself comes to life at the same moment when India is granted independence, and dies at midnight on the thirty-first anniversary of that event. Saleem begins to communicate with the other Midnight's Children at the same time that Prime Minister Nehru approves the First five year plan. While a child, the protagonist provokes a language riot between two communities in Bombay. The first session of the Midnight's Children Conference (MCC) coincides with the elections to the Indian Congress. As a result of these elections the Communist Party becomes the second political force in the country, which has its counterpart in Saleem's discovery of his mother's relationship with Nadir Khan, also known as Quasim the Red. In 1958 Saleem participates symbolically in Ayub Khan's coup in Pakistan by moving pepperpots on a table, under the direction of General Zulfikar. The disintegration of the Midnight's Children Conference is the direct consequence of political differences regarding China's invasion of India. According to Saleem the purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965 is to kill all the members of his family, and Shiva's arrival in Bombay occurs at the precise instant when India explodes its first nuclear device. Finally, Saleem's wife, Parvatl, goes into labor while Indira Ghandi is being accused of electoral malfeasances and the child's birth takes place at the moment when the Prime Minister declares the state of Emergency.

In the chapter entitled "The Kolynos Kid" the narrator gives a meticulous exposition of all possible connections
between his Rabellesian life and the history of the nation. He begins with Nehru’s prophetic words about him: “Your life, which will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own” (285). His rational and taxonomic mode of explaining these connections contrasts heavily with their absurd and comic nature. The effect produced by Saleem’s confusion between metaphor and reality is the creation of an alternative reality which, even though it acquires a fantastic dimension, still bears a strong resemblance to the historical facts.

All these examples of comic allegorical connections form arbitrary juxtapositions of biographical and historical events, following one another in a carnivalesque chain. Rushdie thus takes to the point of absurdity Jameson’s view that in Third World texts “the story of the private individual is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (1986).

Saleem’s appearance, too, reflects the physiognomy of the nation. The teacher Emil Zagallo explicitly compares Saleem’s face with the map of India: “In the face of this ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of India? See here — the Deccan peninsula hanging down!... The stains are Pakistan! These birthmarks on the right ear is the East Wing; and these horrible stained left cheek, the West!... Pakistan is a stain on the face of India!” (277). When Mr. Zagallo is teaching his peculiar “human geography” lesson, “a large blob of shining goo” emerges from Saleem’s nostrils, the other children yell: “The dip from his nose, sir! Is that supposed to be Ceylon?” (277).

Saleem’s role as national hero, methodically constructed throughout the novel, suddenly collapses when the protagonist starts approaching his end. After a period of invisibility induced by Parvati the witch, the up-to-now epic hero decides to rid himself of the constraints of prophecy: “Something was fading in Saleem and something was being born. Fading: ... an old determination to espouse, willingly, a prophesied historical role” (456). Saleem’s renunciation acquires a new reading in the light of Jameson’s discussion on the role of prophecy in the transition between feudal and capitalistic societies. In his study on Max Weber, Jameson discusses “the historical transformation of religion from its early, magical origins to its later codified and bureaucratic structure” (1988:16). The prophet — “the bearer of rationalization” — acts as a mediator between the magician and the priest, between the “immediate gain” granted to the former by his personal charisma, and the “modern bureaucracy” characteristic of capitalism’s “rational organization of means”. By giving up his role as a prophet and rejecting the expectations conferred upon him by prophesied birth, Saleem refuses to be part of a process that leads not to individual or collective liberation, but instead to a reinforcement of the new religious institutions.

As an ex-centric and peripheral figure, Saleem cannot reliably assume the central role of the prophet in the historical process that constitutes the modern capitalistic state.


14 It is striking that in the Chapter entitled “Drainage and Desert” the narrator’s digression on his name closely follows Jameson’s process of the historical transformation of religion (see the discussion above). “Sinai” evokes the name of Ibn Sina, “master magician”, but also Khalid Ibn Sinan, a prophet who was a contemporary of Muhammad. His name is, finally, that of “the place of revelation”, “the name of the desert”, “the name of the end”. Jameson’s first two stages are clearly represented in the narrator’s name, both the third and final stage is unclear though sufficiently threatening for the narrator to abandon his role. In other characters of the novel we see, however, glimpses of Jameson’s third phase, above all in the protagonist’s friend Cyrus-the-Great, who builds up a profitable industry around himself, becoming the favorite guru of American singers. Cyrus concentrates in his anachronistic figure the two extreme poles of Jameson’s historical progression. Cyrus obtains profit thanks to his charismatic power and controls a vast religious organization which has as its end not religion but the accumulation of capital.

12 Uma Parameswaran (1983) develops the analogy between India and Saleem’s face one step further. She compares the “monkish tonsure” that Mr. Zagallo produces on Saleem’s head, by pulling out his hair, to Kashmir — an isolated region on the top of India.
But Saleem's decision to cut his historical ties does not imply his withdrawal from society, only the assertion of his individuality, his determination to choose his "own undetermined future" (457). From the moment of his decision, he seems to deteriorate physically almost to the point of disintegration. Rushdie makes multiple allusions to cracks, scratches and splits, which, in turn, reflect the split between his cultural personality and his psychological one. Saleem's sterilization at the end of the novel is another ironic sign of the impossibility of his ever escaping from the strictures of history. Moreover, all the Midnight's Children are tortured in Indira Ghandi's prisons and suffer a "sperectomy" — the drainage of hope — an operation that puts an end to Saleem's last remaining messianic fantasies.

The fight of a fractured self against a fragmented reality can be appreciated at different levels of the novel. Psychologically, Saleem's identity is mistaken, lost, barren, sterile, amnesiac. The splits in his psyche are paralleled by an endless chain of physical mutilations. He becomes deaf in his left ear when his father slaps him; Mr. Gallo produces a monkish tonsure on his head; at the School Social he loses the top third of his middle finger, as the result of an accident; when his mother's errant spittoon hits him on the head he loses his memory, and is recruited as a man-dog by the Pakistani army; his incestuous desires for his sister Jamila lead him to impotence; a nasal operation to clear his sinuses results in the loss of telepathic powers. Finally he is tortured and sterilized, and literally drained of hope. As Naik points out, Saleem's disfigurement suggests the idea that the character "is fated never to know peace and stability" (1985:65).

The protagonist's identity crisis is the result, among other reasons, of both the conditions of his birth and the split lives of his ancestors. He is the illegitimate son of an Englishman and a Hindu woman, and is raised by a Muslim family. His triple ancestry thus combines the three cultural heritages of India. But the question of fatherhood and motherhood attains a high degree of complexity in the hands of the novel's playful narrator. Saleem identifies seven different characters as being his "fathers": Methwold (his real father), Ahmed Sinai (his putative father), Willie Winkie (his real mother's husband), Nadir Khan (his putative mother's first husband), Schaapsteker (the German "snake-doctor" who cures him), general Zulfikar (his uncle), and Picture Singh (the snake-charmer). For Saleem's mothers, the novel refers to Vanita (his real mother), Amina (his putative mother), Mary Pereira (his mother's midwife), and Pias (his childless aunt). Such a nonsensical multiplication of parentage provokes in Saleem a feeling of orphanhood, of displacement and lack of symbolic center which would otherwise help him to establish his identity in society.

Saleem's feeling of dispersion is magnified by its connections with the past and its projections into the future. All four generations described in the novel are involved in events similar to those that befall Saleem, and their lives become interconnected through the use of recurrent metaphors. The most evident is the perforated sheet, which appears at the beginning of the novel and is associated with the relationship between Aadam Aziz and Naseem; it reappears in the third generation in the form of the perforated chadar used by Jamila during his public performances. This motif of fragmentation is also present in the second generation (Amina attempts to love her husband dividing him "in parts"), and achieves its climax with the narrators' final disintegration. The novel's increasing emphasis on the splitting and undermining of Saleem's identity is the result of his inability to build coherence out of the past. In Foucault's terms we could say that Saleem's body is "totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (1977:188; qtd. in Hutcheon 1988:188).
Finally, Saleem's son, who shares the name of his great grandfather (Aadam), reproduces some of the most significant features of his ancestors. Like Saleem, his physical appearance is described as both ludicrous and supernatural. He also is the son of more than one father (Siva and Saleem). But, above all, Aadam shares Saleem's fate of being "handcuffed to history" by his birth, on the night June 25, 1975, the same time the Emergency was declared.

Rushdie's portrait of Saleem and his family make the main character and narrator into an eccentric and marginalized figure. Saleem is, like postcolonial literature itself, peripheral yet involved in the titanic enterprise of trying to inscribe the individual into history. As Hutcheon comments in her analysis of historiographic metafiction, this kind of narrative "investigates how the subject of history is the subject in history, subject to history" (1988:177).

II

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory. Fredric Jameson (1986:69)

The idea that sets in motion the narrative machinery of Cristóbal Nonato bears a striking resemblance to the one that animates Midnight's Children. As in Rushdie's novel, historical dates acquire a symbolic transcendence, tying the protagonist to his country's destiny. The first events described in Fuentes's novel take place nine months before October 12, 1992 — the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas. The narrator-protagonist has just been conceived at Acapulco, on the Pacific coast of Mexico. His parents, Angel and Angeles, a modern Edenic couple, are trying to win a contest organized by the corrupt Mexican authorities that will award the child born at the stroke of midnight on October 12 with the title of "PRODIGAL SON OF THE NATION", a free education provided by the state and, upon coming of age, appointment as regent of the country with absolute powers of election and succession.15

Nine books later, Cristóbal's birth puts an end to the novel. Meanwhile we have witnessed his physical and intellectual gestation. In his nine months of intrauterine life Cristóbal achieves a full apprehension of reality, becoming a universal consciousness.16 What at first seems to be a simple futuristic parable becomes, as the reading progresses, a corrosive radiography of Mexican society. Fuentes's frequently grotesque vision is complemented by an attempt at a reconstruction of the national past and the premonition of an apocalyptic future.

The geographical, historical and political realities of Mexico are represented in the novel's characters, who exemplify not only national types or social classes, but also features and tendencies rooted in Mexico's collective unconscious. Characterization in Fuentes's novel therefore clearly has a symbolic intent. Cristóbal Nonato describes a hallucinatory universe where ideas, and even reality itself, have been replaced by symbols. The figure of Ange-

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15 The analogy between the "Cristóbal Columbus Contest" and the contest organized by the Times of India in Midnight's Children seems too obvious to require any further commentary. In Rushdie's novel, the narrator explains how the Bombay edition of this newspaper, "searching for a catchy human-interest angle to the forthcoming independence celebrations announced that it would award a prize to any Bombay mother who could arrange to give birth to a child at the precise instant of the birth of the new nation" (113).

16 Fuentes gives some clues to understanding this process in an interview with José María Marco: "Cristóbal Nonato son esos nueve meses misteriosos en los que quizás aprenderemos todo lo que es necesario saber en el mundo. Lo olvidamos cuando al nacer baja ese ángel de la kábala judía, con su espada flamígera, nos pega en la boca y nos condena al olvido y a aprender una parcela de la totalidad que entonces supimos. Toda la novela está construida sobre este hecho" (1987:38).
les, prototype of the ideological purity of a utopian and ingenious left, contrasts with that of Angel, Cristóbal's father, who is involved in an endless search for identity. Angel's contradictory spirit leads him to define himself as a conservative revolutionary or as a reactionary progressive. These two polarities, progressivism and reaction, are personified by Angel's uncles: Fernando Benítez and Homero Fagoaga. The former is an idealistic anthropologist, inheritor of the few virtues of the Mexican Revolution; the latter, a member of the permanently governing PRI (“Partido Revolucionario Institucional”), who is obsessed with the purity of Castilian language, an who represents the many deceptions originated by the Revolution.17

Two characters in the novel serve to represent the traditional political corruption of Mexico: Ulises López (64 years old), a member of the oligarchy that obtained its riches from the oil boom, and Federico Robles Chacón (34 years old), creator of the new politics of symbols which has taken power. The rest of the constellation of characters (aunts Capitolina and Farnesia, the “Four Jodiditos”, etc.) also follow a dynamic by which the personalities of two characters complement each other, so as to make it possible for each to find his/her sense in “the Other”, in his/her complement.18

The titles and quotations that open each of the nine parts of Cristóbal Nonato are each an example of Fuentes's allegorical style, and also establish the leit-motif of the narrative. Book I is entitled La suave patria, as in López Velarde's famous book, and the opening quotation (“La patria es suave y diamantina”) is taken from it. Needless to say, the allusions to Velarde's poems are frequently ironic and grotesque. Fuentes's view of Mexico is Velarde's anti-utopia. The territory of “The Sweet Fatherland” has been carved up and sold to multinational companies, mainly American, in order to pay the interest on the foreign debt. The territorial plundering (Fuentes uses “mutilation” of Mexico leads the narrator to use a recurring — the nation as a sick body in the process of decomposition: “Vio una angosta nación esquelética y decadida, el pecho en los desiertos del norte, el corazón infartado en la ciudad de México, el ano supurante y venéreo en Acapulco, las rodillas recortadas en Guerrero y Oaxaca…” (27).19 The Fatherland that Fuentes foresees for the second millenium is thus far from being “impeccable and adamantine”.20

17 Fernando Benítez is an actual person, a Mexican ethnologist who is the author of the monumental work Los indios de México. 3 vols. (México: Era, 1967). Fuentes's passion for this seemingly outdated figure must be understood outside of his actual life. The fact that Fuentes dedicated his essay Tiempo mexicano to Benítez is noteworthy. For Fuentes, Fernando Benítez represents the archetypal intellectual who should become the standard bearer of social change: “... al filo de sus ochenta años, aún no agotaba su discurso vital, su lucha por los indios y la democracia y la justicia” (95). This fatherly and idealistic figure embodies the consciousness of the past. To Fuentes he represents the guardian of memory. Fuentes's idealization of Benítez raises the question of how this or any other liberal humanist can be at the avant-garde of any social change; how Benítez's picturesque interest in the indians and merely good intentions can lead the real revolution that Fuentes pleads for his country. The idealization of the old-fashioned Benítez proves to be even more anachronistic in contrast with Fuentes's fascination with modernity. Again, the solution to this paradox can be glimpsed in relation to Fuentes's global vision of the intellectual, and especially the writer, as a cultural hero. By metaphorizing the figure of the Messianic Benítez, and associating him with the pristine primitiveness of an indigenous past, Fuentes attempts to legitimize his discourse and his leading position in Mexican culture.

18 The subject of Otherness and its relationships with psychic life and artistic creation has been thoroughly studied by Todorov in his essay on Bakhtin, Ch. 7 (“Philosophical Anthropology”). According to Todorov, “we can never see ourselves as a whole; the other is necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself” (1984:95)

19 All parenthetical references to Fuentes's novel are from Cristóbal Nonato (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987).

20 In Book V, Ch. 3, Angel writes some lines on the sand of Acapulco beach. What turns out to be a new version, a literal deconstruction, of “La suave patria” reflects the true physical space of Mexico:
Three cities acquire a clear allegorical meaning in the novel, giving it its spatial axes: Oaxaca, Mexico, and Acapulco. As we have seen above, these correspond to the knees, the bowels, and the anus of the nation, respectively. If Oaxaca represents the utopian foundations of Mexico, Acapulco is shown as the ultimate degree of moral corruption and degradation. Mexico City, by contrast, is a microcosm for the country, the Fatherland's stomach, its sociocultural and political center, where all the national elements mingle.

In Cristobal Nonato Oaxaca embodies Lopez Velarde's national fantasy: the province that contains in it the essence of "the Mexican". When Angel escapes from the capital, he seeks shelter in Oaxaca. Then he undergoes a transformation that manifests itself in an epiphany: his discovery of Nature and of the erotic mysticism evoked by Velarde in his work, Oaxaca is also the archetypal place for the love encounter. In the church of San Felipe Neri Angel makes love with one of the most celebrated of Velarde’s creations: “la prima Agueda”. In the same place Angel and Angeles meet again and reconcile with one another. This second encounter in Oaxaca is described with exactly the same words and poetic prose as the first.

If Oaxaca reveals itself as a mystic fantasy. Mexico City becomes a lumpenproletariat’s nightmare, and Acapulco is a monument to the civilization of waste. As in real life, Acapulco in the novel is the center of the tourism industry and its attendant financial speculation and moral degradation — the brothel of the fatherland. The so-called “paracaidistas” (parachutists), peasants who illegally occupy the land, are evacuated to uninhabitable territories, such as a swamp ironically called “Ciudad Florida”. The narrator makes the opposition between Velarde’s utopian Oaxaca and the decadent promiscuity of “Rajapulco” explicit when he laments: “... Acapulco la Babilonia de los pobres, escogida para ejemplificar todo lo que No Es la Suave Patria” (247). The city’s destruction — its “Acapulcalipsis” — is telling: a wave of excrement razes the city. The coyotes and the cockroaches do the rest.

Mexico City is, finally, the urban center of the novel. The capital embodies the cabalistic doctrine of the reconciliation of opposites. Agua quemada (Burnt Water) is not just the title of one of Fuentes’s first books. As the author explains in his introduction to his collection of short stories, that was the name that the Axtecs gave to the lake surrounded by volcanoes where the city of Tecomchtitlán — origin of the present capital — was settled. This tension between opposite elements (water and fire) is revived in the contradictions of the Mexican soul. The image of Mexico City as a microcosm for the nation is confirmed in Fuentes’s portrayal of the capital: “la ciudad es un inmenso cráter llagado, la caries del universo, la caspa del mundo, el chancro de las Américas, la hemorroide del Trópico de Cáncer” (326). The city is, metaphorically, a vast rubbish dump where the life of the nation evolves: 

Patria, tu superficie es el bache, digo
Tu cielo es el esmog estancado
El niño Dios te escrituró un palacio en Las Lomas y una chalet de ski en Vail
Y los veneros de petróleo un diablo que vive en el spot market de Rotterdam, digo... (247)

21 The Mexico-Acapulco opposition recurs frequently from the first part of the novel. The earthquake of September 1985 establishes their oppositional relation. Although the epicenter of the tremor was located in Acapulco, this city did not suffer its consequences whereas most areas of Mexico City were destroyed. For the first time some of the novel’s main characters — those rep-
A minute description of the city physiognomy's is provided in Book VI, Chapter 1 ("Ciudad Potemkin"). The access to Mexico City is flanked by a series of kitschy reproductions of man-made structures, such as the Statue of Liberty, the Big Ben, the Empire State Building, and the Holiday Inn in Disneyland. Fuentes's details all point to the predominance of appearance over reality. This culture of simulacrum embodies the self-deception that rules over the political and social life of the nation: "este prólogo de cartón unidimensional era idéntico a la ciudad misma, no una caricatura sino una advertencia" (301). The narrator's view of the government is that it will never do anything it promises. The megalomaniacal engineering enterprises, such as a huge glass shell protecting the city from pollution, are only "puras fachadas", like the facades that preside over the city's main entrance. Nonexistent heroes are honored, war is declared against illusory enemies, and nonsensical contests and anniversaries are celebrated. "Makesicko City", also known as "Mug Sicko City", endures daily an acid rain as a consequence of industrial pollution. It has become the capital and symbol of underdevelopment.

22 The latent utopia-simulation duality (recurrent motif in Cristóbal Nonato) is interpreted by Jean Baudrillard in relation to the loss of the linguistic conceptual value in the contemporary world, and especially in capitalistic societies: "La simulation part à l'inverse de l'utopie du principe d'équivalence, part de la négation radicale du signe comme valeur, part du signe comme réversion et mise à mort de toute référence" (1978:16) [the author's emphasis].

23 The implied metaphor in the scene — the cardboard monumental cardboard facades masking a Third World reality — is used by Fuentes to communicate the masked underdevelopment in which the southern hemisphere of the continent lives: "This is what Latin America is: a collapsed feudal castle with a capitalistic facade." The quotation comes from his essay "The Argument of Latin America: Words for the North Americans" (1963:12). Fuentes had trouble finding a publisher for this book because he was barred from participating in a TV debate sponsored by the big American networks. The manipulation of the mass media by the hegemonic power is, in fact, a target of Fuentes's and Rushdie’s criticism in their respective novels.

The allegorical importance of the capital rests on its capacity to encapsulate the Mexican past. It exemplifies one of the characteristics that Fuentes observes in his country: the coexistence of all the historical levels in the same space and time: "Entre nosotros... no hay un solo tiempo: todos los tiempos están vivos, todos los pasados son presentes" (1971:9). The indigenous past is still alive in some isolated territories, reservations where the native population has no contact with urban civilization. But it can also be found in the big cities, where there are belts of misery inhabited by Mexicans who never learned Spanish.

Fuentes alludes to significant periods of Mexican history throughout the novel: conquest, colonization, independence, revolution and its subsequent institutionalization. These successive stages conform to the four traditions that the writer observes in the history of his country: the mythical vision of cosmos in the indigenous world; the Spanish notion of continuity and legitimacy; the stoic individualism which buys serenity and personal satisfaction in exchange for solitude; and the European positivism which identifies the bourgeois interests with those of the state. Fuentes also identifies a fifth utopian tradition, which places the community interests in front of the interests of power (1971:39). Cristóbal Nonato’s originality lies in its presentation of all these traditions simultaneously in the futurized present of Mexico.

The complex symbolic web spun by those in power comprises all these different strata. Federico Robles Chacón, the Machiavellian mind of the regime, creates in "Nuestra Señora de Mamadoc" a symbolic legitimation of the political system. Mamadoc reproduces the eternal myth of the Mother, which is frequently associated with man's wish to regress to his origins. The same impulse is present in the
legend of Quetzalcóatl, a deity of Aztec culture to whom the novel alludes on several occasions. The myth of Quetzalcóatl parallels the myth of the Fall in the Judeo-Christian tradition: original purity, deceit, fall and expulsion. The promise of redemption is manifested in the Aztec myth through the promised return of the god.  

Quetzalcóatl is represented as a feathered serpent biting its tail, its profile corresponding to Cristóbal's fetal position. The similarities run deeper: Both Cristóbal's and Quetzalcóatl's births are prophesied; both are bearers of their society's culture; both are messianic figures who promise redemption. Like the indigenous god, the novel's protagonist brings with himself a message of hope, a return to the originally subverted Eden.  

Baudrillard points out: "Lorsque le réel n'est plus ce qu'il était, la nostalgie prend tout son sens. Surenchère des mythes d'origine et des signes de réalité. Surenchère de vérité, d'objectivité et d'autenticité secondes. Escalade du vrai, du vécu, résurrection du figuratif là où l'objet et la substance ont disparu. Production affidée de réel et de référentiel, parallèle et supérieure à l'affolement de la production matérielle: telle apparaît la simulation dans la phase qui nous concerne - une stratégie du réel, de néo-réel et d'hyperréel, que double partout une stratégie de dissuasion" (1978:17).

25 There are many versions of this protean myth. According to one of them Quetzalcóatl was one of the four children of Ometecutli and Omecihuatl (Lord and Lady of duality). These two deities were at the origin of all beings and gods. The whole world was thus created from this primordial couple (Bosch and Calabrese 1974:61). Fuentes himself provides further information about the myth in Tiempo mexicano: The three magicians Tezcatlipoca, Ilhumímocatl and Toltécatl wanted to expel Quetzalcóatl — the feathered serpent, creator of men and Lord of the Arts — from the city of gods. Since Quetzalcóatl's reputation was irreproachable, the magicians decided to set a trap for him. Their plan was to make him drunk and to induce him to commit incest with his sister. But, when Quetzalcóatl resisted, Tezcatlipoca proposed "to give him a body"; until that time the god had ignored his appearance. When the magician showed the feathered serpent his own image reflected in the mirror, Quetzalcóatl was covered with great shame and fear. That night he drank and laid with his sister. The following day the god departed, heading eastward, ignoring that he had been "the simultaneous protagonist of both the Genesis and the Fall". But, according to the legend, he prophesied his return (Fuentes 1971:17). Ironically, in the eyes of the Aztecs, it was Hernán Cortés who fulfilled the prophecy. When the Spanish conqueror arrived in Mexico the natives believed him to be the reincarnation of the god. The return of Quetzalcóatl was associated with the restoration of a lost utopian order. However, the conquest in fact brought to America something rather different: the shattered Mexico Fuentes defines as "the subversion of Eden".

26 The representations of the god Quetzalcóatl go beyond mere repetition of the myth of the Fall. Burr L. Brundage has studied those Mixtec codices in which the Mesoamerican divinity is shown as an initiator and a cultural hero. As Brundage writes, "Quetzalcóatl is shown to us seated in the thirteenth heaven while receiving his commission to appear on earth and bring culture to mankind" (1982:93). Fuentes refers to this myth in his depiction of Cristóbal as a messianic hero.

27 Patricia Waugh offers one of the most comprehensive definitions of this mode of writing: "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (1984:2). Linda Hutcheon includes Midnight's Children within the specific subgenre of "historiographic metafiction". The novels in this mode problematize the received notions of "subject-formation": "They challenge the humanist assumptions of a unified self and an integrated consciousness by both installing coherent subjectivity and subverting it" (1988:xii).
constructed ideas, especially nationalism, one of their favorite targets.28

The narrative imagery in *Midnight’s Children* and *Cristóbal Nonato* expresses the authors’ allegorical concern. Their metaphors and images, describing the production and reception of the literary work, reflect not only their individual styles but also the conflict-ridden relationships with their respective societies. The search for identity in the two novels permeates all levels — subjective, historical, and narrative. Their I-narrators’ desperate longing for selfhood works as a textual bridge between Rushdie’s and Fuentes’s search for literary identity and that of the reader. Rushdie’s novel tries to achieve a personal discourse through the hybridity of the author’s own cultural background. Rushdie seems to be caught between the heritage of Indian epic tradition and the avant-garde experiments of Western modernist and postmodernist discourses. This hybridity is dramatized in the cosmopolitan narrator’s dialogues with Padma (who represents the plebeian, native tradition), and through a rich imagery that mirrors the production of literary texts. Fuentes, in *Cristóbal Nonato*, emphasizes the search for a Mexican national identity — the dominant topic in most of his works. Like Rushdie, he thematizes the role of all actors in the process of literary communication (the author, the text, and the reader), dramatizing its mechanics within his novel, and proposing a composite identity for the three.

28 “Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical facts and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their claim to truth from that identity” (Hutcheon 1988:93).

Birth images recur throughout *Midnight’s Children* and are frequently opposed to images of decline, fragmentation, and degeneration. Rushdie uses these metaphors to link autobiography, interpretation of Indian recent history, and the writing of the novel. The narrator’s memory of his fetal growth is conveyed by a cluster of metaphors that compare it to the growth of a chapter, a book, or even the whole language: “What had happened (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter, now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one may say, a book — perhaps an encyclopaedia — even a whole language...” (115).

However, Rushdie’s dominant metaphor for the narrator’s view of a multi-faceted reality is a sheet perforated by a single hole. It appears as early as chapter 1. Adam Aziz, a doctor recently graduated from a German university, has as his first Indian patient, Naseem, the landowner Ghani’s daughter. The strict observance of the purdah system does not allow Dr. Aziz to see all of Naseem; to examine her he must look through a perforated sheet. The image of the perforated sheet, of seeing the world in a fragmentary way, reappears periodically in the novel and gives it a thematic thread that unifies the account. The narrative, like the perforated sheet, follows a pattern of alternating concealment and disclosure, which creates suspense and holds the reader’s attention. As Batty explains, “deferral
of disclosure follows a rigid pattern of promise and fulfilment: the implicit contract between narrator and narratee is made explicit and self-conscious" (53). The reader's reconstruction of Saleem's fragmented account mirrors this dynamics. Like Naseem's body, the novel is offered to the audience as a series of pieces, which the reader has to assemble in order to construct a coherent whole. The perforated sheet is also reminiscent of the classical Indian myth of the veil of Maya. According to this Hindu belief, the sensory world hides a second, deeper reality. This idea is at the core of Indian allegorical tradition and theological concerns (the highest stage of perfection in Hinduism consists of achieving a unified vision outside the sensory world).

The novel's narrative structure finds in the episodic cinema another of its most celebrated metaphors. This kind of films based on trailers is similar to Rushdie's technique of repeating prolepses in the novel. The synopses of previous chapters have their counterpoint in the novel's preview of the events to come (what the narrator calls "coming attractions").

Rushdie frequently alludes to Bombay talkies as metaphors for the distortion and manipulation of reality by art. The blurring of the frontier between reality and fiction (between history and the story) finds in this image a powerful means of expression: "Reality is a question of perspective, the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems — but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (197). This discussion on the nature of reality is followed immediately by the cinema metaphor. The narrator compares the futile attempt to grasp present reality with the changing perspectives as one moves closer to the screen at a movie theater. As we move closer, until we almost touch the screen, the illusion of fiction as something reflecting everyday life vanishes, converted into "dancing grain": "the illusion dissolves — or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality" (197).

The reflection on the deceptive quality of reality and the problems of representing it is comically portrayed when film director Hanif and his actress-wife Pia Aziz discuss the cinema. Whereas Pia accepts unconditionally the melodramatic concessions of Bombay movies, which gave her fame and success, Hanif believes fanatically in the accurate representation of reality through art. The conflict between the two characters is a confrontation between two opposite aesthetic views — melodrama, a genre which consciously plays with the spectator's feelings by manipulating history, and the realistic and naturalistic tradition, which seeks to reveal the truth of contemporary life. Pia and Hanif embody the opposites that dominate Rushdie's and Fuentes's narratives, and the struggle between the two verges on the grotesque. The narrator comments that Pia is deprived of her work in the cinema after her marriage with Hanif "had turned her life into a feature picture" (292). Hanif, in turn, rebels "against the entire iconography of the Bombay film; in the temple of illusions, he had become the high priest of reality" (292). The last comment implies the contradictory nature of the character: although he works for an industry which mass-produces sentimental stories, he is, nevertheless, fixated by the idea of portraying in detail the physical minutiae of everyday life. This obsession leads him to his

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29 As Stephens writes referring to the perforated-sheet metaphor: "Retrospectively, this episode develops the additional significance of a figure for how the reader reconstructs the text — "Glued together by his imagination" and proceeding from the image of the person at last s/he thinks s/he sees it whole s/he is already committed to misreading" (1958:198). For a reader-response approach to Rushdie's novel see Wilson (1984).

30 "Do Hindus not accept — Padma — that the world is a kind of dream; that Brahma dreamed, is dreaming the universe, that we only see dimly through that dream-web, which is Maya. Maya... may be defined as all that is illusory, as trickery, artifice and deceit. Apparitions, phantasms, mirages, sleight-of-hand, the seeming form of things: all these things are part of Maya" (253).
most ambitious enterprise: a reportage on the history of a pickling factory. His inherent contradictions reappear even at the moment of his death. Although he dies “for his hate of melodrama”, melodrama, the narrator says, inspires his last act: committing suicide.

Rushdie employs three other metaphors that convey the novel as an expression of the author’s hybrid identity: the spittoon, the city of Bombay and the pickling process. Saleem’s silver spittoon is the place where the highest and the lowest meet and coexist. As Brennan points out: “It is, like the perforated sheet, a symbol for the narrative although it emphasizes another side of it: that quality of being a meeting place of the rare and the revolting, the ornate and the useless — a place where the refuse all classes and races mingle freely” (1987:328). The author’s native city plays the same role. Rushdie’s descriptions of Bombay are tinged by that love-hate feeling so central in Fuentes’s relationship with Mexico City: “Our Bombay, it looks like a hand but it’s really a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talent from everywhere else in India” (147). The biological metaphor, which we have seen is present in Cristóbal Nonato, is here used by Rushdie to convey his ambivalent feeling toward the city. By the end of the novel Saleem’s return to Bombay and his visit to the “Midnite-Confidential Club” is described in the same terms as a descent into hell, becoming, as well, a parody of this universal myth: “Hell is other people’s fantasies: every saga requires at least one descent into Jahnnum” (541). In the symbolist tradition the rites de passage, and the journeys to the great beyond, stand as metaphors for the writer’s inner journey. But if in the traditional epic quests the hero is reborn and achieves illumination, Saleem’s experience in the Jahnnum turns out to be the beginning of his end. Unlike Rimbaud, who sings the “splendides villes” at the end of his Saison en enfer, Rushdie’s antihero returns to Bombay’s urban spittoon, inhabited by “many-headed monsters”. Bombay’s radical, religious, and linguistic promiscuity makes it the epitome of the hybridity that characterizes ‘s and Fuentes’s styles.

Another metaphor that Saleem uses frequently in relation to the act of writing is first alluded to in Hanif’s ideal film: writing as pickling. This analogy comes to dominate the scene of writing in the last chapter, in a previous chapter, “The Shadow of the Mosque”, Saleem explicitly establishes the connection between the twenty-six chapters he has narrated so far and the twenty-six pickle-jars standing “gravely on the shelf”. There are still five empty jars left on his desk, four of which correspond to the four remaining chapters. The destiny of the fifth one is not revealed until of the novel.

The “symbolic nature of the pickling process” is thoroughly discussed in the closing chapter, “Abracadabra”. Saleem, a surrogate for the author, conceives the act of writing as a melting pot, an attempt to encapsulate reality. Like reality itself, “chutnification” (writing) does not respond to rational and taxonomic mechanisms. Within the pickle jars, everything melts, giving place to dynamic substances that are continuously transformed: “The process of revision should be constant and endless”, Saleem comments “... I should revise and revise, improve and improve”. At this point in the novel the acts of writing and of reading become part of the same process. Saleem, the narrator, revises (reads) his own work in a continuing modification of the novel. This “endless process of revision” mirrors, and is mirrored by, the constant actualization of the text in the reader’s imagination. The goal is, as Saleem states, “to give shape and form — that is to say meaning” (550). The act of writing thus responds to Saleem’s longing for identity, for wholeness, for significance. He mentions repeatedly his “fear of absurdity”, ironic since his whole life is ruled by nonsense. The pickle jars work, in this way, as the antidote to absurdity, the receptacle of mem-
ory "waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation." The intended audience of Saleem's "pickles of history" is composed of all those who will also have to undertake his work of transformation.

Rushdie places the reader in a situation that strongly evokes Wolfgang Iser's "theory of the aesthetic response": "The trick is to fill in the gaps, guided by the few clues one is given. Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence." The first-person narrator in Rushdie's novel performs the activities set out in Austin's theory of the illocutionary act (informing, promising, ordering, warning, threatening). His reliability is question-

33 In Rushdie's novel, like in Cristóbal Nonato the I-narrator knows his future loss of memory. Since his conception Cristóbal is aware that he will forget everything as soon as he is born. Likewise Saleem foretells his imminent, and already felt, disintegration. In both novels the concern for encapsulating/preserving memory grows considerably as the novel approaches its end.

32 When Saleem, like the novel itself, is nearing its end he samples different possible endings, coming to the final conclusion that if past can be encapsulated, manipulated, and distorted, the future cannot: "... I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet. But the future cannot be preserved in a jar; one jar must remain empty." Rushdie's refusal to establish "closure" on the text — expressed by his empty-jar metaphor — acquires a broader meaning when considered in the light of Bakhtin's "idea de la novela como un género inacabado, perpetually abierto, que es por tanto testimonio de que la historia no ha terminado" (Fuentes in Ortega 1990:637).

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able, and his tone fluctuates, sometimes considering the reader as a guest on a narrative journey, other times treating him as a mentally handicapped person unable to understand anything.

Rushdie's novel becomes especially complex in its splitting of the figure of the reader. Apart from the "you" that the novel addresses as an equal (representing the kind of ideal reader or literary critic who sympathizes with the narrator's project), Padma plays the role of an intradiegetic naive reader (the tone Saleem uses in addressing her is generally insulting or patronizing). Unlike the actual "you-reader", who possesses literary competence, Padma works as "a constant monitor of the potential reactions of a semi-illiterate audience" (Franco 1990). The fact that the I-narrator usually mocks Padma's naive reactions to the narrative account does not imply that the author is favouring an elitist discourse. On the contrary, it is Saleem's own dreams of grandeur that are constantly mocked and, finally, demolished at the end of the novel. In Rushdie's criticism of the intellectual's arrogant and patronizing attitude to the others there is an implicit rejection of the elitism that characterizes the writing of postcolonial cosmopolitan authors.

35 Rushdie's protagonist belongs, according to Hutcheon, to the category of self-deconstructive narrators who challenge the traditional notions of perspective. These narrators are usually unreliable, "resolutely provisional and limited — often undermining their own seeming omniscience."
In Cristóbal Nonato the narrator's consciousness of his physical development is manifested through constant references to the different stages of his gestation, from the minute description of his conception on the beach at Acapulco until his final birth in the same place. The interwoven narrative of his biological formation and his intellectual growth evokes Rushdie's birth imager, and it is connected with the act of writing. In one of the novel's central chapters Cristóbal says, “mi palabras les salen ojos y párpados, uñas y cejas, igual que a mi cuerpo” (278).

Like Rushdie, the narrator focuses much attention on the evolution of the novel itself, and on the self-conscious relationship between himself and the reader. Cristóbal periodically counts the number of pages he has spent in telling his story: “... y llevamos más de doscientas páginas escritas” (255), “llevamos cientos de páginas conociéndonos...” (494), etc. As he approaches birth, which he knows will bring the end of his memory, the narrator becomes ever more self-conscious and interrupts the narrative more and more frequently. In the last chapters the novel acquires a wild speed: “... la Historia es más rápida que la Ficción (aquí, en México, en el Nuevo Mundo!) y... es tiempo de pasar, sin más al mes de agosto y lo que en él nos agudara, empujar hacia adelante, hacia el desenlace, hacia mi Na-Ta-Li-Dad! mi Mother-Ni-Dad!” (415).

Mexico City is Fuentes's symbol for this superimposition of history and fiction in the New World. The capital becomes both the paradigm of the aesthetics of simulacrum and a possible space for democratization. Following Donald Fanger, Fuentes says that “la ciudad es la protagonista de la novela moderna porque es el lugar de artificio, es el lugar antinatural, donde el género de la novela, que es el género en contra de la naturaleza... tiene que verse a sí mismo como un artificio” (Ortega 1989:641). Fuentes's view of the city as the center of modern artifice makes the urban landscape into a metaphor for the novel itself. This city-novel identification points to Fuentes's view of both México City and Cristóbal Nonato as archetypal intertexts, the kind of symbolic scenario where historical and literary dialogue take place. As Julio Ortega suggests in a recent interview with Fuentes: “La ciudad es también un espacio de democratización, de intercambio horizontal de información, como lo es la misma novela” (190:642). In spite of the novel's apocalyptic tone, Fuentes emphasizes the necessity to still believe in the possibility of accomplishing a humanistic utopia: “Somos hijos de Tomas Moro”, Fuentes says, “de una utopía, de Maquiavelo, de la negación de la utopía, de la afirmación del poder; pero también de Erasmo, que dice: intentemos esta posibilidad humana y tolerante. Yo quisiera que Cristóbal Nonato, a pesar de su apariencia, fuera una novela erasmista, al final de cuentas, un elogio de la locura, ad usum año 2.000” (Ortega 1990:642).

Facing the chaotic situation portrayed in Cristóbal Nonato — where the utopian and the counter-utopian discourses seem to deconstruct each other — the reader, according to Fuentes, must help the novelist in his work of reconstruction. The novel's demand for formal organization mirrors the author's call for social reconstruction. Cristóbal Nonato displays a labyrinthine narrative organization. Like Tristram Shandy, Fuentes's novel belongs to a tradition of narratives for which “la línea recta es la distancia más larga entre dos palabras” (207). It moves continually backward and forward, and the narrator's enthusiasm for digression.
is equalled only that of Rushdie or Sterne: "nada es lineal, gracias a Dios todos somos observadores circulares y espirales, es nuestro privilegio, el tuyo y el mío, Elector" (560).

In confronting what Iser calls the "multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives", the reader tries to establish connections that make sense of what he is reading. In the first pages of Cristóbal Nonato, the reader has to deal with a confusing mass of detail. Characters and events are explained only as the novel progresses and the reader is able to connect an endless series of opposing vantage points. The progressive assimilation of information, the building of coherence from textual cues is paralleled by the different stages of the narrator's physical development. Thus, his embryonic and fetal formation mirrors the act of "consistency building" in the reader's consciousness. Cristóbal's birth at the very end symbolizes the terminus of what Iser calls "the wandering viewpoint", the creation of a final Gestalt after a long process of assembling and adjustment.

In Fuentes's novel the narrator exhorts the reader, who receives the significant name of "Elector" (in Spanish meaning both "the reader" and "the one who elects"), to become involved in the work. The audience members are not, therefore, the passive recipients of the realistic novel, but participants. This necessity for Cristóbal to draw the reader in is obvious in his digressive monologues: "[Q]uien es el otro que yo más necesito para ser, inimitablemente, yo, único Cristóbal Nonato. Mi respuesta es clara y contundente: Te necesito a ti, Elector" (114). He even leaves blank pages, allowing the reader to fill them in according to his or her own inspiration. In Book IV, Ch. 5, when Cristóbal decides to sum up, he offers the reader the opportunity to write down his own list with the facts deduced from Cristóbal's account. Two slots are given in the text, one with the title of "LISTA DE ELECTOR", and another with "LISTA DE CRISTÓBAL". The self-conscious narrator summarizes what has happened up to that point; the reader completes his list. Ironically, the reader's list is progressively invaded by Cristóbal's text, making the actual asymmetry between narrator and reader explicit. The reader may take part in the story, but he is ultimately ruled by the narrator's will and cues. Here Fuentes unconsciously reveals his own possible ambivalence about

37 In the third chapter of The Act of Reading (1978), Iser explains in detail the acts of comprehension by means of which the text is translated into the reader's consciousness. Of primary importance in understanding this process is the concept of the "wandering viewpoint". Unlike the objects of perception in the empirical world, which are already given and can be viewed as a whole, the "object" of the text cannot be conceived until the successive stages of reading have been completed. In the literary text, instead of a stable subject-object relationship, the reader becomes a moving viewpoint which travels along the text. This is actualized at certain stages. But its totality is approached only at the very end, through a process of synthesis. Every moment of reading is part of what Iser calls "a dialectic of pretention and retention" (1978:112). Each particular sequence in the text opens an inner horizon that the reader evaluates with regard to his expectations for the future and his ideological "stock of experience". He is located at the point of intersection between both horizons. His role is to cover the eminence of the horizon with the past ones, already filled but still fading. Through a process of synthesis, the wandering viewpoint unfolds the text in the consciousness of the reader as a network of connections, a network that exists potentially in the text but which can never be fully realized. The final connection of perspectives depends on the subjective approaches on the part of the readers, who are involved in a permanent process of "consistency building". The different segments and vantage points of the text are assembled by them, giving as a result an imagined Gestalt, which will be under revision as the reading progresses. Therefore, that Gestalt, not explicit in the text, only guides the reader's act of perspective assembling - an act in which the revision and modification of expectations are part of the process.

38 Iser conceives the image-making activity of the reader as a "synthesis" which entails "ideation". Successive images are modified and adjusted in our consciousness, producing the aesthetic object. This process of modification and adjustment has for Iser a therapeutic value, since it enables the reader to project his consciousness onto the text and thus to discover an aspect of his inner world which he has, until this time, ignored.

39 As Slemson has noted, "the reader is actually the central character in the allegorical text" (1988:160).
the participation of the audience: the narrator invites the reader to participate, and then frustrates him. The apparent
dominion of the “Tú” ends by yielding to the dictates of an overwhelming “Yo”. This kind of authorial invasion
sometimes turns out to be more didactic and controlling than the method of the traditional novel, which Cristóbal
Nonato purports to subvert.40

3. THE POLITICS OF LAUGHTER: INTERTEXTUALITY,
CARNIVALIZATION, AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE
NOVEL

The study of dialogism in the text cannot be limited to
analysis of its content as autonomous from its formal
expression. As Bakhtin points out in his “Essays of Historical
Poetics”: “We understand the chronotope as a literary cat-
egory of form-and-content” (1981).41 Both elements are
part of the same ideological discourse.42 The dialectical
impulse that we have seen at a historical and social level
reappears in the scope of forms, which then gives rise to
intertextuality:43 “… all discourse is in dialogue with prior

40 Such a seeming contradiction, however, is a characteristic device of “narcis-
sistic narrative”. For Hutcheon (1984), the paradox underlying this class of
texts is that they “demand of the reader both detachment and involvement”.

41 Bakhtin’s phrase in Russian is “formal’no-soderzhatel’nuju” as “cat-
egory of form-and-content”. I follow Todorov’s translation, “a category of
form-and-content (1984:35), which is also arrived at in the Spanish version,
categoría de la forma y el contenido” (1989:237). These seem to capture
Bakhtin’s meaning better than Emerson’s and Holquist’s English translation
(1981), which reads “we understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive
category of literature”.

42 On this point Todorov writes of Bakhtin: “… he does not valorize one
of the terms to better condemn the other, rather, he asserts the necessity of
finding a link between the two, of taking both into account simultaneously,
and of maintaining a perfect balance between them” (1984:35).

43 In her reworking of Bakhtinian poetics Julia Kristeva first introduced the
term “intertextuality”, to allude to the fruitful exchange that all works maintain
with the literary traditions in which they are inscribed (1967:16–17).

discourses on the same subject yet to come, whose reac-
tions it foresees and anticipates” (Todorov 1984:x).

Both Midnight’s Children and Cristóbal Nonato reflect on
the subject of literary paternity. The two novels con-
template intertextuality not as static or mechanical but, as dy-
namic and reversible. Rushdie and Fuentes maintain a
creative dialogue with their respective traditions, especially
the comic popular culture. According to Bakhtin, such cul-
ture has its source in primitive folklore and is at the core
of what he labels “carnivalesque” or “grotesque realism”44.

In order to reconstruct the historical foundations of this
mode Bakhtin carries his study back to the tribal, precap-
titalistic societies where it originated. This communities
were characterized by: collective life and work; the im-
portant role played by natural rhythms (the growing of the
plants, the change of seasons, etc.); an orientation toward
the future; a cyclical view of time; and the equal valuing
of the vital elements. With the rise of class society this
way of life was abandoned and repressed, but it emerged
in the form of a popular culture opposed to the official one,
which is “unconditionally serious and somber; beholden to
strict hierarchical order; filled with fear, dogmatism, devo-
tion and piety” (Todorov 1984:78).45 The popular culture,
by contrast, is the culture of laughter, “of carnival and the
public place, free; full of ambivalent laughter, sacrileges,
profanations, of all things sacred, disparagement and un-

44 In his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin lists “exaggeration, hyperbolism, and
excessiveness” as “fundamental attributes of the grotesque style” (1968:302).

45 Bakhtin’s quotations, collected by Todorov, come from a chapter added
to the second edition of his essay on Dostoevsky, which was devoted to analyze
the problems of the genre. In a late article, “Rabelais y Gogol: El arte de
la palabra y la cultura popular de la risa”, Bakhtin writes that the grotesque
culture (exemplified in Gogol’s work) is no longer “una simple violación de la
norma sino la negación misma de todas las normas abstractas” (1989:498). In
this kind of literature “la risa lo vence todo. Crea, entre nosotros, un tipo de
catarsis de la trivialidad” (1989:492).
seemly behaviour, familiar contact with everybody and everything" (Bakhtin 1984; qtd. in Todorov 1984:78).

The subject of intertextuality in *Midnight’s Children* leads us to the always controversial matter of who is influencing whom. The connections between Rushdie’s novel, Latin American “magic realism”, Western postmodernist fiction, the British novel, and Indian oral narrative have been widely discussed. Some critics, seeing similarities in technique between Rushdie and certain postcolonial and postmodernist fiction, accuse him of imitation. This seems to me a biased and narrowminded view of what is, in reality, a fruitful and flowing dialogue between literary traditions. Critics, in analyzing postcolonial texts, also exhibit a misunderstanding that Ashcroft describes as “a schizophrenic form of critical dismissal”. Third World scholars see these texts as simply borrowing from the native tradition, whereas Westerners tend to neglect the native influence entirely. Both currents are ignoring some of the most remarkable features of contemporary Third World literature: allegory, parody, and hibridity. The first two modes imply the existence of a pre-text, which is taken as a referent, to be finally displaced by a new one. The third, hibridity, is characterized by the writer’s heterodox use of real and fictional materials, which are distinguished, in turn, by their heterogeneity. The author’s manipulation of narrative can produce a work in which two different discourses are transformed into a single mode. In speaking of *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie, for example, has commented on the paradoxical kinship between modernist and traditional aesthetics:

One of the strange things about the oral narrative — which I did look at closely before writing *Midnight’s Children* — is that you find there a form which is thousands of years old, and yet which has all the methods of the post-modernist novel, because when you have somebody who tells you a story at that length, a story which is told from morning to night, it probably contains roughly as many words as a novel, and during the course of that story it is absolutely acceptable that the narrator will every so often enter his own story and chat about it — that he’ll comment on the tale, digress because the tale reminds him of something, and then come back to the point. All these things, which are absolutely second nature in an oral tale, become bizarre modern inventions when you write them down. It seems to me that when you look at the old narrative and use it, as I tried to do, as the basis of the novel, you become a post-modernist writer by being a very traditional one. By going back to ancient traditions you have done something which is bizarre (Brooks 1984:57).

In representing the fearful as well as the benevolent, the sublime as well as the grotesque, Hindu mythology is a good example of this kind of hibridity. Based on a triple heritage — Vedic, Sankrit, and folk and tribal — this mythology, like most, originates in oral tradition.

47 The use of hibridity in postcolonial discourses has been studied by Ashcroft (189:33-37) and Sangari (1987:186).

48 The Vedic literature is the oldest source of Hindu mythology (1400 BC-500 BC). Its best known texts are the *Rigveda* and the *Upanishads*. The other main tradition is the epic, which refers to the works transmitted orally and written during the classical period (500 BC-1000 AD), e.g. the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. These great epics tried to capture the civilization of their age as it was reflected in its religion, philosophy, politics, and ethics. (O’Flaherty 1988:1-5).
Blackburn points out, “oral epics in India have that special ability to tell a community’s own story and thus help to create and maintain that community’s self-identity” (1989:11). At a later stage these myths were written down, and subsequently used in the Sanskrit theater. All these mythological forms are mainly allegorical and had a direct influence on the allegorical framework of Rushdie’s novel. In order to understand the incorporation of Midnight’s Children into the context of Hindu tradition we must look at two of the most important figures of its theogony, Shiva and Ganesh, and at the role of the buffoon (Vidushka), in Midnight’s Children.

Shiva, a primary and one of the most complex gods of Hindu mythology, is a figure of both destructive power and of reproduction and restoration. The name of Shiva (in Sanskrit meaning “friendly” or “auspicious”) brings together many contradictory characteristics and was frequently applied to any god feared by men. Shiva is both the destroyer and the restorer, the great ascetic and the symbol of sensuality, the protector of men and the wrathful avenger. He has more than a thousand names, detailed in the Siva Purana, one of the Sanskrit epics. His most realistic image shows the linga or phallus (Stutley 1985:106-10).

Ganesh, son of Shiva and Parvati, is described as the creator and the remover of obstacles and as the Lord of Beginnings. He is spatially symbolized by the Threshold, reflecting his mediating role. Ganesh is the patron of letters and learning and is usually represented holding a manuscript. (According to a legend, he is the scribe who wrote down the Mahabharata — the great epic of the Bharata dynasty.) As Courtright concludes in his study of the deity, “it is clear that Ganesh is not finished. His protean nature continues to give forth vitality” (1985:251). This mutability explains Ganesh’s relevance in “a culture undergoing rapid change” (Courtright 1985:251).

Shiva and Ganesh make their presence felt in Midnight’s Children. The character called Shiva, one of the Children and the real son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai, appears as a constantly threatening shadow over Saleem. As a result of a baby-switch, he is raised by a poor family. His poverty makes him bitterly resentful and suspicious of Saleem’s role as leader in the Midnight’s Children Conference. As in the myth, he represents both violence and sexual power. He is first introduced in the novel when his birth and Saleem’s are prophesied by the false guru Ramram. The I-narrator recurrently confirms the guru’s prediction of Shiva’s destructive powers, making explicit the identification between the fictional character and the Hindu god: “Shiva, the god of destruction, whom no force can resist... the boy Shiva, he told us, had to fight for survival from his earliest days” (264).

Saleem, on the other hand, is associated with the god Ganesh. Not only does the protagonist share Ganesh’s most characteristic features (his preternatural nose and his son’s colossal ears complete the image of the elephant-headed god); he is, like Ganesh himself, the archetype of the artist. Unlike Shiva, Lord of War, Ganesh/Saleem is the Lord of Imagination. While Shiva embodies sexual power (the narrator describes him as a “stud”); Saleem is impotent. In contrast to Shiva’s miserable upbringing, the protagonist grows up with the loving care of a well-to-do family. It is therefore not surprising that Shiva’s and Saleem’s political ideas are opposed from the very beginning. When the Midnight’s Children Conference begins to disintegrate for political reasons, Saleem tries to keep the group together by telepathically broadcasting a message of reconciliation. His political speech turns out to be like a demagogic liberal discourse of modernity, in which he pro-
poses a third principle beyond radical polarities. His position is immediately demolished by Shiva the plebeian:

No, little boy, there is no third principle; there is only money-and-poverty, and have-on-luck, and right-and-left; there is only me against the world!... the world is not ideas, rich boy; the world is no place for dreamers or their dreams; the world little Snotnose, is things. Things and their makers rule the world. When you have things, then there is time to dream; when you don’t, you fight (307).

In accordance with the paradoxical nature of the Hindu gods, Shiva and Saleem exchange roles as the novel approaches its end. Saleem falls into misery and ends up living in the ghetto of the communist magicians; Shiva ascends on the social ladder. At this point it is Saleem who must fight for survival and is the one who believes, albeit temporarily, in class struggle: Shiva becomes one of the most successful generals in India Gandhi’s politics of repression. Saleem’s identification with Ganesh extends to his son. Their role of Ganesh — the Lord of Beginnings standing at the Threshold of new enterprises — is confirmed by Rushdie’s description of Aadam Sinai’s birth: “... something was ending, something was being born, and at the precise instant of the birth of the new India and the beginning of a continuous midnight which would not end for two long years, my son, the child of the renewed tick-tock, came out into the world” (499-500).

The complexities of the plot round off the novel’s mythological structure. Saleem marries Parvati-the-witch, another of the Midnight’s Children, but because he is impotent, Parvati seeks Shiva’s sexual favors. Thus Aadam Sinai’s real father is Shiva, which completes his identification with the myth: “because he was also the true son of Shiva-and-Parvati; he was elephant-headed Ganesh” (500).

Saleem also plays the role of the “Vidushka”, one of the most popular figures in Sanskrit drama. This character, according to Ashcroft (1989:184) and Paniker (1986:21–2), has its origins in the clown narrator of Kutiyattam:

The Vidushka can take all kinds of liberties; in fact he is expected to and encouraged to do so. He can indulge in any kind of extravaganza, provided he can come back to the main thread of the narrative without getting lost in his own elaborations. He could turn his narrative into a string of short stories or take one of these stories and lengthen it for hours or days. Thus the oral narrative can easily achieve the length of a novel — if length is a criterion at all (Paniker 1986:21–2; qtd. in Ashcroft 1989:184).

Most of these oral narrations were dramatized in the Sanskrit theater. On stage the Vidushka became a kind of theatrical clown described as “a bucktoothed, dwarfish hunchback with a cleft-palate, bald head, yellow eyes, and a distorted face” (Natyasastra 24.106; qtd. in Siegel 1987:19). The “comic appeal of deformity” was often used in Sanskrit theater to dramatize the virtues of the king or hero (regularly a lover or warrior). However, the Vidushka also plays a transgressive role. He mocks the hero’s or king’s abstractions and affirmations of the ideal; thus the fool comes to represent their opposite, the concrete realities. As Siegel has written, “he offers an ‘alternative’ to the hero” (1987:287). In his study of the Indian comic tradition, Siegel goes further in suggesting that the farcical element in this character is a vehicle for the “expression of the people’s hatred of Brahmins”. His central function is therefore to be “an institutionalized transgressor of brahminical norms and taboos” (1987:289).50

50 Siegel devotes a whole chapter to analyzing the figure of the fool in the Sanskrit tradition. In a shorter section entitled “A Scholar’s Conference: The Theatrical Fool”, he envisions a dicussion among several experts on the role and functions of this clownish character. In this dramatization of Siegel’s thesis, Prof. Schengler (author of “The Origin of the Vidushka and the Employment of this Character in the Plays of Harsadana”) explains that “[the Vidushka originated not in the court drama under the influence of the Brahmana caste, but in the early plays of the different tribes of India... By making
The extravagant narrator speaks for the Vidushka's spirit in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem finds it difficult to submit himself to the imperatives of linear narrative. His frequent digressions break the work into a mosaic of interrelated stories, and his inherent unreliability undermines the authority of a univocal point of view. The novel becomes a prism in which reality is approached only through multiple vantage points, a kaleidoscope where figures briefly provide an illusion of symmetry and totality only to be immediately replaced by new, deceitful figures, new illusionary wholes.

The buffoon-like quality of Rushdie’s narrator evokes also the Bakhtinian discussion of the carnivalesque as an expression of popular and comics culture. In the carnival festivities, as in Vidushka’s story’s and plays, the sacred is profaned, hierarchies are turned upside-down, opposites mingle, and officialdom is subverted and mocked. Rushdie’s mixtures of styles, stress on deformities and the bizarre, and, especially, his view of opposites interacting and exchanging roles mark his novel as a paradigm of the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque.

The I-narrator’s identifications with the god Ganesh and the subverting Vidushka in *Midnight’s Children* emphasize Rushdie’s fascination with the act of writing. Extending the mythological analogies, it is an act of affirmation, but also an act of manipulation, as well as of genesis. Threatened by immediate disintegration, in the form of physical fragmentation and oblivion, the narrator feels compelled to record his memories. These memories, however, are never faithful to reality; they create one of their own. The function of the artist is that of Genesis: “the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating the world” (201). His task, however, can only be achieved by problematizing the already-given truths and myths, and this includes permanent revision, endless self-criticism — aiming to unveil the fictionality of the world: “... because human beings, like nations and fictional characters, can simply run out of steam, and there’s nothing for it but to finish with them” (39).

Intertextual dialogue is also a vital part of Cristóbal Nonato, whose referential code is found not only in its historical context but also in the novelistic reality to which it belongs. The novel is heavy with literary allusions, so much so that the book becomes a minute rereading of previous models. Book III, Ch. 7, is the metafictional center of the novel. One of the characters gets imprisoned within a gigantic egg (a counterpart to the motherly uterus in which Cristóbal remains throughout the novel) and he decides to write a novel in his head. He tries several beginnings that turn out to be ironic inversions of classical models. The

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51 “Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent versions of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own” (253).
first lines of A Tale of Two Cities, Don Quijote, Anna Karenina, Cien años de soledad and The Metamorphosis, among others, are parodied.

Fuentes’s novel is, like Don Quijote or Tristram Shandy, a novel of novels. If one of the intentions of Cervantes’s work was to parody all the genres that were still popular in his time, in Cristóbal Nonato we witness similar intertextual dialectics. In Book III, Ch. 7, we find again a profound reflection on intertextuality. Under the title of “LOS HIJOS DE LA MANCHA”, Cristóbal offers a long list of “novedas hermanas, amadas”, a genealogy that helps us understand and interpret the text of the Mexican novelist. Among other authors, characters and works, the narrator alludes to Tristram Shandy, Emma Bovary, Franz Kafka, Erasmus, Pickwick, Myshkin, Nikolai Gogol, Alonso Quijano, Jacques le fataliste, Nazarín, and Pierre Menard, “author of Don Quijote” (152).

Fuentes places this long list of “LOS HIJOS DE LA MANCHA” alongside another, “LOS HIJOS DE WATERLOO”: the imagination against power, diversity and contradiction against the univocal interpretation of reality. But in Cristóbal Nonato the intertextual phenomenon does not conform to chronologies. The use, inversion and manipulation of previous texts enriches the possibilities for interpretation. The openness of Fuentes’s novel not only allows multiple readings but also multiplies the readings of previous works, so it would be possible to talk about the influence of Cristóbal Nonato in Tristram Shandy or in Don Quijote.

This list of kindred novels reveals something more than a mere affinity between Fuentes and Bakhtin. Both put forward a theoretical proposal that favors a literature that violates the cultural canon. Cristóbal Nonato celebrates the carnivalesque literature that is championed by Bakhtin. The characteristics of the carnivalesque (also called “grotesque realism”) have their counterpart in an article on Fuentes: “... el influjo entre obras de cronología distinta sería no unilateral sino recíproco y la obra posterior podría inyectar a su vez nueva sabia en la trama de las obras que le preceden, establecer un diálogo con ellas, extraerlas de su primitiva cadena significativa y vincularlas, más allá de sus propios límites, en un nuevo texto general, común y más amplio” (1987:40). Notice the similarities between Bakhtin’s theses (Todorov 1984:x) and Goytisolo’s. This notion of the text as a space for encounter and dialogue with other texts is developed also by Octavio Paz in his essay Corriente alterna (1969): “... ese mundo de ideas que, al desplegarse, crea un espacio intelectual: el ámbito de una obra, la resonancia que la prolonga o la contradice. Ese espacio es el lugar de encuentro con las otras obras, la posibilidad de diálogo entre ellas”.

In an essay on Goytisolo (“Modos de lectura”) Fuentes insists in proposing Bakhtin’s theses as the theoretical model for contemporary narrative. In contrast with the realistic aesthetics consecrated by authors such as E.M. Forster, Fuentes praises the dialogical principle of the Russian critic: “La libertad creativa de Bajtkin es la que conviene a la novela contemporánea, la que da cabida a su potencialidad, concebida en términos verbales, pero, mediante el lenguaje, en términos históricos, políticos y aun nacionales dinámicos, no pasivos; con costillas, no con papillas; inclusivos, no excluyentes. Este es el honor de la novela contemporánea, y Juan Goytisolo lo encarna soberanamente” (1989:28).

Octavio Paz’s El laberinto de la soledad, Ch. 4 (“Todos santos, día de muertos”) examines the revolutionary power of the Fiesta and its roots in Mexican tradition. His description of the Fiesta as a subversive black mass, as a ceremony of transgression, coincides substantially with the Bakhtinian view of Carnival: “En ciertas fiestas desaparece la noción misma de Orden. El caos regresa y reina la licencia. Todo se permite: desaparecen as jarruqitas habituales, las distinciones sociales, los sexos, las clases, los gremios. Los hombres se disfrazan de mujeres, los señores de esclavos, los pobres de ricos. Se ridiculiza el ejército, al clero, a la magistratura. Gobiernan los niños o los locos. Se comienan profanaciones rituales, sacrilegios obligatorios. El amor se vuelve promiscuo. A veces la Fiesta se convierte en Misa Negra. Se violan reglamentos, hábitos, costumbres. El individuo respetable arroja su máscara de carne y la ropa oscura que lo añada y, vestido de colorines, se esconde en una careta, que lo libera de s mismo” (1959:45).
in Fuentes's text: the parodying of the classic, "the attraction of the eccentric, the surprising, the bizarre; misalliances and the reunion of opposites, profanation and debasement." The essence of Carnival rests on change, on death-rebirth dynamics, on simultaneously creative and destructive time. Like Fuentes's characters and situations, carnivalesque images are basically ambivalent (Bakhtin 1968 & 1973; qtd. in Todorov 1984:79).56

Cristóbal Nonato, as we have seen, thematizes some of Bakhtin's postulates. But the metafictional nature of the text is also manifested in the narrator's reflections on the acts of writing and reading. The concept of the author that emerges from these reflections corresponds to the role that Jean Franco assigns to the writers of the boom: "... la idea del autor como 'fundador' o 'creador' de un universo texto original" (1983:311). The new Latin American novel proposes a third notion of the writer, opposed to the concepts of "narrador" (the guardian of historical memory) and the "autor superestrella" (whose narrative technique reflects the models of mechanical repetition in mass culture): "la noción del autor como iniciador o fundador de un nuevo 'cosmos' o 'estado' dotado con la posibilidad de generar su propio discurso" (Franco 1983:314). This capacity of mythopoiesis that the artist grants to himself is appropriated by the I-narrator in Cristóbal Nonato in his frequent monologues:

\[
\text{mi cuerpo es el sistema} \\
\text{con el que voy a contestarle} \\
\text{al mundo físico, le contestaré al mundo} \\
\text{creando el mundo, seré el autor de lo que me precede,} \\
\text{contestándole, hagan lo que hagan ellos, se quieran o se} \\
\text{odien, se separen o se reúnan, yo tendré que responder con mi} \\
\text{cuerpo y mis palabras al mundo que ellos me están} \\
\text{creando, cuidado! apenas aparezca yo} \\
\text{empezaré a crearles su mundo} \\
\text{a ellos} \\
\text{(Angel/Angeles)} \\
\text{(384)}
\]

Through Cristóbal, Fuentes asserts himself as a founder hero in a continual process of creating his own utopian reality. The above passage also says a great deal about the aesthetics of the novel. On one hand, Cristóbal appropriates the power to acquire historical existence since, as a text in gestation, he comes into being at the end of the novel. Angel and Angeles, on the other hand, are only fictional characters created by Cristóbal-Fuentes's imagination. The novel's creation, and therefore Cristóbal's, results from the encounter between the author's text and the reader who holds the novel in his hands. Cristóbal's declaration of omniscience is also another allusion to the inversion of the chronological dimension of influences. The I-narrator declares that he is the author of what precedes him. In addition to his parents and ancestors at the plot level (Angel, Angeles, etc.), he also means his literary predecessors, those who have influenced Fuentes's cultural background. The use and manipulation of those texts within Cristóbal Nonato moves the reader to reconsider his own readings of them — in short, to rewrite them.

Like the protagonist, the novel itself curls up. Its narrator reveals the work's mechanisms and the process of cre-
ating it. At every level of the novel, the reader encounters the image of the fetal position: the circle, the serpent biting its tail, the spiral turning around itself, the maelstrom that invites us to penetrate into its depths in order to discover the answer to the last question, the mystery of the “I”.

In the end, the violation of the norms of literary realism (the task undertaken by Fuentes in *Cristóbal Nonato*) has a paradoxical goal: the representation of Mexican reality. This reality is not seen as linear and ordered, but as cyclic, chaotic and fundamentally heterogeneous.\(^{57}\) If Bakhtin defends diversity in the European literary tradition, such diversity is multiplied further in Latin America, where the confluence of other cultures, the mixture of other styles and tradition, interact with the European heritage.\(^{58}\)

**CONCLUSIONS**

Both *Midnight’s Children* and *Cristóbal Nonato* challenge our assumptions that historical statements are objective, neutral, or impartial. Rushdie and Fuentes mock the traditional conception of history as a utilitarian enterprise that responds to totalizing patterns.\(^{59}\) They view the construction of nation-states in the same terms as the production of novels: both are acts of fabulation that look for legitimacy in a manipulated past. Fuentes and Rushdie obsessively and multifariously metaphorize writing and reading in their narratives, conceiving them as acts of subjective, historical, and narrative affirmation. By using elements of what Bakhtin calls the tradition of Carnival, the two authors give shape to their eagerness for a permanent subversion of the literary canon.

Although both novels begin with a national hero who embodies the past and longings of the community, they evolve along different patterns. As Fuentes states in *Tiempo mexicano*, his political and literary aim is to create an independent national consciousness that would serve as the foundation for a more just and egalitarian society. In this enterprise, Fuentes sees intellectuals playing a leading role. Mexican literature is, for Fuentes, a utopian and revolutionary synthesis of the national traditions (1971:40), with the writer as the cultural hero and agent of change. Notwithstanding its highly parodical tone and its caustic satire of official national imagery, *Cristóbal Nonato* thus seems closer than Rushdie to Jameson’s view of Third World texts as ones in which private individual destiny is “an allegory of the embattled situation of public third-world culture and society” (1986:69). The novel itself ultimately emerges as an allegorical representation of national consciousness in the process of gestation, with which Fuentes’s imagined community seeks to assert its identity.

Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* proposes, instead, a more skeptical vision. Unlike Fuentes, Rushdie systematically

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\(^{57}\) “... human existence itself is a ‘mixture' of style, an irreducible heterogeneity” (Todorov 1984:80).

\(^{58}\) In his interview with Julio Ortega, Fuentes confirms this hypothesis of Latin America as an intertext whose very nature is multifarious and heterogeneous: “Desde estas dos premisas [the novel as an open genre and the unfinished quality of history] me he propuesto... ver a la América Latina como una región plicultural, que no puede reducirse a una sola interpretación, a un solo texto” (1989:637), or as Franco suggests, ‘Latin America’ itself, as a pastiche” (1990:98).

\(^{59}\) The two novels’ view of history is reminiscent of Foucault’s distinction between the traditional, “total” history and what he calls genealogical analysis: [Genealogy... must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history — in sentiment, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles” (1977:139-40). Like Foucault, Rushdie and Fuentes seek to reveal the multiplicity of factors underlying every event in order to show the fragility of historical forms. See “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, in Foucault (1977:139-164).
undermines the notion of the national hero and consistently parodies his own role as an intellectual in the historical process of social transformation. Rushdie’s protagonist, Saleem, is frequently caught in a struggle between his feeling of responsibility as savoir of the nation and his human desire for a private life. The demands of forming a national consciousness prove too taxing for him, and he eventually gives up the mission. Saleem’s efforts to make his story into history are subverted by the end of the novel, his search for privacy being frustrated by the “annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes” (552).

Apart from their different treatment of the messianic potential of the Third World writer, formal and ideological concerns in Fuentes and Rushdie run in parallel. None of the two provides an easy answer to this dilemma between the spectacle — the history of the elites — in favor of the marginalized, the de-centered. They are ludic celebration of heterogeneity amidst the dystopian and monolithic powers of postcolonial societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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