The Pyramid and the Volcano: Carlos Fuentes' *Cambio de piel* and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*

Twenty years separate Carlos Fuentes' *Cambio de piel* (1967) from Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947); yet Lowry's depiction of Mexico of the late 1930's coincides in interesting ways with Fuentes' Mexico of the 1960's. Although Carlos Fuentes knows and admires *Under the Volcano*, he did not have it in mind when he wrote *Cambio de piel*.[1] Nevertheless, because the two novels provide insights into certain aspects of Mexican culture, because they view the human condition from a similar perspective, and because they are remarkably alike thematically and technically, a comparative study of the two books can enhance a reader's appreciation of both. The comparison will, of course, emphasize similarities but cannot blur the sharp contrasts between two very different works.

Both novels are set in Mexico in the Mexico City-Cuernavaca-Cholula area, and both convey a feeling of transcendent regionalism which is a significant part of the total experience contained in each. As the reader moves with the drunken Consul through Quauhnahuac and nearby Parián, he feels the imposing presence of the volcanoes and the lush semi-tropical natural surroundings. In his biography of Malcolm Lowry, Douglas Day identifies five thematic levels in *Under the Volcano*: the chthonic (earth-bound), the human, the political, the magical, and the religious. Referring to the chthonic level, Day says, ". . . the natural and man-made setting for the novel is quite possibly the most vital element in it, and as expressive of the 'meaning' of *Under the Volcano* as any of its other thematic levels. It is this chthonic level that gives the work its extraordinary textural density, its oppressiveness which is sometimes almost insupportable. Everything in nature is rendered alive and febrile. . . ."[2] In *Cambio de piel* on various levels—human, mythic, religious, political, as well as chthonic—the Mexican setting also provides "extraordinary textural density." The reader constantly feels its emotional power: the overwhelming sense of continuation in the remains of ancient civilizations in the pyramid at Cholula, the anomaly of the Church resting above the pyramid, the ominous feeling surrounding the asylum below, the pathos of the poverty visible in the streets of Cholula and dating back to the time of the Conquest, the electricity of the constant threat of arbitrary violence.

While the Mexicanness of the surroundings is extremely important in both novels, the principal characters are either foreigners or are familiar with foreign cultures and ambivalently feel love and hate toward the Mexican environment and toward each other. In neither novel, however,

does the ambivalent attitude toward Mexico overshadow the magnetism of the environment. In general, Fuentes' works, even when critical of certain aspects of Mexican society and politics, reveal the author's love for that country and his profound interest in its past, present, and future. Lowry's attitude is positive in a similar way. Jorge Ruffinelli in his study of Lowry sees a basic difference between Lowry's portrayal of Mexico and that of other foreign writers: "Lowry fue uno de los pocos escritores extranjeros a México que no denigró en su obra al país, caso contrario a los de Lawrence y Greene, aunque tenía—entre otras cosas, por la angustiosa deportación ilegal en 1945—sobrados motivos para hacerlo. La visión de México—que de todos modos es bastante sombría y crítica—aparece compensada por la luminosidad de la atmósfera y el paisaje, y hasta con la idea de un posible paraíso que pudiera encontrar en esa tierra su lugar de residencia."[3] Residence in Mexico for a long period of time seems not only to have enabled Malcolm Lowry, an Englishman, convincingly to describe the experience of foreigners living there, but also to have given him an extraordinary sense of closeness to Mexico and its people. Although Carlos Fuentes is Mexican, he has spent much of his life in other countries. The combination of an international perspective with an intimate knowledge of all aspects of Mexican life lets him view his own country with the familiarity of an insider as well as with the distance, and often with the sense of wonder, of an alien.

The principal action in both novels significantly takes place on a day that celebrates the myth cycle of Life and Death. *Under the Volcano* begins on the Day of the Dead in November 1939, one year after the day during which the principal action occurs. In *Cambio de piel* the story that is related on a "September night" (see CP 9 and 365) takes place on April 11, 1965, Palm Sunday. At these special times characters in each work descend into an abyss of darkness and death.

The basic story in each novel is relatively uncomplicated, while the way it is told is complex and transformational. In *Cambio de piel* the story is a simple mystery. In it four people traveling in Mexico on the weekend of April 11, 1965, are being spied upon by the narrator, Freddy, who says that he is going to kill one of them. The travelers—a middle-aged Mexican professor and his wife, who claims to be from a Jewish family from New York, Javier Ortega and Elizabeth Jonas de Ortega, and their respective lovers, Javier's Mexican student Isabel and a middle-aged Czech man named Franz Jellinek—stop in Cholula and are forced to stay there overnight when they find that the gearbox of their car has been destroyed. While they are in Cholula, a youthful group of Nazi hunters called "los Monjes" (the Monks) arrive. Isabel has put these "hippies" and "Vietniks" in touch with Freddy, who is also an "old rebel." When Isabel takes Franz, Javier, and Elizabeth to visit the great pyramid in Cholula at midnight, Freddy leads the Monks there. The Monks then leave Freddy outside and follow Franz's group to the center of the pyramid, where they take their vengeance on Franz. One learns in the course

of the novel that Jakob Werner, the Monks' leader and the only one of them who dresses conservatively, is the son of a Jewish girl named Hanna whom Franz had loved in Prague before he became an architect for the Nazis. Near the end of the war when the Nazis' cause was lost and their behavior was dictated by panic, Franz had searched out, mutilated, and killed the already dying prisoner who had fathered Jakob in a concentration camp.

The characters' hopes, illusions, deceptions, and disappointments take the form of stories shown in scenes and related in conversations interspersed among the events of the night in Cholula. Throughout the novel, Freddy intrudes; he talks to Elizabeth and at times to Isabel. Writer and taxi-driver, Freddy is a kind of perceptive madman, who asks himself, "¿Seré realmente un rebelde sin causa envejecido, un angry young man rancio, a middle-aged beatnik?" (CP 73) He is watcher, listener, collector of information, and teller of a tale in which he, too, participates. In his conversations with Elizabeth and Isabel, Freddy refers to experiences he has shared with them, to their relationships with other characters, and to past backgrounds of all major characters. He apparently acquired much of this information in previous conversations with the women, especially with Elizabeth, but he also has in his possession a trunk full of memorabilia from Elizabeth's past. In spite of having promised Elizabeth not to reveal the contents of the trunk, he uses the material to create his own fiction, which he shares with the Monks, who are themselves a part of his fictional creation. The Monks in their turn create their own version of the story, stealing its elements (what Freddy has told them and what they find in Elizabeth's trunk), parodying the behavior of the principal characters, and holding a mock trial before confronting Franz. As the Monks impose their will on the outcome, Freddy is in an especially ambiguous position; although he is the narrator and in a sense the Monks' creator, he cannot control their behavior.[4] At the end of the novel the reader learns that Freddy has been telling the story in an asylum where Elizabeth is either a fellow patient or is visiting him. Freddy signs his narrative "Freddy Lambert."[5]

In *Under the Volcano* the story opens on the Day of the Dead in November of 1939 in a Mexican town called Quauhnahuac, modeled on Cuernavaca. Jacques Laruelle, a French movie director who has been living in Mexico, reminisces with a Mexican doctor, Arturo Díaz Vigil, about their friend Geoffrey Fermin who was killed on the same day a year earlier. After the men separate, Jacques continues to remember Geoffrey and Geoffrey's ex-wife Yvonne, who was also killed on the day of Geoffrey's death. The novel jumps back in time to the fatal day in 1938. On that day Yvonne returned to Geoffrey, who had been the British Consul and was now an unemployed drunk. But it appeared that because of Geoffrey's chronic alcholism and because of his bitterness about Yvonne's past behavior, reconciliation would always be impossible no matter how strongly the desire to love persisted. An added

complication was the presence of Geoffrey's younger stepbrother, Hugh, who came a short time earlier and was still visiting when Yvonne arrived. Since Hugh and Yvonne were as attracted to each other as they had been in the past, they spent much of the day together, while Geoffrey wandered around in a deliriously drunken state.

The culminating actions of the novel occur in simultaneously timed chapters in which Yvonne and Geoffrey are killed. In Chapter XI Yvonne and Hugh are walking in a storm through the forest near the casino where Geoffrey is drinking when they hear a couple of gunshots. Hugh attributes the sounds to target practice. A short time later, while Yvonne is walking separated from Hugh, the storm intensifies, bringing heavy lightening and thunder and blocking out the sound of an approaching runaway horse. By the time Yvonne realizes that the horse is there, it has trampled her; she perceives herself being transported toward the stars. In Chapter XII, at approximately the same time, Geoffrey releases the same horse because he knows that its owner is dead. (He recognizes the horse because it has a number 7 branded on its rump.) Then, after a conflict with Mexican Facist officials, one called Chief of Rostrums and another called Jefe de Jardineros, who is not a gardener at all but rather a Spanish Facist in Mexico to enlist Mexican support, Geoffrey, considered a British spy ("espider"), is shot and thrown into a nearby barrance. He descends as if into a volcano and then as if into the collapse of "the world itself." While the action moves toward this violent conclusion, throughout the novel many symbolic acts and references prefigure what is to come. Flashbacks to scenes, conversations, and thoughts reveal the characters' backgrounds and their interrelationships with each other.

Patterns of characterization, symbolism, imagery, and allusion closely coincide in the two novels. Malcolm Lowry says that in *Under the Volcano* the four principal characters—Geoffrey (the Consul), Yvonne, Hugh, and Jacques—are "intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit. . . . "[6] Douglas Day explains that because of the sexual connection existing among the four (the three men have all made love to Yvonne), the group might be interpreted as a Freudian family with Geoffrey as Father, Hugh as Son, Jacques as Brother, and Yvonne as the Eternal Woman, filling all female roles.[7] Unity also exists among the four principal characters in *Cambio de piel* —Javier, Elizabeth, Franz, and Isabel. Carlos Fuentes has acknowledged that ". . . el Narrador podría ser todos."[8] The four with the narrator Freddy Lambert may be said to form an image of the "squaring of the circle."[9] They not only form male and female pairs of doubles, each character also has certain attributes corresponding to those of the other three and to those of Freddy, who serves as a central unifying figure. The characters are like four points, separate and opposite while at the same time singularly unified by Freddy.

The concept of the "artist *manqué*" which Lanin Gyurko has identified in *Cambio de piel*[10] also exists in *Under the Volcano*, where it applies to

the principal male characters. In *Cambio de piel*, a novel largely about the act of creating fiction, most of the characters are failures in one way or another. Javier is a frustrated writer unable to produce his great work, or any substantial work for that matter. He blames much of his difficulty on Elizabeth, but it seems to stem mainly from his own lack of volition. Writing is Freddy's form of rebellion. Describing his feelings after an orgiastic spectacle with the Monks in a whorehouse on Niño Perdido, Freddy says that although all were exhausted, what he most wanted to do was to write down the things that the Monks told him: "Bastante es lo que me dicen y escribirlo significa atravesar todos los obstáculos del desierto. . ." (CP 407). He also says that literature is called a "betrayal of confidence," but that as he sees it, "La verdad nos amenaza por los cuatro costados. No es la mentira el peligro; es la verdad que espera adormecernos y contentarnos para volver a imponerse: como en el principio. Si la dejáramos, la verdad aniquilaría la vida" (CP 407–408). He feels that the creation of fiction is a way of struggling to exist: "La mentira literaria traiciona a la verdad para aplazar ese día del juicio en el que principio y fin serán uno solo. Y sin embargo, presta homenaje a la fuerza originaria, inaceptable, mortal: la reconoce para limitarla" (CP 408). Time takes its toll on the artist who because of his lack of will does not write. Freddy's novel is in part the work that Javier intended to write but did not; Freddy, however, who creates fictions in an effort to assert his version of reality, does not succeed in altering his own condition, or even in completely controlling his own fictional creation.[11]

Geoffrey, like Javier, is a frustrated writer. In a touching scene in Lowry's novel, Jacques Laruelle finds a letter from his dead friend Geoffrey to Yvonne. In this letter, which was never sent, Geoffrey talks about a book on the occult that he had intended to write but had not completed:

> Meantime do you see me as still working on the book, still trying to answer such questions as: Is there any ultimate reality, external, conscious and ever-present etc., etc., that can be realized by any such means that may be acceptable to all creeds and religions and suitable to all climes and countries? Or do you find me between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah (but still at Chesed)—my equilibrium is all, precarious—balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretractable path of God's lightning back to God? As if I ever were in Chesed! More like Oliphoth. When I should have been producing obscure volumes of verse entitled the Triumph of Humpty Dumpty or the Nose with the Luminous Dong! Or at best, like Clare, "weaving fearful vision". . . A frustrated poet in every man. Though it is perhaps a good idea under the circumstances to pretend at least to be proceeding with one's great work on "Secret Knowledge," then one can always say when it never comes out that the title explains the deficiency (UV 39).

When he speaks of Chesed and Qliphot, Geoffrey, who is well-versed in the mystical lore of the Cabbala, is referring to the Sephirotic Tree, the

tree of life, which is believed to have ten progressive emmanations from physical to spiritual levels through which the adept moves towards union with God. Geoffrey, however, feels himself in the pattern of the inverted tree, on a downward path leading to Qliphot, "the realm of husks and demons."[12] Day interprets Geoffrey's condition as the result of this conscious decision to take "the way down": "This failed Consul, this erratic and faintly ludicrous drunk, is nothing less than a modern-day type of the Faustian-Promethian rebel, a man who turns his back on Grace, and who seeks by doing so to acquire diabolical wisdom and power. He knows, like Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and the rest of the *poètes maudits*, that the way down and the way up are one and the same; and he, like them, prefers the way down."[13] While the way down might lead Geoffrey to the knowledge he is seeking, Geoffrey is not able to write his book as he descends.

Hugh is in a sense also an "artist *manqué*." His career as a songwriter began when he gained some measure of success with his songs at an early age, was aborted through a series of self-created misfortunes. At the time of the novel, at 30, Hugh is a wanderer and would-be revolutionary. Jacques Laruelle, once a successful film producer, was also at a low point in his career when he came to Quauhnahuac, where he stays on during the year after the deaths of Geoffrey and Yvonne.

In both novels various characters in addition to being "failed artists" are failures as human beings. In *Cambio de piel* this is true of Javier and Franz. Both fail to act affirmatively. Javier does not write his novel. Franz, while still in Europe, did not speak out against the Nazis, but rather worked with them as an architect in the planning of concentration camps. The artistic talent that he had hoped to use creatively when he was a student became a force of destruction. At the end of the novel, as Franz and Javier wrestle in a love/hate encounter at the center of the pyramid, each represents an aspect of the failure to exert the power of the Will in a positive way in the human context: ". . . esa locura, esa negativa de aceptar el hecho individual como algo relacionado con el hecho social, esta súbita ausencia de toda restricción, ese acto silencioso, esa complicidad ciega, avanzaron con el cuerpo y la mirada da Franz hacia la inmovilidad de Javier, hacia ese contrario pasivo, ansioso de liberarse por la mentira y la fiebre antes de que llegue el ataque final, la rendición de cuentas, incapaz de convertir la compasión en respeto, finalmente inadecuado a todo el dolor y toda la alegría del mundo" (CP 370). The active Franz, who is incapable of connecting his individual choices to his social responsibility, moves with tenderness and cruelty toward the passive Javier, who is incapable of feeling for and with his fellow man. The end of *Cambio de piel* exists in two versions. At the end of this encounter, which is included in the first version, the passageway inside the pyramid caves in, trapping Elizabeth and Franz, while Javier and Isabel escape. In that version Javier later kills Isabel when she begins to talk to him the

way Elizabeth had. In the second version the encounter between Franz and Javier is implied but not shown.

Javier shares his failing as a human being with both Hugh and Geoffrey. Events in *Under the Volcano* occur near the end of the Spanish Civil War. Hugh feels strong sympathy for the Republican cause and regrets that he is not in Spain to take part in the struggle; in a way his not being there is a personal failure. In *Cambio de piel*, Javier, unconcerned about his fellow man and unable to write, forms a contrast with the successful poet Vasco Montero, who did go to Spain (see CP 172–173). Both Javier and Geoffrey have failed relationships with their wives. Each feels on the one hand an emotional and physical bond with his wife, and on the other a need to be free from her. In both cases a resentment against women can be traced back to the mother-son-relationship (in Geoffrey's case stepmother/stepson) in childhood and adolescence.

Malcolm Lowry said that his novel ". . . has for its subject the forces that dwell within man and lead him to look upon himself with terror," and that "its subject is also the fall of man, his remorse, his incessant struggle towards the light under the weight of the past, which is his destiny."[14] These words describe the condition of both Geoffrey Fermin and Franz Jellinek. Fuentes, like Lowry, insists on the importance of the past; mankind must remember in order to define present reality. Both Franz Jellinek and Geoffrey Fermin in their pasts committed or unprotestingly permitted horribly violent acts of war. Franz, who was an idealistic student of architecture, did not resist the Nazis when they came into power. Acting as an architect for them, he indirectly contributed to thousands of deaths. At the end of *Cambio de piel*, Franz becomes the victim of the young Nazi hunters, led by the son of a man whom he had murdered before escaping at the end of the war. During World War I, while Geoffrey was acting commanding officer on the S. S. Samaritan, his ship captured a German submarine, and before going to port, the Samaritan's crewmen, possibly with Geoffrey's consent or even aid, shoved the German officers into the Samaritan's engineroom furnace. Geoffrey received an honorable citation for the capture of the enemy submarine, but he was court-martialed because of the incident. Although he was acquitted, the memory of the deaths stayed with him. At the end of *Under the Volcano* Geoffrey is shot by Facist sympathizers who believe that he is a British spy.

Grotesque imagery of war and chaos runs through both novels. Even though they are written at disparate times, both refer specifically to World War II; in *Under the Volcano* it is an imminent threat, and in *Cambio de piel* it is seen in retrospect. In both, the authors base imagery of semi-madness on that found in Expressionist films dating from the short period between World War I and World War II. References to *Las manos de Orlac* (*Orlacs Haende*, 1925) in *Under the Volcano* serve a function similar to that of references to *El gabinete del doctor Caligari* (*Das*

Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, 1919) in *Cambio de piel*; both films were directed by Robert Weine and raised questions about guilt and responsibility for actions.[15]

In *Las manos de Orlac* an artist has the hands of a murderer. Day points out that the evil character ironically called Fructuoso Sanabria has "long, beautiful hands, murderer's hands," that Hugh also has "beautiful" hands, and that Yvonne and Jacques are vain about their hands.[16] In a letter to his English publisher, Lowry explained the allusion to that motion picture, which was playing at the theater in Quauhnahuac on the day when Geoffrey was killed: ". . . the man with the bloody hands in the poster via the German origin on the picture, symbolized the *guilt* of mankind, which relates him also to M. Laruelle and the Consul again, while he is also more particularly a foreshadowing of the thief who takes money from the dying man by the roadside in Chapter VIII, and whose hands are also covered with blood."[17]

The principal function of the Caligari imagery in *Cambio de piel* seems to be to form a parallel between the hypnotist Caligari and Hitler and between the somnambulist César and the Nazis such as Franz and the women ("Eran robots automáticos," CP 218) who poisoned the retarded children in Germany during the Second World War. Images of the camp at Theresienstadt, which Franz helped create, evoke the distorted visions of scenes from the film *Caligari*: "Ese lugar hay que recordarlo como una película muda. . . . . . las chimeneas de Theresienstadt se levantan rectas, las mansardas y los patios de esos viejos edificios son rectos y sin embargo debemos verlos como aquella escenografía oblicua, ornamental, como un espacio propio y falso de la locura . . ." (CP 341).

At the end of *Cambio de piel*, among a series of changes of skin, Herr Urs, a dwarfed madman and artist whom Franz met during his student days, symbolically becomes Caligari—a relationship which has already been formed in Elizabeth's mind. During the mock trial of Franz, dramatized by the Monks, a doll which represents Herr Urs is taken from Elizabeth's trunk to play the part of Caligari, whose story on film is also in the trunk. The puppet doll, using the words which became the catch phrase for publicity when the film first appeared, says, "Ich muss Caligari werden!" (CP 427)

In Freddy's and Elizabeth's world, the Caligaris are the dictators, and the Césars are those who follow orders without thinking. The keepers of the insane asylum, like the German women, follow orders. Freddy tells Elizabeth that for the inmates the keepers are equivalent to priests who offer a version of reality. The inmates, however, do not listen to them: "pero los locos, como mi cuate Tristram Shandy, no oyen los argumentos de los intérpretes y dirigentes, o dicen estar de acuerdo con ellos: no hay diálogo posible porque, en resumidas cuentas, el loco se burla de su mentor y lo convierte, a la vez en el loco del loco" (CP 308).

The works of both Fuentes and Lowry have been strongly influenced

by film. Both authors have written scripts and have had direct contact with people from all aspects of the industry. Day sees a "lifelong influence of film on Lowry's work." Indicating Lowry's familiarity with German films, he cites a passage from an unpublished letter in which Lowry wrote, "I think I have seen nearly all the great German films, since the days of *Caligari*. . . ."[18] In Fuentes' novels and essays one finds a myriad of references to movies, actors, directors, and film techniques which attest to his intimate knowledge of the medium. In *Cambio de piel*, for example, Fuentes refers to numerous films in addition to the *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*; Elizabeth defines her reality through its relationship to the wide range of films she knows. Actions and conversations indicate that she and Javier have made film an integral part of their personal relationship (see, for example, CP 316).

In keeping with the atmosphere of semi-madness and illusion set by the film references, surrealistic elements of dream, carnival, and chaos are also present in both novels. In *Under the Volcano*, Chapter I ends and Chapter II begins at the festival fair in Quauhnahuac. Rising high above the activities is a huge Ferris wheel, visible to characters throughout the novel. In the letter to his English publisher, Lowry explained its significance: "This wheel is of course the Ferris wheel in the square, but it is, if you like, also many other things; it is Buddha's wheel of the law (see VII), it is eternity, it is the instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return, and it is the form of the book; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before and Chapter II. . . ."[19] Wheel imagery is also related to Lowry's finding inspiration in Cocteau's play *La Machine Infernale*, in which the Universe becomes the mechanism of destruction of human life with time as its spring.[20] The wheel thus becomes a symbol of the movement of time toward Geoffrey's death. The Ferris wheel is part of the carnival through which the Consul drunkenly wanders in Chapter VIII. To escape children who are begging him for money at the fair, Geoffrey confusedly gets into a ride called "Máquina Infernal" (a "loop-the-loop" machine) which whirls him violently forwards and then backwards:

> The Consul, like that poor fool who was bringing light to the world, was hung upside down over it, with only a scrap of woven wire between himself and death. There, above him, poised the world, with its people stretching out down to him, about to fall off the road onto his hear, or into the sky. 999.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> All at once, terribly, the confession boxes had begun to go in reverse: Oh, the consul said, oh; for the sensation of falling was now as if terribly behind him, unlike anything, beyond experience; certainly this recessive unwinding was not like looping-the-loop in a plane where the movement was quickly over, the only strange feeling one of increased weight; as a sailor he disapproved of that feeling too, but this—ah, my God! (UV 222)

Everything falls tumultously out of the Consul's pockets, but once on the ground, with his head still spinning, he realizes that the beggar children have returned all of his belongings, and he wishes that he had been kinder to them. Throughout this experience Geoffrey's death is prefigured: "999" is the upside-down image of "666," a number referring to the Beast of the Apocalypse; Geoffrey rides in a "confession box"; he hangs upside down like the "poor fool who was bringing light to the world." Geoffrey's drunken vision, through which much of the novel is perceived, gives it an aspect of unreality and dream, or perhaps better said, nightmare.

In *Cambio de piel* Franz's death is alos prefigured in a carnival scene, in a dream which Franz had during the last days of the war while he was wandering with a German child who had been serving with Nazi troops. In Franz's dream the child, Ulrich,[21] led him onto a stage and into a pre-Lenten carnival in which on one side of the town square mummers were celebrating and on the other children were playing. The King Momus, the representative sacrificial figure, like Hanna's son Jakob and Jakob's father, had one blue eye and one brown. The children's antics, the disguises, the revelry delighted Franz until the tenor of the dream changed. At that point the violence was suddenly directed at him:

> Los saltimbanquis con uniformes grises y estrellas amarillas van trepando por el techo desde la plaza del carnaval y la cuaresma. Los niños se esconden en una montaña de arena; la niña se asoma por el hueco de un barril y señala a Franz con el dedo; la niña deja caer su muñeca de gengibre con ojos de ciruela pasa; los niños que fabrican ladrillos empiezan a arrojarlos hacia la figura detenida en el techo [Franz] mientras los saltimbanquis avanzan en cuatro patas sobre las pizarras del tejado y un buho, desde un altillo, le guiña un ojo. Los saltimbanquis lo asaltan, le toman del cuello, los brazos, los pies, las ingles: . . . . . mientras los saltimbanquis, entre las risas y obscenidades de los dos reyes, Momo y Cristo, y de su corte de enanos y mendigos, baldados y menestreles, monjas y mercaderes, arrastran a Franz al centro del cuadro, al pozo cuya cubeta inspecciona una vieja, una vieja que empuja a Franz cuando lo acercan a esa caída, a esa salida del combate de la carne por donde cae fuera del cuadro, mientras allá arriba, en el rectángulo de un cielo que no dejan ver las cabezas asomadas a mirar el descenso, se cierra el telón pintado (CP 303).

As the curtain closed, Franz became a witness to scenes of death, destruction, and Final Judgment. Then he awoke. When questioned by Franz, Ulrich said that he saw his German officers flee; he began to cry. Franz offered the boy advice, but a short time later he saw him killed by an American soldier who was "jest practicin" (CP 307). The war was over. Clearly, this dream both reflects Franz's feeling of guilt and prefigures his own sacrificial death.[22] Though very different in many ways, the carnival experiences in both novels serve to prefigure a character's death and to reveal compassion felt for the children with whom the same characters have contact.

Under the Volcano and *Cambio de piel* also have in common certain other symbolic references related to the central mythic imagery of Life and Death cycles, to deremonial sacrifice, and to the Mexican environment. Pariah dogs, for example, appear in both novels as symbolic presences. In *Under the Volcano*, when the Consul and Yvonne enter their home in Quauhnahuac together for the first time since their separation, "a hideous pariah dog followed them in" (UV 64). Their relationship, like the house and garden, has deteriorated. The ominous presence of the dogs throughout the novel reinforces the feeling of the precariousness of Geoffrey's position, until, at the end of the novel, one of these animals shares Geoffrey's final descent: "Suddenly he screamed, and it was as though this scream were being tossed from one tree to another, as its echoes returned, then, as though the trees themselves were crowding nearer, huddled together, closing over him, pitying. . . Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (UV 375). Lowry likely knew of the Aztec and Mayan belief that the dog served as a guide to assist the souls of the dead on their journey through the underworld and that in pre-Columbian times dogs were frequently buried with the dead.[23]

Both Fuentes and Lowry in their references to the existence of underfed dogs in the areas they are describing seem to be suggesting a parallel between the fate of the dogs and that of human beings in the same areas. At the end of *Cambio de piel* the hungry yellow dog, present throughout the novel, poses an immediate threat. When Elizabeth takes a newborn child from the trunk of the Monks' car after Franz has been killed, and when, after considering other places, she leaves it on the threshhold of the asylum, the defenseless child is in danger of being devoured by the hungry yellow dog: "Pero el perro amarillo y babeante de Cholula va a terminar su merienda, va a hacer trizas esas vendas sucias que aún lo atan y luego, Dragona [Elizabeth], y luego. . . Sé que su apetito no está satisfecho" (CP 442). The reference to the dog here reflects the scene at the beginning of the novel which describes what the travelers saw when they entered Cholula: "Los perros sueltos que corrían en bandas, sin raza, escuálidos, amarillos, negros, desorientados, hambrientos, babeantes. . ." (CP 11). Dogs, used for hunting and at times for food, were in Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards, but accounts of the Conquest report that the Conquistadores were accompanied by ferocious dogs to which they sometimes fed the bodies of their victims.[24] In *Cambio de piel* the dog represents both victim and victimizer. Early in the novel Javier becomes nauseated at the sight of the rotting body of a yellow dog on a street in Mexico City. The dogs are hungry and neglected; but hungry dogs either live and die miserably or feed upon those more defenseless than they.

This list of coincident elements in the two novels could be expanded to include bulls, dwarf-like characters, number and color symbolism, and possibly other things, but the preceding exposition should suffice to show the similarity of pattern in *Under the Volcano* and *Cambio de piel*. a comparison of like elements says nothing about the relative merit of

either novel. It merely shows that two authors writing about the cyclical pattern of Life and Death and about mankind's struggle wiht the forces of Evil, and locating their stories in the same geographical area, chose many of the same patterns of imagery to create the experience conveyed in their novels. Whatever the reasons for the similarity of choice—and one might conjecture that it grows out of similar artistic and social experiences and interests—each author used the material successfully, shaping it to fit the specific circumstances of his novel:

Malcolm Lowry described *Under the Volcano* as follows:

> The novel can be read simply as a story during which you may—if you wish—skip whole passages, but from which you will get far more if you skip nothing at all. It can be regarded as a kind of symphony or an opera, or even as something like a cowboy film. I wanted to make of it a jam session, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce. It is superficial, profound, entertaining, boring, according to one's taste. It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a crazy film, an absurdity, a writing on the wall. It can be thought of as a kind of machine; it works, you may be sure, for I have discovered that to my own expense. And in case you should think that I have made of it everything except a novel, I shall answer that in the last resort it is a real novel that I have intended to write, and even a damnably serious novel.[25]

Fuentes says that what is important in Lowry's novel is "el mito del paraíso perdido y su representación trágica y fugaz en el amor." He groups Lowry with several authors who, he says, "regresaron a las raíces poéticas de la literatura."[26] Carlos Fuentes' *Cambio de piel*, like Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, is an intricately textured, poetic novel which requires close, even multiple, readings to be fully enjoyed. It too has the formal qualities of musical composition, the interpretive freedom of jazz, the confusion and brashness of pop culture, the emotion, beauty, and preciseness of poetry, the penetrating vision of cinema, the humor of comedy, the seriousness of tragedy. It is absurd and profound.

The easiest way to approach the differences between the two novels is through structure. They are not alike in form. *Under the Volcano* begins on the Day of the Dead a year after the day on which Geoffrey was murdered. Jacques Laruelle looks at the barranca into which the Consul was thrown, and time jumps back to the day's events leading to the death. The way Lowry presents these events is complex: although it is the memory of Jacques Laruelle that triggers the jump, there are flashbacks to conversations and thoughts of other characters prior to that fatal day. Much of the material is related to and colored by Geoffrey's alcoholic perception of the world and by his interest in "secret knowledge." In *Cambio de piel*, the basic story line is as simple as that of *Under the Volcano*; however, since *Cambio de piel* has a metafictional dimension not present in *Under the Volcano*, its structure is more self-consciously complex.

Fuentes' novel is so complex that the reader must not only read closely, but even participate actively in the process of creating the novel. *Cambio de piel* functions through many layers of narration. In the opening epigraph, on a September night in France, an unnamed narrator, having ended a narration, asks the reader's permission to begin the novel. At the end of the novel, the narrative is signed by a narrator named Freddy Lambert. The stories related by Freddy have been told to him by Elizabeth and Isabel, who in turn experienced them, fabricated them, or heard them from Franz and Javier. The story runs away from Freddy when the Monks enter; they take the story elements and, refusing to heed Freddy's directions, use them for their own purposes. The reader must follow all of these interchanges and must sort out diverse versions of events as well. At times, reality in the novel is presented in multiple versions, each of which is equally as valid as the others. In addition, the reader must understand a seemingly infinite number of allusions to just about everything from the established arts—painting, classical music, jazz, literature, "art" film—to pop culture—popular music, popular movies, slang, catch phrases, and so forth. News items, dreams, visions, versions of poetry, songs, and a variety of other material are interpolated freely, though with purpose and design, throughout the work. (Lowry uses allusion and interpolation in *Under the Volcano* in thematically significant ways—for example in Chapter X, when he inserts information from a folder describing Tlaxcala—but he does not integrate his allusions and interpolated material into the total structure of the novel as Fuentes does in *Cambio de piel*, as, for example, in his use of the Brahms, Verdi, and pop requiems.) Fuentes' reader must remember both what is being alluded to and what has happened at each previous stage of the novel in order to fathom the intricate relationships and transformations occuring in the book. The reader ultimately decides which version, if either, ends the work; the openness of the structure gives him the further freedom to create his own version if he wishes.

The endings of both novels, in which Fuentes and Lowry portray characters in a downward trajectory through worlds of madness, movies, magic, and myth, can be said to serve as warnings to mankind. Lowry related his book to the period in which it is set, just preceding World War II: "On one level, the drunkenness of the Consul may be regarded as symbolizing the universal drunkenness of war, of the period that precedes war, no matter when. Throughout the twelve chapters, the destiny of my hero can be considered in its relationship to the destiny of humanity."[27] The imminence of war, along with the fact that Lowry had originally envisioned *Under the Volcano* as the first part of a Dantesque triptych of Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise, may account in part for the finality of Geoffrey's descent and death at the end of the novel. Although the trajectory is consistently downward, ending when Geoffrey's body is hurled into the barranca, Lowry said that this ending should not be depressing: "I don't think the chapter's [XII] final effect should be depressing: I feel

you should most definitely get your katharsis, while there is even a hint of redemption for the poor old Consul at the end, who realizes that he is after all part of humanity. . . ."[28] The novel closes with a final warning: "¿Le gusta este jardín que es suyo? ¡Evite que sus hijos lo destruyen!" (UV 376)

In *Cambio de piel*, also written at a time when the world was deeply concerned about war and violence, Fuentes takes his characters into the bowels of the earth at the center of the great pyramid at Cholula, but he allays a feeling of complete hopelessness by introducing ambiguity into the structure of his novel. Fuentes says that *Cambio de piel* contains "una serie de actos ceremoniales," and that it ends with a sacrifice in the pyramid because that is "el sentido mexicano de la novela."[29] Although Fuentes' story does not suggest that mankind will follow any path other than one of violence prescribed by ceremonial acts, the open structure of the novel suggests that paths other than those of sacrifice and vengeance are possible. Freddy is the Monks' *lazarillo*, and their Virgil. As he describes his decision to serve as their *lazarillo*, his tone reflects disgust with himself and with human cruelty (CP 436). When he says that he serves as "una especie de Virgilio presente y de Narrador futuro" (CP 378), his statement refers to his role as the guide who will lead the Monks into the depths of the pyramid as Virgil led Dante into the underworld and also to his role as the narrator who will later relate what he has done. But Freddy's role as Virgil might also be taken as a reflection of the philosophical position of the novel. Freddy, perhaps like Virgil,[30] seems to be a writer who is tired of war and vengeance. Freddy's behavior indicates that he is caught up in the violence, but his observations suggest an ironic view of the cyclical pattern of victimization and vengeance, of ceremonial sacrifice that he wishes did not continue to repeat itself. In both versions of the ending of *Cambio de piel*, the Monks kill Franz. But if two versions can exist simultaneously, an infinite number of others become possible. The implication is that just as fictional reality can be altered, it is possible for the reader to alter his own reality. Through creativity and imagination he may find a way to prevent the repeated destruction of his garden.

NOTES

1. When asked about *Cambio de piel* and *Under the Volcano* on December 2, 1981, Carlos Fuentes said that he was not thinking of *Under the Volcano* when he wrote his novel. Citations from *Cambio de piel* and *Under the Volcano* will be indicated in the text and will refer to the following editions: Carlos Fuentes, *Cambio de piel* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1967) and Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (New York: New American Library, 1965). Text copyright year for *Under the Volcano* is 1947.

2. Douglas Day, *Malcolm Lowry: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 332.

3. Jorge Ruffinelli, "Malcolm Lowry: El viaje que nunca termina," *Texto crítico*, 4:9 (enero-abril 1978), 14.

4. Carlos Fuentes, "*Cambio de piel* en Italia," *Mundo Nuevo*, No. 21 (marzo 1968), p. 22.

5. Carlos Fuentes, "*Cambio de piel* en Italia," p. 22, says that the name "Freddy Lambert" refers to "el apelativo de Nietzsche y el apellido de Louis Lambert." Several critics have discussed the implications of this combination. Suffice it to say here that the name suggests a combination of references to madness and to specific applications of the concept of the human Will.

6. Malcolm Lowry, *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, eds. Harvey Breit and Marjorie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippencott Company, 1965), p. 60. Letter to Jonathan Cape, dated January 2, 1946.

7. Day, pp. 338–339.

8. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," *Mundo Nuevo*, No. 1 (julio 1966), p. 10. (An interview with Carlos Fuentes)

9. This concept appears in various religious systems. In alchemy the term describes the round and the square properties of Mercury. Mercurius is the symbol for "the mysterious transforming substance of alchemy." Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Vol. XII of *Collected Works*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 133. The symbolic representation is also related to the quincunx figure which symbolizes "The Law of the Centre" or the union of opposites in Aztec religious expression. See Laurette Séjourné, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), esp. 89–94.

10. Lanin A. Gyurko, The Artist *Manqué* in Fuentes' *Cambio de piel*," *Symposium*, 31 (Summer 1977), 126–150.

11. Gyurko, pp. 143–144.

12. Lowry, *Selected Letters*, p. 65. See also, Day, p. 344; and Perle Epstein, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), esp. pp. 25 and 40–41.

13. Day, p. 345.

14. Malcolm Lowry, "Preface to a Novel," *Canadian Literature*, No. 9 (Summer 1961), p. 28. (Reprint of the preface to the 1949 French edition of *Under the Volcano*) See also, Lowry, *Selected Letters*, p. 66.

15. The original script for *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer differs from Weine's interpretation. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), in Chapter V, contrasts the "revolutionary" context of the original script, in which Caligari is a "real" madman, with Weine's "conformist" film, in which Caligari's story becomes the creation of an asylum inmate's imagination. Relating Weine's film to the pre-war psychology of the German people, Kracauer says that it "reflects . . . [a] double aspect of German life by coupling a reality in which Caligari's authority triumphs with a hallucination in which the same authority is overthrown" (p. 67). For a good analysis of Fuentes' allusion to this film in CP, see Gyurko, pp. 146–150.

16. Day, p. 333.

17. Lowry, *Selected Letters*, p. 69.

18. Day, p. 116. Letter to Ten Holder, dated October 31, 1951. It is also quoted in Paul G. Tiessen, "Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema," *Canadian Literature*, No. 44 (Spring 1970), p. 38. Tiessen discusses the use of cinema techniques in *Under the Volcano*.

19. Lowry, *Selected Letters*, pp. 70–71.

20. Day, p. 332.

21. Ulrich was also the name of one of Franz's friends when he was a student. In contrast to Franz, that Ulrich refused to join the Nazis.

22. In the mock trial the Monks' actions are similar to those of participants in a Mummer's Play, a vegetation rite in which a figure representing the spirit of vegetation is sacrificed. Sir James Frazer reports that in one such ceremony a group of young men cut a tree from which they make an artificial man. "The cavalcade then returns with music and song to the village. Amongst the personages who figure in the procession are a Moorish king

with a sooty face and a crown on his head, a Dr. Iron-Beard, a corporal and an executioner." This sacrificial rite occurs in the spring. See Sir James Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodore Gaster (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 304. Abridgement of *The Golden Bough* (1890). For a comparison to Frazer's description, see CP 380–381.

23. Epstein, p. 216, relates Lowry's ending to the Aztec custom. For additional information about the custom, see Donald Cordry, *Mexican Masks* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 191.

24. See, for example, Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 144. Translation of *Visión de los vencidos* (México, 1959).

25. Lowry, "Preface," p. 28.

26. Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 19. See also Carlos Fuentes, *Casa con dos puertas* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 19. See also Carlos Fuentes, *Casa con dos puertas* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1970), p. 60.

27. Lowry, "Preface," p. 28.

28. Lowry, *Selected Letters*, p. 86.

29. Rodríguez Monegal, p. 11.

30. Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 296 writes: "Virgil is war-weary, and sees the miseries and frustrations of battle. Even the death of Aeneas' wholly evil foe Mezentius is a cause for no exultation. Virgil suffers from a malaise, or from a national guilt about war, and interprets his myths accordingly."