Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemio Cruz:*

A Literary Analysis of a Revolution Betrayed

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Carlos Fuentes is widely regarded as one of Mexico's greatest twentieth-century novelists, commentators, and intellectuals. Arising to prominence during the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s, Fuentes' best known and influential work is La muerte de Artemio Cruz (The Death of Artemio Cruz). Originally published in 1962, the novel profiles the life of its title character, tracing the course of modern Mexican history from the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to the late 1950s. Coupled with its unique narrative structure, representative of the Latin American "New Novel," the themes found in La muerte de Artemio Cruz penetrate modern Mexico's political, social, and economic ills and offers the reader an interpretation of the complexities of modern Mexican life as they developed out of the Revolution.

The revolutionaries had multiple goals, which included producing agrarian reform, closing a wide economic gap between the rich and poor, increasing labor rights, ending political corruption, improving education, and providing restrictions on Church power. Each of these elements is present within the pages of La muerte de Artemio Cruz. This essay will identify, and place into historical context, the themes in Artemio Cruz's life centered around the revolutionary goal of agrarian reform and the economic factors—the disparity between rich and poor, corruption, and the role of foreign interests—that the Revolution attempted to remedy. Through the events of the life of Artemio Cruz, Fuentes analyzes and criticizes the events of modern Mexican history to explore the contradictions of the Revolution and show how the social, political, and economic goals of the Revolution went unfulfilled.

I. The Author

Carlos Fuentes was born in Panama City, Panama in 1928. The son of a Mexican diplomat, Fuentes lived in various locations throughout his childhood, including Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Washington D.C. In Washington D.C. Fuentes received much of his primary education, but he spent many summers with his grandparents in Mexico City where he took in Mexican politics and culture. Fuentes studied law at the National University of Mexico and then at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Like his father, Fuentes obtained a diplomatic position in 1965. While working for the Foreign Service, Fuentes engaged in his passions of writing and literature. His literary works, which were highly influenced by his cosmopolitan upbringing and international experiences, gained Fuentes international recognition.

Carlos Fuentes first published a collection of short stories in 1954 entitled Los días enmascarados. By the age of twenty-eight, Fuentes had published his first novel, La región más transparente (Where the Air is Clear) in 1958. However, his 1962 fictional examination of the Mexican Revolution and its legacy in La muerte de Artemio Cruz became his breakthrough work. Within the novel's complexity, the reader finds "a passionate echo of the inchoate protest which causes young Mexican intellectuals to find themselves (at least in theory) disenchanted with material affluence and yearning for a cause worthy of their devotion." A novel of such influence however must be studied within the larger context of its influences and the contemporary writings that emerged out of Latin America at the time.

Latin American novels that incorporated and critiqued the Mexican Revolution within the plot did not originate with Fuentes. In 1915, Los de abajo (The Underdogs), by Mexico's Mariano Azuela, focused on the social and political implications of the Revolution using the power struggle between Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa as its backdrop. Los de abajo explores

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EX POST FACTO
several of the themes embraced by liberal intellectuals since its publication, especially the idea that the "Revolution became little more than a senseless bloodbath and that it simply opened the country up to a new breed of parasitical opportunists, who used revolutionary rhetoric to advance their own career interests." The novel uses gritty social realism to depict the violence of the period and explores the Revolution in terms of its failure to achieve any of its original goals. Perhaps more importantly, it was the first to incorporate the idea that the Revolution was betrayed by rapacious opportunists, a theme that became highly influential to later generations of Mexican writers, including Fuentes.  

II. The New Narrative  

The realism depicted in novels such as Azuela's *Los de abajo* was challenged in the 1940s and 1950s by a style that emerged in Latin America known as the New Novel or New Narrative. Influenced by *modernismo*, an influential artistic and literary movement rooted in escapism and European Romanticism popular in Spain in Latin America from 1890-1910, the New Novel challenged the idea that reality was comprehensible and questioned the ability of language to capture reality in its traditional third-person narratives. A New Narrative was required and emerged, "characterized by a range of 'difficult' narrative techniques which demanded a more active role from the reader" where the reader would have an "engaged role in the construction or reconstruction of the narrative itself." The literature challenged the reader to decipher a reality that was often uncertain, chaotic, complex, contradictory, and ambiguous. The New Narrative also introduced new concepts to Latin American fiction such as Magical Realism, a style which highlights the separation between perception and reality in order to more deeply probe and critique Latin American reality. Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* (1955), a novel about the Mexican Revolution, employs Magical Realism to explore the role of the cacique, corruption, and moral decay in the town of Comala. The reader is forced to differentiate between characters that are alive and the speaking souls of the deceased townspeople. The New Narrative author's writings centered on the problematic nature of language to accurately depict reality and thus challenged conventional ideas about literature during the era. Another key theme that made the novels of the period standout is their "highly discontinuous treatment of time and space and the instability of the narrator's and characters identities." Like the nature of language, chronological and linear conceptions of time are challenged by New Narrative writers, forcing the audience to assemble and disassemble the texts. During the 1960s, the era of the New Novel reached its apex in what became known as *El Boom*, the period that saw the emergence of Fuentes as a literary force.  

III. The Boom  

The Boom period of the 1960s was marked by the voluminous production of Latin American fiction that reached international audiences and received worldwide accolades. Literary critics have identified four key New Narrative writers, the "Big Four," that rode the crest of the Latin

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8 Swanson, *Latin American Fiction*, 38, 39, 49-59.

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EX POST FACTO
American literary wave: Mexico's Carlos Fuentes, Argentina's Julio Cortazar, Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa, and Colombia's Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Several factors prompted increased international interest in the Latin American world during this period, especially the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The material played a significant role in fostering a sense of community and identity across much of Spanish Latin America and offered alternative cultural perspectives to the rest of the world. Though not necessarily considered the greatest novelist of the time, Hispanic Studies professor Philip Swanson nevertheless sees Carlos Fuentes as the main cultural ambassador and promoter of the New Narrative and Latin American fiction. An examination of the stylistic and structural elements in La muerte de Artemio Cruz will help place the novel in the context of El Boom.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz criticizes the failure of the Mexican Revolution and takes a critical perspective on the past and present of Mexico through its analysis of elements of society, politics, and religion. The narrative highlights pervasive class divisions between the haves and have-nots in Mexico. These conditions, contends Latin American Literature professor Victor Manuel Duran, necessitates a Marxist reading of the narrative structure and themes to assist the reader's understanding of the socio-political implications of the work. This is not to suggest that the text is a Marxist novel; Duran employs Marxist literary theory for analytical purposes.

Fuentes challenges the ability of language to depict reality through the traditional third-person narrative by writing in the first, second, and third persons. Each chapter in La muerte de Artemio Cruz opens with the first-person perspective of Artemio Cruz. Upon his deathbed, Cruz observes the commotion around him as he is surrounded by his wife Catalina, his daughter Teresa, his secretary Padilla, and the priest who attempts to provide Cruz his last rites, Father Paez. The technique, representing the present, invites the reader into the mind of Cruz to hear his thoughts, probe his conscience, and witness the internal psychological state of the dying oligarch. Each chapter concludes with an episode that employs the second-person, the "You" narrative structure, or future tense. An episode depicting Cruz riding horses with his son Lorenzo is illustrative:

You will bring Lorenzo to live so that he can learn to love this land on his own, without need on your part to explain the motives behind your labor in reconstructing the burned walls of the hacienda and reopening the flatland agriculture. The two of you will go out into the sun. You will pick up the wide-brimmed hat and put it on your head. The wind from your gallop through the quiet, shimmering air will fill your mouth, eyes, and head.

The use of the future tense, "you will," throughout the novel suggests that the future for both Cruz and Mexico is pre-determined. In each chapter, positioned between the opening deathbed scenes and the closing future tense scenarios, are the flashbacks to the pivotal events of the life of Artemio Cruz. Written in the third-person narrative form, this is the most widely used perspective and takes

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9 Swanson, Latin American Fiction, 60-62.
10 Swanson, Latin American Fiction, 66.
12 In a 1984 interview with the New York Times, Fuentes stated: "In Mexico, the left thinks that I'm too amicable to the United States, that I see too many virtues in the United States, that I am not a Marxist, that I don't have a rigid set of dogmas and principles, or that I won't adhere fully to Marxism, although I am very respectful of Marx... I've always proclaimed myself a reader of Marx and a student of Marx." Interview accessed online at http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/10/26/home/fuentes-lifelong.html.
13 Fuentes, Artemio Cruz, 161.

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EX POST FACTO
the reader from the present into the past life of Cruz, and correspondingly, of the country of Mexico.4

The distortion of time is a fundamental feature of the New Narrative and is a key literary device Fuentes employs in Artemio Cruz. The novel begins with the protagonist Cruz on his deathbed in 1959 and the novel concludes with the character's birth in 1899. This inversion of time has been interpreted by Duran as representative of the author's perception of 'the death' of Mexico after the 1910 Revolution and of its eventual 'birth' after it has been purged of its present corrupt capitalist influence.5 For the goals of the Revolution to succeed, Mexico must literally remove the corruptive post-Revolutionary influences such as Cruz. The birth of Cruz at the end of the novel symbolizes the rebirth of Mexico.

IV. The Porfiriat: Symptoms of Discontent

Between the years 1876-1880 and then again from 1884-1911 Mexico was under the leadership of President Porfirio Diaz. More dictatorial than elected President, Diaz ran a tightly controlled state from the capital, Mexico City, through force and intimidation. As a result of Diaz's strong-arm tactics, Mexico experienced an era of relative peace and stability known as the Pax Porfiriana, which contrasted sharply with much of the earlier nineteenth-century period which was marked by warfare, bloodshed, and contestations for power.6 Centuries of Spanish colonial rule and political unrest had left Mexico behind the United States and Europe in terms of economic development and industrialization. The astute Diaz recognized the need for Mexico to develop its economy and industry and thus instituted a program for modernization under the philosophical platform of positivism, a system of thought based in scientific progress and precise economic planning. The results were astounding. During the Diaz years, Mexico successfully balanced its budget, stabilized its economy, invited foreign capital investment, built railroads that criss-cross much of the country, repaired its ports and harbors, revived and modernized the mining industry, and foreign investors struck oil. Construction proceeded at a rapid pace in towns and cities throughout the country, while the major cities and capitals had electricity, sewage systems, hotels, and hospitals. Unfortunately, despite the peace, stability, and progress during these years, the rapid modernization that Mexico experienced left out the majority of the population, specifically the rural poor.7

By the turn of the twentieth-century, Mexico remained a largely rural country, and the rural peasantry bore most of the costs of the modernization that transformed the capital and large cities. Peasants were harassed by local officials, their labor was exploited in the farms and plantations of the hacienda system and seizure of private and communal lands by the government and foreign investors devastated their traditional ways of life, as some 134 million acres of the best land had passed into the hands of a few hundred fantastically wealthy families.8 When rural labor organized and engaged in strikes, such as the 1906 strike at the U.S. owned Cananea Consolidated Copper Company mine, the strike was quickly put down by government troops who killed between thirty and one hundred workers and fourteen Americans, and also imprisoned the labor agitators in Veracruz. Foreign interests seemingly ruled over the plight of the Mexican worker. The rural Mexicans were destitute, powerless, and without hope, clearly far worse off than their ancestors

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4 Duran, A Marxist Reading, 57-58.
5 Duran, A Marxist Reading, 55.
of a century before, and it became clear that Diaz had developed his country at the expense of his countrymen.19

The abuses of the Diaz regime are well represented in La muerte de Artemio Cruz. The vivid descriptions anchor the text to a grim historical reality through which Artemio Cruz maneuvers. Born an illegitimate son of a wealthy hacienda owner, Cruz is rejected by his father and forced to live among the peasants, where he witnesses at an early age the disparity between the rich and poor. During his youth, he empathizes with the goals of the Revolution, specifically closing the gap in prosperity between rich and poor, which compels him to join the rebel forces of the Revolution. In December 1913, Artemio Cruz, a lieutenant in the northern revolutionary army, and his battalion encounter a set of hanging bodies murdered by the Federales. Another lieutenant in the force wants the men to remember the atrocity:

"Don't anyone cut them down!" shouted Lieutenant Aparicio from his rearing horse, using his riding crop to beat back the hands imploringly. 'We've all got to remember this forever! Everyone's got to know who we're fighting! They make the common people kill their brothers. Take a good look - That's how they killed the Yaquis, because the Yaquis didn't want their land taken from them. The same way they killed the workers at Rio Blanco and Cananea, who didn't want to die of hunger. And that's the way they'll kill all of us unless we kick the shit out of them first.'20

The novel directly references three injustices committed by the Porfiriato: the Yaqui removal and the strikes at the textile factory in Rio Blanco and at the Copper mines of Cananea.

The Yaqui Indians of the state of Sonora offer a prime example of the agrarian dispossession that occurred during the Porfiriato. The Yaquis had a history of revolt against the Church and the state since the conquest, and especially in the nineteenth-century, but by the time of Diaz their situation had worsened. Foreign interests and the construction of railroads made the Yaqui land increasingly attractive for expropriation, and over 900,000 hectares of land were stolen to build railways or converted into haciendas. The government hoped the Yaquis would become peaceful peons after they were settled into approved pueblos and compelled to find work in the mines, the cities, or in the plantations. It was not long before mestizo settlers and American farmers swarmed into their Pueblos and tribal lands, which instigated Yaqui attacks against them. Federal authorities responded with guerrilla tactics against the civilian population and massacred women and children, while captured militant Yaquis were deported to the plantations in the Yucatan. An illusory peace was established in 1908, only for contestations for land and violent outbreaks to resume after 1910.21

V. Outbreak of Revolution

In 1910, the social and political tensions of Mexico rose to a boil. For three and a half decades, the power in Mexico had been centered in Mexico City around the Diaz regime and his assembly of advisors and planners, the científicos. In this sham democracy, elections at all levels were predetermined, local bosses (jefe politicos) loyal to the Porfiriato administered justice, the press was censored, and opposition forces were either jailed or exiled. By the early 1900s, a new generation of Mexicans was coming of age and found their opportunities for advancement blocked due to the

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20 Fuentes, Artemio Cruz, 74, 75.

EX POST FACTO
entrenched Porfirián hegemony. The inequality and corruption that the dictatorship perpetuated became increasingly unacceptable to young, socially conscious Mexicans. The presidential elections of 1910 saw Francisco Madero, running under an Anti-Re-electionist platform, emerge as the main political rival to the regime; however, he was imprisoned in San Luis Potosí in June 1910, while Díaz won re-election again. The pressures of the social and political situation however, would soon break the tyranny of the Porfiriát.\footnote{Knight, \textit{The Mexican Revolution}, 19. 21. 24. 25.}

While in prison, Francisco Madero drafted his \textit{Plan de San Luis Potosí}, a document calling for a revolution on Sunday, November 20, 1910. The document was primarily political in nature, with little reference to Mexico's social conditions, but the masses responded with rebellions throughout the country, and thus initiated the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution. The rebels were not armies in any sense of the word, but rather a loose organization of Mexicans of different backgrounds and professions including peons, shopkeepers, students, teachers, miners, army deserters, lawyers, and bandits. They joined the uprising for various reasons, some were radicals, others liberals. Some saw \textit{jefe políticos} as their main enemies, while others viewed foreign capitalists as their enemies. Regardless, Díaz was the symbol of all that was wrong with Mexico.\footnote{Meyer, \textit{Mexican History}; 481-483.}

The rebellion grew most intensely in the northern state of Chihuahua under the military leadership of Pascual Orozco and a collection of local leaders, most notably Francisco Pancho Villa. By May of 1911, the Díaz regime was no longer able to control the uprising, and after the capture of Ciudad Juarez by the Northern forces, Díaz submitted his resignation. Díaz was overthrown, and as historian Adolfo Gilly notes, "as far as the bourgeoisie was concerned, the revolution had come to an end."\footnote{Gilly, \textit{Mexican Revolution}, 58.} The bourgeoisie however, constituted the minority. For the masses, the Revolution had just begun. The following months revealed the many divisions within the Revolutionary leadership and illuminated the lack of a mutual, unifying ideology between them. Madero assumed the Presidency in 1911 and, primarily concerned with establishing democracy and political reform, largely ignored the pressing social realities. This would prove to be a costly oversight.

Pancho Villa of the northern army and Emiliano Zapata of Morelos concerned themselves with the social and economic concerns of the vast majority of the population. Of primary concern were land rights and they were not prepared to compromise with the moderate policies of Madero. The Revolution began with a shared goal, the overthrow of Diaz; however, only after Madero had risen to the presidential office did he realize "that the Revolution had profoundly different meanings to different groups of Mexicans."\footnote{Meyer, \textit{Mexican History}; 493.} Madero's tumultuous presidency was marked by failure at the national and state level as the labor movement made few gains, there was little progress in education, and land redistribution was meager at best. The violent phase of the Revolution had only just begun, and it would degrade into a bloody contest for power – marked by shifting allegiances – between both ambitious generals and the bourgeoisie, who hungered for power, and the factionalized peasant forces, led by Zapata and Villa. In Fuente's novel, the shifting nature of the Revolution caused the character Gonzalo Bernal, while imprisoned with Artemio Cruz to lament, "A revolution starts in the battlefields, but once it gets corrupted, even though military battles are won, it's lost."\footnote{Fuentes, \textit{Artemio Cruz}, 186.}

VI. Land and the Hacienda System

\footnotetext[12]{Meyer, \textit{Mexican History}; 481-483.}
\footnotetext[13]{Gilly, \textit{Mexican Revolution}, 58.}
\footnotetext[14]{Meyer, \textit{Mexican History}; 493.}
\footnotetext[15]{Fuentes, \textit{Artemio Cruz}, 186.
Land redistribution was the fundamental priority for the majority of the peasant participants in the Revolution, and as historian Alan Knight argues, the basic character of the 1910 Revolution was as a “popular, agrarian movement.” After six years of violence, by 1917 the Revolution had dwindled down due to a weakened Villa settled in the North, and Zapatista forces isolated in the South. First Chief Venustiano Carranza assumed the new leadership and decided to begin the institutionalization process of the Revolution. Carranza convened a meeting at Queretaro to draft a new constitution. However, Zapatistas, Villistas, and political opponents were ineligible to participate. The Congress witnessed a split between moderates who wanted to focus on political elements, and radicals who desired to bring about rapid social reform. One of the most important aspects of the new constitution was the drafting of Article 27, which addressed the country’s land problems. Article 27, based on Emiliano Zapata’s influential 1911 Plan de Ayala, outlined the immediate agrarian demands of the Zapatista insurgents. Article 27 thus elaborated and enriched the original sentiments within the Plan de Ayala. The provisions required that land illegally seized during the Porfiriatro be restored and also elicited a new conception of ownership of land, which would now be considered a privilege rather than a right. Further, if the land did not serve a practical social function and serve the public interest, the state could appropriate the holding. The article also put restrictions on the land owned by foreign nationals and their rights to acquire lands, water, and mines.

Article 27 was of fundamental importance to the second phase of the Revolution in the 1920s and 1930s as the presidents of Mexico faced demands for land redistribution from the large peasant population. Despite the demands for land, the first major presidents after the violent phase of the Revolution, Carranza Alvaro Obregon, Plutarco Calles, and the three puppet presidents succeeding Calles, were very modest in the land they distributed to the peasant populations. Hacienda owners remained powerful, and the Presidents were hesitant to distribute land to the campesinos, fearing decreased agricultural output and production injurious to the economy.

For Artemio Cruz, the Revolution has a fortuitous outcome, not only because he survives, but because he marries into the family of a rich hacienda owner. In 1919, Cruz arrives at the hacienda of Gamaliel Bernal prepared to court his only daughter, Catalina. Cruz had met Don Gamaliel’s son, Gonzalo, while they were imprisoned by Pancho Villa’s Northern army forces during the war. Posing as one of Gonzalo’s best comrades, and the last person he was with while he was alive, he appeals to Don Gamaliel’s business sense as well as his sense as the family patriarch with no male heir to pass on the land:

“You said it yourself, Don Gamaliel," said the guest when he returned the next day. “It’s impossible to stop the course of events. Let’s turn over those plots to the peasants, after all they’re only good for dry farming, so no one’s going to get much out of them. Let’s give out those plots so they can be used only for small-scale farming. You’ll see that, to thank us, they’ll leave their women to work that dust and come back to take care of our good land. Think about it: you could turn out to be a hero of the agrarian-reform program, and it won’t cost you a thing”

In 1919 Mexico, the Constitution and Article 27 had been passed, however few lands had been distributed to the peasantry. The large landowners had reason to be fearful, as the peasantry was restless and social activists were eager to begin the process of agrarian reform. In the novel, Cruz argues that it is “impossible to stop the course of events,” so instead of having the most profitable,

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17 Knight, The Mexican Revolution, xi
18 Gilly, Mexican Revolution, 246, 247; Meyer, Mexican History, 524, 525.
19 Fuentes, Artemio Cruz, 48.
arable land confiscated, he suggests that Don Gamaliel dole out the dry land to appease the peons. The Bernal hacienda would not lose its labor force because the land is so poor that it will be left for the women to work, while the men will return to their traditional roles. Further, the benevolent Don Gamaliel will be perceived as a hero of the agrarian reform, thus gaining influence within the surrounding community. Cruz's logic is strategic and cunning as he sets himself up to inherit the profitable lands through marriage, and will be thus insulated from having to parcel out quality property because of the "generous" donations of Don Gamaliel. Here, Fuentes depicts the program of agricultural reform, designed to aid the economic situation of the peasants, and the simultaneous corrupt practices of the wealthy class attempting to undermine and profit from the program. Cruz later consolidates his landholdings and manipulates the peasants of neighboring haciendas to turn against the hacendados. Cruz then purchases these lands and began to amass his fortune, indicative of the way a new elite class emerged from the Revolution and manipulated what should have been communal peasant land for private gain.

VII. Modernization: The Revolution Institutionalized

Towards the end of the presidency of the social-reform minded Lazaro Cardenas, the leadership of the official party, the Partido Revolucionario Mexicano (PRM), recognized the need to focus on economic development. Cardenas had diligently worked towards achieving many of the social reform goals of the Revolution. Through his land distribution, he effectively broke the back of the centuries old hacienda system. Construction of schools benefited rural education, the labor movement was strengthened through the creation of a strong national union – Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM) – and Cardenas struck a blow for Mexican economic nationalism by his 1938 decree, which nationalized seventeen foreign-owned oil companies. Unfortunately, foreign and domestic capital investment was virtually non-existent as investors were reluctant to invest in a country with such leftist tendencies. Cardenas' nomination of the conservative Manuel Avila Camacho signaled a shift to the right.

The 1940s ushered in a new era of economic investment and industrialization in Mexico. The shortages produced by World War II found Mexican raw goods in increased demand by the United States, yet at the same time "deprived Mexico of its normal sources of imported manufactured goods and convinced even the doubters of the need for industrialization." This thought confirmed the belief of many leading Mexicans that for the people of Mexico to have a better life, the economic base needed to be expanded. The wartime era proved to be a boom for internal development. Economic growth and industrialization continued under the presidency of Miguel Aleman and drastic upgrades were seen in communications, agriculture, and transportation.

Aleman is also credited with discovering "Mexico's tourist potential, 'creating' Acapulco as an international resort and establishing a pattern that would be followed by his successors" that would later create resort towns like Cancun and Ixtapa. An episode from La muerte de Artemio Cruz finds the protagonist vacationing at an Acapulco resort with his mistress in September, 1911. Cruz takes a moment to sit back and observe and reflect on the remarkable transition that transformed the resort town:

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³ Duran, A Marxist Reading, 48-49.
³ Meyer, Mexican History, 582-585.
³ Meyer, Mexican History, 611.
From his table, he could see the esplanade of Acapulco's new frontage, which had been hastily erected to provide comfort for the huge influx of travelers from the United States, which the war had taken from Waikiki, Portofino, and Biarritz, and to mask the squalid, muddy land behind it where naked fishermen lived in shacks with their swollen-bellied children, their mangy dogs, streams of sewage, trichnosis, and bacteria. Two ages are always present in this Janus-like community with its double face, so far from what it once was, and so far from what it will be.31

The passage describes the boom that Mexican tourism experienced from United States travelers. But the text also alludes to another product of the burgeoning industrialization.

Here Fuentes penetrates the façade of the so-called "economic miracle" Mexico experienced in the 1940s, pointing out that it left behind a significant portion of the population. While the Mexican government catered to the dollars of the U.S. tourists through the construction of fifteen-story hotels, its own people wallowed in the slums, a view to be kept out of sight of visitors. The shift of the Revolution from a program of social reforms under Cardenas, to a program of industrialization clearly did not benefit everyone.

VIII. Corruption

Fuentes purposely places Artemio Cruz in Acapulco. The creation of Acapulco during the presidency of Aleman is illustrative of the corrupt business practices that went on during the period of industrialization. This president, whom many historians identify as the "architect of modern Mexico," courted foreign investment and spent heavily on the construction of roads. But as historian Alan Riding points out, "public works in particular enriched many officials and Aleman himself bought up much of Acapulco before building a new airport and oceanfront boulevard," as well as a key road linking it to Mexico City.35 President Aleman knew that the region of Acapulco was going to undergo a drastic transformation and made sure that he would share in the profits. Alan Riding notes that Mexican bureaucrats and officials often preferred to invest in real estate rather than ventures that would recycle their takings back into society.36 In *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, there is a moment when Cruz reminisces at his "cozy, tight relationship with Aleman" who helps usher in "twenty years of confidence, social peace, class collaboration; twenty years of progress after Lazaro Cardenas's demagoguery."37 By placing Cruz in Acapulco, Fuentes draws a symbolic link between the protagonist and the practices of Aleman, as both the fictional character and the President profited in the era of industrialization through corruption.

An episode where Artemio Cruz hands out dry lands to the peasants shows he is no stranger to corruption himself. After he amasses his business empire, Cruz engages in the high level corruption that had become so endemic in the late 1950's when Fuentes was writing. Just prior to falling ill in 1959, Cruz makes a business trip driving his new, Swedish import car from Mexico City to Sonora:

> You will have made the trip to Sonora by car—a 1959 Volvo, license plate DF 712—because some government officials were misbehaving badly and you would have to go all that way just to make sure those people remain loyal, the people you bought—bought, that's right, you will not fool yourself with words

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31 Fuentes, *Artemio Cruz*, 143, 144.
35 Riding, *Distant Neighbors*, 57.
36 Riding, *Distant Neighbors*, 122.

EX POST FACTO
from your own annual speeches: I'll convince them, I'll persuade them. No, you'll buy them—and then they'll impose tariffs (another ugly word) on the truckers who carry fish on the Sonora-Sinaloa-Mexico City route. You will give the inspectors ten percent, and because of those middle-men, the fish will be expensive when they reach the city, and your personal profit will be twenty times larger than the original value of the fish."

The passage illustrates corruption on two levels: the "buying of officials" to ensure their loyalty, and the fixing of prices by instituting a tariff on the truckers transporting fish, thus driving prices up and increasing the profits of Cruz.

Though certainly not born during his rule, corruption grew rapidly under Aleman, took many shapes and extended well into the future, but sapped the strength and vitality of the institutionalized Revolution. Corruption in the police force and the judiciary was not unusual, while corruption in both small and large businesses was rampant because of the bureaucracy involved in dealing with the government and competing interests. Riding notes that a common saying in Mexico, "La Revolucion le hizo justicia—the Revolution brought him justice," remains a popular euphemism for those appointed a government job with perks. Publishing his work in 1962, showing Cruz's acts of bribery and manipulation, Fuentes demonstrated how the post-revolutionary elite class perpetuated corrupt influence at the expense of social justice, clearly an indictment of the recent past.

IX. United States Economic Relations

Throughout much of their history, the United States and Mexico have had an asymmetrical relationship, with Washington D.C. clearly holding an advantage. The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) cost Mexico half of its territorial holdings. Meddling in economic and political affairs has at times hindered development, and the presence of US troops on Mexican soil at various points in history wounded national pride. The presence of United States economic interests in Mexico accelerated under the Porfiriato, as Diaz sought foreign capital to propel the drive towards modernization. After the demise of the Diaz regime however, economic policy was altered. In the wake of the Revolution, the Mexican government turned inward to focus on social developments. Investment and growth rates were low, which left capitalists and businessmen unhappy.

During World War II and especially under Aleman, social programs and agrarian reforms were cut in favor of investment in the economy, and the Mexican government's liberal policies once again wooed foreign investment. If there was a profit to be made, the northern neighbor was willing to assist. Mexican farming in the Northwest soon mirrored the capitalist agricultural production of the United States and many exports were sent to U.S. owned companies for processing. The industrialization spawned the continued growth of a high-spending middle class and American companies arrived to meet their demands for cars, appliances, consumer goods, and pharmaceuticals, and in the process, virtually controlled the market. Corporate giants such as Ford, GM, and Chrysler built assembly plants that provided jobs to the middle-class and elements of American culture were visible in metropolitan areas throughout the country.

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38 Fuentes, Artemio Cruz. 8.
39 Meyer, Mexican History. 620; Riding, Distant Neighbors, 113-122.
40 It should be noted that Diaz also recruited investment from France and England to counterbalance the influence of the Yankee entrepreneurs. Riding. 318.

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In the Fuentes novel, Artemio Cruz participates in facilitating U.S. investment into Mexico, revealing the inherent corruption and one-sided economic relationship that the relations often produced. In 1941, Cruz meets with two American businessmen over a plot of land that contains sulfur domes and a rich forest. They enter into negotiations with Artemio:

The other man explained that the zone was so rich they could go on mining it at full capacity until well into the twenty-first century... The American winked and said that the cedar and mahogany forests were also enormous and all the profits from that would go—one hundred percent—to the Mexican partner... He [Cruz] demanded $2 million... The $2 million was not an advance or credit or anything like that; that was how much they owed him for getting the concession for them, with the payment, it might be impossible to get the concession; over time they would earn back what they would give him now; but without him, without the front man... they would never get the concession to work those deposits... they could exploit those sulfur deposits until well into the next century.4

Fuentes depicts one of the methods used by the post-Revolution elite to accumulate wealth, accepting bribes from foreign business interests and mortgaging potential revenue and the country’s resources to outsiders. Duran argues that Fuentes is thereby describing a social and political reality common to Mexico, noting that “before international or even national businesses can operate, they have to negotiate bribe payments to the appropriate ministers of government.”43 Fuentes portrays Cruz as self-centered and greedy, representative of a larger elite class in Mexico whose business practices contradict the social concerns over which the Revolution was fought.

X. The Gap Between Rich and Poor

By the late 1950s, the Revolution took a decidedly different course of events. Under the leadership of Lazaro Cardenas, social reforms took precedence, but afterwards the pendulum shifted markedly towards the conservative side. Reformers on the left that once hoped for the Revolution to take a socialist shape were disappointed to see Mexico transform into an industrial-capitalist state. Further, while much wealth was being generated, it was not distributed equitably. On his way out of office in 1938, President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines conceded that the Mexican masses had not benefited from the revolutionary process, and that its promises were yet to be fulfilled as poverty, illness, and ignorance remained prevalent. The political and economic elite grew fat and rich and the middle-class experienced growth and increased purchasing power, but the affluence did not trickle down to the rural peasantry who remained at the margins of society. Economic progress proceeded at the expense of social justice.44

The lifestyle of Artemio Cruz illuminates the harsh disparity between the opulence of the Mexican elite and the plight of the impoverished. Throughout the novel Fuentes describes the luxurious lifestyle of the main character. We have already seen that he drove imported cars and vacationed in Acapulco, but there are also numerous instances where Fuentes portrays the wealth and fortune of Cruz. To amuse himself, Cruz inventories his assets:

The newspaper, real-estate investments... sulfur domes in Jalitpan, the mines in Hidalgo, the logging concessions in Tarahumara, your stock in the chain of

4 Fuentes, Artemio Cruz, 18, 19.
43 Duran, A Marxist Reading, 53.
44 Meyer, Mexican History, 626.
hotels, the pipe factory, the fish business, financing of financing, the net of stock operations, the legal representation of US companies, the administration of the railroad loans, the advisory posts in fiduciary institutions, the shares in foreign corporations—dyes, steel, detergents—and one fact that does not appear on the diagram: $15 million deposited in London, New York, and Zurich.  

Artemio Cruz amasses a vast empire through opportunism, cunning, and deception, and he is also unafraid to exhibit his wealth. At various points in the novel, Cruz is depicted wearing Italian loafers, riding on yachts, admiring Bohemian crystal, vacationing in Paris, listening to German opera records, smoking fine cigars, and hosting lavish New Years parties in his mansion for his sycophantic followers.

All he acquires contrasts starkly with the poverty he experiences as a rural peasant boy, yet prosperity becomes meaningless in the face of declining health and impending death. By the end of his life, the decrepit Artemio becomes a shell of his former self, and while his worldly possessions will forever be left behind, the history of modern Mexico indicates that another ambitious individual in the mold of Cruz will assuredly betray, deceive, and manipulate their way into the powerful oligarchic role Artemio once embodied. The cycle of corruption and inequality will continue without end.

XI. Conclusion

Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* is a complex, multi-layered text that offers a powerful, critical examination of twentieth-century Mexico and the author's perceived failure of the Mexican Revolution. The unique narrative structure, symbolic of the New Novel, offers the reader a glimpse into Mexico's past, present, and future as narrated through the life of Artemio Cruz. The social, political, and economic threads therein depict a country permeated with corruption by a small elite class who co-opted the Revolution for their own personal gain at the expense of the masses. The novel thus acts as an indictment against the ills of the present, yet retains a sense of optimistic hope for the future. The influence of the book gained Fuentes worldwide recognition as an author and intellectual; whether the novel has effected any change in the ever-present ills in Mexican society remains a different question altogether.

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45 Fuentes, *Artemio Cruz*, 9,10.