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Archetypal Patterns in Carlos Fuentes' "La Muñeca Reina"

The common experience of humanity is expressed in its myths. Although myths are universal in their meaning, each new age must re-invent their content in order to vivify the culture. Thus the mythmaker and the poet are closely allied. Mythical stories become transformed into imaginative fiction or incorporated as substructure in works of literature. Nineteenth-century Romantic writers frequently availed themselves of specific mythological correspondences for the ennobling effect to be achieved by thus associating the creatures of their invention with culture heroes of earlier civilizations. By contrast, contemporary mythopoeic works (writings that re-create the ancient myths in renewed symbolic form) exercise an inspirational function:

The perennial appeal and vitality of mythic thinking stem from the fact that it makes us feel that in all civilizations men face analogous situations, undergo similar experience. . . . The myth is of particular import for the modern artist who feels himself estranged from the divisiveness and uniformity of our age.¹

Carlos Fuentes, in his essay *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, makes it clear that he attaches exceptional importance to the use of mythic or archetypal patterns as prefigurative structuring devices.² The presence of an anima figure in his short story "La muñeca reina" has already been noted, but the function of this and other archetypes in the work has remained unexamined.³ The present study endeavors to establish the interrelation and significance of the archetypal patterns involved.

As employed by C. G. Jung, the term "archetype" refers to motifs or images recurring the world over that are capable of eliciting analogous psychological responses from all men. They evoke the "racial memory" of endlessly repeated experience. Jung postulates that archetypes are "the manifestations of a deeper layer of the unconscious where the primordial images common to humanity lie sleeping."⁴ These contents of the so-called "collective unconscious" are patterns of potential experience; they are

first only . . . *forms without content*, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action. When a situation occurs which corresponds to a given archetype, that archetype becomes activated and a compulsiveness appears, which, like an instinctual drive, gains its way against all reason and will, or else produces a conflict of pathological dimensions, that is to say, a neurosis.⁵

The correlative concepts of hereditary racial memory and the "collective unconscious" are widely discredited today as unverifiable and contrary to the findings of genetic science.⁶ This development has merely necessitated a modification of the "provisional hypothesis," which is how C. G. Jung viewed the whole structure of his analytical psychology.⁷ It is only the source of the archetypes that is at issue. Jolande Jacobi, the distinguished associate of Jung, readily admitted that "No direct answer can be given to the questions of whence the archetype comes and whether or not it is acquired."⁸ The origin of the archetypes remains controversial; but the fact of their existence is generally acknowledged.

Carlos Fuentes' short story "La muñeca reina" expresses the theme of reality versus illusion in an atmosphere that develops from mild mystery into delirium and horror. A young man, Carlos, looking through a book from his childhood, discovers a card that a little girl named Amilamia had given him fifteen years earlier. They had been playmates even though she was then only seven years old and he was twice her age. Amilamia had drawn a map on the card to enable Carlos to find her house should he ever wish to do so. He becomes fascinated with his memories of her, and, by following the directions she had provided, he locates the house. The occupants—Amilamia's parents—prove to be a repugnant, fearsome couple. Amilamia apparently has died. Obsessed, the two are devoting their lives to the worship of her memory in the form of a porcelain doll lying in a little coffin between sheets of black silk. The monstrous cult is conducted in a private sanctum fitted out with funerary decor and flowers, candles, incense and religious artifacts. While engaged in the perverse ritual, they seem to Carlos more pathetic than frightening, but the suffocating atmosphere overwhelms and terrifies him, and he flees to the outer world. Several months later, his idealized memories of the "true" Amilamia having overcome the horror inspired by the false corpse, he returns to the house intending to offer the child's card to the couple as a keepsake. The door is opened this time by a deformed and ugly little woman in a wheelchair. Only her gray eyes recall the vital young Amilamia he once knew. Inside the house, her enraged father shouts curses at her and threatens to beat her again for having answered the door. Frightened, Amilamia tells Carlos to leave and never return.

The structure of "La muñeca reina" is an adaptation of the familiar archetypal motif known as "the hero's quest," according to which "the hero (savior, deliverer) undertakes some journey during which he must perform impossible tasks, battle with monsters, solve unanswerable riddles, and overcome insurmountable obstacles in order to save the kingdom and perhaps marry the princess."⁹ Carlos' memories of Amilamia correspond to a period during his adolescence when they spent many happy hours together in a small city park isolated from the din of traffic—he discovering the joys of imagination and the adventures to be found in melodramatic juvenile fiction, and she laughing, singing, rolling

on the hillside and generally presiding over his vicarious exploits. As an adult, Carlos has achieved material success. He describes himself thus:

debidamente diplomado, dueño de un despacho, asegurado de un ingreso módico, soltero aún, sin familia que mantener, ligeramente aburrido de acostarme con secretarías, apenas excitado por alguna salida eventual al campo o a la playa.¹⁰

He feels that his life has had no center, no focus since he renounced the *locus amoenus* and Amilamia, and it is this realization, one supposes, that compels him to seek her out. As an adolescent struggling towards consciousness and self-affirmation, he had acquired an incongruous conception of woman from his tales of adventure. Actual contact with the female sex aroused panic in him, presumably because it exerted a force of attraction back towards the unconscious state. Such a compulsion would explain his rejection of Amilamia the last time they played together:

caímos juntos, Amilamia sobre mi pecho, yo con el cabello de la niña en mis labios, y sentí su jadeo en mi oreja y sus bracitos pegajosos de dulce alrededor de mi cuello, le retiré con enojo los brazos y la dejé caer. (p. 31)

There are, I believe, three features of the adaptation that serve to revitalize and validate the archetypal motif for the modern reader. The first is the important role assigned to popular fiction in the initiatory process for the average young person in a society where little scope remains for exposure to real danger. As Mircea Eliade has observed, "Every man wants to experience certain perilous situations, to confront exceptional ordeals, to make his way into the Other World—and he experiences all this, on the level of his imaginative life, by hearing or reading fairy tales, or, on the level of his dream life, by dreaming."¹¹ A second attribute that relates the motif to modern life is the detective-story format in which, at least superficially, the story is cast, complete with a set of labelled clues, a resort that has value beyond technical plotting to lead the reader into the heart of the tale. As life becomes more complex, detective fiction exerts an ever stronger appeal, because it holds out the reassuring illusion of order, of a system wherein everything finally will make sense. The third feature concerns the protagonist, Carlos, who lacks the heroic qualities that are needed if he is to "rescue the princess" from those whom he perceives as "los ogros de mi invención" (p. 42). Modern literature has tended to dispense with the noble, valiant hero as unrealistic; typically, we have instead the anti-hero, an ineffectual outcast:

Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; . . . Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom,

hard work, or "culture," the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless—even though . . . he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown. Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death . . . All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration.¹²

The evolution of the human personality, the process known as individuation, entails bringing the contents of the unconscious, i.e., the archetypes, into consciousness. Without a successful accommodation and integration of these elements into ego-consciousness, the subject's life will lack satisfaction and creative potentiality. The archetypes can be discerned only when they emerge from the unconscious and are encountered as projections attached onto other people. Among the most influential of such personifications of the unconscious are the "shadow" (the inferior, "natural," darker side of the psyche, usually repressed) and the "anima" (the feminine component of a man's psyche; "animus" in the case of a woman). The shadow is thought to lie near the surface, mainly in the personal unconscious; the anima, rather deeper—predominantly, Jung would say, in the collective unconscious.

Shadow and anima, being unconscious, are then contaminated with each other . . . But if the existence of the anima (or the shadow) is accepted and understood, a separation of these figures ensues . . . The shadow is thus recognized as belonging, and the anima as not belonging, to the ego.¹³

In "La muñeca reina" Carlos is incapable of resolving his shadow and anima projections, and so cannot embrace and integrate either one.

As described by Carlos, the narrator-protagonist, Amilamia's parents are repulsive, grotesque, evil figures. Another observer, however, might regard them as inoffensive and harmless. If indeed this is a case of shadow projection, Carlos will be seeing them as embodiments of qualities that are really his own, attributes that he rejects and is impelled to project upon others. In the narrator's expressed disgust and revulsion for the necrolatrous couple, we have a variant of a recurrent theme in Fuentes—namely, the pernicious, enervating effect of the cult of the dead past in modern Mexico (e.g., *Aura*). Carlos submits to the spell only momentarily, as the couple begin to initiate him into the mysteries of the upper room.¹⁴ His flight may be his salvation. Then again, it could mean an opportunity lost, because, like all other personifications of the unconscious, the shadow is ambivalent, having both a dark and a light side:

One never knows whether [the shadow figure] will transform itself into advocate or antagonist. It can develop either way: toward the daimonic, the advocate, to try to find courage to create our unique being-in-the-world, or it can move toward the negative pole, as an antagonist leading us into a malevolent darkness that destroys meaning.¹⁵

It is perhaps unfortunate for Carlos that he rejects utterly the guidance offered, for it is the task of the shadow to aid in bringing about "the marriage of the hero and his anima"¹⁶ and to serve as "an inspiring, creative spirit . . . when the anima loses her demonic qualities."¹⁷ Expressed from a different standpoint: Only when a man "has courageously acquired a shadow does [his] interaction with [his anima] open up deep creative potentials."¹⁸

Carlos takes at least a successful initial step toward psychic growth when he relinquishes conscious control and allows his idealized memories to draw him to the unconscious. The sketched map that guides him to the house is reminiscent of the treasure maps in children's literature; in this case, it serves effectively as a key to the place where he may confront his anima, in whatever form she should appear. To be sure, Amilamia may never have been as graceful in reality as she was in his cherished memories of her, but, on the other hand, the distorted development of Carlos' own personality could be the cause of his subsequent perception of her as ugly and misshapen. The nature of the anima a man projects will vary according to his experience of woman—especially, of his mother.¹⁹ She may appear to him as a soul-mate, a mother-figure or as a fascinating demon. "The figure of a deformed little girl appears in numerous fairy tales. In such tales the ugliness of the hump usually conceals great beauty, which is revealed when the 'right man' comes to free the girl from a magic spell—often by a kiss."²⁰

Unfortunately, Carlos is not equal to the challenge, he declines the call, and thus can only know the dark aspect that he sees in Amilamia, or, rather, that he projects onto her. He is doomed to continue in his prolonged state of arrested development. Frustrated in his feeble attempt to bring into full consciousness and integrate an important component of his psyche, he must resume his routine mode of being, denied the inner power of a creative imagination and excluded from a more spiritual form of life. The archetype of the anima, if allowed to function, serves as a mediator between the ego and the unconscious, a guide to creative development. As a pattern of behavior, the anima is "the drive toward involvement, the instinctual connectedness to other people and the containing community or group."²¹

"La muñeca reina," Fuentes has employed archetypal patterns that are as old as humanity, but he has given them especial relevance for this modern secular age in which men are intensely aware of the contingency of existence and yet, by valuing the rational above the spiritual, by giving primacy to logic over emotion, exclude themselves, individually, from psychic wholeness and, collectively, from solidarity.

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NOTES

1. Harry Slochower, *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 14-15.
2. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969).
3. Gloria Durán, "La bruja de Carlos Fuentes," in *Homenaje a Carlos Fuentes: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra*, ed. Helmy F. Giacomani (Long Island City, N.Y.: Las Américas, 1971), p. 259; and in her *The Archetypes of Carlos Fuentes: From Witch to Androgyne* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980), pp. 198-99.
4. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 76.
5. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, The Collected Works*, IX, pt. 1, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 48.
6. Norman N. Holland, for instance, dismisses them roundly, if unfairly, by suggesting that they "require the troublesome assumption that our RNA and DNA, already so fraught with information, must carry Grimm's fairy tales as well." *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 244.
7. C. G. Jung, cited by Morris Philipson, *Outline of a Jungian Aesthetics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1963), p. 141.
8. Jolande Jacobi, *Complex / Archetype / Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 31.
9. Wilfred L. Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 162.
10. Carlos Fuentes, "La muñeca reina," in his *Cantar de ciegos* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1964), p. 33. Subsequent references are included in the text.
11. *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 126.
12. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 59.
13. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy, The Collected Works*, XII, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 177n.
14. Although "La muñeca reina" is essentially a tale of terror, it does not rely upon use of the supernatural—the only exception being the existence of this upstairs room in the "casa de un piso" (p. 47). The hallucinating mood is created instead by means of a sustained assault on the reader's senses—including synaesthetic interference with perceptual organization—and by the subtle manipulation of traditional symbols, e.g., the "upper room" (The Acts of the Apostles, i. 13) at the head of twelve steps.
15. Ann B. Ulanov, "The Psychological Reality of the Demonic," in *Disguises of the Demonic: Contemporary Perspectives on the Power of Evil*, ed. Alan M. Olson (New York: Association Press, 1975), pp. 137-38.
16. Marie-Louise von Franz, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Fairy Tales* (Irving, Tex.: Spring Publications, 1978), p. 120.
17. von Franz, *Introduction*, p. 119.
18. Julius E. Heuscher, *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning and Usefulness*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1974), p. 260.
19. M. L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (London, 1940; rpt. New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 178-79.
20. Jolande Jacobi, "Symbols in an Individual Analysis," in *Man and His Symbols*, p. 289.
21. Edward C. Whitmont, *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology* (New York: Harper, 1973), p. 189.