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Translation, Invention, Resistance: Rewriting the Conquest in Carlos Fuentes's "the two Shores"

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Instead of being defined merely as a crossing over in order to grasp something, translation can also provide a place or forum for the practice of a crossing over which disseminates and escapes. Instead of translations fixing the same meaning, translations can also allow further room for play, extend boundaries, and open up new avenues for further difference.

--Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories*

I translated as I pleased. . . . I added, inventing on my own and mocking Cortés . . . I translated, I betrayed, I invented. . . . But since things happened as I'd said, my false words becoming reality, wasn't I right to translate the commander backwards and tell the truth with my lies to the Aztecs?

--Carlos Fuentes, "The Two Shores"

At a crucial moment in "The Two Shores" (1994), Carlos Fuentes's novella about the conquest of Mexico, Jerónimo Aguilar finds himself **[End Page 405]** having to translate for Cortés in his discussions with the defeated Emperor, Cuauhtemoc. The novella, narrated by Aguilar, is based on the eyewitness account of the conquest written in 1555 by Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In the Díaz narrative, Cuauhtemoc weeps in shame before Cortés for having been unable to prevent the defeat of his people, and he invites Cortés to slay him with his own dagger. Instead, as Díaz writes, Cortés "answered him very kindly through our interpreters that he admired him greatly for having had the bravery to defend his city, and did not blame him at all. On the contrary, he thought rather well than ill of him for having done so. . . . Let his spirit and the spirit of his captains be at rest. For he should rule over Mexico and his provinces as before" (403-04). ¹ In Fuentes's version of this scene, however, Aguilar purposefully mistranslates Cortés, recalling that he "didn't

communicate to the conquered prince what Cortés really said, but put into the mouth of our leader a threat: 'You will be my prisoner; today I will torture you by burning your feet and those of your comrades until you confess where the rest of your uncle Montezuma's treasure is. . . . You'll never be able to walk again, but you'll accompany me on future conquests, crippled and weeping, as a symbol of continuity and the source of legitimacy for my enterprise'" (10). Though he mistranslates what Cortés actually said, he truthfully describes to Cuauhtemoc what *would* happen to him. Cortés's aides did in fact torture Cuauhtemoc by igniting his feet with oil in order to extract information about where Montezuma's gold was buried. Though the historian Hugh Thomas gives no evidence that Cuauhtemoc could never walk again, the Emperor was left with a limp and was forced to travel with Cortés on an expedition to Honduras, where he was hanged in 1524 on suspicion of fomenting an insurrection. ²

Throughout "The Two Shores," Aguilar mistranslates Cortés in an attempt to thwart the conquest of the Aztecs. However, as in the scene with Cuauhtemoc, his mistranslations merely serve to prophesy Cortés's brutal victory. Mistranslate though he does, Aguilar remains an agent of the conquest. "Were my words perhaps a mere exchange," he wonders in frustration, "and I nothing more than the intermediary (the translator), the mainspring of a fatal destiny that transformed trick into truth?" (10). The experience with Cuauhtemoc haunts Aguilar in death, troubling his ability to be an objective witness and judge of the conquest. "From my grave," he writes, "I try to judge things calmly," **[End Page 406]** but the "image" of Cuauhtemoc "forces itself on my thoughts again and again" (9). It is not just the brutality of Cortés's treatment of Cuauhtemoc that troubles Aguilar, but his own inability to come to terms with both the meaning and effect of his attempt to betray Cortés. In telling the story of how he willfully mistranslated Cortés's words to the Aztec emperor, Aguilar worries that "I reveal myself before posterity as a falsifier, a traitor to my commander Cortés" (10). The crisis Aguilar experiences here grows out of his struggle to turn the act of translation into something more than complicity with Cortés's plans, something other than an exchange of words that provides the "mainspring of a fatal destiny." In willfully mistranslating Cortés, Aguilar attempts to thwart destiny, but he instead gets caught up in an ontological game (his lies are truth, while his accurate translations would have been lies). ³ His warnings don't work, but seeing this, he falls back on the idea that his mistranslations contained a prophetic truth. Still, he remains haunted by "possibilities not carried out" and by the paradoxical fact that in mistranslating Cortés it seemed that he "merely confirmed the power of [Cortés's] words" (11). Worse still, Aguilar remains haunted by the idea that he *caused* the downfall of the Aztecs, that he was complicit in the conquest in spite of himself: "The story of the last Aztec king . . . ended with him not in the place of power promised by Cortés . . . but in a cruel comedy, the very one I'd invented and made inevitable with my lies. . . . What happened was exactly what I had lyingly invented. For that reason I don't sleep in peace. Possibilities not carried out, the alternatives of freedom all rob me of sleep" (11).

In moments like this, Fuentes develops in "The Two Shores" a rich, complicated, and speculative exploration of translation in all of its guises. While Aguilar has a very small role to play in Díaz's exhaustive story of the conquest, he is at the narrative and thematic heart of "The Two Shores." Aguilar's version of the conquest is less about the military power of Cortés than the colonizing power of language and translation. Fuentes puts

Aguilar (and Cortés's other principal translator, the native woman Doña Marina) at the center of his text in order not only to dramatize the pivotal role of translation in the conquest but also to explore the subversive power of translation, the potential it has to reverse the violent meaning of colonial discourse. In Fuentes's hands, translation has the potential to become what Gentzler calls "a crossing over which disseminates and escapes" (162). In what follows, I want to **[End Page 407]** relate Fuentes's treatment of translation to developments in the theory and practice of translation influenced by deconstructive, cultural, and postcolonial criticism. Aguilar's narrative, I will be arguing, is *about* translation, but it is also itself a translation of Díaz's *The Conquest of New Spain*, a translation that seeks literally to reverse and undo the earlier chronicle by rewriting it. My reading of Fuentes's text is partly aimed at stressing how it dramatizes a range of contemporary issues in translation theory, but more importantly, it seeks to underscore the performative and transformative impulse behind the novella, the ways in which it presents the myriad acts of translation it evokes as forms of historical and even political intervention. ⁴ For the novella underscores at once the instrumental role of translation in colonization *and* what Tejaswini Niranjana has characterized as the contemporary attempt on the part of postcolonial theorists "to reclaim the notion of translation by deconstructing it and reinscribing its potential as a strategy of resistance" (6).

Our commonsense assumption about translation, that it refers to the accurate transcription of words from one language into another, encourages us to forget the fact that "translation" carries with it the strong sense of changing, transforming, or altering one thing into another (and that it is also intimately connected with the act of interpretation). The OED isolates five distinct meanings for the word "translate": to bear, convey, or remove from one person, place, or condition to another; to turn from one language into another; to interpret or explain; to change in form, appearance, or substance; to transform, alter. ⁵ Recent work in translation theory has tended to emphasize the transformative and interpretive elements in translation. Though this emphasis can be traced back to Walter Benjamin's famous essay, "The Task of the Translator," ⁶ it has its roots first in the "linguistic turn" translation theory took under the influence of deconstruction, and later the "cultural turn" it took in its assimilation of recent anthropological and cultural theory. ⁷ Where traditional approaches to translation were "unified by a conceptual framework which assumes original presence and a representation of it in the receiving society" (Gentzler 144), deconstruction shifted attention away from the interlinear to the **[End Page 408]** *transformational* elements of translation by raising a series of questions about both presence and representation in translation: "What if one theoretically reversed the direction of thought and posited the hypothesis that the original text is dependent upon the translation What if the 'original' has no fixed identity that can be aesthetically or scientifically determined but rather changes each time it passes into translation?" (Gentzler 144-45). Deconstruction, which as Barbara Johnson has noted, has always been about translation (144), shifts our attention from identity to difference, from meaning as a reflection of the "real" to meaning as the product of a play of differences within a system with no fixed reference points outside it. Translation, from this point of view, is not a secondary but a *primary* process (Gentzler 146). ⁸

This deconstructive reversal of our common sense notion of translation gets developed in Paul de Man's oft-cited discussion of Benjamin's essay, a gloss (or translation) that pushes the implications of the original right over the edge. Where Benjamin emphasized a reciprocal relationship between fidelity and freedom (or license) in translation, underscoring the poetic element in its practice, de Man forces Benjamin's logic toward a more radical undermining of the role of fidelity in translation. In so doing, he extends the analogy Benjamin draws between translation and literary criticism, for in his view "both criticism and translation are caught in the gesture which Benjamin calls ironic, a gesture which undoes the stability of the original The translation . . . shows in the original a mobility, an instability, which at first one did not notice" (82). De Man sees in the act of translation a more violent reversal of the original than does Benjamin. Indeed, he links translation to critical philosophy, literary theory, and history precisely because "they do not resemble that from which they derive . . . they disarticulate, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was always already disarticulated They kill the original . . . bring to light a dismemberment" (84).

De Man takes a characteristically bleak point of view toward the *mise-en-abyme* of translation, since he sees it purely as a perpetual play of language: "Translation, to the extent that it disarticulates the original, *to the extent that it is pure language and is only concerned with language*, gets drawn into what [Benjamin] calls the bottomless depth, something essentially destructive, which is in language itself" (84; emphasis added). [9](#) Critics working under the aegis of Translation Studies, **[End Page 409]** however, have begun to turn this same logic toward a more constructive cultural approach to translation. Translation Studies picks up where the linguistic turn in translation theory leaves off, adding to its deconstructive logic attention to forms of institutional and social power derived from work in cultural studies. Where de Man connects the impossibility of fidelity in translation to the difference that always inheres in language and the ironic disarticulation at the heart of commentary in criticism, philosophy, and history, Translation Studies critics like Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere see translation as a potentially more productive *rewriting* of the original:

Translation is . . . a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. (i)

This approach to translation is based on the deconstructive logic Johnson, Chase, Gentzler, and de Man invoke, but it takes that logic in a very different direction. The focus here is less on the kind of ironically circular relationship between source and original we get in de Man, where translation simply gets caught up in the arbitrary language game characteristic of all discourse, and more on the cultural and social *function* of translation conceived as a strategic and motivated rewriting of the original. "Translations," write Bassnett and Lefevere, "are never produced in an airlock where they, and their originals,

can be checked against the *tertium comparationis* in the purest possible lexical chamber, untainted by power, time, or even the vagaries of culture. Rather, translations are made to respond to the demands of a culture, and of various groups within that culture" (7). By conceiving of translation as a *rewriting*, Bassnett and Lefevere underscore a key point from de Man. However, where de Man sees rewriting purely in linguistic terms as an "ironic gesture," a violent dismembering, they see it as a complex ideological and poetic attempt to manipulate the function of discourse in **[End Page 410]** society, to exercise a "shaping" power with the potential to create new concepts, genres, and devices. The radical reconceptualization of translation they endorse--translation as "appropriation," as "mimicry," as "parody"--is right out of Derrida and de Man, but their stress is on the critical and even liberatory possibilities of translation as an undoing and displacement of dominant discourses and cultural forms. [10](#)

In stressing the historical role of translation in exercising one culture's shaping power over another, Bassnett and Lefevere underscore the crucial relationship between translation and anthropology (a disciplinary form of rewriting left unmentioned by de Man). [11](#) As Gísli Pálsson recently noted, "for quite some time, anthropology has been regarded as an 'art of translation' . . . a textual exercise, facilitating understanding across boundaries of time and culture" (1). "The problem of translation," he continues, "is said to be 'at the heart of the anthropological enterprise'" and should be thought of as its "most important theoretical problem. . . . Indeed, if there is a root metaphor, which unites different ethnographic paradigms and different schools of anthropological thought, it is the metaphor of cultural translation" (1). This metaphor, as Talal Asad, has pointed out, has a long and somewhat problematical history dating back to the early 1950s. [12](#) Shifting our attention to the *metaphor* of "cultural translation," it would seem that we are turning from the literal translation of one language into another to a more figurative use of the term "translation," one that has less to do with linguistic transcription than with explaining and interpreting a given set of social and cultural practices to an audience that does not know about or understand them. However, if interlinear translation is itself already a metaphor for transforming, rewriting, altering, changing, and "disarticulating" the original, then the distinction between literal translation and the metaphor of cultural translation loses much of its force. Why? Because the deconstructive critique of traditional assumptions about translation has revealed "literal" translation to *be* a metaphor for cultural translation. Interlinear translation *is* a form of cultural translation, and cultural translation turns out to have all of the characteristics of interlinear translation. If the "literal" translation is in fact a "production" or "performance" in the sense Godard means, if it so transforms the original as to obliterate it (de Man's point), then the same would hold for the "original" *culture* which is the subject of the ethnographer's "cultural translation." The radical instability of language **[End Page 411]** de Man stresses turns out to be the radical instability of culture as well, so that the ethnographic rendering of any given culture turns out, potentially, to have the paradoxical qualities of translation proper. [13](#) To return to the OED definition with which we began, cultural translation, like interlinear translation, turns out to be a conveying or removing, an interpretation which changes the form and substance of the original into something new.

Translation theory, then, has undergone a fundamental shift in which the traditional value

of fidelity has given way, first to a deconstructive critique that seemed to erase the difference between "original" and "translation," and secondly to a general reconceptualization of the phenomenon of translation, one that linked it to a range of cultural activities--interpretation, critical rewriting, performance, the manipulation of language with political purpose--and therefore revised our sense both of its purposes and its forms. Indeed, Talal Asad, extending the implications of Benjamin's approach to translation, sees no reason why a translation ought to mimic the form or genre of the original. "If Benjamin was right," he observes,

in proposing that translation may require not a mechanical reproduction of the original but a harmonization with its *intentio*, it follows that there is no reason why this should be done only in the same mode . . . it could be argued that "translating" an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography, that under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt. These would all be *productions* of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it. (156)

Asad wants to sanction the creative and performative in translation, liberating it from mimetically reproducing the *form* of the original. Other critics want to go even further, pushing the element of transformation and change in translation to the point where the translation becomes a critical reading of the original, "modifying the original text," as Gertzler puts it, "deferring and displacing forever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name" (163). It is this kind of displacement Gertzler has in mind when, in the quote I cited at **[End Page 412]** the outset of my essay, he insists that we see translation as a "crossing over" that "disseminates and escapes" the original. [14](#)

With this reconceptualization of the linguistic and cultural nature of translation in mind, I want to return to my earlier assertion that Fuentes's novella, "The Two Shores," can be read as a translation of Bernal Díaz's *The Conquest of New Spain*, one that seeks, quite literally, to undo or reverse his chronicle of the conquest. Fuentes, as we shall see, explores what contemporary Translation Studies speculates is the playful and subversive power of translation. By putting Cortés's translator, Jerónimo Aguilar, at the very center of his text, Fuentes is able to explore the nature and function of translation both in its guise as an act of colonial conquest *and* as an instrument that might perform a discursive undoing (or reversal) of that act. Fuentes's playful treatment of the paradoxes and ironies of translation constitutes a reflection on the linguistic turn translation theory took under the influence of deconstruction. However, in having Aguilar initiate a subversive rewriting of Díaz's text, one that seeks to manipulate the instabilities of its source text in ways that thwart its historical, political, and ideological power, Fuentes is also able to explore a potential for translation associated with the cultural turn in Translation Studies, a turn that envisions the activity of translation as transformative in a political and historical way.

As I noted earlier, Fuentes's narrative is based on the sketches of Aguilar contained in the historical chronicle by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*. According to Díaz's narrative, Cortés and his troops encountered Aguilar in the jungles of

the Yucatan in March of 1519. Aguilar (a priest from a town near Seville), shipwrecked with a group of men off the Yucatan in 1511, had managed to survive for nearly nine years as a slave of the Mayans. Indeed, in every respect Aguilar appeared to Cortés's men to *be* Mayan. ¹⁵ According to Díaz (and Thomas), Aguilar was eager to return to Spain and agreed to accompany Cortés and to serve as his translator. Only one other of his shipmates had survived capture, a man named Gonzalo Guerrero. Unlike Aguilar, Guerrero had married a native woman and seems to have transformed himself into a Mayan (his ears were pierced and his face tattooed [Díaz 60]). Moreover, Guerrero was considered a valued **[End Page 413]** warrior by the Mayans; the year before he suggested that they attack three ships under the command of Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba (65). Guerrero stayed behind with his Mayan family, while Aguilar left with Cortés, whom he served faithfully until his death sometime before Cortés embarked for Honduras in 1524.

"The Two Shores" betrays the surface truth of Díaz's narrative at nearly every turn. Narrated by Aguilar, it recasts the Spaniard as a passionate protector of the natives who agrees to accompany Cortés only in order that he might disrupt the conquest and, with the help of Guerrero, assist the Mayans in "discovering" and conquering Spain. From the very beginning, Fuentes presents Aguilar's narrative as his attempt to liberate himself from the confines of Díaz's chronicle by reimagining his own story:

I saw it all. I'd like to tell it all. But my appearances in history are rigorously limited to what's been said about me. The chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo mentions me fifty-eight times in his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. The last thing known about me is that I was already dead when Hernan Cortés, our commander, embarked on his ill-fated expedition to Honduras in October of 1524. That's how the chronicler describes it, and he soon forgets about me. (4)

The problem with Díaz, in Aguilar's view, is that "he's got more than enough memory and not enough imagination" (5). Aguilar wants both to imagine a different role for himself in the conquest and, more ambitiously, to create an alternative outcome to the conquest, a "telling" that "disputes the order of things" as we get them in Díaz. He writes out of the conviction that historical events could always have turned out differently and that the act of telling that difference can dispute the catastrophes of history: "Observe then, readers, listeners, penitents, or whatever you are as you approach my tomb, how decisions are made when time presses and history suppresses. Things could always have happened exactly opposite to the way the chronicle records them. Always" (5). Fuentes turns the historical Aguilar into the narrator of a history that methodically undoes the one Díaz tells, reversing the order of his chronicle *and* translating Aguilar's willing participation in the conquest into an act of betrayal.

Fuentes, in fact, has Aguilar betray *both* Díaz and Cortés. He **[End Page 414]** betrays Díaz by writing a story that revises and reinvents his narrative of the conquest, and he betrays Cortés *in* that story by willfully mistranslating Cortés's words to the Aztecs. In both instances, Fuentes explores the relationship between translation and colonization, and how, usurped by the conquered, translation can reverse the order of things so as to

reveal a subversive truth or desire that thwarts the surface meaning of the original. ¹⁶ Fuentes's Aguilar, unlike the historical Aguilar, sides with the Aztecs against Cortés and does everything he can in his role as translator to thwart the conquest. "I fell in love with my new people," writes Aguilar, "with their simple way of dealing with the matters of life. . . . Taking care of the land was their fundamental mission; they were the servants of the land--that's why they'd been born. Their magic stories, their ceremonies, their prayers, I realized, had no other purpose than to keep the land alive and fertile, to honor the ancestors who had in their turn kept it alive" (40). Thus, he continues, "I associated myself with the hope of an Indian victory . . . the triumph of the Indians over the Spaniards" (19). One of the ways he tries to effect that victory is to warn the Indians of Cortés's true intentions by mistranslating his words, to "frustrate the fatal plan, if such a thing existed, by means of words, imagination, lies" (19). In this aim, "language . . . was power, it was the very life that animated my plans" (26). So, when Cortés instructs him to tell the leaders of Cholula that he has come in peace, Aguilar instead explains to the village priests that he has lived in the Yucatan for eight years: "That's where I have my true friends. If I abandoned them, it was to follow these white gods and find out their secrets, because they have not come to be your brothers but to conquer this land and smash your gods 'Listen carefully to me,' I said to the priests. 'These foreigners really are gods, but they are enemies of your gods'" (27). Having thus mistranslated Cortés in an attempt to disrupt his plans, he turns to Cortés to claim that "'there is no danger. They're convinced we're gods and honor us as gods'" (27). Later, at Tabasco, Cortés "proclaimed in Spanish that we had come in peace . . . while I translated into Maya 'He's lying! He's come to conquer us, defend yourselves, don't believe him'" (30). ¹⁷

These attempts on Aguilar's part to warn the Aztecs of Cortés's true intentions do not work, and by the time he faces Cuauhtemoc in the scene with which I began this essay, Aguilar becomes frustrated by his seeming inability to do more than simply tell the truth about what **[End Page 415]** will happen. As a translator, even in his attempts to thwart the conquest, Aguilar worries that his role as an "intermediary" merely makes him "the mainspring of a fatal destiny that transformed trick into truth" (10). Haunted by "possibilities not carried out" (11), Aguilar has shifted his attention from one act of mistranslation (reversing Cortés's words) to another (reversing or undoing Díaz's narrative). Fuentes presents Aguilar's agony over the fate of Cuauhtemoc as a moment of crisis that necessitates the writing of "The Two Shores." Unable to reverse Cortés's conquest of the Aztecs through mistranslations that invent in order to betray, Aguilar sets out to translate backwards the narrative Díaz produced, releasing from *The Conquest of New Spain* what we earlier saw Johnson term the "subversive forces of its own foreignness." From the very beginning, Fuentes has Aguilar foreground his narrative as a *rewriting* of the conquest that reverses events in order to dramatize what might have happened. Fuentes's fascination with the relationship between translation and transformation, his interest in exploring whether or not translation can ever be anything more than the "mainspring of a fatal destiny," comes to center on the potential for reversal in translation (literal, narrative, and cultural), the extent to which its power can be located not in the accurate transmission of intended meaning but in the reversal or betrayal of intentionality, getting things backwards in order to tell the truth with lies and thus reverse the order of things.

To see the connection Fuentes makes between reversal in translation at the literal level and reversal in translation at the level of a rewriting, we need both to recall that in musing over his mistranslations in the interview with Cuauhtemoc, Aguilar writes that he translated his "commander *backwards*," thus telling the truth with his lies (10; emphasis added), and to connect this passage to his statement near the outset of his narrative that "things could always have happened exactly opposite to the way the chronicle records them" (5). If the attempt to mistranslate fails to reverse the narrative Cortés has in mind, such a reversal is reattempted in the narrative Aguilar writes, one that seeks to answer the question Fuentes has him ask at the end of the novella: "What would have happened if what did happen didn't? What would have happened if what did not happen did?" (47). The connection between reversal in translation and Aguilar's reversal of Díaz's narrative is made explicit in Aguilar's explanation at the end of **[End Page 416]** his narrative about the curious structure of the story he has told, which is divided into eleven sections told in reverse order from ten to zero: "[T]he form of this tale is like a countdown, which has been associated too often with mortal explosions, overcoming a rival in the ring, or apocalyptic events. I'd like to use it today, beginning with ten and ending with zero, to indicate instead a perpetual rebeginning of stories perpetually unfinished . . ." (48). The reversal here is not just numerical, but chronological, for sections ten through one tell the story of the conquest in *reverse* chronological order (the novella opens with the conquest of Tenochtitlan and the interview with Cuauhtemoc, then moves systematically backwards in time so that the earliest parts of Aguilar's story--his shipwreck, his discovery by Cortés, the first events of the conquest--are narrated in the last few sections of "The Two Shores," with the "discovery" and conquest of Spain by the Mayans capping off the narrative in section zero).

That this reversal is meant to indicate the "perpetual rebeginning of stories perpetually unfinished" is central to Fuentes's desire in "The Two Shores" to dramatize how "telling disputes the order of things." Fuentes isn't so much disputing the Real, in the Lacanian sense glossed by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, as he is seizing on the poststructuralist insistence (from Foucault--via Nietzsche--and Hayden White through Jameson) that what we call "history" is a discursive object, subject to the possibilities and limits of language, mediated and even shaped by the formal, ideological, conscious, and unconscious desires of the historian to shape, interpret, or translate the past for some present purpose. ¹⁸ In the Nietzschean sense, Fuentes has Aguilar set out not so much to "use" as to "abuse" history. Nietzsche, of course, was one of the first philosophers to question the distinction between historiography and literature, to suggest that since "we require the same artistic vision and absorption in his object from the historian" that we do from the artist, "objectivity" for the historian is a kind of "superstition" or "myth" (37). ¹⁹ Since, in Nietzsche's view, it is never possible for the historian to render an ontologically "true picture" of historical events, historical truth is a "dramatic" creation: "the unity of plan must be *put into the objects* if it is not already there" (37-38; emphasis added). Nietzsche effectively deconstructs the binary opposition he inherited between *fact* and *creation* in historiography, not so much dismissing the role of the factual out of hand as complicating **[End Page 417]** its ontological status by demonstrating how irreconcilably it is linked to the creative (or, following White, tropological) elements of writing. In his view, the historian "uses" a past that is literally irrecoverable, but he or she also "abuses" it in

the positive sense of using the "power" of language to coin "the known into a thing never heard before" (40). [20](#)

When Nietzsche, Jameson, and White stress the *transformative* nature of historiography, the way its dependence on narrative devices and an essentially tropological language performs a rewriting of nondiscursive events, they are of course stressing the same mechanism at work in translation. Philip Lewis's notion of a rigorously "abusive" (46) translation suggests the link between Nietzsche's radical meditation on the translational nature of historical writing (historical discourse is an abuse of history in the sense that it uses language to transform the "known" into something that was unheard of) and the revisionary work of Translation Studies critics, who insist on the positive role in translation of revising, rewriting, reinterpreting, and troping the "original," turning *it* into a thing never heard before. Nietzsche's stress, as well, on the artistic vision of the historian suggests the same blurring of generic boundaries we saw in Asad's comments about translation. The latter questioned whether "the representational discourse of ethnography" was always the most appropriate mode for translating cultures, and his suggestion that dramatic or performative productions of the original may at times be preferable to the "authority" of ostensibly representational modes of discourse underscores how Fuentes's novella can be read as both a history *and* a translation.

The question Nietzsche raises about conventional distinctions between the literary and the historical gets picked up by Fuentes in the distinction we have seen Aguilar make in "The Two Shores" between *chronicle* and *invention*. We should recall in this context how Aguilar opens his narrative by remarking that he is trapped in the relatively empirical rendering of his life in Díaz's narrative and that as a historian Díaz had "more than enough memory and not enough imagination" (5). Aguilar associates Díaz's text with a "chronicle" (something like Nietzsche's "known" or the "original source" in translation theory) in order to distinguish it from an imaginative retelling of things which, like his own, "disputes the order of things." If we take Díaz's text (or even Thomas's scholarly history) to constitute what Nietzsche calls the **[End Page 418]** "known," what Fuentes has done is to have Aguilar translate the known into a thing never heard before; from the very beginning he sets out to "abuse" the history we get in Díaz in just the senses invoked by Nietzsche and Lewis.

Fuentes's abuse of history in "The Two Shores" is dramatic in the sense Nietzsche has in mind but with a twist that emphasizes the performative power of discursive acts. Why else (beyond its entertainment value) go to such elaborate lengths to rewrite and reverse Díaz than to enact a kind of ritual undoing of his chronicle? We have seen that there is something Nietzschean in Aguilar's attempt to rigorously abuse history. His rewriting of Díaz's chronicle aims to keep history open, subject to reinterpretation; he wants his "tale" to "indicate . . . a perpetual rebeginning of stories perpetually unfinished" (48). Beyond this metahistorical contextualization, however, which draws on a Western critique of traditional historiography, Fuentes interweaves Aguilar's interest in building into his narrative a Mayan belief in language's power to perpetually remake and renew reality. This power, embodied in both public ceremony and private prayer (42), is rooted in language's ability to create through renaming. The Mayans, Aguilar has learned, lived with "the purpose of sustaining divine creation day by day by means of the same thing

that brought forth the earth, the sky, and all the things in them: language. . . . [T]he real greatness of these people was . . . in the most humble vocation of repeating in every minute, in every activity in life, the greatest and most heroic thing of all, which was the creation of the world by gods" (42-43). Aguilar's narrative is committed to this transformative power of renaming, which gets played out in a tale systematically organized to create a different history by reversing an earlier one.

As we have already seen, this transformative dimension in "The Two Shores" (which, drawn from the Mayans, has something of a ritualistic element to it) is at work in the way Fuentes has structured his narrative in the form of a "countdown" ending with an explosive turnaround in which the Mayans conquer Spain. Fuentes is careful in this last section of the novella to have the Mayan conquest of Spain follow the logic of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, and in so doing he mines a subversive truth out of Díaz's narrative. That is, his translation of the conquest reverses the players, but it leaves the mechanisms of conquest **[End Page 419]** in place and so dramatizes the Mayan's appropriation and transformation of the methods of the Spanish. In this way the conquest of New Spain is seamlessly translated into the conquest of Spain.

Section Zero opens with a passage that mimics the language of the novella's opening passage, but it substitutes the fall of Andalusia for the fall of Tenochtitlan. Here is the novella's opening passage: "All this I saw. The fall of the great Aztec city in the moan of the conch shells, the clash of steel against flint, and the fire of Castilian cannon. I saw the burnt water of the lake where stood this Great Tenochtitlan, two times the size of Cordoba" (3). Here is the passage that opens Section Zero: "All this I saw. The fall of the great Andalusian city in the moan of the conch shells, the clash of steel against flint, and the fire of Mayan flamethrowers. I saw the burnt water of the Guadalquivir and the burning of the Tower of Gold" (43). Fuentes has quite literally translated the historical fall of Tenochtitlan into a vision of the fall of Andalusia. In so doing he reverses the nature of religious "conversion" that drove the conquest and undoes the logic of racial purity that drove the Inquisition. Where the Spanish sought to translate Mayan and Aztec forms of worship into a New World Catholicism by replacing sacrificial alters with icons of the Virgin, ²¹ the conquering Mayans "began to build the temple of the four religions, inscribed with the word of Christ, Mohammed, Abraham, and Quetzalcoatl, where all the powers of imagination and language would have their place, without exception" (44). Fuentes also has the Mayans burn Spanish archives, "along with the laws about purity of blood and being 'old Christians' . . . the ultimate result was an increased mixing of bloods--Indian and Spanish but also Arab and Jew. . . . The complexion of the old continent quickly became darker, as that of southern, Arabian Spain already was" (44). Fuentes is partly disputing "the order of things" (48) in Díaz by having the *Mayans* bring civilization to the Spanish, inaugurate the beginning of a new mestizo identity in the "Old World," liberate the "humanists, poets, and philosophers" ("who at the beginning celebrated our arrival, considering it a liberation" [45]), and save the barbaric Spanish from their own tyranny over the Moors. The Mayans bring to their "discovery of Spain" (45) exactly what the Spanish brought to their discovery of Mexico: the "true" religion. According to Aguilar "all the gods were already in Spain," but "the fact is they'd been forgotten. The Indians managed to reanimate the Spanish gods" (46). **[End Page 420]**

Fuentes's conclusion is unabashedly utopian, of course, (and often tongue-in-cheek, as when he writes that the Mayans "committed a few crimes, it's true," giving "the members of the Holy Inquisition a taste of their own medicine, burning them in the public plazas" [44]). But the utopian ending is integral to Fuentes's interest in creating a postmodern translation of Díaz based on the principles of mimicry, parody, appropriation, and reversal. For, in the end, "The Two Shores" turns the act of translation into what Godard, following Luce Irigaray, calls a "playful repetition," one that seeks to displace "the dominant discourse" as "it crosses back and forth through the mirror" in "a logic of disruptive excess" (90). Godard's image here, consciously or not, recalls the root meaning of "translate": "to bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another." Fuentes's focus on translation in its myriad guises is complemented by the many crossings evoked in the novella, from Aguilar's shipwreck to the Spanish crossing of the Atlantic to the Mayans' crossing to conquer Spain. Each of these crossings (between two shores) is in its way an act of translation, for it transforms irrevocably the identities of both found and transported cultures and of the individuals associated with them. ²²

Aguilar's identity develops at the intersection of all these crossings. He is the man caught in between, the mediate figure, born Spanish, allied with the Mayans, writing from the world of the dead, usurping the power of both Díaz and Cortés, in every sense of the word a hybrid (one of the meanings of the verb "to cross" is to "breed by hybridizing"). He inhabits something like the position of the ethnographer who, as a "cultural translator," is in a "mediating position . . . inside and outside at the same time" (Gentzler 26, 28). Surely Fuentes has plucked Aguilar from the obscurity of Díaz's text because, as a translator, he traversed the border spaces between languages, cultures, and identities. One of the ways in which he has translated Díaz's chronicle into a postmodern meditation on translation--literal and cultural--is to make Aguilar a *translated* subject, a liminal figure, not someone who has "gone native" (like his companion, Guerrero) but someone whose identity has become terminally displaced through cross-cultural experience. In Fuentes's text, Aguilar's repatriation does not reanimate his Spanish identity. It leads, rather, to a meditation on the double or split nature of his identity, what many critics would now call his *hybridity*. ²³ This split, this double-consciousness, is the result of **[End Page 421]** his captivity, an experience in which he grows ever more sympathetic to the Mayans. However, it crystallizes in his experience as a translator when, speaking two languages, he comes to realize he is a creature of "two shores": "I . . . possessed the two voices, European and American . . . I had two homelands, which perhaps was more my weakness than my strength . . . I found myself divided between Spain and the New World. I knew both shores" (22).

These are the qualities that separate Fuentes's Aguilar from the Díaz who gave us *The Conquest of New Spain*. Both make their way to the "New World" and participate in the conquest, but only Aguilar experiences a radical displacement of his personal and cultural identities, one that leaves him in the paradoxical position of having two voices and two homelands. This is, of course, the central imaginative leap Fuentes takes: to transform Díaz's passing reference to Aguilar's sojourn with the Mayans into a contemporary meditation on the forms subjectivity takes (especially for the writer) under the regime of colonization and in the context of cultural displacement and syncretism.

Aguilar is Spanish and not Indian, to be sure, but one of the ways that Fuentes has rewritten Díaz's text is to have Aguilar narrate the conquest from a point of view sympathetic to the conquered population. There is never any question that the Díaz who writes *The Conquest of New Spain* is an unreconstructed Conquistador. Fuentes, however, seizes on Aguilar's experience with the Mayans to imagine his identity as a hybrid construction, a man with a double voice and two homelands, at once both conqueror and conquered, a self translated into a kind of metaphorical mestizo.

It is both Aguilar's blessing and his curse, his weakness and his strength, that he "knew two shores." Fuentes could have written a version of the conquest from the point of view of an Aztec or Mayan narrator, but his imagination was clearly captured by the idea of choosing a narrator he could put in a *mediate* position, someone who (as a captive of the Mayans and a translator for Cortés) operated between two cultures and whose identity had in a sense become undone by that experience. His Aguilar becomes the locus for a meditation on the forces of transformation let loose by voyages like Cortés's, voyages that led to forms of contact with both predictable and unimaginable consequences. Aguilar's paradoxical identity is a result of his many border crossings (from Spain to the Mayan's homeland, from European to **[End Page 422]** Indian, speaker of Spanish to speaker of Mayan, from colonizer to colonized), a series of migrations that forces him to imagine a new self forged out of the resources of two homelands. In this sense Aguilar is very much like the figure Salman Rushdie has identified in *Imaginary Homelands* as the migrant writer, someone who suffers a "triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes offensive to, his own" (277-78).²⁴ The migrant writer actually inhabits at least two imaginary homelands, the one he or she has lost and the new one necessarily constructed in the context of displacement. When Aguilar writes that he "had two homelands," it is very much in the sense Rushdie has in mind. Having lost his place through shipwreck, and, once captured by the Mayans, faced with both an "alien" language and social behavior and codes that were radically unlike his own, Aguilar suffers just the kind of triple displacement Rushdie ascribes to the migrant writer.

In Rushdie's view, migrancy is one of "the richest metaphors of our age" (278). Stressing its many resonances, he underscores the connections between terms like metaphor, migrate, and translate. Metaphor and migration are linked because, as Rushdie points out, "the very word *metaphor*" having its "roots in the Greek word for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration. . . . Migrants--borne-across humans--are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us" (278-79). Translation, of course, is linked to metaphor and migration through the root meaning they share: bearing across. The word "translation," Rushdie notes, also "comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across,'" so that the migrant, in his sense of the term, is a metaphorical or "translated" subject (17).²⁵ For Rushdie, the migrant writer and the translated subject denote specifically postmodern and postcolonial conditions, so it may seem odd to associate Aguilar, a colonial figure from the early 16th century, with Rushdie's concept of migrancy. Yet surely one of Fuentes's chief aims is to link the beginning of the conquest with its end, to see in Aguilar's displacement the seeds of a late-twentieth-century condition like the one Rushdie outlines. Turning Aguilar into a

writer, emphasizing the extent to which his cultural bearings and the very core of his identity have been displaced, and then making the activity of his translation resonate on so many levels, [End Page 423] Fuentes is able to link the historical conquest with a contemporary condition it helped inaugurate. Fuentes has rewritten Díaz's chronicle so that the history it told gets translated into something like its own opposite, but he has done so in a way that makes Aguilar a peculiarly contemporary figure. Surely this is part of his professed desire in the novella to disrupt the order of things. What I am suggesting, of course, is that Fuentes's novella is historical in two familiar senses of the word. It is about the history of the conquest, *and* it grapples with the social and cultural condition Rushdie refers to through the metaphors of migrancy and translation. On the historical level, "The Two Shores" offers a nearly hallucinatory critique of the conquest, and as a contemporary meditation on migration, subjectivity, and translation, it dramatizes the postmodern centrality for identity of what Rushdie calls hybridity and mongrelization. ²⁶ Aguilar emerges in Fuentes's text as a kind of paradox, a migrant writer so displaced by the mechanisms of his own colonialist homeland that he suffers the effects of being colonized as well. His experiences in the "New World" foreground the personal and cultural disruptions imperialism visits on *both* the conquered and the conquering. ²⁷

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Notes

1. Díaz's version is confirmed by the historian, Hugh Thomas, who suggests both Aguilar and Doña Marina were present as translators. See 525-27.
2. See Thomas 545-46 and 594.
3. This occurs to Aguilar again later in the narrative when he recalls his frustration with Moctezuma's conviction that the collapse of the Aztecs was foretold, destined. "Even stronger than his vanity," Aguilar writes, was Moctezuma's "feeling that everything was foretold . . . [his] fidelity to forms. . . . What I did want was to frustrate the fatal plan, if such a thing existed, by means of words, imagination, lies. But when words, imagination, and lies jumble together, the result is the truth . . ." (19).
4. I should acknowledge here that in citing the translated version of Fuentes's novella issued by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, my own essay may seem caught up in the web of issues it discusses. My reasons for using the English translation are fairly simple: I first taught the novella in translation in one of my English Department seminars, and I decided to stay with it for this essay in order to make my reading available for a general literary studies audience.
5. The OED entry on "translation" also carries with it a strong stress on the transformative

nature of translation: "Transformation, alteration, change; changing or adapting to another use."

6. The task of the language of translation, according to Benjamin, is to "let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*" (79). For this reason, he questions the accuracy of seeing "fidelity" and "freedom" as "conflicting tendencies" in translation (79). The "letting go" involves what we call poetic license, an imaginative rendering of the original aimed less at reproducing an exact semantic copy than a linguistic rewriting of the feeling of the original. For a discussion of Benjamin's essay in the context of ethnographic translation, see Asad.

7. For lengthy treatments of the recent history of translation theory see Gentzler, Graham, Pálsson, and Bassnett and Lefevere.

8. Johnson writes that

Derrida's rearticulation of philosophy and translation is obviously not designed to evacuate meaning entirely. But his concept of textuality displaces the very notion of *how* a text means. . . . Derrida's entire philosophic enterprise, indeed, can be seen as an analysis of the translation process at work in every text. In studying the *différance* of signification, Derrida follows the misfires, losses, and infelicities that prevent any given language from being *one*. (145-46)

For Derrida's commentary on Benjamin's essay, see "Des Tours de Babel."

9. For another deconstructive meditation on translation, see Chase.

10. This approach to translation is exemplified by the feminist critic, Barbara Godard, who insists that "the possibility of future feminist intervention requires an ironic manipulation of the semiotics of performance and production" in the act of translation (88). A feminist theory of translation would have to see it as "production, not reproduction . . . [a] playful repetition. . . . Feminist discourse presents transformation as performance as a model for translation" (90-91). Like the critics I have been reviewing, Godard sees translation as a "rewriting," in light of which "the concept of translation is enlarged to include imitation, adaptation, quotation, pastiche, parody--all different modes of rewriting: in short, all forms of interpenetration of works and discourses" (93).

11. Translation Studies has also, as we shall see later in this essay, played an important role in postcolonial criticism and theory. For an excellent discussion of contemporary translation theory and its impact on postcolonial criticism, see Niranjana.

12. Asad's excellent critique of this metaphor is not aimed at ruling out its use, but rather to rescue it from banality (141) by stressing how "the process of 'cultural translation' is inevitably enmeshed in conditions of power--professional, national, international. And among these conditions is the authority of ethnographers to uncover the implicit meanings of subordinate societies" (163). Like Bassnett and Lefevere, Asad wants us to

see "how power enters into the process of 'cultural translation,' seen both as a discursive and as a non-discursive practice" (163). He doesn't want to abandon the use of this metaphor, but he does want to encourage a rigorous historical and theoretical critique of the concept and function of "cultural translation." For another critical discussion of "cultural translation" see Hannerz.

[13](#). Both literal and cultural translation, of course, can have violent consequences, obliterating, altering, and transforming original texts and cultures in ways that serve the dominance of those with the power or desire to translate. On this problem see Mann, Asad, and Niranjana.

[14](#). Barbara Johnson makes something like the same point when she writes that translation can be the paradoxical act of releasing "within each text the subversive forces of its own foreignness" (148). Her essay provides an important discussion of the ways in which deconstructive theory has undermined the whole notion of "fidelity" in translation.

[15](#). According to Díaz, "Aguilar looked exactly like [an Indian]. . . . Tapia quickly brought the Spaniard to the place where Cortés was, but before they got there some soldiers asked Tapia: 'Where is this Spaniard?' Although they were close beside him, they could not distinguish him from an Indian, for he was naturally dark, and had his hair untidily cut like an Indian slave" (64).

[16](#). See the introduction to Niranjana's *Siting Translation* for a discussion of the relationship between translation and colonialism. She stresses the importance of seeing translation as a principle "site" of colonization, one in which indigenous subjects are interpellated (11) or translated into colonial ones. "The Two Shores" simultaneously dramatizes the colonizing work of translation and the subversive uses to which it can be put. As a translation of Díaz's narrative, the novella seeks both to foreground and subvert the colonizing function of Díaz's narrative, one that served to fix and perpetuate Aztec history and culture from a Spanish perspective.

[17](#). Aguilar continues in this passage to explain that his mistranslations "provoked a rain of Indian arrows" (30). It is interesting to compare this passage to the original one in Díaz because the passage in Díaz actually leaves room for the possibility that Aguilar mistranslated in a way that warned the natives about Cortés's true intentions. The passage might therefore have been the genesis of Fuentes's idea for the novella. About this moment, Díaz writes that Cortés, seeing "the Indians drawn up for battle," told "Aguilar the interpreter . . . to ask some Indians, who appeared to be chieftains and were passing close to us in a large canoe, why they were so alarmed, since we had not come to do them any harm, but would give them some of the things we had brought with us, and treat them like brothers. . . . However, *the more Aguilar talked the more defiant they became*. They said they would kill us all if we entered their town. . . . Then they boldly began to shoot arrows at us and beat tattoos on their drums" (69-70; emphasis added). Fuentes has not changed anything from the original, save to suggest that the growing defiance of the Indians as Aguilar spoke resulted from his mistranslated warnings to them.

[18](#). "One does not have to argue the reality of history," Jameson writes. "Necessity, like

Dr. Johnson's stone, does that for us. That history--Althusser's 'absent cause,' Lacan's 'Real'--is *not* a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual forms, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re) textualization" (82). White's *Metahistory*, of course, provides an exhaustive treatment in this context of history as a kind of writing.

[19](#). Critics of this point of view often mistakenly claim that Nietzsche and the poststructuralists do not see a difference between history and literature, that they believe that history itself is made up or does not exist. This is of course inaccurate in the extreme. The point is not that "history" or historical events do not take place, that the Real and the textual are equatable. The point is, rather, that the only recourse we have to past events is through *discourse*, which has all of the qualities Nietzsche, Jameson, Foucault, and White ascribe to it. I have compared literature to *historiography* to try to limit confusion on this point.

[20](#). See as well Foucault's discussion of Nietzsche's ideas in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

[21](#). For an excellent and detailed discussion of the "cultural conquest" of the Aztecs by the Spanish, see Gruzinski, especially chapters 4, 5, and 6 on "Colonial Idolatry" and the "Christianization" of the Aztec "*imaginaire*."

[22](#). One effect of all these crossings, translations, and rewritings in Fuentes's novella is to blur the boundaries between Díaz, Aguilar, Cortés, and the cultures of Spain and Mexico. Cultural translation can be an instrument of conquest (a fact no more clearly dramatized than in Díaz's text, where the Spanish systematically convert Mayan and Aztec cultural forms into Spanish ones and translate place names in order to use language to take possession of Mexico). However, as we have already noted, it is the root activity of the anthropologist as well, who under the guise of liberal humanism is ostensibly interested in understanding and preserving, rather than transforming and obliterating, the culture of the other. One of the things that links Díaz and Aguilar is that they inhabit the kind of mediate positions often associated with the ethnographer and the translator. Díaz's narrative is a history and a memoir, but it is also one of the first ethnographic texts produced in the so-called New World in the sense that it relates, puzzles over, and struggles in its own way to make sense of an "alien" culture. Pálsson distinguishes between three modes of ethnographic discourse, "colonialist" (which "typically employs the vocabulary of universalism and superiority"), "textualist" (stressing relativism and "underlining the difficulties of reading the 'texts' of other cultures"), and "living" (in which anthropologists "immerse themselves in a democratic ethnographic dialogue with the people they visit") (36). As an ethnographic text, Díaz's narrative is of course a prototype of what would become colonialist ethnography since he operates with no question in his mind that Spanish culture is superior to what he judges to be the barbarism of the Aztecs (this is especially the case in his discussions of the practice of human sacrifice), though he is impressed with the sophistication of Tenochtitlan, a metropolis he describes in relatively rich detail in the chapters preceding his narration of its conquest.

[23](#). The term "hybridity" has of course been used in cultural studies with increasing frequency. It is a powerful term, but we ought to acknowledge some problems with it. The concept of "hybridity" worked effectively for some years to draw critical attention to how colonized and border cultures developed by synthesizing themselves out of elements of multiple cultures. This called attention to what seemed their special or distinguished status vis-à-vis the supposedly monocultural nature of colonial societies, especially to the extent that colonial cultures relied on purist notions of identity and belonging. However, the metaphor of hybridity as an explanation of cultural origins turned out to be so powerful that it very rapidly seemed to deconstruct any kind of purist notion of cultural origins. As Renato Rosaldo points out, once we realize the more general truth about hybridity as an explanation of cultural origins and a map of how identity evolves (that it is "hybridity all the way down" [xv]), the term loses its specific applicability to border zones. If all cultures and identities are, at their core, hybrid, then two things happen: hybridity loses its value as an explanatory term specific to border cultures, and the term itself becomes essentialized and foundational since it comes to stand for a general truth about the ontological nature of all forms of subjectivity and identity. For a thorough discussion of the concept of hybridity in contemporary cultural studies, see Young.

[24](#). I am indebted to Harveen Mann for calling Rushdie's discussion of migration and translation to my attention. Readers interested in a fuller discussion of Rushdie's treatment of these issues, and how they are played out in his fiction, should refer to her essay, "'Being Borne Across': Translation and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*."

[25](#). Niranjana also makes this point when she refers to the need of postcolonial theory to "make sense of 'subjects' already living 'in translation'" (6).

[26](#). In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie observes about the negative reception of *Satanic Verses* that "those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure" (394).

[27](#). I do not mean to suggest here that these disruptions are equatable. Using Aguilar as his narrator provides Fuentes an opportunity to focus on the space and experience between the shores of the conquered and the conquering, to entertain the disruptions visited on Aguilar, but his sympathetic treatment of the Spaniard surely does not serve to minimize the barbarism of the conquest.

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