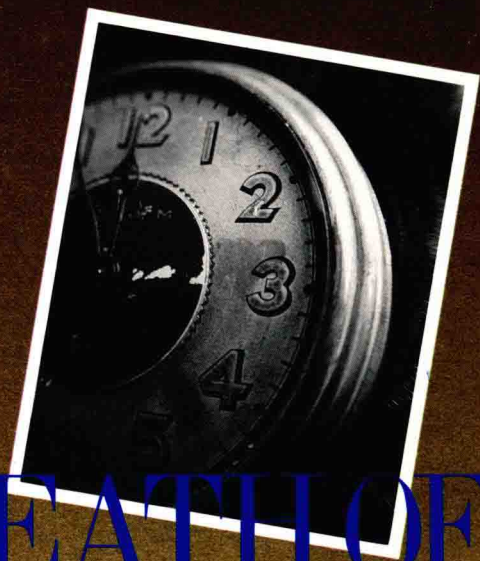


Carlos Fuentes



THE DEATH OF
ARTEMIO
CRUZ

IN A NEW TRANSLATION

THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ



Carlos Fuentes

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY

Alfred Mac Adam

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

NEW YORK

Farrar, Straus and Giroux
19 Union Square West, New York 10003

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Distributed in Canada by Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.

Printed in the United States of America

Originally published in Spanish by Fonda de Cultura Económica as *La*

Muerte de Artemio Cruz, copyright © 1962 by Carlos Fuentes

This paperback edition first published in 1991

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
Fuentes, Carlos.

*The death of Artemio Cruz / Carlos Fuentes ; translated from
the Spanish by Alfred Mac Adam.— 1st ed.*

p. cm.

Translation of: *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*.

ISBN 0-374-13559-2

1. Mexico—Fiction. I. Title.

PQ7297.F793 M813 1991

863—dc20

90-43280

Paperback ISBN-13: 978-0-374-52283-4

Paperback ISBN-10: 0-374-52283-9

Designed by Victoria Wong

www.fsgbooks.com

18 20 22 24 26 27 25 23 21 19

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CRUZ

TO C. WRIGHT MILLS

*True voice of the United States of America
Friend and companion in Latin America's struggle*

La préméditation de la mort est préméditation de la liberté.

MONTAIGNE, *Essays*

*Oh, men who come forth into the earth
through a cradle of ice
and who enter through a grave,
behold how you act . . .*

CALDERÓN, *The Grand Theater of the World*

*Moi seul, je sais ce que j'aurais pu faire . . . Pour les autres, je
ne suis tout au plus qu'un peut-être.*

STENDHAL, *The Red and the Black*

*. . . of me and of Him and of the three of us
Always three!*

GOROSTIZA, *Death Everlasting*

Life is worth nothing. Nothing: that's what life is worth.

Mexican popular song

THE DEATH OF ARTEMIO CRUZ

I wake up . . . The touch of that cold object against my penis wakes me up. I didn't know I could urinate without being aware of it. I keep my eyes shut. I can't even make out the nearest voices. If I opened my eyes, would I be able to hear them? . . . But my eyelids are so heavy: two pieces of lead, coins on my tongue, hammers in my ears, a . . . a something like tarnished silver in my breath. It all tastes metallic. Or mineral. I urinate without knowing I'm doing it. I remember with a shock that I've been unconscious—maybe I ate and drank without knowing it. Because it was just getting light when I reached out my hand and accidentally knocked the telephone on the floor. Then I just lay there, face down on the bed, with my arms hanging, the veins in my wrist tingling. Now I'm waking up, but I don't want to open my eyes. Even so, I see something shining near my face. Something that turns into a flood of black lights and blue circles behind my closed lids. I tighten my face muscles, I open my right eye, and I see it reflected in the squares of glass sewn onto a woman's handbag. That's what I am. That's what I am. That old man whose features are fragmented by the uneven squares of glass. I am that eye. I am that eye. I am that eye furrowed by accumulated rage, an old, forgotten, but always renewed rage. I am that puffy green eye set between

those eyelids. Eyelids. Eyelids. Oily eyelids. I am that nose. That nose. That nose. Broken. With wide nostrils. I am those cheekbones. Cheekbones. Where my white beard starts. Starts. Grimace. Grimace. Grimace. I am that grimace that has nothing to do with old age or pain. Grimace. My teeth discolored by tobacco. Tobacco. Tobacco. My brebre-breathing fogs the squares of glass, and someone removes the handbag from the night table.

"Look, Doctor, he's just faking . . ."

"Mr. Cruz . . ."

"Even now in the hour of his death he has to trick us!"

I don't want to talk. My mouth is stuffed with old pennies, with that taste. But I open my eyes a little more, and between my eyelashes I can make out the two women, the doctor who smells of aseptic things: his sweaty hands, stinking of alcohol, are now tapping my chest under my shirt. I try to push that hand away.

"Easy now, Mr. Cruz, easy . . ."

No. I am not going to open my mouth, or that wrinkled line with no lips reflected in the glass. I'll keep my arms stretched out on top of the sheets. The covers reach my stomach. My stomach . . . ah . . . And my legs stay spread, with that cold gadget between my thighs. And my chest stays asleep, with the same dull tingling that I feel . . . that . . . I felt when I would sit in one position for a long time in the movies. Bad circulation, that's all it is. Nothing more. Nothing more. Nothing serious. Nothing more serious than that. I have to think about my body. Thinking about your body wears you out. Your own body. Your body, whole. It wears you out. Better not to think. There it is. I do think about this flight of nerves and scales, of cells and scattered globules. My body, on which the doctor taps his fingers. Fear. I'm afraid of thinking about my own body. And my face? Teresa removed the handbag that reflected it. I'm trying to remember it in the reflection. It was a face broken by asymmetrical pieces of glass, with one eye very close to

an ear and far away from the other eye, with the grimace spread out on three encircling mirrors. Sweat is pouring down my forehead. I close my eyes again, and I ask, ask that my face and body be given back to me. I ask, but I feel that hand caressing me, and I would like to get away from its touch, but I don't have the strength.

"Feeling better?"

I don't see her. I don't see Catalina. I see farther off. Teresa is sitting in the armchair. She has an open newspaper in her hands. My newspaper. It's Teresa, but she has her face hidden behind the open pages.

"Open the window."

"No, no. You might catch cold and make everything worse."

"Forget it, Mama. Can't you see he's fooling around?"

Ah. I smell that incense. Ah. The murmuring at the door. Here he comes with that smell of incense, with his black cassock, and with the hyssop out in front, a farewell so harsh it's really a threat. Ha, they fell into the trap.

"Isn't Padilla here?"

"Yes, he is. He's outside."

"Have him sent in."

"But . . ."

"First Padilla."

Ah, Padilla, come closer. Did you bring the tape recorder? If you knew what was good for you, you'd have brought it here the way you brought it to my house in Coyoacán every night. Today, more than ever, you should be trying to trick me into thinking that everything's the same as it's always been. Don't disturb the rituals, Padilla. That's right, come closer. They don't want you to.

"Go over to him, so he can see who you are. Tell him your name."

"I am . . . I'm Gloria . . ."

If I could only see her face better. If I could only see her grimace better. She must notice this smell of dead

scales; she must be looking at this sunken chest, this gray, messy beard, this fluid running out of my nose, these . . .

They take her away from me.

The doctor checks my pulse.

"I'll have to talk this over with the other doctors on the case."

Catalina brushes my hand with hers. What a useless caress. I can't see her very well, but I try to fix my eyes on hers. I catch her. I hold her frozen hand.

"That morning I waited for him with pleasure. We crossed the river on horseback."

"What's that? Don't try to talk. Don't wear yourself out. I don't understand what you're saying."

"I'd like to go back there, Catalina. How useless."

Yes: the priest kneels next to me. He whispers his words. Padilla plugs in the recorder. I hear my voice, my words. Ay, a shout. Ay, I shout. Ay, I survived. There are two doctors standing in the doorway. I survived. Regina, it hurts, it hurts, Regina, I realize that it hurts. Regina. Soldier. Hug me; it hurts. Someone has stuck a long, cold dagger into my stomach; there is someone, there is someone else who has stuck a blade into my guts: I smell that incense and I'm tired. I let them do as they please. I let them lift me up heavily as I groan. I don't owe my life to you. I can't, I can't, I didn't choose, the pain bends my waist, I touch my frozen feet, I don't want those blue toenails, my new blue toenails, aaaah ayyyy, I survived. What did I do yesterday? If I think about what I did yesterday, I'll stop thinking about what's happening to me now. That's a good idea. Very good. Think yesterday. You aren't so crazy; you aren't in so much pain; you were able to think that. Yesterday yesterday yesterday. Yesterday Artemio Cruz flew from Hermosillo to Mexico City. Yes. Yesterday Artemio Cruz . . . Before he got sick, yesterday Artemio Cruz . . . No, he didn't get sick. Yesterday Artemio Cruz was in his office and he felt very sick. Not yesterday. This

morning. Artemio Cruz. Not sick, no. Not Artemio Cruz, no. Another man. In a mirror hanging across from the sick man's bed. The other man. Artemio Cruz. His twin. Artemio Cruz is sick. The other one. Artemio Cruz is sick. He isn't living. He certainly is living. Artemio Cruz lived. He lived for some years . . . Years he didn't miss, years he didn't. He lived for a few days. His twin. Artemio Cruz. His double. Yesterday Artemio Cruz, the one who only lived a few days before dying, yesterday Artemio Cruz . . . That's me . . . and it's another man . . . Yesterday . . .

Yesterday you did what you do every day. You don't know if it's worthwhile remembering it. You only want to remember, lying back there in the twilight of your bedroom, what's going to happen: you don't want to foresee what has already happened. In your twilight, your eyes see ahead; they don't know how to guess the past. Yes; yesterday you will fly from Hermosillo, yesterday, April 9, 1959, on the Compañía Mexicana de Aviación shuttle, which will depart from the capital of Sonora, where it will be hot as hell, at 9:55 a.m., and will reach Mexico City exactly on time at 4:30 p.m. From your seat on the four-motor plane, you will see a flat, gray city, a belt of adobe and tin roofs. The hostess will offer you a Chiclet wrapped in cellophane—you will remember that in particular because she will be (she has to be, don't think everything in the future tense from now on) a very pretty girl and you will always have a good eye for such things even if your age condemns you to imagine rather than do (you're using words incorrectly: of course, you will never feel condemned to that, even if you can only imagine it). The bright sign NO SMOKING, FASTEN SEAT BELTS will go on just when the plane, entering the Valley of Mexico, abruptly descends, as if it had lost the power to stay aloft in the thin air; then it suddenly leans to the right, and packages, jackets, suitcases will fall and a collective shout will ring out, cut off by a low sob, and the flames

will sputter, until the fourth motor on the right wing stops, and everyone goes on shouting and only you stay calm, unmoved, chewing your gum and watching the legs of the hostess, who will run up and down the aisle calming the passengers. The internal fire extinguisher will work and the plane will land with no difficulty, but no one will have realized that only you, an old man of seventy-one, maintained his composure. You will feel proud of yourself, without showing it. You will think that you have done so many cowardly things that it's easy for you to be brave. You will smile and say to yourself no, no, it isn't a paradox: it's the truth and perhaps even a general truth. 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 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 middlemen, 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. You will try to remember all this, and you will carry out your desire even if all this seems a fit subject for an editorial in your newspaper and you think that, after all, you're wasting your time remembering it. But you will insist, you will go through with it. You will insist. You would like to remember other things, but above all you would like to forget the condition you're in. You will excuse yourself: You're not at home. You will be. They will carry you in a faint to your house, you will collapse in your office; the doctor will come and say that it will take a couple of hours to make the diagnosis. Other doctors will come. They will know nothing and understand nothing.

They will say difficult words. And you will want to imagine yourself. Like an empty, wrinkled wineskin. Your chin will tremble, your breath will be bad, your armpits will smell, everything between your legs will stink. You will be left there, without a bath, without a shave: you will be a storehouse of sweat, irritated nerves, and unconscious physiological functions. But you will insist on remembering what will happen yesterday. You will go from the airport to your office and you will cross a city impregnated with mustard gas because the police will have just broken up a demonstration in Caballito Plaza. You will consult with your editor in chief about the headlines, the editorials, the cartoons, and you will feel satisfied. You will be visited by your U.S. partner, you will point out to him the dangers of these so-called clean-up-the-union movements. Later your administrator, Padilla, will come to your office and tell you that the Indians are agitating and you, through Padilla, will tell the commissioner for communal lands to clamp down on them; after all, that's what you pay him for. You will do a lot of work yesterday morning. The representative of that Latin American benefactor will visit you and you will get the subsidy for your newspaper increased. You will summon your gossip columnist and order her to insert a libel in her column about that Couto who's fighting you in the Sonora business. You will do so many things! And then you will sit down with Padilla to count your assets. That will amuse you a great deal. An entire wall of your office is covered with the diagram of the vast network of businesses you control: the newspaper, the real-estate investments—Mexico City, Puebla, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Culiacán, Hermosillo, Guaymas, Acapulco—the sulphur domes in Jáltipan, the mines in Hidalgo, the logging concessions in Tarahumara, your stock in the chain of hotels, the pipe factory, the fish business, financing of financing, the net of stock operations, the legal representation of U.S. 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. You will light a cigarette, despite the doctor's warnings, and you will recite to Padilla the steps that led to this wealth. Short-term loans at high interest to the peasants in the state of Puebla at the end of the Revolution; acquisition of property near the city of Puebla, foreseeing its growth, thanks to the friendly intervention of whichever President happened to be in power at the time; property for subdivisions in Mexico City; acquisition of the metropolitan daily; purchase of mining stocks and the creation of joint Mexican-U.S. corporations in which you were the front man, to comply with the letter of the law; the man on whom U.S. investors depended; intermediary between Chicago, New York, and the Mexican government; manipulation of the bond market to raise or lower prices, sell or buy according to your wish or need; a cozy, tight relationship with President Alemán; acquisition of communal properties stripped from the peasants to create new subdivisions in the cities of the interior; logging concessions. Yes—you will sigh as you ask Padilla for a match—twenty years of confidence, social peace, class collaboration; twenty years of progress after Lázaro Cárdenas's demagoguery; twenty years of protection for the company's interests; twenty years of submissive union leaders and broken strikes. And then you will raise your hands to your stomach, and your head, with its unruly gray hair, will land with a hollow thud on the glass tabletop, and once again, now from up close, you will see that reflection of your sick twin, while all noise pours out of your head, in laughter, and the sweat of all those people envelops you, the flesh of all those people suffocates you, makes you lose consciousness. The reflected twin will join the other, which is you, the old man seventy-one years of age who will lie unconscious between the desk chair and the big metal desk,