Carlos Fuentes Lemus: An Abbreviated Life

E. Shaskan Bumas

Minnesota Review, Number 52-54, Fall 2001 (New Series), pp. 73-84 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press

E. Shaskan Bumas

Carlos Fuentes Lemus: An Abbreviated Life

To understand peoples' lives, we tend to construct something of a plot based on what we know of them, with tropes as simple as beginning and end. My friend Carlos Fuentes Lemus was born August 22, 1973 and died May 5, 1999. This is the kind of information that goes in parentheses after his name: Carlos Rafael Fuentes Lemus (1973–1999), the en-dash, a fill in the blank representing his life and work. By way of disclaimer, I find myself very careful, knowing that any of his friends or family might say no, that is only what Carlos was like to me, and perhaps was not even like that to me. Because I mostly knew him over the many years we spent together through short intense bursts, small stars, different from each other, I am trying to connect them in the constellation of our lives. In order to know and explain Carlitos better, now that it is too late to just call him up, I try to understand him in the way that those closest to him have, although I am all too aware that this is a limited variation of their understandings, based on what they have allowed me to know. And he too, if he were alive, might say I had left out the good stuff, told only the embarrassing things, omitted the seedier aspects, inserted myself in his story.

My friendship with Carlos Fuentes Lemus was something of an arranged marriage. His father had been my professor when I was an undergraduate and Carlitos was still a little boy. Later Carlitos and I liked each other, cared about each other, and grew used to each other. In the last two-thirds of Carlos Fuentes Lemus's abbreviated life, I observed, or emplotted, if not exactly a *change*, then something that may be better described by the rhetorical term *chiasmus*, from the symmetrical Greek letter X, a repetition that is a reversal. I explain this to myself in terms of his inheritance. When he was really just a child, he was rather like his father, erudite and encyclopedic, an old soul. Carlitos was, after all, born while his father, Carlos Fuentes, was finishing the grand, scholarly epic novel of Latin civilization, *Terra nostra*. He was a memory bank of biographical information of artists and pop lyrics. The older that Carlos Fuentes Lemus became, the more I found him like his mother, more of an innocent. His mother, Silvia Lemus, is best known for her intellectual talk show on Mexican television's cultural Channel 22, *Tratos y retratos* ("Relations and Portraits"). She is the most non-confrontational interviewer, the best listener, the perfect example of the ideal reader/critic Henry James asked for, one who would grant a writer his or her *donnée*. She is a proper lady who handles a fork and

knife with a surgeon's exactitude, though with less blood, but likes to tell bawdy jokes about various clergies or Bill and Monica. The older Carlos Fuentes Lemus became, the more I noticed his youthfulness. Carlitos's talent was to see things new. He would stare at a reproduction of an Egon Schiele painting until the lines formed a constellation and he would point out the presence of a face and there it would be. If no one was talking to him, he would write a poem or paint a picture.

Trim, small, and handsome, Carlitos looked like his grandfather, that is, his grandfather before a battle wound took his eye. In Carlitos, that eye was restored. Somehow this process makes sense to me when I remember how Carlitos, when he became a young filmmaker, liked to brag that, as an infant, he had been given a bath by the master of surrealist cinema, Luis Buñuel—baptized by the most beloved anti-cleric in history. In Buñuel's first short feature, *An Andalusian Dog* (1929), the director appears on screen sharpening a razor. One of the main characters is seated staring blankly ahead, in the position of a movie viewer. A cloud passes across the moon, and Buñuel cuts her eye open. In the next scene the wound has healed or another eye grown back with which the spectator can see a new type of reality, a surreality. The lost eye of the grandfather regenerated in the grandson. When I went to Carlitos's room after the funeral mass, I found beside his bed an old issue of *Cahiers de Cinéma*, with the scripts to several Buñuel movies including *An Andalusian Dog*. Carlitos would suffer many wounds that one would have expected him to die from, but he also learned to see anew.

The first time I knew of Carlitos was when his dad asked me where one could buy camouflage pants. I smiled at the idea of this superb, classic dresser getting down with what was then the latest urban style. He was at the time working toward the peace process in El Salvador, and arguing against a U.S. invasion in revolutionary Nicaragua. He would blend.

The pants were for his eight-year-old son, he explained.

"Oh," I said, and sent him to Urban Outfitters.

I would meet the eight-year-old son in person the following semester when Carlos Fuentes and Silvia Lemus invited me and three other students to dine at their stately rented house on Edgehill Road in Princeton, New Jersey. One was a trim Taiwanese woman; another was a scientist and budding writer; and the last was Carolivia Herron, who is now rather famous herself for her novel, *Thereafter Johnnie*, and her children's book, *Nappy Hair*. Carlitos's sister Natasha, a year younger, would not leave her mother's side. The chocolate Chihuahua, Simon, though reserved, was more friendly.

The day before, Carlos Fuentes's old friend Gabriel García Márquez had won the Nobel Prize in literature, and the phone was

ringing off the hook with reporters looking for leads and quotes. Either *Time* or *Newsweek* was told that it was a bad time to call, that he had important guests. That must have been where Carlitos, who spent much of his childhood with constant visits to and from famous cultural figures, learned to demystify the famous and value people for their friendship. Meanwhile music was blasting down from a phonograph upstairs, and his father called up at the latest distraction, "Carlos, turn down the English Beat."

"It's not the English Beat," corrected the young discophile. "It's the Specials." That's when we formed a friendship based on pop music.

I suppose I had ulterior motives in befriending the young man, but not the usual ones. I was young for my college class and especially young amongst grad students, a bit overwhelmed and loathe to say dumb teenage things, and needed a break from grown-up conversation. So, following the music, I went upstairs where Carlitos was sitting over a spread of his ska revival albums, studying the sleeves. We talked about ska music and a bit about punk. Aside from politics and literature, pop music was my favorite thing to talk about, and we shared a language. I asked him how he liked his camouflage pants. The time seemed about right to go downstairs with the other guests and with *il maestro*, as we called him behind his back. I said, "I'll be seeing you around," and Carlitos nodded as if as a matter of course we would be seeing each other around in New York, in Paris, in Mexico, in the Midwest, in the South, and talking to each other on the phone from England, Germany, Argentina, Chile, China, and Colombia. After Carlitos's death, his mother told me that on my first visit to the Fuentes' house, Carolivia Herron had remarked that I wanted to be friends with her children. In his novel *The Old Gringo*, Fuentes, Sr., mentions the people who hang around a famous writer and compares them to the ubiquitous buzzards of Mexico. I was flattered. I did have ulterior motives, if not even clear to me.

Thus my friendship with Carlos Fuentes Lemus began with the initial shock of mature intellectual and erudite references mumbled from the mouth of a diminutive, mop-topped pre-teenage boy who looked even younger than his years. He was Mexican, but English was his mother tongue, with the slight tinge of an accent from no place one could find on a map of the world. He was small for his age, and would continue to be small for his age until, as a grown-up, he was just small, short and slim, dropping on occasion to thirty-five kilos because of the many diseases that made him live largely in pain: hemophilia, HIV, crypto-meningitis, encephalitis, to name the major ones, all further complicated by uneven medical attention, imperfect water, and the style of life fed by a feeling of invinci-

bility native to most men in their twenties multiplied by the number of times he had improbably survived. If we walked too much, we found out the hard way, his ankle would swell with blood, and he would be bedridden the next few days.

From country to country, as an adolescent, Carlitos crated around humongous biographies of Arthur Rimbaud (the Starkie) and Oscar Wilde (Ellman). Both writers were famously handsome and famously self-destructive. I'm not sure which came first, Carlos's enthusiasm for Oscar or his enthusiasm for the eighties alternative pop band The Smiths and its lead singer Morissey, who shilled devotedly for Oscar. In a poem he wrote at fifteen, Carlos catalogues Oscar Wilde's literary accomplishments, then continues, "Women would ask for advice on their clothes & furniture, and Oscar would tell them the latest fashion." I think what drew Carlos most to Oscar Wilde was the way that the Victorian writer was capable, through attention to surfaces, to introduce hitherto unacknowledged depths, depths of depravity and hitherto unimagined depths of beauty. Carlos seemed to have Wildean moments as, in one of his last poems, he wrote, "It's not 'as far as the eye can see,' but as far as the world will let you see."

I took Carlitos and Natasha on their first New York City subway ride. We found her Vans on Bleeker Street, when they were still cool, and bought everything by and about the Smiths and Elvis and James Dean for Carlitos. I was often exasperated by the relentlessness of his pursuits, but indulgent, suspecting that obsession in youth might be the larva of later genius. And it wasn't my money he would spend like sparkling water. A Tower Records salesman kept changing subjects from musical genre to genre, from opera to gospel, from music to movies, from movies to books, and fourteen- and fifteen-year-old Natasha and Carlos followed every nuance. He took a step back, glanced at me for encouragement or explanation, and asked, perhaps because of their slight, unplaceable accents, "Where are you from?" a little stunned.

"Mexico," they said as one.

Since friendships are rare between people with a decade separating their ages, people often thought Carlitos was my little brother, or even my son. "More likely," scoffed his real father, "he's your grandfather."

His best friend, Alejandro Branger, was often taken for his twin or his lover. People were always surprised to find such closeness as Carlos inspired among males. "You must know how it is," Alejandro told me when we went to Mexico City after Carlitos's death, "you look so much like him." Carlitos made Zeligs out of us all.

Seven years after meeting, Carlitos and I took an arduous road

trip to Memphis around the anniversary of Elvis Presley's death, an itinerary that later, when he got a driver's license and eventually a huge old Cadillac, became one of several *de rigueur* routes with all his friends. I borrowed the Fuentesmobile, in Manhattan, loaded it with a crate of Factor 8 and half my material possessions, and drove to St. Louis, where I was moving. (Carlos Fuentes had recommended me for the writing program at Washington University, which is, I suppose, no small part of why I was admitted.) I picked up Carlos, and then we started driving and drifting. Once I had figured out cruise control, I would let my feet dance around on the floor of the sedan. Straight on I-80, left on I-76, left on I-71, right on I-70. Along the way, we stayed at a friend's apartment, Juda Bennet. She looked into the fridge and saw a box of Factor 8. I explained what it was. "He's a hemo." I had only recently learned of Carlitos's condition. Factor 8 is the clotting element absent from Carlitos's blood. He had learned about Factor 8 as a little boy. The first time he received an injection of it, he screamed and cried. The second time his mother told him that he would have to have the injections forever and please not to scream; he only cried. Years later, of course, we found out how all hemophiliacs were susceptible to HIV from contaminated blood supplies.

On I-55, we saw signs for Lambert Café, in Sikeston, Missouri: Home of Throwed Rolls.

"Don't they mean thrown?" Carlitos asked.

It turned out they meant thrown after all. They threw rolls at us, and then waiters came around with sorghum to spread on the throwed rolls. I caught all the rolls for both of us. Otherwise we ate the only vegetarian food we could find on the highway: baby food. We would sit towering over a jar of Gerber's and plan our day. We rode all around Memphis and Tupelo (where Elvis was born), visited the grave of his still-born twin, Jesse, and talked to people. Most natives told us that they knew Elvis very well, and most tourists felt they had a personal connection with Elvis. Sheriffs followed us from inches behind our bumper through rattier Memphis and Tupelo neighborhoods. At Graceland, Carlos told the guide that he had read that Elvis had bought an Andy Warhol; he asked which Warhol it was. The volunteer guide didn't seem to know who Warhol was and said it was probably in the attic. I later wondered if it were one of those big silver-and-black repeating Elvises on display at the Warhol museum in Pittsburgh. I sent Carlitos a postcard with those Elvises in 1995.

In Memphis in August we found ourselves freezing in air conditioning and from soft drinks that were 75 percent hard ice. We went to Liberty amusement park, the one that Elvis would rent out for his friends. Carlos even convinced me to go on a spider, though

I was sure I would throw up. We spun. I remembered the nausea of that day on the night that he died when I found myself throwing up repeatedly for no apparent reason.

Carlitos found me bourgeois sometimes, and I sometimes thought he was a brat. He would want to play the same tape ad infinitum and, when I dissented, said his mother always let him. Only later would I believe such indulgence possible. We shared a hotel room at the Howard Johnson's on Elvis Presley Boulevard, and I insisted he turn off the music so I could sleep. He dissented, and we tugged the cassette player back and forth, until the antennae fell off. I wasn't tired anymore. It wasn't till we called Carlos, Sr., who said that it sounded like slapstick, that we let our anger subside and realized how funny it was. I complained to people about him, but would also defend him to them. The only accident we had was when I was driving along Elvis Presley Boulevard in Memphis, and Carlitos had his short legs on the dashboard. He stretched back into the seat, pushing his feet out, and the safety windshield cracked. I described the scene to his mother as perfectly reasonable, blamed it on a design flaw, a safety feature that courted an accident, an accident that had been waiting for Carlitos to make it happen. I was in some way relieved to have to go out to the auto shop row and miss seeing the Elvis car museum.

After a stop at one of the ubiquitous souvenir stores, he pulled a three-inch Elvis figurine from a box and said, "Oh damn, I already have this one!" Then he looked at me. "You can have it," he said, and I still do. I have several other things from Carlitos, a Jane's Addiction CD, an assorted Elvis tape labeled *Long Legge* that Carlitos left in my place by accident a decade ago and that I kept meaning to return. In the last page of one of my notebooks, when he had run out of paper, Carlos drew some sketches while I snored away. The next morning I had to go back to Mexico City to grab my stuff and catch a plane. When I stopped at the house, I X-acto bladed out his sketches and left them there. On the last page, he had taped in with band-aids a prosy poem he had written on the back of a shopping list. At the top it says that it is for me. I am glad to have the poem but also I think of the missing pages. There is an illustrated Cuban edition of *Innocent Erendira* he passed on because my brother, who has the same birthday, is a book illustrator. It is signed, For Carlos Fuentes-Lemus, his second book, *Gabriel* 1986.

We fell into roles. I was a bourgeois Sancho Panza and he a Don Quixote seeking for Elvis, alive and well in the present. He would propose something, and I would find the proposal outrageous. Then, having shown my proper bourgeois repugnance, we would usually go and do it. He was practically shocked that I had never been to a strip club, and a lack of fake ID for him was all that kept us out that

summer in Memphis. He took me to my first one in Mexico City, something misleadingly called an exotic dance club, which meant that girls in (and out of) bathing suits wrapped themselves around a subway-style pole. He didn't seem disappointed that I didn't get it. "These girls can't dance at all," I explained. But he had a romantic attachment to any class of squalor, and promised the girl who came over to us a copy of his forthcoming book of photos.

Over the years we spoke on the phone mostly. When he was in high school, he called me from Boston to read me a story he was working on for an English class. I suggested some changes. Then he called me back, having spoken to his father and had it confirmed that it was a work of genius. That was my first experience of editing Carlitos.

Time passed, as it tends to, like pain accumulating. The owner of the Lambert Café, home of throwed rolls, committed suicide, front-page news in *The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch.* Lisa Marie Presley married Michael Jackson. I published stories, essays, a book. Carlitos's first published photo of his father with Salman Rushdie had appeared in Spain's *El País* right after the *fatwah* was declared, and he had put together a book of early photographic portraits, to which his father was going to attach verbal portraits. Lisa Marie Presley separated from Michael Jackson. Carlos told me he had stopped painting for a while, his style too indebted to Egon Schiele. My hair receded, and I looked older than Carlos's mother.

"I have good genes," she consoled me.

When it was Carlos's turn to live in New York, he and Natasha split a Broome Street apartment with Alejandro Branger, who was attending NYU film school at the time. When I was in town we would get together at one of the cheaper bars I preferred. I told Natasha that I imagined their life together made Jean Cocteau's novel *Les Enfants terribles* seem like the story of Beaver and Wally Cleaver. She confirmed the Cocteau book was a great inspiration.

Carlos called once after a long time. "Where've you been?" I asked.

"In a coma," he said. He'd had meningitis. His mother spent several months by his side, as did his doting father as often as he was able, while several of his bodily functions, including for a while his eyesight, failed. It is a great relief to know that he was intensely aware he was loved, as Carlos knew well the devoted love of his parents and sisters and an astounding number of friends for someone so shy. Carlos told me little about the disease and its course and more about his projects in painting, poetry, and film. I told him what movies he had missed. We planned to visit each other.

"We're here with the ghost of Elvis Presley," his father said into

the phone, when he walked into the hospital room.

"What do you mean ghost?" I asked. "You have to die before you become a ghost."

Carlitos was one of those who, like some fans of Morrison and Cobain, believed that the rumors of Elvis's demise had been exaggerated. One life was perhaps not enough, as his father had written in *Terra Nostra*. To Carlitos this meant Elvis would fake his own death like the patriarch in the García Márquez novel; to me this explained the carnival of multiple Elvises. But time had passed, and Carlitos had given up that theory. Death now seemed more probable. Also the official story changed. When we had gone to Graceland, we had been told that Elvis had died on the handball court. Now it was said that the king had collapsed in the adjacent bathroom on his throne.

In the time that passed, before the meningitis, Carlos had also shot enough 16mm and super 8 film, and video for a movie he originally called *One for My Baby* (as in "and one for the road") and eventually *Gallo de pelea*.

Gallo de pelea is the story of a young New Englander, Phil, who gets into trouble for beating someone up in Providence, Rhode Island. *Gallo de pelea* means cock fighter, and in Fuentes Lemus's two main languages (he was also fluent in French and had studied German) was meant to let us know that Phil was cocky and a fighter. Phil goes to Mexico to lay low until his troubles with the law blow over. There he discovers some of his self—but seldom a particularly likeable self. After a night in the desert illuminated with peyote, Phil stops into a barber shop for a shave, not understanding that the *Estetica* is actually a prostitution parlor, a beauty parlor selling beauties. There he meets Natasha (played by the director's sister, Natasha Fuentes), and sleeps with her. They develop not love but a relationship of sorts and spend several days together, becoming closest in adversity, when Natasha's sister hemorrhages in the hospital and miscarries. In one of the film's most striking images, Phil comforts Natasha while, behind them, carpenters carry a newly carpented coffin in some empty funeral procession, a reminder that death is always near, as stirring a *momento mori* as the famous side view of Holbein's *Ambassadors*. The cocky fighter, Phil, becomes something of a romantic. The prostitute, from a poor family, has just taken the job as any other to help support her family. After several days, she asks Phil for money, to compensate her for what economists call opportunity costs, how much she would have made if she had been working. Phil flips out and jumps from a taxi in traffic to beat up one of the flame swallowers who line busy streets in Mexico. A fire ensues that burns an innocent girl. Phil, now a murderer, has to flee Mexico for the United States, crossing the border, we infer, like any Mexican *ilégal* would have to do. In a post-script super 8 sequence,

a different couple is shown in the Nevada desert and having an idyllic honeymoon in Las Vegas, and we don't know if Phil is stalking them or if they are an image of what the couple could have been.

It is a striking movie that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, and since Carlos Fuentes Lemus died in May 1999, it has been up to Alex (who worked with him on post-production), his mother, and me to think of ways to edit it down to a final cut, while saving the current version as an interrupted director's cut. Carlitos was also interested in doing a version of his father's classic story *Aura*, and a bio pic of Elvis in the later years.

The family often worked together. On a cassette recording of Carlos, Sr., reading *Aura*, Natasha Fuentes cameos as the ghostly eponymous character. Silvia produced *Gallo de pelea*. Natasha had a lead role. Carlos, Sr. wrote the texts, and Carlos, Jr. provided the photos for the collaborative *Retratos en el tiempo (Portraits in time)*, the working title of which had been the Steinian *Tratos y retratos (Relationships and portraits)*, ceded to Silvia when she developed her tv show. The collection is rather astounding. Big Carlos writes short essays about the well-known people he has hung out with—from Gabriel García Márquez to Audrey Hepburn. The text mingles with photographic portraits of astounding casualness, permitted because no one was paying attention to the scarcely visible adolescent clicking away with his Leica, which may or may not have had film in it. This book is a testament of friendship and filial collaboration. I think that comparing his photos of Susan Sontag to Robert Mapplethorpe's stresses what Carlos did. In Mapplethorpe's, a studio portrait, Sontag is overexposed so that her face bears no defined wrinkles, the face of a celebrity, freed from context by a plain white background. In Carlos Fuentes Lemus's, the great essayist looks like Susan Sontag, attractive but not young, with her frequent companion, her son, David Rieff. Half her face is lighted by a window behind her, just the right angle to emphasize the direction of her gaze, toward, not the anonymous viewer, but her companion, in a private moment. Audrey Hepburn is turning away, blinking out of focus like Remedios the Beauty ascending to heaven.

Now that Carlos is gone, his family and friends continue to work together. A show of his paintings will be exhibited in Madrid in May. The two Carloses are collaborating on a bilingual edition of the son's poetry. Alex and I are trying to be of some use, readying his poems for publication, editing down his film, suggesting photos for a book. I never knew Carlos to revise. Now I wonder if he knew his time was limited. He was twenty-five when he died, and so much of his work treats the enthusiasms of the young, poems to prostitutes, poems on drugs and mortality. It's been a decade since his parents entrusted me for a week with his life. Now I am being entrusted

with a bit of his work.

When Carlos Fuentes Lemus was a full grown adult, looking, when he was well, like his handsome grandfather, he spoke of paintings, movies, and poetry with the innocence of a child on his first trip to a great museum, a child who gets it, who runs from one painting to another and explains everything. He was repainting the image with his glance. This was an even more delightful surprise than a precocious child one could talk to about anything popular or intellectual. Carlos projected wonder when he would look at one of his paintings on flattened cardboard boxes and tell you what he saw. In the massive swirls of black and white and red paint, pencils, pens, punctuated with band-aids, gauze tape, or pornographic magazine pictures or whatever he could find at hand, smeared with globs of primary color, he would point at what seemed, up to that instant, a random spot and say: that's a woman, or that's a woman with a child, or that's Elvis. And then you would see that woman or that woman with the child or that Elvis. And you would wonder how you had missed it. It was like learning to see for a second time. This was his considerateness, a gift for friends, giving us a sample of his perception.

Carlos wasn't interested in light, like say a Claudio Bravo, but painted and wrote in the wee hours of the night, when everyone else had gone to sleep and was dreaming. "The best moments are always alone late at night," he wrote in August, 1998, alone, late at night. He was interested in the sensation of consciousness, a painful and eroticized landscape. El Vampiro, the maids called the nocturnal painter. When he was ill, I thought they had a point.

"Just look at you," I said. "You look like a vampire."

"No, I don't," he said.

"Just look at yourself in a mirror."

"Okay," he agreed open-mindedly. "I can see myself in the mirror. You can't see a vampire in a mirror."

When he was well he would talk about his paintings as the night grew late, finding a figure he had forgotten, and then until morning, playing Elvis or the Velvet Underground, spread a piece of cardboard on the floor and paint it from above. If music was on, I would go to another room to write or read or even, once in a while, to sleep.

"Ethan," he called out once, "you have to help me."

I came in, and his foot was covered with red.

"Would you mind carrying me?"

I looked at him melodramatically.

"It's paint, but I can't go to the bathroom to wash it off without getting paint everywhere."

Even when he was well, he was often in a lot of pain, and a nurse would have to come to give him a shot, then break off the hypodermic point into a plastic box made for just such purpose. There were other drugs, the usual pain that we export along with the better parts of our culture.

On the last day of his life, he left a message on my answering machine: *Ethan, it's Carlos, are you there?* Beep. I called back and asked if he was there.

"He's not here, Don Ethan," said the maid.

"Is he over at Yvette's house?"

"He's not there either."

"Do you know where he is?"

"He's," she said, "in heaven."

I pretty much got it, but to make sure asked, "Do you mean he's dead?"

"Sí, Ethan."

There's probably no good way to learn of a friend's death.

"At least she didn't say," Alex offered a week later, when we had become friends and were trying to put Carlos's papers in order, "'he's with Elvis."

After he died, his mother asked me to come down. There was absolutely nothing that I could do but use my scholarly, editorial, and writerly skills, and to be strong when people angry at the world for stacking the deck so thoroughly against a hemophiliac needed to be angry at someone. I missed the funeral mass, watching his sister, sick with grief and sedatives. Her loss was immeasurable. When she showed her friends pictures Silvia, Erendira, and I had taken of Carlos in drag, they thought it was her. At the service, they played Bach and Mozart's requiems, and they also played, for the first time in the colonial chapel, Elvis.

Remembering, though all we have, is no way to bring back a person. When I went into Carlitos's bedroom, after his death, I found amidst other things, a *Cahiers de Cinéma* special Buñuel issue, which may be why when I try to explain his life, I think of Buñuel, whose work I loved as a teenager and whom I had studied with Carlos Fuentes. "Let me have copies of your papers," Professor Fuentes had graciously requested of the class, "so I can send them down to Buñuel in Mexico so he may die happy."

Remembering is not enough. We also imagine what we want to understand. Did he know his time, as they say, was up? Did he want to go out as happy as he could, with his girlfriend, Yvette, and her son, Fredo, at the beautiful beach of Puerto Vallarta, where he would leave us on May 5, 1999? We read into his death and his life, and if we give it meaning, plot, isn't that plot then a property of his life? Is plot more than where we bury someone? One life has many

emplotments. Each of our friends has a different view of us.

I don't know for sure when endings end. And does the story of his life end now? His father said he sees him "driving around heaven in a Cadillac." "Listening to Elvis," adds his friend Liam. His mother wanted to know if I thought that people live on after death. If I knew I would've told her. But it was strange that I had been sick on the night of his death, and so had Erendira. I thought of one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous disingenuous characters, Miles Coverdale. "Our lives are not our own," he says. "We share our souls with those with whom we associate." *Está con Elvis.*

I hope my account will have less influence on other people's understanding of Carlitos than his film, art, and poetry. Somewhere a portrait of Carlos Fuentes Lemus is growing into a wise old man, a master of his various arts.