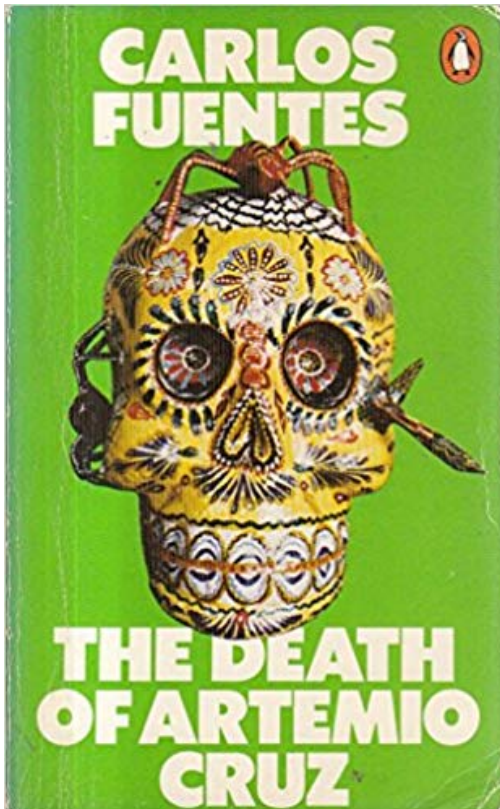


## The Death Of Artemio Cruz *by* Carlos Fuentes



The Death Of Artemio Cruz



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**Author:** Carlos Fuentes

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Reviews of the [The Death Of Artemio Cruz](#) *by* Carlos Fuentes

6snake6

The book was beautifully written, the plot was interesting, and the character development went above and beyond most books.

So why is there such controversy over this book? Well it is easy to say, this is not your cruise vacation book to read while laying by the beach. The first chapter will have you kicking and screaming for anything tangible to grab onto. The only person in this book you have to guide you is Artemio Cruz, who is sharing with you his memories. However, he isn't always the most stable guide. Half the book he is on his deathbed rambling, switching tenses and narratives.

So that is the first warning. However if you are willing to invest some time, you can find an entire new meaning to life within this book. If you can't invest the time, go out and rent Citizen Kane, you'll get the gist in about two hours, rather than the month minimum you'll need to get this book. Even after rereading it, the book leaves dozens of pieces in the book isolated and unconnected. (In fact we never how Artemio gets from being 13 to 23, and if you read the book you'll know why this is important and frustrating).

So what does this book have to offer besides several headaches and why in the world did I give it five stars? Well I could throw a lot of pretty adjectives out at you, but I won't. I will tell it to you simply. This book makes you think. And not in the painful way. If you fight this book, you will never get it. If you embrace it, even in it's most challenging passages, you will be opened to a whole new world of ideas. Ideas about memory, desire, life, death, and our place within society are embedded in this story.

Bottom line: This story is like an excavation site waiting to be dug up, hidden with endless treasures. If you are willing to put in the time, you won't be disappointed. If that sounds like too much work, move right along then.

Usic

I was first attracted to this novel because of the author's reputation as the premier man of Mexican letters, and Carlos Fuentes' accomplishment with this novel alone is monumental. How could Fuentes have known enough about life to have written it at the age of about 34? Wow! The novel should be read and reread--perhaps in different translations, as one reviewer has recommended. Other reviewers of this novel, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, have summarized the plot and action for you; I want to say something about "who" Artemio Cruz is and why we should still care 47 years after the original publication date. Another way of saying it is this: *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is also the life of Artemio Cruz--and we've got to care because there is so much in this novel about Mexico that the U.S. government should learn, which we cannot learn from a documentary or statistics.

I can't pretend to be an expert on Latin American Literature, (and I've never traveled south of the border), but it seems to me that Artemio Cruz is Mexico--of course, it's more complicated than that metaphor--but you have to read all the way to at least page 267 to understand that Mexico is "a thousand countries with a single name." In other words, if Mexico is like Artemio's life then both are powerful and powerless, a success and a failure, extremely poor and extremely rich, loving and hateful, courageous and cowardly, dazzling and dizzying, quiet and explosive. For Artemio is all of those--and by analogy, so is Mexico, or Latin America. Fuentes had to develop a narrative structure and voice that would show us Mexico (and Artemio) in a comprehensible way. But how do you show chaos as logical and tragedy as a sign of hope? Fuentes does it here.

One reviewer of this novel didn't like the narration switching back and forth between 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person, and another cited "wordy lyricism," but, Readers, this novel attempts to create order out the astoundingly beauty of all of Mexico. This novel comes forth like the Aztecs and the Mayans, Cortez and Maximilian, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Emiliano Zapata, and Pancho Villa all rolled into one. From this mix, a terrible beauty is born. No wonder we Puritan Americans--raised on Nathaniel Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson--can't understand Latin American literature.

A key line to understanding this novel can be found early: "Who is he? How did he rise out of himself?" (97) These questions come from inside his wife Catalina's consciousness; she's wondering how Mexico came to produce someone like Artemio because he's not at all like her fine aristocratic father. Catalina desires Artemio but is disgusted by his origins and suppresses her natural love. My question is: How did the world come to the surface in Artemio? What is Mexico that it brought the Artemios into existence?

Cruz has been corrupt in his career, but Fuentes is showing us the points at which a man goes either one way or the other. The author shows us that the sheer naked will to survive horrible life circumstances can drive a boy to become this type of man, to do almost anything to survive, and that men are born into circumstances not of their own making, and they make history while trying to overcome these terrible circumstances. Another reviewer says that though Cruz was corrupt, he is not a monster. True; I don't think that a monster would have enough of a consciousness to think of other people on his death bed. Cruz seems to be dying of a bilious stomach disease which has eaten him from the inside out all his life. As a man, he is aching for love; he's sad and lonely in his triumph. His dying wishes might not be fulfilled, but he will perish with one thought on his mind, a tragic accident early in his life which resulted in a loss that haunts him to his death.

Vudogal

Artemio Cruz is a man whose impending death compels him to look back over the span of his life to re-live its peak experiences. In a real sense Cruz was more than a man living in Mexico during a time of revolution: he is a microcosm of Mexico itself. I deeply respect and admire the inventive, narrative technique, which in some respects is revolutionary. The switch of narrative voice in its person is daring and works brilliantly to make the narrative come alive. The story line becomes personal and engaging in the first person and yet more objective in the second and third persons. One really gets to know Artemio in the first person narrative segments. The flashbacks intrigued me in the way that Fuentes used changes in time to serve the narrative as they take the reader to high-points and low points of this man's rise from abject poverty and military adventures to his love affairs and rise to power with its attendant material wealth. Cruz is a fascinating literary figure whose human weaknesses are legion but he is roundly and credibly drawn and leaps off the page by virtue of the narrative technique of Fuentes. The translation by Alfred Mac Adam is elegant, poetic, lyrically rich and does justice to this literary novel: I highly recommend this great translation. This is a great book by a supremely gifted writer and translator: I hope you decide to read Artemio Cruz.

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