

FILM AS THEME AND TECHNIQUE
IN THE NARRATIVE WORLD OF
CARLOS FUENTES

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The highly prolific creations of the contemporary Mexican novelist, short story writer, essayist and dramatist Carlos Fuentes are salient for a number of reasons—for their magical and mythical evocation of Mexico, toward which Fuentes throughout his work has evinced a remarkably ambivalent relationship, for their keen insights into both the achievements—the triumphs of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and the betrayals and the failures of that Revolution—which he has masterfully explored in three major novels: *La región más transparente*, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, and *Gringo Viejo*. Indeed, all three of these panoramic, action-filled narratives are highly cinematic creations. *The Death of Artemio Cruz* was initially destined for the screen, with the exuberant, machista Anthony Quinn, the visceral, life-loving protagonist of *Zorba the Greek*, scheduled to play the role of Artemio Cruz, but the project was never completed. The remarkable visual qualities of *La región más transparente* led to another project never actualized—a PBS series chronicling the fortunes and ill fortunes of the upper class Porfiristas, the flashy materialistic *nouveaux riches* that took their place, and the perpetually alienated and marginalized *los de*

abajo. The cinematic project that was completed is *The Old Gringo* (1989), the Hollywood produced film that was directed initially by the Mexican American Luis Valdez, who was subsequently replaced by the Argentine director Luis Puenzo. *The Old Gringo*, released, at least initially for a North American audience, starred Gregory Peck, the imposing Captain Ahab of *Moby Dick* and the victorious general in the Pacific theatre of World War II, Douglas MacArthur in the biopic *MacArthur* (1977), as the acerbic U.S. essayist and short story writer Ambrose Bierce; Jane Fonda as the headstrong Gibson Girl Harriet Winslow, who leaves behind her stultified beau in Washington, D.C. to plunge into the violent, chaotic world of Revolutionary Mexico, and Jimmy Smits, who also starred in Gregory Nava's *Mi familia*, as the reluctant Revolutionary general Tomás Arroyo. The epic film strikingly captures Revolutionary conflict in northern Mexico—in Chihuahua—and provides a bold, incisive portrayal of the two North American outsiders—the obstinate Harriet Winslow, who maintains an abortive love affair with Arroyo, and her father-surrogate, the curmudgeon writer Ambrose Bierce, who sought to die in Mexico—to die not peacefully in his bed but on the field of battle. And it has been recently announced that another cinematic version of *The Death of Artemio Cruz* is in the works, to be directed by the Mexican animator Jorge R. Gutiérrez and co-produced by Guillermo del Toro.

One of the striking aspects of Carlos Fuentes himself is his movie star appearance and his relishing of public acclaim. Indeed, the hundreds of persons who line up after his lectures in the United States, Mexico, England, and throughout the world attest to both the excellence of his literary works and the charisma of the dashing Fuentes himself. This masterful Latin American novelist and short story writer aged with gracefulness and distinction—still slim, impeccably coiffed, elegantly dressed, at eighty-three—the very year he died, still

filled with vigor, enthusiasm, and excitedly touting new projects, and planning new speaking engagements across the globe. For many years, Fuentes feared travel by airplane, and in the seventies and eighties, took long and laborious trips from East Coast to Los Angeles, for example, by train. Yet toward the end of his life, Fuentes totally embraced air travel, to the extent of stating that he lived on a plane. Fuentes not only cultivated a Hollywood movie star appearance but constantly compared himself with Hollywood superstars. He identified both with the versatile German-born Man of a Thousand Faces, Conrad Veidt, who played the role of the sinister and demonic somnambulist killer Cesare in one of Fuentes's favorite films, *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, that forms the basis of his convoluted narrative *Cambio de piel*, which moves from Mexico City and Cholula to the Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia and incorporates characters, scenes and settings from Robert Wiene's grim, murder-filled world. Fuentes is a great admirer of the gifted, erudite but sinister killer-actor Sydney Greens-treet, who starred in several of Fuentes's favorite films—like *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, films that have decisively impacted Fuentes's fast-paced mystery and thriller novel, *La cabeza de la hidra* (*Hydra Head*, 1978).¹

Yet in an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine (November, 1988) Fuentes makes a surprising identification with just the opposite of those killer actors as he exalts the silent screen comic Buster Keaton: "I would love to be Buster Keaton. I think he is the angel of films. He's the innocence, the purity. I've never seen in life. Maybe in some children. Like the children I saw in Nicaragua [when Fuentes was guest of the Sandinistas, including Danny Ortega] They had the same purity. They had halos."

Like a film actor playing multiple roles and always entrancing his audience, Fuentes is a novelist and short story writer,

essayist, diplomat who served as Ambassador from Mexico to France, college professor, cartoonist, even writer of operas—his opera on Santa Anna premiered in Mexico City in 2009, when Fuentes's eightieth birthday was lavishly celebrated, with appearances not only by one of his best friends, Gabriel García Márquez but also the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, who also gave the eulogy at Fuentes's funeral, which took place at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in the heart of Mexico City.

This highly visual depiction of Mexico City, where Fuentes died suddenly, tragically at age eighty three of a massive heart attack, is continued in his postmodernist evocation of the apocalyptic horrors of Mexico a magically in *Cristóbal nonato* and in one of his most recent narratives, the epic and problematic work, *El destino y la fortuna* (*Destiny and Desire*) and for his supernatural, Neo-Gothic visions like *Aura* and his collection of vampire short stories *Inquieta compañía* including one which resuscitates Count Dracula and transports him to a new mansion with built-in gutters to carry out the blood of his victims. Even though Fuentes's Dracula has his origins in the central European Vladimír Radu, or Vlad the Impaler, Fuentes's twentieth century vampire is another highly visual, highly cinematic creation, like Universal Studios' *Dracula* starring the tuxedo-dressed blood-sucking Bela Lugosi.

Indeed, the Gothic Horror film *Nosferatu*, by the great German director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, has exerted an extensive impact on both the Neo-Gothic novel *Una familia lejana* (*Distant Relations*, 19) and Fuentes's most bizarre metaphysical and labyrinthine work, the sinuous novel *Cumpleaños* (*Birthday*, 19). Indeed, a strong, even powerful component of Fuentes's art is its concentration on film—not only Mexican film, particularly the cinema from the classic Golden Age of the 1940's and 1950's like the films of Dolores Del Río and María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz: *María Cande-*

laria and *Flor Silvestre*, and *Bugambilia*, starring Dolores Del Río, and *Enamorada* and *Río Escondido* and *La monja Alférez* and *Maclovía* of the vivacious, irrepressible *María Félix*, but also Hollywood films from the magical extravaganza of the 1930's like the sparkling *Flying Down to Rio* to the films of Humphrey Bogart in the 1940's such as the still enormously popular *Casablanca*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *Dark Passage*, to Hollywood classics of the 1950's, such as Billy Wilder's scathing attack on Hollywood and its highly touted values of incessant publicity, ravishing beauty and eternal youth, caricatured in *Sunset Boulevard*.²

Film runs consistently throughout Fuentes's extraordinary oeuvre, which consists of five short story collections: *Los días enmascarados*, *Cantar de ciegos*, *Agua quemada*, *La frontera de cristal*, and *Inquieta compañía*, twenty novels, including his most recent works *Destino y fortuna* (*Destiny and Desire*) and *Carolina Grau* and *Adán en Edén*, three dramas, *Todos los gatos son pardos*, *El tuerto es rey*, and *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna* and seminal works of literary criticism including *La nueva narrativa hispanoamericana*, and most recently, *La gran novela latinoamericana* and even an opera on one of Mexico's most controversial military and political leaders, the ill-fated General Santa Anna.

The impact of film on the literary art of Carlos Fuentes is extensive and intensive, explicit and implicit, and above all, formidable. The highly eclectic Latin American and world author, who continued to write habitually even in his mid-eighties, and whose final article on the French election of François Hollande, written shortly before his death was published in the journal *Reforma* on May 15, 2012, the very day that Fuentes died. Fuentes authored three brilliant, intense, highly cinematic novels: *Zona sagrada*, *La cabeza de la hidra*, and *Diana o la cazadora solitaria*. In *Hydra Head*, Fuentes's most cinematic creation, Mexican, Hollywood and European

and even Asian-Japanese films are a key ingredient. In addition, Fuentes has written and collaborated in the production of a cinematic drama, whose very title *Orchids in the Moonlight*, *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*, is derived from an exuberant Hollywood musical of the 1930's starring Dolores Del Río, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers and Gene Raymond, *Flying Down to Rio*, which concentrates on a picture postcard Brazil, in particular Rio de Janeiro, and exuberantly presents a mythic Latin America of moonlit beaches and tropical paradises and sophisticated beauteous heiresses who dazzle North American males. *Zona sagrada*, written in a convoluted, *art nouveau* style, stands as both an extension and homage to the cinematic icon María Félix, born María de los Ángeles Félix Güereña in Alamos, Sonora, Mexico in 1914 and died in 2002. Indeed, this compact labyrinthine novel evokes her both as a superstar and invincible power, a *fascinatrix femina saga* and as a lonely, thwarted, even suicidal victim who paints the mirrors in her mansion black and in solitude screams out her afflictions, exactly as María Félix herself has done in her four-volume autobiography, which concentrates on her life-long struggles against male dominance: *Todas mis guerras*. Indeed, María Félix herself has stated that she is not a *devoradora de hombres*—an allusion to the role as the fierce Doña Bárbara that she played in the now classic Fernando de Fuentes film *Doña Bárbara* in which she made her debut in 1943, but rather as a rising star, devoured by exploitative males. In the convoluted, serpentine world of *Zona sagrada*, whose baroque, entangled prose reflects the serpentine jewelry that the real María Félix was so fond of wearing and incorporates allusions to her most successful Mexican films as well as exposing the tortured relationship between the highly possessive La Doña and her son Quico. In *Holy Place* Felix's character, Claudia Nervo, is markedly ambivalent toward her only son, first kidnapping Mito-Guillermo-Guillermito from his passive father then

abandoning her over-devoted, even worshipful son but keeping him dangling—and explores the imaginary incestuous relationship that Guillermo attempts to actualize with his mother—to whom all women will be only pallid reflections of his adored mother, and a restless, driven, man-eating Claudia Nervo. Just as there was a contemplated filmic version of the epic *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, with legendary Hollywood actor Anthony Quinn, whose lust for life, displayed so masterfully in *Zorba the Greek* would have made him perfect for the role of the arrogant, *machista*, exploitative yet sensuous even on his deathbed, Artemio Cruz, but was never brought to fruition, just as a filmic version of *Holy Place* with the starring role of María Félix—to be played by the Hollywood goddess of Latin American extraction Rita Hayworth—also was never actualized. But one novel clearly written for the screen and confessed to by Fuentes himself that the narrative creation was inspired by Jane Fonda, a personal friend of Fuentes and a champion of women's liberation, *Gringo Viejo* was filmed under two foremost directors. First the Mexican American Luis Valdez who also directed the film version of his searing drama of the Zoot Suit riots and crackdown in Los Angeles in the early 1940's, *Zoot Suit*, and then the biography of the brilliant short-lived career of the Mexican American singer and satirist who achieved success in mainstream rock and roll at age sixteen, Richie Valens in *La bamba* and then, after Valdez was inexplicably replaced, the Argentine director of major Latin American films like *La historia oficial*, Luis Puenzo. In his brilliant drama *Orchids in the Moonlight*, Fuentes provides not only a historical but a mythic evocation of Mexico's legendary cinematic superstars—María Félix and Dolores Del Río, in the 1930's and 1940's symbols of powerful idol like woman. Dolores Del Río, a Mexican aristocrat, the privileged offspring of a Porfirista family, was presented to the King of Spain, Alfonso XIII when she was four years of age, Del Río

was seemingly fated to fulfill the traditional role of aristocratic wife, circumscribed by husband and children, married to a wealthy Mexican family who owned a lavish hacienda in Durango. Yet Del Río, with the encouragement of the North American director of silent films Edwin Carewe, who was introduced to Del Río when he was visiting his friend, the artist Alberto Best Maugard, fell in love with the alluring Del Río and brought her to Hollywood to star in early silent films like *Ramona*. Del Río left behind her opulent lifestyle to plunge into Hollywood in the 1920's, where to be an actress was considered equivalent to prostitution. Fuentes both exalts and caricatures, both mythifies and demythifies his cinematic superstars—from Dolores Del Río and María Félix to Jean Seberg, the eighteen year old from Marshalltown, Iowa suddenly catapulted to international fame after winning a beauty contest and being starred in two films by the Academy Award winning master who directed such iconoclastic films as *The Moon is Blue* and *The Man With the Golden Arm!* Otto Preminger. Preminger first gave Seberg, then an unknown with only limited acting experience in high school productions, the starring role in *Saint Joan* based on George Bernard Shaw's drama and then in *Bonjour Tristesse*, based on the novel by Françoise Sagan. Fuentes engaged in a two-month affair with Jean Seberg while she was on location in Mexico, filming *Macho Callahan*. *Diana o la cazadora solitaria* (*Diana, or the Goddess who Hunts Alone*; 1994) evokes Seberg as both blonde, grey-eyed, captivating cinematic superstar and as frightened, troubled, even anguished radical of the 1960's, identifying with the Black Panther movement to which she made substantial monetary contributions. In one of the most remarkable *chiaroscuro* passages in a work of literature, Fuentes evokes Jean Seberg as an entrancing fusion of black and white, which stunningly captures Seberg's paradoxical character, pampered

socialite and frustrated social activist who took on an Afro-American name and a Black Panther lover.

Carlos Fuentes stated to the author of the study that he had asked both Dolores Del Río and María Félix—Dolores Del Río who at the time was in her eighties, to perform the roles of the two deracinated, impoverished, alternately quarreling and then reconciling *chicanas* María and Dolores who lived in isolation and alienation in Venice, California, in exile from native Mexico and also exiled from the Hollywood that they have come from their homeland to achieve success in. Once more Fuentes models his character creations on the idealistic yet consistently thwarted *caballero andante*, Don Quixote de la Mancha—Cervantes's masterpiece which Fuentes has stated he re-reads every year—just as his re-creation of the historical Ambrose Bierce and the cinephile protagonist of *The Hydra Head*, Félix Maldonado, owe much to the valiant yet ultimately defeated Don Quixote, the impoverished squire Alfonso Quejano who dreams his way into a gallant knight errant. Indeed, just as in *Don Quixote* which Fuentes has stated he re-reads every year, dream transforms into both the historical personalities and the myriad cinematic roles played by these two Mexican icons. In Fuentes's intriguing drama, María finds only tragic, brutal death, as does the intrusive and murderous Fan who in turn is slain by a vengeful Dolores, who throughout *Orchids in the Moonlight* remains ambivalent to soulmate and rival María Félix.

In the elusive hall of mirrors that is *Orchids in the Moonlight*, cinematic figures are relentlessly piled upon other cinematic creations. Dolores in *Orchids in the Moonlight* is *chicana* and Dolores Del Río and all the cinematic roles, in both Hollywood of the silent and sound eras and Mexico in its Golden Age of cinema, just as the indomitable *mujer castradora* María is María Félix and all the filmic roles played by María Félix in Mexico and France and a hidden but key cinematic

star whose career began in the silent era in Mexico and who achieved rapid success in Hollywood, the ravishing and scintillating Lupe Vélez. It is not Vélez's life but her tragic death that is re-enacted in *Orquídeas*. Cinematic allusions abound from the start—on stage is a white telephone—an allusion to the second husband of Dolores del Río, the art deco set designer Cedric Gibbons, who imbued Hollywood set design with elegance and sophistication. But the white telephone rests incongruously on a white toilet bowl—an allusion from the very start to the horrific way that Lupe Vélez died, as she choked on her own vomit and drowned in the toilet bowl.

Not only cinematic superstars from Del Río and Félix to Pedro Armendáriz, Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet, Claude Rains, Conrad Viedt, Marlene Dietrich, and Jean Seberg but myriad cinematic techniques are skillfully utilized by Fuentes throughout his works, from his first novel, the brilliant epic, kaleidoscopic narrative of both contemporary Mexico fused with Pre-Columbian Aztec Mexico, *La región más transparente*, to his dazzling novel filled with extreme close-ups and distant shots, superimposition and cinematic montage, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. Indeed, Fuentes's works run the whole gamut of filmic techniques, from *chiaroscuro* to fade-in and fade-out, zoom shots and reverse zooms, high angles and low angles, distance shots, mid-shots, close-ups and extreme close-ups, superimposition, deep focus—a technique perfected by a film that has so powerfully influenced Fuentes's masterpiece, Orson Welles's in *Citizen Kane*, where background action is as important as foreground action, panoramic shots and even freeze-frames and even lengthy segments of narrative in Fuentes's novel of the supernatural, *Una familia lejana*, has been overwhelmingly influenced by the chilling silent film of Murnau, *Nosferatu*. Many scenes of *Una familia lejana* are in black and white—in homage to the horror film of Murnau, in which the Director reversed the negatives,

seem to be filmed in black and white, as costuming of characters and landscapes are all in silver, gray, and black tones—in honor of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's chilling film of demonic possession and ultimate exorcism, *Nosferatu*, as Lucy spends the night with the blood-sucking monster and vanquishes him. But in *Una familia lejana* there is no final exorcism of the demonic—the name of the family painstakingly evoked is Heredia—an allusion to a hereditary curia which is never absolved, which Fuentes himself, a character in the novel, is afflicted with.

Indeed, fusion—fusion of the individual and the collective, fusion of scenes—the *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna* a fusion of theatre and film, of history and myth, of Self and Other, of past and present, of reality and dream, of vacuous existence and transcendental myth, of stage actresses and rapt audiences.

In the world premiere of *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*, staged in 1982 by the American Repertory Theatre under the direction of the eminent Robert Brustein at the Loeb Drama Center at Harvard University, the drama was presented in English, in a translation done by Carlos Fuentes himself, and starred two Afro-American actresses, Ellen Holly and Rosalind Cash in the complex, ever-shifting roles of María Félix and Dolores Del Río. The stage design was unique—a huge mirror-like screen loomed in back of the actresses and reflected the members of the audience to achieve what Fuentes has desired for all of his work—the active, participatory spectator/reader, one who does not passively absorb but who creates the work along with the author. And indeed, Fuentes, like the cinematic director who has decisively influenced him, the great Alfred Hitchcock, deliberately leaves a space of ambiguity in all of his narratives, a space that the collaborating reader is enticed to enter so that the work becomes a co-creation between author and reader.³

Not only visible but invisible characters are central to *Orchids in the Moonlight*, and several of these are cinematic. The drama takes place on the day that Orson Welles dies, a date that was still in the future when Fuentes's drama was premiered. But the ghost of Welles permeates *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*—on the personal level, Dolores Del Río and Orson Welles conducting an affair at the time that the boy genius was filming his greatest work, *Citizen Kane*. And Welles is alluded to again, in the extensive word play engaged in by Dolores, who blends Orson Welles with H. G. Wells, the author of *The War of the Worlds*, a novel of the invasion of the Earth by seemingly invincible Martians, which Welles with his outstanding Mercury Theater Group so convincingly broadcast on the radio that thousands of Americans on the East Coast actually believed that the Martians had landed—and people died of heart attacks believing that their very lives were in danger. As a result of this Fantasy made Reality—the central theme of *Orchids in the Moonlight*, Welles was catapulted to Hollywood and given *carte blanche* by RKO Studios to direct the highly controversial *Citizen Kane* (1942).

Invisible cinematic caricatures, like a filmic palimpsest, enshroud the malevolent Fan, who is developed as a combination of the cheery, bumbling comedian Harold Lloyd, the star of films like *Safety Last* (1923) and *The Freshman* (1925), the sinister, psychotic Cody Jarrett, savagely played by James Cagney in the 1940's film *White Heat* (1949) and Tom Powers, Cagney's killer role in *Public Enemy* (1931).

Fusion—the mother bound to her wheelchair—who is one of the many invisible characters, one of the many living ghosts who inhabit—or transhabit *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*, just as they proliferate in *Aura*, *Una familia lejana* and *Cumpleaños*. María in particular is developed as an intriguing, even mystifying, composite character; she is a fusion of both María Félix and the scintillating Hollywood film star of the

1940's Lupe Vélez, who began her extraordinary career in Mexico during the Silent Era and who achieved enormous success in the United States as a vivacious, fiery dame named The Mexican Spitfire, before her tragic suicide after she refused to abort an illegitimate child by Harold Raymond, who was unwilling to divorce his wife and marry her. María in *Orchids in the Moonlight* dies in the same manner as the scintillating Lupe Vélez, who when the second she had swallowed mixed with her sumptuous and spicy Mexican meal. A white toilet was placed prominently on the stage of *Orquídeas* from the very start and contrasts with another key element, the white telephone, another cinematic allusion, this time an allusion to the elegant, elaborate Hollywood sets of Cedric Gibbons, the second husband of Dolores Del Río and the design genius who transformed drab and pedestrian Hollywood sets into glamorous, palatial art deco showpieces—paralleled by the Art Deco mansion in which he dwelled with his new spouse, Dolores Del Río. But similarly to Billy Wilder's stunning film of the mythification and demythification of the Hollywood screen goddess *Fedora*, the use of the telephone in the apartment of the *chicanas*, who deliberately cut themselves off from the outside world, is prohibited. The white telephone is prominently displayed in the sumptuous hotel suite occupied by the Brazilian heiress Belinha de Rezenda.

This drama is one of Fuentes's finest, most intricate, and compelling works, and one surrounded by controversy. Significantly, its premiere was not in Mexico but at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts at the Harvard Repertory Theatre, at a time when Fuentes was a visiting professor in the Department of Comparative Literature. The drama premiered in English, the first translation into English done by Fuentes himself. In this intricate drama which functions on so many levels—the historic, the psychological, the metaphysical, a series of dramas within dramas as two actresses play two

chicanas who in turn play Dolores Del Río and María Félix as well as scenes from the many films of these two iconic actresses—the music is eclectic—is it a Hollywood tango, danced in *Flying Down to Rio* by Dolores Del Río and Fred Astaire, that provides the title to the musical film, the dramatic, mythical title that symbolizes Latin America itself, as a paradoxical land of moonlit beaches and natives who are not what they seem, who are neither cannibalistic nor belligerent revolutionaries but playboys enjoying golf on a luxurious Country Club setting. *Flying Down to Rio* provides an escapist Latin America designed to fulfill the romantic fantasies of Depression worn North American filmgoers. *Flying Down to Rio* marvelously anticipates the lavish, color-filled, glamorous cinematic Mexico, stunningly created by Julie Taymor and Salma Hayek in the film *Frida*, that was a great success in the United States because it masterfully exploited every fantasy that gringos hold of Mexico. *Frida* was deliberately aimed at a North American public—in which banquets of food, majestic pyramids of the Sun and Moon, guitar-strumming mariachis and banquets and weddings, Latin and Russian lovers. Even the arrival of Leon Trotsky and his cadre of bodyguards at Frida's residence in Coyoacán is filmed, as if it were taken from a gangster film of Hollywood in the 1930's like *Scarface* or the 1970's like *The Godfather*. Dolores Del Río was at the pinnacle of her Hollywood career in *Flying Down to Rio*, in which she wore the first two-piece bathing suit ever to appear on Hollywood screen. With the slow tango of *Orchids in the Moonlight*, in Fuentes's drama danced by Dolores and María—as the *ranchero* music of Jorge Negrete—one of the several husbands of the real María Félix, and her co-star in one of her first and still greatest films, *El peñón de las ánimas* (*The Cliff of Lost Souls*) alluded to in *Orchids in the Moonlight* and foreshadowing the tragic death of María Félix herself in Fuentes's spectacular drama. The real María Félix played the role of the young,

vulnerable, alluringly beautiful María Valdivia in *The Cliff of Lost Souls*, who dies violently, shot in the back by her own relative, the irate and vengeful Don Braulio Valdivia, who kills her for breaking her promise to marry his son and instead running off with his hated rival Iturriaga. And the beautiful composition “María bonita,” by one of the several husbands of María Félix—the brilliant composer Agustín Lara, “El flaco” is also a part of the intricate musical background to *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*.

Throughout Fuentes’s narrative works there are myriad cinematic allusions not only to the Hollywood films of the thirties, forties and fifties but also to French and Italian and Japanese films—to Jean Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini and Orson Welles and Billy Wilder and John Houston and Luis Buñuel and Emilio Fernández and Alfred Hitchcock. Throughout Fuentes’s labyrinthine work and the implicit films that unlike *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* in *Cambio de piel* or Raimu’s *The Breadmaker’s Wife* in *The Hydra Head* are never mentioned explicitly but run like a secret fire through the narrative—*Citizen Kane*, *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, and, in *Aura*, Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard*. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Fuentes’s utilization of film are the many hidden films that undergird to an amazing extent the characters of his most brilliant novels. For example, one of the many sources of the mysterious and highly malevolent Ixca Cienfuegos in one of Fuentes’s greatest works, his monumental *La región más transparente*, a titanic figure that has baffled critics—first of all a symbol of the ancient Aztec god of war Huitzilopochtli and the life-giving Toltec deity, Quetzalcóatl. But Ixca also has a hidden, cinematic resonance. The supernatural, demonic Ixca, on a fanatic quest for victims of blood sacrifice in twentieth century Mexico, is a re-creation in the late 1950’s of one of the most egregious, demonic yet mesmerizing figures created and perpetuated in many films

by the great and still controversial German director Fritz Lang. And as Dr. Mabuse is himself a perpetuation of but another figure of tyranny and demonism who is found in Fuentes's epic *Cambio de piel*, Herr Urs, a Hitlerian symbol and a literary descendant of the demonic Dr. Caligari, in Robert Weine's silent film of German Expressionism that is found both explicitly and implicitly in *Cambio de piel*, *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (1919). Ixca emerges as a congeries of masks as he incessantly changes his role—confidante to the plutocrat banker Federico Robles; gigolo, one of whose conquests is Robles's wife Norma; self-styled psychiatrist to Rodrigo Pola. Ixca's donning multiple masks has its origin in the myriad personalities of the chameleonic Dr. Mabuse, who moves from radical agitator to cardsharp to stock market dominator to street peddler, all the time undermining and killing his adversaries.

And perhaps the most fascinating, most elaborate use of Hollywood film by the keen visual artist Carlos Fuentes is the titanic figure of Charles Foster Kane. The titanic Kane himself, in Orson Welles's cinematic triumph *Citizen Kane*, is based on one of the most powerful of American plutocrats, William Randolph Hearst, deemed "Imperial Hearst" by one of his many biographers. *Citizen Kane*, which critics laud as one of the greatest films of all time, is one of Carlos Fuentes's favorite films, as he himself has repeatedly confessed, just as is *Flying Down to Rio*. Thus one of the most paradoxical and complex character creations in all of Latin American Literature has plural inspirations—Artemio Cruz is not only a composite figure of several Mexican Revolutionary generals who seized power after winding up on the winning side in the Mexican Revolution and then, as evoked by Fuentes, systematically betrayed the ideals of land, labor and educational reform so highly touted by the Revolution, in which sanguinary conflict more than a million Mexicans perished. Many noble, idea-

listic Revolutionary leaders like Emiliano Zapata engaged in a quest for social justice and economic equality incarnated in Mexican heroes of the Revolution depicted by Fuentes Pancho Villa whom Fuentes through a poetic, exuberant style mythifies in *Gringo Viejo*, his novel written for the screen and brought to the screen with Jane Fonda in the role of the independent-minded, headstrong Gibson Girl Harriet Winslow, Jimmy Smits as the Reluctant Revolutionary General Tomás Arroyo, and Gregory Peck, who starred in epic masterpieces such as *Moby Dick* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as the audacious North American writer of short stories and the trenchant volume *The Devil's Dictionary*—the curmudgeon Ambrose Bierce. Indeed one of the principal characters of *The Old Gringo* has a cinematic origin: Fuentes has confessed that inspiration for the liberated woman Harriet Winslow came from Jane Fonda, a major screen actress, the star of *Barbarella* (1968) and *Klute* (1971) and *Cat Ballou* (1965), who produced the film *Gringo Viejo* and starred as the audacious, socio-politically committed Harriet Winslow. Indeed, Fuentes has stated that he created the character of the bold, border-crossing governess Harriet Winslow, who leaves behind her suffocating existence and her prissy Washington D.C. beau Delaney to plunge into the maelstrom of Revolutionary Mexico just as Bierce did. Emiliano Zapata, whose historic and mythic presence in Mexico Fuentes has for many years promised to evoke in a projected novel *Emiliano en Chinameca*, which was to concentrate on the last days in Zapata's tragic, heroic life—and surely was another literary creation that Fuentes destined for the Hollywood screen, but which was never completed.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz can be analyzed politically, as a continuation of the most vibrant, most original and most compelling of Mexican literary currents, *The Novel of the Mexican Revolution*—founded by Mariano Azuela in his terse, scathing novel *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*) and continued in

the piercing narratives of Martín Luis Guzmán like *La sombra del caudillo* and Agustín Yáñez's epic work *Al filo del agua* (*At the Edge of the Storm*). Ironically, the Novel of the Mexican Revolution, which constitutes a major narrative subgenre in Mexico, can really be depicted as a narrative of Anti-revolution, as Cruz's life evoked as a series of choices that if he himself makes and seeks to rescind on his deathbed to not abandon his friends on the battlefield, to not marry the Catalina who is an embittered daughter of a Porfirista whose brother Bernal left the sheltered world of his Porfirista family to become a Villista, Cruz has abandoned to be executed by a firing squad. Cruz is portrayed as a universal symbol, as an Everyman in a work that can be seen as Fuentes's greatest, most universal novel. Here Artemio Cruz—very similar to *Citizen Kane* as *The American*, which is how Kane defines himself proudly, functions as a symbol of the Mexican Revolution and its betrayal. Like *Citizen Kane*, evoked initially on his deathbed, in a masterful extreme close-up, the shattered countenance of the dying Artemio Cruz is evoked in dramatic close-up. Just as the fragmentation in *Citizen Kane*—the shards of the symbolic glass ball that Kane clutches and lets fall to mark his death, symbolize his whole existence, evoked by the film as a series of multiple perspectives and fragmented, distorted episodes. So also is Cruz's disintegrating countenance grimly reflected on the multiple facets of the purse of the daughter who hates him, Teresa. This episode is doubtlessly taken from the highly distorted way that the dying *Citizen Kane* is evoked in Welles's epic film, first by an extreme close-up on his countenance that makes his lips seem like volcanic craters, and subsequently the fragments of a glass ball that falls from his dying hands at the outset of *Citizen Kane*. Indeed, the very structure of *Citizen Kane*, the highly fragmented evocation of Charles Foster Kane's convoluted professional and personal life, is developed masterfully by Orson Welles, not as a linear chronology from

birth to death but starting with death and evoking him from a series of rapidly spinning fragments, is paralleled by the way in which Cruz's sinuous career, from impoverished *campesino* to mercenary Revolutionary to manipulative plutocrat even after the military phase of the Revolution is over, as Cruz relentlessly battles for control of the rival *cacique's* vast estates previously held by the Porfirian elite, into which caste the aggressive and domineering Cruz marries. Indeed, Cruz's calculated marriage with the upper class Catalina is inspired by Kane's loveless marriage with the niece of the United States President Emily Monroe Norton, and the dissolution of Kane's marriage into mutual distrust and enmity parallels Cruz's marital debacle with Catalina Bernal. Behind the scenes depicting the vast empire of the titanic Artemio Cruz including mines and factories and newspapers, is the looming, grandiose figure Charles Foster Kane, who like Hearst achieved prominence as a founder of influential newspapers. Kane was born into poverty but capapulted by chance into the aristocracy. Cruz too was born as the illegitimate offspring of the mulata slave Isabel Cruz and the rapacious *hacendado*, Ireneo Menchaca, who wanted to kill his illicit child—from the very start of his existence his life fused with his death—just as it is structurally in the narrative—the moment of his death juxtaposed with the moment of his birth. In the case of both Kane and Cruz, overwhelming ambition, ruthless manipulation and exploitation mark the death of their initial idealism. Charles Foster Kane, which Welles initially entitles *The American*, constitutes a complex, paradoxical evocation of a man and a national symbol—just as is the anguished, dying but complex and paradoxical Artemio Cruz, who is both a historical creation and a cinematically based protagonist. Even specific scenes in Fuentes's narratives such as the placement of characters—Cruz and the tormented wife who despises him and, at the same time loathes herself for submit-

ting to him, is skillfully developed by Fuentes through the masterful use of cinematic techniques—Cruz evoked in a distant shot as relentlessly active and conquering and Catalina superimposed in close-up over Cruz—defying him, submitting to him physically but denying him forgiveness for betraying her brother Bernal and leaving him to die. The triadic first-person-second-person-third-person structuring of Cruz's life echoes the triadic composition of *Citizen Kane* in which over and over again three figures, such as in a key scene, Mary Kane, Kane's obdurate Mother determined to sacrifice her son by signing him over to be brought up by the Faustian Thatcher—an allusion to J.P. Morgan—who has come to get the confidential papers signed by a Mother determined to separate the boy from the negative influence of his alcoholic father. Mary Kane, her spineless and greedy husband and the grasping businessman Thatcher are all evoked in a tight composition deliberately not facing one another, masterfully to express great tension and compulsion and mutual hatred. Throughout *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* as throughout the dark, labyrinthine world of *Citizen Kane* is the significant influence of German Expressionist film. Bizarre shadowy compositions in chiaroscuro typify scenes in both *Citizen Kane*, like the initial death scene and the evocation of Xanadu at the end as an immense mausoleum and its literary offshoot, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, as Cruz envisions a monstrous role of collective blood sacrifice at his New Years Eve party over which he presides as a demonic Aztec god of blood sacrifice, Huitzilopochtli.

And many of Fuentes's artistic creations contain *multiple* Hollywood and Mexican films as does Fuentes's *Hydra Head*, which fuses three of the major films of one of Fuentes's favorite movie stars, Humphrey Bogart: *Casablanca*, *Dark Passage*, and *The Maltese Falcon*. In Fuentes's unique, trenchant cinematic drama *Orchids in the Moonlight*, everything is in flux. In

this drama Reality, insubstantial from the start, is again and again subverted by the cinematic image, the illusion—the Hollywood Dream Machine so thoroughly embraced by the impoverished *chicanas* who at times embrace one another to signify that for Fuentes the two great cinematic icons are essentially the same phenomenon. Indeed, the very ending of the drama is powerfully cinematic, as the stage is dominated by gigantic images from all of the many films of both Dolores Del Río and María Félix, films that achieve a spectacular prominence and an awesome power, films that symbolize immortality—the endless perpetuation of the beauty and wonder and mystery of these two cinematic goddesses—and their final triumph over alienating and degrading reality and even over death itself.

At times the two cinematic goddesses become reconciled—an allusion to the circumstance that the real Dolores Del Río and María Félix were never really rivals, as both had their own myriad devotees. And both screen icons starred together in the film *La cucaracha*, directed by Ismael Rodríguez. Fuentes stunningly depicts Dolores Del Río and María Félix as two parts of the same soul. Thus it is a spectacular, highly controversial drama, which had a negative reception in Mexico where its performance at the huge, elegant Foro Isabelino Theatre at the Universidad Metropolitana appears to have been sabotaged by an extremely irate María Félix, furious that she is evoked as a caricature by Fuentes, whom she trusted as a close friend. In Fuentes's corrosive drama, the *chicana* Maria is portrayed as isolated and indigent and aged and unrecognized. The regal, tempestuous María Félix became outraged that she is linked, in the drama that both mythifies and demythifies her, with drugs and alcoholism and even further degraded by suffering the humiliating fate of drowning in a toilet bowl. Instead of agreeing to play the role of María in *Orquídeas*, after reading the at times vitriolic play, María Félix sought to have

the President of Mexico himself, Miguel de la Madrid, with whom apparently Fuentes did not get along—cancel the Mexico City production of *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna*, which was staged in 1986, four years after its World Premiere in the Harvard American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, in 1982. María Félix rebukes Fuentes at length in the fourth and final volume of her best-selling autobiography, *Todas mis guerras* (“All My Battles”), even considering Fuentes to have betrayed her and of markedly furthering his own career by exploiting her legendary mythic and iconic status and even disdainfully dismissing *Orquídeas a la luz de la luna* “Una porquería.” Not only to Billy Wilder’s trenchant *Sunset Boulevard*, one of the major sources of cinematic inspiration for *Orchids in the Moonlight*, one of Latin America’s greatest and most underappreciated plays, but also the searing Hollywood film starring the aged and increasingly demented Hollywood actresses, Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* constitutes another cinematic subtext of this psychedelic, incessantly changing drama. Like *Orquídeas*, which is an enormous series of mirror reflections and distortions, of the lives of the two dazzling heroines, the dark world of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* evokes and then ruthlessly parodies the spectacular and just about to be terminated Hollywood careers of the two finest of the super actresses whose achievement has never been equaled—paralleling the iconic status of Dolores Del Río and María Félix in Mexico and throughout most of Latin America. Dolores Del Río in her response to Fuentes’s request that she play Dolores in *Orquídeas*, apparently engaged in a double game. On the one hand she supported the diatribe against the drama launched by María Félix, who in *Todas mis guerras* claims that Del Río at the time was dying in a hospital in Newport Beach, where she lived with her third husband, the film producer Lewis Riley. But Fuentes himself told the author of this study that Dolores had

agreed to star in the Meixcan version of his play. The roles were assigned to two transvestites, both of whom subsequently died of AIDS—but whose performance Fuentes deemed the best of all the productions of his drama.

One of the salient characteristics of *Citizen Kane* is its instability, as it portrays Kane's life and meteoric career in incessant flux, continually, shifting perspectives on Citizen Kane—who is first evoked on the very day of his death, as a tragic hero, and then, in a sudden shift, is evoked from the cinematic perspective of the News on the March newsreel so popular in the 1940's view of hyper inflated newsreels that portray Kane as both a champion of the working man and a ruthless capitalist, as both a fascist in his support of Adolf Hitler and a champion of freedom. Then shifting away from the viewpoint of the reporter/investigator Thompson who searches for the meaning of Kane's dying word, "Rosebud," to the perspective of Kane's second wife Susan Alexander Kane to that of the blustering pompous guardian Thatcher to that of the obsequious Bernstein, Kane's lifelong loyal and richly rewarded lackey who in *The Death of Artemio Cruz* inspired the creation of the obsequious Padilla, doggedly at his master's side and obeying commands of his Master as Cruz lies in excruciating pain there on his deathbed, ready to complete the potentate's every wish, to the jaundiced perspective of Kane's idealistic and profoundly disillusioned associate JedLeland and finally to the cold, even chilling butler at Xanadu, Raymond, indicating a gradual distancing from Kane's former intimates and those like the besotted Susan Kane, presented at the outset of *Citizen Kane*, who still love him. The ceaseless movement of Welles's masterpiece on both the thematic and stylistic levels is paralleled by Fuentes's incessant movement as Cruz's tortured existence as portrayed only in fragments of first, second, and third person narrative, which form twelve triads of *yo-tú-él* patterning, the thirteenth triad symbolizing the end

of Cruz's existence and the fusion of all three voices. captured in the taut, highly dramatic third-person segments that depict Cruz as revolutionary leader, then cunning and brutal land grabber and finally, corporate titan in the new Mexican society that has deposed the Porfirian elite—into which the savvy Cruz immediately marries—while affording unparalleled financial and political opportunities to the previously dispossessed, illegitimate child of the *hacendado* Menchaca and *mulata* slave, Isabel Cruz/Cruz Isabel. Corresponding to and emphasizing thematic moment—the sudden opening of a tightly enclosed world of the Mexican underdog bound to the land, indentured for life to the *patron* in the incessant first, second and third person movement of the structure of *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, which corresponds to the restless multiple perspectives on the Plutocrat Charles Foster Kane by the boy genius that was Orson Welles in his first major films—corresponding to the volcanic energy of Carlos Fuentes, born on November 11, 1928 and in his late twenties when he published *Where the Air is Clear* in 1958, followed by *The Death of Artemio Cruz* in 1962, and a third masterpiece also saturated with implicit filmic influences, *Aura*, also in 1962.

Indeed, both *Citizen Kane* and *The Death of Artemio Cruz* contain many mysteries that are never really solved—in Orson Welles's masterpiece, the significance of Kane's dying word, "Rosebud" revealed at the end to be the name of his cherished childhood possession, a sleigh. Yet "Rosebud" is a symbol and as such open to many interpretations. One major explanation of the sleigh is that it symbolizes a lost paradise—the halcyon world of childhood from which the young and innocent Charles was suddenly and brutally—and permanently—expelled. *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* also has one of its fundamental themes the expulsion from paradise, as the boy Artemio is one day expelled from the lush, verdant paradise in Veracruz that he shares with his guardian Lunero, who is

suddenly killed by the agent of the landowner sent to round him up for the *hacienda*. And, like Citizen Kane, Citizen Cruz spends his life restoring the hacienda of the Menchaca family, to which he deliberately brings his son Lorenzo, instilling him with an idealistic fervor which Artemio himself reiteratedly betrayed, and like a fanatic Pygmalion, converting Lorenzo into a martyr who will sacrifice himself in the Spanish Civil War to redeem Cruz's repeated acts of cowardice as he deserted his own men on the Revolutionary battlefield to save his own life, cynically maintaining the mere image of himself as heroic Revolutionary leader to catapult himself into a position of national spokesman through his newspaper. And Cruz's elaborate self-mythification and self-aggrandizement are influenced by Welles's *Citizen Kane*, which portrays its protagonist in terms of a ruthless Pygmalion, as Kane attempts to redeem himself by converting his mistress into a world-famous Opera Star. His political fortunes have come tumbling down once his affair with Susan Alexander Kane has been discovered, and a rival newspaper publishes the scandal as "Kane found in Love Nest with 'Singer'." Defeated at the polls, his ascending to governor, then President of the United States permanently thwarted, Kane seeks to exonerate himself by taking his sweet voiced but definitely not operatic voiced mistress and compelling her to sing the lead in *Salambo* in the Chicago Opera House that he builds for her. But his frantic attempts to redeem himself through re-creating another person end in disaster—in Susan's negatively reviewed performance and her subsequent attempts to take her own life. Both Citizen Kane and Artemio Cruz are collectors of artistic treasures and of human beings; both end up in solitude, surrounded only by a of lackeys. Kane was suddenly and permanently expelled from a snowy paradise that is regained only symbolically, as Kane throughout his life amasses a horde of personal possessions from all over the

world to compensate for a spiritual vacuity in his existence—exactly as does the over-possessive Artemio Cruz, who ironically on his deathbed cannot recall the features of his beloved son Lorenzo—Cruz’s spiritual center—Lorenzo, who died as a hero in the Spanish Civil War to compensate for Artemio Cruz’s cowardice and betrayal of his comrades on the battlefield in the Mexican Revolution. Yet Cruz’s anguished and increasingly delirious imagination even at the moment of his death is filled with elaborate, precise images of his material possessions. Here is yet another correspondence, this one to Welles’s spectacular evocation at the end of *Citizen Kane* of Xanadu, Kane’s palatial estate and itself a symbol of Hearst’s mansion of San Simeon—Welles who evokes Kane’s domain as a huge mausoleum—the sumptuous tomb of a modern Pharaoh—which Fuentes skillfully echoes in his evocation of Cruz’s palace-mansion in the old Heronymite monastery that Cruz painstakingly restored in Coyoacán, the oldest part of Mexico City, still haunted by ghostly presences of its ancient Aztec past and the imperial court of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, Mexico-Tenochtitlán. And Artemio Cruz, perhaps Fuentes’s most complex character, becomes fused as a despotic, imperious power, imagining himself with the absolute authority of life and death over his myriad guests who have been summoned to celebrate the New Year, with the despotic emperor Moctezuma II reigning supremely over his court, debasing even the Aztec nobles.

Even the ending of *Where the Air is Clear* is highly visual, intensely cinematic, and provides an excellent example of voiceover as the tone of Ixca most often veiled and sinister, how turns calm and resigned and conciliatory. In this vast, shadow-filled world of relentlessly active characters like the protagonist the plutocrat Federico Robles, and the fallen aristocrat Pimpinela de Ovando, who insistently seeks to restore singlehandedly the family fortune, Gladys, a lower-class, indi-

genous character who is evoked at both the outset and the end of *La región más transparente*, significantly, is a passive figure—alone, isolated, to symbolize the marginalization of indigenous Mexico even after the glorious Revolution of 1910, one of whose primary goals was to establish social justice and bring the ever-marginalized lower classes into the socio-economic mainstream. Ixca from the very start of *Where the Air is Clear* has impassionedlly articulated the identity of Mexico as inseparable from its ancient Aztec core, at the end returns once more to envelop the mute, solitary prostitute Gladys García, like Ixca a cinematic presence. Her first name, Gladys, was undoubtedly chosen by her mother who was entranced by the Hollywood blonde actress of *The Maltese Falcon*, Gladys George. The forlorn Gladys, significantly is depicted alone on the Nonoalco Bridge—an isolated bridge figure between contemporary Mexico and its ancient Aztec past—the Nahuatl society permanently destroyed by the Spanish conquistadores from which the indigenous Gladys descends. Once again the visual power of Fuentes's style is evident:

García pauses. Swift also within the dust, lights the night's last cigarette, tosses the match down towards the corrugated iron roofs and breathes in the great city's early morning, the somnolence of flesh, the smell of gasoline and alcohol and the voice of Ixca Cienfuegos, running through the tumultuous silence of all those memories and dust of the city, wanting to touch her fingers and tell her, just tell her: This is our place, what we can do. Here where the air is clear. (WA, 459-460)

And, in his brilliant evocation at both beginning and end of *La región más transparente* of the awakening of the Sleeping Giant of Mexico City, Fuentes has undoubtedly been influenced by Walter Ruttmann's powerful silent film of the German Expressionistic Era, *Berlin: Die Sintonie der Grosstadt* (1927), which concentrates on the slow and yet ultimately thunderous awakening of the vast city—a sleeping giant that

is in strikingly visual terms brought to a crescendo of vibrant life, just as Fuentes at the outset of *La región más transparente* brings the Behemoth of Mexico City to life in a powerful and profoundly cinematic way that had never before been accomplished in Mexican literary expression.

Among cinematic techniques so often found in epic visions like *Where the Air is Clear* and *The Death of Artemio Cruz* are fade-out and fade-in, or in films like *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, iris-in and iris-out.

Why is the art of the cinema, the only original art form of both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, so important to Carlos Fuentes as a prolific creative writer, and an inveterate cinephile and as an author of several filmscripts, including a Western, *Tiempo de morir*, which he co-wrote with one of his best friends and fellow member of the Latin American Boom, Gabriel García Márquez? Fuentes's knowledge of Hollywood films from the Silent Era to the present is encyclopedic. Indeed, Fuentes has confessed that his daily routine in his flat in Kensington Garden in a fashionable section of London is to work diligently and methodically at writing in the mornings and attend film showings in the afternoon—a repetition, more than three quarters of a century later, of those cherished times when his father, the ever elegantly attired diplomat Rafael Boettinger Fuentes, brought the young Carlos frequently to the movie theatre—in Mexico, in the United States, in Chile and Argentina, thus providing his only son with an extensive cinematic background even as a child. Fuentes himself has stated that his process of character creation is to base his characters on cinematic predecessors, thus affirming that the cinematic influence is not subconscious or automatic but is a deliberate, sustained and highly controlled aspect of his art.

Hollywood film and Mexican film, particularly of Mexico's Golden Age, the 1940's and 1950's, French New Wave Film and the eerie, spellbinding films of German Expressionism, all

have significantly influenced Fuentes's literary art. Fuentes is an inveterate fan of the movie stars, of the Hollywood goddesses of the silent screen like Greta Garbo and Louise Brooks, the latter who starred in the German Expressionist films of G.W. Pabst, like *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*) and *Tagebuch einer* (*Diary of a Lost Girl*), both of which have influenced Fuentes in his cinematic masterpiece *Hydra Head*, as Louise Brooks's cinematic image is re-created in the beguiling Sara Klein, the lover that Félix Maldonado is haunted by both during her life and even moreso after her brutal death. and of the Mexican cinema divas like María Félix and Dolores Del Río, of male legends like Pedro Armendáriz and Gary Cooper, Humphrey Bogart and Clint Eastwood, and most of all, the protean, spectral and multifaceted Conrad Viedt and the Faustian Emil Janning and the *femme fatale* Marlene Dietrich, especially one of her earliest and greatest roles as the sultry temptress Lola-Lola in *Der blaue engel*, Josef Von Sternberg's masterful *The Blue Angel*, which is alluded to explicitly in one of Fuentes's most cinematically sophisticated narratives, *La región más transparente*. Like many of Fuentes's novels and short stories, *La región más transparente* contains both explicit and implicit cinematic influences impacted by both Fritz Lang and Linda Darnell—who died in a house fire while she was watching one of her old films and whose fiery death served Fuentes as the inspiration for the flaming demise of Norma Larragoiti, the supercilious, relentlessly ambitious, materialistic wife of Federico Robles—Norma's very name evoking the Hollywood film stars of the 1930's so cherished by Carlos Fuentes—Norma Talmadge and the fierce, insane protagonist of Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, Norma Desmond.

Indeed, *Where the Air is Clear* has been decisively influenced by Josef Von Sternberg and Sergei Eisenstein, master of the techniques of collage and montage. In the kaleidoscopic *La región más transparente*, as in *Das Kabinett des*

Doktor Caligari, nothing is clear; everything including the very national identity of Mexico is constantly shifting, evoked from myriad, fragmentary perspectives, and characters appear and disappear, are both realistic and like the sinister, ubiquitous, murderous Dr. Mabuse of Fritz Lang, supernatural and murky, elusive and profound.

Indeed Fuentes's identification with screen stars led him to marry one of the leading Mexican film stars, who subsequently divorced him for his infidelity—Rita Macedo, who appears under the pseudonym of Luisa Guzmán in *Diana o la cazadora solitaria* and who is evoked as the double, the parallel cinema-star to Jean Seberg—both women strong, talented but failing to achieve screen roles which matched their abilities and both ultimately frustrated in their careers. And Fuentes conducted affairs with the blonde, grey-eyed cinematic goddess Jean Seberg, which he turns into another one of his explicitly cinematic narratives, *Diana or the Goddess Who Hunts Alone*, as well as with Jeanne Moreau, the star of the French New Wave film *Jules et Jim* (1962), directed by François Truffaut, which depicts a love-triangle of two men and a woman, which inspired Fuentes's short story of a love triangle of two women—mother and daughter—and one man, Fuentes's short story, itself made into a film, "Las dos Elenas."

Carlos Fuentes has many times proclaimed his fascination with the cinema—and even his fervent desire to become a movie star. His thin, elegant, handsome, always impeccably dressed appearance is reminiscent of several movie stars, including Ramon Navarro, and the hero of *The Thirty Nine Steps*, an Alfred Hitchcock thriller, Robert Donat, particularly with his pencil-thin moustache and courtly mannerisms.

Fuentes himself has declared in an interview with the author of the study that he sought to become a movie star, on the model of the great Sydney Greenstreet highly cultivated actor who starred in *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, *They*

Died With Their Boots On and *Flamingo Road*. Greenstreet weighed three hundred pounds and played roles of urbane, witty, highly cultivated villains. Indeed, his enormous bulk, which was photographed in low angle shots, strikingly conveyed his menace, as it does in key scenes of *The Maltese Falcon*. It would be a challenge for the regally slim Fuentes to duplicate—the performance of the actor when he desired to be foreboding and eloquently treacherous, as in one of Greenstreet's finest roles, that of the villainous Casper Gutman, the fanatic pursuer of the fabulous artifact in *The Maltese Falcon* in which he is paired, as he was in *Casablanca*, with the soft-spoken yet deadly incarnation of treachery and malice, Peter Lorre.

The decisive impact of cinema on Fuentes's short stories, novels, essays such as the one with the provocative "High Noon in Latin America" an allusion to the Academy-Award winning film *High Noon*, starring Gary Cooper and introducing Grace Kelly, which develops the theme of the Marshal who is abandoned not only by his deputies but by the fearful judge who suddenly departs from town, and even deserted by his new wife, a Quaker who initially rejects killing even in self-defense. Marshal Kane confronts alone the man who has vowed to kill him, and Fuentes's essay acquires power through its allusion to this highly acclaimed, now classic Hollywood Western. Indeed film—Hollywood, European, Japanese, silent and sound film, German Expressionist film and Film noir, French New Wave film and Hollywood blockbusters like Hitchcock's spellbinding and enigmatic *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*, infuse Fuentes's art with vibrancy, great dramatic impact, and electrifying power. Film functions as creative mechanism, influencing Fuentes's intricate process of character creation. Its importance makes Fuentes's highly eclectic vision unique. As a consequence, the critical attention to Fuentes's socio-political vision needs to be complemented

by exploration of the fierce cinematic undercurrents that permeate his superb artistic creations.

Perhaps it is fitting, in this essay that concentrates on the prodigious impact that Hollywood, Latin American, European, and Asian film has exerted on the art of Carlos Fuentes, that we highlight a 1941 film, directed by the great Raoul Walsh, a film that Fuentes undoubtedly viewed and that can serve as an epitaph to his long and distinguished and action-filled career and his unrelenting devotion to his literary craft right up to the time of his tragic death: *They Died with Their Boots On*. Indeed, this is how Fuentes died, at the very pinnacle of his career, at eighty-three still relentlessly active, crisscrossing the globe to fly from London to the University of Puget Sound in the state of Washington to deliver a lecture in the prestigious Hay Festival in Cartagena, Colombia, in January 2012, or visiting the Book Fair in Buenos Aires, where he explained that as long as he had plans for the future, he would never surrender his life to the melancholy of death, and in 2011 to receive the Prix Formentor. Indeed to the very last day of his life Fuentes wrote and published ceaselessly, so that on the very day of his death of a massive heart attack, May 15, 2012 an article just written by Fuentes appeared in *Reforma* that the day before concentrated on the election of Francois Hollande as the new President of France. Fuentes had passionately stated that he had just finished the book which will be published in 2012, on Friedrich Nietzsche, entitled *Fernando en su balcón*, which evokes a dialogue between the narrator and Friedrich Nietzsche, and was beginning another, *El baile de centenario*.

Fuentes died with his boots on—like the dashing Errol Flynn who portrayed the still highly controversial North American General George Armstrong Custer in *They Died with Their Boots On*. The Hollywood film idealizes Custer as a dashing, gallant but doomed figure. The role of General

Winfield Scott is played by the distinguished Hollywood actor whom Fuentes as we have seen, so often indentified with and to whom Fuentes dedicated his foremost cinematic narrative, *Hydra Head*. Sydney Greenstreet/Anthony Quinn portrays Crazy Horse and Custer's beautiful wife is portrayed by Olivia De Havilland. The character created by Fuentes who died with his boots on, both historically and in Fuentes's fictional vision, is the curmudgeon, the acerbic journalist and short story writer Ambrose Bierce, author of the scathing *The Devil's Dictionary*. Bierce is portrayed by Gregory Peck in the film version of *The Old Gringo*. The historical Bierce a veteran of combat in the Civil War in the United States, who fought in the battles of Chicamagua and wished to die in his bed but in his seventies left the United States to join the Revolutionary forces of Francisco Villa—and to find death in war, either in battle or perhaps even executed by his new commander Pancho Villa for insubordination.

It is almost as if Fuentes, who knew that as a result of a major operation, a quintuple bypass that he had experienced in the 1980's—a bypass that generally does not last for more than fifteen years before needing to be done again—that he was going to die, and decided that instead of succumbing to an invalid status and prolonging his life by withdrawing to a rest home was going to live life fully, even spectacularly which he did, not decelerating but even increasing the pace of his activities as he entered the fateful decade of his eighties, even appearing on the cover of AARP/*Viva* magazine, the journal of the American Association of Retired People—not to extol retirement but to decry it! Fuentes affirmed defiantly “You have to work until the very end,” as he fully displayed his Calvinistic work ethic, of which he was so proud. Fuentes throughout his brilliant career which spanned six decades thrived on public attention and everywhere he spoke, at University campuses, at the Guadalajara Book Fair, receiving one of his myriad prizes

—the awards that were incessantly heaped upon him but that sadly, could not compensate for the Grand Prize that he so avidly sought and almost received but was never awarded—the Nobel Prize in Literature, which was bestowed on two of his fellow Latin American Boom Authors—the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez in 1982 and the outstanding Peruvian novelist and short story writer Mario Vargas Llosa in 2010, as well as to Fuentes’s mentor Octavio Paz (1990).

With his elegantly and impeccably groomed appearance, his animal vitality, his *savoir faire*, his patrician stance and engaging manners, including the ever present glint in his gaze, his volcanic flow of thoughts on world politics, including initiating a querelle on Peña Nieto, whom Fuentes undoubtedly knew was going to be elected as the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) candidate to be President of Mexico in July of 2012. Fuentes was for decades every bit the Hollywood celebrity, and he reveled in his fame, celebrated not only in Mexico but throughout Latin America and many times provoked controversy, fully enjoying the subsequent brouhaha, which only increased his fame and fortune, and stating fiercely that he has his critics for breakfast! Fuentes received the prestigious Cervantes Prize awarded by King Juan Carlos of Spain and the Príncipe de Asturias Prize in celebration of his stunning literary achievements. He died with his boots on, ready and very eager to plunge into new travels, new writings, to meet new screen stars and political dignitaries from around the world. In one of his many lectures, this one in London, when he was asked a pointed question about when he would stop writing by a young Mexican foreign exchange student, the normally unflappable Fuentes bristled and launched a withering rebuttal to his impertinent questioner, “And you, sir, when will you stop breathing?” Just as for Alfred Hitchcock films meant everything and constituted the very essence of his life, so too has Fuentes stated unabashedly in

his cinematic novel *Diana o la cazadora solitaria* that everything in his life—politics, family, friends, love itself is subordinate to his art—so much so that a brief two month affair with a Hollywood blonde goddess, Joan Seberg served Fuentes as fodder for his most autobiographical and one of his most mystifying narratives, chronicling the love affair and the tumultuous 1960's which culminated in Mexico with the tragic events of October 1968—the sanguinary conflict at Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, in which five hundred students and their supporters and even passersby were gunned down. That Fuentes was in Paris celebrating the peaceful May Day demonstrations during the tragic events in Mexico and was even warned by his wife not to return to his homeland, left Fuentes riddled with guilt that compelled him to write several narratives dealing with the tragic events of 1968, including his complement to *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* the feminist epic *Los años con Laura Díaz*.

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1. For an extensive examination of the unique way that Fuentes incorporates these films, and *Dark Passage* a third film starring the great Humphrey Bogart, consult Lanin A. Gyurko, *Magic Lens: The Transformation of the Visual Arts in the Narrative World of Carlos Fuentes*.
2. For an extensive examination of the impact of two of Billy Wilder's greatest films, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Fedora* (1978) on Fuentes's literary art, consult Lanin A. Gyurko, *The Shattered Screen: Myth and Demythification in the Art of Carlos Fuentes and Billy Wilder* (New Orleans, University Press of the South, 2009) 450 pp.
3. For an extensive examination of the extraordinary thematic and stylistic influence of four of Hitchcock's greatest films, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *The Birds*, on Fuentes's open, intricate, and highly eclectic narratives, consult Lanin A. Gyurko, *Spellbound: Alfred Hitchcock and Carlos Fuentes* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2012). 450 pp.