Thirteen

Library #M-48
Show # 522

**WNET/Thirteen:** 356 West 58th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019
**Transcripts:** Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101
**Press contact:** Sara Reitz (212) 560-2039

FILE COPY

# Bill Moyers' Journal

## The Many Worlds of Carlos Fuentes — Part 2

Executive Producer ..... JOAN KONNER
Executive Editor ..... BILL MOYERS
Producer ..... BETSY McCARTHY

*Funding for this program is provided by this station and other Public Television Stations and by grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Ford Foundation, and Weyerhaeuser Company.*

WNET/Thirteen

PBS Air Date: July 3, 1980

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
COPYRIGHT © 1980 BY EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING CORPORATION. THIS TRANSCRIPT MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED IN WHOLE OR IN PART BY MIMEOGRAPH OR ANY OTHER MEANS, WITHOUT PERMISSION.

**TRANSCRIPT CHARGES:**
One to ten copies, $2.00 each; additional copies, $1.00 each. Be sure to indicate air date and subject or participants. Send order with payment to Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101. All orders must be prepaid. Make checks payable to Bill Moyers' Journal. PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH OR STAMPS.

CANADIAN VIEWERS: Canadian checks are not acceptable due to excessive bank clearance charges. Please send U.S. funds. Thank you.

# The Many Worlds of Carlos Fuentes — Part 2

© Copyright 1980, Educational Broadcasting Corporation

*[Tease]*

**BILL MOYERS:** I'm Bill Moyers. Two weeks ago at this hour, I began a conversation with the Mexican novelist and diplomat, Carlos Fuentes, who possesses one of the liveliest minds I've ever encountered. We touched on many subjects in that hour, but I was exasperated at its conclusion, because there was yet so much to cover with this man whose life and ideas transcend many worlds. So, tonight I return with Carlos Fuentes to continue our discussion. If it seems unusual to give two hours of television merely to talking with one man, and one not well known in this country at that, perhaps it's because in a mass society whose media are directed chiefly at selling consumer goods, we forget how powerful and exciting ideas can be, even ideas we don't agree with. In a time when the United States must deal with scores of small nations it once could dominate, and no longer can, it's all the more important, or so it seems to me, to hear from a man who literally and spiritually moves easily through those intersections of the world where the ideas of many cultures meet, from East and West, North and South. Such a man is Carlos Fuentes.

*[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]*

**MOYERS:** It has been said that to be a 20th Century Mexican is to be a contemporary of all men. And that goes a long way toward explaining why Carlos Fuentes, so thoroughly a son of Mexico, is at home almost everywhere, including the campus of Princeton University, near which he lives while in the United States. Descended from coffee planters, merchants and bankers, Fuentes, the son of a Mexican diplomat, spent his early years in Washington, D.C. and South America, growing up between two cultures. After studying law in Mexico and Geneva, and teaching himself French by reading Balzac with a dictionary, he became a diplomat himself, his last post as Mexico's ambassador to France. But he had started writing when he was 13, and it would be in literature that he would gain international acclaim. His first novel, *Where the Air is Clear,* was published in 1958, followed a year later by *The Good Conscience*. And then, in 1962, by *The Death of Artemio Cruz,* a stunning tale of revolutionary idealism and decay in modern Mexico. *Terra Nostra,* his most ambitious work, is a panoramic vision of Spanish culture and human nature. To the left politically, Fuentes has criticized both the Soviet Union and the United States for their foreign policies among the Third World nations. On several occasions, Fuentes has been denied a visa to enter this country, and remains officially an undesirable alien. But it's hard to pin labels, political or intellectual, on Carlos Fuentes. Novelist, essayist, playwright, diplomat, teacher, he prefers to be known as simply a *cuentista,* storyteller. We talked at his home in Princeton, among other things about the enormous flood of people who have been trying to escape Fidel Castro's Cuba.

*[Interior, Fuentes' home, Princeton, New Jersey]*

**CARLOS FUENTES:** For those émigrés from revolutions we know — now, this happens 20 years after the revolution — I think there is a basic choice which people want to avoid. It's a very difficult and tragic choice. It is the choice between justice and freedom. What happens in the 20th Century view, is that justice and freedom used to be equated. And they no longer are. I think the first man who saw this was Dostoevski. Ivan Karamazov is the first man who says, 'If it comes to a choice between freedom and justice, I am on the side of justice against freedom.' So, freedom and justice are not the same thing any more. There is divorce. They divorced themselves. In— sometimes in process, such as the Cuban revolutionary process, this division becomes tremendously acute. I think the society there has evolved toward certain forms of justice, yes— the distribution of wealth, the things we've been talking about a while ago, but it has denied the freedom. And specially for some people in the revolution, the freedom for consumption, to elect, to have their choice, to consume. The things are not there. In a way sometimes, I don't try to shortcut across the disastrous failings of the economy in Cuba. Simply, there's another fact that many things which used to be accumulated in Havana are now distributed to the countryside, and fishing ports all over, and more people get to eat than 20 years ago. But the people who had more have less. This creates a problem of choice. Do I want this justice, or do I prefer freedom? And that freedom has been denied through the creation of totalitarian vigilance communes, so the life is difficult, and you sometimes say to yourself, 'How tremendous, that many of these people

should want to go to a poor country like Peru.' Which is one of the most dirt-poor countries in the Western Hemisphere. There are dramatic choices there. There are dramatic choices of which it is very difficult to speak, I think, if you are not a Cuban. I see this in the drama of many of my friends, writers, who have gone out of Cuba, who live here, who want to be reunited with their relatives, with their friends, who want to bring them over. But let me tell you something else. I think you are going to have 200 million people at your doorsteps by the end of the century. Everybody will want to come into the United States, not only the Cubans, but the Haitians, and maybe the Dominicans, and the Mexicans, and the Central Americans, and Nicaraguans, and the Colombians, if we do not achieve some sort of political and economic role to solve the great problems of underdevelopment.

**MOYERS:** You mean, they will want to come here because they will still see a good life?

**FUENTES:** Yes, they will say, it's the only country to go to, and besides, as we see on television programs all the day, it said 'the United States is bounty, freedom, you have everything you want.' You know, a thing that precipitated the flight of all these Cubans is the visit of the American-based Cubans who were admitted back, as you know. A few months ago, they visited, and they talked about television sets, and they talked about refrigerators and cars, and this precipitated the exodus as well. But this foreshadows a tremendous problem you might have, with all the Third World wanting to get into the United States if the problems are not solved in our countries, you see.

**MOYERS:** What is the role of oil production going to mean to all this in Mexico?

**FUENTES:** The president of Mexico, López Portillo, said a historical utterance a few years ago. He said, for the first time in its life, Mexico is a financially independent country. Now, you realize what this means for a nation that has been invaded, mutilated, insulted, pressured, menaced, because it could not pay its debts? Know that in 1838, we had something called the Pastry War. There was an insurrection in Mexico City, and the pastry shop of a French baker, called Monsieur Ramatelle, was destroyed by the mob. So, he asked for the military intervention of France, and France sent warships to Vera Cruz, bombarded Vera Cruz, occupied Vera Cruz, in order to protect the pastry maker, because Mexico could not pay back, the country was so poor at the time. Mexico was invaded by Napoleon III, Maximilian was put on the throne because Juarez declared a moratorium on the foreign debt. Now, suddenly we have money, eh, we have recieved from oil exportations. What are we going to do with it? It is a decisive thing for the Mexican state, this state which has been struggling from the times of Juarez to show its viability, and now suddenly it's rich. And if it doesn't do the job properly, it means it commits hara-kiri. It is the last chance it has. If it doesn't do things well, the military will say, 'You are— Now we have money, but you don't know how to administrate.' Or the private sector will say, 'Get out of the place. I know how to do business. I know how to use money. You don't.' Many things could happen. I don't think the Mexican state will commit suicide, and I'm very glad to see that the central orientation of the new global plan for development of Mexico, which has just been published, underlines that Mexico's grave, grave problems were, as I've always thought, is the rural sector. A decision was taken, you see, 1965, to forget the rural economy in favor of the industrialization and in favor of great agro-industries for exportation— tomatoes, cotton, etc. The result has been hunger. The result has been that Mexico is not producing enough to feed itself. And at the rate we are going, by the end of the century, Mexico will be spending all the money it receives from the exportation of oil in importing foodstuffs. Now, this would be disaster. So, I'm glad to see that in the global plan for the government of which I'm talking, 25 percent of the earnings from oil go to the rural sector of the economy and to the production of food.

**MOYERS:** But one only has to read your novels to get a view of reality which, if it prevails, that is, that great opportunities like this are often squandered by the ruling class in the interest of preserving its own status quo, and the poor are left out. If that view of reality prevails, that is expressed in Carlos Fuentes's novel, this opportunity will be lost.

**FUENTES:** And then, my country will be lost, and the Mexican state will be lost, and I don't think the Mexican ruling classes want to commit suicide. Besides, let me tell you something. After 1968, Mexico went into a deep crisis. The whole system I described in *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *Where the Air is Clear* came into a full crisis in the year 1968 with an eruption of insurrection from the middle class, specially from the middle class students, against the status quo. The system was caught unawares. It did not have political responses to what was a political challenge, so it murdered the students— 300, 400 were killed in the square of the Three Cultures, Plata Volko, in Mexico City on October the 2nd, right before the Olympic games. That developed tremendous crisis in the country.

The government of Luis Echeverria, since 1970 to 1976, tried to make the system much more flexible and to have political responses to the new challenge from the Mexican middle class without resorting to violence, seeing to it that Mexico would not fall into the chasm of repression, as countries of the hemisphere — Chile, Argentina, Uruguay — have done. This is all taking place within a new context, which is not that of my novels. The people who are now the majority of Mexicans were not even born when I wrote my novels, Bill. They were not around. And more than 50 percent of the country is today under 25 years old. There's a new conscience which did not exist before 1968. There are new pressures on the government. There are new political parties. I'm telling you, it's a different situation.

**MOYERS:** How do two cultures, the Third World culture which has this pronounced sense of tragedy you have described, a sense of failure, of defeat — your father's imaginary country you have talked about — how does that culture and our culture, the West, which thrives on optimism, success, triumph, the future, how do they ever meet in peace and make their way with one another?

**FUENTES:** Well, to begin with, I think Mexico is part of the West. It is an eccentric part of the West, but it is part of the West. You cannot understand Mexico without many of the Western values. As it was founded by Spain, we speak Spanish. The ideas that arrived with the conquest are the ideas of the Renaissance, even the utopian ideas of Sir Thomas More and Machiavelli and Erasmus, they're all there. And the ship of fools that comes after the ship of the *conquistadores*. So, we're an eccentric branch of the West. It's the West with Indian inflections. We have an Indian culture, but other parts of the hemisphere have black inflections. We are a polycultural nation. We are a polycultural nation. This is the thing to keep in mind when we deal with each other, that Mexico is made of many living cultures, many cultures that the United States would have condemned to the past, are living in Mexico. The Indian culture is very much alive. The culture of the Renaissance is very much alive. And they're alive because they feel they have not had their full opportunity. These things are sacrificed, I think, in the United States. You feel, 'Well, this has had its opportunity, it's assimilated, we can go forward.' Same thing happens in France or in England. Mexico is struggling to find still its identity, and therefore it feels it must keep many things of the past alive, many cultural options open. Because, you see, in Latin America we have been imitating the West since independence, since the early 19th Century, and now we're suddenly at the gates of progress, at the gates of the great values of the West, when these values are breaking up in the very centers where they originated, which is a great irony for our historical lives. Maybe we should look around and find what can we create with all these values, these polycultural values we have, in order to create our own model of progress, not a copy of the American model, not a copy of the Soviet model, but our own model.

**MOYERS:** What should we understand about Mexico? We share a 2,000-mile-long border with you. In fact, it's the border between the United States and the Third World, for that matter. But what should we understand about Mexico?

**FUENTES:** You just said it. It is the only border between the United States and the Third World. It is the border between the United States and the whole of Latin America. And it is the only border between a highly industrialized and a developing nation. The thing to understand is what I have just said, that Mexico is a polycultural nation. That the origins of the two countries are so different, of the two civilizations are so very different, that you are the children of the Protestant reform which is based on thrift — capitalism is thrift — and we are the children of the Counter-Reformation, of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which is based on splurging, on spending what you don't have, and creating magnificent baroque churches full of gold when the village is dying. And showing that you have more than the others, and having this largesse, and being the antithesis of capitalism. In a way, it is understanding, it is understanding that we believe in the written word, in written laws that we're the descendants of Rome and of Spain, and that nothing exists unless it is written. The law has no existence unless it is written. Zapata knew this, and López Portillo knows this. You depend very much on the British common law, the Constitutional law. The juristic visions of the two nations are very different. We are very orthodox with a center in Saint Augustine. And the orthodoxy— there must be intermediaries between man and God, between man and the hierarchy. You're descendants of the Pelagian heretics. You can directly communicate with God because the grace of God is so abundant. We have very different problems. Imagine, the United States — what a problem — could you transform Pocahontas into the Virgin of Guadalupe? It's something we did. But the problem for us— Could we transform Moctezuma into a member of the Kennedy dynasty? The countries are different, and they can only make a supreme effort to identify both their cultures. First of all, I think it's a first step for understanding between Mexico and the

United States, is the understanding, the identification of the cultures, and then the identification of the national interests within these cultures. It has to be understood on the American part, that since the Juarez revolution of 1854, Mexico is a country that has been desperately looking for an identity and desperately trying to create a national state, a viable national state. This, which the French have done, which the English have done, which you have surpassed — because I think your country is more than a nation state, it's a sort of strange universe which I am unable to understand fully, although I read your books — and that this determines many of the Mexican attitudes. That we do want to reach the level of the national state, that we do want to affirm our right to have a national center of decisions to plan our political and economic and social and cultural life, and that this has to be respected. As I once said, Mexico is more than an oil well, it is a nation, it is a civilization. This is the thing to respect and understand in order to negotiate with us.

**MOYERS:** What's the old question that Mexicans often ask themselves, 'How can people so—

**FUENTES:** Oh, this is something Porfirio Diaz, the old dictator, said, 'Poor Mexico, so far from God and so near to the United States.' Well, now we're not far from God because the Pope has visited us. Yes?

**MOYERS:** What should Mexico try to understand about the United States? For example, if you were writing a story for your people about the United States today, as you have done about your people, what would you say? What kind of story would it be?

**FUENTES:** Ah! Listen. There many things that we must understand about the United States, and those are the things we have to learn from them, because we stress all the bad influences that come through television, and popular culture, and economic dependency and exploitation of our resources. And so many things the United States does which affect our lives, which corrupt our lives in Mexico. At the same time I think there are great things that should be learned from the United States. I think we should learn one thing on a pragmatical basis— it has been very difficult for the countries of the Third World to understand this, Bill. And it is that there are many power centers in this country, that power is diffused in the United States, and that if you want to make your case, if you want to make your policy in the United States, you have to be very agile, and you have to deal not only with the State Department and the White House, but with Congress, but with the media, and with private business, and with local powers in California, in Texas, and with the universities. That it is a country of immensely diffused power. So, for a country like Mexico which is right next door to the United States, this creates a tremendous challenge. We have to structure our diplomacy in order to meet this American challenge, the challenge of immense diversification, as seen from a country that is a highly centralized country. Mexico is a profoundly centralized country. The Aztecs had a centralized vertical regime, and the Spaniards just came and created an identical regime on top of the regime they had— on top of the culture they had vanquished. We have to understand that this country, the United States, is not an apocalyptic-minded country.

**MOYERS:** What do you mean?

**FUENTES:** I mean by that that *we* are very apocalyptic-minded, and we want to see change overnight. Many of the left wing movements in Mexico failed because they want immediate change. Either you have socialism tomorrow, or it's not worthwhile. The United States offers a great lesson, I think, of perseverance to bring about change. Perseverance, political perseverance. When one sees the great progress made by the Civil Rights movement over the past 20 years, it is a product of immense political perseverance, of knowing that you win little battles every day in order to sum a big battle 10 or 20 years afterwards. These are very good things in the United States that I think we should appreciate and understand.

**MOYERS:** It is sometimes hard, as I know you are aware, for the United States, even with generosity in its mind, to understand the way it is either hated or attacked in the Third World. Just the other day, one of your leading Mexican politicians condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the holding of hostages by Iran, and was roundly attacked by Mexican newspapers and by leftists in Mexico for being servile to the United States. And sometimes I wonder if Third World resentment of the United States isn't an excuse for the absence of hard decisions on the part of Third World countries. To what extent is that a real problem?

**FUENTES:** No, no. No, I think— No, it is a problem, it is a real problem, because, in effect, the United States has intervened in many of our countries—

**MOYERS:** From the halls of Moctezuma to the shores of Tripoli?

**FUENTES:** From the halls of Moctezuma to the shores of Tripoli, has exploited our countries, has dismembered our countries, sometimes. It has occupied them. It has corrupted the political and social process in many of our nations, in Chile, Guatemala. We've mentioned this in our talk. But I think that a moment is coming in which— Okay, it's not good to have historical amnesia and the Iranians don't have historical amnesia, certainly, but I think also that serious negotiations should finally take place. I mean, if the U.S. wants to have a Third World policy, it must manifest itself and show political will in that sense, and come to the table with the responsible countries of the Third World, and with the new perception I think the United States should have by now, that the world is not made in its image, and that its values are not the universal values of the world, and seriously discuss what can be done from a pragmatical point of view in order to order this immense chaos which we're living— in which we're living and which can drown both the United States and the Third World. Inflation can be controlled through cooperation with the Third World, through recycling of petrodollars, through a decision of the United States to sit down and talk about monetary reform, monetary stability, the debt of the Third World countries, what to do with $700 billion dollars which are sloshing around with no productive basis, what Andrew Young calls 'the engines of inflation' — this can only be solved if the United States has a Third World policy. If it forgets the Moynihan, Irish, bully-boy tactics that have been employed and even the very sad declarations by Mr. Vanden Heuvel that the Third World should be punished for not going far enough in the Afghanistan situation. How can we, if you don't let us?

**MOYERS:** What do you mean, we don't let you?

**FUENTES:** Yes, I think there was an immense repudiation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was felt to be an insult and an aggression against all the Third World countries and all the nonaligned countries, and this attitude was shown in the United Nations by the vote of an immense majority, 120 nations against the Soviet Union. This was something which was fathered by Mexico and the Philippines in the General Assembly. What we were saying is, let us carry the ball in this. We are the ones that are directly offended by what the Soviet Union has done. The United States has no right to condemn anybody on moral or juristic grounds about intervention. They simply cannot do that. So, the United States decided nevertheless to use this in its— to resuscitate, in a way, attitudes of the past and to challenge the Soviet Union and to fritter away the opposition in the Third World through very secondary firecracker attitudes — I call them firecracker attitudes because once you light a firecracker, you can't light it again. Such as the Olympic boycott. It becomes a very secondary matter if you have to decide whether we go to the Olympics or not. Well, we go to the Olympics. Why not?

**MOYERS:** The issue is not boycott—

**FUENTES:** The issue is not there. The issue was the menace against the independence of the countries in the Third World. This has been now forgotten. And it has been forgotten, I think, because of the erroneous policy of the United States.

**MOYERS:** Are you saying that we trivialized the invasion by transferring attention to the boycott?

**FUENTES:** I think so. I think so. It's a great pity, you see. Sometimes I think, well, the United States doesn't have a foreign policy. Maybe it has Barbara Walters, but it doesn't have a foreign policy.

**MOYERS:** What about the tide of Mexican immigrants flooding across that border we discussed? What are we to make of that?

**FUENTES:** You are to make many things of this. First, you're to make of it that it is basically a Mexican problem. There is, rather, the Mexican problem. This is something— I as a Mexican assume immediately, and it is the problem that we have of offering our people employ, of creating conditions whereby our people can be more fully employed in the future, so that less and less will be attracted to cross the frontier and work in the United States. Is this being done? I think it is. I think it is. I think the great wealth from petroleum exportations from Mexico will permit us to change our economic and social structure over the next 20 years. There's now a plan which if put into effect, will transform the structure of the Mexican rural world. Then there is the American problem, which is the right you have to decide on what conditions people come into your country. This is a sovereign right which I think nobody can deny you. But then come the problems which are problems of another nature, and which immediately bring the joint

perspective into being. Does the American economy need, or does it not need, the Mexican workers? What would happen to the American economy if the Mexican workers were kept out? These are workers. They are not criminals. They have a right to be respected. Their human rights should be respected. They cannot be treated with abuse, even to the extent of murder, as they sometimes are by the border authorities. I have the impression, and this is what our common friend, John Kenneth Galbraith says in his book on *The Nature of Mass Poverty*, that immigration has never hurt anyone. He recalls the case of Sweden, of Ireland, of Germany, in the 19th Century where immigration helped both the country from where the immigrants came and the country to which they came. The Swedes solved the problem of Sweden and the problem of the United States. Today, the southern tier of Europe helps the northern tier of Europe through immigrant labor. Immigrant labor is a fact of life today. What should we do about it? Should we recognize that these workers are helpful to the economy? I understand it that you will need 20 million immigrant workers in the next 20 years in order to have an economic development of 3.5 percent a year in this country. At the same time, there might be less and less immigrants because of development in Mexico. These are people, as you know, who are not permanent laborers. They come and go. Out of every eight Mexican indocumented workers that come to this country, seven go back. Yet, all of them, at least 77 or 78 percent of them, pay federal income tax and pay social security. Only four percent of them have children in this country, and only four percent of them receive welfare benefits.

**MOYERS:** Is it possible that—

**FUENTES:** You must remember this.

**MOYERS:** Is it possible that — when I drive from Austin, Texas to Brownsville, Texas down through the valley where so many of the Mexican workers are living at the moment — I recall that Mexico, as you yourself have just said, rose from the Spanish and Indian cultures, and I'm wondering if there isn't a possibility, or is this just simply romantic, that a new culture born of Mexico and the United States will rise in that tier of the United States along that border.

**FUENTES:** No, I think a culture is already being born, the Chicano culture. There is a literature written by Chicanos. I've just been to Los Angeles a few weeks ago, and they're writing books. Sometimes they write them in Spanish, sometimes they write them in English, sometimes they write them in Spanglish. So, something is being born. But the fact remains, Bill, that for the first time your melting pot faces this challenge, that in the past, the Italians, the Irish, the Swede, the Jews, all became part of the central current of United States culture rather easily, because the old culture was left on the other side of the ocean, it was very far away. Here you have for the first time — and this is not only the case of Mexicans, but of Puerto Ricans, of Cubans — a culture which is right next door. Which is very strong. The sense of family, and religion, of music, of individualities— extremely strong, and it is right there. It is a challenge to the melting pot. But I think it's a good challenge, because of what we've been talking about, almost as a theme of our talk, and it is that a great power like the United States, if it is to save itself and save the world, it certainly has to understand the other. And what better understanding of the other, then of this other, who is working in your economy and bringing his own cultural values to your very territory, to your own homes, to your own schools.

**MOYERS:** Speaking of aliens, do think our definition of 'undesirable alien' has changed since you were three times in the 1960s denied entry here because you were an undesirable alien? Or have you changed, or what?

**FUENTES:** No, no, no. What has changed is the world situation. The law has not changed. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 — whenever it is, '54 — is always the same. It is there, and it has not changed, and it is an open contradiction that we have to Basket III of the Helsinki Agreements.

**MOYERS:** Which allows—

**FUENTES:** Which establishes that the signing parties will promote the free flow of people and information, persons and information, for cultural purposes. You denounce the Russians for not respecting Basket III of Helsinki. But you yourselves have a law written to the books, a statutory law, the McCarran-Walter Act, which also creates an immense obstacle for the free movement of persons and ideas, and which is, I think, the greatest impediment to good cultural relations between the United States and Latin America.

**MOYERS:** Are you classified as an undesirable alien right now, still?

**FUENTES:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. My constitution is the same as it was in 1959 or '60 when I was first classified.

**MOYERS:** How is it you're here?

**FUENTES:** I got a waiver. I got a waiver, because it seems that of the thousands — let's say, for the sake of a working number, 18,000 cases — of undesirable aliens who apply for visas, and then the visas are denied. How many visas are granted through waivers — 18,000 again. It means that the bureaucracy works twice. It shuffles papers twice. It wastes the taxpayer's money twice. But finally there are waivers given because the Cold War is over, because there are more enlightened people at the State Department and the Justic Department. I once got into this country, let me tell you, in a very funny way. George Ball tells this— No, Arthur Schlesinger tells this story in his biography of Robert Kennedy. How I was an undesirable alien who could not come, and how Robert Kennedy and George Ball waited for Dean Rusk to go on a vacation in order to get me into the United States, but limited to five days and the island of Manhattan.

**MOYERS:** And you came under those circumstances?

**FUENTES:** I came—

**MOYERS:** Stealthily, in a way.

**FUENTES:** I came because a book of mine was coming out, and I was tailed all the time. Norman Mailer took his house, so that we would avoid the tail — we called him Humphrey, he was dressed like Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca* — but he was very, very pertinacious. He always popped up in bars, in hotels, everywhere he was. It's a comedy, really.

**MOYERS:** What do you think still makes you by definition undesirable? I mean, you're— certainly you're a heretic. Writers are supposed to invent heresy—

**FUENTES:** Writers— there are no greater heretics than the ones you have in your own country, right?

**MOYERS:** You don't— That's right. You don't strike me as a dangerous ideologue.

**FUENTES:** No, I don't put bombs in post offices. I—

**MOYERS:** You put bombs *[touching a Fuentes novel on the desk]* in here.

**FUENTES:** I do not intend to kill the president of the United States, which is one of the things asked of you in the formulas 'Do you intend to kill the president of the United States?' And I'm not a drug addict or a prostitute.

**MOYERS:** Just a writer.

**FUENTES:** Just a writer. Just a writer. Is that so dangerous? Maybe it is. Maybe they are right.

**MOYERS:** When my wife and I went to Edinburgh, Scotland, to study back in 1956, we had to go register at the police department. The sign said, 'Dangerous drugs, weapons and aliens.' And I began to wonder about this.

**FUENTES:** You're right, you're right.

**MOYERS:** Do you find this should be changed?

**FUENTES:** I think people who are the head of the judiciary committees in the House and in the Senate, namely Elizabeth Holtzman and Edward Kennedy, should come to grips with this problem, because it is very bad for your image. Very, very bad.

**MOYERS:** What did Artemio Cruz mean when he said, 'The line of life lies between paralysis and frenzy.'?

**FUENTES:** *[Laughs]* It means, listen — that would be almost a Hitchcockian affirmation on the part of Artemio Cruz. I have always admired so much in Hitchcock the way he takes us to the extremes, because he presents the middle. He presents a totally normal middle-class neighborhood, where Teresa Wright lives with her father and mother and suddenly Joe Cotten arrives, and drives it open and bursts it and goes to the extremes. Yes, the line of life is this middle ground, and only being it— being in it, can we savor the extremes of action or of contemplation, if you wish, but you have to be there. If you always live in the extreme of paralysis, as Artemio Cruz calls it, which would

be the extreme of contemplation, or in the extreme of frenzy, that is, the extreme of action, you would think that is the rule, and then you would not savor the extremes. That's just what I mean.

**MOYERS:** Someone said of you, 'Carlos Fuentes meets us in America half way. He is like the prophet in the wilderness asking, where are the ideals for which we fought?' Well, where are they?

**FUENTES:** They are in our constant re-posing of the questions. Not in the reaffirmation of the ideas, but in our capacity to ask the questions, all the time. Which I think is a function of a sentient individual, living in a society, to make questions, not to have ready answers. I don't have ready answers, I hope, for anything. But I am trying to pose questions to myself, and that's why I write— I write books. And I don't know this quote, but I hope also that I played a minimal role of 'link' between certain cultures in which I move. Working in your country from time to time, working with young people at universities, in the campuses, meeting people, the media intellectuals like yourself, I think offers me the opportunity to learn from you, but also perhaps I can say something about my own culture and we can establish links. I am terribly afraid of cultures that do not introduce themselves to each other, that stay like the proverbial Englishman on the desert island— 'We have not been introduced,' as my daughter said to you when you came in, my little five-year-old daughter. And then, we will end in cannibalism of some sort. We must introduce ourselves to each other, and I think this is a precise function that writers, universities, the media, have in our world.

**MOYERS:** Where is God in this scheme, your scheme?

**FUENTES:** God— This novel *Terra Nostra* is about God. It is about men who believe themselves to be God. But probably God also thought he was something else. There's a whitewashing here of the ancestor figure. Consequently, it's a book about the Hapsburg dynasty in Spain, Terra Nostra, which is also a book about fathers and mothers and the ancestry we have in us, up to the last ancestry which is God. And it is a novel where the ancestry tries to whitewash the sins of the father, and the sons are paralyzed— It is a very complex novel, I can't go into it too much. But finally, it hearkens back to the whitewashing process whereby God whitewashes himself and disappears into oblivion, and leaves us with history in our hands. In a way, this is the presence of God there. Are you asking me about religion in the world today, in Mexico—?

**MOYERS:** No, no, no. I asked you where is God in your scheme of things, and you answered by describing God in the novel, and then you offered to talk about God in Mexico. Where is God in your own personal scheme of things?

**FUENTES:** I came out of a church, the Catholic Church. I think, in a way, I came near to many— I was attracted to many left-wing positions out of the need for a church. Then, I said, 'No, no, no, my rebellion is against hierarchy, against any kind of church.' There's a great phrase by Pascal. He says, 'You would not search for me if you had not found me.' I think it is a phrase which illuminates the wonderful Christian experience in literature, in writers such as Graham Greene, and Francois Mauriac, and Bernardes, in our own century. I'm impressed when Camus says that you can also revolt into the sacred, into religion, not only to get out of it, but to re-enter the sacred. We're witnessing a rebirth of the sacred all over the world. It is now clear that when we speak of cultures and a revolt of the cultures, we cannot put aside the strong religious component of many of these cultures. Especially right now, Islam is evident. And Latin American— whatever changes will come about in Latin America, will have also a strong religious component. So, one has to rethink all these things, and for me, in the scheme, is— can I revolt into the sacred. Can by an act of revolt, of personal revolt, of personal doubt, of doubt, can I go into a faith. I ask myself this. The greatest Catholic novelist is the Cuban novelist, Jose Lezarud Lima, who died a few months— years ago. The author of *Paradiso*, a brilliant, Proustian, difficult, magnificent novel. It's like a great baroque tree. And he quotes the father of the church, Tertulian by saying this is the phrase of the Christian, this is the phrase of the believer: 'I believe in it because it is impossible.' You have to meet something which you find radically but valuably impossible, and then believe in it, in order to have a religious temperament. I don't whether I have that temperament, you see.

**MOYERS:** In this conversation, you have used the words 'hope' and 'renewal' and other rather confident terms about the human experience, and yet there is that— there is that stunning description in *Terra Nostra*. This is a book that goes all the way back to the Judea of Roman days, and then goes forward with its eerie vision of the future in 1999, which is not very far away, not very far away, when you talk about when in 1999— '12 o'clock did not toll in the church towers of Paris, but a cold sun shone.' And my question is, is that our destiny as you see it, a chill and empty void, without warmth, love or mercy?

**FUENTES:** Our destiny is a destiny of contradictions, a dialectical destiny. At the same that this chill takes place in Paris and the city is dying, as all the cities in the world are dying, and there are medieval processions of flagellants in the streets, and whatnot, at the same time, a couple is recreating itself. A couple is recreating itself in a bed in Paris, there. They are the protagonists. And this couple is becoming one. I was reading Dante when I was writing this book, because I was living in the same street in Paris where — the rue de Biarou — where Dante started writing *The Divine Comedy*. Imagine. So, I said, now is the time to read *The Divine Comedy* seriously. And there was this beautiful phrase that says, 'Arano uno in due e due in uno' — 'One in two, and two in one' — which is the great idea of the original unity. The original unity. So, there is the two, but there is also the warmth of a total unity, taken to an extreme which is terrible in this book, because this man, as he makes love to the woman, becomes a woman, and the woman becomes the man. They become one being that can then fecund itself, and start the human race all over again. Yes, I'm saying, we have to rethink things constantly and start all over again constantly, that we are unfinished. And I think the basis of freedom and of writing is this sentiment that things are unfinished. When you think things are perfect and finished, once and for all, which is what the law thinks of itself in a Kafka novel— 'I'm perfect. How dare you? How dare you come and ask for something different? I am perfect. The law has solved everything. You are free, you're independent, you are rich, you are happy, you are beautiful. Why do you come here and protest, Mr. K?' You— when you have— You want to write novels because you have a sense that we are unfinished men and women. There's a title by Lillian Hellman which is very nice, *An Unfinished Woman*, right? And that even if we fail, we must go on shaping our lives, demanding, being defeated, biting the dust, rising from the dust again. Yes, it's hope and it's despair. It's a tragic vision of the world. I think we need a tragic vision, because when we don't have tragedy, we have crime. The absence of tragedy in the modern world has led to crime, has lead to Dachau, has lead to Auschwitz, has led to the Soviet gulag, has led to Guernica and Hiroshima.

**MOYERS:** In the absence of tragedy? I thought it was the presence of evil.

**FUENTES:** No. It is the presence of evil which has taken over because there is an absence of tragedy.

**MOYERS:** What do you mean by the absence of tragedy?

**FUENTES:** I mean that the modern world could not accept— The modern world could not accept tragedy, the very idea of tragedy, because it was based on optimism. The 18th, 19th Century worlds are optimistic worlds. How can there be tragedy if we are going towards a perfect future or rosy future based on the perfectability of man, on the idea of progress, right? Therefore, tragedy is thrown out of the window. And tragedy comes back as evil, as crime. Since you don't have tragedy, you have the opposite of tragedy which is the banality of evil, as Hannah Arendt called it. I mean, good and bad, facing each other. In tragedy, you don't have good and bad facing each other. You have two forces of equal value in conflict with each other. Prometheus and God, Antigone and the tyrant Chreon, are not good and bad. They are equally good. I mean, they are equally valuable, and they are in conflict with each other, and the tragedy derives from the fact that they are in conflict with each other. And that the tragedy is even worse when the conflict is within you, when it is two values within one man fighting each other. Oedipus. Right?

**MOYERS:** Do you still believe in the revolutionary spirit?

**FUENTES:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. I very much believe in the revolutionary spirit. Revolutions are not something that can be drawn out of a hat, a magician's hat, like a rabbit. They happen when they have to happen, when there are a series of circumstances— the United States in 1776, France in 1789, Mexico in 1910, Russia in 1917, Cuba in 1959, Nicaragua in 1979. If these conditions are not there you can not invent them. Nobody can export revolutions. Revolutions are born of very, very deep cultural, individual, psychological, social realities as we are seeing in Iran today. All the great conflicts and contradictions, you see, they really cannot be invented. I seem to be trying to say that revolutions are a part of historical life, that we should not be afraid of them, that, especially in today's world, they bring forth the cultural reality of a country. This happened in my country. I hope that in *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *Where the Air is Clear* that the Mexican revolution meant a renewal of the cultural sources of the country, of its spiritual sources. How Mexico came to know itself in the anguish of revolution. May I tell you a little story? Which is the arrival of the Zapatistas in Mexico City, 1915. Zapata and his peasants arrived in Mexico City, and they occupied the town houses of the aristocracy of the Diaz regime, which had fled the country, had gone away. And there they found for the first time mirrors, you know, enormous, fullbodied mirrors. They spent their time looking at themselves in the mirrors. Said, 'Look, it's you! It's me! It's us!' They'd never seen each other before. There's a

tremendous image of the self-recognition you can find in this social turmoil, which was the Mexican revolution. Mexico has been such an isolated country all its life, you see. The revolution broke down the isolation. The people from the north met the people from the south. These great cavalcades of Pancho Villa, of Zapata, of Obrejhon, meant that that the people knew them, that they learned how the other Mexicans sang and danced and cried and swore and prayed and spoke. The country got to know itself, and getting to know yourself is probably the first basis of any cultural reality.

**MOYERS:** Do you think this in any way bears a resemblance to what is happening in Iran today?

**FUENTES:** Oh, very much, very much. I think this is a profound revolution. That is why it has been so difficult for anybody to pinpoint it, to put an ideological label on it, and then invade it. Because it is basically a very autochthonous revolution, with all the contradictions, and it frightens many people aside because they're different. Well, we should understand the different. The whole purpose of culture is to relate to what is different. To what is strange. Because you either relate to it, or you feel the temptation to exterminate it. If you feel the temptation to exterminate, you're in trouble.

**MOYERS:** If we were to use our imaginations, we Americans, we North Americans, then to try to understand what's happening in Iran, what's happening in Mexico, what's happening in the Third World, well, what would we do?

**FUENTES:** I think you would finally be able to have a policy towards the Third World, which would completely change the picture of international relations in the coming three or four years. Certainly for the 21st Century. And it is indispensable that you achieve a vision of the problems of the Third World, and that you have a policy towards the Third World, which means a general policy but also a particular policy towards Mexico, towards the Palestinian issue, towards Iran, which many, many things, but basically an overall policy in which you can negotiate in favor of yourselves and of the Third World. You are living— We are living in a Gaullist society. All the new nations of the world are Gaullist nations in the world, in a way—

**MOYERS:** Which means?

**FUENTES:** Which means we all want to be apart from the Soviets and apart from you. We want to be independent from both. But finally, but finally, I think that any country in the Third World will admit that it will have to have relations with the West and with the United States, of the sort that it is very difficult to have with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries because of the nature of their economies, because of the failure of their economies, if you wish, because of the limitations. The West has technology, the West has capital. We want these things, but we want them in a way that will respect our cultural physiognomy, our social and political integrity. So, I think the cards are in your hand if you want to use them. The thing is, you don't want to use them. You prefer to create allies for the Soviet Union. This seems to be the principal purpose of American foreign policy.

**MOYERS:** But what do you mean?

**FUENTES:** Let's fabricate an ally for the Soviet Union, quick. I mean, you drove Cuba into the hands of the Soviet Union. You want to drive Nicaragua. And you are even capable of driving Iran into the hands of the Soviet Union. Incredible! I think you are the best allies of the Kremlin.

**MOYERS:** By what failure?

**FUENTES:** By the failure of communication, of understanding, of diplomacy, of understanding that diplomatic identity does not mean approval of another regime. You have this very manic, caen-puritanical attitude of saying, 'No. I will only recognize them if they are my friends and they're good.' Or, 'Maybe they are not good, but they are my friends.' Uh? But diplomatic recognition, I think, does not depend on that. It means, 'Let us deal seriously with any nation in the world independently of its internal regime.'

**MOYERS:** That takes a mature society to do that.

**FUENTES:** Oh, yes.

**MOYERS:** We're not a very mature society. We're adolescents in a way. Two hundred years is not a very long time.

**FUENTES:** No, but it should be— You being a successful society, I insist on that. Other countries like Mexico do have a foreign policy because they've had to go through so much adversity. We've had to go through enormous adversity in our history. And therefore, we've had to create a foreign policy which is a shield and a flexible instrument for our self-defense. Probably that is the problem. But I think it's— there are so many brilliant people in this country and so many brilliant diplomats that could shape policy like this for the future. I know many of them. I hope they are present as the new decade unfolds, this decade that can be the dangerous decade.

**MOYERS:** Finally, and personally, is there anything you long for that you don't have?

**FUENTES:** If I knew that, I don't think I would say it in public, because it's like telling a story, you see. My experience is that if you tell a novel before you write it, it becomes thin air. It never gets written. That there are certain realities which are best kept secret until— internal realities which are best kept secret until they become objective realities.

**MOYERS:** Do you find yourself, Carlos, stretched between two worlds, between Mexico and the United States, between the Third World and the West, between the Latin America of the past and the United States of the future? Do you find yourself stretched like that?

**FUENTES:** Thankfully, thankfully I do. Yes, yes, very much so. I think it is evident in my novels. I am not at peace with myself. I am combatting myself. I am fighting my own paradoxes trying to understand them, trying to express them through literature. And I have no regrets about it. No regrets.

**MOYERS:** You live in an elegant way. You have all the benefits of travel and money and esteem—

**FUENTES:** Don't have property, you see. I don't own anything, but my books.

**MOYERS:** What does that do for you, not owning property?

**FUENTES:** It means that you're not a prisoner of your property. I don't own a car, I don't own a house. I own a few books and a few paintings, which I love. That's all I own. I don't have property.

**MOYERS:** And what's in your mind. I mean, you own what's in your mind, and that's constantly being created.

**FUENTES:** Yes, oh yes, of course.

**MOYERS:** Do you ever become disenchanted with this life of the itinerant inventor, imaginer of worlds and yearn for some cause such as Byron in Greece, fighting for something very specific?

**FUENTES:** No, no, no. Listen. Let us come back to this. And I would like to quote Tom Stoppard, who has this very good thing in *Travesties*. He says, 'If you are a revolutionary, you have no more business being an artist. If you are not an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary.' Whatever I have to do, I have to do through my books. I cannot do it any other way. And I don't know if this is useful or not. Stoppard says another good thing, 'Art does not change society. It is merely changed by society.' What we are doing is being changed by the society. Yes. You are a part of the society, and what you do is this: write books in order to maintain the life of that sense of the incompleteness of the world, of the relativity of things, of the necessity for criticism, of assuring that there will never be a unanimous chorus of obeyance about an issue, about any person of offering this possibility. There is another thing, always. There is something else, always.

**MOYERS** *[voice-over]*: From Princeton, New Jersey, this has been a conversation with Carlos Fuentes. I'm Bill Moyers.

*[Fuentes reading, intercut with various scenes of Mexico]*

**FUENTES** *[reading]*: Remember this country? You remember it It is not one; there are a thousand countries, with a single name. You know that. You will carry with you the red deserts, the hills of prickly pear and maguey, the world of dry cactus, the lava belt of frozen craters, the walls of golden domes and rock thrones, the limestone and sandstone city, the red brick cities, the adobe pueblos, the reed-grass hamlets, the black mud paths, the roads across the drought country, the lips of the sea, the thicketed forgotten coasts, the valleys sweet with wheat and corn, the horse pastures of the north, the lakes of the Bajio, the slender tall forests, the boughs laden with hay, the white peaks, the asphalt

flats, the ports of malaria and whorehouses, the bony skeleton of sisal, the lost rivers hidden in cliff-walled canyons, the tunnels that burrow for gold and silver, the Indians who lack a common tongue: Cora, Yaqui, Huichol, Pima, Seri, Chontal, Tepahuana, Huasteca, Totonaca, Nahua, Maya; the native fife and drum, the group dancing, the guitar and cithern, the head-dresses of plumes, the delicate-boned men of Michoacan, the squat bodies of the men of Tlaxcala, the light eyes of Sinaloa, the white teeth from Chiapas, the *huipiles* of Towantapec, the Veracruz combs, the Mixtec braids, the Tzotzil belts, the rebozos of Santa Maria, the marquetry of Puebla, the glass of Jalisco, the jade of Oaxaca, the ruins of the serpent, of the black head, the great nose, the churches and altar-pieces, the colors and reliefs, the pagan faiths Tonantzintla and Tlacochaguaya, the old names Teotihuacan and Papantla and Tula and Uxmal: you will carry these with you and they are leaden, they are stone heavy for one man: they have never moved and you have them bound to your neck; they weight you down, they have entered your guts, they are your parasites, your amoebas . . . the land of your birth . . .

*[Credits]*

Transcript produced by Journal Graphics, Inc., New York, N.Y.

**OTHER TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME:** #M-27, "Our Times" (commentary on the end of the '70s and arrival of the '80s); #M-28, "The World of David Rockefeller"; #M-29, "What's A Party For" (about Maine politics); #M-30, "A Reporter's Notebook" (about John Anderson and political advertising); #Spec 2/24/80, "The Politics of Regulation" (about the Federal Trade Commission); #M-31, "Barry Commoner: Politics of Energy"; #M-32, "A Conversation with George Bush"; #M-33, "Vietnam Remembered"; #M-34, "The Black Agenda"; #M-35, "The Detroit Model"; #M-36, "Texas Notebook" (about politics Texas-style, and an interview with economics professor Clifton Grubbs, University of Texas); #M-37, "Big Business: Doing Well or Doing Good?"; #M-38, "The MX Debate"; and #M-39, "Voices on Iran" (Part 1); #M-40, "Voices on Iran — Part 2"; #M-41, "A Reporter's Notebook: Money and Politics"; #M-42, "Within Our Power" (includes an interview with author Hazel Henderson); #M-43, "A Conversation with Max Lerner"; #M-44, "1,000,000,000,000 for Defense"; #M-45, "Who Chooses Our President?"; #M-46, "The Many Worlds of Carlos Fuentes" (Part 1); #M-47, "It Isn't Working" (about the automobile and steel industries — a follow-up to "The Detroit Model"); #M-49, "A Conversation with Ronald Reagan" (a modified re-run of last season's show); and #M-50, "A Conversation with Max Lerner — Part 2". For a transcript of any of these shows, send $2 and the number of the show to: Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101.