

My Husband *Salvador Elizondo*

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One year after the death of Salvador Elizondo (1932-2006), one of the twentieth-century's most talented Mexican writers, a master of erotic literature and linguistic invention, *Voices of Mexico* pays him well-deserved homage.

I am daring here to write a brief portrait of Salvador Elizondo, my husband for almost 40 years. I think it is risky because I am neither a writer nor a photographer. This craft forces me to concretize the idea in an instant; writing is complex and requires a discipline and rigor that I do not possess, though I do have those implicit in sharing an entire life. For that reason, I happily take on this task that is not precisely my specialty.

* Photographer.

All photographs in the "Literature" section are courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

The first character trait that I would point to—taking for granted his being an artist, which is always mysterious—is his critical attitude toward *all* things. I believe this astuteness and constantly exercised attention made him unique among Mexican writers, among other things because he applied them first of all to himself. But more than critical, he was analytical, and you could say that nothing escaped his analysis. Even his writing reflects this propensity to dissect and break down everything, but he never had problems with writing. I never saw him suffer because he couldn't do things. He walked around his table. Then he took a seat and wrote

his idea down in a notebook, by hand, first off. Everything about him was aimed at the general. The particular didn't interest him more than as part of an ideal generality.

Salvador was a voracious but systematic reader (or re-reader) in four languages; he was also familiar with the principles of Chinese writing. I shared his readings because although I lacked both the time and the ability to read them myself, he always gave me a digest or summary. Some of them were present in our lives. I remember that many years ago his enthusiasm for *Monsieur Teste* prompted him to translate it so I could read it. Salvador also painted in oils a watercolor by Valéry, *The Soirée in Monsieur Teste's Home*. Since then our household slogan has been *Transiit classificando*... although we didn't always follow it. It's very useful in the kitchen.

Among the artists who dominated his life, the most important place was always taken by James Joyce. As a professor of literature, I would say that he was the most important figure for him. Salvador believed that *Finnegans Wake* was the end of literature and that two centuries were needed to achieve this level of literary writing in any language.

For almost 40 years, Salvador infected me with his preference for authors who reflect about the

nature of things or for artists who use a technique to obtain harmony and beauty in a work of art. For him, poetry, architecture, painting and music were the same: the result of the application of the same principle...or the same chance. Leonardo, Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry and Joyce were his perennial idols, in addition to innumerable transitory ones, usually baseball players, matadors, opera singers.

He was an autocratic but pleasant conversationalist, as though he always wished that the art of conversation still existed. Although he had stage presence and confidence as a teacher, he was absolutely impractical in matters of everyday life. Incapable of cashing or depositing a check, he was totally baffled by ATMs. Although very lazy, he was obsessively punctual and very reliable.

This is only one way of understanding Salvador. There are many. His personality changed depending on the angle you looked at him from. Generally speaking, I would say that being with him was to face a severe, rigorous critic, who demanded above all thought and ideas; he was like that in everything. It was not easy being his wife; it was very difficult, but it was a fascinating adventure that I wouldn't exchange for anything. **MM**

