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The Significance of the Journey in the Works of Juan Rulfo



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ABSTRACT:

*The fame of Juan Rulfo (1918–1986), one of the most well-known Mexican authors of his time, is based almost entirely upon two works, **Pedro Páramo** (1955) a novel, and a collection of short stories entitled **El Llano en Llamas**, [The Burning Plains] (1953). These, however, are not the only works that make up his repertoire. He wrote three screenplays **La Fórmula Secreta** [The Secret Formula] (1964), **El Gallo de Oro** [The Golden Cock] (1964), and **El Despojo** [The Remainder] (1960). In addition, he wrote a few other articles and short stories including a collection of his photographs portraying the Mexican landscape reflected in his literary works. He is well known for his literary experimentation in narrative techniques such as shifts of narrative and temporal focus and for his employ of magic realism (although based in the reality of Latin America, this mode reveals a world in which the laws of nature are suspended or act contrarily) and changes in temporal settings.*

While the concept of the journey has not been as studied as other areas in the works of Juan Rulfo, it is one motif found in his writings that contributes to the development of his themes and narrative style. An examination of the idea of the journey in the works of Juan Rulfo brings to light three main issues found in his writings: the role of religion, the theme of escape, and a criticism of society. Although his criticism of society is less well acknowledged in his works, nevertheless they play a role as George D. Schade comments, “Large social ills are commented on dispassionately only when they have bearing on the personal dramas Rulfo is unfolding” (Schade ix). Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that, while Rulfo is not well known for his criticisms of society, there are certain moments in his stories in which he does effectively present them.

Religion

Religion plays a significant role in Latin American cultures. Juan Rulfo, like many Latin American writers, comments on particular aspects of religion, particularly those that have evolved from Catholic traditions such as the pilgrimage and reverence for the Virgin Mary. There are, however, certain instances in which the author uses allusions to other religions such as Greek and Roman mythology.

In “Anacleto Morones,” the significance of the journey with respect to religion comes through clearly in the personification of the old women who approaches Lucas Lucatero, the narrator, for help. In this tale, a religious imposter deceives the town of Amula, reminiscent of the deceptions of the faith healers of the United States in the early 20th century. Lucas Lucatero aids the religious charlatan Anacleto Morones by helping him sell religious objects. The two of them travel from village to village selling statues of saints. Anacleto demonstrates one of his miraculous tricks as several pilgrims passing by ask him how it was done. He tells the pilgrims how he has come from Rome and bears a splinter from the Holy Cross. The pilgrims then revere him as a holy man. The obvious nature of their gullibility places their entire faith in the hands of a man who is morally bankrupt. Taking advantage of the superstitions and gullibility of the simple villagers, Anacleto perpetuates their belief in his saintliness. He abuses his power and, according to Lucas: “Dejó sin vírgenes esta parte del mundo, valido de que siempre estaba pidiendo que le velara su sueño una doncella” (Rulfo 169–70). [“He left this part of the country without virgins, always seeing to it that a maiden watched over his sleep”] (Rulfo 142–3). Anacleto gives his daughter to Lucas in marriage after Anacleto himself impregnates her. After the local authorities arrest Anacleto and put him

in jail, he escapes. He asks Lucas to sell everything so that he has money to escape. "Vende todo y dame el dinero, porque necesito hacer un viaje al Norte" (Rulfo 173). ["Sell everything and give me the money, because I need to take a trip up North"] (Rulfo 146). This is where the group of old women enters. They are seeking something from him. They wish him to return with them to Amula.

Queremos que nos acompañes en nuestros ruegos. Hemos abierto, todas las congregantes del Niño Anacleto, un novenario de rogaciones para pedir que nos lo canonicen. Tú eres su yerno y te necesitamos para que sirvas de testimonio. El señor cura nos encomendó le lleváramos a alguien que lo hubiera tratado de cerca y conocido de tiempo atrás, antes de que se hiciera famoso por sus milagros. Y quién mayor que tú, que viviste a su lado y puedes señalar mayor que ninguno las obras de misericordia que hizo. Por eso te necesitamos, para que nos acompañes en esta compañía. (Rulfo 165)

[We want you to accompany us in our prayers. All us women who were followers of the Holy Child Anacleto have started a novena to ask that he be made a saint. You are his son-in-law and we need you to serve as a witness. The priest recommended that we bring someone who had known him well and for some time back, before he became famous for his miracles. And who better than you, who lived by his side and can point out better than anyone else his works of mercy. That's why we need you, so you'll help us out in this campaign.] (Rulfo 138)

The purpose of the journey they are on is to make this religious charlatan a saint. In order to do so, they need to find someone who truly knows Anacleto to help them. Their religious desires drive them to make the journey to the remote home of Lucas Lucatero.

Las vi (Lucas Lucatero) venir a todas juntas en procesion. Vestidas de Negro, sudando como mulas bajo el mero rayo del sol. Las vi desde lejos como si fuera una recua levantando polvo. Su cara ya ceniza de polvo. Negras todas ellas. Venían por el camino de Amula, cantando entre rezos, entre el calor, con sus negros escapularios grandotes y renegridos, sobre los que caía en goterones el sudor de su cara. (Rulfo 159)

[I (Lucas Lucatero) saw them coming all together in a procession. Dressed in black, sweating like mules under the hot sun. I saw them from a long way off as if they were a string of mules raising the dust. Their faces now ashen with dust. All of them black. They came along the Amula road, singing while they prayed in the heat, with their large black scapularies on which the sweat from their faces fell in big drops.] (Rulfo 131)

They come by foot, as pilgrims are required to do. They come to Lucas Lucatero as if they are on a pilgrimage to some holy site to beg for healing. Lucas does his best to try and dissuade the women from their mission, even insulting them, trying to shake their belief in Anacleto in whatever way necessary. All but one are finally dissuaded from their mission. Their great need to believe leads the women along their journey and its end reveals not what they expected, a holy man, but disillusion.

The next story that employs the motif of the journey with respect to religion is "Talpa." As in most of Rulfo's works, there are few characters presented in "Talpa." The three main characters are Tanilo Santos, his wife, Natalia Santos, and his brother who doubles as narrator. The brother remains nameless throughout the story. The journey as a quest is quite possibly the most diabolical aspect of all in the writings of Juan Rulfo. The brother and the wife of Tanilo Santos are involved in an affair. The husband is suffering from a nameless disease that produces "las ampollas (que) se le convirtieron en llagas por donde no salía nada de sangre y sí una cosa amarilla como goma de copal que ditilaba agua espesa" (Rulfo 50). ["blisters (which) became wounds that didn't bleed—just a yellow gummy thing like thick distilled water came out of them"] (Rulfo 54). The brother and wife convince him to go to Talpa. "Lo llevamos a Talpa para que se muriera. Y se murió. Sabíamos que no aguantaría tanto camino; pero, así y todo, lo llevamos empujándolo entre los dos, pensando acabar con él para siempre. Eso hicimos" (Rulfo 50). ["We got him to go with us to Talpa so he'd die. And he died. We knew he couldn't stand all that traveling; but just the same, we pushed him along between us, thinking we'd finish him off forever. That's what we did"] (Rulfo 54). The only reason they agree to the pilgrimage is to accelerate the death of Tanilo so they could be together.

Tanilo's desire to embark on the journey has nothing to do with dying. The shrine of the Blessed Virgin in Talpa represents a sign of hope. People pray to the Virgin with hope that she will heal physical and spiritual wounds. Miracles, such as the blind being made to see and the lame to walk, are said to occur at these sites. Tanilo does not care about the length of the journey, he only cares that: "La Virgencita le daría el remedio

para aleviarse de aquellas cosas que nunca se secaban... Ya allí, frente a Ella, se acabarían sus males; nada le dolería ni le volvería doler más" (Rulfo 50). ["The blessed Virgin would give him the cure to get rid of the stuff that never dried up... Once he was there before Her, his troubles would be over; nothing would hurt him then or hurt him ever again"] (Rulfo 54). The end of the story ironically proves him right through this foreshadowing.

The brother and wife are committed to their course of action. When Tanilo tells them that he wants to return home they insist that he must continue. "A estirones lo levantábamos del suelo para que siguiera caminando, diciéndole que ya no podíamos volver atrás" (Rulfo 51). ["We jerked him up from the ground so he'd keep walking, telling him we couldn't go back now"] (Rulfo 55). Their desire for his death was so great that they could not think of letting him give up while on the road to Talpa. "Pero Natalia y yo no quisimos. Había algo dentro de nosotros que no nos dejaba sentir ninguna lástima por ningún Tanilo... Así, a tirones, fue como llegamos con él a Talpa" (Rulfo 55). ["But Natalia and I didn't want him to. Something inside us wouldn't let us feel any pity for Tanilo... So, dragging him along was how we got to Talpa with him"] (Rulfo 59). This illustrates the depth of the passion that the brother and the wife of Tanilo held for each other.

As they approach Talpa, Tanilo imitates the self-imposed physical penance of his fellow pilgrims:

En cuanto se vio rodeado de hombres que llevaban pencas de nopal colgadas como escapulario, él también pensó en llevar las suyas. Dio en amarrarse los pies uno con otro con las mangas de su camisa para que sus pasos se hicieran más desesperados. Después quiso llevar una corona de espinas. Tantito

después se vendó los ojos, y más tarde, en los últimos trechos de camino, se hincó en la tierra, y así, andando sobre los huesos de sus rodillas y con las manos cruzadas hacia atrás." (Rulfo 56)

[As soon as he saw himself surrounded by men wearing cactus leaves hanging down scapularies, he decided to do something like that too. He tied his feet together with his shirtsleeves so steps became even more desperate. Then he wanted to wear a crown of thorns. A little later he bandaged his eyes, and still later, during the last part of the way, he knelt on the ground and shuffled along on his knees with his hands crossed behind him.] (Rulfo 60)

He goes further, and reminiscent of Christ on his journey to the cross, is transformed into a sacrificial victim, exchanging his life for the sins of his wife and brother. However symbolic his actions might be, he is not a passive or willing victim. After his arrival he dances with the other pilgrims furiously "haciendo un ultimo esfuerzo por conseguir vivir un poco más" (Rulfo 56-7). ["making a last effort to try and live longer"] (Rulfo 60). Reminiscent of the "dance of death" illustrated in the woodblocks portraying people dancing in a frenzy in the midst of the plague in the Middle Ages, they struggle to hold on to life. In spite of his efforts, Tanilo ends by dying at Talpa. The brother and Natalia are so consumed with guilt that they can no longer carry out their affair. In a certain way, the journey to Talpa and the individual quests of the characters are transformed and inverted in the story. Tanilo, hoping to be healed, becomes a sacrificial victim in the process, and his wife and brother, rather than freed to continue their affair, are forever separated by guilt and remorse.

In "Luvina," we see a representation of what can only be described as a sort of purgatory. "Es el lugar donde anida la tristeza. Donde no se conoce la sonrisa, como si a toda la gente le hubieran entablado la cara" (Rulfo 104). ["It's the place where sadness nests. Where smiles are unknown as if people's faces had been frozen"] (Rulfo 95). The story begins in a bar where a nameless narrator is describing his venture into the town of San Juan de Luvina with his family. He tells his story to another nameless character because the second character intends to travel to the town.

The man, who guides the narrator and his family with all of their belongings into town, has no desire to stay. "El arriero que nos llevó no quiso dejar ni siquiera que descansaran las bestias. En cuanto nos puso en el suelo, se dio media vuelta: 'Yo me vuelvo' nos dijo" (Rulfo 106). ["The mule driver who took us didn't even want to let his animals rest. As soon as he let us off, he turned half around. 'I'm going back,' he said"] (Rulfo 96-7). The narrator asks the driver if he thinks it would be better if the animals rested and the man replies: "Aquí se fregarían más" (Rulfo 106). ["They'll be in worse shape here"] (Rulfo 97). The description of the town leads the reader to believe that only the dead populate the town. No one ventures outside during the day and the sky is continually overcast because "Dicen que porque arrastra arena de volcán; pero lo cierto es que es un aire negro" (Rulfo 103). ["They say it is full of volcano sand; anyway it's a black air"] (Rulfo 94). Even the church is dead. "Era un jacalón vacío, sin puertas, nada más con unos socavones abiertos y un techo resquebrajado por donde se colaba el aire como por un cedazo" (Rulfo 107). ["It was a vacant old shack without any doors, just some open galleries and a roof full of cracks where the air came through like a sieve"] (Rulfo 97). This is perhaps the most

significant marker of the notion that this place is either purgatory or a close representation of purgatory because of the centrality of the church in the lives of the Latin American people. Even the poorest of towns in Latin America have churches. Another indicator of the town's association with purgatory is the passing of time. "Nadie lleva cuenta de las horas ni a nadie le preocupa cómo van amontonándose los años. Los días comienzan y se acaban. Luego viene la noche. Solamente el día y la noche hasta el día de la muerte, que para ellos es una esperanza" (Rulfo 109). ["Nobody counts the hours and nobody cares how the years go mounting up. The days begin and end. Then night comes. Just day and night until the day of death, which for them is a hope"] (Rulfo 100). In this town there are none but the very young and very old for as soon as the young get the chance, they leave.

Many people of the town refuse to leave because they are tied to the place by their dead. "¿quién se llevará a nuestros muertos? Ellos viven aquí y no podemos dejarlos solos" (Rulfo 110). ["who'll bring along our dead ones? They live here and we can't leave them alone"] (Rulfo 101). The tradition of keeping in close contact with departed loved ones is followed by many people in Latin American countries. It is not uncommon for them to visit the cemeteries, care for graves of the departed, build altars with favorite items of the departed, and offer prayers and donations in their names. Juan Rulfo in an interview states, "Sometimes when they move they actually dig up their graves" (Harss 250). To many North Americans this is a morbid concept, but those in Latin America feel very close ties to their ancestry and by extension to their mortal remains.

The final story treating religion and the journey is Juan Rulfo's most famous work, *Pedro Páramo*. It is a commonly held belief among critics such as Lanin

A. Gyurko that "Luvina" was a precursor to *Pedro Páramo*. Both of these stories focus on a village that appears to be populated by the dead. *Pedro Páramo*, as a novel, develops this idea more profoundly. The name of the village in the novel is Comala, which is where Juan Preciado's mother sent him on her deathbed. She describes the village to her son as something akin to Heaven. In reality, once Juan arrives, all he sees is a deserted village. "Aquello está sobre las brasas de la tierra, en la mera boca del infierno. Con decirle que muchos de los que allí se mueren, al llegar al infierno regresan por su cobija" (Rulfo 182). ["That town's the hottest place in the world. They say that when somebody dies in Comala, after he arrives in Hell he goes back to get his blanket"] (Rulfo 3). Like Hades or Hell one must descend into Comala. Pedro Páramo is the patrón or leader of the village. Juan Preciado, the only legitimate son that Pedro Páramo has fathered is guided into Comala by one of Pedro's illegitimate sons, Abundio. "Caminábamos cuesta abajo, oyendo el trote rebotado de los burros" (Rulfo 180). ["We were walking downhill, hearing the steady trot of the burros"] (Rulfo 2). Abundio reminds of the reader of the Greco-Roman myth of the boatman who ferries the dead into Hades across the river Styx. This is especially poignant with regards to the payment that must be made to the boatman. Doña Eduvigis, the person with whom Juan spends the first night in town, makes mention of the payment. "Yo le daba sus propinas por cada pasajero que encaminara a mi casa" (Rulfo 192). ["I used to give him a tip for very person he brought to the house"] (Rulfo 13). Juan Preciado does not know it yet but he too, like everyone else in the town, is dead.

Escape

The second area that emerges from a study of the journey motif in Juan

Rulfo's works is that of escape. This topic relates both to the physical aspect of escape and to its more intangible aspects. This may include an attempt to escape from a burden, such as guilt or remorse.

The first of the stories examined relates to both aspects of escape, the physical and the intangible. "El hombre" ["The Man"] incorporates three main characters: the pursuer, the pursued, and the shepherd who reports the death of the pursued to the local authorities and is to be punished for his acquaintance with the pursued. The man who is being pursued killed an entire family in their sleep. The reason given for the killings remains ambiguous except that he felt it was necessary that one of the members of the family die. The reader is lead to believe that the killing was retribution for the killing of his brother. The pursued speaks of his guilt as a burden that should be obvious for all to see. "Pero es peligroso caminar por donde todos caminan, sobre todo llevando este peso que yo llevo. Este peso se ha de ver por cualquier ojo que me mire; se ha de ver como si fuera una hinchazón rara. Yo así lo siento" (Rulfo 34). ["But it's dangerous to go where everyone goes, especially with this load I am carrying. Anyone looking at me must see this weight, just as if it was a strange swelling. That's the way it feels to me"] (Rulfo 36). He tries at times to justify killing the entire family to escape his burden of guilt. "Después de todo, así estuvo mejor. Nadie los llorará y yo viviré en paz" (Rulfo 35). ["After all, the way it was, was better. Nobody will cry for them and I'll live in peace"] (Rulfo 38). This is not the first time he tries to justify killing the entire family to remove the guilt he is feeling. The pursued states: "No debí matarlos a todos; me hubiera conformado con el que tenía que matar; pero estaba oscuro y los bultos eran iguales... Después de todo, así de a muchos les costará menos el entierro" (Rulfo 34). ["I should've been

satisfied with the one I had to kill; but it was dark and the shapes were all the same size—After all, with so many at once it won't cost as much to bury them"] (Rulfo 36). These are the only two moments in which the pursued tries to escape the burden of guilt he has placed upon himself. "No debí matarlos a todos' iba pensando el hombre. No valía la pena echarme ese tercio tan pesado en mi espalda. Los muertos pesan más que los vivos; lo aplastan a uno" (Rulfo 35). ["I shouldn't have killed all of them,' the man was thinking. 'It wasn't worth it putting such a burden on my back. Dead people weigh more than live ones; they crush you"] (Rulfo 37). He does not, however, regret killing the man he was after.

The second aspect of this story has more to do with the physical aspect of escape. The man is obviously trying to escape certain retribution from the authorities. He tells the sheepherder that "Camino y camino y no ando nada. Se me doblan las piernas de la debilidad" (Rulfo 39). ["I walk and walk and don't cover any ground. My legs are so weak they buckle on me"] (Rulfo 41). This also can be attributed to his attempt to escape the guilt that hounds him. However, although it is not entirely clear if he knows that the second man is pursuing him, we may assume that he does not. He makes no specific mention of pursuit, only that: "Tengo que estar al otro lado, donde no me conocen, donde nunca he estado y nadie sabe de mí" (Rulfo 34). ["I have to be on the other side, where they don't know me, where I've never been and nobody knows about me"] (Rulfo 37). The unfortunate sheepherder, even though he does not know the situation, describes his acquaintance with the pursued, "Parecía venir huyendo. Traía una porción de lodo en las zancas, que ya ni se sabía cuál era el color de sus pantalones" (Rulfo 36-7). ["He seemed to be running away. His shanks were so caked with

mud that you couldn't tell what the color of his pants was"] (Rulfo 39). The sheepherder repeats this statement a couple of times. This is unfortunate for the sheepherder, as the police now believe that if he wasn't trying to kill him, he was "un encubridor" (Rulfo 39). ["in cahoots with him"] (Rulfo 42). The poor sheepherder tells the final part of the story to a person who wants to arrest him "por esconder a ese individuo" (Rulfo 40). ["for hiding that guy"] (Rulfo 42). It should be mentioned that it is pretty atypical of a poor person in Latin American countries to have anything to do with the police. According to an interview with Juan Rulfo in the book *Into the Mainstream*, "the people there don't like to be asked any questions. They settle their affairs in their own private personal way, almost secretly" (Harss 249). It is an oddity that Juan Rulfo has the sheepherder offering information of any kind to the police.

The second of the stories "La noche que lo dejaron solo" ["The Night They Left Him Alone"] is about a young boy, Feliciano Ruelas, and his two uncles, Tanis and Librado. The three of them recently finished a mission in which they ambushed a patrol of soldiers. They are now rejoining their forces in the mountains three days travel from the site of the ambush. Unfortunately, being a young boy, Feliciano cannot keep up with his two uncles and falls behind. The uncles leave him to catch up at a later time. The uncles do not even stop for sleep. "Nos pueden agarrar dormidos' dijeron. 'Y eso sería peor" (Rulfo 115). ["They might catch us asleep,' they said. 'And that would be the worst that could happen"] (Rulfo 106). Feliciano tries to argue with them to stop for sleep. "vamos dejando este día para descansar. Mañana caminaremos de filo y con más ganas y con más fuerzas, por si tenemos que correr. Puede dares el caso" (Rulfo 115). ["let's leave this day for rest. Tomorrow we'll

march in a file and feel more like it, with more strength if we have to run. We might have to"] (Rulfo 106). His uncles ignore him and they continue their journey without Feliciano. Feliciano falls asleep and later continues on with the journey. He abandons his rifles and descends down the mountain. He arrives at the base of the mountain and sees that his uncles are swinging from a tree. The soldiers had caught them. He overhears the conversation of the soldiers, which explains why his uncles had been caught. The soldiers know that there is one more member of the party for whom they are waiting. "Tiene que caer por aquí, como cayeron esos otros que eran más viejos y más colmilludos" (Rulfo 117). ["He'll have to come this way like the others did who were older and more experienced"] (Rulfo 108). After he hears this, Feliciano slinks away into the night. "Cuando llegó al reliz del arroyo, enderezó la cabeza y se echo a correr, abriéndose paso entre los pajonales. No miró para atrás ni paró en su carrera hasta que sintió que el arroyo se disolvía en la llanura" (Rulfo 118). ["When he reached the edge of the arroyo he raised his head and then began to run, opening his path through the tall grass. He didn't look back until he felt the arroyo dissolve into the plain"] (Rulfo 109). Feliciano, because he was inexperienced and wanted to rest, is the only one to escape the soldier's grasp.

The next tale concerning both the journey and the topic of escape is "¡Diles que no me maten!" ["Tell Them Not to Kill Me!"] The main character in this story, Juvencio Nava has been on the run for over thirty years for killing Don Lupe Terreros, a neighbor who would not allow Juvencio to feed his cattle on his land during the drought. Now, at the end of his life, he is finally caught after many years of escaping his fate.

Por eso era que le costaba trabajo imaginar morir así, de repente, a estas Alturas de su vida, después de tanto pelear para librarse de la muerte; de haberse pasado su mayor tiempo tirando de un lado para otro arrastrado por los sobresaltos y cuando su cuerpo había acabado por ser un puro pellejo correoso curtido por los malos días en que tuvo que andar escondiéndose de todos. (Rulfo 95)

[It was hard for him to imagine that he'd die like this, suddenly, at this time of life, after having fought so much to ward off death, after having spent his best years running from one place to another because of the alarms, now when his body had become all dried up and leathery from the bad days when he had to be in hiding from everyone.] (Rulfo 86)

Even now Juvencio begs his son, Justino, to convince the soldiers to let him go. “¡Diles que no me maten, Justino! Anda, vete a decirles eso. Que por caridad. Así diles” (Rulfo 92). [“Tell them not to kill me, Justino! Go on and tell them that. For God's sake! Tell them”] (Rulfo 83). Unfortunately for Juvencio, the colonel in charge of the troops is the son of the man he killed. This does not deter Juvencio in the slightest. He pleads his case before the colonel, begging him to let him go.

Ya no valgo nada. No tardaré en morirme solito, derrengado de viejo. ¡No me mates...!... He pagado muchas veces. Todo me lo quitaron. Me castigaron de muchas modos. Me he pasado cosa de cuarenta años escondido como un apestado, siempre con el palpito de que en cualquier rato me matarían. No merezco morir así, colonel. (Rulfo 99)

[I'm not worth anything now. It won't be long before I die all by myself, crippled by old age. Don't kill me! ... They punished me in many ways. I've spent about forty years hiding like a leper, always with the fear they'd kill me at any moment. I don't deserve to die like this, colonel.”] (Rulfo 90)

Towards the end, the colonel relents a little and shows a tiny bit of compassion. “Amárrenlo y denle algo de beber hasta que se emborrache para que no le duelen los tiros” (Rulfo 99). [“Give him something to drink until he gets drunk so the shots won't hurt him”] (Rulfo 90). Nothing in the world will allow the colonel to show mercy and allow Juvencio to live while the memory of his father and what Juvencio did to him remains in his mind. This is the colonel's way of achieving closure in the matter. Juvencio's wanderings for 30 years end with his capture, ironically by the very man most wanting him dead.

The tale, “El llano en llamas,” [“The Burning Plains”] for which the collection of stories was named, is a tale, which parallels The Revolutionary War in México (1910-1920). The story is one of the few written by Juan Rulfo that follows a sequential chronological pattern. The story is told from the perspective of one of the men in the revolutionary forces. The reader is not told his real name. He is called by his nickname El Pichón, or “young pigeon.” El Pichón serves under Pedro Zamora, the leader of the revolutionary forces. Initially, the group of revolutionaries is fighting against the forces of generals Petronilo Flores and Urbano, but later in the story, a man named Olachea replaces these two generals.

The story begins in the midst of a battle. The forces of Pedro Zamora wait in ambush for those of General Flores. For a time it seems that the revolutionary forces are going to win, but then General

Flores manages to turn the tables on the troops of Pedro Zamora. What began as an easy ambush becomes a rout. The revolutionary forces are forced to flee from the general's forces.

Luego comenzó la corretiza por entre los matorrales. Sentíamos las balas pajueleándonos los talons, como si hubiéramos caído sobre un enjambre de chapulines. Y de vez en cuando, y cada vez más seguido, pegando mero en medio de alguno de nosotros, que se quebraba con un crujido de huesos. (Rulfo 72)

[Then we started running, taking cover among the thickets. We felt the bullets cracking at our heels, and it felt like we'd fallen on a swarm of grasshoppers...we ran. We reached the edge of the barranca and let ourselves slide down it pell-mell.”] (Rulfo 67-8)

A few of the fighters survive, but not all. Many are killed, forcing the rest to go into hiding. “Después ya no peleamos. Para decir mayor las cosas, ya teníamos algún tiempo sin pelear, solo de andar huyendo el bulto; por eso resolvimos remontarnos los pocos que quedamos, echándonos al cerro para esconcernos de la persecución” (Rulfo 75). [“After that we quit fighting. Or you might say, we passed some time without fighting, trying to keep ourselves hidden; that's why the few of us that were left decided to take to the woods, going up into the hills to hide from persecution”] (Rulfo 70-1).

Eight months later, Pedro Zamora again calls them to battle. This time the battle tactics have changed. Instead of facing the troops head-on, the revolutionaries choose a hit and run type of battle plan. The main focus of their attack is upon the wealthy landowners. A cycle of attack and escape begins before the army finally

catches up with them and attempts to finish them off.

No tiene ni qué, era más fácil caer sobre los ranchos en lugar de estar emboscando a las tropas del gobierno. Por eso nos desperdigamos, y con un puñito aquí y otro más allá hicimos más perjuicios que nunca, siempre a la carrera, pegando la patada y corriendo como mulas brutas. (Rulfo 79)

[Why should we go on this way, when it was easier to swoop down on the ranches instead of ambushing the federal troops. That's why we scattered, and with a little strike here and another there we did more damage than ever, always on the run, shooting and running like crazy mules.] (Rulfo 74)

This cycle would most likely have been somewhat tolerated if they had not derailed a train full of troops and civilians instead of focusing on the wealthy landowners.

Numerous followers of Pedro Zamora become disgusted with what was happening and desert his army. The federal troops consider the train derailment a personal affront and declare unconditional vengeance upon the revolutionaries. There is no escape for those in Pedro Zamora's army.

Estuvimos escondidos varios días; pero los federales nos fueron a sacar de nuestro escondite. Ya no nos dieron paz; ni siquiera para mascar un pedazo de cecina en paz. Hicieron que se nos acabaran las horas de dormir y de comer, y que los días y las noches fueran iguales para nosotros. (Rulfo 84)

[We stayed in hiding for several days, but the federal troops came to flush us out. They didn't leave us

alone any more, not even to munch on a piece of jerky. They saw to it that we didn't have time to eat or sleep, and the days and nights all became one to us... all we wanted to do was get away from them.] (Rulfo 79).

The revolutionaries realize that the battle is over and the time had come to disband forever.

The intangible aspect of escape is also present in "El llano en llamas." Juan Rulfo seems to add it to the plot almost as an aside to end the tale and provide closure. The narrator El Pichón is thrown in jail for crimes that have nothing to do with his revolutionary service under Pedro Zamora.

Yo salí de la cárcel hace tres años. Me castigaron allí por muchos delitos; pero no porque hubiera andado con Pedro Zamora. Eso no lo supieron ellos. Me agarraron por otras cosas, entre otras por la mala costumbre que yo tenía de robar muchachas. (Rulfo 87)

[I got out of jail three years ago. They punished me there for a lot of crimes, but not because I was one of Zamora's men. They didn't know that. They got me for other things, among others for the bad habit I had of carrying off girls.] (Rulfo 81)

One of the girls he carried off waits for him outside the jail to try to make him take responsibility for his actions. He had fathered a son with her. Initially he thinks that she plans to kill him, but this does not turn out to be the case. "Ahora vive conmigo una de ellas, quizá la mejor y más buena de todas las mujeres que hay en el mundo. La que estaba allí, afuerita de la cárcel, esperando quién sabe desde cuando a que me soltaran" (Rulfo 87). ["Now one of them is living with me, maybe the finest and best

woman in the world—the one who was there, outside the jail waiting I don't know how long for them to let me loose"] (Rulfo 81). She makes him realize that he cannot escape responsibility for his actions as he journeys through life.

The last story that connects the theme of escape with the motif of the journey is "¿No oyes ladrar los perros?" ["No Dogs Bark"]. This is a slight mistranslation by George D. Schade; a more literal translation of the title would be "Can You Hear the Dogs Bark?" The title is significant because the father (narrator), who is carrying his son over his shoulders, cannot hear anything. The journey occurs during the night and with his son, Ignacio, over his shoulders like a heavy burden the father cannot see anything but the ground beneath his feet. Since his son's body covers his ears, the father is continually asking his son if he can hear the dogs barking. The sound of the dogs barking would be the first indication that the village is nearby. The father is carrying his son to a neighboring village to be cured of a gunshot wound. The only doctor is in the nearby village on the other side of the mountains. "Dicen que allí hay un doctor. Yo te llevaré con él. Te he traído cargando desde hace horas y no te dejaré tirado aquí para que acaben contigo quienes sean" (Rulfo 136). ["They say there's a doctor in the town. I'll take you to him. I've already carried you for hours, and I'm not going to leave you lying here now for someone to finish off"] (Rulfo 117). If it were entirely up to the father, he would try to escape the responsibility of caring for his son and carrying him through the night to be cured. However, he cannot escape his responsibility because of the memory of his dead wife, the mother of Ignacio. "Todo esto que hago, no lo hago por usted. Lo hago por su difunta madre. Porque usted fue su hijo. Por eso lo hago. Ella me reconveniría si yo lo hubiera dejado tirado allí, donde lo

encontré, y no lo hubiera recogido para llevarlo a que lo curen, como estoy haciéndolo” (Rulfo 136). [“I’m not doing all this for you. I’m doing it for your dead mother. Because you were her son. That’s why I’m doing it. She would’ve haunted me if I’d left you lying where I found you and hadn’t picked you up and carried you to be cured as I’m doing”] (Rulfo 117). He feels an inescapable responsibility to her memory. Later in the story he tells Ignacio that he will no longer have anything to do with him. He does this one last act in honor of his late wife. “Porque para mí usted ya no es mi hijo” (Rulfo 136-7). [“...Because as far as I am concerned, you aren’t my son any more”] (Rulfo 118). For the rest of the father’s journey through life, he relinquishes any and all duties required of a father to a son. As the full moon follows them in its journey across the sky, first turning red and then later a bluish color, it marks with its passing the slow death of the son.

Social Criticism

As mentioned previously, the works of Juan Rulfo are not believed to present an overt criticism of Mexican society, but are of a more subtle nature. Any social criticism has been considered in a secondary role to other aspects found in his works. Nevertheless, the social critiques are buried, and it is a critical thinker’s job to uncover these buried bits of treasure like a miner sifting for gold in the Alaskan wilderness. His stories set in the stark landscape of the Mexican plains present particular situations in which individuals are influenced and changed by their society and its contexts.

In “La cuesta de las comadres” [“The Hill Of the Comadres”], a tale of a power struggle unfolds. The weak or unwary are preyed upon by the strong. This is a way of life for those living in Latin American countries. For the poor, it is

sometimes all they know. The narrator of this tale remains nameless throughout the story, which is a common technique for which Juan Rulfo is known. He is both friend and subject to the Torricos, Odilón and Remigio, two brothers who control or own an entire slope a short distance away from the town of Zapotlán.

Y si no es mucho decir, ellos eran allí los dueños de la tierra y de casas que estaban encima de la tierra, con todo y que, cuando el reparto, la mayor parte de la Cuesta de las Comadres nos había tocado por igual a los sesenta que allí vivíamos, y a ellos, a los Torricos, nada más un pedazo de monte, con una mezcalera nada más, pero donde estaban desperdigadas casi todas las casas. Apesar de eso, la Cuesta de las Comadres era de los Torricos. (Rulfo 14)

[And—if I’m not exaggerating—they owned the land there and the houses on the land, even though when the land was distributed most of the Hill had been divided equally among the sixty of us who lived there, and the Torricos got just a piece of land with a maguey field, but where most of the houses were scattered. In spite of that, the Hill of the Comadres belonged to the Torricos.] (Rulfo 15)

The Torricos are bullies and try to control the entire population on the slope. Because of this, most of the residents decide to move away and slowly, little by little, the numbers of residents trickle away. They feel powerless against the brothers. “Es seguro que les sobran ganas de pelearse con los Torricos para desquitarse de todo el mal que les habian hecho; pero no tuvieron ánimos” (Rulfo 15). [“They sure felt like fighting the Torricos to get even with them for all

the bad things they’d done to them, but they didn’t have the courage. That’s the way it was”] (Rulfo 16). Juan Rulfo makes a broader point in depicting the way that life is or was in Mexico. The strong, just because they are strong, prey upon the weak. A large majority of people accepts this as the natural course of events as they go through their life journey.

Further proof of the nature of the Torricos comes to light when the narrator is asked to participate in one of the Torricos’ ventures and the narrator assists the brothers in robbing a mule driver. Upon arriving at the camp of the mule driver, the narrator notices that the mule driver appears lifeless. He is assured that the man is only sleeping and that he will wake up in the morning.

Apparently, these ventures are common occurrences in the daily lives of the people on the hill. “hubiera querido ser un poco menos viejo para meterme en los trabajos en que ellos andaban” (Rulfo 17). [“I wished I wasn’t quite so old, so I could join them in what they were up to”] (Rulfo 18). The brothers would sit for hours and wait for a victim traveling down the road. “Únicamente se ponían a ver el camino: aquel ancho callejón arenoso que se podía seguir con la mirada desde el comienzo hasta que se perdía entre los ocotes del cerro de la Media Luna” (Rulfo 16). [“They just looked at the road—that wide, sandy track you could follow with your eyes from the beginning until it got lost among the pines on Half Moon Hill”] (Rulfo 17). The Torricos are willing to prey on whoever is unfortunate enough to cross their path. They know what they are and do not deny it. In fact they are quite proud of the fact and even have a sort of code of ethics concerning their thievery. “Odilón y yo éramos sinvergüenzas y lo que tú quieras, y no digo que no llegamos a matar a nadie; pero nunca lo hicimos por tan poco”

(Rulfo 21). ["Odilón and I were hoodlums or whatever you want to call us, and I won't say that we never killed anybody, but we never did it for such small pickings"] (Rulfo 22). Remigio's statement comes after his brother's death in Zapotlán. Remigio believes that the narrator killed his brother because his brother had 14 pesos and now the narrator has a new blanket. Knowing that Remigio is in a terrible rage and drunk, the narrator doesn't attempt to argue with him even though he knows who really killed his brother. His brother got into a fight with a group of men in town and they killed him. In self-defense, the narrator is forced to kill Remigio. The story ends with the narrator apologizing to Remigio for killing him. So ends the life of a pair of bullies. In the end there is a message of hope. Bullies can be overcome and the weak can defeat the strong.

In "Paso del Norte" ["The Passage North"], the journey motif elucidates a criticism of family relations and responsibilities of parents to children. The story starts as a young man goes to his father and tells him that his children are starving and that he needs to go north to look for work. "Ya le digo, la semana pasada comimos quelites, y ésta, pos ni eso. Por eso me voy" (Rulfo 122). ["I already told you, last week we ate weeds, and this week, well not even that. That's why I am going"] (Schade 124). He wants his father to look after his wife and children. The father is a self-centered old man who tries to avoid agreeing to look out for his son's. "Yo ya no estoy pa criar muchachos; con haberte criado a ti y a tu hermana, que en paz descanse, con eso tuve de sobra" (Rulfo 121). ["I can't raise kids any more; raising you and your sister, may she rest in peace, was more than enough for me"] (Rulfo 122). His own father has essentially shirked his responsibility in raising him.

Nomás me trajo al mundo al averíguatelas como puedas. Ni siquiera me enseñó el oficio de cuetero, como pa que no le fuera a hacer a usted la competencia. Me puso unos calzones y una camisa y me echo a los caminos pa que aprendiera a vivir por mi cuenta y ya casi me echaba de su casa con una mano adelante y otra atrás. (Rulfo 121)

[No sooner did you bring me into the world than I had to shift for myself. You didn't even teach me the fireworks trade, so I wouldn't be in competition with you. You put some pants and a shirt on me and put me out on the street to learn to live on my own and you almost threw me out of the house with just the clothes on my back.] (Rulfo 122)

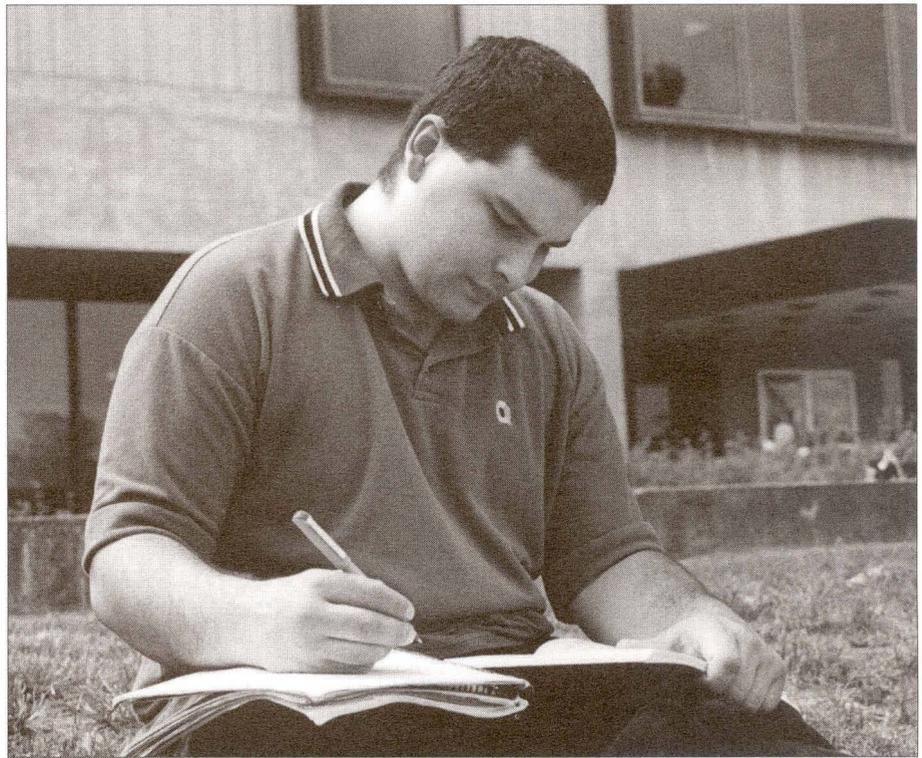
The incentive to feed his family thus is the motive for the son's journey and he leaves for the north and earns enough money for the border crossing. At the border, the men crossing are met with a hailstorm of bullets. "Y estábamos pasando el río cuando nos fusilaron con los máuseres" (Rulfo 125). ["And we were crossing the river when they shot at us with their rifles"] (Rulfo 127). All of the men are killed except for the narrator. The story presents a social critique of the United States and their treatment of those people who cross the border in order to earn some money to feed their families. The son returns home defeated to find that his wife has run off with a mule driver and his father has sold his home. Again leaving his father in charge of his children, the son departs in search of his wife. "Abandoning his children, he vanishes after her, destined from then on to roam the country like a soul in pain" (Hars 263). The journey comes full circle as the son, like his father before him abandons his children.

"Nos han dado la tierra" ["They Have Given Us the Land"] presents the most obvious criticism of society in relation to the journey. Having been given land through the agrarian reform movement in Mexico, the prospective farmers go out to inspect it. "Uno ha creído a veces, en medio de este camino sin orillas, que nada habría después; que no se podría encontrar nada al otro lado, al final de esta llanura rajada de grietas y de arroyos secos" (Rulfo 7). ["At times, along this road with no edges, it seemed like there'd be nothing afterward, that nothing could be found on the other side, at the end of this plain split with cracks and dry arroyos"] (Rulfo 9). They discover that what they have been given is worthless. It is a gigantic plain in which there is nothing. "No, el Llano no es cosa que sirva. No hay ni conejos ni pájaros. No hay nada" (Rulfo 8). ["No, the plain is no good for anything. There're no rabbits or birds. There's nothing."] (Rulfo 10–11). They try to protest that nothing will grow on the plain but it is of no use. "Nosotros paramos la jeta para decir que el Llano no lo queríamos. Que queríamos lo que estaba junto al río... Pero no nos dejaron decir nuestras cosas. El delegado no venía a conversar con nosotros" (Rulfo 9). ["We opened our mouths to say that we didn't want the plain, that what we wanted was by the river... But they didn't let us say these things. The official hadn't come to converse with us"] (Rulfo 11–12). They try to tell the official that there is no use for the plain. The official tells them ["You can state that in writing. And now you can go. You should be attacking the large-estate owners and not the government that is giving you the land"] (Rulfo 12). After inspecting the land, the small group of men returns to the town. "Y a mí se me ocurre que hemos caminado más de lo que llevamos andado" (Rulfo 8). ["It occurs to me that we've walked more than the ground

we've covered"] (Rulfo 10). Like the characters in the story, the Mexican people keep trudging over the same ground, getting nowhere.

The story reflects the folly of the agrarian reform movement in Mexico. As Juan Rulfo explains in an interview, "The land was distributed among small tradesmen instead of farmers" (Harss 258). Similar to Rulfo's story, these people could not use the land. They did not know about farming, so the land given to them was about as useful as the plain was to the group of men in the tale.

In conclusion, the motif of the journey in the works of Juan Rulfo has been greatly overlooked. In the majority of his works someone is going somewhere for a purpose as in "Talpa" or trying to escape from something as in "El llano en llamas" ["The Burning Plains"]. Many times this escape is from the burden of guilt that the main character has as in the story "El hombre" ["The Man"]. Other times this escape is more in the realm of the physical as is the case in "¡Diles que no me maten!" ["Tell them not to kill me!"]. While not obviously, Juan Rulfo does present a number of social criticisms in his writings. They tend to be more obscure than in other writers' works. One must dig deeper, however, to discover what it is that Juan Rulfo is saying.



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¹ All English quotations except for where indicated and those dealing with *Pedro Páramo* come from this book.

² All English quotations from *Pedro Páramo* come from this book.

³ All Spanish quotations in this paper come from this book.