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TITLE: *'Muchos Méxicos': Widening the Lens in Rulfo's Cinematic Texts.*

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DECLARATION

I, Dylan Joseph Brennan, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Dylan Joseph Brennan

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Juan Rulfo's two major pieces of fictional narrative work—his haunting, enigmatic novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and his unrelenting depictions of the failures of post-revolutionary Mexico in his short story collection *El Llano en llamas* (1953). In her foreword to the Margaret Sayers Peden English translation, Susan Sontag hails *Pedro Páramo* as 'not only one of the masterpieces of 20th Century world literature, but one of the most influential of the century's books'. García Márquez has compared the influence of Rulfo on 20th Century world literature to that of Sophocles: 'No son más de 300 páginas, pero son casi tantas y creo tan perdurables como las que conocemos de Sófocles' and, completing this oft-repeated triumvirate of recommendations, Jorge Luis Borges has referred to *Pedro Páramo* as: 'una de las mejores novelas de las literaturas de lengua hispánica, y aun de la literatura.' Despite the praise heaped upon Rulfo's two most famous books, when his third book of fiction, *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, was finally published in 1980, just six years before his death, it was greeted with almost critical silence. It is precisely this publication that provides the focus of this investigation. The collection contains three texts—*El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro*. Constituting a third of the fictional work he published in his lifetime, expanding upon themes present in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* while, at the same time, examining new ground, no thematic discussion of Rulfo's written output is complete without including these texts. Yet they are frequently dismissed. In this way this investigation attempts to go some way towards filling this critical gap in the work of one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER ONE: WIDENING THE FOCUS IN RULFO'S CINEMATIC TEXTS—AN INTRODUCTION

1.1. Texts for Cinema?—Rationale and Paramaters

1953 saw the publication of Juan Rulfo's collection of short stories *El Llano en llamas* and the novel, *Pedro Páramo*, appeared in 1955. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Rulfo's two major pieces of fictional narrative work. In her foreword to the Margaret Sayers Peden English translation, Susan Sontag hails *Pedro Páramo* as 'not only one of the masterpieces of 20th Century world literature, but one of the most influential of the century's books'. (Rulfo 2000: 3) García Márquez has compared the influence of Rulfo on 20th Century world literature to that of Sophocles: 'No son más de 300 páginas, pero son casi tantas y creo tan perdurables como las que conocemos de Sófocles' (García Márquez 1983: 25) and, completing this oft-repeated triumvirate of recommendations, Jorge Luis Borges has referred to *Pedro Páramo* as: 'una de las mejores novelas de las literaturas de lengua hispánica, y aun de la literatura.' (Rulfo 2011: 23) Despite the praise heaped upon Rulfo's two most famous books, when his third book of fiction, *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, was finally published in 1980, just six years before his death, it was greeted with almost critical silence. So much so, in fact, that Sontag's introduction seems to deny the very existence of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* (1980):

> It is rare for a writer to publish his first books when he is already in his mid-forties, even rarer for his first books to be immediately acknowledged as masterpieces. And rarer still for such a writer never to publish another book. (Rulfo 2000: 3)

It is precisely this publication that provides the focus of this investigation. *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* was published by Ediciones Era and was

accompanied by a foreword and explanatory notes provided by Mexican cinema expert, Jorge Ayala Blanco. The collection contains three texts—*El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro*. All three texts are inextricably linked to cinema and are analysed in detail, in both their written and filmed formats, in the following chapters. The peculiar nature of the genesis of each of these texts is discussed individually in the following chapters. At this juncture a short note on each of the films is warranted. Suffice it to mention, by way of an introduction, that, while the texts are clearly linked to cinema, not one of them constitutes a screenplay in the traditional sense. *El despojo* is a 12-minute film that was directed by Antonio Reynoso in 1960 and is based upon a story composed by Rulfo. However, Rulfo never set about typing up a screenplay or dialogue and acted more like co-director on set, verbally suggesting the argument and dialogues on a reportedly ad-hoc basis. The dialogues were later transcribed and included in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*. In this way *El despojo* appears to take the form of a screenplay in the 1980 publication. *La fórmula secreta* is a 45-minute film directed by Rubén Gámez between 1964 and 1965. Rulfo was shown a segment of the film in which a group of male *campesinos* appear in an arid landscape and he subsequently composed a poetic monologue to accompany the *campesino* footage. The text composed by Rulfo for *La fórmula secreta* was eventually published in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*. The definitive version of the text, with corrections, was published in *El gallo de oro* (2010) by the Fundación Juan Rulfo. Finally, *El gallo de oro* is a short novel that was adapted for the screen by Roberto Gavaldón (in conjunction with Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes) in 1964. It seems that, once the text was adapted for

the screen, Rulfo abandoned any plans he may have had for publishing it until, of course, he finally did so in 1980. *El gallo de oro* was also adapted for the screen five years later by Arturo Ripstein. His film, *El imperio de la fortuna*, proved to be a significantly more faithful adaptation. The definitive version of the novel was published by the Fundación Juan Rulfo in 2010

The cover notes for *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* recognise the collaboration of Rubén Gámez, director of *La fórmula secreta*; Antonio Reynoso, director of *El despojo*; Pablo Rulfo, visual artist and son of Juan Rulfo; and renowned cultural commentator Carlos Monsiváis. In the cover notes, the need to 'rescue' these texts is emphasised: 'Era urgente rescatar y difundir al Rulfo cinematográfico. Sus trabajos de cine ignorados'. While many cinematic and theatrical adaptations of Rulfo's work exist, Rulfo, in his own lifetime, was directly involved with few films. In addition to the three films mentioned here he also collaborated (despite protestations to the contrary), with Emilio Fernández on *Paloma Herida* (1962); acted as historical adviser and unofficial on-set photographer of Gavaldón's *La Escondida* (1955) and acted in the capacity of an extra in Alberto Isaac's *En este pueblo no hay ladrones* (1964). He also advised filmmakers Mitl Váldez (*Los confines*: 1987) and José Bolaños (*Pedro Páramo—El hombre de la media luna*: 1976). Nevertheless, this investigation focuses solely *El gallo de oro*, *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*, in both written and filmed formats. The fact that these three texts were published together in a compendium makes the decision easy in that, published during Rulfo's lifetime, they represent

(along with modifications to *El Llano en llamas*) the only fictional work that *he* published after *Pedro Páramo*.[1]

The lack of critical attention paid to the films *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* is understandable. Both films, of unconventional length (*El despojo* lasts twelve minutes and *La fórmula secreta*, described by Ayala Blanco as a 'mediotraje' clocks in at the unusual length of forty-five minutes) and limited release, were never likely to become well known upon their release. Furthermore, for years it was believed that the only surviving print of *El despojo* had been lost in a fire at the Cineteca and there are various examples of critical research on the film based solely upon the transcribed dialogue presented by Ayala Blanco. *La fórmula secreta*, though well-received by those that saw it (it ran to a fifth week at the Cine Regis, an impressive showing for an avant-garde film), was, like *El despojo*, seen by relatively few before the age of the internet. With regard to *El gallo de oro*, the almost critical silence that greeted its publication is both intriguing and confusing. The phrase 'Rulfo cinematográfico' is problematic indeed and part of the reason that Rulfo's second novel, *El gallo de oro*, has received so little attention. By adding on the phrase 'y otros textos para cine' it seems that the text was immediately regarded, upon its release, as something less, something not quite at a par with his other pieces of narrative fiction—some kind of cinematic argument that was not a 'real' novel. As already mentioned, while still unpublished, *El gallo de oro* was adapted for the screen by Gabriel García

[1] *El gallo de oro* has since been published by RM Editorial in collaboration with the Fundación Juan Rulfo (*El gallo de oro*, 2010) and most of the references in this investigation will pertain to this revised version, minus the many typographical errors included in the Ediciones Era edition. The same too can be said for the monologues of *La fórmula secreta*. The changes to the monologues are discussed in depth in the appendix.

Márquez, Carlos Fuentes and Roberto Gavaldón. The resulting film, Gavaldón's *El gallo de oro* (1964) was, though well received in Mexico, a far cry from Rulfo's original text. Wholly devoid of the desperate atmosphere of claustrophobia and stasis that characterise the novel's coda, the film version represented a truncated interpretation of the original. In this way, when the text was finally published some twenty four years after it was written, the public could be forgiven for having thought of it as representing nothing more than a written account of Gavaldón's, by then, dated, film—a sort of novelisation. In 1980, everyone *knew* that Rulfo was the writer perennially famous for only publishing two books and, for reasons unknown, the publishers opted not to challenge the notion that Rulfo's fiction ended in 1955 with the publication of *Pedro Páramo*.

Despite these texts being available (albeit in flawed and incomplete form) since 1980, even today, Rulfo is still frequently referred to as the writer who published just two books. Upon the publication of the first edition of *Inframundo* (itself a new edition of the publication *Homenaje Nacional* that accompanied Rulfo's major photographic exhibition in 1980), Frank Janney, in his 'Carta al lector' states that: 'Juan Rulfo es el autor de solo dos libros, *El llano en llamas* (1953) y *Pedro Páramo* (1955)'. (Rulfo 1983: i) What is more surprising is that this was written in 1983, just three years after the publication of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, when the publication of Rulfo's newest work should have been fresh in the memory. One more high profile example will suffice to highlight that, despite the best efforts of the Fundación Juan Rulfo, the notion that Rulfo only published two books in his lifetime is alive and well in the 21st Century. In 2012, an English language translation of *El Llano en llamas* appeared under the

title *The Plain in Flames*. On the publisher's website (University of Texas, Austin), the following description of Rulfo appears:

> Juan Rulfo is one of the most important writers of twentieth-century Mexico, though he wrote only two books—the novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and the short story collection *El llano en llamas* (1953).[2]

Constituting a third of the fictional work he published in his lifetime[3], expanding upon themes present in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* while, at the same time, examining new ground, no thematic discussion of Rulfo's written output is complete without including these texts. Yet they are frequently dismissed. In this way this investigation attempts to go some way towards filling this critical gap in the work of one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

The background and rationale of this investigation now established the remainder of this introductory chapter is outlined in four sections. Firstly, an outline of the methodology of this investigation is included. Secondly, a thematic overview of each of the works in question highlights the way in which, in these three texts, previously addressed themes jockey with newer areas of concern. Thirdly, the notion that Rulfo's work constitutes a coherent representation of Mexican culture is re-examined. Entitled 'Muchos Méxicos', the penultimate section of this introductory chapter situates each film as representing mere fragments of a multi-cultural whole and, thus, questions Octavio Paz's affirmation that:

> Juan Rulfo es el único novelista mexicano que nos ha dado una imagen—no una descripción—*de nuestro paisaje.* (Paz 1984: 18)

[2] http://utpress.utexas.edu/index.php/books/rulbu2

[3] Rulfo, in fact, published four books in his lifetime: *El Llano en llamas* (1953), *Pedro Páramo* (1955), *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* (1980) and the publication that accompanied his major photography exhibition in 1980—*Homenaje Nacional* (later editions were published under the title *Inframundo*).

Fourthly, the final section of this chapter outlines the objectives of this investigation.

El despojo contains various striking elements of indigenous Mexican cultures; *La fórmula secreta* manifests itself as a fractured, delirious and irreverent vision of rural and industrial Mexico clashing against the backdrop of an increasingly globalised (Americanised) world; and *El gallo de oro*'s narrative unfolds within a melodramatic, cinematic world of travelling carnivals. From these brief descriptions it is clear that each text differs hugely from the others. Instead of crystallising the already explored vision of rural Jalisco, they serve to present a more kaleidoscopic vision of Mexico. Fragments within fragments, parts of an arbitrarily delineated whole—this is what Rulfo's cinematic texts present. While similar representations of the downtrodden peasants of *El Llano en llamas* make their appearances (especially in *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*) they are shown to represent a Mexico with which Rulfo was familiar, but a Mexico located within many other Mexicos, both real and imaginary.

1.2 Methodology

With regard to primary research, this investigation necessitated the sourcing and examination of a wide range of archival material. Access has been gained to the entire collection of Rulfo's personal newspaper clippings and archives as well as the Fundación Juan Rulfo's comprehensive collection of Rulfo's photographic negatives and prints. An exhaustive bibliography has been compiled from the collections of University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin and UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). The extensive archives of the

UNAM Filmoteca in Mexico City provide access to rare film material unavailable elsewhere. The Filmoteca archive contains one of the rare extant copies of the film *El despojo*. The archive also includes a copy of the film *La fórmula secreta* and other films by Rulfo collaborators. The primary work for this thesis has resulted in the establishment and publication of the definitive version of Rulfo's text for *La fórmula secreta*. Included, with extensive notes, as an appendix to this thesis, the various typographical errors and textual omissions have been rectified and, as already stated, since 2010, the corrected version of the monologues have been included in RM Editorial's edition of *El gallo de oro*. Access to various copies of the film, as well as the assistance of the director of the Fundación Juan Rulfo, Víctor Jiménez, were instrumental for this primary research and ensured that, well before the completion of the thesis, a significant achievement in Rulfian scholarship had been completed.

With regard to secondary research, the methodology for this investigation draws from two primary fields. Firstly, this investigation relies heavily upon theoretical work on film with reference to theories of montage, the male gaze, extra-diegetic filmmaking and psychoanalytical approaches to 20th century cinema; and, secondly, cultural investigations on Mexico framed within the fields of history, anthropology and the socio-economic and cultural theories of *indigenismo*. Because of the peculiar nature of each text, and their on-screen manifestations, each one is examined within its own specific context. For example, the extended montage sequences of *La fórmula secreta* demand to be analysed within the context of theories of filmic montage drawing on the theories of Eisenstein, Quigley and others. Through the analysis of the film within the

context of these theories, in the most comprehensive critical investigation of the film to date, new conclusions are inevitably made. Furthermore, the crucial sequence of *La fórmula secreta* revolves around the extra-diegetic gaze of the protagonist who, refusing to exit the shot, follows the camera and demands the spectators' attention. Lacan's theory of the mirror and self-consciousness provides an essential background for later analyses of the incorporation of the "cinema of attraction" within the now established framework of diegetic film. Christian Metz (*Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, 1982) has developed this theory further. Indigenous elements in *El despojo* (the presence of the Nahual character, the use of indigenous musical instruments amongst others) demand for the film to be analysed with reference to theories on *indigenismo* and the social theory of *mestizaje*. Rulfo and contemporary *indigenista* writers were informed by thinkers such as José Vasconcelos (philospher of the 'raza cósmica' and proponent of 'strength-through-*mestizaje*' social programmes); Samuel Ramos (author of *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* and interrogator of the Mexican national psyche); and, particularly Manuel Gamio, (author of *Forjando Patria* and influential *indigenista* thinker); whose theories of nationhood encouraged active investigation of Mexican indigenous cultures. The tension between the perceived need for homogenisation and the cultural and linguistic costs of this are embodied by *El despojo*. Finally, *El gallo de oro*, in its focus on melodrama and the theme of female incarceration is contextualised by reference to Carlos Monsiváis's comments on the genre and Jackie Stacey and Laura Mulvey's views on the female form and the male gaze in twentieth century cinema. *El gallo de oro* is also

compared to Rulfo's first novel *Pedro Páramo* and considered as a melodramatic reworking of the former.

1.3 ***Muchos Méxicos***

Borrowing the term popularised by Lesley Byrd Simpson in his *Many Mexicos*, Rulfo highlights the diversity of Mexican culture without promoting a perceived necessity for indigenous communities being subsumed for the greater good. Seeing 'Mexico' as an arbitrary construct that cannot be unified by notions of patriotism, language or religion, Rulfo goes as far as stating that there is no such thing as Mexico:

> Tampoco fue mía la idea de imponer ningún tipo de aspecto de lo mexicano, porque no representa ninguna característica lo mexicano, en absoluto. Lo mexicano son muchos Méxicos. No hay una cosa determinada que pueda permitirnos decir: Así es México. No, no es México. Ninguna de las cosas es México. Es una parte de México. Es uno de tantos Méxicos. (Rulfo 1979: iv)

Instead of a melting pot (*crisol*) in which the molten cultures of Spanish and Indigenous Mexico intermingle to form some kind of new, stronger and, crucially, 'Mexican' metal, Rulfo sees *lo mexicano* as more of a disjointed mosaic of unrelated fragments defined by arbitrary borders:

> "Mexicano" es una definición civil. Abarca lo mismo a quien posee, gracias a su única lengua, el castellano, todas las riquezas culturales del mundo, que el campesino que abandona el campo destruido por la corrupción y la erosión, los caciques y la sequía, y busca un trabajo que no hallará en las grandes ciudades: México, Guadalajara, Monterrey. (Rulfo 1986: 75)

Of course, this point of view is a clear reaction to the theories of unity and strength through *mestizaje* set forth by Mexican intellectuals from the beginning of the century. Ten years before Ramos's investigation, in 1916, Manuel Gamio's *Forjando Patria*, encouraged the *forging* of a monolingual *mestizo* Mexican

society from Spanish iron and indigenous bronze: 'Ahí está el hierro […]Ahí está el bronce […] ¡Batid hermanos!' (Gamio 6) In 1925, José Vasconcelos proposed what Heriberto Yépez has referred to as an *omni-mestiza* American race (Vasconcelos 21). Four years later, during a lecture series in the United States, Vasconcelos's ideas, generally revolving around the idea that mongrel races are the most successful, were crystallised for an American audience:

> De hecho, los grandes periodos de la historia han sido resultado de la mezcla de razas, pueblos y culturas, en lugar de la obra de una nación privilegiada de sangre pura. (Vasconcelos 136)

Vasconcelos, also highlights the heterogeneity of Mexico's societal makeup:

> Una serie de capas compuestas de materiales que no se mezclan, tal es el bosquejo de nuestra historia. Un compuesto de razas que aún no se han mezclado por completo, tal es la condición social de México, a pesar de que hace cuatrocientos años los españoles, introduciéndose ellos mismos como un nuevo elemento de dicha complejidad, trajeron los primeros esfuerzos organizados de amalgamar los diferentes pueblos en una sola fe, una sola ley, un solo propósito. (Vasconcelos 30)

Vasconcelos, recognising the multitudinous ethnic and cultural strata upon which Mexican society rested, also encouraged the notion of *mestizaje* by citing the positive homogeneity of Argentina (where most of the indigenous communites had been annihilated). Samuel Ramos referred to the 'indio' as representing the Mexican 'hinterland'. In other words, as the 'Indian' seems to be present in every corner of Mexico he therefore does not merit a special mention. He promptly eliminates him from his discussion: 'Consideremos, pues, que el indio es el "hinterland" del mexicano. Más por ahora no será objeto de esta investigación'. (Ramos 58) Ramos's technique is unsatisfactory and implicitly suggests that his *El pérfil de hombre y la cultura en México* is an investigation of exclusively *mestizo* and *criollo* Mexico in which the indigenous community is nothing more

than ‘un coro que asiste silencioso al drama de la vida mexicana.’ (Ramos 2010: 58) Sixteen years after Ramos’s analysis appeared, Octavio Paz, in his *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), seems to poeticize the ‘indio’ out of existence:

> El indio se funde con el paisaje, se confunde con la barda blanca en que se apoya por la tarde, con la tierra oscura en que se tiende a mediodía, con el silencio que lo rodea. Se disimula tanto su humana singularidad que acaba por aboliría; y se vuelve piedra, pirú, muro, silencio: espacio. (Paz 2000: 16)

It seems that, for Paz, while the ‘indio’ lounges about in the sun the real work of defining the national psyche continues without him. While it is fair to say that Paz affords more room to the indigenous in his discussion than does Ramos, particularly in his examination of the dual influence of Spanish and Pre-Hispanic cultures on the Mexican fiesta, his emphasis on the Mexican’s denial of the duality of his roots implies *mestizaje* as antidotal to his sense of orphanhood. Rulfo, on the other hand sees *mestizaje* as a tool of *criollo* domination:

> El problema de la identidad mexicana se creyó resuelto en aquella época gracias a la teoría del mestizaje: México era la equilibrada fusion entre las grandes culturas indígenas y la cultura europea en su modalidad española. Las grandes diferencias étnicas, económicas, sociales, regionales quedaban resueltas en el crisol del mestizaje.
>
> Hoy sabemos que el mestizaje fue una estrategia criolla para unificar lo disperso, afirmar su dominio, llenar el vacío de poder dejado por los españoles. México en 1984 está poblado por una minoría que se ve a sí misma como criolla, y es más norteamericanizada que europeizada, y por inmensas mayorías predominantemente indígenas que, cuatro siglos después, aún sufren la derrota de 1521. Ya no están en los bosques ni en las montañas inaccesibles: los encontramos a toda hora en las calles de las ciudades. (Rulfo 1986: 74)

And it is precisely when members of hitherto isolated rural indigenous communities end up on the streets of the cities that their culture has been surrendered as, through dispersal and assimilation, remnants of language, dress and religion are abandoned. Rulfo, while recognising the need to attempt to

improve standards of living for all members of the Mexican population, sees attempts at incorporating the indigenous into the *mestizo* Mexican political and economic system as destined to eliminate the culture that they have fought to preserve. Byrd Simpson's 'Many Mexicos' highlights the cultural diversity of Mexico and points to the dramatic geographical landscape as a major factor in the existence of numerous isolated communities that possess their own languages and customs. Instead of the well-intentioned '*mestizaje* solution' of the 1930s, in which indigenous communities were to be respected and studied and, ultimately, assimilated into a monolingual society, Rulfo sees the inevitable destruction of multi-culturalism as the end result of this process. Vargas Llosa, in his essay "Fiction and Reality", would make a similar commentary on the detrimental effect of cultural assimilation on indigenous communities:

> Only in countries where the native population was small or non-existent, or where the aboriginals were practically liquidated, can we talk of integrated societies. In the others, a discreet, sometimes unconscious but very effective 'apartheid' prevails. There, integration is extremely slow and the price the native has to pay for it is high: renunciation of his culture—his language, his beliefs, his traditions and customs—and adoption of that of his ancient masters. (Vargas Llosa 16-17)

It is true that Rulfo at times seems to echo the thoughts of Vasconcelos and Gamio, particularly when he states that 'necesitamos, forjar una comunidad de naciones hispánicas. No podemos volver a las culturas precolombinas ni ignorar que somos parte del orbe español'. (Rulfo 1986: 74) Through the use of the verb 'forjar' he consciously invokes Gamio's earlier call to arms. However, the community of nations must be constructed, not through forced assimilation or the elevation of the *mestizo* as the mythical ideal, but through the principles of justice and fair treatment of all strata of society:

> Una verdadera comunidad sólo podrá construirse basada en el respeto a las diferencias pero sobre todo basada en la justicia: el fin del hambre, la opresión y el desprecio que las mayorías mexicanas han sufrido durante cuatro siglos. (Rulfo 1986: 75)

In other words, Rulfo aims to highlight the fragmented nature of the term 'Mexican', the heterogeneity that this implies. He questions *mestizaje* as a solution and simply urges the improvement of living standards for all cultures, indigenous and otherwise, that happen to find themselves within the modern borders of the Mexican Republic, through good government and the elimination of oppression caused by corrupt landowners.

El despojo and *La fórmula secreta*, through their fractured forms, encapsulate Rulfo's views on the pluricultural makeup of Mexican society. While *El gallo de oro* stands apart from these two works, populated entirely by Spanish speaking *mestizos* as it is, it, nevertheless, contributes to the construction of Rulfo's fragmented world view when considered alongside the other two texts. In presenting a melodramatic view of Mexican society that, at times, adheres stringently to the norms of Golden-Age Mexican cinema almost to the point of parody (particularly in the descriptions of and construction of La Caponera, his María Félix-inspired take on the archetypal femme-fatale), *El gallo de oro* seems to mock this notion of *mestizo* unity. By designating a text suitable for the screen, a text that is based upon the premise that La Caponera is some kind of supernatural lucky charm for her male companions, Rulfo defines the Mexico presented by the makers of Golden-Age Mexican cinema as something fake and risible.

With reference to notions of cultural fragmentation, arbitrary boundaries and ideas of mestizaje, *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*, despite their radical, structural differences, make for very suitable comparable texts while *El gallo de oro* is less easily included in that particular discussion. Conversely *El gallo de oro* most easily lends itself to the examination of the continuation of thematic strands from Rulfo's previous fiction. For this reason, the films are analysed in two long chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* while Chapter 3 focuses on *El gallo de oro*, both the written novel and the two filmed versions. The three films differ significantly in style, conception and atmosphere and this is made clear throughout this investigation. The fact that they were published together is interesting. The simultaneous inclusion of three radically differing within the same compendium serves to strengthen the argument of this investigation as, while *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* represent fairly coherent vision of the trials faced by Jaliscan *campesinos*, *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* widens Rulfo's focus to include elements that are almost wholly absent from those two previous books. There is a thematic tension clearly present in these films, in both their written and filmed formats. The themes of Rulfo's earlier fiction are maintained while, at the same time, new elements are incorporated into each of the three works. This tension is discussed in the following section.

1.4 Widening (not shifting) the Focus

Each of the films analysed in this investigation constitutes new artistic ground for Rulfo while simultaneously returning to themes present in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*. In *El despojo*, elements of indigenous Mexico, almost thoroughly

absent from *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, are essential elements of the film. From the enigmatic Nahual character to the interspersed recordings of Yaqui ceremonies and use of indigenous musical instruments, *El despojo* becomes a strange, dreamlike, attempt to enter what Rulfo refers to on various occasions as the *inframundo*. He sees the *inframundo* as a sort of impenetrable ontological zone that the *indio* preserves from *mestizo* encroachment through the preservation of ancient, and often intangible, cultural elements. On the other hand, the corrupt and callous nature of Don Celerino's dealings with the protagonist are reminiscent of Pedro Páramo's modus operandi while the struggles of the downtrodden peasant class, abused by an unscrupulous *hacendado* call to mind the plight of the dusty characters depicted in 'Nos han dado la tierra',[4] the first story in *El Llano en llamas*.

La fórmula secreta, very much a collaborative effort with director Rubén Gámez, constitutes a Surrealist-influenced, fragmented vision of mid-twentieth Century Mexico and its troubled relationship with its northern neighbour. Winning the Primer Concurso de Cine Experimental in 1965, *La fórmula secreta* again finds Rulfo in unfamiliar territory: at the forefront of Mexican avant-garde filmmaking. Footage of urban Mexico, machinery, hot-dogs and other clear references to the industrialisation of Mexico further distance this work from Rulfo's previous texts. However, Rulfo's monologues occur while the screen is populated with working class men in an arid landscape. These characters call to mind the narrator of 'Paso del Norte' and the countless *braceros* that attempted to

[4] In 'Nos han dado la tierra' the antagonist is not, in fact, an unscrupulous *hacendado* but the faceless post-Revolutionary government that carves up and distributes the land. Nevertheless, the similiarties are clear.

cross into the United States, legally and otherwise, in search of better wages and the American Dream. Again, the viewer is reminded of the *campesinos* that wander the plains of Jalisco throughout *El Llano en llamas*.

El gallo de oro is a melodrama, both in the colloquial sense and in the etymological sense of the word. As most of the early events of the novel take place among the tents and *palenques* of travelling carnivals, the setting is markedly different than that of his previously published fiction.[5] La Caponera, a brash, fun-loving and loud-mouthed female character, seems, upon cursory examination, more akin to the exuberant female characters inhabited by María Félix during Mexico's cinematic golden agethan any of Rulfo's previously constructed female characters. Nevertheless, despite, at first glance seeming light years away from Rulfo's previous fiction in both style and content, a closer examination reveals a range of similarities between *El gallo de oro* and *Pedro Páramo*. So much so, in fact, that the latter work can be seen as a melodramatic reworking of *Pedro Páramo*.

It is clear from the above that although there is a constant tension present in Rulfo's cinematic texts, the themes previously explored in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* do not make way for newer elements. Instead, they jostle for position. Melodrama, indigenous elements, fragmented visions of urban and rural Mexico—all these constitute new ground for Rulfo. At the same time common themes rise to the surface. While Rulfo, writing for new media, seems freer to engage with previously unexplored territories, he does so to the same end as his

[5] While *El gallo de oro* is, like *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, clearly situated within a Mexican rural environment its carnivalesque atmosphere and wider geographical sphere set it apart from Rulfo's previously published material.

most famous works of fiction. The corrupt landowner that tries to take a woman for himself as his property (Don Celerino, Pedro Páramo, Dionisio Pinzón, Lorenzo Benavides) either ends up dead or miserable; the desirable female is incarcerated to the detriment of both herself and her male incarcerator (La Caponera, Susana San Juan, Cleotilde); and the poor *campesino* is continually at the mercy of corrupt *hacendados*, the government and the harsh natural environment (the narrator of *La fórmula secreta*, the protagonist of *El despojo*, most of the characters of *El Llano en llamas*). The fact that Rulfo continued the themes of female incarceration, abuse of *campesinos* and corruption of *hacendados* in his cinematic texts means that these themes cannot be ignored by any researcher that sets about a thematic investigation of the Jaliscan's work. Conversely, any thematic study of Rulfo *must* include these cinematic texts in order to obtain an integrated understanding of his work as a whole. For this reason, throughout this investigation, each film is analysed with a focus on both the newer elements and the reccurrences of previous themes.

1.5 Objectives

Before moving on to the second chapter of this investigation, in which *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* are analysed in detail, a concrete outlay of the objectives of this piece of research is warranted. The objectives of this thesis are four-fold.

Firstly, one of the aims of this investigation is to present an in-depth analysis of *El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro* in both their written and filmed versions. Up until recent years, these works, particularly *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*, have been virtually neglected by Rulfian

scholars. Therefore, merely by dedicating such a large piece of research to these texts, this investigation counts as a significant addition to both Rulfian scholarship and Mexican cinema and literary studies.

Secondly, this investigation, in positing the notion that these texts represent a thematic tension between previous and newer Rulfian concerns, helps to firmly establish certain themes in Rulfo's work. It may seem contradictory to focus on the continual thematic strands while at the same time highlighting the ways in which these cinematic texts include elements previously neglected by Rulfo. Nevertheless, any investigation of *El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro* that focused on the continual thematic strands of land ownership, dispossession, incarceration of female protagonists and structural experimentation with no mention of the ways in which Rulfo incorporates elements of indigenous cultures, melodramatic cinema tropes and references to the fragmented nature of Mexican society, would result in a flawed analysis. The same, of course, could be said of any investigation of these texts that neglected the aforementioned newer areas of concern in favour of exclusively focusing on the ways in which Rulfo expands upon themes already encountered in his fiction. This has frequently been the case in critical analyses of Rulfo's photography where investigators, keen to stress that Rulfo's photographs can be viewed as visual representations of the abandoned towns of Comala and Luvina, fail to analize his photographs of indigenous communities in Oaxaca, his Mexico City street photography or his work photographing the trains and tracks of Nonoalco. In other words, this investigation benefits from an even handed thematic analysis of these three texts that is not afraid to disrupt long-held notions of what constitutes the Rulfo canon.

Thirdly, and this objective has already been realised, this investigation sets establishing a definitive version of the text that Rulfo composed for *La fórmula secreta*. From 1980 to 2009, Rulfo's text had been published with errors and omissions by Ediciones Era. In conjunction with the Fundación Juan Rulfo, part of this investigation was published in the RM Editorial/Fundación Juan Rulfo edition of *El gallo de oro* in 2010. The publication included what has now been identified by the Fundación Juan Rulfo as the definitive version of the monologues with an accompanying explanatory note.

Finally, through its thematic analysis, this investigation challenges the notion that Rulfo's work represents a coherent vision of Mexico, or indeed, as stated by Paz, the Mexican landscape. As mentioned in this chapter, Rulfo himself challenges the idea that the poor, Spanish-speaking *mestizo* farmer of the plains and mountains of Jalisco represents the typical Mexican. Rulfo's cinematic texts are fractured and allude to a wider range of Mexican identities—the femme fatale of Mexican Golden-Age cinema, the indigenous *inframundo* and the smashed, multi-cultural mirror of *La fórmula secreta* that can only be reassembled in the bewildered mind of the viewer—all these contribute to this fragmented vision of 'muchos Méxicos'.

The fact remains that these three texts are still viewed as lesser works, or, at the very least, lesser-known works. For this reason, in each of the following chapters, it is necessary to present a synopsis of the text and to provide some context as to each text's origin as well as its relationship to the denomination 'texto para cine' before any deeper thematic analysis can come about. Each of the texts boasts a peculiar and complex origin and, for this reason, as much context

has been provided as possible. The following chapter presents a detailed study of *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* and highlights, among other things the fractured vision of Mexican society that incorprates elements of indigenous Mexico, globalisation and other significant areas of concern that are wholly or almost wholly absent from his previous work. Before conclusions are made, these two films are analysed in the order in which they were made, *El despojo* followed by *La fórmula secreta*.

CHAPTER TWO: *INFRAMUNDOS* AND FRACTURED VISIONS—*EL DESPOJO* AND *LA FÓRMULA SECRETA*

2.1 Conception and Synopsis: An Introduction to *El despojo*

In 1960, Antonio Reynoso directed *El despojo*, relying heavily on Rulfo's help as consultant and scriptwriter of the film's sparse dialogue. *El despojo* clearly reflects Rulfo's recurring fascination with the rural struggles of Mexican peasants as well as his interest in structural experimentation. This twelve minute short film was photographed in black and white by Rafael Corkidi and was filmed over a period of weekends without a tangible script. It tells the story of an indigenous man whose land has been taken away from him. Fearful that the local *hacendado*, Don Celerino, will also steal his wife, the film charts his efforts to escape with his wife and child, named Petra and Lencho respectively. When he arrives to the town of Cardonal (although this is unnamed in the film) carrying a *guitarrón* on his back, he comes face to face with Don Celerino. He shoots Don Celerino, who, in turn, at the moment of death, manages to shoot the protagonist. As the protagonist slowly falls down dead, the camera freezes and the rest of the story happens in the mind of the protagonist as he imagines his escape with his wife Petra and his sick son Lencho. As they flee, they are stalked by the Nahual and eventually, after the protagonist imagines a better life in a land which 'es tan verde la tierra que hasta el cielo es verde' (Rulfo 1980: 110), Lencho dies and is buried. It is at this moment that the film cuts back to the protagonist's falling lifeless body which slowly comes to ground in a manner not unlike the way in which Pedro Páramo's slowly crumbling heap of rocks brings Rulfo's first novel to a close. As he lies

lifeless in the dust, he is covered by the ominous shadows of encroaching onlookers.

There is an element of confusion surrounding the ownership and authority of the text and the roles played by Rulfo, Reynoso and Corkidi which can now be clarified with reference to two illuminating interviews by Gabriela Gómez Yánes with director Antonio Reynoso and photographer Rafael Corkidi which are referred to below.

There are four pieces of conflicting information regarding Rulfo's role in the film which will now be considered: In the opening credits of *El despojo* it clearly states: 'de un cuento de Juan Rulfo. Dirección—Antonio Reynoso'. Alberto Vital, in *Noticias de Juan Rulfo* states that Rulfo acted as *co-director* on *El despojo*. (Vital 2003: 154) In a grant application to the Guggenheim Foundation, Rulfo himself describes *El despojo* as a short novel when he includes the following auto-bibliographical information:

> *El gallo de oro*. Novela. 1959. No se publicó por haberse utilizado como argumento para la película del mismo nombre.
>
> *El despojo*. Novela corta. 1960. También fue convertida en película. (Vital 2003: 162)

In the interview with Yanes Gómez, Corkidi recalls how he and Reynoso already had a story to film and how that story began to change during Rulfo's night-time storytelling sessions:

> Cuando llegamos a ese lugar, que se llama Cardonal, llevábamos ya el guión y todo, supuestamente. Pero Rulfo empezó a alucinar, a contarnos cosas en la noche, que filmábamos en la mañana. Entonces, aunque hicimos la anécdota de *El despojo*, que es algo que nos contó Rulfo, el mundo era él de "Luvina". A mi maestro [Reynoso] se le quedó en la cabeza "Luvina" y con esa idea contó *El despojo*. Muy interesante corto. (Yanes Gómez 64)

Of these four clues, the least trustworthy, it must be said, is the Guggenheim application form where Rulfo states that *El despojo* was a short novel later made into a film. It was not, as seen elsewhere, uncommon for Rulfo to tell wildly contrasting accounts of what he had written, not written or was planning to write and the Guggenheim application form must be seen within the context of a writer seeking a grant from a prestigious organisation and wanting to portray himself in as productive a light as possible. Vital's claim that Rulfo acted as co-director may be close to the truth as it does seem, from the interviews with Corkidi and Reynoso, that he did have a fairly 'hands-on' role in the day-to-day planning and shooting of the film. The script that they originally had planned was discarded when Rulfo began to get his own idea for the film's plot. The opening titles sequence can, however, be taken at face value as *El despojo*, was, in fact, based on a story by Rulfo, albeit a story that was not written down and was formulated on an *ad hoc* basis while already on location.

In this light, it would seem appropriate to consider the film very much as a collaborative project in the avant-garde tradition while, at the same time, being based upon Rulfo's own narrative. It is argued in this thesis that *El despojo*, while using a new format for Rulfo, continues his explorations of the themes of death, revenge, dispossession and corruption which are ever-present in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* while, at same time, attempting to incorporate significant elements of indigenous Mexican culture. It also embodies Rulfo's penchant for experimenting with narrative structure and blurring the lines between the living and the dead. It is essential to note that, while Rulfo's narrative provides the film's thrust, it must be viewed in a different light than, for example, the

stories of *El Llano en llamas*. The text presented by Ayala Blanco in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, lacks independence, and this is noted below by José Carlos González Boixo. As the dialogue is sparse, any analysis of *El despojo* as solely a written text will result in a partial reading as important elements, such as images and sound are, naturally, only appreciable when viewed on screen.

From 1963 up until his death in 1986, Rulfo held the post of director of publications at the INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista). After the death of Alfonso Caso and the appointment of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán to the role of Director General of the INI in 1970, Rulfo oversaw a significant increase in publications over the following six years. Under the directorship of Aguirre Beltrán, the INI launched 43 sholarly publications. With 2,000 copies of each publication, Rulfo (from 1970-1976) introduced around 80,000 books into circulation (Báez-Jorge 225).[6] It is clear to any investigator that Rulfo was heavily involved in the publication and dissemmination of scholarly research into the area of Mexican indigenous communities. Nevertheless, indigenous communties are almost entirely absent from Rulfo's first two books of fiction. While a reader of *Pedro Páramo* or *El Llano en llamas* will find few easily apparent references to indigenous communities, *El despojo* proves otherwise. *El despojo* represents the clearest example of the way in which his collaborative cinematic works retain themes from his first two books while simultanesously exploring newer elements. The protagonist's desperate attempt to survive in a world of agrarian oppression

[6] Félix Báez-Jorge lists the following titles as highly significant publications that Rulfo oversaw in collaboration with well-known publisher Lauro J. Zavala and anthropologist Alfonso Villa Rojas: *Vida y Magia en un pueblo otomí* by Luigi Tranfo, *Parentesco y economía de una sociedad nahua* by Lourdes Arizpe, Planos de interacción del mundo tzotzil by George A. Collier, La religión de los totonacos by Alain Ichon, *El indio en la narrativa contempóranea de México y Guatemala* by Lancelot Cowie and *Los zoque-popolucas: estructura social* by Báez-Jorge himself. (Báez-Jorge 2010: 225)

echoes Rulfo's previously published literature while the introduction of the Nahual character and the decision to film in an Otomí region clearly set this work apart in that it specifically incorporates elements of Pre-Hispanic mythology. Particular attention, therefore, is paid to Rulfo's use of the Nahual and the enigmatic significance of this character's presence. The bulk of the analysis of *El despojo* is given over to an analysis of the notion of the *inframundo*. The film's soundtrack, as well the incorporation of the Nahuatl language, also help to situate *El despojo* at the crossroads between the previously established Rulfian world and the pre-Hispanic *inframundo*.

This section continues with a compendium of published critical responses to the film arranged in chronological order. The structure of the film's plot is then analysed with reference to 'El milagro secreto' by Jorge Luis Borges and 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' by Ambrose Bierce. The plot of *El despojo* shares similarities with these two stories, and, in comparing both common ground and, crucially, the way in which Rulfo's plot differs from the other two, interesting conclusions as to authorial intent are reached. As already noted, the bulk of the analysis is dedicated to the examination of indigenous elements in the film and the way in which the inclusion of Pre-Hispanic references alongside the themes of the oppression and dispossession of *campesinos* by cruel *hacendados* both consolidate the themes of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* while, at the same time, expanding Rulfo's vision.

2.2 Published Versions of the Text and Critical Responses

Along with that of *La fórmula secreta*, the script for *El despojo* first appeared in written format in 1976 when it was published in *La Cultura en México*—the

supplement of the magazine *Siempre!* On the occasion of its first publication, *El despojo* was presented to the reader as a 'cuento cinematográfico' and the entire script was reproduced with minimal narrative notes and an introductory essay provided by Jorge Ayala Blanco. This publication was provided with Rulfo's consent:

> Con autorización expresa de su autor, La Cultura en México ofrece a sus lectores dos textos escritos para cine por Juan Rulfo, rigurosamente inéditos hasta hoy en su forma literaria. (Rulfo 1976: II)

Four years later, a second published version was included in the collection *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* with more extensive narrative notes provided again by Jorge Ayala Blanco along with an extended introduction. The 1976 version was divided into eight sections and the expanded 1980 version into ten sections. In this chapter, the 1980 version is referred to when citing the published text and other references to soundtrack, performance and cinematography will, of course, refer to the 1960 film.

Critical texts on *El despojo* are few and far between and when one does chance upon an analysis of this film, it is often carried out by someone who has not seen it and is left to make sense of the dialogues and synopsis presented by Ayala Blanco in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*. This is because, for years, the film was believed to have been lost in a fire. For this reason, upon the publication of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, it became a film that was more commonly read than seen. Nevertheless, Ayala Blanco notes that both *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* were both very well received critically:

> Ambas cintas fueron muy apreciadas por la crítica y participaron en algún festival internacional (Moscú, Locarno), pero en México no obtuvieron la difusión que merecían. Por ser un cortometraje y aquí los complementos de programa pagan para ser exhibidos, la cinta de Reynoso sólo circuló en

> algunos cine-clubes de su época (IFAL, Casa de Lago y demás). (Rulfo 1980: 12)

Ayala Blanco sees both *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* as faithful representations of Rulfo on screen and considers them both as 'obras maestras olvidadas'. What Ayala Blanco focuses on most in his brief analysis are the structure and the soundtrack. The structure, he describes as follows:

> [...]la cinta desea escapar hacia la irrealidad a cada instante, mediante la inserción colateral de elementos fantasmagóricos que nunca se definen, dentro de esa retención sobrenatural del Tiempo de Morir que estructura al relato. (Rulfo 1980: 106)

He goes on to make the aforementioned comparison with Ambrose Bierce's story before suggesting that the use of 'notas musicales agudísimas que, espaciadamente, emiten rústicas flautas aborígenes, dentro de un partitura sonora' (Rulfo 1980: 107) are precursors of later work by Michel Fano. Ayala Blanco's brief "review" of *El despojo* is, as one would expect from the editor of the book in which the text appears for the first time, very positive and he sees *El despojo* as a film which is worthy of more attention than it had hitherto received.

The next significant critical mention of *El despojo* was to come in Paul W. Borgeson's 1982 review of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para el cine* featured in the *Revista Iberoamericana* (Julio-Diciembre). Borgeson's review mostly centres on his acute dissatisfaction with *El gallo de oro* and his disbelief that this novel had, in fact, been written by Rulfo, a theme that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. With regard to *El despojo*, Borgeson does, however, make a valid point about the correlation between *El despojo* and Rulfo's previous work:

> El texto que leemos interesa por señalar la coexistencia tan rulfiana de la preocupación social y un escape "hacia la irrealidad", y por el desdoblamiento temporal que da fuerza psíquica y dramática al texto. (Borgeson, 747)

Borgeson is most interested in the film's treatment of the movement of time:

> El tema, conste, no está en los sucesos mismos, sino en el fruto alucinado que dan en la mentalidad del protagonista y su ampliación en tema de mayor transcendencia mediante la duplicación del tiempo, que re-presenta un momento ya vivido a principios del texto. (Borgeson 1982: 747)

Borgeson goes on to note that it seems difficult, if not impossible, to gain a true understanding of the film simply from the notes provided by Ayala Blanco and sees the text as lacking independence:

> En suma: es éste un texto fílmico que no ha podido desligarse de sus complementos visuales y sonoros: música, movimiento e interpretación de los actores, que por llevar el comunicador principal, son irreductibles a tan pocas palabras. (Borgeson 747)

It was not until 1986 that *El despojo* received a positive critical review from someone not directly related with the publication of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* when *Revista Iberoamericana* published José Carlos González Boixo's article "El gallo de oro y otros textos marginados de Juan Rulfo". In this article, González Boixo differentiates between what he sees as Rulfo's 'textos marginados' and 'textos marginales'. The 'marginados' include texts that, for whatever reason, Rulfo himself marginalised, items such as 'Un pedazo de noche', 'El hijo del desaliento', 'Paso del norte' (which, at the behest of Rulfo, was not included in some editions of *El Llano en llamas*), 'La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas' and *El gallo de oro*.[7] González Boixo sees *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* as 'textos marginales' in that they do not possess autonomy:

[7] 'La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas' was published in the literary journal *América* in 1945 but was later rejected by Rulfo and not included in *El Llano en llamas*. 'Paso del norte' was included in the original version of *El Llano en llamas* but was excluded from the 1970 FCE publication at Rulfo's request. It would later re-appear with some lines of text omitted. The case of *El gallo de oro* requires further discussion and will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

> Son "marginales" respecto de la literatura, puesto que nacen exclusivamente en relación con el cine y, en cuanto tal, son impensables sin el acompañamiento de las imágenes. (González Boixo 1986: 491)

González Boixo, like Borgeson, was at a distinct disadvantage in that his analysis of the film seems to be based solely on the text and, so, his natural and valid conclusion is that:

> A pesar de todo, resulta claro que no son obras literarias, simplemente por una razón obvia: no poseen autonomía. (González Boixo 1986: 505)

Like Borgeson, González Boixo is of the opinion that to analyse *El despojo* would be almost to re-create it, so meagre is the text itself. He does, however, see *El despojo* as a worthy addition to the Rulfo canon:

> [...] lo que sí me parece interesante es señalar su identidad temática con la parte más esencial de la obra literaria de Rulfo. También en el lenguaje—junto con el tema, los dos únicos aspectos que pueden analizarse—se observa la misma identidad con la obra literaria: giros, imágenes, expresiones, etc., se corresponden al más característico y perfecto estilo de Rulfo, principalmente el impresionante monólogo de "La fórmula secreta". (González Boixo 1986: 505)

The next significant mention of *El despojo* comes in 1996, with the publication of Gabriela Yanes Gómez's *Juan Rulfo y el cine.* Yanes Gómez's book provides brief analyses of many on-screen adaptations of Rulfo's work. However, at the time of publication she tells Rafael Corkidi: *'*A mí ya no me tocó ver *El despojo*'. (Yanes Gómez 63) Strangely, however, her book sheds more light on *El despojo* as a film than any other previous analysis. Although she had not seen the film, she did have the privilege of interviewing Reynoso and Corkidi and this marked the first real investigation of *El despojo* as a film and not simply as a piece of published text.

The latest mention of *El despojo* in a critical text came in Alberto Vital's 2003 publication *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo*. As is the case with all references to *El despojo*, Vital's was brief. He, as mentioned above, names Rulfo as the film's co-director and laments (as he would later do in his article "El gallo de oro, hoy" in *Tríptico para Juan Rulfo*) the lack of cohesion and communication between the proponents of different art-forms, the lack of funding and the lack of public support:

> Si el cine independiente hubiera tenido en México una proyección mayor, entre otras razones gracias a la existencia y el apoyo de un público atento y audaz, Rulfo habría encontrado allí una ruta para enriquecer más nuestra cultura y dar cauce a su inventiva y su pasión por el cine y por las renovaciones estéticas. (Vital 2003: 162)

He thus interprets the relative neglect of *El despojo* as the logical consequence of a public disinterest in independent cinematic productions. For Vital, had cinema-goers at the time been more invested in independent cinema, *El despojo* could have expected a greater budget and a greater distribution upon its release.

2.3 Eternal Hardships: The Structure of *El despojo*

The idea of a man contemplating his life at the moment of death was not a new one for Rulfo and, in this way, *El despojo* can be seen as a continuation of preoccupations which Rulfo had dealt with before in his first novel *Pedro Páramo*: 'La idea me vino del supuesto de un hombre que antes de morir, se le presenta la vision de su vida'. (Rulfo 1983: 6) This idea was not a revolutionary plot device and certainly had precedents. Luis Leal notes that 'there seems to be no doubt that the short story "An occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce influenced Rulfo in the writing of this script' and this influence warrants analysis in this section. (Leal 95) Published in 1890, Bierce's story uses the same

time-freezing device in which, unbeknownst to the reader, the protagonist's life is halted at the moment of imminent death and his escape to freedom is described before the reader is abruptly returned to the instant of death. The similarities between the plots of *El despojo* and 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' are enough for Leal to be sure of Bierce's influence. There is also a similarity between *El despojo* and Borges's story 'El milagro secreto'. The same literary mechanism is also memorably used by Borges in his aforementioned story. One cannot be certain whether Rulfo was directly influenced by Bierce or by Borges's story which was published in 1944. Another possibility is that Rulfo, an avid cinemagoer, was introduced to Bierce's technique by way of Charles Vidor's 1929 film *The Spy*, a silent adaptation of Bierce's story.

Bierce's and Borges's stories will now be considered in their respective order. 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' tells the story of a captured Confederate sympathiser during the American Civil War condemned to execution on Owl Creek Bridge as a result of being conned by an undercover Union scout. At the moment of his death by hanging, he closes his eyes and concentrates on seeing a clear picture of his wife and children. Then the rope breaks and suddenly he finds himself being washed downstream while miraculously wrestling with the loosening rope and dodging volley after volley of gunshot. He eventually makes it back to his home where his wife awaits his return. Then the ground beneath him gives way and he is left dangling above the river, dead. The similarities between Bierce's beautifully crafted story and *El despojo* are obvious. Nevertheless, there is an important difference in how Rulfo employs this imaginary escape device.

Rulfo's protagonist does manage to flee the village but his escape is tainted by the death of his son and the presence of the Nahual (discussed later in this chapter).

In Borges's story, at the precise moment of his execution by firing squad, Jaromir Hladík (an imprisoned jew living in Prague) is miraculously granted a full year in which to complete his verse tragedy, *Los enemigos*. The bullets stop in mid-flight and Hladík is free to complete his composition. In this way, Borges manages to correct the horror of war and execution by insinuating that, by completing his work of art (albeit, solely in his mind), Hladík, in a way, can meet death with a greater sense of validation. His life has amounted to something. He may not have a finished copy to hold in his hands, but, nevertheless, *Los enemigos* does exist.

Bierce's and Borges's protagonists both use their minds to escape the horror of their impending executions and both, in different ways, manage to transcend their horrible fates and it is at this point that *El despojo* departs from these stories. Patrick Dove, with reference to *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, claims that the work of Rulfo challenges the idea that art can compensate for the catastrophes of history and this is central to an understanding of *El despojo*. (Dove 103) There is a moment, towards the end of the film, when the protagonist looks into the distance and sees a woman breast-feeding a baby. This could be a memory of a happier time when Petra nursed the newborn Lencho, or it could be a glimpse of the land of milk and honey that the protagonist has promised his dying son where 'hasta el cielo es verde' (Rulfo 1980: 112). Immediately after this he sees an idealised vision of the topless Petra brushing her hair. Just as she is about to make eye contact with the camera, the shot cuts to the

small crucifix placed upon the make-shift grave for the now departed Lencho. In this way, at the point when the protagonist's, and, therefore, the viewers', gaze is pointed towards the possibility of a happy outcome for the family, we are immediately brought back to the harsher 'reality' of Rulfo's world and, as Dove points out, this is not a work of art that will correct the brutal wrongdoings of history. Instead, we see that, even in a dreamlike episode that exists in the mind of the protagonist, a utopia is impossible. Not only have the hidden forces of evil that Rulfo seeks to expose taken away the poor man's land and indirectly caused the death of his son, they have also taken away his hope and, more devastatingly, his imagination. Not even in his own mind can the protagonist conceive of a perfect escape. His flight is tainted by the injury and subsequent death of his son. In a written interview that Máximo Simpson conducted with the author, Rulfo made specific reference to the near death experiences that he had encountered in his own life:

> Al final de la vida las cosas se confunden. Igual que al comienzo. Yo, que he estado en dos o tres ocasiones bordeando esa situación lo sé, o al menos he creído saberlo: se vuelve uno inconsciente. […] No hay análisis ninguno, sólo una mezcla de atrofiada de pensamientos, donde aparece la gente que uno quiere, pero con mutilada y muy lejana [...] (Vital 2003: 201)

And so it is for the protagonist of *El despojo*. In the moment of his demise he is surrounded by the mutilated versions of his loved ones—an injured son and a distorted vision of his wife who, at her most desirable is unattainable, a wife who keeps her head hidden for most of the film. In this way, through his peculiar use of cinematic flashbacks, Rulfo continues his exploration of the bleak and impoverished situations that faced (and still face) poor and dispossessed *campesinos*, indigenous or *mestizo*, throughout the country. The desperate

situations facing the inhabitants of the plains and mountains of Jalisco throughout *El Llano en llamas* are now shown to dominate equally the lives of those that reside in what Rulfo refers to as the *inframundo* of the indigenous communities.

2.4 *El Inframundo* – The Nahual and Other Indigenous Elements

After a major retrospective exhibition of Rulfo's photography in 1980, a catalogue of the exhibition was produced under the same name: *Homenaje de Juan Rulfo*. This publication, of which 3,000 copies were made available, was re-printed on three separate occasions in 1983 with the same critical texts as the 1980 publication, but with the significantly new title of *Inframundo*. A fascination with the beyond and the idea of underworlds overlapping with the 'real' world abound in Rulfo's literature and *El despojo* continues this preoccupation with the *inframundo*. Throughout this chapter it is made clear that, for Rulfo, the term *inframundo* not only denotes a netherworld of wandering souls but also a sort of mythical world in which indigenous communties reside—a place that, for him, remains inaccesible. Despite featuring heavily in his photographic work, indigenous characters rarely feature in Rulfo's written work. González Boixo has written on the virtual absence of indigenous characters in the literature of Rulfo, citing as he does, one occasion in which they do appear in *Pedro Páramo:*

> La mayoría de los rostros fotografiados por Rulfo corresponde a indígenas o mestizos y, en cambio, en su obra literaria, sin entrar en los difusos límites del mestizaje, el tipo de campesino que aparece refleja más bien a una población de origen español que coloniza la región de Jalisco desde el siglo XVI. El mismo Rulfo habló de estos campesinos apegados a su tierra y temerosos de perderla, y de la dificultad para comprender el pensamiento indígena. Sólo en una ocasión aparecen indígenas en su obra literaria, en *Pedro Páramo*, cuando los indios bajan de Apango a Comala para vender sus mercancías. La presencia constante de indígenas y mestizos en la fotografía de Rulfo parte de una realidad social en la que criollos, indígenas y mestizos comparten un territorio. (González Boixo 2006: 267)

For this reason, due to the sparsity of indigenous refererences in his previous work, the inclusion of these references in *El despojo*, critically ignored before now, must be addressed. Central to this discussion is the inclusion of the Nahual character. Nevertheless, before a specific discussion on the presence of the Nahual, it is worth considering the location in which *El despojo* was shot—Cardonal, a small town in the Mezquital Valley in the state of Hidalgo. Gustavo Fares, with reference to the work of Roger Bartra and Alvaro Hernández Mayorga, describes the Mezquital region as follows:

> Si atendemos a la referencia geográfica concreta, la zona es una de las más pobres del país. Según Roger Bartra "esta región de México, desde hace decenios, ha significado el ejemplo más notorio de miseria y explotación; Valle del Mezquital ha sido sinónimo de Valle de la Muerte". Hernández Mayorga habla de un paisaje "que se levanta en una tierra hosca y gris, pedregosa y seca, cuyo mejor símbolo es el nopal". Habita allí el grupo indígena otomí, explotado tanto por blancos como por mestizos desde la época de la conquista. Son innumerables los estudios de todo tipo, en especial antropológicos, que se han hecho de este grupo pese a lo cual, o quizás precisamente debido a ellos, siguen sufriendo una pobreza extrema. Bien pudiera ser que el protagonista de la película de Rulfo perteneciera a este grupo indígena. (Fares 1995: 83)

Rulfo's decision to film in Cardonal is connected to his decision to include the Nahual character in his and Reynoso's attempt to penetrate what Rulfo has repeatedly referred to as the indigenous *inframundo*. In choosing the Mezquital Valley as the setting for the film, Rulfo is making a conscious decision to visit and document an area of Mexico in which an indigenous community has suffered the abject poverty mentioned by Fares. Furthermore, this choice of location may have potential links with the work of Mauricio Magdaleno about whom Rulfo wrote in his 1981 article 'Notas sobre la literatura indígena en México':

> Su obra más importante es *Resplandor* (sic), novela que trata la miseria y el despojo sufridos por los indios otomíes del árido Valle del Mezquital,

> de la cual se han hecho numerosas ediciones a partir de los años 40. (Rulfo 1981: 4-5)

It is possible that Magdaleno's novel, *El Resplandor*, concerning, as it does, the plight of poor Otomí *campesinos* dealing with a cruel *hacendado* in a small town of the Mezquital Valley, influenced Rulfo's story and the choice to film in Cardonal. The name of the principle villain of *El Resplandor* (Saturino) bears similarities with the abusive landowner of *El despojo* (Celerino). However, the most significant aspect of the possible influence of Magdaleno's novel is Rulfo's reference to 'los indios otomíes'. With this in mind, a reasonable assumption can be made that, despite the presence of dialogue in Spanish, Rulfo's intention is to tell the story of an indigenous character.

The title of this thesis as a whole comes from Lesley Byrd Simspon's seminal history of Mexico. It also comes, indirectly, however, through Rulfo, who, it is known, read both *Many Mexicos* and *The Encomienda in New Spain*.[8] In his article 'El México de los años 30 visto por Henri Cartier-Bresson', Rulfo makes specific reference to Simpson in the context of Mexican multi-culturalism and the unchanging poverty of much of Mexican (particularly rural and indigenous) society during the thirty years that separated the photographer's visits. The quotation is worth reading in full as it highlights important issues that are examined throughout this thesis:

> Sin embargo, y eso lo pudo comprobar también Cartier-Bresson en su segunda visita a México en 1963, numerosas regiones del país permanecían olvidadas del progreso, aisladas en sus propias comunidades indias. Esto se debe primordialmente a un régimen tradicional, por no decir secular, que los indios ejercen para salvaguardar sus culturas. La defensa de costumbres, lenguaje, creencias e identidad, las cuales intentan

[8] From email correspondence with Arq. Víctor Jiménez, Director of the Fundación Juan Rulfo, April 2014.

> conservar pese a las presiones extrañas. Por tal motivo, la política oficial ha sido la de no interferir, sino en casos extremos, para apoyar su prevalencia dentro del ámbito nacional. Y si se toma en cuenta que existen en territorio mexicano 53 grupos étnicos, con lenguas y costumbres bien definidas, no debe considerárseles como una rémora, sino un gran aporte pluricultural que forma parte integrante del país. En otras palabras, la incorporación al sistema de estas 53 comunidades, traería el exterminio de tales culturas, cuyas manifestaciones artísticas, mitos y leyendas, han sido y serán por mucho tiempo valiosas para etnólogos, sociólogos y antropólogos.
> De allí nació el calificativo de "muchos méxicos" que le diera Lesley Byrd Simpson. Cierto que habitan zonas deprimidas y de grandes carencias; pero jamás abandonarán su pedazo de tierra, ni su mundo ni su inframundo. (Rulfo 2010: 23)

Rulfo sees this *inframundo* as a semi-mystical place where he can never enter. In other words, the stories, myths, legends and religious practices that indigenous communities attempt to hide from outsiders constitute a separate ontological plain that remains inaccessible to the *mestizo* or *criollo* interloper.[9] It must be noted, and this is made clear by Rigoberta Menchú in her testimonial *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, that there is certainly some truth to this belief in the protection of ancient belief systems by indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the emphasis that Rulfo places on the idea of the inaccessible *inframundo* further propagates the contemplation of the *indio* as the other. The notion of the other, or, he/she that we do not understand, invariably creates suspicion. Manuel Gamio, writing in 1916, laments the inability to fully understand the *indio*:

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[9] Rulfo, with reference to his work at the INI, deals with this at length in 'Notas sobre la literatura indígena en México': 'Actualmente, en el Departamento de Publicaciones del Instituto Nacional Indigenista, así como en varias editoriales, se han publicado y se están editando, cuentos y leyendas indígenas. Sobre este asunto, exista algunas dificultades, pues el país cuenta con 58 grupos dispersos en toda la nación y cada uno de ellos tiene su propio idioma y naturalmente sus propios mitos, los cuales solo se transmiten por tradición oral. Y si se toma en consideración el carácter hermético de cada comunidad, resulta difícil extraer de alguno de ellos cualquier información; pues para cada grupo esto tiene un significado ritual no excluido de su sincretismo pagano-religioso, que han conservado casi intacto desde hace 450 años.' (Rulfo 1981: 3)

> […] no sabemos cómo piensa el indio, ignoramos sus verdaderas aspiraciones, lo prejuzgamos con nuestro criterio, cuando deberíamos compenetrarnos del suyo para comprenderlo y hacer que nos comprenda. Hay que forjarse – ya sea temporalmente – una alma indígena. (Gamio 25)

Gamio's description of the *indio* as constituting something whose aspirations and 'truths' are, possibly, radically different to those of the Hispanic *mestizo* community further contributes to the idea that indigenous communities operate according to some kind of ancient and guarded mystical code. Gamio's solution to the social problem of the *indio* was rooted in the notion of assimilation with the final goal of producing a 'coherent and homogenous national race' (Gamio 10) that would be unified by language. That language would, of course, need to be Spanish, the most widely spoken language in the Americas. While Rulfo certainly views indigenous communities as something 'foreign' to him, he nevertheless insists upon the multiculturalism of the *indio*:

> Los problemas de la identidad comienzan en ese punto: vistos desde Europa existen nada más "los indios". Vistos desde dentro los aborígenes se saben tan distintos entre sí como pueden serlo noruegos y húngaros que, sin embargo, reciben la denominación común de "europeos". Los indios de México hablan lenguas (no "dialectos") tan diferentes entre sí como el italiano y el polaco. (Rulfo 1986: 75)

The problem with the term *indio* is that it naturally encourages the false notion that the *indio* is one unified race and this, in turn, strengthens the notion that *mestizaje* can easily be achieved by the combining of just two cultures—Hispanic and 'Indian'.

In a publicly conducted interview at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, Rulfo spoke at length about indigenous communities and expressed his opinion on the nature of the Mexican *indio*. In response to a question

regarding the supposed 'hermética interioridad' of the Mexican *indio*, Rulfo replied:

> Naturalmente que uno no entiende eso, y es muy difícil, como decía, escribir con personajes indígenas, puesto que uno no sabe qué piensan, cómo piensan ni por qué actúan de determinada manera. Y eso, quizás, contesta esta pregunta. Pero no, no hay indios en mi literatura. (Rulfo 1996: 13)

With only one *Indigenista* Institute (populated by what can only be described as people from *mestizo* and *criollo* backgrounds) dealing with the needs of approximately fifty-three different ethnic groups, it seems inevitable that a certain degree of homogenisation of indigenous groups would creep into the mindset of those involved. The idea that *we*, (those who work at INI) are here to look after the needs of *they* (all Mexican indigenous groups) feeds into this notion of indigenous Mexicans being part of one ethnic group. In fact it seems clear, both from Rulfo himself and those who worked closely with him, that he opposed this vision of an homogenous indigenous community. The confused and disjointed nature of *El despojo* can be viewed as a representation of a more heterogeneous vision of indigenous cultures, including, as it does, elements of Nahuatl language, maya mythology and recordings of a Yaqui celebration.

When Rulfo was to speak in public about his view of indigenous Mexicans he highlighted what he saw as the differences between each group, noting (as seen above) how certain groups within Mexico were as different as Norwegians are to Hungarians and speaking languages as different as Italian is to Polish. A picture begins to emerge of Rulfo as continually mystified by the incomprehensible nature of indigenous communities (thus, emphasising the sense of otherness)

while at the same time possessing a keen sense of what was really the problem for indigenous communities:

> Rulfo sabía bien quién era el enemigo capital del indio, que dicho enemigo no se halla ubicado en el retraso de su cultura, en sus valores ancestrales; en sus relaciones comunitarias; en su bilingüismo estrecho y analfabetismo generalizado; el enemigo se halla en la relación de clase que en el sistema capitalista le toca vivir, situación agravada por el caciquismo y las tensiones de la situación económica nacional que llegan hasta sus propias comunidades y lo victiman. (Pozas 17)

In *El despojo*, the protagonist occupies an undefined ontological space where the living and the dead seem to intermingle with visions of an imagined future and possible glimpses of an idyllic past. The idea that the majority of the events which take place in *El despojo* would happen in the imagination of a man at the point of death began to take shape after the inclusion of the character of the Nahual. As Reynoso explains:

> [Reynoso to Rulfo]—'Oye, necesitamos algo así en la historia, algo como la negación de la vida'. Y se le ocurrió el personaje del nahual, una fuerza que persigue a los demás y que surgió de esa negación de la vida. Después se le ocurrió que toda la historia sucediera cuando muere el personaje. (Yanes Gómez 59)

Reynoso would later explain how Rulfo's Nahual was inspired by a man from Cardonal: 'Un hombre que había ahí, que era ciego, paralítico y creo que sordo también—de esas personas que no sabes cómo pueden vivir, esas cosas extrañas que hay en los pueblos'. (Yanes Gómez 59) The choice of this indigenous man to portray the Nahual is at once arresting and problematic. The Real Academia Española defines *Nagual*/*Nahual* as follows:

> (Del nahua *nahualli*, bruja).
> **1.** m. *Am. Cen.* y *Méx.* **brujo** (‖ hechicero).
> **2.** m. *El Salv.* En la mitología popular, animal simbólico que representa el espíritu de una persona o de un lugar.

> **3.** m. *Guat.*, *Hond.* y *Méx.* Animal que alguien tiene de compañero inseparable.[10]

The Nahual character of *El despojo* is never depicted in animal form and, instead, acts as a silent, humanoid portent of doom standing at the portal between the worlds of the living and dead, human and supernatural. As Pedro (the protagonist), Petra and Lencho leave the village, the Nahual stares at them from the side of the otherwise deserted street. He is represented as an old man, dressed in filthy white trousers and shirt. He wears a straw hat and carries a bag slung over his shoulder. Presented to us as an old weather-beaten man, this is a Nahual that can be seen in many villages the length and breadth of Mexico.

Rulfo's depiction of the Nahual as humanoid was not revolutionary.[11] Amongst other writers, Miguel Ángel Asturias depicted the Nahual as a sort of human doppelganger in his *Leyendas de Guatemala*. In the 'Leyenda del Volcán', we are told that 'seis hombres poblaron la Tierra de los Árboles: los tres que venían en el viento y los tres que venían en el agua'. (Asturias 2002: 99) When the 'tres que venían en el viento' come face to face with the 'tres que venían en el agua', they become alarmed when they see their doubles staring back at them. The hero of this particular legend, Nido explains that these doubles represent their Nahuals:

> Nido calmó a sus compañeros – extrañas plantas móviles -, que miraban sus retratos en el río sin poder hablar.
> - ¡Son nuestras máscaras, tras ellas se ocultan nuestras caras! ¡Son nuestros dobles, con ellos nos podemos disfrazar! ¡Son nuestra madre, nuestro padre, Monte en un Ave, que matamos para ganar la tierra! ¡Nuestro nahual! ¡Nuestro natal! (Asturias 1981: 100)

[10] Definition as found at http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=nagual
[11] See the first of the Real Academia Española definitions.

In the glossary Asturias devised and included in the *Leyendas de Guatemala*, under the heading of *Dobles* he notes the following:

> *Dobles.*—(Véase Nahual.) En el río revivía el nahual muerto, el espíritu protector asimilado a la madre y al padre (¿totem?), para ponderar el grado máximo con que cuidaba de ellos…En los bailes religiosos aún visten los nativos máscaras y trajes de animales: tigres, pumas, dantas, etc. (Asturias 1981: 228)

Asturias sees the Nahual as a multi-faceted anthropomorphic guardian, playmate, protector, mother, god and homeland, but particularly seems drawn to the idea of linking the Nahual with the idea of cultural memory. When Nido exclaims: '¡Nuestro nahual! ¡Nuestro natal!', notions of the Nahual/double become fused with the notion of cultural memory. 'Natal' is thus defined in Asturias's glossary:

> *Natal*.—En dialecto maya, la memoria, el recuerdo, el *souvenir*. (Asturias 1981: 234)

The Spanish adjective 'natal' (native) and the Mayan noun, 'natal' (memory), combine to create a new word that conjures up memories of a native land. Asturias's Nahual becomes a metonym for both the nation and the collective memory of that nation. In the same way, Rulfo's Nahual serves as a sort of cultural reminder linking his world with the pre-Hispanic world. However, Rulfo's Nahual has mutated into something menacing taking on a sinister, almost diabolical, significance. Indeed, the references to the Nahual in the script are ominous to say the least—'¡Qué bueno que no nos cruzamos con El Nahual!' (Rulfo 1980: 111) and 'Ánimo, Lencho, no ves que El Nahual nos viene persiguiendo'. (Rulfo 1980: 112) In fact, in the explanatory film script notes the Nahual is defined as 'un espíritu maligno'. (Rulfo 1980: 111) This diabolical link harks back to early Spanish fear of the Nahual as expressed by Fray Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón. Both Claudio Lomnitz and Asturias invoke Ruíz de Alarcón's

Tratado de las supersticiones de los naturales de Nueva España. Interestingly both Asturias and Lomnitz quote from the same passage, but Asturias presents a censored version. Lomnitz explains how:

> ...after parading the testimony of a number of credible (that is, Spanish) witnesses who testified that Indians could indeed turn into their nahuales (animal soul companions), Friar Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón explained the Indians' ability to transform:
> *"When a child is born, the Devil, by the express or tacit pact that its parents have with him, dedicates or subjects it to the animal which the child is to have as a nahual—which is like saying, as owner of his birth and master of his actions, or what the gentiles used to call fate. And by virtue of this pact the child remains subject to all the dangers and travails that the animal may suffer until its death. And, on the other hand, the Devil makes the animal always obey the command of the child, or else the Devil himself carries it out, using the animal as instrument".* (Lomnitz 278)

As mentioned, Asturias cites the same passage from Ruíz de Alarcón, but removes all diabolical references:

> *Nahual*—Fue y es muy repartida entre los indios la creencia de un espíritu protector, encarnado en un animal, que puede equiparse al Ángel de la Guarda de los católicos y "el cual—escribe Herrera, en su libro sobre las Indias Occidentales—es lo más que puede decirse para significar guardia o compañero, agregando que la amistad entre el indio y su nahual llega a ser tan fuerte que, cuando uno muere, el otro hace otro tanto, y sin nahual el indo cree que ninguno puede ser rico o poderoso". "Cuando el niño nace se le dedica o sujeta a un animal, que el dicho niño ha de tener por nahual, que es como decir por dueño de su natividad y señor de sus acciones, o, lo que los gentiles llaman hado y en virtud de este pacto queda el niño sujeto a todos los peligros y trabajos que padeciere el animal hasta la muerte" {Ruiz de Alarcón, *Tratado de las supersticiones de los naturales de Nueva España*, 1629}. (Asturias 1981: 234)

It is uncertain whether Rulfo was familiar with Asturias's glossary. However, as Rulfo's frequent reading of the *cronistas* has been well documented (notably by Víctor Jiménez in his introduction to *Letras e imágenes*), it may safely be assumed that he was familiar with Ruíz de Alarcón's *Tratado.* This may present a clue as to the real significance of Rulfo's Nahual. Rulfo was fascinated by

indigenous cultures but rarely succeeded in integrating them into his work. *El despojo* is a rare example of Rulfo's treatment of these cultures in a narrative format. In 'Juan Rulfo. Inframundo', an interview with Silvia Lemus de Fuentes (included in *Toda la obra*), Rulfo explains his reluctance to do so and again makes reference to the 'inframundo':

> …los indígenas en México están llenos de mitos, viven en el inframundo, creen en el inframundo, entonces es muy difícil entrar en un inframundo. (Rulfo 1992: 477)

Rulfo sees the indigenous communities as existing in another world, far removed from his. For this reason, he tended to exclude indigenous references from his literature. Outside of his artistic endeavours, however, Rulfo was heavily involved in the attempt to improve the life of indigenous communities through his publications at the INI. His co-worker Ricardo Pozas notes how he promoted the rights of indigenous communities from behind his desk rather than in the field:

> Muy escasas ocasiones se apersonó en las comunidades indígenas para ver de cerca la realidad de sus vidas; pero, a cambio, se informó, a través de la tarea cotidiana que se le encomendó, de supervisar las publicaciones que daría a conocer el Instituto; en ellas dejó siempre su valioso juicio crítico, impidiendo la publicación de todas aquellas expresiones que de cualquier modo lesionaran la dignidad del indio. (Pozas 16-17)

There are certain discernible elements not only of the influence of thinkers such as Gamio and Vasconcelos but also of José Carlos Mariátegui (whose *7 ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* firmly links the 'indigenous problem'—the marginalisation and extreme poverty of indigenous communities in Peru—to the 'land problem') present in Rulfo's attitude towards Mexico's indigenous population. Like Mariátegui, Rulfo sees the resolution of the problem as being inextricably linked to land issues and this will be discussed later in this

chapter. However, like Gamio, the author seems to subscribe to the view that the indigenous represent something 'other', something impenetrable:

> Principalmente ese hermetismo en el que ellos viven; no es fácil que acepten contar sus tradiciones porque piensan que son propiedad exclusiva de la comunidad y no aceptan exponer sus secretos a gente extraña. (Rulfo 1986: 52)

Through his time at the INI, Rulfo worked for the promotion of the welfare of indigenous cultures, and yet, like other contemporary thinkers, recognised his limitations in explaining cultures that were not his own. For Rulfo, understandably, the Indian represented the 'other'—the almost unfathomable inhabitant of an ethereal *inframundo*. This view informs Rulfo's most explicit attempt to include indigenous culture in his art—*El despojo*. Rulfo's Nahual serves as a gateway to this *inframundo* but also willfully eschews the indigenous idea of the Nahual as protector. Rulfo plays with the early Spanish fear and misunderstanding of the Nahual and presents us with a flawed Nahual which, while feared by the protagonist, is neither protective nor particularly awe-inspiring.

Up to this point in the discussion, all definitions of the Nahual have been provided by investigators of Spanish or *mestizo* lineage. In her celebrated testimonial *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y asi me nació la conciencia*, Rigoberta Menchú, (a Quiché Maya from Guatemala), devotes the entirety of Chapter 3 to the phenomenon of the Nahual. She explains how:

> Todo niño nace con su nahual. Su nahual es como su sombra. Van a vivir paralelamente y casi siempre es un animal el nahual. […] Es como una persona paralela al hombre. (Burgos-Debray & Menchú 39)

Menchú goes on to outline the complicated and highly structured system of appointing a child's Nahual and how the day of a child's birth will decide which

Nahual will be associated with which child. Usually, the Nahual is an animal although this is not always the case. A Nahual, could, for instance, be a tree. However, the Nahual will be the child's shadow throughout its life and acts as a person's parallel spiritual guardian.

As Asturias and Menchú make clear, Rulfo's decision to not depict the Nahual in animal form is not a radical departure from the established Nahual mythology. The Nahual that appears on screen is a humanoid double, who both represents death and the miserable human existence of the film's protagonist. Filthy and haggard, Rulfo's Nahual could even be seen to represent an older version of Pedro himself, perhaps his inevitable future from which he flees in vain.

It is reasonable to assume, given Rulfo's avid reading of the *cronistas*, that he was aware of the that he was aware of Ruíz de Alarcón's description of the Nahual. When presented with something alien to his own culture, the Spanish *cronista*'s fear of the unknown leads him to depict the Nahual as something malignant. As Rulfo noted, the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America have kept parts of their culture safely guarded and Rulfo's Nahual may serve as a metaphor for the *mestizo*'s inability (inherited from the Spanish) to fully penetrate the *inframundo* of pre-Hispanic cultures. This metaphor can be expanded to represent the *mestizo's* bewilderment with the belief-systems of pre-Columbian America ever-present since before the time of Fray Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón. This bafflement is embodied by Rulfo's Nahual and treasured by Rigoberta Menchú and her people:

> Nosotros los indígenas hemos ocultado nuestra identidad, hemos guardado muchos secretos, porque somos discriminados. Para nosotros es bastante

> difícil muchas veces decir algo que se relaciona con uno mismo porque uno sabe que tiene que ocultar esto hasta que garantice que va a seguir como una cultura indígena, que nadie nos puede quitar. Por eso no puedo explicar el nahual pero hay ciertas cosas que puedo decir a grandes rasgos. Yo no puedo decir cuál es mi nahual porque es uno de nuestros secretos. (Burgos-Debray & Menchú 41)

Menchú finds it almost impossible to reach a comprehensive representation of the Nahual. This leaves much open to the imagination when one seeks to portray a Nahual on or off screen. It also, of course, leaves any representation of the Nahual open to criticism. One may speculate as to how Rulfo and Reynoso would have chosen to portray the Nahual on screen given an unlimited budget. Yet this line of reasoning will prove fruitless and ultimately pointless. The Nahual 'written' into the story of *El despojo* takes on the form of many harbingers of doom, a cross-cultural phenomenon like, for example the Banshee (*Bean Sí*) in the Gaelic tradition. While Asturias's Nahual represents a vibrant and celebratory return to a mythical past, Rulfo's Nahual recalls the misunderstanding and willful oppression of indigenous beliefs. Menchú's Nahual protects her people throughout their lives as a constant companion. Asturias's Nahual shapeshifts in the dancing waters of the *Tierra de los Árboles*, while Rulfo's Nahual stands alone, mute in the dust—the bastard child of indigenous myth and colonial fear.

The Nahual of *El despojo* was born the day that the colonists (whether wilfully or through ignorance) mistook this guardian spirit as a diabolical accomplice. Rulfo's Nahual looks pathetic but is feared by Man; and this mutated, joyless Nahual is not the descendant of the pre-Hispanic Nahual. Rulfo creates a metaphorical character that symbolises both the inheritence of the colonist's protracted fears of the unknown. Rather than simply misunderstanding the origin of the Nahual and its protective connotations, Rulfo chooses to use his Nahual to

develop both his narrative and his vision of a fractured Mexican society. Firstly, his Nahual, potentially a ghostly manifestation of Pedro's future, serves to signpost the inevitable demise of the protagonist and, thus, furthers the pessimistic theme of the poverty-stricken *campesino* formerly explored in Rulfo's previous works of narrative fiction. Secondly, by depicting the Nahual as a pathetic malign spirit the character serves to metaphorically represent the the misunderstanding of indigenous culture by Spanish and, later, *mestizo* (Mexican) society—through this fractured depiction of the confusion that arises from the clash of cultures it is clear that, within Rulfo's *inframundo*, homogeneity seems like a far from fully-realised concept.

In addition to the presence of the Nahual character, the soundtrack of *El despojo* expands the focus of the film beyond the streets of Cardonal and the surrounding hills. Through the use of Nahuatl language, indigenous instruments and snatches of recordings of Yaqui ceremonies, *El despojo* points towards a multi-cultural understanding of Mexican reality and these elements are now addressed. When the protagonist enters the ramshackle house where Petra and Lencho are huddled, he says to Petra: 'Cuíjele, Petra. Vine por ustedes. Acabo de acabar con ese hombre que nos trajo la desgracia'. (Rulfo 1980: 110) In his *Diccionario de la obra de Juan Rulfo*, López Mena defines 'cuíjele' as '¡Alerta!' or '¡Vámonos!' and explains how the word 'cuije' (from the Nahuatl 'cuixi') is an onomatopoeic word used to describe a breed of sparrowhawk in Tabasco. This sparrowhawk is also known as 'espanta-venados' as its song alerts deer to the presence of hunters. (López Mena 71) While this may be viewed as merely a linguistic curiosity, it nevertheless further serves to situate the story of *El despojo*

closer to an etymologically indigenous *inframundo*, a world that exists beneath another. The remnants of one language continue to bubble just beneath the surface of a superimposed language; the *inframundo* (a netherworld) demands to be heard and seen.

With reference to the film's unsettling score, Julio Estrada makes the following appraisal:

> Uno de los señalamientos a mi entender más reveladores del pensamiento de Rulfo respecto a la música aparece en las indicaciones del guión de *El despojo*, donde su esquema del ambiente sonoro-musical es singular. (Estrada 48)

Estrada goes on to explain how Rulfo's instructions for the music of *El despojo* relate to Rulfo's concept of music and silence. While Estrada's analysis is interesting, it is also fundamentally flawed. What Estrada is referring to are not, in fact, Rulfo's instructions but Ayala Blanco's *descriptions* of the music that is heard in the film: 'Música, ruidos estilizados, silencios'. (Rulfo 1980: 113) We do not know if Rulfo had any hand in the choice of music for this film and Estrada seems to be analysing only the text supplied in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* and not the actual film. Estrada's ideas are misguided but the soundtrack of *El despojo*, whether or not Rulfo was involved, is certainly a fascinating and integral part of the film and worthy of analysis. Like everything else surrounding *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, there is an element of confusion.

The musician is neither credited on screen nor in the Rulfo filmography provided in *Toda la obra* and *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*. And no mention of his name in the critical literature has been found during this investigation. The film's soundtrack is explained by Reynoso himself as follows:

> Había un americano que grabó muchas canciones mexicanas en el campo. En una ocasión me dijo que tenía grabados unos instrumentos prehispánicos. Escogí algunas piezas para la banda sonora. Había un instrumento que sonaba como un corazón, no sé que sería. También había la grabación de una fiesta yaqui con muchísima gente, ruidos y gritos. (Yanes Gómez 60)

Both the music made with pre-Hispanic instruments and the unsettling use of the recorded party help to further situate the action within an atmosphere where worlds are overlapping. The *guitarrón* on the protagonist's back comes to symbolise the *mestizo* world of Mariachis while the pre-Hispanic percussion and twangs of the background music evoke the indigenous world while conveying the mysterious and foreboding tones of the narrative. On various occasions the viewer witnesses the family fleeing through deserted streets while suddenly the walls reverberate with the sounds of, what we now know to be, a Yaqui party. This naturally proves unsettling for the viewer as the expected silence of a *Luvinaesque* ghost town is punctured by the cries of invisible indigenous revellers. The unsettling suspension of an empirical chronology during times of celebration has been analysed by Paz in his *El laberinto de la soledad*. He sees the fiesta as an occasion when time becomes immobile—an eternal 'now':

> El tiempo deja de ser sucesión y vuelve a ser lo que fue, y es, originalmente: un presente en donde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian. (Paz 2000: 52)

For Paz, festivity acts as a portal to a dreamlike world where our actions and thoughts are no longer shackled by the chains of time and reason:

> Todo ocurre en un mundo encantado: el tiempo es otro tiempo (situado en un pasado mítico o en una actualidad pura). El espacio en que se verifica cambia de aspecto, se desliga del resto de la tierra, se engalana y convierte en un "sitio de fiesta" (en general se escogen lugares especiales o poco frecuentadas). Los personajes que intervienen abandonan su rango humano o social y se transforman en vivas, aunque efímeras representaciones y todo pasa como si no fuera cierto, como en los sueños. Ocurra lo que

> ocurra, nuestras acciones poseen mayor ligereza, una gravedad distinta: asumen significaciones diversas y contraemos en ellas responsabilidades singulares. Nos aligeremos de nuestra carga de tiempo y razón. (Paz 2000: 55)

However, when the Mexican frees himself from the 'carga de tiempo y razón' the results are not always of a jubilant nature. Festivity leads to drunkenness, fireworks, dancing, love, quarrels and death. Paz's description of the chronological breakdown that occurs at the time of festivity is remarkably similar to Rulfo's depiction of the moment of death where, for the protagonist of *El despojo*, time freezes and all subsequent events in the film occur in a dreamlike world of hallucinations and allusions to a mythical past. In his aforementioned interview with Rulfo,[12] Máximo Simpson talks about the links between revelling and death towards the end of *Pedro Páramo* when the bells toll for Susana San Juan and the inhabitants misinterpret reason for the bell-ringing and believe a party has begun:

> ...cuando muere Susana San Juan, el duelo total que Pedro Páramo impone al pueblo se convierte insensiblemente, por imperio de circunstancias impersonales en un jolgorio. El duelo se convierte en jolgorio, y las campanas de duelo son ahora de alegría […]. Hay aquí, creo, también una especie de amalgama entre vida y muerte, entre duelo y festejo, como cuando no se sabe con exactitud si los personajes están vivos o están muertos. (Vital 2003: 201)

In Rulfo's *inframundo* the protagonist finds himself stumbling through a world of pain and festivity, life and death; and, of course, he his utterly powerless to stop the collision of these two worlds. He is unable to prevent his own demise and, even in his imagination, he is unable to stop the death of his young son. Paz famously described the Mexican death as something sterile, not fertile as in the tradition of the Aztecs or Roman Catholicism:

[12] Reproduced in Alberto Vital's biography *Noticias sobre Juan Rulfo: 1784-2003*.

> El mexicano, obstinadamente cerrado ante el mundo y sus semejantes, ¿se abre la muerte? La adula, la festeja, la cultiva, se abraza a ella, definitivamente y para siempre, pero no se entrega. Todo está lejos del mexicano, todo le es extraño y, en primer término, la muerte, la extraña por excelencia. El mexicano no se entrega a la muerte, porque la entrega entraña sacrificio. Y el sacrificio, a su vez, exige que alguien dé y alguien reciba. Esto es, que alguien se abra y se encare a una realidad que lo trasciende. En un mundo intranscendente, cerrado sobre sí mismo, la muerte mexicana no da ni recibe; se consume en sí misma y a sí misma se satisface. Así pues, nuestras relaciones con la muerte son íntimas —más íntimas, acaso, que las de cualquier otro pueblo— pero desnudas de significación y desprovistas de erotismo. La muerte mexicana es estéril, no engendra como la de los aztecas y cristianos. (Paz 2000: 65)

Death is certainly a constant in Mexican culture but, notwithstanding new analyses of the notion of death in Mexican culture by Claudio Lomnitz and others, Paz's ideas on the sterility of death certainly seem to resonate in Rulfo's depiction of death in *El despojo* occurring as it does amid the confusing sounds of an invisible celebration. For the protagonist of *El despojo*, death is not represented as a form of corporeal degradation but, rather, as a portal to a confused and purgatorial netherworld. With reference to the work of Rulfo, Claudio Lomnitz, in his *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, sees 'life in Luvina as a long, senseless, helpless, and hopeless wait for death' and describes Juan Preciado's search for his father as 'an encounter with violence, promiscuity, and suspicion, a condition that is routinized—and not transcended—in death.' (Lomnitz 21) This can easily be applied to the experience of the protagonist *of El despojo* whose death is futile and pointless. Paz's sterility manifests itself in the form of an almost Beckettian purgatory. The death of the protagonist of *El despojo* does not revitalise the cosmos nor does it transport him to a land of milk and honey, rather, it leads him down a dead-end road where he is destined to fail time and time again in his

efforts to lead his family across the desert to a promised land. Throughout *El despojo,* the intertwined phenomena of revelling and death are used to startling effect. And through what are, it must be noted, simple filmmaking devices (incongruous musical elements and the imaginary 'flash-forward', for example), Rulfo's nightmarish *mestizo* vision of this *inframundo* is eerily represented on screen.

2.5 Land and Property and Women—Ownership and Dispossession in *El despojo*

Victor Jiménez, in his prologue to *Letras e Imágenes*, explains how Rulfo was fascinated with the sixteenth century as he viewed the Conquest as a sort of original sin which had still not been pardoned. (Jiménez 2002: 18-19) He notes how Rulfo saw a continuity between pre and post-colonial massacres as an eternal return from which Mexican society would not free itself until it confronted its own history without self-delusion. Luis Leal sees *El despojo* as 'typical of Rulfo's writing in the thematic treatment of death, revenge, and despoilment.' (Leal 96) Leal also sees *El despojo* as a criticism of the eternal *cacique* system that has shackled peasants since pre-Colombian times. This idea of continuity between pre and post-colonial systems of oppression are explained further by Rulfo himself. Rulfo draws a direct line from the pre-Hispanic system of *cacicazgo* which easily facilitated the Spanish *encomendero* system to the *hacienda* system. When asked to comment on metaphors and symbols in *Pedro Páramo*, Rulfo, writing in response to questions posed by Máximo Simpson, states that the character of Pedro Páramo is not just a metaphor but the very real physical embodiment of the continuation of old colonial systems of land-control-as-government and describes

his protagonist as just one of the representatives of the old colonial system 'al que aún estamos sometidos'. (Vital 2003: 200) Rulfo sees his novel as a search for the hidden forces of power in Mexican society:

> Con la pregunta "¿Están ustedes muertos?" se quiere encontrar una respuesta al por qué las fuerzas del poder, no obstante que operan en todas direcciones, permanecen en la oscuridad. (Vital 2003: 200)

Rulfo goes on to distill his novel to just one question: '¿Dónde está la fuerza que causa nuestra miseria?'(Vital 2003: 200), *El despojo* is very much a continuation of this question. Aside from Pedro Páramo, the archetype of the abusive landowner, examples of the abuse of power by landowners are evident throughout *El Llano en llamas* while in Don Celerino in *El despojo* represents, perhaps, an even more obvious attack on the Mexican *cacique* system than Pedro Páramo himself.

In his apparent desire not to only take possession of Pedro's land but also to take his wife, Don Celerino has even more in common with both Pedro Páramo and Dionisio Pinzón (the male protagonist of *El gallo de oro*). In fact, the possession of women by brutal *hacendados* is a recurring motif that cannot be overlooked in Rulfo's work as it is a major theme in *Pedro Páramo* and is consolidated in the filmic texts, namely *El despojo* and *El gallo de oro*. In *Pedro Páramo*, the incarceration of Susana San Juan within the walls of La Media Luna coincides with her apparent descent into delirium; while, in *El gallo de oro*, Dionisio's insistence that his free-spirited wife, Bernarda, remain ensconced within the walls of his Santa Gertrudis *hacienda* leads to an increase in her alocholism. While the incarceration of Bernarda is explored in much more detail in Chapter 3, the relationship between Petra, Don Celerino, Pedro and the

spectator in *El despojo* merits attention. Petra is depicted as something 'other', in some way cut off from the male characters. She is first shown in the home with her face covered up and her gaze directed downwards. Later she is shown with her face and hair uncovered as she holds her dying baby close. In the final stages of the film she is portrayed with her head again covered, but with her breast exposed as she feeds her son. Finally, she is depicted topless with her hair down and is photographed in a rather scopophilic manner as she brushes her hair. She is idealised and exoticised and is presented as elusive. Her *rebozo* hides her from our view and, as the gaze of Pedro and the spectator (a decidedly male gaze in the Mulvey sense) watches her, she turns away becoming, again, unattainable. When Pedro enters the town he declares that, though Don Celerino may have his land, he can never have his wife. In this way, Petra becomes the possession for which Pedro must fight. Even in Pedro's dreamlike escape, his own wife seems aloof and unobtainable. In the alternative reality, the one in which he is shot dead, she is definitely out of his reach. In Rulfo's fiction and cinematic works, any attempts by men to curtail, control or possess women leads inevitably to the demise of both male dominator and idealised female. In this sense, *El despojo* is no different. Don Celerino is ruthless in his desire to steal away Pedro's land, home and wife. Whether the context is *mestizo* or indigenous, narrative prose or film, the world of Rulfo is heavily populated with poor disspossessed *campesinos* and rich, abusive *hacendados*.

The way in which Rulfo's thinking reflects that of Gamio has been clearly outlined in this chapter. Nevertheless, a parallel can be seen between the author of *Pedro Páramo* and the ideas of Mariátegui who had previously written:

> La cuestión indígena arranca de nuestra economía. Tiene sus raíces en el régimen de propiedad de la tierra. Cualquier intento de resolverla con medidas de administración o policía, con métodos de enseñanza o con obras de vialidad, constituye un trabajo superficial o adjetivo, mientras, subsista la feudalidad de los 'gamonales'. (Mariátegui 47)

The need to dismantle the cacique land system of which Mariátegui speaks is a constant throughout the work of Rulfo and seems to be an eternal source of frustration as he sees the landowner as the epitome of corruption and malice:

> El cacique, el que tiene pistoleros a sueldo, el que los ha robado, el que dice tener gente y controlarla es el que cuenta. (Rulfo 1986: 44)

Referring, perhaps, to Mariátegui's warning that 'la solución del problema del indio tiene que ser una solución social. Sus realizadores deben ser los propios indios', Rulfo, almost despairingly asks: 'los antropólogos dicen que el indio debe decidir acerca de su destino, pero ¿cuál es el destino que le depara la realidad nacional?' (Rulfo 1986: 45) *El despojo* can be viewed as the perfect expression of Rulfo's exasperation and, while steeped in pessimism, his recognition of Mariátegui's notion that the indigenous issue is essentially a land issue adds an important dimension to Rulfo's work. It is, also, quite far removed from the 'ingenuidad antisociológica' (Mariátegui 50) that taints the astonishing blood-mingling solutions put forward even by *indigenista* Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias in his formative years:

> Los hijos de alemán e india son robustos, bien dotados y en cuanto al aspecto físico, desde el punto de vista estético, no puede pedirse más[...] Hágase con el indio lo que con otras especies animales cuando presentan síntomas de degeneración[...] Cabe preguntar: ¿Por qué no se traen elementos de otra raza vigorosa y más apta para mejorar a nuestros indios? ¡Se trata de un remedio heroico! (Asturias 1971: 107)

Rulfo's *indigenista* ideas, as presented in *El despojo*, seem to be an interesting mixture of Gamio's intellectual liberalism and Mariátegui's agrarian

Marxism. His filmic texts stay far away from the troubling genetic arguments espoused by Asturias. No, the problem, as Rulfo sees it, lies squarely with the agrarian question. *El despojo* seems to offer no real political solution but this merely serves to deepen the emotional and intellectual impact of the protagonist's fruitless escape. An archetypal corrupt landowner—no back story is given for Don Celerino. We are given only the essential details of the roots of Pedro's misery—Celerino has taken his land and, perhaps intends to take his wife. His son has been injured protecting his mother from Celerino's cronies. Pedro reacts, planning his dramatic and violent escape. His inability to successfully flee, even in his imagination, reflects Rulfo's pessimism with regard to the struggle that he views as 'una constante en la historia de México [...] los encomenderos tienen otros nombres pero la lucha es la misma en el fondo'. (Rulfo 1986: 45)

2.6 *La fórmula secreta*: An Introduction

La fórmula secreta (1964) is an experimental film directed by Rubén Gámez which includes two poetic monologues written by Juan Rulfo. Describing *La fórmula secreta* as 'a unique film: the only mid-length feature and the only film really to propose new narrative and figurative strategies', Tomás Pérez Turrent notes how, 1965, the year in which *La fórmula secreta* won the inaugural (and only) Concurso de Cine Experimental, represented a decisive year for Mexican cinema:

> Beyond the awards and the immediate results of the competition, the event itself represented a new start. At the very least, prestigious names in national and Latin American letters had been incorporated into the cinema: Inés Arredondo, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan García Ponce, Sergio Magaña, José Emilio Pacheco and Juan Rulfo. (Pérez Turrent 97)

Winning this competition meant that Gámez's film was championed as the remedy for the stagnation of the national film industry. Vivian Lash, writing about the Experimental Film Competition noted that:

> If the contest had produced nothing else worthwhile, this would have been sufficient. With an uncanny mastery of his camera (which he manned himself) Gámez presents a series of images which he links symbolically and exploits poetically. (Lash 20)

However, despite the fact that the film won the Premio de Cine Experimental in 1965, neither the film nor the monologues have received much critical attention. Furthermore, when *La fórmula secreta* does attract attention it is usually from Rulfian scholars who tend to focus solely on the two pieces of text that were written by Rulfo[13] or classify the film as an adaptation of Rulfo's writings.

Rubén Gámez (1928-2002) produced around 300 commercials and a small number of experimental films including *Magueyes* (1962), *La fórmula secreta* (1964) and *Tequila* (1992). Despite very little critical material being available on Gámez, a detailed entry on his life and work is provided on the CONACULTA website.[14] Gabriela Yanes Gómez describes him as 'un cineasta renuente a la producción comercial, relegado a la soledad, al silencio y a la elaboración de comerciales para subsistir'. (Yanes Gómez 41) Filmmaker Juan Carlos Rulfo describes Gámez as follows:

> Rubén Gámez, for whom I worked as assistant director, I regard as the most inventive film director Mexico has had in the last forty years, and the one who has taken the most risks. His films *Magueyes* (1962), *La fórmula secreta* (1965) and *Tequila* (1992), among others, are points of reference for anyone wishing to talk about the roots of Mexican and experimental cinema. (Wood 5)

[13] Jiménez de Báez, 1990; Borgeson, 1982; González Boixo:1986; and Leal:1983.
[14] http://sic.conaculta.gob.mx/ficha.php?table=artista&table_id=2310

Gámez, a friend and admirer of Rulfo's, also produced a documentary short entitled *Los murmullos* (formerly the title of *Pedro Páramo*) and even contemplated a radical re-working of *Talpa*:

> Resumiendo, quiero señalar que por mucho tiempo he creído que la única opción que existe para que lo de Rulfo tuviera una representación cinematográfica digna y que de alguna manera se acercara a su excelencia literaria sería trastocarlo. A modo de ejemplo, y para ilustrar mejor lo que estoy explicando, les diré que en alguna ocasión escribí un libreto de cine del cuento "Talpa" en el que sus personajes principales, Natalia y el hermano de Tanilo, terminan al final de la película cantando en inglés en un *freeway* de la ciudad de Los Ángeles, California. (Yanes Gómez 70)

However, according to Yanes Gómez, *Los murmullos* was actually inspired by *Hombres de maíz* by Miguel Ángel Asturias and, as the Talpa project never materialised, *La fórmula secreta* is the only Rulfo-Gámez collaboration to see the light of day. In her paper 'Rulfo y el cine: *La fórmula secreta*', Mónica Padilla defines *La fórmula secreta* as 'la interpretación realizada por Gámez de la narrativa de Rulfo' (Padilla 6) and relates how Gámez 'asumió el problema de recrear el mundo rulfiano'. (Padilla 8) However, Ayala Blanco has noted that Rulfo wrote his scripts for *La fórmula secreta* a posteriori to Gámez's film. While it is now known that some filming continued after Rulfo's text was written, what is certain is that the scenes for which Rulfo wrote his monologues were filmed before the text was provided. For this reason it is fair to say that *La fórmula secreta* should not be viewed as an adaptation of Rulfo's fiction in the vein of, for example, Mitl Valdez's *Los confines*.[15] Rulfo did not direct the film nor have a hand in devising the film's 'plot' and, therefore, the Gámez/Rulfo creative

[15] Produced in 1987 *Los confines* is a portmanteau-style film that links the stories *¡Diles que no me maten!* and *Talpa* through an encounter of a stranger at the house of the incestuous couple from *Pedro Páramo*.

relationship should be viewed more as a process of collaboration rather than an attempt by Gámez to 'recreate the Rulfian world'.

On Sunday, 21st November, 1965 *La fórmula secreta* received the following review (quoted here in its entirety) in the 'México en la cultura' section of the *Novedades* newspaper:

> La película ganadora del primer concurso de cine experimental, construida a base de frases poéticas que se forman a través de imágenes de gran fuerza, acepta la influencia del Buñuel surrealista, del pop-art, de la desesperación rulfiana, y de múltiples elementos estéticos más, así como de abusivos impactos a lo perro mundo. Gámez, admirable fotógrafo, eleva su rabia nacionalista muy por encima de las posibilidades que de tal tema podrían esperarse. (Ayala Blanco 4)

Despite its brevity, this review highlights the essential elements of this experimental piece of cinema: Surrealism, Buñuel, Rulfo, Pop-Art, and nationalist rage. Upon its release, *La fórmula secreta* proved surprisingly popular for such an unorthodox piece of cinema. It showed for five weeks at the Cine Regis, not bad for an experimental film released at the same time as fils such as *The Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*. (Gámez 243-244) Nevertheless, though it was relatively popular upon release and has, therefore, received more attention over the passing years than *El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* represents another gap in Rulfian criticism. Unlike the script that Rulfo devised for *El despojo*, the text for *La fórmula secreta* possesses a greater sense of autonomy in that it can be read without knowledge of Gámez's images. While critical analyses of *La fórmula secreta* have sometimes been based on the film as a whole, it is still more common to encounter discussions of the monologues in isolation as printed in

1976 and 1980.[16] This is not surprising as the film has not enjoyed a wide circulation beyond its initial five week run at the Cine Regis and many critics and members of the public are familiar with *La fórmula secreta* solely through Rulfo's monologues as published in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine.* In this chapter, the monologues will be examined within the wider contexts of the Rulfo-Gámez collaborative film. The sense of frustrated rebellion that permeates Rulfo's monologues is, in fact, present throughout the film and it is this very anger that proved to be the catalyst for Rulfo's involvement:

> Yo la única película que hice se llamó *La Fórmula Secreta*. Originalmente se llamaba *Coca-Cola en la sangre*, pero le quitaron ese título porque pensaban que nadie iba a verla. Es la historia de un hombre que le están inyectando Coca-Cola en lugar de suero y cuando empieza a perder el conocimiento siente unos chispazos de luz y la Coca-Cola le produce unos efectos horribles, y entonces tiene una serie de pesadillas y en algunas ocasiones habla contra todo. Esta película es una película ANTI. Es anti-yanqui, anti-clerical, anti-gobernista, anti-todo […] No la han dejado exhibir. (Rulfo 1992: 880)

It is now known how Rulfo initially became involved with Gámez's film. In 2014 Víctor Jiménez describes how this collaboration began:

> La esposa de Rubén Gámez, Susana, recordaba en una conversación que tuvo con Juan Francisco Rulfo y quien esto escribe, en marzo de 2014, que su esposo y Juan Rulfo se conocieron en un elevador, probalemente a finales de 1964—año de gran actividad cinematográfica para Rulfo—, y que éste habría dicho a Rubén, apenas al conocerlo, que acababa de ver lo que llevaba rodado de *La fórmula secreta* y le había gustado. En ese momento Rulfo tenía ya una década de experiencia en el mundo del cine. Gámez, con espontaneidad, le pidió un texto para la película y Rulfo accedió. (Jiménez 2014: 19)

[16] The following texts are examples of critical evaluations of La fórmula secreta's monologues in isolation: "De la historia al sentido y El gallo de oro" in *JUAN RULFO, del Páramo a la esperanza by* Yvette Jiménez de Báez; "El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine", Revista Iberoamericana, Núms. 120-121 by Paul W. Borgeson; "El gallo de oro y otros textos marginados de Juan Rulfo", Revista Iberoamericana, núms, 52: 135-136 (Apr-Sept), by José Carlos González Boixo; "Sí, tampoco los muertos retoñan. Desgraciadamente", by Carlos Monsiváis in *Inframundo*. The most in-depth study of the film is Mónica Padilla's *"Rulfo y el cine, La Fórmula Secreta.*

However, in a conversation with Alejandro Pelayo Rangel, Gámez explains the origin of Rulfo's involvement with *La fórmula secreta* slightly differently. To Pelayo Rangel's question about whether Gámez had previously been acquainted with Rulfo, the director replies the following:

> No lo conocía. Traté de entrevistarme con él y lo logré, lo convencí para que viera la película a la cual le tendría que poner texto; afortunadamente accedió y me entregó el poema tres días después. (Pelayo Rangel 364)

There may not be a contradiction here. It is possible that Rulfo had seen some of Gámez's footage then, as Gámez's widow suggests, bumped into the director in an elevator and commented upon how he enjoyed the footage. Perhaps then Gámez asked him to see some other scenes, the scenes for which he required a monologue. The director was certainly, by his own admission, greatly influenced by Rulfo:

> Mi pretensión es crear realmente un cine mexicano, el mexicano de Rulfo. Creo que el cine mexicano debe tener una experiencia propia como la tiene su pintura. (García Riera 182)

Whatever the exact sequence of events, what is clear is that the words and images share a unique relationship in that they were conceived in dialogue with each other—Gámez showing Rulfo images that he felt were Rulfian in nature and Rulfo responding to the images of certain scenes post-filming. Any analysis of the written texts, therefore, is incomplete without careful consideration of the images to which they were conceptualised as a response. In addition, writing the two sequences for the film's soundtrack was not, in reality, Rulfo's only involvement. He also wrote (albeit 'anonymously') a note on the film that was provided to spectators at film screenings. The objectives of this analysis of *La fórmula secreta*

are twofold: to establish the definitive text of the Rulfian monologues[17] and to analyse the film within the contexts of Surrealist film, Eisensteinian montage and the extra-diegetic gaze in order to gain an understanding of the way in which Rulfo's monologues function as fragments within a vast and confused mosaical mirror of twentieth century Mexico. This analysis, in common with the analysis of *El despojo*, responds to an identified gap in Rulfian criticism and addresses the critical reluctance to consider Rulfo's involvment in the three film projects as central to his creative output. This chapter constitutes the first long study of *La fórmula secreta* and it is hoped that it will underscore the importance of this text in the Rulfian canon. In particular, the corrected version of Rulfo's text is laid out in this chapter and this has already been accepted by the *Fundación Juan Rulfo* as the definitive version of the text and the *Fundación* has published it as such in their *El gallo de oro* (2010).

The analysis begins with an introduction to the two published versions of the text from 1976 and 1980. These two versions of the text are compared with each other as well as with the actual soundtrack. It will be seen that both the 1976 and 1980 versions of the text differ from the soundtrack. After a close analysis of these two versions and the soundtrack a final version of the text will be established.[18] This section will be followed by a synopsis of the film. The next section of the chapter will focus on the film's montage sequences and their relationship to Surrealist film-making and Eisensteinian montage. In particular, the effects of the odd juxtaposition of imagery will be examined with reference to

[17] The definitive version of Rulfo's text for *La fórmula secreta*, in addition to extensive notes, is included below as an appendix.

[18] In fact, the final version of the text as established in this chapter has been published by the Fundación Juan Rulfo as the definitive version of the text in *El gallo de oro*, 2010.

Surrealist film and the *Manifestes du Surrealisme* by André Breton as well as Sergei Eisenstein's ideational montage. The connection between *La fórmula secreta's* dreamlike scenarios and Surrealism's association with psychoanalysis are then explored. The sequence that heralds the beginning of Rulfo's first monologue is arguably the most significant moment in the film. A peasant is filmed against a vast rural backdrop. The camera moves away from him to focus on the stunning horizon. Unexpectedly, the *campesino* follows the camera, insisting on remaining the focus of the camera's gaze. At this moment, Rulfo's words begin. This sequence will be analysed with reference to theories of the extra-diegetic gaze and the cinema of attractions. The Mirror Theory of Lacan and its application in a cinematic context as explored by Christian Metz play an important role in the analysis of this section. Particular attention is paid to the area of audience spectatorship and the implications of this character's seeming self-awareness.

From this investigation, it is clear that *La fórmula secreta* is chiefly concerned with engaging the audience with the confused nature of Mexican identity in the face of impending modernisation. In this way, the film manifests itself as a fragmented mirror of the society from which it is born. *La fórmula secreta* is peppered with clearly identifiable images of Mexican culture that regularly jockey for position with images of modernization and external influences. In many ways, *La fórmula secreta* is an attempt to psychoanalyze Mexican society and the film is here examined in the light of Samuel Ramos's attempt to do just that in his *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* and Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad.* Finally, *La fórmula secreta* shares

similarities with the exemplary manifestation of Third Cinema, *La hora de los hornos* (Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, 1968) in particular, the scenes of animal slaughter present in both films). While *La fórmula secreta* has much in common with *La hora de los hornos* in that it is intended as a kind of societal wake-up call, *La fórmula secreta,* with its multi-layered hallucinogenic images and startlingly poetic voiceover, will be shown in this chapter to be much more closely related to the subliminal nature of Surrealist film and Eisentsteinian montage than to the bombastic, instructional nature of *La hora de los hornos*. Finally, it is envisaged that, as a result of the establishment of the definitive version of the text and the multi-layered analysis of *La fórmula secreta* in this chapter, that the film will in the future enjoy a more prominent position in Rulfian criticism, Mexican film studies and studies of *mexicanidad.*

2.7 ***La fórmula secreta*** **: A Synopsis**

Although Ayala Blanco divides the film into 'diez intensos episodios', (Rulfo 1980: 117) the film can be more naturally divided into twelve distinct sections. The twelve sections are outlined below.

Section 1—The film begins with a close-up of an upturned Coca-Cola bottle which is connected to a drip, which is in turn connected to a man's vein. Powerless as he is on a hospital stretcher the fluid entering his veins brings about a series of disturbing hallucinations which make up the rest of the film. This short introduction is followed by the title sequence which features a low-flying

silhouette of a vulture[19] as it flies at break-neck speed around an almost empty Zócalo.

Section 2—Opens with a close up shot of a statue's emotionless face from the interior of the Churrigueresque church at Tonantzintla (images of this interior will punctuate the film from this point on, culminating in section 11). Then, a worker at a flour-packing plant finds a colleague dead on the floor and loads the corpse onto a truck along with the filled bags of flour. As the truck speeds along a highway the man notices that the formerly male corpse is now female and he begins to fondle the woman with sexual intentions. Just before he kisses the woman the body once again becomes male and then the gender of the corpse/body begins to flicker rapidly between male and female.

Section 3—This section represents the first of the Rulfo monologues voiced by renowned poet Jaime Sabines. It begins memorably with a close-up of a *campesino*. The camera then pans away but, unexpectedly, the staring figure follows the camera and, thus, demands the viewers' attention. This is followed by close-ups of other *campesinos* (all male) as they stare motionless at the camera while Sabines's voice is heard reciting Rulfo's text.

Section 4—Begins with a shot of a man eating a hot dog in a city diner. He later leaves the diner and drags a seemingly unending link of hot-dog sausages with him across the country. The sausages are seen passing Mexican and foreign

[19] Ayala Blanco refers to the bird that flys around the Zócalo as an eagle: 'El revoloteo de un águila enloquecida que sobrebuela el Zócalo de la ciudad de México.' (Rulfo 1980: 117) Nevertheless, despite the obvious associations between the Zócalo and an image of an eagle, Gámez clearly states that the bird in question is a vulture: 'El público dice que es el águila mexicana en el Zócalo; pero no es el águila, es un buitre, es una silueta de cartón que hice con un pescuezo muy largo para que no pareciera águila, porque mi intención no era que pareciera el águila mexicana, quería que pareciera un buitre volando sobre el Zócalo, y los críticos y el público piensan que es el águila mexicana.' (Pelayo Rangel 367)

iconic images such as the Torre Latinoamericana, heated tortillas, a display of chillies in a market, a Mercedes Benz, a poster of a Hollywood film, a picture of a golden haired child, US Diesel, etc. The sausages are then used as fishing bait for three suited men (two young and one old) who fight like dogs over the sausages. The sausages are finally used to lasso a cow's udder.

Section 5—This sequence features what seems to be Sabines's voice played backwards as the camera focuses on six men shrouded in darkness. The images of these men are punctuated by shots of the interior of the church at Tonantzintla. The camera then glides over the men as they lie on the floor.

Section 6—This sequence begins with a soldier shooting live rounds at metal ducks in a fun-fair. Then we are introduced to a couple passionately kissing in front of what appears to be a blood-splattered wall. We then see a young man bind a cow before slaughtering the animal by knifing the neck and draining the blood. This is done while the camera focuses on the creature's face at the moment of death. The cow is then expertly skinned and carried by the boy who is then ordered by the kissing couple to deliver the flesh. The boy climbs steps with the large chunk of animal flesh on his back. This then transforms into the man and, subsequently, into the woman who we previously saw kissing.

Section 7—This section features the second Rulfo monologue, again voiced by Sabines. We see the *campesinos* struggling to climb up a steep stony hill. They then lie motionless with crossed arms on the rocks as the camera pans over them.

Section 8—This section begins with stills of machinery with the sound of a voice uttering what appear to be U.S. military commands in the background. Then

we hear a child struggling with an English lesson as the camera shows close-ups of what appear to be migrant workers in the U.S.

Section 9—This section begins ominously as young girls in Communion dresses ride a carousel under the watchful eyes of members of the clergy. Then we see young clerical students playing on a climbing frame. After exchanging words with a senior clergyman, the young students begin to imitate the crucifix on the frame. The camera then cuts to priests riding the carousel and then again to young and old clerical students on the climbing frame. Those who manage to sustain themselves on the frame begin to bleed from the mouth and one by one they fall to leave a heap of dead priests beneath the climbing frame. As each priest falls, the young students applaud.

Section 10—Cowboys practice the art of *jaripeo*—lassoing running bulls. Then in the city, a businessman carrying a briefcase is stalked through the streets by one of the cowboys who then proceeds to chase and successfully lasso the businessman and drag him through the streets.

Section 11—This section features an extended examination of the Churrigueresque interior of the church at Tonantzintla with backing music. The sequence finishes as the camera slowly approaches the crucifix.

Section 12—This final sequence sees the camera pan over an unending blackboard with names of foreign enterprises written on it in chalk. The soundtrack features what sounds like an American voice conducting a final check and countdown to a rocket launch as the camera pans over names such as British Petroleum and General Foods.

2.8 Surrealism, Montage and *La fórmula secreta*

Available in the archives of the UNAM Filmoteca, *La fórmula secreta* is also (at the time of writing) available on DVD from an Atlanta-based distribution company *5 Minutes to Live* and it is from this edition that the following description comes:

> Strange, semi-surrealist nightmares—somehow related to Mexican realities—form the matrix of this work.[20]

The 'semi-surrealist nightmares' of the above description constitute almost the entirety of *La fórmula secreta.* This section focuses on the connection between *La fórmula secreta* and Surrealist film and explores how the strange hallucinations brought about by the intravenous ingestion of Coca-Cola are related to Mexican social reality. The relationship between the strange juxtapositions of Surrealist film and Eisensteinian ideas of montage are then examined with the intention of exploring notions of interpretation.

La fórmula secreta was made in Mexico in the 1960s by artists with no formal connection to the Surrealist movement and, though clearly inspired by Surrealism, was not born from the peculiar 'recherches expérimentales' of Paul Éluard and his companions. For this reason, despite its similarities with the four 'truly surrealist films' (Goudal 90) [*L'Etoile de mere*, *La Coquille et le Clergyman, L'Age d'or* and *Un chien andalou*],[21] *La fórmula secreta* cannot be

[20] http://5minutestolive.com/2D/laformual.htm

[21] For debates on what films belong to the canon of Surrealist cinema see the following: *The Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938) includes Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* (1926) as well as Duchamp's *Anemic cinema* (1925). However, Linda Williams names *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Age d'or* as "perhaps the only unquestionably Surrealist films" (*Figures of Desire*, p.xiv). The line between what constitutes Surrealist film and what constitutes Dada film is always open to debate with Kuenzli offering the following explanation: 'The difference between Dada and Surrealist films (...) lies in their different strategies of defamiliarizing social reality. Surrealist filmmakers largely rely on conventional cinematography (narratives, optical realism, characters) as a means

considered a 'pure' Surrealist film for reasons of time and place. Nevertheless, despite not evolving directly from the Surrealist Paris of the 1920s, *La fórmula secreta* is, in reality, deeply Surrealist in nature. The purpose of this section is not to create a list of 'truly Surrealist films' but to discuss the extent to which an understanding of Surrealist film can inform interpretations of *La fórmula secreta*.

The Surrealist film that is most closely related to *La fórmula secreta* is, without doubt, *Un Chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1928). This is not only because of *Un Chien andalou*'s privileged status and its position as a marker for all subsequent Surrealist films. The films share overlapping concepts such as the importance of dreams (in the conception of *Un Chien andalou* and as a narrative catalyst in *La fórmula secreta*), the presence of androgyny, dead animals, gore, eroticism and irreverence towards the church. However, what sets *La fórmula secreta* apart is the inclusion of specifically Mexican socio-political totems and the inclusion of Rulfo's two coherent monologues which disrupt the film's rhythm and introduce a strong element of social commentary.

Indeed the overtly political tone of *La fórmula secreta* echoes that of Buñuel and Dalí's other Surrealist film, *L' Âge d'or* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1930). Dalí was horrified by Buñuel's completed treatment of *L' Âge d'or* and 'disowned the film altogether on the grounds that Buñuel had totally betrayed his intentions, replacing his own 'authentic sacrilege' with a 'primary anti-clericalism' and over-explicit political message. (Short 2008: 106) Nevertheless, official Surrealism and political involvement went hand in hand at the time of *L'*

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to draw the viewer into the reality produced by the film. The incoherent, non-narrative, illogical nature of Dada films, which constantly defamiliarize the familiar world through cinematic manipulations, never let the viewer enter the world of the film. A distance is thus created between the viewer and film from the beginning, which accounts for the viewer not being deeply disturbed by these films. (*Dada and Surrealist Film*, p.10)

Âge d'or's first screening to such an extent that the Surrealists published their "Manifesto of the Surrealists concerning L' Âge d'or" to accompany screenings in 1930 in which the connection between Surrealism and a love of societal upheaval were made glaringly obvious. By referencing 'The Battleship Potemkin's indomitable call to revolution', (Short 22) the Surrealists actively sought to associate *L' Âge d'or* and *Un Chien andalou* (as their perfect filmic manifestations of Surrealism) with political upheaval and radical Marxism. By joyfully prophesying the time when 'capitalist society is annihilated', the Surrealists, in line with Breton's *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (1929) which, as well as championing the role of Freudian analysis, was hugely political in tone and explicitly linked to Marxism, made clear (for those who had still not realised it) that Surrealism was intrinsically linked to political and societal subversion.

2.9 Surrealist Film and the Problem of Psychic Automatism

Naturally, *La fórmula secreta* suffers from the same problem that afflicts all Surrealist cinema i.e. it is a film. Despite Goudal's insistence that 'surreality represents a domain actually indicated to cinema by its very technique' (Goudal 2001: 89), the unwieldy nature of film production greatly inhibits the 'psychic automatism' of Breton's definition. Automatic writing requires far less planning and organisation (and, of course, fewer resources) than film production and automatism was considered essential to Surrealist production, certainly in its early stages. In the words of Robert Short:

> Part of the trouble was that Surrealism meant automatism—absolute fidelity to the voice of the unconscious unsullied by rational intentionality. And filmmaking cannot do without forethought, rehearsal and a certain technical expertise. (Short 4)

Nevertheless, when devising their cinematic epitome of Surrealism, *Un Chien andalou*, Buñuel and Dalí sought a way around this problem by insisting on drawing only upon irrational images of free association to supplement their dreams of the slit eye and the ants from the hand, respectively. Any sequence or image that had been 'derived from remembrance, or from their cultural pattern or if, simply, it had a conscious association with another earlier idea' (Short 10) was discarded immediately as the collaborators 'accepted only those representations as valid which, though they moved them profoundly, had no possible explanation.' (Short 4)

When it comes to the interpretation of *Un Chien andalou* it is worth examining Buñuel's contradictory affirmations. For instance, Buñuel explains that:

> The plot is the result of a *conscious* psychic automatism, and, to that extent, it does not attempt to recount a dream, although it profits by a mechanism analogous to that of dreams. (Goudal 89)

So, the film is not the description of one particular dream but a world built around free associations with two remembered dreams as starting points. The idea of 'conscious psychic automatism' is immediately problematic and, as Elza Adamowicz points out, Buñuel's attempts to express the (im)possibility of interpreting the film are clearly paradoxical. (Adamowicz 27) Immediately after his robust assertion that 'nothing symbolizes anything', he immediately re-opens the door of interpretation by adding that 'the only method of investigation of the symbols would be, perhaps, psychoanalysis.' (Short 10)

The subversive political instinct of the Surrealists sits uncomfortably with their devotion to psychic automatism and often leaves their work open to

criticism. For example, if one takes the Buñuel/Dalí assertion that nothing in *Un Chien andalou* should be considered a symbol for anything, then one must not consider the scene depicting two seminarists dragged and bound across the floor as an act of anticlericalism. However, it is simply not conceivable, in twentieth century Western Europe, that this would be viewed as anything other than, at least, politically irreverent. While the artists may claim that the incongruous juxtapositions were simply the result of absurd associations in the Dada tradition, (and this is, of course, entirely plausible) the decision to include this scene (and exclude others) is a *conscious* decision to include a scene that would clearly cause controversy and be interpreted as anti-clerical. In addition, when one considers Buñuel's assertion that the *symbols* of the film may be interpreted via psychoanalysis one is presented with a clear paradox: symbols that mean both 'absolutely nothing' and 'possibly something' at the same time. Perhaps, therein lies the allure of *Un Chien andalou*.

In light of the above, Dalí's disgust with the more obviously political commentary of *L' Âge d'or* is surprising. The links between Surrealism and political subversion were clear and their second collaboration manifests itself as a logical progression towards a bolder version of their previous film. So, *La fórmula secreta*, while, not a film of 'official' Surrealism (for reasons of time and place), is more closely related to the Surrealist movement than at first seems apparent. The beginning of *La fórmula secreta* depicts a patient being fed Coca-Cola through a drip and what follows seem to take the shape of a series of dreams or hallucinations. The primacy of dreams is central to Surrealist methodology and inextricably linked to psychoanalysis. In this way, through its use of the

dream/nightmare scenario and evocation of the Lacanian theory of the mirror, *La fórmula secreta* is deeply surrealist (if not 'Surrealist') in nature. Furthermore, in light of 'official' Surrealism's deeply rooted connections with politics, *La fórmula secreta* is, perhaps, even more closely related to the Surrealist movement *because* of its overt politicism.

2.10 *La fórmula secreta*: Dreams and Hallucinations of *Mexicanidad*

Dreams (and their Freudian interpretation as symbols of wish fulfilment) are central to Surrealism and psychoanalysis and, therefore, *La fórmula secreta* can be seen as an invitation to psychoanalyze the Mexican.[22] For example, Section 2 revolves around the sexual encounter between what appears to be a corn-flour packer and the transforming corpse of a dead co-worker. As well as recalling the androgynous figure of *Un Chien andalou* this scene also calls to mind Philippe Soupault's scenario for his *L'indifference*:

> ...suddenly there appears beside me a man who changes into a woman, then into an old man. Just then another old man appears who changes into a baby then into a woman [...] I get up and they all disappear. (Williams 5)

When isolated and analyzed within a Freudian conceptual framework, Gámez's sequence points towards notions of repressed homosexuality. Section 6 also features the phenomenon of the changing figure. The boy who walks up the steps to deliver the meat is alternately depicted carrying the meat and his father and mother. Having previously shown images of animal slaughter and bloodstained images of erotica, the scene (with its death-blood-sex-murder-father-

[22] Which is, of course, exactly what Samuel Ramos attempted in 1932 with his article *Psicoanálisis del mexicano*, later published as part of his landmark publication *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*. Octavios Paz's acclaimed *El laberinto de la soledad* also concerns itself with the construction of the Mexican psyche. The connection between the work of these two thinkers and *La fórmula secreta* is explored in this chapter in the section entitled *La fórmula secreta and Identity.*

mother-corpse trajectory) takes on a clearly perceivable Oedipal quality. However, these scenes must not be analyzed as divorced from the whole and must be explored with reference to Gámez's dizzy tapestry of symbolic imagery. Beginning as it does with the spectacle of the intravenous dripping of Coca-Cola into the blood stream of an anonymous patient, almost the entirety of *La fórmula secreta* can be viewed as a series of dreams or hallucinations brought about by this bizarre procedure. In *La fórmula secreta* they manifest themselves as a relentless clash of symbols of Mexican identity with symbols of the United States of America and with globalisation more generally. So, while the presence of dreams and Surrealist-influenced imagery point towards the subconscious, in reality, one does not need to dig deep beneath the psyche to interpret Gámez's clash of obviously stereotypical symbols:

> The transfusion of Coca-Cola that is given to a patient at one point obviously alludes to slavish imitation of the US lifestyle and to the ravages of imperialism, but much of the film amounts to a parody of Mexican stereotypes, a critique of a people whom Gámez saw as lacking initiative and imagination. (Standish 148)

Rulfo describes the film (in the 'anonymously' attributed synopsis of the film distributed to spectators at screenings) with much reference to dreams and nightmares but links the dreams directly to social reality:

> Un sueño acarrea otro sueño. Y la lápida cae poco después de que el hombre recurre a los ángeles, a Dios mismo, cuando ya no puede recurrir a ningún amparo terrenal.
> La única tesis es la de la verdad. Aunque cualquier espectador de estas imágenes puede encontrar las implicaciones que siempre están contenidas en la verdad. (Rulfo 1980: 128)

In this way, *La fórmula secreta*, despite its appearance as an obscure work of avant-garde art, is far more accessible than at first may seem apparent. While lacking a traditionally coherent linear argument, the film is rife with easily

assimilated symbolic imagery as *almost everything symbolises something*. Gámez exerts an element of control over possible interpretation by choosing easily recognisable symbols. If meanings are to be found, they are found in interpreting the relentless collisions of symbolic imagery, Rulfo's monologues and spectator-character interaction.

2.11 Eisenstein, Montage and *La fórmula secreta*

Eisenstein, in his essay 'The cinematographic principle and the ideogram' uses the Japanese writing character (or, hieroglyph) as a metaphor for ideational montage. Similarly to Maya glyphic script, the combination of two Japanese characters serve to create a third meaning or concept and 'by the combination of two "depictables" is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable'. (Eisenstein 30) With reference to the Japanese writing system, Eisenstein uses the following 'equations' to further explain this point:

> Dog + mouth = "to bark"
> Mouth + child = "to scream"
> Mouth + bird = "to sing"
> Knife + heart = "sorrow" (Eisenstein 30)

For Eisenstein, images are volatile chemicals that react with each other when combined and 'from the collision of two given factors arises a concept'. (Eisenstein 30) Eisenstein goes on to compare the effect of montage sequences to the dynamics of an internal combustion engine:

> If montage is to be compared with something, then a phalanx of montage pieces, of shots, should be compared to the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, driving forward its automobile or tractor: for, similarly, the dynamics of montage serve as impulses driving forward the total film. (Eisenstein 38)

In this way, the concept is to be found in the sparks that fly when two images collide. Perhaps a more appropriate twenty-first century metaphor for Eisenstein's

theory of colliding images can be found beneath the Swiss-French border, the home of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the Large Hadron Collider where physicists examine the unpredictable results of colliding streams of sub-atomic particles at high energy. In a similar manner to ideational montage, the Surrealists would experiment with the unpredictable effects of decontextualising everyday objects:

> ...the Surrealists would circulate random objects among themselves, posing irreverent questions about their function [...] These games [...] were created as ways of separating the object from its functional connection to a context in order to create new associations emanating from the concrete density of the thing itself. (Williams 12)

Inevitably the notion of directorial control surfaces at this point. The unpredictability of spectator interpretation is a problem difficult to resolve. If the concept is produced by the collision of images, surely the interpretation of the concept must reside with the spectator as the filmmaker has no control over the interpretation of these concepts. The extended montage sequences of *La fórmula secreta* can be compared to the collision of sub-atomic particles and the potentially chaotic results. However, while the effect on the spectator of image-collision is naturally unpredictable, the choice of subject matter is a way of steering interpretation so that 'the choice of the material and the calculation of the mindset of the viewer are equally part of the gauging of the 'affect' of film'. (Antoine-Dunne & Quigley 3) With regard to *La fórmula secreta*, the 'choice of the material' is, naturally, of vital importance when analysing meaning. From start to finish the film is peppered with images that can be considered as quintessentially Mexican: the Torre Latinoamericana, the chillies in the market, *jaripeo,* representations of Roman Catholicism, among others. These national

symbols are constantly jockeying for position with images of modernisation (machinery) and images of globalisation which are almost exclusively represented by quintessential symbols from the United States of America: hot-dogs, baseball caps, Hollywood movies and, of course, Coca-Cola.

2.12 Modernisation, Machinery and Meat Production in *La fórmula secreta*

The fourth sequence of the film is introduced by the bleeping flashing silhouettes of Coca-Cola bottles followed by a mechanised cartoon cow that smiles while moving its legs and tail (as emphasised by close-up shots of tail and face). In a Mexico City diner a man looks squarely at the camera whilst eating a hot dog. This is followed by a series of stop-motion still images of the hot dog being prepared with what appears to be *pico de gallo* (chopped tomato, coriander, onion and chilli) garnish.

Following on from the above, the frankfurter is revealed to be connected to a seemingly unending link of frankfurters which drags along the man as he walks out of the diner still eating. The link of frankfurters is then depicted as dragging along the ground past a wide range of iconic images now detailed in full: the Torre Latinoamericana, a parade of uniformed youths, a *comal* with heated tortillas, a publicity poster for the film *Taras Bulba* starring Tony Curtis and Yul Brynner with a tagline that reads in English ‘add a motion picture to the wonders of the world’, the front of a Mercedes Benz with the logo clearly visible, a book case containing an autobiography of Cecil B DeMille, *The Psychology of Adolescence*, *Mass Society in Crisis* and other publications, a rural highway, an astronomer staring into a large telescope, a dark-skinned foot wearing a leather sandal, a dense constellation, a large variety of raw chillies laid out on a mat for

sale at a market, a painting of a fair-skinned blonde baby, an advertisement for diesel petrol, a revolving display of feminine shoes for sale, two working-class men wearing baseball caps in conversation, a shot of people walking near Tlatelolco with the Aztec ruins and twentieth century apartment blocks both visible, a girder around which the linked frankfurters wrap themselves in front of the cathedral, a factory temperature gauge with steam blowing from close by, two men cleaning a car, a television with a chat show playing, a man pressing his face up against a mesh of metal bars whilst staring at the camera, a machine that whisks dough, a machine that is either painting or polishing plates in a factory, and, finally, a baker icing a cake. The man then arrives at a lake where he proceeds to wave the link of frankfurters around as if they were a rope and hurl the link into the water where three men in business suits fight like dogs for the sausages. This is followed by a close-up of still shots of real cows' faces and, subsequently, a shot a cow's udder trapped in a stranglehold by the tightened link of sausages. The final shot is of the happy cartoon cow's shaking and smiling face.

The relentless binary interplay of Mexican and U.S. symbols is clearly present in Section 4 from the beginning. Traditional Mexican images are represented by the tortillas and the chillies while indigenous Mexico is represented by the ruins of Tlatelolco and the weather-beaten sandal-clad foot. Modern Mexico can be seen represented in the Torre Latinoamericana and the modern machinery. Were it not for the images that follow, the hot dog garnished in *pico de gallo* could even be considered a symbol for Mexican-US harmony. However, the images of meat and animals add a disturbing element. By including

images of livestock and processed meat the montage urges the spectator to contemplate the nature of meat production. This is an example of ideational montage of which, according to Stephen M. Hart, Eisenstein 'can be called the inventor'. (Hart 20) Hart explains how, 'In ideational montage two separate images are brought together and their juxtaposition gives rise to an idea which shows how they are linked, rather like the tenor and vehicle in a vivid metaphor'. (Hart 20) Framed within the images of the smiling mechanical cow (obviously from a piece of advertising for beef or some dairy product) images of live animals' faces give way to a cow's udder brutally strangled (in an act of unnecessary cruelty by the perpetrator) by the foreign, processed meat. It is clear that, via this process of ideational montage, Gámez urges the spectator to interpret the juxtapositions as an analogy between the strangled udder and the overbearing influence of Mexico's neighbour. The sequence can also be interpreted as an analogy between traditional values and an increasingly mechanised society. Passing uninterrupted, as they do, past so many indifferent faces (more of which is explored later in this chapter) the frankfurters seem to permeate every facet of Mexican daily life. In this way, the entire sequence depicts a society completely influenced at every level by U.S. culture and this anxiety about Mexico's fascination with U.S. culture is central to an understanding of *La fórmula secreta*. The references to animals and meat production also announce the brutal scenes of animal slaughter that dominate Section 6.

2.13 Animal Slaughter: Surrealist Abjection

With its graphic depiction of real animal slaughter and striking juxtapositions of bloodletting and eroticism, Section 6 is one of the most affecting in *La fórmula*

secreta. It is also the section that proves most difficult to decipher. Throughout the sequence, the images constantly clash with visual depictions of bloodstained eroticism and the stench of death to produce a jarring and deeply disturbing effect. The fact that the meat that the boy carries on his back constantly transforms into the man and woman that were previously depicted kissing in front of the blood-splattered wall unavoidably recalls Freud's Oedipal Complex. There is a suggested link between catching a glimpse of the couple kissing and then seeing them being carried away like dead meat. While the spectator, of course, does not witness any foul play, the suggestion is provoked by the juxtapositions and is again related to Eisensteinian ideational montage.

The expert nature of the traditional method of animal slaughter demands a macabre element of admiration. However, at the same time the close-up shots of the animal at the point of death make for difficult viewing. Charting the short journey from live animal to meat delivery the sequence depicts a more traditional method of distribution of meat than the extensive processing involved in hot dog frankfurter production. The choice of Vivaldi's ethereal Gloria to accompany the scenes of slaughter and carnal desire adds a noted sense of unease to the proceedings. In this way, while the scene again invites the spectator to contemplate the nature of animal slaughter and meat production and its relation to Mexican (hugely carnivorous) gastronomic culture, its real power resides in the sinister atmosphere of menace tinged with sad beauty.

The use of animals and, particularly, animal death and/or mutilation is famously present in *Un Chien andalou.* The eye slit by the razor blade was of bovine origin but, as it passes for a human eye in the film, it will not feature in

this discussion. More interesting are the rotting corpses of the donkeys on the grand pianos that are dragged across the room. Julia Kristeva, in her *Powers of Horror, an essay on abjection*, relates the corpse, not to 'signified death' but, rather to 'shown death':

> ...as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being [...] the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (Kristeva 3)

The presence of rotting animal corpses and their cause of abjection have, arguably, more to do with the provocative intentions of the Surrealists than any meaningful pronouncements upon the nature of animal slaughter. The Surrealists, with their notions of societal upheaval and radical social change used (in *Un Chien andalou*) the rotting animal corpses as part of the film's relentless juxtaposition of arresting and shocking imagery for its own sake. For Kristeva, abjection, 'proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it', (Kristeva 4) is caused by 'what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.' (Kristeva 69) Kristeva's comments would surely appeal to the irreverent, non-conforming Surrealist filmmakers. Yet, the scene of real animal slaughter in *La fórmula secreta* can be viewed as something more complex than the mere provocation of revulsion for the sake of absurdist juxtaposition. As it *shows* real death (as opposed to signified death), the scene is a natural cause of abjection. The camera (and, by extension, the spectator), focusing on the animal's eye at the moment of expiration, literally stares death in the face. The musical accompaniment provides an auditory sensation that adds to the eerie

atmosphere. When contextualised within the film the scene adds to Gámez's multi-layered socio-political commentary.

In the 'Oligarquía' section of *La hora de los hornos*, footage of animal slaughter and a livestock auction smash against (in the Eisensteinian sense) images of the on-looking elite landowners. The spectator is informed that 'los dueños del país, hoy, asociados con la alta burguesía industrial y el capital financiero americano' own more than 35 million hectares of land. The juxtaposition of the ruling elite against images of animals (described as 'muy macho, potente, fuerte, huesudo') is a clear derogation of the ruling classes brought about by aligning the abjection of animal slaughter with the tyranny of the elite. Throughout *La hora de los hornos*, the overriding tone is one of anger and the voiceover (continually providing the spectator with statistics relating to the inequality of Argentinean life) is both informative and instructional in nature. In *La fórmula secreta* the positioning of the scene of animal slaughter is significant. Produced at a time when the cattle industry was in decline, (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 172) (the scene draws attention to the tensions between modern and traditional meat production, urban and rural realities and the problem of U.S. influence. Sandwiched between the whirlwind of competing images of Mexico, U.S.A, traditional life, aggressive modernisation and the forlorn *campesinos*, the scene takes on an important meaning within the context of the film. So, while the unsettling coupling of real slaughter with Vivaldi's *Gloria* owes something to the absurdist nature of the Dada/Surrealist tradition, its association with other sequences relates more to socio-economic realities. Thus, *La fórmula secreta*'s use of animal slaughter is balanced between the irreverence (not to mention the

obsession with psychoanalysis) of the Surrealists and the more obviously militant protest of the proponents of Third Cinema.

Section 9, like the Surrealist films *Un Chien andalou* and *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1928), prominently features catholic clergymen engaging in irreverent activities. In *La fórmula secreta*, the sense of inappropriateness is again generated from the Eisensteinian montage technique that invites the spectator to grasp the concept that springs forth from the coming together of two images. The images here directly relate to the clergymen's gaze. Young girls wearing First Communion dresses ride horses on a carousel. A gaze of inappropriate desire arises from the simple juxtaposition of this image with that of priests staring at the girls. When the priests are then shown riding the carousel, the implication is that their previous desire has now been sated.[23] Later in the sequence, while the children play on the climbing frame there are occasional shots of a black screen with the word 'CENSURADO' written in white. Again, the priests observe the boys on the climbing frame and then, themselves, play the same game. The gaze of desire and subsequent images of desire sated, together with the 'censored' scenes naturally provoke feelings of further unease. In this way, Gámez, to paraphrase Eisenstein, achieves the representation of something that is graphically undepictable via the combination of depictable images.

While Gámez may have taken risks with the film's irrational juxtapositions, unorthodox length[24] and confrontational tone, his choice of

[23] While such a sexually deviant interpretation is not the only possibility (other dichotomies come to mind—old age/youth, male/female, youth/nostalgia for youth etc.) the subsequent presence of the 'censurado' shots seem to imply that something inappropriate or, at the very least, worthy of censorship, is afoot.

[24] The unorthodox length of the film was, of course, also tied in with the financial restraints of making an independently funded film.

familiar symbolic imagery deeply rooted in national psyche grants the film an unusual sense of abstract, subconscious coherence. If it is true that 'readers make meanings from texts on the basis of the specific assumptions and knowledges that they bring to their encounter with them', (Jancovich 7) it can then be argued that, while the non-Mexican spectator may grapple with the seemingly irrational nature of Gámez's essay, the Mexican viewer will, at the very least, relate the film to questions of national identity and:

> …hay que decir, que la palabra identidad se utilizó aquí sólo de manera provisional, en la medida en que lo hace Gámez es hacer evidente esa parodia de esas búsquedas por lo nacional, llevando el estereotipo mexicano hasta límites ridículos […] (Padilla 14)

For example, Section 10, with its juxtapositions of *charros* engaged in *jaripeo* and a Mexico City businessman engaged in a sinister game of cat-and-mouse, provides a simple example of what Gámez sought to achieve—the visual collision of archetypal representations of rural Mexicans with archetypal representations of citizens of the modern city. As mentioned, the symbols are clear and the interpretation of the sparks that fly when these symbols collide, while suggested by Gámez, must ultimately be constructed by the spectator.

2.14 *La fórmula secreta*—The Extra-Diegetic Gaze

Throughout *La fórmula secreta* the spectator is confronted by the extra-diegetic gaze. Characters—human, sculptural and animal—appear to stare at the camera conveying either indifference or, contrarily, an active acknowledgement of the spectator. Within traditional narrative cinema, it has long been considered taboo to look directly at the camera and, thus breaking what has become known as the 'fourth wall'. (Gunning 57) On one occasion, the extra-diegetic gaze coincides with the beginning of Rulfo's first monologue and the significance of this scene is

analysed in this section of the chapter. In this way, both monologues will be analysed with continual reference to the coinciding on-screen images. When discussing cinema and the nature of the extra-diegetic gaze it is necessary to acknowledge the contribution of Lacan. Lacan and his theory of the mirror and Metz's theory of the spectator as 'all–perceiving' are discussed in this chapter in relation to the Gámez/Rulfo characters' self-awareness (and lack thereof).

In Section 4 the man eating the hot dog devours his meal oblivious to the world around him. The astronomer is too busy staring towards the Milky Way to notice the passing spectacle of an unending link of frankfurters and this scene (along with the others in Section 4) can, of course, be taken as a metaphor for indifference in the face of cultural homogenisation. The hot dog eater stares at the camera and the astronomer stares into space but both convey a sense of numbed indifference. However, it is the extra-diegetic gaze that is of interest in this section as it represents a direct confrontation with the spectator. As mentioned in the preceding section, there are plenty of instances of the extra-diegetic gaze in *La fórmula secreta*. Section 5 features six men shrouded in darkness staring at the camera. They say nothing, but what sounds like Sabines's voice played backwards is heard while they continue to stare. As the voice becomes unintelligible, the coherent anger of the Rulfian sections is rendered nonsensical and the figures, thus, pathetic. Section 8 juxtaposes still images of agricultural machinery with close-up footage of working class men. Section 6 begins with the juxtaposition of footage of the solider shooting live rounds at the toy ducks in the funfair with footage of a young man against a wall. Again, the young man stares at the camera. However, this time there is a crucial difference—the camera rapidly approaches

the man's face and seems to hit against it. Each time the camera hits the man's face (three times) it leaves what appears to be a blood stain on his face. In this way Gámez comments upon the naturally violative nature of filmmaking as the man, uncomfortable with the attention, is physically wounded by the camera. This and the other examples in this paragraph represent instances of the troubling use of the silent, extra-diegetic gaze. The camera-bound gaze naturally invites a dialogue. However, without words the dialogue becomes a frustrating exercise as the spectator continually guesses the intentions of the on screen characters that seem either unwilling or unable to express their viewpoints. Combined, they seem to represent a nation that is either unwilling or unable to speak its mind and this idea is central to the 'critique of a people whom Gámez saw as lacking initiative and imagination'. (Standish 148) Nevertheless, though Gámez's film does seem deeply concerned with the notion of 'passive acquiescence and lack of higher aspirations' (Standish & Bell 144) it also contains the highly confrontational sequences that contain Rulfo's script. These two sections finally give a voice to accompany the silent camera-bound gaze and, as mentioned in the previous section, force the Mexican spectator into a national introspection. This is all made possible by the technique of combining the Rulfian text with the extended scenes of *campesinos* who, through their gaze, acknowledge the presence of the camera.

Christian Metz's theory focuses on the notion of the 'imaginary signifier'. In a theatre, the spectator is aware that the signifier (i.e. the actor on the stage) is real. The action that unfolds upon the cinema screen is not really happening in front of the spectator, it is a representation of something that happened previously. Metz explains how the spectator at the cinema is aware that, unlike at the theatre,

the signifier is imaginary and that, for this reason, 'every film is a fiction film', (Metz 44) the cinema screen presents a 'new kind of mirror':

> Thus the cinema, 'more perceptual' that certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, is also "less perceptual" than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity; for its perceptions are all in a sense 'false'. Or rather, the activity of perception which it involves is real (the cinema is not a phantasy), but the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror. (Metz 44-45)

Metz, following on from Lacan's theory of the mirror and the beginning of self-awareness, argues that the spectator identifies, first and foremost, with himself/herself:

> In the cinema the subject's *knowledge* takes a very precise form without which no film would be possible. (Metz 48)

> In other words, the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every there is. (Metz 49)

Metz notes the paradoxical nature of the 'perceptual wealth' of cinema. On a purely sensory level, post-silent era cinema is perhaps the most engaging of art forms. Nevertheless, Metz observes how, because of the imaginary signifier on screen, 'more than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present'. (Metz 45) However, Metz's observations become problematic when related to the idea of the extra-diegetic gaze. When the fourth wall is wilfully broken by the on-screen character the voyeuristic nature of cinema-going is called into question. While the spectator/voyeur is present in the cinema, the 'exhibitionist' has left:

> Yet still a voyeur, since there is something to see, called the film, but something in whose definition there is a great deal of 'flight': not precisely

> something that hides, rather something that *lets* itself be seen without presenting itself to be seen, which has gone out of the room before leaving only its trace visible there. This is the origin in particular of that 'recipe' of the classical cinema which said that the actor should never look directly at the audience (= the camera). (Metz 63)

It is, precisely, this 'recipe' that *La fórmula secreta* (particularly the scene directly preceding the commencement of the monologues) does not follow. The characters *do* look directly at the camera and directly address the audience and the effect of this is explored in this section.

Commercial cinema first came into its own as a fairground attraction and Gunning notes how the emphasis on 'direct stimulation' (Gunning 1990:59) that characterises the early days of cinema interested the avant-garde filmmakers. As Gunning has noted, in the early days of the *cinema of attraction*, it was normal for a character on-screen to actively acknowledge the presence of the camera:

> From comedians smirking at the camera, to the constant bowing and gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator. (Gunning 57)

However, by the time that Gámez devised *La fórmula secreta*, narrative cinema was well and truly diegetic and to gaze into the camera was considered taboo:

> Classical cinema offered its viewer an ideal vantage point from which to witness a scene, unseen by anyone belonging to the fictional world of the film, the diegesis. (Hansen 23)

Cinema was no longer considered a novelty and fictional narratives became accustomed to the diegesis to such an extent that Christian Metz proclaimed that 'at the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am *all-perceiving*'. (Metz 48) For this reason, the moment preceding Sabines's recital of Rulfo's monolgues is all the more noteworthy. At this point, a description of this moment

is warranted. The following passage describes the beginning of Section 3 and the beginning of Sabines's recital of Rulfo's words:

> Perhaps the best scene is of a Mexican staring out silently toward the Mexican plateau; after a while, the camera pans away from him, to concentrate on the landscape. Stubbornly he re-enters the frame and assumes his former position, the camera pulls away again, and again he returns [...] a perfect visual metaphor.[25]

The camera slowly pans away from him to focus on the desolate hills. Unexpectedly, in an act of 'exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption' (Gunning 59) the peasant follows the camera's movement, directing his gaze squarely at the viewer, demanding his attention. By refusing to allow the camera and the viewer to peer out wistfully over the vast landscape and ponder the stark natural beauty, this character has shattered the fourth wall and committed an act of rebellion. In this way, the event represents the most intellectually intriguing instance of artistic violence in *La fórmula secreta*. Gustavo Fares explains the disruption as follows:

> The rural character looking at the observer from the screen toward the subject produces a doubling effect, revealing an ambiguous relationship between what is seen and the entity that sees, between object and subject, spectator and character. In the case of the movie, the look at the camera projected on the screen questions which half of the viewing relationship is the real one. (Fares 1999: 67)

So, while Metz highlights the 'all-perceiving' role of the spectator, Gámez disrupts this notion by allowing the character to directly address the audience. At this point, the notion of self-recognition inevitably arises. The character certainly seems to possess an acute sense of awareness in that he seems to acknowledge both his audience while simultaneously accepting his own capability to rebel against the expectations of his audience. Aware that he is being viewed, he insists

[25] http://5minutestolive.com/2D/laformual.htm

on positioning himself in front of the camera so that the spectator can see him. When the monologue, the voice of which seems to represent the collective voice of this character and his companions, begins with 'Ustedes dirán que es pura necedad la mía', the man not only directly addresses the spectator through his gaze but also, through the collective voice of Rulfo's monologue even goes as far as second guessing the prejudices of the spectator towards himself and his companions. Lacan, in his famous treatise on the mirror, describes all human knowledge as paranoiac and this is echoed by Rulfo's opening words where the character defends the charges of *necedad* he believes the spectator will level against him from the offset. Lacan relates the mirror stage to the birth of self-awareness:

> We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image […](Lacan 2)

However, this character and his companions seem not to view a mirror. In fact they seem to peer straight through the clear glass of the camera lens and through to the other side. In this way, they possess a direct portal through which they can glimpse the *real world* (that of the spectator) and, in this way estrange themselves from the surrealist world in which they have been placed by Gámez.

> They are in front of the camera, looking back at it, and questioning, in this fashion, the cinematic space, inasmuch as they seem to be the spectators of whatever is taking place on our side of the screen. (Fares 1999: 67)

The self-awareness has already been attained and Gámez and Rulfo have turned the mirror around to face the audience. In this way, the spectator becomes objectified. Carlos Fuentes, with reference to the work of Gabriel Figueroa, in

contrast to Metz's notion of the spectator as all-perceiving, celebrates the role of the photographed character as spectator in his own right:

> La proyección más extraordinaria de la fotografía, en este sentido, es que no sólo da una identidad inmediata a millones de seres que jamás la tuvieron en los largos siglos del anonimato facial de las mayorías; es que esas nuevas identidades fotografiadas cambian nuestra propia identidad porque *nos miran.* (Fuentes 29)

My making the on-screen figure enter into a dialogue with the spectator (through his gaze and the collective voice of the monologue) Gámez and Rulfo enable the character to enter the same ontological space. In New York, at around the same time as Gámez and Rulfo's film, Donald Judd and other so-called minimal artists, had forsaken the plinth in their search for the 'sculptures'' self-sufficiency. The 3D pieces produced by the minimal artists in New York in the sixties invaded the space traditionally reserved only for the spectator—Gámez and Rulfo's character does the same. Leading minimal artist and prolific art critic, Donald Judd, championed the absence of the plinth so that the viewer could experience what he famously dubbed the 'specific object'. Through the insubordination of this character who metaphorically steps off his plinth and speaks, the viewer, so shocked at this act of treachery, is compelled to pay attention. It is at this point that Rulfo's words begin and it then becomes clear that this character, who speaks not just for himself but also on behalf of his companions, wants to differentiate himself from the perceived indifference of the spectator and exert his very *specificity*.[26]

[26] It is, of course, unclear whether the voice of the monologue is that of the insubordinate character or a collective voice of a community of which he is a member. Nevertheless, the fact that the monologue begins at the moment of his appearance in the film, leads the spectator to assume that the words voiced by Sabines represent the opinions of the character, individually or as part of a collective consciousness.

2.15 Rulfo's Text - Monologues of Estrangement?

The text, when examined in isolation, has been described by various critics as 'poetic'.[27] Brought to life on the film's soundtrack by the poet Jaime Sabines and later arranged in verse format by Carlos Monsivaís, it comes as no surprise that, when in 1976, the text was first presented to the public in published format, it received the sub-heading 'poema para cine'. The vivid imagery and striking metaphors coupled with the visual impact of the verse arrangement of the words on the page all contribute to this text's *poetic* nature. Whether the reader defines the text as a film script, soliloquy or poetic monologue, one thing is certain—the voice of the peasants is at once poetic and enraged, aggressive and dignified. Crucially, Rulfo's words begin with '*Ustedes'*:

> Ustedes dirán que es pura necedad la mía,
> que es un desatino lamentarse de la suerte,
> y cuantimás de esta tierra pasmada
> donde nos olvidó el destino.

A clear barrier has been erected from the outset. The 'ustedes' defines the viewer/reader and the 'mía' and 'nos' represent one narrator who speaks on behalf of all these figures from the desolate plain where nothing grows. As well as foregrounding the presence of a *you* (spectator) and a *we* (characters) through the script, Gámez also contributes to this established dialectic through the characters' spectator-bound gaze. The sense of desperate negativity continues in lines 7-14

[27] In his review of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* (Revista Iberoamericana, Núms. 120-121, Julio-Diciembre), Borgeson refers to the monologues as 'dos breves poemas en prosa' and Jimenéz de Báez praises the 'gran intensidad poética [...] de *La fórmula secreta'* (*Juan Rulfo, del páramo a la esperanza*).

with [lo que] *digan ustedes* undermined by the harsh realities of life in a place where there does not even exist a space in which to die:

> y no tenemos ni siquiera
> dónde caernos muertos.

Then, in lines 23-32, the sense of despair increases. In typical Rulfian fashion[28], the forces of nature conspire against his protagonists adding to their collective woe.[29] They must literally haggle with the shade before it will grant them comfort—'se nos regatea hasta la sombra'. There can be no bargaining, however, with the sun—it is incessant in its torment and indifferent to human suffering. This section is followed by the separated couplet: 'Pero somos porfiados. / Tal vez esto tenga compostura'. The campesinos take a stand by announcing their will to survive. This act of defiance is, however, immediately undermined by the 'tal vez' that follows.

The subsequent section begins with 'El mundo está inundado de gente como nosotros, / de mucha gente como nosotros'. Here, a sense of defiance is felt through the idea of solidarity and strength in numbers and the sinister promise that 'alguien tiene que oírnos [...] aunque les revienten o reboten / nuestros gritos'. These characters promise to get their point across, even if their complaints disgust the passive masses. The spectator/reader is made aware of this by an unusual prophecy of some kind of blood sacrifice. An extraordinary sense of menace

[28] It is true that elements of the monologues echo the concerns of parts of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo.* It is precisely for this reason that critics (Padilla, Jiménez de Báez, Borgeson Jr. etc.) examining the published monologues in isolation, have suggested that the film is chiefly concerned with recreating a "Rulfian World" on screen.

[29] Throughout *El Llano en llamas*, Rulfo's characters are victims of the harsh reality of natural phenomena. For example, in 'Es que somos muy pobres', the overflowing river becomes both destructor of the town and moral corruptor; in 'Talpa' the pilgrims writhe like worms below the blazing sun and in 'Luvina', almost nothing grows and the desolate landscape mirrors the barren lives of the town's inhabitants.

bubbles beneath the surface of the text and, like the buzzing of wasps, warns of impending aggression as the peasants prophesise their disturbing transformation from forgotten farmers to 'tail of a whirlwind' before they will spill out across the valley as if they were a 'lightning bolt of corpses'. As the speaker proclaims that 'somebody must hear us' and, indeed, throughout this sequence, the indifferent faces of the angels and saints of the church in Tonantzintla clash with the almost inanimate figures of the characters on the plateau. The indifference of these adored faces makes the frustration all the more poignant. While the church figures remain silent they are untouched by the hardship of the *campesinos*. Despite being physically present in the same world, they because they are sacrosanct, are free from pain and seem almost to echo Beatrice's boastful declaration that 'vostra miseria non mi tange'.[30] The figures on the plateau, had Gámez not decided to enlist Rulfo to give them a platform, would have possessed the same sense of indifference. However, their camera-bound gaze takes on a new significance once they are allowed a voice.

The images that correspond to Rulfo's second monologue are accompanied by notable sound effects. As Sabines's reverberating voice begins with 'Cola de relámpago', a thunderstorm is heard in the background. The threatening tones of the first monologue continue in section II of Rulfo's text through its apocalyptic imagery:

> Cola de relámpago,
> remolino de muertos.
> Con el vuelo que llevan,
> poco les durará el esfuerzo.
> Tal vez acaben deshechos en espuma
> o se los trague este aire lleno de cenizas.

[30] *Divina Commedia*, Inferno II, 92.

These lines and, indeed, the following verse, accompany images of the men featured in Section 2 of the film. The beginning of this section, however, depicts the men climbing up a steep hill. In the contexts of the recurring theme of Mexico's peculiar relationship with its northern neighbour, it is inviting to view this scene as a representation of illegal immigrants attempting to avoid capture. Eleven years before the United States government officially declared an end to the *bracero* agreement, (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 194) Alejandro Galindo's 1953 film, *Espaldas mojadas*, presents a cautionary tale of the dangers associated with illegal entry into the United States by Mexican economic migrants. While the defiant figure of *La fórmula secreta* that first refused to remain out of shot wears a typically Mexican *sarape* his companions, dressed largely in denim and with some sporting baseball caps, appear closer to the 'wetbacks' in Galindo's film and this suggests that the Gámez / Rulfo characters may, indeed, also be engaged in attempting to illegally cross the northern border for the purpose of work. Regardless of their aspiration, the lines now spoken by Sabines appear to directly refer to these characters who desperately scuffle up the steep hill:

> Tal vez acaben deshechos en espuma
> o se los trague este aire lleno de cenizas.
> Y hasta pueden perderse
> yendo a tientas
> entre la revuelta obscuridad.
>
> Al fin y al cabo ya son puro escombro.
>
> El alma se la han de haber partido a golpes
> de tanto darle potreones a la vida.
> Puede que se acalambren entre las hebras
> heladas de la noche,
> o el miedo los liquide
> borrándoles hasta el resuello.

Gámez cuts to a large-eyed figure from the church at Tonantzintla who seems to look down upon these characters indifferent to their suffering while Sabines's voice hypothesises their final outcome—perhaps they will end up as foam or swallowed by the ash-ridden air. Rulfo's notion of the ash-filled air of a barren land where nothing grows is complemented by the strange, almost lunar landscape as filmed by Gámez:

> The scenery resembles a Martian landscape, full of crevices, among which appear farmers looking intensely at the camera. They seem to be part of the rocky landscape, symbolizing petrified human life. (Leal 96)

Perhaps they will get lost in the darkness or simply razed by fear itself. As the spectator sees the characters climbing the hill and hears the voiceover contemplating a variety of possible disastrous outcomes, the figures become walking corpses in the eyes of the spectator. Throughout this sequence the recurring elemental associations and images ('cenizas', 'hebras', 'espuma') implicitly associate the *campesinos* with the earth which serves two purposes. The close association between the *campesinos* and the land upon which they walk places them in direct confrontation with the mechanised forces of modernisation on both sides of the border and again foregrounds the conflict between old and new, rural and urban. However, the natural elements with which the *campesinos* are aligned are hardly representative of a rural paradise. The images of dust, ash and lightning evoked by Rulfo and the quasi-lunar landscape presented by Gámez equate the barren and desolate natural atmosphere with the desperation of the *campesinos*. This is common in Rulfo's work and the following example from *¡Diles que no me maten!* highlights this correlation between natural sterility and impending doom:

> La madrugada era oscura, sin estrellas. El viento soplaba despacio, se llevaba la tierra seca y traía más, llena de ese olor como de orines que tiene el polvo de los caminos. (Rulfo 2006: 94)

The absence of stars, the slow wind, dry earth and urine-scented dust all foreshadow the impending death of Juvencio as he is led towards his execution. In the same way, the dust, ash and rubble of Rulfo's text for *La fórmula secreta* are accompanied by images of darkness ('la revuelta obscuridad de la noche'), cold ('la hebras heladas de la noche') and violence ('El alma se la han de haber partido a golpes/ de tanto dar potreones a la vida'). While the *campesinos* here are clearly essentialised in their portrayal, this alignment with the earth is far from a fruitful arrangement. It is, in fact, sterile.

Rulfo's suggestion that San Mateo 'amaneció desde ayer / con la cara ensombrecida' corresponds to a still image of a saintly figure in Tonantzintla and his 'Santo Dios, Santo Inmortal' is also accompanied by an appropriate still image from the church. As the voiceover mentions the blessed souls in purgatory, Gámez cuts to one of the men in the wilderness who also stares towards the camera. As Sabines's voice laments how 'Ya están todos medio pachiches de tanto que el sol / les ha sorbido el jugo', the spectator is presented with the final outcome of these figures from the plateau as they lie motionless on the moon-like rock. After the still image of the Saint Anthony figure and its accompanying 'Santo san Antoñito', Section II of Rulfo's text mutates into a bizarre inverted religious procession of *holgazanes*, *bribones* and *bandidos*. The prayers begin by addressing Saint Matthew, Immortal God and Saint Anthony. When that fails the characters will pray to anyone, good or bad, blessed or cursed. Despite their best efforts to climb the steep hill, they finally end up gushing out over the dry valley. The 'pack of

bandits' and 'mob of good-for-nothings' of the *romería* can, of course, refer to either the desperate characters that lie strewn about the rocky landscape or to the religious figures who remain indifferent and unmoved by suffering or, of course, to external forces, visually undepicted in the film. Either way, the pageant has taken on a distinct air of menace as the repetition of the 'ruega por nosotros' refrain converts the reader of the text and/or the spectator of the film into a participant in this deformed *romería*. The use of this phrase (meaning 'pray for us') continues the established connection between *campesinos* and reader/spectator as the characters again directly address the reader/spectator. By demanding (through the use of the imperative) the prayers of the reader/spectator, identification with the *campesinos* is strengthened further. Finally, as the camera pans over their motionless bodies as they lie cross-armed upon the rocks, Rulfo's text arrives at its exhausted epiphany: 'Al menos ya no vivirán calados por el hambre'.

Describing Rulfo's text for *La fórmula secreta*, José de la Colina refers to 'un tono coloquial elevado al plano de lírico, que penetra las imágenes, como los títulos de ciertos grabados, e introducen ellas en una corriente de un sarcástico dramatismo'. (Colina 13) This 'colloquial' tone mentioned by de la Colina manifests itself through the use of phrases such as 'arrancar pa'l monte' and the use of the diminutive 'Santo san Antoñito'. Manuel Blanco, offering his response to the publication of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* in 1980, describes this as 'naturaleza literaria'—the phenomenon of a strikingly 'literary' use of language somehow managing to flow in a natural manner that allows the reader/listener to believe that the words do, indeed, emanate from the *campesinos*

on screen. It is this 'naturaleza literaria' (Blanco 2) of Rulfo's text that renders it so effective. The rural speech patterns are infused with the most basic element of poetry—the striking metaphor. The memorable and troubling imagery that Rulfo conjures lend this text its distinct poeticism. Dead bodies manifesting themselves as whirlwinds and lightning bolts, praying figures drained of their fluid by the relentless sun and the decomposition of the peasants from human beings to foam and ash are all unusual and striking visuals. These stark, apocalyptic images, granted to these peasants, make their despair impossible to ignore and, for the first time, enable the reader/listener to glimpse a more optimistic Rulfo. This text, through its threatening prophecies of impending disaster and surreal imagery, seems to *will* a confrontation into existence or, if not a confrontation, then at least an end to complacency. Consider the following passage from 'Nos han dado la tierra':

> Pero, señor delegado, la tierra está deslavada, dura. No creemos que el arado se entierre en esa como cantera que es la tierra del Llano [...] Nosotros no hemos dicho nada contra el Centro. Todo es contra el Llano [...] No se puede contra lo que no se puede. (Rulfo 1992: 10)

This story, which appears at the beginning of *El Llano en llamas*, introduces the reader to a purgatorial world of desperate stasis where the *campesino* is powerless and the landowner, whether taking the form of a corrupt hacendado or the faceless government, reigns supreme,—a post-Revolutionary land where the disparity remains between those who work the land and those who are landowners.[31] *La fórmula secreta*, while situated within this same realm differs in that it manifests itself as a violent scream of frustration. While bloodshed will probably be the

[31] While, in 'Nos han dado la tierra', the criticism is aimed at the results of goverentmental land reform, the consequences, for the *campesinos*, remain the same. Whether they are left with no other option than to farm difficult, arid land by the government or a corrupt *hacendado*, the results are equally desperate for the *campesinos*.

result of any kind of rebellion, by prophesising a violent, possibly horrific, conclusion, the monologues *allow* for the possibility of some kind of improvement through blood sacrifice. As discussed previoulsy in this chapter, the protagonist of *El despojo* was unable to reach this goal as, even in his dream-world, his son perishes. In *La fórmula secreta*, the unified voice of the peasants will be heard 'aunque les revienten o reboten [los]... gritos' and this, in itself, must represent some kind of victory.

In *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, Ayala Blanco refers to a 'cierta dimensión brechtiana' (Rulfo 1980: 118) in Rulfo's text. Although not explored further by Ayala Blanco, it is interesting to examine Rulfo's monologues with reference to Brecht's ideas of estrangement and distancing. The inclusion of Rulfo's monologues, produces an effect of distancing from the dizzy surrealism of what precedes and follows the two Rulfian sections. While Rulfo's text is certainly rich in striking images, the pace, style and lucidity of the two Rulfian sections give the spectator cause for pause and contemplation. The combination of the actors' gaze, stark landscape and the rich metaphors of the voiceover all contribute to attract the attention of the spectator and seem to verify 'Brecht's epistemological precept that knowledge is generated thanks to the observer's astonishment'. (Brecht 60) Brecht, himself wrote that:

> *The actors must estrange characters and events from the spectator so as to attract his attention.* The spectator must take sides, instead of identifying. (Brecht 88)

The 'astonishment' of the spectator is further increased by the rhythmic disruption at work here. The first monologue is preceded by the rapid montage sequence of the corn-flour plant worker and the second monologue is preceded by the

meat/corpse delivery sequence and its haunting score. In this way, both monologues (devoid of music) jar with the established rhythm and slow down the action almost to a halt. The monologues and their accompanying on-screen sequences add an entirely new dimension to the proceedings. In other sequences, the extra-diegetic gaze of the characters seems to represent a sense of universal indifference—speechless and motionless, their stare echoes the detached, cold fixation of the fish-eyed figures from the Tonantzintla church. The stares of these characters, however, now backed up by a powerful voice, become more accusative than acquiescent. The Rulfian sequences negate the indifference by providing the characters with a coherent and poetic voice of revulsion. In this way, when the spectator returns, for example, to the hot-dog sequence; he/she does so with a new perspective.

While the slower, more contemplative atmosphere of the monologue scenes jars with the preceding sequences of high-octane montage, there is certainly a tension between the idea of primary identification with the self as expressed by Metz and the Brechtian idea of estrangement alluded to by Ayala Blanco. It seems that there is a combined effect at work here. The change of rhythms, by way of contrast, draws attention to the peculiar details and inherent strangeness of both sections. At the same time, the natural identification of the spectator with the self (as described by Metz) is challenged by both the extra-diegetic gaze and the unifying nature of the monologues. As the spectator, aware of the residual nature of the signifier, identifies with his/her self, this identification is sharply bifurcated through the extra-diegetic nature of these sequences. The identification with self is suddenly ‘hacked into’ by the character’s sudden

decision to directly address the camera with his gaze and, subsequently through the collective voice of the monologues. Thus, the identification with the *campesinos* (i.e. the characters on screen) is no longer secondary or tertiary (as Metz would have it in 'fictional' film) but, rather, as primary once the *all-perceiving* complacency has been destroyed through Gámez's non conformist character on the plateau. While the change of pace and directorial style produce a level of estrangement, (perhaps, the Brechtian element to which Ayala Blanco refers) this estrangement comes from the style rather than the content of the monologue sequences. In fact, the monologues, through the use of the 'ustedes' address, rupture of the fourth wall and the conscription of the reader/spectator to the cause of the *campesinos* (by demanding both to participate in the *romería*), *demand* a level of primary identification with the characters on screen.

2.16 Identity and *La fórmula secreta*

Despite subscribing to the mistaken notion that *La fórmula secreta* represents an adaptation of the Rulfo's fiction, Padilla's description of the film is succinct:

> [...] un ensayo cinematográfico sobre lo que *parece ser* la paulatina pérdida de la identidad cultural mexicana, impulsada por el rígido proceso *norteamericanizante*, que excluye del panorama grupos específicos como el campesino y el obrero. (Padilla 5)

However, there are some very evident problems with the film's own 'panorama'. When analysing the makeup of the characters depicted in *La fórmula secreta*, one is struck by the almost complete lack of women and indigenous characters.[32] While few indigenous characters are present, the choice of filming in the church of Santa María Tonantzintla is interesting. Designed and decorated by indigenous

[32] While it is, of course, entirely possible that some of the actors used come from indigenous backgrounds, the fact remains that almost none of the characters depicted on screen can be easily identifiable as belonging to any indigenous group.

artesans, the church's interior is a riot of colour in which Catholic and indigenous symbols almost wrestle for prominence. Catholic saints are placed beside Eagle Warriors and 'Xochipillis' abound. Vibrant depictions of fruit and unusual, cleft-lipped, papaya vomiting figures are juxtaposed against typical images of Catholicism and pagan images of suns and moons. So, while the film hardly features any live indigenous people, the church's interior can easily be viewed as a metaphor for a pluri-cultural societal mosaic.

The few female characters that appear in the film do so in passive roles—the woman on the truck that is kissed by the corn-flour packer, the young girls in communion dresses on the carousel and the woman that is kissed against the blood-splattered wall.[33] Notwithstanding the problems associated with listing self-denial as a quality to which Mexican women should aspire, Gámez goes some way to balance the scales with his later film *Tequila*, dedicated to the 'Mexican Woman' with this epigraph:

> Por su abnegación y valentía,
> esta película está dedicada
> a la mujer mexicana.

The gender imbalance of *La fórmula secreta* is alarming in a film that sees itself as a criticism of national complacency. However, by presenting a surreal vision of a society in which women take secondary roles, *La fórmula secreta* makes a valuable statement on the perceived place of women in Mexican society. It must be stated at this point that, just because the film depicts the female characters

[33] The woman on the truck leans ever so slightly towards the man and makes no protestations at his advances, she then allows his hands to roam freely over her body; while the girls on the carousel smile joyfully, they are depicted as objects of the male gaze; and while the woman kissed in front of the blood-splattered wall participates freely in the kiss, she does so with her arms dangling down at her sides. In this way, while all these female characters seem to participate in the action of their own free will, they are depicted as doing so in a largely submissive manner.

solely as receivers of male attention, this does not necessarily represent the view of the filmmakers. Whether intentionally or not, the lack of unsubmissive female characters in *La fórmula secreta* functions as a comment upon machismo in Mexican society and, therefore, serves a purpose in Gámez's vision of the national psyche.

Notions of Mexican national identity and the problems associated with modernisation permeate every frame of *La fórmula secreta.* The film, shot in 1964, was made at a critical moment for the Mexican *campesino*. From the early sixties, there were indications that 'the import-substitution model of industrialization was not working well' and agriculture 'also showed symptoms of stagnation, its productivity decreased, it became unable to satisfy the domestic food demand and to be a dynamic factor in international trade. Products that were exported before began to be imported, and the surplus turned into a deficit'. (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 166-167) While national GDP had risen from 150, 511 million pesos in 1960 to 199, 390 million pesos in 1964, the agriculture and cattle industries were declining in significance.[34] The period from 1940 to 1968 are referred to as the years of the 'Mexican Miracle' by Aguilar Camín and Meyer and these years represented:

> [...] the development of the "modern" industrial base of the country, the years in which import-substitution industrialization (ISI) accelerated, in which agriculture was subordinated to industry, urbanization expanded, average growth reached 6 percent per year, exchange rate stability was achieved, and there was an equilibrium in prices and wages. (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 200)

[34] The proportion of the national GDP obtained from cattle fell by one per cent between 1960-1964 (from 5.3% of GDP to 4.33%). While the overall GDP was rising in this period the revenue from the cattle industry actually dropped between 1961 (8.032million pesos) and 1962 (7, 913 million pesos). (Aguilar Camín & Meyer 172-173)

So, while Mexico was in the process of increased industrialisation and accelerated GDP, the importance of agriculture lessened. The *campesino*'s relevance to the national economy lessened simultaneously to rapid urbanisation and geographical displacement and this is reflected throughout the film as images of traditional ways of life (rural life, campesinos, *jaripeo*, traditional methods of animal slaughter) clash with images of modernisation (machinery, processed meat, urban life).

La fórmula secreta can be described as a fragmented portrayal of a nation and its relationship with the outside world. To some extent *La fórmula secreta* accepts and reflects the canonical investigations into the questions of Mexican nationhood and the national psyche from the work of Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz. Despite recognising the indigenous Mexican as integral to the nation ('la masa indígena es un ambiente denso que envuelve todo lo que hay dentro del país') (Ramos 58), Ramos regards the indigenous population (the 'Mexican hinterland') as 'un coro que asiste silencioso al drama de la vida mexicana'. For this reason, indigenous groups are excluded from the rest of his investigation. For Ramos, Mexican society is divided into 'El pelado': 'un animal que se entrega a pantomimas de ferocidad para asustar a los demás, haciéndole creer que es más fuerte y decidido'; (Ramos 54) 'El mexicano de la ciudad': 'sólo se interesa por los fines inmediatos' (Ramos 59) and 'El burgués mexicano': 'el grupo más inteligente y cultivado de los mexicanos' (Ramos 62). Ramos, who famously included a chapter entitled 'Psicoanálisis del mexicano' in his *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) focused his argument on what he perceived as the Mexican's inferiority complex:

> Al nacer México, se encontró en el mundo civilizado en la misma relación del niño frente a sus mayores. Se presentaba en la historia cuando ya imperaba una civilización madura, que sólo a medias puede comprender un espíritu infantil. De esta situación desventajosa nace el sentimiento de inferioridad que se agravó con la conquista, el mestizaje, y hasta por la magnitud desproporcionada de la Naturaleza. (Ramos 51)

Ramos clarifies that he does not assert that the Mexican *is* inferior, rather, that he/she *feels* inferior. This feeling of inferiority and its manifestations (aggression, lack of planning, erratic behaviour) are to be eliminated before the Mexican can fully realise his potential. While Ramos defines the 'Burgués mexicano' as the most cultured and intelligent of Mexican society, the inferiority complex is still present only better hidden. Ramos also deals extensively with the Mexican's obsession with Europe and perceived European ideals. The inferiority complex of the Latin American intelligentsia and its obsession with Europe is dealt with succinctly in *La hora de los hornos*. In the section entitled 'La violencia cultural' the 'action' centres on the launch of Manuel Mújica Laínez's *Crónicas reales* at the Salón Pepsi-Cola. An interview with Mújica Laínez is heard during footage of the launch and he proclaims proudly that he is 'un hombre de formación muy europeo' and that the problems facing Argentina are intrinsically linked to Latin America's geographical location:

> Interviewer: ¿Como ves al país?
> Mújica Laínez: Está complicado. Vivimos tan lejos de todo.[35]

Distance from Europe and the abandonment of the old gods are also central to Octavio Paz's exploration of the Mexican's sense of orphanhood. For Paz, the *hijo de la chingada's* denial of his combined roots results in the Mexican's sense of displacement. The theories of Ramos and Paz are both perceptible in Gámez's

[35] *La hora de los hornos*, Section 10, La violencia cultural.

film. *La fórmula secreta* is steeped in this sense of inferiority in the face of external influences. The focus has shifted from Europe to the United States of America. However, the sense of inferiority is not only due to external factors. The paranoia and despair of the *campesino*, the loneliness and displacement of the urban dweller, the silence of the indigenous groups and the almost total absence of women; these internal conflicts (particularly between the urban and the rural) are central to *La fórmula secreta*. While *La fórmula secreta* accepts and, to some extent, continues the arguments of Ramos and Paz, the interplay of symbols at work in the film arguably paints a more heterogeneous vision of Mexican reality. While the binary interplay of images from Mexico and those from the U.S.A. create an obvious tension, the constant binaries within binaries of Mexican reality (rural vs. urban, traditional vs. modern, *mestizo* vs. indigenous) help to highlight the discordance within Mexico's socio-political makeup. The iconic images are accompanied by images of the traditional, banal, modern and indigenous creating a more detailed, albeit fractured, mosaic of Mexican life. So, while the images of the United States are rather homogenous and obvious, the construction of Mexican reality is far more intricate and point to a vision of Mexico as a fragmented and diverse organism. In this way, *La fórmula secreta*, takes up Paz's argument and not only affirms the combined roots of Mexico but insists upon its heterogeneity. Vivian Lash, interviewing Gámez for *Film Quarterly* in 1966 notes how:

> When asked what had been the most valuable experience for him in the making of this film, Gámez said that it had been the realization that Mexican Cinema "has not yet gotten to the roots of Mexican Reality". It is evident that his own search for this reality has led him to explore with humour many Mexican myths and clichés. He is particularly merciless with the clergy. (Lash 21)

Gámez thus defines his film as an attempt to 'get to the roots of Mexican Reality'. Clergymen watching young girls on the carousel, the real slaughter of the cow, the pursuit of the businessman through the streets of the metropolis and the solitary character of the plain who refuses to be ignored all point to one thing—*La fórmula secreta* is an exercise in violence, clearly concerned with the clash of old traditions with the expanding industrial world. In section 10 of the film, the businessman is hounded through the city streets by the *charro*. Finally the *charro* succeeds in lassoing the businessman who had tried in vain to escape. In a similar way to Rulfo's monologues, the *charro* represents the frustrated rural class's scream for attention. There is a sense of duality clearly perceptible to all in this section as both men, one a city dweller and the other a rural inhabitant, seem to suffer from the same problem as they both grapple for identity in an increasingly mechanised world.[36]

The timing of the production and original release of *La fórmula secreta* must not be ignored. As noted by Byrd Simpson, at least 74,600 *bracero* workers had crossed the border (legally) and found legal employment in the United States during 1947-1949 (Byrd Simpson 350). However, in 1965, the year in which *La fórmula secreta* won the national experimental film prize, the 'Bracero Agreement' promptly ended and, thus criminalised those who would continue to attempt to cross the border in search of employment. In this way, *La fórmula secreta*, with Rulfo's monologues accompanying figures that certainly look like

[36] This scence can also be read as a depiction of the clash between romaticised portrayals of a mythical Mexico in Golden Age films and the real, modern Mexico.

braceros near the border[37], makes a clear statement on the desperation of those workers unceremoniously left out of the loop, unable to enjoy the opportunities that so many had legally obtained in previous years.

In Ayala Blanco's introduction to El *gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* he claims that *La fórmula secreta*, upon its release, was limited to small cine-clubs and art-house cinemas. However, the abundance of newspaper clippings included in the recent publication *La fórmula secreta: Rubén Gámez* (2014) makes it clear that the film enjoyed a relatively wide release for an experimental film, showing, as it did, for five weeks at the Cine Regis. The film nowadays is occasionally available on video streaming websites and was, until 2010, available for purchase through an obscure Atlanta-based internet retailer. So, while it remains very much in the public realm, it has still been viewed by relatively few people since its initial release. This, of course, represents an irony that must not go unmentioned. Rulfo, in his involvement with the film, uses the medium of avant-garde filmmaking to represent the struggles of the Mexican *campesino*. From what is known of the film's meagre distribution (post initial cinema run) it is highly unlikely that the *campesinos* whose plight is highlighted would have actually seen any of the film. Perhaps, that is not the point though. The film seems to engage critically with almost every facet of Mexican society from the church to the businessman on the street and from the rural dweller to the urbanite. As Brecht would have it, the spectators may not *identify* with all of the characters on screen. They must, however, *take sides* and this is most evident in Sections 3 and 7 when

[37] While they carry no water or food, wandering, as they are, in an arid wilderness, the characters definitely seem to have been displaced. In the context of the film, in which images of foreign and national symbols struggle for prominence, it may be fairly concluded that these wandering men represent migrant workers.

Rulfo's memorable script combined with Gámez's images certainly has the spectator on the side of the *campesinos.*

2.17 Fragments Within Fragments, Conclusions

El despojo represents a true crossroads in the artistic endeavours of Rulfo. This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of the pre-Hispanic elements present in the film. This analysis sheds new light on Rulfo's work and may disrupt any notion of an established Rulfo canon. If anything, *El despojo* represents a synthesis of Rulfo's literary and photographic concerns in that it combines his preoccupations with land dispossession and the plight of rural peasants with his fascination with the indigenous *inframundo*. *El despojo* can be linked to *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* in theme and tone but, in reality, this film stands apart from his previous work. It is essential to remember that *El despojo* is the film with which we can most closely associate Rulfo as he was present during the filming, documented the process with his photographs, devised the plot and constantly re-worked the story on-set. The issues of land ownership and rural corruption are revisited by Rulfo while the introduction of pre-Hispanic elements widen the scope of his work and mark a significant departure for Rulfo into the *inframundo* that would later take up so much of his working life at the INI. The presences of the Nahual, the Otomí setting, the indigenous instruments, the incongrous soundtrack featuring the voices of Yaqui revellers—combine to suggest a much more fragmented vision than that present in any of Rulfo's prior work. Although *Pedro Páramo*, for example, is structurally fragmented, the depiction of Mexican society presented within the novel is homogenous—rural, *mestizo*, Spanish-speaking Mexico. The pluricultural fractured vision of Mexico

hinted at in *El despojo* is dramatically expanded upon in his collaborative work with Rubén Gámez, *La fórmula secreta*.

It can be argued that specifically indigenous concerns are not foregrounded as much in *La fórmula secreta* as they are in *El despojo*. When Gustavo Fares describes the central character of Section 3 in the English language version of his text, he describes him as the 'rural character'. However, when he describes him in an almost identical passage in the Spanish language he describes him as 'indígena':

> Quien aparece frente al espectador, mirándolo a través de la cámara, es un campesino indígena que trata en todo momento de permanecer dentro del espacio visual, como observando a través de una ventana. (Fares 1998: 99)

Ayala Blanco also describes the peasants and indigenous:

> Invadiendo el agreste fondo, imponiendo por la fuerza su presencia en un devastado paisaje lleno de grietas como de fin del mundo, aparecen figuras de campesinos indígenas mirando con persistencia, enigmáticamente, a la cámara [...] (Rulfo 1980: 118)

However, it can be argued that these figures are no more indigenous than the characters that populate the pages and barren dusty plains of *El Llano en llamas*. According to Víctor Jiménez, the classification of 'indigenous' is generally reserved for members of specific groups that express identity through 'indigenous' languages and clothing. Jiménez (with regard to Rulfo's photography) asserts that:

> "Indígena" tiene, en la antropología no física (en la etnología, digamos, y es la tradición mexicana), una connotación estrictamente cultural (es requisito, por ejemplo, tener como lengua materna una lengua mexicana: náhuatl, etc.).[38]

[38] Correspondence with the author.

In Section 4 of *La fórmula secreta* the spectator is presented with one shot of a weather-worn sandal-clad foot and (with the exception of the shots of Tlatelolco) this represents the only occasion in the film when a specifically indigenous image is included. However, its inclusion must be viewed as one tile in a complex mosaic of visual symbols as Gámez constructs a vision of the entire nation. In this way, indigenous imagery is included in an attempt to construct an all-encompassing portrayal of the makeup of the republic as opposed to an attempt to foreground the plight of Mexican indigenous communities. As discussed in an early section of this chapter, the expression of this *mestizo* identity is through the use of stereotypically Mexican motifs—the eagle/vulture in the Zócalo, the chillies in the market, the woven *sarape* and hand-made *panimeño* style hat of the self-aware figure on the plain. These motifs act as easily recognisable emblems of Mexican identity. There is a constant juxtaposition of symbols throughout the film as Mexican totems incessantly clash with those of globalisation. These symbols come from modern and pre-Hispanic Mexico as well as from abroad and serve to conjure up a confused whirlwind of defining characteristics that make up the *mestizo* world. There is a sort of binary code of metonymic symbols at work here—the film possesses an important duality. The indigenous *sarapes* are complemented by the distinctly western denim clothes. The typical wide brimmed *sombreros* are worn by some while others sport baseball caps. The film can be best understood as a nightmarish battle between traditional life and the modern world. The voice of the young child struggling with an English lesson, the ever-expanding hot-dog sausage, the prominence of foreign multi-nationals such as British Petroleum and General foods—all these motifs of foreign economic and

cultural filtration are juxtaposed against surreal manifestations of traditional *mestizo* Mexican culture. In this way, both *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* go a long way towards consolidating the themes of agrarian corruption and rural poverty (and in the case of *El despojo*, *machista* dominace of women) while also radically expanding Rulfo's areas of concern to include indigenous Mexico, industrial and urban Mexico—just some of the 'muchos Méxicos' towards which his cinematic works point.

CHAPTER THREE: *PEDRO PÁRAMO* RE-VISITED AS MELODRAMA—*EL GALLO DE ORO*

3.1 *El gallo de oro*—An Introduction

Rulfo published two novels during his lifetime—*Pedro Páramo* (1955) and *El gallo de oro* (1980). With a chronology that is almost entirely linear and with little of the literary experimentation that dominates his first novel, *El gallo de oro* differs from *Pedro Páramo* in style and tone. Nevertheless, it reworks major themes of *Pedro Páramo* in a melodramatic fashion reminiscent of films of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. Both novels chart the rise and fall of a rich landowner. Both central male characters attempt to dominate and incarcerate the woman that they love with dire consequences for all. The relationship between Dionisio and his daughter echoes that of Pedro and Miguel Páramo. These are some of the most striking similarities between the two novels. As Rulfo wrote so little (and published even less) the thematic parallels between *El gallo de oro* and *Pedro Páramo* cannot be ignored. While some critics, notably Milagros Ezquerro, have commented upon these similarities, few in-depth analyses of the novels and their similarities exist. This owes something to the unusual history of *El gallo de oro*—published over twenty years after it was written as part of an anthology of *textos para cine*, it has suffered marginalisation both by critics, publishers and, clearly, by the author himself. In this way this chapter represents an important contribution towards addressing this unusual critical gap. This chapter begins with an examination of the history and origin of the text and its critical reception. The rest of the chapter is focused on the mechanics behind the novel or, in other words, the way in which Rulfo uses the template of melodrama as a vehicle for

both covering new ground and re-addressing the major themes of *Pedro Páramo*. *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* fit well together as examples of the way in which Rulfo's cinematic works both expand upon previously addressed themes while also including socio-cultural elements absent in his previous work. In the same way, *El gallo de oro*, though returning to the major themes of *Pedro Páramo*, also embraces the tropes of Mexico's cinematic golden-age, roughly the forties and fifties. Throughout this chapter the elements of *El gallo de oro* that both align it with his previous work are explored alongside the ways in which Rulfo situates his narrative within a cinematic world. There has been confusion surrounding the nature of *El gallo de oro*, with some critics relegating it to the status of cinematic argument. This chapter sets about clearing up the mystery surrounding the novelistic and cinematic elements of the text. A synopsis, crucial to any reader unfamiliar with the text, follows. The use of song lyrics, geographical specificity and the carnival setting both help to situate the narrative within the realm of Mexican melodrama as well as differentiating it from Rulfo's other works of fiction. After examining the musical elements of the text and narrative style, the similarties with *Pedro Páramo* are explored before a thorough analysis of the influence of María Félix on Rulfo's La Caponera character. Before reaching conclusions, the cinematic adaptations of *El gallo de oro* are analysed.

In the previous chapter, *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta* were both critiqued in their written and filmic manifestations and so too is *El gallo de oro*. The difference here is that Rulfo did not participate in the filmmaking process. As already noted, there are two film versions of the novel, Roberto Gavaldón's *El gallo de oro* (1964) and Arturo Ripstein's *El imperio de la fortuna* (1985). This

chapter will analyse the ways in which the themes of Rulfo's original are explored by both Gavaldón and Ripstein and it is clear that, in their respective emphasis on certain elements of the original text, each film bears the hallmark of its respective director. The analyses of the filmed versions of *El gallo de oro* play an important role in this investigation. While Rulfo loses the element of control on these two cinematic projects, the films, of course, would not exist were it not for the source material. Both Gavaldón and Ripstein accentuate different elements of the text for their own ends. The melodrama that is clearly present in Rulfo's original is placed to the fore in Gavaldón's exuberant adaptation while the poverty, squalor, social commentary and misogynist treatment of La Caponera by her male captors are magnified throughout *El imperio de la fortuna*. The way in which both Gavaldón and Ripstein expand upon Rulfo's original text warrants investigation as their films, irregardless of what Rulfo's opinion of them may have been, also contribute to the widening of Rulfo's lens, bringing his work (albeit altered versions of his work) to newer audiences.

The abusive *hacendado*, the imprisoned woman, the abject poverty of the uneducated rural inhabitant, are the elments of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* that resurface throughout *El gallo de oro*, in all its manifestations. However, the melodramatic nature of the text makes *El gallo de oro* seem to stand far apart from his other work upon a superficial examination. In this way, this chapter presents an exhaustive exploration of the ways in which *El gallo de oro* (in both novelistic form and in its cinematic adaptations) re-works Rulfo's greatly influential and structurally experimental *Pedro Páramo* as a piece of heightened

melodrama, maintaining (even consolidating) the major themes of his previous work while simultaneously moving into newer territories.

3.2 *El gallo de oro*: ¿Texto para cine?

As noted in previous chapters, Rulfo's second novel, *El gallo de oro*, was published for the first time in 1980 by Ediciones Era in *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* with a foreword and explanatory notes provided by Jorge Ayala Blanco and with the acknowledged collaboration of Rubén Gámez, Antonio Reynoso, Pablo Rulfo and Carlos Monsiváis. Despite teasing journalists and critics for years about forthcoming novels and stories for years after the publication of *Pedro Páramo*[39], *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* was met with critical silence upon its release. This unusual neglect was later described in romantic terms by Milagros Ezquerro:

> Es difícil explicar que un texto de Rulfo pasara tan desapercibido cuando el escritor mexicano era ya una de las figuras más unánimemente reconocidos de la literatura de lengua española. Verdad es que todo cuanto toca a Juan Rulfo es algo misterioso, y este texto aparece rodeado de misterio. (Ezquerro 785)

The mystery that Ezquerro refers to is not only the strange indifference towards the work but also the 'mystery' surrounding the origin of *El gallo de oro*. She, along with Heber Raviolo, believed that *El gallo de oro*, published by Ediciones Era was, in fact, the hitherto unpublished novel *El gallero* and that this novel was adapted for the screen by Rulfo himself. Heber Raviolo suggests that Rulfo's son Pablo Rulfo 'puede haberse salvado alguna copia de "el material artístico" que éste creía destruido.' (Rulfo 1981: 8) Regardless of how it came to be published, it

[39] In 1965, Rulfo mentioned that he was working on a novel entitled 'La cordillera'. In 1969 he claimed to have already written a collection of stories entitled 'Los días sin flores'. For further reading on this, see "*El gallo de oro y otros textos marginados* de Juan Rulfo" by José Carlos González Boixo.

is quite clear that what was released lacked any of the formal qualities of a screenplay. In 1981, just one year after the first appearance of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, Ediciones de la Banda Oriental published *El gallo de oro: Novela*. This Uruguayan edition contained only *El gallo de oro* and, with its unequivocal title, defined the work as a novel. From this it can be seen that as early as one year after its initial appearance, a publisher was seen attempting to distance *El gallo de oro* from its appellation—*otros textos para cine*. For this reason, the editor Heber Raviolo insists on its clear definition as a novel. In fact, most of the (until recently, scant) critical attention paid to *El gallo de oro* has focused on genre definition as critics have discussed whether the text represents a novel, a short novel, a screenplay or a cinematic *argumento.* In this way the 'problem' of genre definition has attracted the attention of most of the few critics that have dedicated research to *El gallo de oro*. Carrillo Juárez ponders the disadvantages of genre denomination:

> Parece, pues, que decir que es una novela corta o breve deja en el aire una sensación de demérito [...] no se ha propuesto un nombre adecuado para las narraciones que se ocupan de describir el proceso de un asunto significativo y que, a la vez, tienden a la economía. Referirse a estas narraciones como *novelitas* o *noveletas* supone, de entrada, una concesión despectiva, de lo que se deduce que extenderse en pocas páginas implicaría una escritura apresurada e incompleta de alguna manera. (Carrillo Juárez 246-247)

Alberto Vital, unhappy with the inadequacy of the Spanish language to accurately define *El gallo de oro*, insists upon the term *nouvelle* and, in her comparison of the text with the original film version, Carmen Dolores Carrillo Juárez follows Vital's lead:

> Las recurrentes canciones que entona Lucha Villa, cantante de música bravía que interpreta a Bernarda, acercan la película a la comedia ranchera, aspecto que si se revisa permitirá llegar a conclusiones

> interesantes con respecto a la relación y comparación entre *nouvelle* y filme. (Carrillo Juárez 251)

Rulfo himself referred to the text as a 'novela' in a grant application to the Guggenheim Foundation:

> R: …*El gallo de oro*. Novela. 1959. No se publicó por haberse utilizado como argumento para la película del mismo nombre. (Vital 2003: 160)

Various critics in the years following the first publication of the text attributed the public neglect to the fact that the novel was identified as a 'text for the cinema'. In 1986, four years after its publication in Spain, José Carlos González Boixo expressed his surprise that the publication of *El gallo de oro* had not made much of a stir in literary circles:

> [...] la aparición de *El gallo de oro* debería haber supuesto un verdadero acontecimiento literario y, sin embargo, no ha sido así. (González Boixo 1986: 489)

In his introduction to the Cátedra edition of *Pedro Páramo*, González Boixo put forth the proposition that *El gallo de oro* failed to receive the critical attention that it deserved due to the fact that the editors and Ayala Blanco had presented *El gallo de oro* to the reader as a film script (or a template for a film plot) and that this led it to be regarded somehow as being a less 'literary' piece of work:

> No se ha prestado, a mi modo de ver, la suficiente atención al texto El gallo de oro, cuya publicación bajo el epígrafe de "guión de cine", viene en definitiva, a situarlo como texto "no literario", cuestión que me parece sumamente discutible. (Rulfo 2005: 13)

Milagros Ezquerro also agrees with the notion that the novel's association with the cinema has detracted from its merits and caused it to be viewed as a minor text, a cinematic scenario or even a screenplay:

> [...] lo malo es que el título inicial bajo el cual se publicó, contribuyó a su escasa difusión y sobre todo a que se considerase—y se siga considerando—como "un texto para cine", o sea un texto ancilar, no

> literario, con finalidades completamente distinta [...] me importa declarar rotundamente que *El gallo de oro* no es un texto para cine, sino una novela corta que forma parte cabal del núcleo central de la obra del escritor jalisciense, una novela que no sólo tiene un poderoso atractivo, sino que está hondamente vinculada con la obra anterior. (Ezquerro 685)

Despite the efforts of some critics to define *El gallo de oro* as a novel, other critics have sought to do the opposite. Jorge Ruffinelli seems to embark upon an attempt to exonerate Rulfo for the simplistic, linear style of narration by insisting that the text is not to be considered in the same context as his previous novel and short story collection:

> La mayor injusticia contra Rulfo (y la mayor desubicación crítica) consistiría en exigirle al texto el acabado formal y expresivo de una novela o de un relato extensor. (Ruffinelli 59)

Ruffinelli then affirms that, because of the difference in style and technique between *El gallo de oro* and Rulfo's best known fiction, *Pedro Páramo* and *El Llano en llamas*, it can be deduced that *El gallo de oro* is not a novel but a movie treatment or scenario—*argumento*:

> La lectura de *El gallo de oro* (el argumento) como texto de valores literarios nos permite confirmar, por omisión, la densidad propia del lenguaje literario, ese campo de ambigüedad en que las acciones se presentan tan equívocas y complejas "como" en la vida misma. Por otro lado, en compensación de esa ausencia, exhibe con mayor claridad que un texto literario la estructura de su historia, aquella composición que conduce a un significado. (Ruffinelli 56)

On the other hand, Raviolo's prologue brings the readers' attention to the significance of the difference in title:

> "El gallo de oro" no es un libreto cinematográfico, ni un comentario marginal a una serie de imágenes fílmicas, sino un relato cabal, escrito para ser leído y no para ser filmado. (Rulfo 1981: 5)

Raviolo's insistence that *El gallo de oro* be considered a novel and not 'un texto para cine' highlights the controversy surrounding the various interpretations of

this work and other critics have focused on this 'cinematic text' definition. Milagros Ezquerro notes how, upon its release, *El gallo de oro* was: 'considerado, o más bien desconsiderado, desde su furtiva publicación en 1980, como un "texto para cine"'. (Ezquerro 683) Luis Leal, in the preface to his 1983 publication *Juan Rulfo*, describes Rulfo as the author of three books of fiction (and not, as is still quite common, as the author of two works of fiction): [40]

> Juan Rulfo has only published three slender volumes of fiction, yet his name has become known throughout the literary world. (Leal xiii)

In light of the above confusion among critics regarding genre definition and *El gallo de oro*'s relationship with the screen, some clarification is warranted at this juncture. As has been demonstrated here, it has been frequently suggested that the text's association with the cinema has detracted from its merits and this, in turn, has led to it being overlooked by readers and critics. However, while there have been doubts surrounding the inception of *El gallo de oro*, what is clear is that the text is written as a prose narrative and, at some point, Rulfo, by his own admission, thought that the 'folkloric' elements of the story lent it a cinematic quality:

> Esa novela (*El gallero*, no *El gallo de oro*) la terminé, pero no la publiqué porque me pidieron un script cinematográfico y como la obra tenía muchos elementos folklóricos, creí que se prestaría para hacerla película. Yo mismo hice el script. Sin embargo cuando lo presenté me dijeron que tenía mucho material que no podía usarse […] El material artístico de la obra lo destruí. Ahora me es casi imposible rehacerla. (Ezquerro 786)

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[40] For example, the description of the 2012 English language translation of *El llano en llamas* (*The Plain in Flames*) provided by the University of Texas Press website, reads as follows: 'Juan Rulfo is one of the most important writers of twentieth-century Mexico, though he only wrote two books—the novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and the short story collection *El llano en llamas* (1953).' http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/books/rulbu2.html Also, in his introduction to *The Plain in Flames*, Ilan Stavans refers to *El gallo de oro* as one of Rulfo's 'film scripts' and erroneously claims that it was written in the sixties: 'He wrote several movie scripts, among them *El gallo de oro*, which was written in the early sixties and adapted for the screen by Rulfo's acolytes Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes.' (Rulfo 2012: xi)

In recent years, increased research in the area of Rulfo and cinema has charted a slight shift in critical opinion with regard to *El gallo de oro*. For example, in 1990, Yvette Jiménez de Báez argued that *El gallo de oro* 'sólo pretende ser un argumento para cine.' (Jiménez de Báez 1990: 257) Nevertheless, two years later, she stated that 'el hecho es que el texto cobra autonomía literaria y se relaciona con las dos obras anteriores'. (Jiménez de Báez 1992: 606) Alberto Vital, in his "*El gallo de oro*, hoy", argues that, while Rulfo did not write *El gallo de oro* as a commissioned work for any cinema director or producer, he did see cinema as an attractive and viable option:

> El estilo de *El gallo de oro* difiere del de *El Llano en llamas* y de *Pedro Páramo*. Nada indica que la segunda novela íntegra de Rulfo haya sido escrita por encargo de un productor, un director o un actor. Sin embargo, la cercanía del jalisciense con el medio, su pasión por el cine, el impresionante caudal de energía colectiva que transitaba y transita alrededor de esta industria en forma de dinero, de futuro y de prestigio, hacían más que viable la alternativa del cine para Rulfo, así como el ensayo y el teatro fueron una opción para Octavio Paz, para Carlos Fuentes y para tantos otros. (Vital 2006: 429-430)

It is true that the novel may have originally been entitled *El gallero* or *El gallo dorado* (as claimed by Sergio Kogan, see below) and that it may have existed in various formats. What is in no doubt, however, is that the text published by Ediciones Era in 1980 and (with numerous vital corrections) by Editorial RM and the Fundación Juan Rulfo, is a work of fictional prose, a short novel. The 2010 edition was published alongside two essays that quickly became essential reading for anyone interested in Rulfo's narrative fiction. Both "Valoración literaria de la novela *El gallo de oro*" by José Carlos González Boixo and ""Texto para cine": *El gallo de oro* en la producción artística de Juan Rulfo", by Douglas

J. Weatherford represent the most important published investigations of *El gallo de oro* to date.[41] While Weatherford discusses the impossible-to-ignore associations of *El gallo de oro* with the cinema González Boixo explores the novelistic qualities of the text. Both González Boixo and Weatherford were provided with newspaper clippings from the archives of the Fundación Juan Rulfo and both were able to reach the conclusion that Rulfo almost certainly wrote *El gallo de oro* around 1956. González Boixo, with reference to an anonymous article in *Esto* outlines his conclusions as follows:

> Las primeras noticias sobre *El gallo de oro* se remontan a 1956. Gracias a dos textos periodísticos, que se conservan en el archivo hemerográfico del escritor, conocemos que Rulfo ya había iniciado ese proyecto en dicho año. En unas declaraciones publicadas en la prensa del 10 de octubre de 1956, Sergio Kogan, productor de *La Escondida* manifiesta sus quejas antes la ausencia de buenos guiones y directores cinematográficos mexicanos, y señala:
>
> > Ahora bien, una verdadera buena historia no la he tenido sino hasta hace unos cuantos días. Se trata de un relato especialmente escrito para cine por Juan Rulfo, titulado *El Gallo Dorado*.
>
> Un comentarista alude nuevamente en la prensa a este tema el 24 de octubre de 1956, mencionando posibles protagonistas y ambientación de la película, así como que su director será Roberto Gavaldón:
>
> > Bueno es el argumento de *El Gallo de Oro*, que Kogan prepara. El personaje masculino está destinado a Pedro Armendáriz—un señor papel—y para el femenino, el problema será grande, pues tiene que ser un cancionista tipo Lola Beltrán, pero con más calidad artística. Si la encuentran habrán hecho un verdadero hallazgo. No deja de gustarles como entre las posibles, Katy Jurado. Pero en fin, nada hay. Dirigirá Roberto Gavaldón, que puede lograr algo de

[41] Both of these essays make reference to newspaper articles found amongst Rulfo's personal archives, articles that were made available to both González Boixo and Weatherford whilst they prepared their essays. This archival material was also made available to this researcher during the same period. For this reason, it is no surprise that similar conclusions are made with regard to both the genesis of *El gallo de oro* and the time of its writing. Nevertheless, despite the conclusions made during the research of this doctoral being reached *a priori* to (and independently of) the publication of these two essays, both essays are referenced.

> concurso. Las riñas de gallos, la Feria de San Marcos con su juego y los caracteres de los personajes estelares, son como para pensar en el éxito imperecedero. (González Boixo 2010: 17-18)

It is clear that *El gallo de oro* was written sooner than had been thought by some. In fact, it was begun quite soon after *Pedro Páramo* was published. This, as Weatherford points out, marks out the mid-fifties as a busy time of artistic endeavour for Rulfo:

> La alusión tan temprana que hace Kogan a *El gallo de oro* es significativa. Primero, sugiere que Rulfo habría escrito la novela—o una versión de ella—mucho antes de lo que algunos habían pensado. Es probable, de hecho, que Rulfo empezara a redactar *El gallo de oro* en 1956, para acabarlo al año siguiente, como ha indicado Víctor Jiménez. *El gallo de oro* se concibe, entonces, a mediados de la década de los cincuenta, una época importante en la vida creativa del joven escritor. Rulfo, que había ganado una fama casi repentina con la publicación de *El Llano en llamas* y *Pedro Páramo*, sentía cierta responsabilidad por continuar la innovación que había caracterizado sus primeras publicaciones y parece claro que el autor ideó y redactó *El gallo de oro* en un momento que buscaba nuevos retos artísticos. (Weatherford 2010: 49)

Vital, González Boixo and Weatherford all agree that *El gallo de oro* is a novel. While Vital distances the novel from any cinematic relationships it may have had, both González Boixo and Weatheford, in highlighting Kogan's declaration that he would soon make a film based on Rulfo's text, show that, while certainly not a screenplay, *El gallo de oro* is, and has been since its inception, inextricably linked to cinema:

> El hecho de que Rulfo muy posiblemente hubiera escrito su segunda novela con la intención de que esa historia fuera llevada a la pantalla grande atesgigua la importancia que tenía para él, en la segunda mitad de los cincuenta, la posibilidad de escribir para el cine. (Weatherford 2010: 69)

In this way, contemporary research in the area agrees that, while *El gallo de oro* is a novel, it is a novel that must be examined in conjunction with its links to cinema as dominant themes of Rulfo's canonical fiction are developed through the medium of melodrama.

3.3 *El gallo de oro*: Synopsis

The story revolves around the lowly town-crier Dionisio Pinzón, a native of San Miguel del Milagro. Dionisio, because of a deformed arm, can only find work as a town-crier, announcing the disappearance of animals, children and missing or eloped couples. Living with his mother 'enferma y vieja, más por la miseria que por los años', (p. 84)[42], Dionisio is described as one of the poorest people in San Miguel del Milagro. His work often goes unpaid. The priest repays him with prayers and if, for example, he announces the loss of an animal, he may not receive any payment until said animal has been returned to his owner. From time to time he manages to get work as an announcer at the occasional travelling carnivals and he is invited to announce the cock-fights. The last fight changes his life forever—a golden cockerel from Chihuahua is heavily wounded and defeated by a white-feathered rival from Chicontepc. Just as its owner is about to wring the bird's neck, Dionisio pleads for him to spare the animal's life. In this manner the 'gallo dorado' becomes Dionisio's possession.

Effectively choosing the cockerel over his mother, Dionisio heals the cockerel through constant care and attention while his mother dies:

> Pareció ser como si hubiera cambiado su vida por la vida del "ala tuerta" como acabó llamándose el gallo dorado. Pues mientras éste iba revive y

[42] All page numbers refer to *El gallo de oro*, Editorial RM, Mexico City, 2010.

> revive, la madre de Dionisio Pinzón se dobló hasta morir, enferma de miseria.
> Muchos años de privaciones; días enteros de hambre y ninguna esperanza, la mataron más pronto. Y ya cuando él creía haber encontrado ánimos para luchar de firme por los dos, la madre no tenía remedio, ni voluntad para recuperar sus perdidas fuerzas. (p. 91)

Dionisio, lacking the funds necessary to buy a proper coffin for his mother, carries her corpse through the streets wrapped in a 'petate'. Enduring the taunts and jibes of the townsfolk (who believe that he's carrying a dead animal), Dionisio buries his mother himself and vows never to return to San Miguel del Milagro. He then sets off on his travels from carnival to carnival trying his luck at the cockfights.

Initially successful, Dionisio attracts the attentions of the rich cockerel owner Lorenzo Benavides. Benavides, accompanied by the well-known and popular carnival singer Bernarda Cutiño—known as La Caponera—attempts to persuade Dionisio to sell him his bird. He refuses. Two months later, Dionisio's cockerel is killed in the ring in Tlaquepaque. Alone and dejected, he leaves the 'palenque' and finds himself gambling on card games. He loses what little money he still has but a chance encounter with La Caponera changes his luck. She asks him to bet on her behalf and, to the astonishment of Dionisio, she wins every time. With the help of Bernarda, Dioniso is finally persuaded to fight cockerels on behalf of Benavides. Benavides invites him to his *hacienda* in Santa Gertrudis. It is there that Dionisio learns to play cards. Dionisio later discovers that Bernarda, La Caponera, seems to act as a lucky charm, always guaranteeing the gambling success of her male companions.

Dionisio and Bernarda become lovers. One day, while playing cards, Dionisio (accompanied by La Caponera—his 'piedra imán') wins Benavides's Santa Gertrudis residence. An ellipsis of a few years follows and the reader

discovers that Dionisio and Bernarda have a daughter—Bernarda Pinzón. Dionisio, obsessed with playing cards, rarely leaves the *hacienda*. La Caponera, frustrated by the boring life at Santa Gertrudis, grows frustrated and drinks even more heavily than she did on the road. She yearns to travel and to sing at the carnivals but her voice is no longer good enough to perform professionally. Dionisio agrees to travel a little with her so that she can sing in other locations. However, her mariachis leave her when business is bad. At this stage of the text, her voice is shot and she is always drunk. It is at this point that Dioniso seals their fate. He insists that La Caponera return to Santa Gertrudis and there he incarcerates her by forcing her to stay indoors, accompanying him in his interminable card games. With her by his side he wins every card game at the *hacienda*. The locals come to see him to complain about the sexual promiscuity of his daughter and Dionisio proudly proclaims: '¡Mi hija hará lo que le venga en gana!' (p.136). One day, while playing a particularly long game, Bernarda dies in her chair. Dionisio, despite a losing streak, continues to gamble heavily and finally loses everything. Astounded that he has lost with his human lucky charm in close proximity, Dionisio shakes Bernarda. When realising she's dead he shouts: '¿Por qué no me avisaste que estabas muerta, Bernarda?'(p.143) Penniless and distraught, Dionisio shoots himself dead. After the funeral, the young Bernarda Pinzón sets out on the road to earn her living in the same way as her mother and grandmother—by singing at the travelling carnivals.

3.4 Musical Drama in Atemporal Mexico

Gustavo García refers to Roberto Gavaldón's treatment of the text as 'the last great provincial melodrama'. (García 158) Melodrama, in the Oxford Dictionary,

is defined as 'a sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions.'[43] While *El gallo de oro* fits this description (as does, to a greater extent, Gavaldón's version), it is also a melodrama in the etymological sense—Rulfo peppers the story with the lyrics of 'real' 'corridos'. These lyrics were not, as suggested by Alberto Vital in "*El gallo de oro*, hoy", the original compositions of Rulfo but pre-existing 'corridos'. By not composing the lyrics himself and making use of pre-existing songs, Rulfo again links the story to the oral tradition and thus, further situates *El gallo de oro* within the world of Mexican melodrama, both in the colloquial and etymological sense of the word.

Little analysis of the songs exists in the scholarly work on *El gallo de oro* and, so, within the context of viewing the text as melodrama, this must be addressed here. Rulfo's text is punctuated with songs at significant intervals. They appear at important moments in the narrative, accompanying moments of heightened drama. The first song, beginning with the lyrics 'Antenoche soñé que te amaba / como se ama una vez en la vida,' is sung by La Caponera in Fragment 5 just after Dionisio's golden cockerel has won its first fight in San Juan del Río. Sergio López Mena identifies the song as 'Qué te falta, mujer' and notes its presence in both the *Cancionero popular mexicano* and *El romance español y el corrido mexicano*. (López Mena 38-39) The second *corrido* is sung immediately after Dionisio's winning fight in Aguascalientes. With reference to this song (identified as both 'El venadito' and 'El querreque' by López Mena), (López Mena 98) Carmen Dolores Carrillo Juárez notes how the very identification of the

[43] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/melodrama?region=uk&q=melodrama

song with diverse regions of Mexico highlights the expansive range of identified towns and regions throughout the novel:

> Las canciones que entona Bernarda provienen de lugares diversos connotando su no pertenencia a sólo uno. Por ejemplo, la segunda canción que entona Bernarda:
> En la cárcel de Celaya
> estuve preso y sin delito,
> por una infeliz pitaya
> que picó mi pajarito;
> mentiras ni le hizo nada:
> ya tenía su agujerito.
>
> Se trata de una copla que se canta como estrofa suelta en Huejutla (Hidalgo), en Tamazunchale (San Luis Potosí) forma parte del "Querreque" y en Oaxaca y el Distrito Federal es una de las coplas de "El venadito", de acuerdo con el Cancionero folklórico de México. Así que el uso de textos líricos populares provenientes de varias regiones refuerza el carácter trashumante de Bernarda [...](Carrillo Juárez 244-245)

Dionisio's cockerel is mortally wounded in Fragment 10 after a fight in Tlaquepaque. Fragment 10, being the longest fragment in the novel and focusing, as it does, on the changing relationship between Dionisio and La Caponera, is pivotal. It is in this section that the cockerel dies and Dionisio, having lost everything, is rescued by the successful gambling of La Caponera. This section features two songs. The first of the two, beginning with the line 'Hermosa flor de Pitaya', is identified as 'El pájaro carpintero' by López Mena (López Mena 118). Rulfo includes four full verses of this well known song immediately after Dionisio and La Caponera have made some money gambling. The song also features the following lyrics, which were not included in *El gallo de oro*: 'Cuando me vine de Puebla / me vine en carro de roble; / sus ruedas eran de cobre/ todos en silencio van. / ¡Qué malo es ser uno pobre! / ni los buenos días te dan!' (López Mena 118) The lyrics echo the precarious nature of Dionisio's existence on the fringes of

poverty,[44] and Monsiváis sees poverty and melodrama as being inextricably linked:

> Se afirma siempre el carácter estructural de la pobreza, y el que no acepta un enunciado tan determinista parece negar la historia. ¿Alquien, fuera de los utopistas más deslumbrados o menos lógicos, imagina una América latina sin pobreza y miseria? La escritura en la pared: se nace pobre porque el padre y el abuelo tienen ese origen y a los hijos les toca ese camino, lo avalan el feudalismo de una larga etapa y el capitalismo salvaje. (Monsiváis 2005)

Later in this section La Caponera sings 'De los candados'. This song, sung in the town of Cuquío, features lyrics that prophesise the relationship that is about to be consummated. Soon afterwards, the reader is informed that Dionisio has married Bernarda:

> Se casó con La Caponera una mañana cualquiera, en un pueblo cualquiera, ligando así su promesa de no separarse de ella jamás nunca. (p. 123)

Rulfo, including the lyrics: 'Como decías que me querías / y nunca nunca me has de olivdar, / no te abandono ni te desprecio / y ni por otra te he de cambiar', (p. 120) makes reference to the upcoming marriage vows. With the opening lyrics 'Ya los candados están cerrados/ por no saber el hombre vivir' (p. 120) he references the doomed nature of their marriage on account of Dionisio's later insistence that his wife remain metaphorically chained to his side within the walls of Santa Gertrudis.

In Fragment 15, while Dionisio is gambling away his fortune, in some far corner of the hacienda, as his daughter arrives home late from her ramblings, he hears the following lament:

> Pregúntale a las estrellas
> si por las noches me ven llorar,

[44] López Mena finds this particular song catalogued in *Cancionero mexicano, Cancionero folklórico de México, Del Bajío y arribeñas* and *Panorama de la música tradicional de México.* (López Mena 2007:118)

> pregúntales si no busco
> para quererte, la soledad.
> Pregúntale al manso río
> si el llanto mío no ve correr;
> pregúntale a todo el mundo
> si no es profundo mi padecer (pp. 139-140)

Immediately after this, Dionisio is transported back to happier days as he re-imagines this song:

> Y, como una réplica, oyó la misma canción en la voz ardiente de La Caponera, allá, brotando del templete de una plaza de gallos, mientras veía muerto, revolcándose en el suelo, a un gallo dorado, tornasol. (p. 140)

Dionisio hears the voice and then re-hears the same song as he is transported back to the *palenque* where he sees and hears La Caponera singing in her prime. The juxtaposition of the lament as heard in the veritable jailhouse of Santa Gertrudis and, then, as imagined at a carnival cockfight, makes the lyrics all the more poignant. This represents another example of Rulfo's incorporation of popular songs, the lyrics of which correspond to the unfolding narrative. The final song in *El gallo de oro* is sung by La Caponera's daughter as she sets out to emulate her mother's achievements on the travelling carnival circuit as the cyclical narrative comes to a close.

One of the first things that any reader of *El gallo de oro* who is familiar with Rulfo's other works of narrative fiction will notice is that the action takes place not in the crumbling ghost towns of Comala or Luvina. Nor does the story confine itself, (like most of Rulfo's fiction) to the small towns and plains of rural Jalisco. Carmen Dolores Carrillo Juárez notes how, unlike the Jalisco-set stories of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, the action takes place across a wide geographical space:

> Estos personajes se mueven por un espacio geográfico más o menos amplio: poblados de Tlaxcala, Querétaro, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Jalisco y Chihuahua. Si se piensa en la narrativa anterior de Rulfo, se notará que mientras los personajes se situaban en Jalisco, ahora, éstos se mueven en ferias menos o más importantes de diferentes lugares de la República Mexicana. (Carrillo Juárez 244)

As mentioned, the story begins in San Miguel del Milagro. The place name was almost certainly suggested by San Miguel de Milagro in the state of Tlaxcala, a location with which Rulfo was familiar, having worked in Tlaxcala during the filming of *La Escondida*. Whether Dionisio is from Tlaxcala is not stated directly in the text and is, therefore, probable rather than indisputable. What is clear, however, is that he soon joins the world of cock-fighters, songstresses and mariachis to follow the carnivals travelling throughout the Bajío region and Northern Mexico visiting a string of towns and cities the names of which would be easily recognisable to a Mexican reader. When Dionisio works as an announcer at the cockfights of his home town, the reader learns that cockfighters have travelled from such diverse places as Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Teocaltiche, Arandas and Chalchicomula. Later, when Dionisio sets out on the road with his cockerel, his first stop is San Juan del Río, followed by Zacatecas and finally arriving at the still famous San Marcos festival in Aguascalientes. The ranch that Dionisio will later make his home is located in Santa Gertrudis—possibly in Jalisco. Thus, the story's geographical space is a vast area from (probably) Tlaxcala up through the very spine of Mexico, through the Bajío region. By locating the events in real geographical space the Mexican reader easily recognises the territory—the typical Mexican carnival. No carnival seems to have any peculiar defining characteristics in *El gallo de oro*—the *palenque*, La Caponera's songs, card games and heavy drinking repeat themselves over and

over again with only Rulfo's inclusion of different song lyrics providing any sense of differentiation. So, instead of highlighting the peculiarity of each town and its inhabitants, the locations are one and the same: Mexico or, more specifically, rural traditional Mexico.

Given the aforementioned geographical specificity of the narrative, it is surprising to note that when Dionisio and La Caponera get married the narrator makes it clear that the location and time of this life-changing event are unimportant as the reader is informed that the marriage took place 'una mañana cualquiera, en un pueblo cualquiera'. (p. 123) There are plenty of instances of events happening seemingly outside of time and place throughout *El gallo de oro*. Despite the proliferation of specific locations, the life-defining events (and major plot catalysts) happen within the 'arena'—the golden cockerel is first given to Dionisio at the palenque in San Miguel del Milagro, he wins his fights and starts to make money within the various *palenques* on his travels, he loses his cockerel in the arena, he bonds with La Caponera while gambling, he wins the Santa Gertrudis *hacienda* and, finally, he loses everything at the card table. Each of the arenas are situated in their specific points (the *palenque* of San Marcos; the card-table in the Santa Gertrudis *hacienda*) yet these arenas also exist outside the confines of space and time—a tabula rasa, an eternal battleground. This enables Rulfo to create a world that is easily identifiable as specifically Mexican while, at the same time, engaging in the universal themes of fortune and chance.

El gallo de oro begins with a single-worded paragraph: 'Amanecía'. The sun comes up as the story begins. The opening is symbolic—the dawning of a new day represents the beginning of a narrative. Yet, the reader is unaware of

when the events that are to unfold take place. Milagros Ezquerro, in her essay 'El gallo de oro o El texto enterrado' notes the way in which attention is drawn to the dawning of a new day. She emphasises, however, how all other references to time and temporality remain vague throughout the novel.

> Minuciosamente se han descartado todos los elementos que podrían dar una precisión sobre la época en la que se desarrolla la historia: ninguna alusión histórica, ninguna indicación "técnica". Ni siquiera sabemos cómo se desplazan los personajes en sus viajes incesantes. Lo mismo podría situarse la historia a finales del siglo XIX, como en 1960. Evidentemente esta desubicación cronológica responde al carácter folklorista del mundo evocado: es un mundo tradicional, conservador, donde la evolución y el progreso no tienen lugar. Incluso los signos de la riqueza son atemporales: las casas, las haciendas, las alhajas y el dinero. (Ezquerro 791)

Whilst clearly situating the action within Mexico, the events that take place do so within an atemporal Mexican setting. No references to the vehicles of modernity—the automobile or the train—appear in the text; nor is there any reference to contemporaneous politics. Daniele de Luigi has commented upon how Rulfo's 'esteem for Henri Cartier-Bresson [...] or for his friend Nacho López, was not sufficient to make him emulate a style of photography based on an understanding of time contrary to his own'. (Rulfo 2011: 16) Examining the overlapping themes and subject matter of the photography of both Rulfo and Walker Evans, de Luigi notes how 'the fatalistic view of history and the non-linear concept of time through which Rulfo sees all of this is reflected in Evan's words, when he claimed to have always been interested "in what any present time will look like as the past"'. (Rulfo 2011: 19) In the same way, temporal specificity is skewed throughout *El gallo de oro* and this lends the story its atemporal quality.

In 1955, Rulfo worked as an historical adviser for director Roberto Gavaldón on the set of *La Escondida*. In his essay "Gabriel Figueroa y Juan

Rulfo", Weatherford notes how the photoraphs that Rulfo takes on set (in contrary to the work of Figueroa) opt for the authentic over the mythic:

> Pero la presencia de estos indígenas auténticos en el set de *La Escondida*, y la cámara de Rulfo que los retrata, sirven para revelar y, tal vez, denunciar la manipulación de la experiencia campesina que filmaron Gavaldón y Figueroa. (Weatherford 2008: 486)

Atemporal Mexico, as depicted in the *El gallo de oro*, is a recurring phenomenon in Rulfo's prose and photography. For example, by juxtaposing contemporaneous *campesinos* alongside extras on the set of *La Escondida*, Rulfo manages to make a statement on the failure of the Revolution to improve rural living standards more than fifty years after the beginning of that conflict. As suggested by de Luigi, Rulfo's photography is less interested in the 'decisive moment' than in depicting a state of stasis or, slow decline (in the case of the photography of ruined buildings). This atemporal quality serves to represent a nation in which little changes. When Arturo Ripstein began to work on his film version, *El imperio de la fortuna*, only five years after the eventual publication of the text, he did so with the conviction that the novel, though written in the fifties, served as an allegory of the economic crisis of the eighties:

> *El imperio de la fortuna* recibió el reconocimiento a la mejor película por parte de la Academia Mexicana de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas en el año 1987. En un boletín de prensa por parte de Canal Once se señala: "En medio de la miseria de que se vivía México por aquellos años, Ripstein no dudó un instante en insertar su visión pesimista a un relato que representaba, precisamente, una alegoría de la crisis económica." (Carrillo Juárez 256)

While Rulfo's text, though written in the fifties, was published at the beginning of the 1980s, a turbulent time for the Mexican economy. Interestingly, though it evokes popular song and cinematic archetypes that may have been found comforting by Mexican society, the devastating denouements suffered by the

characters can provide little comfort. Instead, the use of popular songs and archetypes, instead of symbolising specific problems in the national and/or international economic markets, function as a reminder that, for the poor in Mexico, nothing changes. The fact that the novel was deemed relevant by filmmakers in the late fifties and early sixties and, then again, in the eighties points further to this notion of the atemporal, the notion that little has changed for the lower classes in Mexico, fifty years or seventy years since the Revolution.

3.5 *El gallo de oro*: Narrative Style

In choosing to name his second novel *El gallo de oro*, Rulfo evokes inevitable connections with the oral tradition—specifically, with Aesop's fable of the Golden Goose (generally referred to as *La gallina de los huevos de oro* in Spanish). While Dionisio's cockerel is usually referred to as the 'gallo dorado', the title of the novel clearly alludes to Aesop's tale of bankruptcy through greed, a theme explored throughout *El gallo de oro*. Dionisio's desire for wealth is understandable at the beginning of the narrative. Coming, as he does, from a humble background and unable to work in any office other than town-crier (because of his feeble, malformed arm) he can only dream of wealth. While it is true that La Caponera's love of alcohol is an integral factor in her downfall, the real catalyst for her demise is the fact that Dionisio forces her to stay indoors, by his side during the card games. Incarcerated, unable to sing as before, she turns to alcohol. Though he finally is granted great wealth (not through the cockerel but, rather, through his alliance with La Caponera), Dionisio destroys what he attains through avarice. Specifically, like the owners of the goose from Aesop's tale,

Dionisio destroys that which brought him wealth. The folkloric, oral tradition is not only referenced in the title of the novel but also in its unusual narrative style.

In his prologue to the 1981 Uruguayan edition *El gallo de oro: Novela*, Heber Raviolo comments upon the novel's seemingly classical style of narration:

> Estamos ante una obra clara, sencilla, "clásica" podríamos decir. Sin prisas ni pausas, con un ritmo literario que parece con sustanciarse con ese ritmo vital del bajío mexicano, de las ferias y las riñas del gallo, de los tahúres y las cantadoras, pero también de los pueblitos polvorientos calcinándose bajo el sol, donde de pronto asoma el toque solitario de una mujer enrebozada, la novela se va desprendiendo del dato folklórico, nunca exagerado, hasta culminar en las magníficas páginas finales, cuando todo ese mundo parece adquirir una nueva dimensión, fatal y trágica, y los elementos anecdóticos se transmutan en verdaderas "categorías" de hondo valor dramático. (Rulfo 1981: 9-10)

Nevertheless, the narrative structure of *El gallo de oro* is more complicated than Raviolo indicates. Throughout, *El gallo de oro* takes the form of a third person non-omniscient narration. However, from time to time, the narrator's voice is clearly identifiable as first person narration to produce an affect that González Boixo defines as 'un caso límite de confluencia entre un narrador en tercera y primera persona'. (Rulfo 2010: 33) The first example of this 'confluencia' occurs when the narrator describes how Pinzón was regularly hired to announce the festivities of the local fair:

> Año con año, para las fiestas de San Miguel, se alquilaba para anunciar los convites de la feria. Y allí lo teníamos, delante de los sonoros retumbos de la tambora y los chillidos de la chirimía [...] (p. 85)

The sudden switch from third to first-person narration is striking and brings the reader closer to the action as the narrator takes on the mantle of a potential eye witness and becomes a local storyteller. Furthermore, the narrator's lexicon

occasionally diverges from standardized Mexican Spanish, adapting a more colloquial tone:

> Y de allí pa'l real, pues no sólo aprendió muchas cosas del oficio, sino que se agenció de una buena partida de gallos y le aumentó el ánimo para seguir en la brecha. (p. 117)

González Boixo describes how the reader 'debe situarse como quien escucha un relato en boca de alguien que conoció la historia y a los personajes de la misma, de un testigo de aquellos sucesos, que se expresa en el único lenguaje que conoce, el de ese medio ambiental.' (Rulfo 2010: 34) Milagros Ezquerro also notes the unusual narrator's voice with regard to the opening lines of the novel:

> Si analizamos el sistema de la deixis en la primera página de la novela, vemos que éste supone una situación particular del narrador, como si se tratara de un narrador-personaje y no de un narrador impersonal. (Ezquerro 798)

However, while the narrator seems to witness the events first-hand, he is occasionally unsure of details and, thus, non-omniscient. An example of this occurs when the narrator recounts the particularly rambunctious fair that led to Pinzon's inheritance of the cockerel:

> Unos de esos años, quizá por la abundancia de las cosechas o a milagro no sé de quién, se presentaron las fiestas más bulliciosas y concurridas que había habido en muchas épocas en San Miguel del Milagro. (p. 86)

While the non-omniscient narrative technique is used on various occasions throughout the novel—'Quién sabe por qué pueblos andaría durante algún tiempo', (p. 97) 'Pronto dejó de ser aquel hombre humilde que conocimos en San Miguel del Milagro' (p. 115)—the technique is used sparingly. In this way, the personality of the narrator, only occasionally presented in the first person, is never fleshed out. The reader is not presented with a rounded portrayal of a resident of San Miguel del Milagro through whom the rise and fall of Pinzón is related.

Instead, the reader is provided with an occasional glimpse of an unspecified narrator, a seemingly eye-witness storyteller, thus relating the narrative to the oral tradition.

The novel is divided into seventeen unnumbered fragments and while the narration is almost entirely linear, there are (as noted by Reina Roffé in her *Autobiografia armada*) significant ellipses as each sequence constitutes a chronological rupture from the previous one as a time lapse, sometimes of a few years, separates each section. In Fragment 10, La Caponera and Dionisio bump into each other again and, as she has distanced herself from Lorenzo Benavides, they decide to stay together. The next section begins after a lacuna of ten years:

> Un día, pasado el tiempo, Dionisio Pinzón decidió visitar a su viejo amigo Lorenzo Benavides, a quien hacía mucho no veía, pues se había desterrado del campo de las ferias.
> Llegaron una tarde a Santa Gertrudis y ya para entonces los acompañaba su hija, una niña de diez años. (p. 123)

Other notable examples exist, Fragment 4 begins with 'Pasaron los días' (p. 90); Fragment 9 with 'Dos meses después, le mataron su gallo dorado en Tlaquepaque' (p. 102) and Fragment 14 with 'El tiempo dejó pasar sus años'. (p. 126) Yet, despite this seemingly simple leap-frogging, linear advance to an endpoint, the temporal structure of *El gallo de oro* is more complex than is immediately apparent. Towards the end of the novel this more traditional advance is disrupted as Dionisio, gambling his possessions away, is metaphorically transported back in time. Firstly, he begins to hear the voice of La Caponera singing and even sees her on stage as he also sees his golden cockerel writhing in its death throes on the floor. The action switches back to the card game but only briefly as Dioniso then sees his mother beside him, squatting down to help him dig the hole in which he

buried the cockerel, blowing on its beak to keep it alive. Much in the same way as Pedro's notions of time and place are shattered in *El despojo*, Dionisio approaches his demise through a temporal whirlwind in which the present and the past mix together freely.

El gallo de oro ends promptly after Dionisio puts a bullet in his head. However, the finale, echoes the beginning:

> Había amanecido. La luz que entraba por las enormes ventanas dio de lleno en el parche verde de la mesa, iluminando los rostros agotados por el desvelo de los jugadores. (p. 142)

The novel closes with the young Bernarda Pinzón heading off on her own to seek her fortune as a singer at the fairs just like her mother and her mother's mother before her. As she sings, the shouts of the announcer '¡Cierren las puertas!' (p. 144) bring the novel to a close. The linear structure, having given way to the whirlwind of Dionisio's confused mind, turns in on itself and the narration becomes cyclical:

> La última secuencia de la novela nos muestra a Bernarda Pinzón iniciando su carrera de cantante en un tablado de una plaza de gallos. Como si de un tiempo cíclico se tratase, todo vuelve a iniciarse, en el mismo contexto del inicio de la novela. (Rulfo 2010: 37)

The narrative structure finally resembles the wheel of fortune that, oblivious to the ups and downs of those it touches, continues to turn regardless. In this way, not only does Rulfo's attitude to temporality serve to create an atmosphere of stasis, it also implicitly continues his depiction of the futility of the poverty stricken rural Mexican that he began in the first lines of *El Llano en llamas*. While the characters of Rulfo's short stories are unable to attain wealth as a result of the tyranny of nature and/or oppressive landowners, Dionisio is granted wealth, fortune, a child and the woman he desires. Even so, his demise seems

inevitable as his ascent is based around games of chance and a lucky charm of flesh and blood and so, when the luck runs out, the narrative wheel turns and his daughter, now penniless and orphaned, must embark upon her own quest for fortune.

3.6 *Piedra Imán* and Rock on the Plain: *El gallo de oro* and *Pedro Páramo*

Despite the differences in geographical location, tone and narrative style as explored in the previous section, *El gallo de oro* reconstructs and re-visits dominant themes of *Pedro Páramo*, particularly that of female incarceration by a possessive, wealthy *hacendado*. This is explored throughout this section with reference to both *Pedro Páramo* and the much lesser-known story 'Cleotilde'.[45] Rulfo, despite the glaring differences between *El gallo de oro* and his other work up to that point, re-works, to a certain extent, his more famous novel through the medium of melodrama as inspired by Mexican cinematic conventions.

Throughout the novel, Bernarda is referred to using names that denote supernatural (and, perhaps, diabolical) powers. For example, when Lorenzo loses his Santa Gertrudis property to Dionisio Pinzón, he strikes Bernarda across the face and accuses her of being a *bruja* (p.126). Throughout the novel, Dionisio, describes Bernarda as his *piedra imán*. Carrillo Juárez notes an important difference in the manner in which Bernarda's two lovers view her magical attributes:

> Aquí habría que decir que mientras para Lorenzo Benavides, antiguo amante de *Caponera* y primer dueño de la hacienda de Santa Gertrudis, ella es una bruja, para Pinzón no es más que una *piedra imán*, es decir, uno la ve como un ser activo y el otro, como un objeto. (Carrillo Juárez 244)

[45] 'Cleotilde' was published postumously in *Los cuadernos de Juan Rulfo* (1994).

When Dionisio begins to realise that it is Bernarda that brings him his fortune he ceases to view her as the alluring, independent woman from the carnival circuit. He sees her as a lifeless talisman, a piece of stone, *his* personal property. By the end of the novel, both he and Bernarda have been reduced to mere symbolic and inanimate lumps of stone. The of incarceration of a woman by a wealthy *hacendado* (which, after all, is what Dionisio becomes) and the physical and emotional sterility that that brings, is a major theme that is present in both of Rulfo's novels.

Fragment 1 of *El gallo de oro* provides the reader with a rare description of Dionisio Pinzón:

> Y aunque la apariencia de Dionisio Pinzón fuera la de un hombre fuerte, en realidad estaba impedido, pues tenía un brazo engarruñado quién sabe a causas de qué; lo cierto es que aquello lo imposibilitaba para desempeñar algunas tareas, ya fuera en el trabajo de obras o en el cultivo de la tierra, únicas actividades que había en el pueblo. (p. 84)

Rodrigo Antonio Cortez González defines Dionisio's deformity as an indicator of his unproductivity:

> La condición discapacitada de Dionisio Pinzón lo convierte en un ser improductivo. Por lo tanto, el juicio generalizado—independientemente de su grado de certeza—es que este hombre no sirve para nada, al no cumplir con la funcionalidad a la que por su edad y sexo está destinado. (Cortez González 134)

More importantly, this description, focusing on his physical ailments helps to signal out Dionisio as a protagonist by emphasising his physical difference from the rest of the townsfolk in San Miguel del Milagro. The reader receives almost no other information about Dionisio's appearance until the closing stages of the novel. Instead, the bulk of the physical descriptions throughout the text focus on Bernarda Cutiño—La Caponera. In this way, the novel strongly adheres to Laura

Mulvey's thesis on the dominance of the male gaze in twentieth century cinema as explained by Jackie Stacey with reference to Mulvey's influential 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema':

> The spectator identifies with the powerful look of the male character on the screen, and his position in relation to it is produced by the camera(man)'s/director's look. In popular cinema point-of-view shots and shot/reverse-shot editing techniques are used to achieve the effect of seeing the female characters as objects of desire through the eyes of the male characters. The conventions of Hollywood narrative cinema construct a particular spectator position, then, whilst carefully covering up the ways in which this is achieved. (Stacey 21)

As Rulfo clearly intended the novel to be later adapted for the screen it is unsurprising that his text would in some way follow the trend in Mexican twentieth century filmmaking's continual focus on its female characters. For Monsiváis, meldorama can be defined as 'un correctivo de la mentalidad familiar' or as 'el molde sobre que se imprime la conciencia de América latina'. (Monsiváis 2005) The celebrated essayist sees melodrama as a sort of functional form of entertainment, entertainment that helps lower class viewers to know their place. While women play a vital role in melodramatic cinema, the vast majority of film directors and screenwriters (both in Rulfo's time and in the twenty-first century) are male. In this way La Caponera's character is constructed by men and, in general terms (and, especially, when transferred to the screen) consumed by both men and women. This raises interesting questions about the treatment of La Caponera at the hands of men. Throughout the text, the reader is afforded glimpses of La Caponera at her most striking—usually through the eyes of the male protagonist Dionisio. In fact, as is made clear in this chapter, La Caponera is at her most vibrant and energetic when viewed through the eyes of the male characters. It is when Dionisio begins to avert his eyes from her to the card table

that she virtually ceases to exist, fading away to something less than human—a symbol.

The reader first encounters La Caponera as early as Fragment 2 when she sings at the fair in Dionisio's home town, San Miguel del Milagro. The introduction of La Caponera is accompanied by an explanation of the meaning of her nickname:

> Al frente de ellas venía una mujer bonita, bragada, con un rebozo ametalado sobre el pecho y a quien llamaban La Caponera, quizá por el arrastre que tenía con los hombres. La verdad es que, rodeadas por un mariachi, hicieron con su presencia y sus canciones que creciera más el entusiasmo de la plaza de gallos. (p. 87)

The non-omniscient narrator speculates that La Caponera is so-called because of 'el arrastre que tenía con los hombres'. López Mena defines 'caponera' as 'la yegua guía' (López Mena 131)—the mare that guides horses or mules. This nickname grants Bernarda Cutiño an element of dominance over the males that surround her and that proves to be true to a certain extent. Nevertheless, Ezquerro sees something ominous in her appellation:

> Más interesante todavía es su apodo: la frase explicativa ya citada parece darle el sentido mexicano de "yegua que sirve para guiar las bestias caballares", que corresponde a la atracción que ejerce en los hombres. Sin embargo es difícil no tener en cuenta las connotaciones derivadas de "capón": Bernarda era mujer "de mucho empuje y de tamaños; que así como cantaba era buena para alborotar, aunque no se dejaba manosear de nadie; pues si la buscaban era bronca y mal portada". Una caponera es también "la jaula en que se pone a los capones para cebarlos". (Ezquerro 795)

Both Ezquerro and Carrillo Juárez note the clear reference to castration and incarceration in Bernarda's nickname and these references are justified by both Bernarda's dominance over her male companions and her later demise and incarceration:

> La Caponera deja de ser la que castra la voluntad de los hombres para convertirse en aquella a quien le suprimen su libertad. (Carrillo Juárez 224)

A capon (or, in Spanish, *capón*) is a castrated cockerel and its use in the context of a novel that deals with cock-fighting cannot be ignored. Not only is Bernarda the 'guiding mare' that leads the way for mules and horses (and, in the context of the novel, men such as Lorenzo and Dionisio), she is also the 'Castrator'. However, the castrating facet of her nickname is not explicitly commented upon by the narrator of by any of novel's characters. The male characters accept her as an object of attraction that they are happy to follow. It is only later, when they realise, consciously or subconsciously, that, by following Bernarda, a woman, from town to town they have been metaphorically castrated. It is at this point that they, both Lorenzo and Dionisio, attempt to tie her down, exert their dominance and keep her in one place.

The next description of La Caponera occurs in Fragment 8 in which she is simply referred to as 'aquella muchacha bonita que cantaba en el palenque' (p. 100). La Caponera, though not described with a Dickension attention to detail, is certainly described with more detail than most Rulfian characters. Fragment 8 also includes one of the most (if not the most) visually descriptive passages of a Rulfian character and is included here in its entirety:

> Desde su sitio, mientras daba cuenta de su cena, Dionisio Pinzón los observaba. Sobre todo a la mujer, ¡guapa mujer!, que bebía un mezcal tras otro y reía y volvía a reír con grandes risotadas ante lo que le platicaba Lorenzo Benavides. En tanto acá, el Pinzón examinaba el brillo alegre de sus ojos, enmarcados en aquella cara extraordinariamente hermosa. Y por la forma de sus brazos y los senos, sobre los que estaba terciado un rebozo de palomo, suponía que debía de tener un cuerpo también hermoso. Vestía una blusa escotada y una falda negra estampada con grandes tulipanes rojos. (pp. 101-102)

A heavy drinker throughout the novel, La Caponera's beauty is described in simplistic terms with references to her shining eyes, low-cut blouse and the shape of her arms and breasts. So, even though the representation of La Caponera is, by Rulfian standards, long and detailed, the details constitute a rather generalised portrayal of visually pleasing feminine features. Throughout *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, Rulfo's descriptions, particularly those of a physical nature, are minimal to say the least. Nevertheless, in this instance he seems at pains to present a clear physical description that adheres to cinematic conventions of the time. The depiction of Bernarda is clichéd and evocative, as it is, of the depiction of femininity regularly encapsulated by actresses such as María Félix on screen, an adherence to conventions of Mexican cinema that almost reaches the levels of parody. The text is laden with melodramatic conventions only for these to be disrupted in the latter stages of the novel to produce results that an audience used to cinematic clichés of the time would find startling.

In Fragment 10, after Dionisio's cockerel has died and he has gambled away the last few coins that remain, he comes face to face with La Caponera:

> No quiso irse enseguida para no aparentar que huía. Y cuando al fin resolvió retirarse se encontró frente a frente la figura reluciente de La Caponera, con su amplio vestido floreado de amapolas y el rebozo terciado como carrillera sobre el pecho. (p. 105)

Her dress is decorated with prints of poppies and her shawl is crisscrossed upon her chest like the ubiquitous cartridge belt of Revolutionary Mexican cinema. Thus, this image, similar to that of a *soldadera* again identifies her as a wandering, powerful (and, therefore, both dangerous and, ultimately, intolerable to a patriarchal society) woman. As Dionisio stares at the striking figure before him, the reader is presented with the dual description of feminine allure and

danger. This binary nature of attraction and power is maintained throughout the text until the latter stages that focus on the incarceration at Santa Gertrudis:

> Un poco atrás de él estaba La Caponera, como si tampoco se hubiera movido de su sitio. Sentada en el mismo sillón, escondida apenas en la penumbra de la sala, parecía un símbolo más que un ser vivo. (p. 126)

Again, Rulfo incorporates, in a highly self-conscious and stylised manner, elements of clearly recognisable archetypal qualities in his depiction of Bernarda. In the twilight of the living room (where the card games take place around the clock) La Caponera eventually becomes reduced to a lifeless symbol—a stone amulet. Her job is simply to be there, beside the card table, gracing her man with the good fortune that she brings:

> Y su obligación era estar allí siempre. Aunque ahora llevara en el cuello un collar de perlas a cambio de las cuentas de colores, que destacaba sobre el fondo negro del vestido y sus manos estuvieran erizadas de brillantes, no estaba conforme. Nunca los estuvo. (pp. 126-127)

She is first introduced when Dionisio thinks he recognises her on stage and enquires after her. References to incarceration abound throughout *El gallo de oro* and the dangers associated with attempting to tie down Bernarda are alluded to from the beginning:

> —¿Quién es esa que canta? Me parece haberla visto en alguna parte.
> —Se llama La Caponera. Y su oficio es recorrer el mundo, así que no es difícil haberla visto en cualquier parte... ¡Vámonos! (p. 96)

In this way, Dionisio is (as is the reader) warned from the start that La Caponera ('The Castrator') is born to roam the earth. *La llorona* and *La soldadera*, archetypal Mexican representations of the wandering woman, cannot be tied down, and therein lies their danger. In the same way, Bernarda is a wandering woman, a symbol of freedom and self-determination. This will become intolerable to the male characters and she is viewed as the *yegua* that must be tamed. In

effect, this moment represents the beginning of the end for Bernarda. This is the moment that Dionisio becomes smitten with her and it is this attraction that will put in motion the events that lead to her eventual incarceration in Santa Gertrudis. It is significant, then, that the first time that Dionisio asks about La Caponera the *padrino* provides him with a description of her independent nature which can be taken as her defining characteristic.

The story descends from one of continual festivity to the unbearable stasis of life in Santa Gertrudis. Despite La Caponera's earlier rebellion against the will of her husband (when she leaves the *hacienda* to sing once again at the carnivals), she, once her voice begins to fail her, is condemned to live indoors by her husband's side. La Caponera seems punished for her desire for independence. Crucially, Dionisio is also made to suffer for his attempts to curtail her freedom. Throughout *El gallo de oro*, the love between a man and a woman is represented through images of incarceration. Milagros Ezquerro draws parallels between three major Rulfian female characters—La Caponera, Susana San Juan and Matilde Arcángel. Ezquerros states that La Caponera 'forma con Matilde Arcángel y Susana San Juan un tríptico único en la narrative hispanoamericana donde no abundan los personajes femeninos de gran densidad.' (Ezquerro 1992: 795) While Ezquerro's *tríptico* is perceptive and intriguing, perhaps, another triptych fits the theme of male possession of desirable females and the infelicities of such unions. For this new triptych, Rulfo's lesser known character Cleotilde can be substituted for Matilde Arcángel. The process of a male character attempting to obtain, possess and retain a desirable female is a central theme of much of Rulfo's work—the dangers and futility associated with attempting to 'possess', 'have' or

'own' a woman. Susana San Juan, denied her freedom by her father and then by Pedro Páramo, loses her mind in a fit of erotic hysteria and dies without confession, the ultimate condemnation. Cleotilde, a trophy wife to an elderly Don, seeks the attentions of men her own age and rebels against her husband who demands she stay with him at home. The first person narrator, Cleotilde's husband, implores her to grant him the attention to which he feels he is entitled to as her husband:

> -Mira. Cleotilde, yo ya estoy viejo. Acabo de cumplir cincuenta y nueve años y como puedes imaginar poco necesito de ti, de lo que es tuyo: pero me gustaría que ese poquito me lo dieras siquiera allá cada y cuando, con toda tu voluntad. A mí no sabes lo mucho que me gusta la forma como manejas esa voluntad que tienes para hacer las cosas. Verdaderamente no te cabe en la cabeza lo que a mí me gusta. Sin embargo, tú no quieres hacerme ni ese favor. Te vas con los otros. (Rulfo 1994: 42)

Enraged by his wife's refusal to accept life indoors with a virtually inanimate husband who prefers the confines of his house, the narrator bludgeons Cleotilde to death with a door-stop. Not only does the narrator murder Cleotilde, he also becomes infuriated that she has died: 'Ella se murió. Después sí me entró rencor en contra de ella por eso, por haberse muerto'. (Rulfo 1994: 39) In the same way, Dionisio becomes furious with La Caponera for having died and shakes her as she lays lifeless on the floor:

> Entonces se notó el extravío de aquel hombre, que seguía sacudiendo a su mujer y reclamándole:
> ¿Por qué no me avisaste que estabas muerta, Bernarda? (p. 143)

This cruel treatment of La Caponera, even after she has died, differs greatly from Dionisio's initial attraction to the singer. The events that unfold in Fragment 10 are crucial to the story as it is in this section that Dionisio and La Caponera meet again and eventually marry. When Dionisio and La Caponera reacquaint

themselves with each other at Cuquío, Dionisio asks Bernarda what her relationship is with Lorenzo Benavides (whom she has left)—'Y a propósito, Bernarda, ¿qué eres tú de Lorenzo Benavides? (p. 119)—To this question she quips in a characteristically brash manner—'No he de ser su mamá, ¿verdad?' (p. 119) Following this exchange and some tears from Bernarda, Dionisio enquires if Bernarda ever really loved Lorenzo. This leads to the key exchange between the pair in which Bernarda explicitly defines herself as one who is born to roam:

- Él era el que me quería. Pero trataba de amarrarme. De encerrarme en su casa. Nadie puede hacerme eso a mí […] Simplemente no puedo. ¿Para qué? ¿Para pudrirme en vida?
- Tal vez te hubiera convenido. Su casa es enorme.
- Sí, pero tiene paredes. (p. 119)

La Caponera's stated aversion to walls and the sedentary, cloistered existence typifies her independent nature. Yet, Dionisio, though clearly smitten with Bernarda, does not and will not hearken to the warnings and will make the same error that Lorenzo Benavides has committed. After some heavy drinking Dionisio asks Bernarda to accompany him to the cockfights to bring him good luck:

> ¿A qué horas terminas con esto?—preguntó Dionisio Pinzón.
> A la media noche.
> No sabes cuánto me gustaría que me acompañaras a los gallos. Tú eres mi piedra imán para la buena suerte.
> Eso me lo han dicho muchos. Entre otros Lorenzo Benavides. Algo he de tener, porque el que está conmigo nunca pierde. (p. 121)

Soon after this exchange, Dionisio and La Caponera decide to get married. This arrangement, from her point of view at least, is chiefly of a practical nature:

> Ella no quería el matrimonio; pero algo en el fondo le decía que aquel hombre no era como los demás, y movida por la conveniencia de asociarse con alguien, sobre todo con un fulano como Dionisio Pinzón, lleno de codicia y del que estaba segura seguiría rodando como ella mientras le aletearan las alas al último de sus gallos, estuvo de acuerdo en casarse, pues así al menos tendría en quien apoyar su solitaria vida.

> Pueblos, ciudades, rancherías, todo lo recorrieron. Ella por su propio gusto. Él, impulsado por la ambición; por un afán ilimitado de acumular riqueza. (p. 123)

From La Caponera's viewpoint, the marriage will enable her to continue her life of travel and festivity whilst also combating her solitude with the companionship of a husband. Though she is aware of Dionisio's growing avarice she sees this as something that will not be sated and, therefore, something that will provide an impulse to continually travel. Unfortunately for her, she is correct that Dionisio's greed will know no bounds. When Dionisio wins Lorenzo's *hacienda* he refuses to leave and fills his time with endless card games, all of which he wins, providing Bernarda is by his side. La Caponera's Achilles' heel proves to be the fact that she brings fortune to her male companions. Her powerful and alluring singing voice grants her the independence to travel the carnival trails, yet her supernatural ability to bring good fortune to her male companions (and, crucially, not to herself) is her undoing and the devastating culmination of this ability is summed up by Mónica Mansour:

> La mal llamada Caponera de *El gallo de oro* se vuelve loca porque pierde lo único que le importaba en la vida: su libertad. La libertad suele ser recibida como un insulto o una agresión por parte de quien no la tiene, y sobre todo cuando la persona que goza de ella es una mujer. La tragedia de La Caponera es haber tenido la mala suerte de darle buena suerte a Pinzón, el ambicioso y compulsivo jugador; la locura de Pinzón por el dinero le hace olvidar todas sus promesas y sus principios y encerrar a su mujer. La hija de tal amante de la libertad como lo fue la Caponera inevitablemente es rica y guapa y de oficio prostituta. (Mansour 668)

At one point, related in Fragment 14, Bernarda leaves the Santa Gertrudis *hacienda* to return to her life of travel and song. Secundino Colmenero informs Dionisio that two dozen of his best cockerels have been killed. Dionisio, blaming

his run of bad form on the disappearance of La Caponera, tracks her down in the town of Árbol Grande and the following exchange takes place:

> - Ya sabes que nací para andar de andariega. Y sólo me apaciguaré el día que me echen tierra encima.
> - Creí que ahora que tenías una hija pensabas darle otra crianza.
> - Al contrario, quisiera que agarrara mi destino, para que no tenga que rendirle a nadie…¡Qué poco me conoces, Dionisio Pinzón! Y ya te digo, mientras me sobren fuerzas para moverme no me resignaré a que me encierren. (p. 129)

Dionisio (who, at no point in the novel shows much concern for the wellbeing of his daughter) tries to persuade Bernarda to return in order to rear their child in a stable environment. La Caponera, however, wishes only for her daughter to follow in her footsteps as she followed in her mother's. This episode results in a victory for Bernarda as Dionisio agrees to follow her again from carnival to carnival until, in Fragment 15 'llegó el día funesto para ella' (p. 130) when her voice fails her and her musicians abandon her. She is then forced to return to Santa Gertrudis. It is there, holed up in the *hacienda*, that she takes to drinking in a more reckless way than before and her now unavoidable decline begins in earnest:

> La Caponera se había tornado una mujer sumisa y consumida. Ya sin su antigua fuerza, no sólo se resignó a permanecer como encarcelada en aquella casa sino que, convertida realmente en piedra imán de la suerte, Dionisio Pinzón determinó que estuviera siempre en la sala de los jugadores, cerca de él o al menos donde adivinara su presencia. (pp. 131-132)

Symbolically, the bright floral dresses and confident air of the travelling performer soon give way to shadows, mourning garb and desperation:

> Desde entonces, hasta la noche de su muerte, esa fue la vida de Bernarda Cutiño. Parecía una sombra permanente sentada en el sillón de alto respaldo, ya que, como vestía siempre de negro y se ocultaba de la luz que iluminaba sólo el círculo de los jugadores, era difícil ver su cara o medir sus actos; en cambio ella podía observarlos bien a todos desde su oscuridad. (pp. 132-133)

La Caponera's transformation from vibrant and confident singer to 'sombra permanente' heralds her coming death. By the time of her expiration she is nothing more than Dionisio's amulet, his 'piedra imán' and serves no other purpose than to bring him luck. Whatever life remained in her has been sucked from her body by the stifling atmosphere of the *hacienda*. Her downfall is similar to that of Susana San Juan. Susana, confined to La Media Luna, attempts to, and to a certain extent is able to, transcend her captivity through her nostalgic ramblings:

> Volví yo. Volvería siempre. El mar moja mis tobillos y se va; moja mis rodillas, mis muslos; rodea mi cintura con su brazo suave, da vuelta sobre mis senos; se abraza de mi cuello; aprieta mis hombres. Entonces me hundo en él, entera. Me entrego a él en su fuerte batir, en su suave poseer, sin dejar pedazo. (Rulfo 2011: 238)

While Susana, through her deteriorating mind, is able to return to a paradisiacal world of yesteryear, Bernarda cannot. Her voice deteriorates as the combined result of age, hard-living and alcohol abuse and she, locked in Dionisio's jail, cannot even transcend her barriers through singing. The two things for which she has lived—freedom and song—have forsaken her and, therefore, her days are numbered.

Over the course of *El gallo de oro*, La Caponera changes from a woman of vibrant exuberance to a shell of her former self—a stone amulet, an unmoving talisman. The symbolic image of stone is also applied to the change that has taken place in Dionisio. Pinzón mutates from lowly town crier and kind-hearted, jilted lover to nervous cock-fighter and, finally, to cold-hearted money-craving brute:

> Pronto dejó de ser aquel hombre humilde que conocimos en San Miguel del Milagro y que al principio, teniendo como fortuna un único gallo, se mostraba inquieto y nervioso, asustado de perder y que siempre jugaba encomendándose a Dios. Pero poco a poco su sangre se fue alterando ante

> la pelea violenta de los gallos, como si el espeso y enrojecido líquido de aquellos animales agonizantes lo volviera de piedra, convirtiéndolo en un hombre fríamente calculador, seguro y confiado en el destino de su suerte. (p. 115)

Like La Caponera, Dionisio has been reduced to nothing more than stone. By the end of the novel all semblance of humanity seems to have deserted him as, throughout the interminable card games, he is devoid of emotion, feeling neither pain nor pleasure:

> Su rostro, tenso por el esfuerzo para conservar la serenidad, no reflejaba ni temor ni júbilo. Parecía de piedra. (p. 138)

Again the similarities with Rulfo's first novel are obvious as this description of Dionisio as a rock inevitably leads to comparisons with Rulfo's most famous character, Pedro Páramo ('rock on the plain'). Both Dionisio Pinzón and Pedro Páramo, during the course of their respective novels, amass large amounts of wealth. Pedro Páramo is neglectful of his son Miguel and turns a blind eye to his marauding. However, when challenged on the matter, he reacts furiously and sees any criticism of his seed as an affront to himself. Knowing that nobody will dare to challenge him for the wrongdoings of his son, he orders any blame that Miguel warrants to be transferred to him:

> 'Hazte a la idea de que yo fui, Fulgor' […] 'La culpa de todo lo que él haga échamela a mí'. (Rulfo 2011: 252)

In the same way, Dionisio pays no attention to the scandalous nightly escapades of his daughter Bernarda Pinzón. Yet, when confronted by the townsfolk at Santa Gertrudis, Dionisio's response is emphatic:

> —¡Mi hija hará lo que le venga en gana! ¿Me oyes, Bernarda? Y mientras yo viva le cumpliré todos sus caprichos, sean contra los intereses de quienes sean. (p. 136)

Both Pedro and Dionisio display contempt for their hometown and yearn for a woman. Pedro Páramo finally manages to bring Susana San Juan to live with him at La Media Luna yet this arrangement brings neither of them any peace. Susana sinks deep into a sweaty, babbling hysteria of erotic nostalgia and Páramo knows that, despite his incarceration of her in his *hacienda*, he can never fully possess her. Dionisio, originally enraptured by La Caponera and willing to do anything for her, forgets his promises as his wealth increases. Dionisio's attempt to possess and retain a woman results in disaster. Ayala Blanco compares the deterioration of their matrimony and their cloistering in Santa Gertrudis, Rulfo's version of Charles Foster Kane's Xanadu, to scenes from Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*:

> Domesticada, uncida por el macho y por su propio envejecimiento a un palacio doblemente inhabitable, porque tiene paredes y paradójicamente es tan grande como el Xanadu de *El ciudadano Kane*, la mujer acostumbrada a la libertad no puede sino languidecer, marchitarse, volcarse en el alcoholismo para acelerar su deterioro. Como en la famosa escena del empantanamiento conyugal durante el desayuno, en la película citada de Orson Welles, Rulfo expresa la sensación de la decadencia emocional por corte directo, planeando una elipsis de varios años, pero manteniendo a sus figuras principales, ya envejecidas, en la misma disposición e idénticas posturas que guardaban en la toma anterior, lustros atrás. (Rulfo 1980: 16)

Douglas J. Weatherford has noticed similarities between Orson Welles's masterpiece *Citizen Kane* and *Pedro Páramo* and has made a most convincing case noting, as he does, how Rulfo, in an early draft of *Pedro Páramo* names Susana San Juan as Susana Foster—a seemng reference to Charles Foster Kane and his wife, Susan Alexander. Through Weatherford's investigation it becomes clear that the unattainable memory of childhood purity (Kane's famous 'Rosebud') is symbolised by Susana San Juan. Weatherford notes how both Susan and Susana 'funcionan como símbolos' and how:

> [...] Rulfo concibe a su protagonista femenina como un símbolo del repudio al lugar común, y describe a Susana, a través de Páramo, como "Una mujer que no era de este mundo". (Weatherford 2006: 521)

With her disdain for the traditional, sedentary life of women in Mexico and her magical ability to attract fortune by her mere presence, the same could also be said for Dionisio's wife. While no mention is made of Dionisio Pinzón's childhood in *El gallo de oro*, the narrative arc bears comparisons with both *Pedro Páramo* and *Citizen Kane*—Dionisio's rise culminates with him leading a reclusive life in his own personal Xanadu—the *hacienda* at Santa Gertrudis. Unable, through his own avarice-induced blindness, to satisfy his wife, she resorts to alcohol. As death stalks Dionisio, he begins to realise that the end is near:

> De pronto sintió que perdía. Vio cómo se le iba desmoronando el monte. (p. 139)

The choice of verb is arresting to any reader familiar with Rulfo's first novel. Pedro Páramo's final act is to crumble ('desmoronar') like a pile of rocks and Dionisio's demise is preceded by this image of a crumbling heap of money. Finally, the narrator describes Dionisio's death in the following manner:

> Después sonó un disparo seco, como si hubieran golpeado con una vara una vaqueta de cuero. (p.143)

This phrase is more than reminiscent of the words that describe Pedro Páramo's moment of death:

> Dio un golpe seco contra la tierra y se fue desmoronando como si fuera un montón de piedras. (Rulfo 2011: 311)

The complementary phrases 'golpe/disparo seco' as well as 'como si hubieran/fuera' as well as the similarity in cadence inextricably links the two phrases as they each melt into the other.

The circumstances differ, but both novels at the core revolve around a power hungry man who attempts to attain happiness through amassed wealth and influence and insistence upon denying freedom to the woman he desires. In this way, Rulfo again enters new territory while simultaneously exploring continuing preoccupations. The carnival world of cockfighting, singing and card games is absent in Rulfo's other work. As discussed in this chapter, the inclusion of song lyrics and the links with the oral tradition again add a new perspective to his writings. Nevertheless, the abject poverty of Dionisio's early rural existence and the similarities with *Pedro Páramo* and 'Cleotilde' allow the Rulfian investigator to identify the ultimately fruitless domination of women by infatuated and cruel *hacendados* as a major theme in Rulfo. While, *Pedro Páramo*'s narrative is threaded together by the disparate voices of Comala's graveyard, a much simpler structure is employed in *El gallo de oro*. This is because Rulfo's second novel, though sharing unavoidable thematic similarities with his first, is rooted in the traditions of melodramatic conventions and this is explored in more detail in the following section.

3.7 La Caponera – Rulfo's María Félix?

The recognition of the presence of María Félix in *El gallo de oro* is central to this analysis of the text and its relationship to both melodramatic cinema in Mexico and Rulfo's other works of narrative fiction. Yet it has never been explored fully by Rulfian investigators. This section examines the presence of Félix within Rulfo's characterisation of La Caponera and links to Mexican national melodramatic cinema and its use of female characters to teach politically acceptable social messages.

Revolving, as it does, around the escapades of a town crier and his human lucky charm, parts of *El gallo de oro* are far removed from realism. The strange coincidences of Dionisio's mother dying at the moment the cockerel is revived and the later antithetical scene of Dionisio's loss of fortune as La Caponera dies, bookend the novel with notable events that lack verisimilitude. La Caponera brings fortune in gambling to whoever is her chosen male companion. She is, in effect, a walking good-luck charm. She dies silently while Dioniso gambles away his fortune, believing her to be alive in the room and the verisimilitude of the scene is stretched to incredulous proportions. The melodramatic streak that permeates *El gallo de oro* would trouble Borgeson who struggled with the concept that Rulfo would sully his hands with popular melodrama. In his astonished review of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, Borgeson was unimpressed with Rulfo's 'interés francamente costumbrista en el color local, evidente en las descripciones de las peleas de gallos' (Borgeson 748) and was disappointed with the 'telenovelismo exagerado' of the description of La Caponera's death. Nevertheless, this criticism of *El gallo de oro* is rooted in arguments about notions of high and low art. That Borgeson would see *El gallo de oro* as somehow beneath Rulfo, merely exposes his own view on melodrama and what he refers to above as 'telenovelismo'.

With reference to the renowned melodramatic films of Golden Age Mexican Cinema and, particularly, the films of María Félix, Susan Dever states that:

> While commercial movie melodramas may be enlisted to model the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in redefined national domains, both mainstream and more independently conceived melodramas can provide ways for newly enfranchised citizens to reflect—both cognitively and

> affectively—on the significance of their participation in nation-states whose sacred legitimacy revolution has called into question. Because of its operation in both aesthetic and political realms, melodrama's tactical maneuvers are necessarily overt. Again, its texts speak in context, in community conversations, and with utmost clarity. The genre's accessibility facilitates the decoding and encoding of its lessons; its intelligibility invites de deconstruction of its practices. (Dever 9)

Rulfo's text is certainly accessible to viewers/readers used to the music, operatic plot-lines and heightened emotions of the traditional melodrama. However, the 'lessons' of other melodramas, mentioned by Dever, are absent or different in Rulfo's text. Much of the melodramatic cinema produced during the forties and fifties was, unsurprisingly given the state involvement, devoted to the difficult (and, for Rulfo, impossible) task of portraying one nation made from so many diverse strands. Dever, in her *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas*, presents an analysis of Emilio Fernández's María Félix vehicle *Río Escondido* (1947). Her focus is on the film's role in consolidating what she refers to as 'Mexico's national project':

> "Adopting" three village children whose mother has been felled by smallpox, she restores Benito Juárez and a map of the Republic to their rightful places in the reconsecrated schoolhouse; she reempowers a weakened Church to support the Indians; she conquers evil incarnate in the body of a would-be rapist while she herself remains pure; and ultimately she dies of a heart condition, but not before hearing the President of Mexico's grateful benediction. In the final footage the celestial chorus renews audience's spirits as the little teacher's hagiography is etched across her headstone. (Dever 60)

Throughout Fernández's film, Félix's character participates in a process of myth building. She teaches the children about their first indigenous president, Benito Juárez, and how he was an Indian just like them. She, through resisting sexual assault, manages to remain 'pure'. She dedicates herself to the indoctrination of young indigenous students into the ideals of the 'reinvigorated rhetoric of a

vasconcelista nationalism' (Dever 23) and is rewarded for her purity and dedication by an invitation to meet the president. For Dever, *Río Escondido* continues a 'cinema of didactic codes'. (Dever 23) These didactic codes have been spelt out by Carlos Monsivaís in his 'Mythologies' of Golden-Age Mexican Cinema. On what he refers to as 'The Family Melodrama', Mythology IV, Monsivaís states that:

> The well-known slogans persisted (for a married woman, monogamy is the only guarantee of your existence; for a single woman, your honour is your only justification; for the prostitute, tragedy is your punishment and your only chance for glory; for the daughter, in your hymen I have deposited my honour and your future). (Monsiváis 1995: 118)

In *Río Escondido*, Félix, a single woman, resolutely preserves her honour. Nevertheless, once her job of enlisting her students in the homogenising process of nation building is accomplished and her efforts validated by the President, she may die with the knowledge that she has fulfilled her obligation to the state. However, despite the inculcation of Félix as an 'appropriately gendered citizen' the arrival of Félix on Mexican cinema screens and, particularly, her performance in the earlier *Dona Bárbara*, allowed 'opportunities for spectators to identify against expectation.' (Dever 10) Monsivaís, in his 'Mythology V' cites the lasting contribution of Dolores del Río and María Félix in the development of Golden Age Cinema in Mexico. Del Río he describes as the 'victim par excellence, so dazzling that she had to be humiliated so as not to offend.' (Monsiváis 1995: 121) This point is hugely significant within any discussion of La Caponera's place within melodramatic conventions. In his essay 'La política del melodrama', Carlos Monsiváis draws parallels between the religious roots of melodrama and its more modern manifestations:

> […] la iglesia católica admite técnicas de renovación en obras de teatro, novelas y poemas. ¿Qué son las narraciones sobre los primeros cristianos sino melodramas que aturden a lectores consternados por el sufrimiento de los conversos a la verdadera fe vueltos teas humanas en la Vía Appia o dispuestos a dar testimonio de su fe mientras los devoran leones y tigres en el Coliseo? (Monsiváis 2005)

There is a connection between this analysis of melodrama and religion and the aforementioned comment about Dolores del Río 'having to be humiliated so as not to offend'. In *María Candelaria* (1943), Del Río's character is murdered because of a perceived lack of purity. By allowing the viewer to know for a fact that María is innocent of any wrongdoing and, even so, permitting her to receive the maximum punishment, she is converted into a martyr of sorts. Just as the religious martyrs, innocent in the eyes of the pious Christian reader, are torn asunder for a perceived irreverence, so too is María Candelaria. The 'victim par excellence' fits snugly into the codification of Monsivais's fourth mythology. When Del Río's character is sullied, (albeit, unfairly) by the misguided notion that she posed nude for a painter in *María Candelaria*, the only possible outcome for her is death. The dramatic irony and, of course, the film's tragic 'raison d'être', is supplied by the viewers' knowledge that María has maintained her purity until the final reel. By dying for her purity, her death is tragic, but, crucially, pure and good. However, in Rulfo's text, La Caponera, though thoroughly humiliated, is denied the gift of a tragic, yet somehow purifying, death. This is one of the ways in which Rulfo mischievously disrupts melodramatic convention to ultimately deny the reader what he/she has come to expect.

With regard to Félix, Monsivaís notes how her 'character began her apogee in Fernando de Fuentes's *Doña Bárbara,* [...] when she took on the traits of the cacique and renounced feminine psychology. She became something

unheard of: a woman who controlled her destiny.' (Monsiváis 1995: 122) Félix, however, due to the popularity of her performance in *Doña Bárbara*, established herself as a character that exercised a degree of control over her choices. While she ultimately perishes in *Río Escondido*, she displays immense strength of character throughout, challenging, as she does the local cacique, her would-be rapist. In the earlier film *Enamorada* (1946), Félix's character takes the 'correct' decision to follow her Zapatista lover into combat in the final scene. She does this on her own initiative against the wishes of her family. By fulfilling her obligation to fight for her country (by *choosing* to fight for her country), she asserts herself as a Fernández role model—beautiful, opinionated, yet loyal to both her man and her motherland.

This leads to Dever's point about the effectiveness of Golden Age Melodrama to both inculcate traditional gender roles and negotiate 'a relationship between spectators and the State, indoctrinating viewers in the rights and duties of Mexican citizenship'. (Dever 12) Despite establishing herself as a kind of femme fatale of Mexican films (for example, her early trilogy of Fernando de Fuentes films—*Dona Bárbara* (1943), *La mujer sin alma* (1943) and *La devoradora* (1946), as well as Roberto Gavaldón's *La diosa arrodillada* (1947)), Félix simultaneously became a common fixture in overtly nationalistic melodrama. Appearing in films such as *La Escondida* (1955), *Tizoc: Amor Indio* (1956) and *La cucaracha* (1958), she helped in the cinematic construction of the cult of the Revolution as well as promoting ideas related to *indigenista* policy:

> Deploying the conventions of melodrama, filmmakers like Emilio Fernández aestheticized indigenous and fetishized the feminine in an attempt to gather all Mexicans under the banner of a unified national subject. (Dever 47)

Félix became known as the predatory, carnivorous, 'devourer of men'—a strong woman that made her own decisions. She was also the haughty young *mestiza* that learned to love the humble ways of the indigenous Tizoc. Frequently, she was the tough woman that did her patriotic duty by joining or supporting the Revolution and revolutionary fighters. In this way, María Félix became an amalgamation of various cinematic symbols that represented varying notions of femininity and national identity. Like La Caponera, Félix's characters were both free and captive—free to make their own choices and bound by the nationalistic ideals of their directors, particularly Fernández.

This discussion of the connection between María Félix and coded governmental lessons is relevant to *El gallo de oro* for the simple reason that a strong case can be made for arguing that La Caponera's character was created with the idea that Félix would represent her on screen. In Fragment 9 of Rulfo's text, a detailed description of La Caponera is offered when Dionisio again admires her in Tlaquepaque and the narrator informs us that this was when Dionisio really got to know Bernarda—'Fue pues en Tlaquepaque donde conoció realmente a Bernarda Cutiño' (p. 108):

> La tal Bernarda Cutiño era una cantadora de fama corrida, de mucho empuje y de tamaños, que así como cantaba era buena para alborotar, aunque no se dejaba manosear de nadie, pues si le buscaban era bronca y mal portada. Fuerte, guapa y salidora y tornadiza de genio sabía, con todo, entregar su amistad a quien le demostraba ser amigo. Tenía unos ojos relampagueantes, siempre humedecidos y la voz ronca. Su cuerpo era ágil, duro, y cuando alzaba los brazos los senos querían reventar el corpiño. Vestía siempre amplias faldas de percal estampado, de colores chillantes y llenas de pliegues, lo que completaba con un rebozo de seda y unas flores en las trenzas. Del cuello le colgaban sartas de corales y collares de cuentas de colores; traía los brazos repletos de pulseras y en las orejas grandes zarcillos o enormes arracadas de oro. Mujer de gran

> temperamento, adonde quiera que iba llevaba su aire alegre, además de ser buena para cantar corridos y canciones antiguas. (p. 108)

A picture emerges of a lively, energetic character that is well able to answer back and take charge even in the male-dominated world of the *palenque*. She wears loud clashing colours, sweeping skirts and enormous earrings and pendants; she is brash and curt with potential suitors/troublemakers and she boasts a deep voice and a solid repertoire calling to mind the dominant star of Mexican melodramatic cinema—María Félix.

In 1955 Rulfo was invited by Roberto Gavaldón to work on the set of his melodramatic tale of love and honour set during the Revolution—*La Escondida* (1955). While Rulfo was supposedly on set to ensure the most realistic portrayal of Revolution-era Mexico, he spent most of his time photographing the actors and, more often than not, the extras:

> El grupo más extenso de fotografías, no obstante, es el de actores secundarios, extras y otros espectadores anónimos que en el momento de ser fotografiados se encuentran fuera del alcance de las cámaras de Figueroa, que grababan la acción del *film*. Esta inclinación a alejarse del centro y a recorrer la periferia en busca de una realidad ignorada es una calidad que define la tendencia artística de Rulfo como fotógrafo y como escritor. (Weatherford 2008: 485)

It is now known that Rulfo was engaged in writing *El gallo de oro* in 1956. For this reason, it is clear that his idea to write a novel that would work as a motion picture happened around this time while he was surrounded by actors who expressed a desire to collaborate. While on set, Rulfo regularly came into contact with both Félix and Pedro Armendáriz, both of whom he photographed. These stalwarts of Mexican cinema expressed an interest in acting in the frequently

mooted[46] film version of *Pedro Páramo*. (Weatherford 2008: 606) As noted previously in this chapter, in 1956, producer Sergio Kogan claimed that 'una verdadera buena historia no la he tenido sino hasta hace unos cuantos días. Se trata de un relato especialmente escrito para cine por Juan Rulfo, titulado 'El Gallo Dorado'. (Anonymous 1956: 4) In the same year, it was reported in the Mexican press that Pedro Armendáriz would take the lead role. These rumours about the forthcoming Rulfian film were well publicised in 1956 and, therefore, it can be inferred that Rulfo had begun do devise his story the previous year when he was on set with Gavaldón et al. These details are enlightening when considering the role of La Caponera in Rulfo's text and perhaps they provide an insight into the type of character that Rulfo envisioned.

The resemblance between La Caponera and Félix's defining character (Doña Bárbara) has not been discussed elsewhere and can no longer be ignored. A close examination of Rulfo's text and the script for *Doña Bárbara*, leaves little doubt as to the inspiration behind La Caponera's feisty attitude. At one point, Bernarda, yearning for a return to the road, lets Dionisio know in no uncertain terms how she prefers to treat men:

> —Óyeme bien, Dionisio —le había dicho cuando aquél le propuso matrimonio—, estoy acostumbrada a que nadie me mande. Por eso escogí esta vida... Y también soy yo quien escoge a los hombres que quiero y los dejo cuando me da la gana. Tú eres ni más ni menos como los demás. Desde ahorita te lo digo.
> —Está bien, Bernarda, se hará lo que tú mandes. (p. 127)

This extract calls to mind the unambiguous words of María Féix's Doña Bárbara:

[46] Of course, *Pedro Páramo* was later filmed by Carlos Velo and did not feature either of the aforementioned actors. However, it is probable that Rulfo had these actors in mind when writing *El gallo de oro*.

> Se olvida uste' Balbino Paiba que yo tomo a los hombres cuando los necesito y los tiro hechos guiñapos cuando ya me estorban.[47]

Both La Doña and La Caponera choose the men they like in the manner they see fit and, once they have served their purpose, they are promptly discarded. Doña Bárbara occasionally resorts to witchcraft to achieve her nefarious aims and La Caponera (a living talisman who brings luck to her male companions that gamble in her presence) is accused of being a witch when Lorenzo Benavides loses his Santa Gertrudis hacienda:

> —... ¡Es a esta inmunda bruja a quien le debes todo! (p. 126)

It seems that the strong-willed 'devoradora de hombres' may have influenced Rulfo as he created La Caponera. Nevertheless, the arc of La Caponera's story leaves no room for the redemption normally granted female leads in Mexican Golden Age Cinema. Despite being a woman that exerts a strong degree of control over the men that surround her, La Caponera is finally dominated by Dionisio and dies a broken alcoholic—a prisoner in her own home. An examination of the plot structure of one of Félix's most famous films, *Enamorada*, exemplifies King's point about Félix's characters' implementation as a state tool:

> Félix was given the part that she would repeat with variations over the next decade: La Doña, the haughty self-reliant woman, *la devoradora*, the femme fatale. The narrative structure of her films, however, seeks to re-impose the law of family and the state on the rebellious woman. (King 23)

At the beginning of the film, her character Beatriz Peñafiel is made indignant by the impropriety of the advances made by the Zapatista revolutionary General Reyes, as essayed by Pedro Armendáriz. She resists and resists and, thus, exerts her independence. She slaps him across the face and, at one point, manages to

[47] *Doña Bárbara* (1943)

strike him to the ground, much to the amusement of the Zapatista leader's comrades. In the closing stages of the film, after being lectured on the responsibilities of being a Mexican woman, she forsakes a life of luxury and runs out of her wedding to the foreigner Eduardo Roberts, throwing her pearl necklace to the floor and hurries to find General Reyes. The final scene shows her triumphantly marching alongside her General as a *soldadera*. Emilio Fernández's films unashamedly carried messages to the viewer and the message here is clear. Beatriz made the correct decision to abandon her life as a rich conservative in order to fight for the ideals alongside Reyes, a surrogate Emiliano Zapata. True, she exerts her independence by choosing who she can marry. However, by electing the Zapatista over the wealthy foreign conservative she helps to re-impose the law of the state upon herself, the rebellious woman. The final scene shows her walking alongside her man, who rides on horseback. In fact, all of the men ride horses, while their accompanying women must walk. In this way, despite all her feisty rebellion and independence, she ends the film as just another Mexican wife subjugated by the dominant male. The only difference, then, is that instead of being bound by the will of her conservative family, she is bound by the will of her revolutionary general. Nevertheless, her submission to the general is portrayed as heroic as she epitomises revolutionary ideals.

In *El gallo de oro* female independence is portrayed differently to the way in which it is exemplified in *Enamorada*. When La Caponera travels the carnival circuit as an unmarried woman she is seen as happy and care-free. Nevertheless, she feels compelled to find a companion, a man with whom she can continue to travel and enjoy life on the road:

> —Eso tampoco. Lo que yo necesito es un hombre. No de su protección, que you me sé proteger sola; pero eso sí, que sepa responder de mí y de él ante quien sea [...] Y que no se espante si yo le doy mala vida. (p. 128)

However, when she submits to the sedentary life of submissive wife, disaster ensues for both her and her husband. As soon as Dionisio begins to amass a fortune, his attitude towards Bernarda changes radically:

> Pero en realidad él fue quien se la dio a ella. En cuanto sintió el poder que le daba el dinero camió su carácter. (p. 128)

Her independence is never rewarded. Her submission to the laws of family and state are fruitless. Her agreement to become the stay-at-home wife is her downfall. There is no redemption for her and no dignity in death. In this way, Rulfo, contrary to the template exemplified by Fernández's *Enamorada* challenges the treatment of the feisty female leads in typical Mexican melodramatic cinema and confirms the mistreatment of women in Mexico as a major theme in his fiction.

One thing that is certain is that *Pedro Páramo*, 'Cleotilde' and *El gallo de oro* foreground the destructive outcomes of attempting to possess and incarcerate women. While women suffer hugely in Rulfo's fiction, nothing good ever comes from their mistreatment—it never proves ultimately fruitful to the male aggressor. Instead of pointing towards Rulfo's fiction as being misogynistic in nature, this continual disrespect of women at the hands of men can be seen as an amoral dissection of the reality of *machista* Mexico. Misogynism is present in Rulfo's fiction because it is present in Mexican society. However, misogynism in Rulfo's work, expressed through the willful curtailment of a woman's independence, invariably leads to one or more of the following outcomes: misery, insanity, alcoholism and, ultimately death for *both* man and woman. In this way, the thematic thread that links these three works can equally be viewed as anti-

misogynistic as the abuse of women leads to the complete breakdown of, and impossibility of, happy domestic life. Even within the melodramatic, and, at time, scarcely believable plot of *El gallo de oro*, cruel realities prove inescapable and this leads to an inevitable comparison with *El despojo*. Just as Pedro is unable to escape the intolerable realities of his miserable existence within a surrealistic dream constructed by his *own* consciousness, Bernarda (possessor of magical qualities) can never fully escape the fact that she is a woman in Mexico and must be punished for her independence.

Rulfo presents a lovable female rogue that is well able to handle herself—'no se dejaba manosear de nadie'—and, instead of a story arc that leads to triumphant rebellion against social norms (*Enamorada*) or heroic death (*La Escondida*), she dies miserably in joyless captivity. In *El gallo de oro*, Bernarda Cutiño, prized by Dionisio for her good looks, fortune and independent attitude, is finally driven to alcoholism when he forces her to stay by his side in the endless card games of Santa Gertrudis. In this way, Rulfo, by making his text resolutely melodramatic, lulls the reader into a sense of comfort of the familiar before taking the rug out from under the his/her feet with Bernarda's cruel and pointless demise. Just like Susana San Juan and Cleotilde, entrapment, imprisonment and, ultimately death greet Bernarda Cutiño. As examined in this chapter, Rulfo's feisty, determined and independent character is reduced, firstly, to an inanimate symbol that serves her man and, secondly, to a non-entity—a lifeless corpse that suffers humiliation even after death as her husband violently shakes her and curses her for having the temerity to die without informing him. In this way, La Caponera starts off in the typical María Félix role and later, becomes more

typically Rulfian (i.e. more similar to the characters of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*) in nature—dying in despair within a sterile environment. To put it bluntly, there are no happy characters in Rulfo's fiction and, arguably, female characters suffer more than their male counterparts. La Caponera's deterioration can be seen as Rulfo's way of playing with the readers' acceptance of melodramatic conventions. Readers, and later, audience members, used to the typical Félix character will expect La Caponera to triumph in some way and this is denied to them. No governmental messages can be found in the characterisation or narrative arc of Rulfo's character. Her death serves no purpose within the scheme of national politics. La Caponera suffers and suffers. Speculation as to whether things would have turned out differently if Bernarda had engendered a son is pointless. She marries Dionisio and provides him with a daughter. However, Bernardita is her mother's child, a sexually independent seductress that ultimately becomes an itinerant singer and that, perhaps, adds to her danger. For, not only is she the seductive, rootless woman, leading men from town to town, she contributes to the continuation of this process by giving birth to another version of herself, literally a new Bernarda. In the static world of Rulfo's fiction this new Bernarda will, it might be assumed, eventually be imprisoned by a new, uneducated and miserable, Dionisio.

3.8 'De la nada a la nada'—Cyclical Poverty and Knowing One's Place

In a typescript dated January 8, 1959, Rulfo is identified as the author of the 'argumento cinematográfico intitulado DE LA NADA A LA NADA'. (Rulfo 2010: 9) This alternative title (an early, alternate title of *El gallo de oro*) is significant in that it implicitly points to the cyclical nature of the narrative arc.

Monsiváis argues that an essential component of Mexican melodrama is the recognition of class division as something sacrosanct against which any attempt to disrupt will prove fatal. Monsiváis deals with this in detail in his article 'La política de la melodrama' as this extensive excerpt reveals:

> ¿Alguien, fuera de los utopistas más deslumbrados o menos lógicos, imagina una América latina sin pobreza y miseria? La escritura en la pared: se nace pobre porque el padre y el abuelo tienen ese origen y a los hijos les toca ese camino, lo avalan el feudalismo de una larga etapa y el capitalismo salvaje. *Confórmate, individuo de las clases populares: si te mueves de tu lugar te vas a otro idéntico…Ah y no intentes la fuga a través del narcotráfico. Lo único que lograrás es morir más joven y no en un buen estado de salud*. Todos están enterados: si se es pobre lo natural es sufrir, si se es rico lo natural es engañarse pensando que la felicidad existe. Afirman cada uno a su modo, presidentes de la República, altos funcionarios, jerarcas eclesiásticos, empresarios, jefes policíacos, tradicionalistas eminentes: Dios hizo al mundo con tal de dividirlo en machos y hembras (naturalmente sometidas), en ricos y pobres, en impunes y delincuentes menores en la cárcel o la fosa común. Y la pobreza es un hecho "estructural". Al aceptarse la fatalidad de la pobreza se suprimen hasta lo último el libre albedrío, la solidaridad, la inteligencia, la rebeldía, la organización de la voluntad igualitaria, y se aceptan también la desigualdad y la injusticia como propias del deber ser de las sociedades; de nuevo el melodrama. (Monsiváis: 2005)

In this way Monsiváis sees melodrama as a way by which the hierarchical strata are maintained. He who knows not his place in society and tries to make a better life for himself is punished. Melodrama, like Catholicism, Monsiváis feels, instructs the poor to be happy with what they have and to make do with their lot. Monsiváis holds that the cinemagoers' resolve to make do with their lot was strengthened by viewing the humility and dignity of poor characters on screen. The film that did most to define this kind of fetishising of the lower classes is Ismael Rodríguez's *Nosotros los pobres* (1947). The trailer for this film drew attention to the dignified resolve of the archetypal inner-city characters and their will to survive against the odds:

> *Nosotros los pobres:* drama de los bajos fondos donde se sabe sufrir sin quejas, llorar sin lágrimas, reír en silencio, amar sin besos, vivir sin pan y justicia, pero donde se es féliz.[48]

The characters, with their archetypal nomenclatures such as 'La que se levanta tarde' and 'La paralítica' play out a melodrama in which it is made clear throughout that, despite their extreme poverty, they are happy to accept their station in life. In the sequel, *Ustedes, los ricos*, (1948), Chachita has the chance to enter the world of the rich. However, after numerous tribulations, the evil associated with a hitherto poor character's sudden encounter with riches, means that Chachita is ultimately delighted to return to her humble roots. Money, when it interferes with the life of a poor person, results in disaster. It is not money that is evil, it is the corrupting power that it exerts over members of the lower classes that is the destructive agent.

By using *De la nada a la nada* as the title of the synopsis of his own text, Rulfo draws explicit attention to the fact that Dionisio begins with nothing and is rewarded by ending his life with nothing. He comes from a background of extreme poverty and inherits great wealth. He never shows any sign of happiness in his wealth. In fact, he is at his happiest at the moment just before he begins to become rich. When he has lost his cockerel and is on the verge of a relationship with La Caponera, this is the time of his greatest contentment. Once he begins to play the part of a rich *hacendado* he is doomed. Once he refuses to live in humility as he once did, he is destined to lose all that he has earned. Is this a representation of the issues referred to by Monsiváis above? In light of the

[48] From the film's original trailer, available on: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA_IEIG_eC4

statements by Monsiváis, arguably the greatest authority on Mexican melodrama, Rulfo's *El gallo de oro*, can be seen as another example of a melodrama in which poverty is fetishised. There is, however one major difference. In the films mentioned here, financial destitution is depicted as a difficult but rewarding state. As long as one has one's family, companions and a sense of identity (provided by church or other social structures), poverty is never so bad. In contrast, in the work of Rulfo (not just in *El gallo de oro*) it is something abject and intolerable. So, while Dionisio begins his life in misery it is never a state that could be seen as anything other than desperate. When he becomes rich, he begins a life of stasis in his *hacienda*. He does not seem ecstatic but it is a much better existence than his previous one. He never has an urge to return to a life of poverty—why would he? In this way, while *El gallo de oro* certainly deals with the corrupting power of money when given suddenly to someone who had previously existed in miserable poverty, it never fetishises the life of the indigent. The poor in Rulfo's work are miserable. They do not transcend their misery and they don't find solace in a tightly-knit community that is content despite their economic woes. In *El despojo*, Pedro cannot transcend his predicaments even through his self-constructed hallucination. In the same way, Dionisio, cannot achieve anything through his accumulated wealth other than a state of joyless boredom and ultimately penniless death. So, while Rulfo situates his narrative within a melodramatic schema, he diverges from what an audience/reader of melodrama would have expected. Penury is nothing to admire in Rulfo's text and it cannot be transcended for long. The cyclical nature of the narration implies that poverty begets poverty as Bernarda Pinzón sets out alone and without possessions to make her way in the

world. Though temporarily free, she is no better off than her mother or her grandmother. *El gallo de oro* breaks new ground for Rulfo in its incorporation of melodramatic techniques. However, he uses this melodramatic format to further criticise the failure of the Mexican Revolution to lessen the hardships of the small town peasant. Poor people stay poor and if they, like Dionisio, chance upon riches, they lack the wherewithal to maintain their wealth or to reap the benefits.

3.9 Melodrama and Realism – *El gallo de oro* on screen

There have been two film versions of Rulfo's *El gallo de oro*. In 1964, Roberto Gavaldón made his *El gallo de oro* and in 1985 Arturo Ripstein made *El imperio de la fortuna*. The purpose of this section of the chapter is to examine to what extent the major themes and characters of Rulfo's novel are represented on screen. As has been shown, the novel is, and has been, since its inception, inextricably linked to cinema. Any discussion of the impact of Rulfo's novel would be incomplete without reference to both cinematic versions. This section will present an analysis of the two films with different emphases on each. The films are analysed in chronological order. As Gavaldón's version differs from Rulfo's source text in major ways, a note on plot discrepancies is required. Gavaldón's film is then analysed with particular attention paid to its status as a melodrama and its unrealistic and romanticised depiction of rural Mexico and to the roles of the three major protagonists—Dionisio Pinzón, Lorenzo Benavides and La Caponera. The following section examines Ripstein's version of the film. As *El imperio de la fortuna* version sticks very closely to the plot as originally written by Rulfo, no synopsis outline is warranted. Instead, the analysis focuses on the way in which Ripstein imposes his own pessimistic vision of a world of squalor

and misogyny upon the template provided by Rulfo. Influenced by the work of his mentor Buñuel, Ripstein, while remaining faithful to Rulfo's plot, presents a desolate vision of greed, domination, abuse and incarceration, thus amplifying and elaborating upon themes inherent in the source material.

El gallo de oro was filmed in 1964 in the Churubusco studios and on location in the state of Querétaro. Produced by Manuel Barbachano Ponce and directed by Roberto Gavaldón, the film was to win Diosa de Plata awards for screenwriting, best actress (Lucha Villa) and best film in 1965. Based on Rulfo's original idea, the screenplay was written by Gavaldón along with Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez. In an essay included in *Inframundo* 'Breves nostalgias sobre Juan Rulfo', García Márquez describes his involvement in the project:

> Carlos Velo me encomendó la adaptación para el cine de otro relato de Juan Rulfo, que era el único que yo no conocía en aquel momento: *El gallo de oro*. Eran 16 páginas muy apretadas, en un papel de seda que estaba a punto de convertirse en polvo, y escritas con tres máquinas distintas. Aunque no me hubieran dicho de quién era, lo habría sabido de inmediato. El lenguaje no era tan minucioso como el del resto de la obra de Juan Rulfo, y había muy pocos recursos técnicos de los suyos, pero su ángel personal volaba por todo el ámbito de la escritura. (García Márquez 1983: 24)

What exactly was contained within those sixteen pages is open to speculation. It is known that Rulfo prepared a screenplay for the film ('yo mismo hice el script') (Ezquerro 1992: 786) which was considered unusable by the producers. Whatever was received by Garcia Márquez, all that can be certain is that it was some kind of short cinematic treatment of Rulfo's novel, either written by Rulfo himself or by someone else after Rulfo's initial screenplay (which he claimed to have destroyed when he was told that it was unworkable). García Márquez goes on to claim that

the work he did on both this film and Carlos Velo's adaptation of *Pedro Páramo* (with which he was also involved) was 'muy lejos de ser bueno'. (García Márquez 1983: 24) Ayala Blanco would later note that this version of the film 'ni remotamente tenía algo que ver con el original'. (Rulfo 1980: 14) While it is clear that the film deviates significantly from Rulfo's original text, Ayala Blanco's appraisal is certainly an exaggeration as the early stages of Gavaldón's film are based on the original text. However, there are major discrepancies as, throughout the film, the traits of various characters are transposed and large chunks of the original narrative are eliminated, providing for a more upbeat ending to this version.

Because the plot differs so much from the original text, this chapter will continue with a detailed synopsis of the plot of Gavaldón's film. This will be followed by a section on the critical reception of the film from its release. The subsequent sections will analyse the role of La Caponera in the film and will address the issues raised by critics of the film, namely that it represents a 'melodrama ranchero' unworthy of a great writer.

A valid summary of the major difference between Gavaldón's film and the source material has been offered by Douglas J. Weatherford as follows:

> Los cambios que se encuentran en el film de Gavaldón incluyen, entre otras cosas, una protagonista femenina (La Caponera) que no es la misma mujer misteriosa del texto rulfiano, un contexto social que exorcisa la crítica social del México pos-revolucionario que es tan obvia en la novela rulfiana y una conclusión moralista y reaccionaria muy apartada del fin pesimista y desesperado de Rulfo. (Weatherford 2010: 57)

El gallo de oro (1964) begins in a similar manner to that of the original text. However, very soon, the plot begins to diverge from the source material. It is Lorenzo Benavides who attempts to incarcerate La Caponera at Santa Gertrudis

and not Dionisio. In fact, all Dionisio's negative characteristics in the original text have been transferred to Lorenzo Benavides. In this way, Dionisio remains likeable throughout and it is Benavides who must be punished for his attempts to control La Caponera. The film also addes a character that does not appear in the source material. The character's name is Esculapio and a card game between he and Lorenzo Benavides results in the loss of Esculapio's *hacienda*. This provides the catalyst for Bernarda's incarceration at the hands of Benavides. Nevertheless, while the theme of forced confinement is, indeed, included in the film, La Caponera manages to overcome this and ends the film as the happiest of all the major characters as she continues her itinerant life of singing at the fairs. Dionisio and La Caponera do not get married in Gavaldón's film and they do not have a daughter either. Overall, Gavaldón's version is far more light-hearted in tone than the original text and Ripstein's later version.

Virtually absent from *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, indigenous characters feature (thought not prominently) in Gavaldón's film. Just before the cock fight in which Dionisio wins the golden cockerel, Chinaco orders his indigenous companion to turn his hat around. His hat has a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the front and Chinaco, addressing the man as 'Yaqui', declares that the Virgin doesn't like 'las peleas y los albures'. Yaqui turns his hat around and the viewer sees that on the other side of his hat he sports a mirror. In the later horse racing scene, both Lorenzo's and Esculapio's horses are ridden by indigenous servants. While these allusions to indigenous Mexicans as virtually mute and submissive witnesses to the unfolding drama are brief and scarce, they constitute an interesting departure and present a difficulty to anyone (see Ariel

Zuñiga's comments below) who wishes to view the cinematic world of *charros*, cock-fighters and singing girls as a rounded depiction of *mexicanidad*.

Filmed by celebrated cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, Gavaldón's film featured major actors such as Narciso Busquets as Lorenzo Benavides and Ignacio López Tarso as Dionisio Pinzón as well as the singer Lucha Villa in the role of La Caponera. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the film was to win three Diosas de Plata. However, *El gallo de oro* has continually been criticised by Rulfian investigators for its so-called picture postcard romanticism. It is also certain that Rulfo himself was dissatisfied with the final product as is revealed by this reminiscence by Eugenia Revueltas:

> Recuerdo que en 1965 estando en Génova, se exhibió una película con guión de Rulfo, *El gallo de oro*, la delegación mexicana acudió toda; callados escuchábamos las carcajadas de los italianos que se burlaban de las tonterías que los personajes iban hilvanando en un rosario, y que alternaban con un sinfín de aguardentosas canciones, que la heroína del film, borboteaba en un desesperante *continuum*. Rulfo, hundido en su butaca contemplaba aquella sucesión de tópicas imágenes de película de charros, que nada tenían que ver con lo creado e imaginado por él. (Revueltas 19)

Rulfo's own dismay at Gavaldón's adaptation has been echoed by the author of *Juan Rulfo y el cine*, Gabriela Yanes Gómez, who refers to what she sees as a sort of melancholic desolation in Rulfo's photography as proof that he could not have written such a folkloric and romanticised story:

> Si nos remitimos de nuevo al testimonio visual de las fotografías de Rulfo —que no ilustra sus textos, pero ciertamente nos complementan—, vemos que en ellas no existen charros, ni mariachis, ni mujeres encopetadas, enjoyadas y pintarrajeadas. La visión de los pueblos, sus habitantes y algunas fiestas que Rulfo registra guardan cualidades de reserva, modestia y sencillez que no vemos en esta versión cinematográfica. Aunque el guión se refiere al ambiente festivo de las ferias de pueblo, la soledad de los personajes principales es el nudo del relato y esto Gavaldón no pudo resolver visualmente. (Yanes Gómez 38)

Yanes Gómez goes on to describe how the film 'fue reducido al barroquismo folclórico' (Yanes Gómez 1996:38) as a plastic and false image of Mexico akin to that presented to foreigners in postcards:

> Pero resultó un México de tarjeta postal (muy del fotógrafo Gabriel Figueroa) para turistas, plástico y falso. Si bien Rulfo no detalló los aspectos técnicos en ese texto concebida para el cine, tampoco visualizamos en él mariachis que van y vienan, ni multitudes felices en interminables ferias de pueblo, como aparecen en la película. (Yanes Gómez 38)

Much has been made of Figueroa's involvement in the film and its subsequent beautification of rural Mexico. With his depictions of expansive images of vast skies and heroic shots taken from below, the framing of *charros* and attractive women against a backdrop of monumental cumulous clouds; Figueroa is well known for his visually pleasing and romanticising vision of the Mexican countryside. His vision is no different in Gavaldón's film. Alberto Vital suggests that Rulfo's photography represents a conscious reaction to the type of embellished 'paisajismo' of Golden-Age Mexican Cinema:

> Aunque admirador de Figueroa, Rulfo hizo en su obra literaria la refinada desarticulación de un paisajismo que, justo por compensatorio, sólo se salvaba gracias al talento de aquél y otros maestros. (Vital 2003: 154)

Vital continues:

> En resumen, el paisaje en la literatura y en la fotografía de Rulfo pudo estar influido por la conciencia de que el paisajismo revolucionario a través del cine urgía un análisis agudo y una expresión distinta, mucho más perspicaz, del papel del entorno geográfico en la historia de México y en el imaginario hegemónico. (Vital 2003: 155)

Vital sees Rulfo's involvement in the project as representative of his desire to seek new media with which to express himself:

> El espíritu vanguardista no borraba el espíritu crítico de Rulfo; al contrario, aquí se nos confirma uno de los propósitos centrales del jalisciense: buscar cada vez nuevos medios de expresión para impedir que

> se olvidara la persistente crisis del campo mexicano, sinécdoque de la condición del ser humano sometido a la injusticia. (Vital 2003: 174)

It is clear from the above that both Rulfo and Rulfian scholars have found Gavaldón's film to be too romantic, too *folclórico* and, overall, an overly sanitised vision of life in small-town rural Mexico. Weatherford goes as far as to mention that 'sería erróneo subestimar el papel nocivo que habrá tenido la versión fílmica que hizo Gavaldón de *El gallo de oro'*. (Weatherford 2010: 58) He is referring to the disappointment that Rulfo felt with this film (and, indeed, with Velo's take on *Pedro Páramo*) and how this contributed to the author's overall disenchantment with cinema, causing him, according to Weatherford, to almost completely disengage from that art form in the years to come. However, criticism other critics have been more favourable. Eduardo de la Vega refers to *El gallo de oro* as 'the most significant film of the nationalist cinema of the 60s.' (Vega 93) In fact, Gustavo García goes as far as identifying it as the last film of Golden Age Mexican melodrama:

> The 'golden age' of Mexican melodrama spanned the years from 1933, when its first indisputable masterpieces appeared, such as *La mujer del Puerto* and Fernando de Fuentes's Revolutionary melodrama *El compadre Mendoza*, to 1964, when Roberto Gavaldón directed *El gallo de oro*, the last great provincial melodrama, scripted by Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez from a plot by Juan Rulfo. (García 158)[49]

[49] However, García's argument is significantly damaged when, lamenting Ripstein's realistic vision in *El imperio de la fortuna*, he makes the rather bizarre statement that Gavaldon's film was entirely faithful to Rulfo's narrative: 'Finally, Gavaldón made *El gallo de oro* (1964) a melodrama touched by the fantastic, in which an incredibly lucky gamecock breeder ends up in the service of an hacendado gambler who uses his lover's presence as a talisman. In 1986, Arturo Ripstein produced a remake, *El imperio de la fortuna*...which was impoverished by its realism: Gavaldón had followed cinematic conventions, with haciendas worthy of Orson Welles in their vastness, cinematic charros and a magical realism that followed Juan Rulfo's plot to the letter'. (García 160-161)

Ariel Zuñiga describes the film as a 'synthesis of Roberto Gavaldón's work as an auteur, summing up the consistency and coherent personal vision manifest throughout his career and evident even in his less important film'. (Zuñiga 200) He makes the case for Gavaldon's film representing a coherent vision of Mexican national identity, 'what we might call Mexicanness'. (Zuñiga 200) Zuñiga's description of the effectiveness of Gavaldón's film in capturing 'what we might call Mexicanness' is far from the stated objective of Rulfo to show, in his work, 'parts' of Mexico and not one thing that could define *mexicanidad.* For this reason, he is worth quoting in detail. First of all, he sees the character of Bernarda Cutiño, La Caponera, as representing an unadulterated manifestation of Pre-Hispanic culture:

> Here we find personal obsessions such as the home, the privileged object of his personal search. In this film, it is reconquered with the same ease with which it is lost in a card game. There is also the character of Bernarda, an earthy woman with telluric power, who represents the continuity of a Pre-Hispanic culture unadulterated by the Conquest. (Zuñiga 201)

The next section of Zuñiga's argument contains some factual errors since, in Gavaldón's film (which is what he is discussing), it is not Dionisio that wins and then loses the Santa Gertrudis hacienda, but Lorenzo Benavides:

> *El gallo de oro* also begins with the death of the mother, without whom our culture is confused and incomprehensible. The death of Dionisio's mother opens up his world and affirms his sexuality. The beginning and the end of the film take place in the very heart of the home, its central patio: in the cock-fighting arena, the Palenque installed there, only luck determines which cock, which masculinity will triumph. After winning the battle and recovering the space over which the vanquished Reglita used to hold sway (in one of the most beautiful shots of the film), he can lose the home again and even permanently, because what was important was not to have it, but to prove his ability to win and to lose. Once that feat has been accomplished, everything returns to the beginning as if nothing had happened. The hero bears a few more scars, but they are inflicted by life

> itself and are unavoidable. The eloquence of the song lyrics adds to the meaning of the film's action and, willingly or not, words and actions bring Rulfo's ideas closer to those of Gavaldón's. The written text and the filmic text narrate, with a single voice, in an appropriate tone and with the right distance, what we are. (Zuñiga 200)

In this way, it is clear that there exists a clear division of opinions on Gavaladón's film—Rulfian scholars who bemoan the melodramatic and romanticised tones and Gavaldón enthusiasts who see the film as a defining moment in Mexican cinema. However, both those in favour of the film and those who see it as a travesty of Rulfo's work, resort to exaggerated tones and, therefore, jeopardise the validity of their arguments. Yanes Gómez uses the example of Rulfo's photography to justify her criticism of the film's romanticism. Contrary to Yanes Gómez's statements, there are several instances of the appearance of *charros* in Rulfo's photography. Of course, they are mostly featured in photographs taken on the set of *La Escondida*, nevertheless they exist. Yanes Gómez's statement also negates, or simply fails to take into account these photographs and others that Rulfo took of indigenous festivals in the Mixteca region of the state of Oaxaca. This focus on the solitary and desolate nature of much of Rulfo's photography stems from the tendency of the literary critic to seek out literary connections between Rulfo's narrative prose and his photography and to disregard what does not fit into this thesis of interconnectedness. In this instance, Yanes Gómez's observation is fundamentally flawed. Just because Rulfo tended not to photograph typical festivals and carnivals does not mean that he never did so. In fact, in Andrew Dempsey's 2005 publication *Juan Rulfo. Fotografía*, four of the most striking photographs involve music, a Ferris-wheel and giant papier-mâché Judas figures

for the Sábado de Gloria celebrations.[50] Furthermore, there are no photographs of cockfighters in Rulfo's photographic oeuvre but this does not, of course, negate the validity of their presence in *El gallo de oro* and the same criterion could be applied to the characters mentioned by Yanes Gómez. Nevertheless, Yanes Gómez is right in her view that Gavaldón trivialises Rulfo's story. By truncating Rulfo's story and omitting Dionisio's demise in his ranch-prison-tomb, Gavaldón's film misses out on the darker side of Rulfo's text—the suffocating melancholy that drives La Caponera to drink herself to death which, in turn, leads to Dionisio's suicide.

By the same token, the exaggerated praise heaped upon Gavaldón's film by the aforementioned critics again lessens the impact of their argument. To regard *El gallo de oro* (1964) as the last great provincial melodrama is a subjective opinion that is, of course, open to discussion. Much more serious is the suggestion that the film represents an accurate depiction of 'Mexicanness'—the idea that Mexico is a land of *charros* and singing girls in which the silent indigenous stay mute in the background. This notion, put forth by Zuñiga is at odds with one of the central arguments of this thesis—that Rulfo, in his filmic work, attempts to address elements of Mexican reality (including indigenous Mexico) that he excludes from his most famous works. While *El gallo de oro*, being, as it is, a kind of melodramatic reworking of *Pedro Páramo*, deals exclusively with *mestizo* Mexico, the notion that it represents an accurate portrayal of 'what Mexicans are' is greatly problematic and contrary to Rulfo's own belief that 'no representa ninguna característica lo mexicano, en absoluto'.

[50] "Rueda de la fortuna, década de los cuarenta", "Judas para el Sábado de Gloria, década de los cincuenta", "Músicos de Jalisco, ca. 1940" and "Músicos Mixes, ca. 1956". (Dempsey:2005)

Rulfo, in collaboration with other artists, portrays elements of Mexico that point towards a varied and, at times, contradictory, mosaic of Mexican culture. In this way, critics of both cinema and literature have resorted to exaggerated and unsubstantiated criticism and praise to promote their respective theses that Gavaldón's film is a mangled version or Rulfo's vision or an all-encompassing and coherent portrayal of Mexican society. Within the paramters of this piece of investigation, a much more effective analysis necessarily involves an attempt to see how the major themes of Rulfo's text are treated by Gavaldón et al.

The depiction of Dionisio Pinzón differs significantly in Gavaldón's film. Contrary to what occurs in Rulfo's text, he doesn't suffer any physical ailment that would prevent him from performing any job other than town crier. He never seems overly avaricious and, even when gambling away the last of his money, remains humble. His only undignified moment is when he throws his dead cockerel at Chinaco. However, this scene has more to do with the cyclical narrative (the scene is an inverse repetition of the one in which Dionisio obtains the cockerel from Chinaco) than with malice on the part of Dionisio. The town crier is presented throughout the film as an innocent dunce. Smitten as he is with La Caponera, at no point does he attempt to initiate an affair with her nor does he ever treat her badly. He does not marry her, does not father a daughter with her and, importantly, does not incarcerate her in Santa Gertrudis nor abuse her physically nor emotionally. He is the fool that attempted to rise above his station in life and was punished for it. However, he ends the film alive and with enough money with which to bury his dead mother and, in this way, triumphs, albeit less emphatically than La Caponera. His affection for La Caponera is manifested

through a fawning adoration at all times as he longs to fight his cockerel in her presence for the simple reason that he never seems to lose when backed by Bernarda. When, finally, he loses all that he has, he turns to look for Bernarda but she has left and he is alone again. The disappointment of this abandonment is less heartfelt as he never really possesses La Caponera at any point in the film. It is she that initiates their entanglement, more through boredom than anything else and, as he never really *had* her, he can never really *lose* her.

Lorenzo Benavides, as played by Narciso Busquets, takes on all the negative aspects of Rulfo's Dionisio. He receives copious amounts of affection and loyalty from La Caponera at the beginning of the film yet, through his own stupidity, he loses her because of his insistence that she remain cooped up in Santa Gertrudis against her wishes. He is physically violent with her and misleads her into staying with him. He tells her that as soon as he gets enough money from card games he'll take her back on the festival circuit. However, he seems to have no intention of leaving his new home as long as she continues to bring him good fortune at cards. When he forbids her from consuming alcohol, it is because she is embarrassing him in front of his guests rather than any concern for her physical and psychological wellbeing. This is made abundantly clear when he uses alcohol to convince her to return to his side during an important game.

Lorenzo is, of course, punished for his aggressive and cruel treatment of Bernarda. He squanders all that he has won and he loses Bernarda. He also forfeits the assistance and partnership of Dionisio and his cockerel. Yet, he easily overcomes the anguish of all this loss by simply beating Dionisio in a cockfight. His damaged masculinity (he is fairly sure of Bernarda's infidelity with Dionisio)

is easily cured through the one-upmanship of having the last laugh with Dionisio. He doesn't need Santa Gertrudis, Dionisio or La Caponera anymore. Once he has reasserted his masculine dominance he can leave the *palenque* and, the film, with his head held high. In this way, Gavaldón, Fuentes and Garcia Márquez's bifurcated take on Dionisio results less engaging and less emotionally unsettling. At no time is Dionisio, like he is in Rulfo's narrative, torn between his desire for La Caponera and his avarice for more money. He does not undergo a degenerative metamorphosis from innocent town crier to ruthless and misogynistic jailer, from adoring admirer to callous dominator. In Gavaldón's film, Dionisio is the lovesick fool and Lorenzo the *machista* dominator throughout. This decision to bifurcate the anti-hero of Rulfo's narrative only serves to construct a pair of one dimensional characters in the place of the tormented and (ultimately) emotionally sterile single character of the source material.

La Caponera is, first and foremost, a singer and, as discussed previously in this chapter, Rulfo's *El gallo de oro* is essentially a melodramatic story. The fact remains that, consciously or not, Rulfo reworked the major themes of his first novel in the form of a cinematic melodrama. For this reason, it should be no surprise that Gavaldón, a giant of Mexican Golden-Age cinema, should take such an approach to proceedings. The decision to cast a singer in the role of La Caponera is again unsurprising and Lucha Villa's voice is both arresting and powerful. However, Gavaldón and his musical director, Rubén Fuentes, choose not to incorporate the songs that Rulfo includes in his original text. Vital, suggests that, perhaps, these lyrics had been composed by Rulfo:

> Inexplicablemente se prefirieron en la película las espléndidas coplas incluidas en la novela, fruto acaso de la pluma del propio Rulfo: el

> mercado de las canciones populares a través de los medios era y es tan cerrado como que los palenques de Lorenzo Benavides; a Rulfo no lo ayudaron ni con la esperanza de que los versos de su novela se musicalizaran y se difundieran: pesaron demasiado los sin duda valiosos y hasta geniales José Alfredo Jiménez y Tomás Méndez, ya para entonces capos del bolero y la canción ranchera. (Vital 2006: 434)

As mentioned in this chapter these songs were not composed by Rulfo. Rather, they were preexisting traditional songs that Rulfo transcribed for the purpose of his novel. The songs that are used in Gavaldón's film are the following (in chronological order): 'Yo me muero dondequiera' by Federico Ruíz, 'La Caponera' by Gasson y R. Sánchez Mota, 'Renunciación' by A. Valdez Herrera, 'La Culebra Pollera' by Luiz Pérez Meza, 'Amanecí en tus brazos' by José Alfredo Jiménez, 'El Gavilancillo' by R. Fuentes and S. Vargas, 'Hace un año' by Felipe Valdez Leal , 'Qué te falta mujer' (anonymous), 'El Gusto' by R. Fuentes and S. Vargas and, finally, 'El Gustito' by Elpidio Ramírez. Vital describes what he sees as the negative effect of the prominence of singing in Mexican cinema in the following manner:

> [...] hay escenas en que la belleza y la voz de Lucha Villa apenas disimulan el carácter ancilar del cine de la época, como promotor de canciones nuevas y permanente difusor y legitimador de canciones viejas, carácter que dañó por años el desarrollo de la industria como un discurso primordialmente dramático [...] (Vital 2006: 434)

Regardless of Vital's view on the negative impact of melodramatic (or musical) cinema, Rulfo's source novel demands a variety of songs throughout the story for the simple reason that much of the novel evolves in small town fairs and one of the principal characters is a singer. The fact that the director chose to incorporate other songs is more significant. As shown in this chapter, the lyrics that Rulfo chose frequently complement the emotional state of the characters and, by not using the same words, the film diverges from the source material. The opening

(and, significantly, also the closing) number from La Caponera can be seen as her manifesto and, in this way, shares Rulfo's attempts at connecting the lyrics of the songs to the narrative. It seems clear that the songs were chosen to play to Lucha Villa's strengths as a singer of *rancheras* and the depth and quality of her voice is one of the most prominent elements of the film and thus lessens the negative impact of disregarding the songs chosen by Rulfo.

Neither Rulfo's nor Gavaldón's La Caponera are realistic constructions. The fact that, in both novel and film, she magically brings good fortune to her male companions coupled with her archetypal beauty and personality make her far more symbolic than realistic. Even so, Gavaldón's character is even less realistic than Rulfo's. This has a lot to do with the conventions of musical drama. Her costume, hair and makeup are flawless throughout and she lacks any sense of authenticity as she breaks into song at the slightest provocation and, no matter how many musicians are in her presence, the music invariably feels artificial.[51]

While Rulfo's character occasionally sprinkles her speech with wry proverbs such as 'la suerte no anda en burro', Gárcia Márquez, Fuentes and Gavaldón's screenplay is bursting with such affectations. One example occurs when La Caponera explains to Dionisio that the cockfighting circuit is rife with illegal activity and makes fun of Dionisio's naivety: '¡Ay Heródes, otro más que se te escapó!' This constant use of formulaic witticisms grows weary early on in the film and prevents the character from being taken seriously. In Rulfo's text Bernarda 'no se dejaba manosear de nadie, pues si le buscaban era bronca y mal

[51] In particular, the scene of her arrival with Lorenzo and Dionisio in Santa Gertrudis is risibly staged as La Caponera launches into a rendition of 'El Gavilancillo' flanked by her troupe of mariachis. The segue to this musical scene is painfully abrupt and clumsy.

portada' (Rulfo 2010: 108) while Gavaldón's character (before her incarceration in Santa Gertrudis) is more than happy to serve as an object of male attention. Gavaldón's Caponera only begins to drink once the boredom of life in Santa Gertrudis sets in while Rulfo's character is a heavy drinker from the beginning.

However, the significant differences, with regard to La Caponera, are provided by the screenplay. Rulfo's insistence that La Caponera become a tragic figure that is driven to alcohol-fuelled dementia is central to his narrative. By being introduced to the reader as the typically beautiful and sought after female and then reducing her to nothing, without hope of redemption, Rulfo plays with the reader and punishes any expectation that one may have to witness her renaissance. In this way Rulfo manages to use the template of melodramatic cinema and turn it on his head by denying the reader the happy ending (or at least a tragically satisfying ending akin to that of *Río Escondido*, for example) an audience may have come to expect. Gavaldón's film adheres to convention and he allows Bernarda Cutiño to suffer before he sets her free.

Plenty of Bernarda's lines in the film echo those from the source novel. On the train to Aguascalientes with Dionisio, in order to show Dionisio that she is not inextricably bound to Lorenzo (and, therefore, possibly available to Dioniso in the future) she declares 'La Caponera escoge el hombre que se le antoje y le da de bajo cuando le sale de los riñones'. As mentioned in this chapter, this line is, of course, a reworking of a line that Rulfo gives to Bernarda: 'Y también soy yo quien escoge a los hombres que quiero y los dejo cuando me da la gana' (Rulfo 2010: 127) which, in turn, may be a reworking of lines spoken by María Félix's Doña Bárbara. Later on in the film, while she is holed up in Santa Gertrudis, she

exclaims to Lorenzo '¡Estoy muriendo aquí lejos del sol y del día [...] yo quiero el mundo por casa!' She refuses to sit by Lorenzo's side during the endless card games and has become an alcoholic, stumbling over furniture and collapsing in drunken torpor on the bed, a source of anger and embarrassment for Benavides. He orders her to return to the table and she refuses. Throwing her to the floor and striking her in the face, he shouts: '¡No voy a perder por tu culpa bruja!' As in the source material and in Ripstein's film version, La Caponera (because of her talismanic powers of attracting good fortune) is physically punished and referred to as a witch. She only consents to help Lorenzo again when he agrees to allow her to continue drinking:

> Bernarda: ¿Me sirves una copa?
> Lorenzo: Sí, mi reina.

Rulfo's Caponera is described, by both herself and by the third person narrator, as an independent woman that chooses her own lovers and (before formalising her relationship with Dionisio) enjoys her hard-won freedom. In Gavaldón's film an extra character is supplied to provide a counterpoint to Bernarda—Esculapio's sister Reglita. Reglita is portrayed as an austere and loyal (to her brother, upon which she is dependent) spinster who has remained 'without sin'. When Esculapio is playing cards with Lorenzo to win back Santa Gertrudis, he orders Reglita to choose the deciding card: 'Jálala tú Reglita con tu manita inocente'. When Lorenzo concedes the card game, in response to an earlier scene in which Esculapio declares that the only reason he didn't wager his own sister was because she is 'virgencita y santa'. Reglita, in one of her few lines in the film, taunts Lorenzo: '¿Y no jugó a la Bernarda, nada más porque es señorita y santa?' Reglita is then joined by the other male characters at the card table in a hearty

laugh. This introduces another facet to the portrayal of Gavaldón's Caponera—the notion of promiscuity. While, Bernarda's free nature is never explicitly depicted as anything other than a positive manifestation of female independence in the novel, she is mocked for her behaviour in the film. While she is ultimately punished severely in the novel, she is never mocked for her independence, sexual or otherwise. By making the supporting characters and, by extension, the viewer, chuckle at the notion of Bernarda as 'señorita y santa' Gavaldón's introduces the notion of La Caponera as 'slut'. That is not to say that the idea of female promiscuity is absent from Rulfo's text. His and La Caponera's daughter, Bernarda Pinzón, causes serious ructions in the neighbouring town due to her promiscuous behaviour. However, this scene in the book is more notable for Dionisio's aggressive reaction to the accusations than for the accusations themselves and, as with Pedro Páramo's refusal to chastise his galavanting son Miguel, serves principally to highlight the character of the powerful patriarch. While the representation of Reglita is clearly a tongue-in-cheek figure of ridicule she nevertheless serves as a vehicle with which to draw attention to the sins of La Caponera, a sexually liberated woman who desires freedom above all. However, by juxtaposing the character of Bernarda against that of Reglita, a cheerless and frigid creature utterly dependent upon her obese and charmless oaf of a brother, La Caponera's qualities are highlighted. Although she is chided for her licentious and socially rebellious nature, the alternative (for, Reglita is the only other female character in the film of any consequence) as represented by Reglita, is something joyless and pathetic. Given only two choices, La Caponera's, wanton as it is, is infinitely preferable to the statuesque life of Reglita.

Finally, after making La Caponera (a likeable character in the film) suffer at the hands of Lorenzo (but never Dionisio), Gavaldón grants her and, consequently, the viewer, a happy denouement. The film closes with La Caponera's triumphant return to San Pedro de la Pasión, singing the same song (significantly, *Yo me muera dondequiera*) in a similar carriage to that of the opening scene. While she allowed herself to be incarcerated and manipulated by a man that controlled her through physical intimidation and by encouraging her alcoholism, she finally redeems herself through her own actions and ends the film on a high and this, of course, is the major difference between Rulfo and Gavaldón's Bernarda. What is striking and unusual about Gavaldón's character is that she *is* brazenly open to Dionisio about her sexual freedom and yet, she is presented as a likeable character that ultimately triumphs. On the other hand, Rulfo's Bernarda Cutiño marries Dionisio, bears him a child and remains by his side in Santa Gertrudis and she is rewarded only with the humiliation of incarceration, alcoholism, misery and death. One is rewarded for her independence and the other is destroyed. In this way, Gavaldón's film, though lacking the emotional intensity and stifling, claustrophobic coda of Rulfo's text, brings the Golden-Age of Mexican melodrama to a close (if we, indeed, accept it as the 'last great provincial melodrama' of Mexican cinema) with an upbeat message of liberation. Dionisio has nothing save a coffin for his mother (a triumph of sorts) while Lorenzo Benavides leaves the *palenque* with his head held high but, crucially, alone. La Caponera's final words are of a song of liberation 'Yo me muero dondequiera'.

3.10 *El Imperio de la Fortuna*: Seeing Rulfo Through Ripstein (and Buñuel)

Shot in 1985 and premiered in 1987, *El imperio de la fortuna*, directed by Arturo Ripstein and adapted for the screen by Paz Alicia Garcíadiego, won nine prizes from the Mexican film academy including best film, best director and best actor. The film features the well-known actors Ernesto Gómez Cruz and Blanca Guerra in the main roles of Dionisio and Bernarda. Ernesto Gómez Cruz, playing the part of Dionisio Pinzón, won Best Actor at the festivals of Havana and San Sebastian. In terms of plot and structure, the film deviates little from Rulfo's text. Unlike Gavaldón's version the action does not end when the cockerel dies; rather, it continues to chart Dionisio's luck at card games and his eventual demise in Santa Gertrudis. Ripstein was certainly influenced by his mentor Luis Buñuel and the following section will examine to what extent, and to what end, the Spanish filmmaker's influence can be detected in Ripstein's film. This will be followed by an analysis of the role of the church in the film and conclusions. In this way, the degree to which Rulfo's source material is exploited on film can be gauged. While Ripstein's film closely follows the plot of the novel, the decision to accentuate certain elements of Rulfo's text (misogynism and the squalor of poverty, for example) result in a film that mutates Rulfo's vision, widening the focus even further.

As has been already noted in this investigation, influential film critic Jorge Ayala Blanco dismisses all adaptations of Rulfo's work with the exceptions of *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta,* claiming that all other adaptations were grotesque and unrecognisable. While it is essential to remember that he is writing in 1980, before Ripstein's version had been made, it is also important to note that,

in future editions of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, despite *El imperio de la fortuna* being added to the filmography, Ayala Blanco failed to update his introduction to make any reference to this newer film. Nevertheless, Milagros Ezquerro, in her article 'El gallo de oro o el texto enterrado' refers to *El imperio de la fortuna* as being entirely faithful to both tone and plot of Rulfo's text:

> La esperada versión fílmica se ha llevado a cabo, con total fidelidad no sólo a la historia de *El gallo de oro*, sino también a su ambiente emocional y simbólico, bajo el título de *El imperio de la fortuna*. (Ezquerro 685)

While, as is made clear in this chapter, Ripstein's film adds plenty of detail that is not mentioned in Rulfo's text, the general plot outline is followed throughout. In 2010, Douglas J. Weatherford examined the opening scenes of both Rulfo's text and Gavaldón's and Ripstein's versions and is convinced that, without doubt, Ripstein's film is the more accomplished of the two:

> Queda claro, sin embargo, que *El imperio de la fortuna* es el film más logrado de los dos y el que mejor conserva, por medio de su acercamiento novedoso y muy al estilo artístico de Ripstein, al espiritú de la novela de Rulfo. (Rulfo 2010: 68)

Despite the critical success that the film garnered at home and abroad, (Rulfo was posthumously awarded an Ariel for best original screenplay) various unfavourable responses exist. However, the few negative responses encountered during this investigation seem misguided in their criticism. As mentioned previously, Gustavo García's bizarre comment about Gavaldón's film following Rulfo's plot 'to the letter' seriously damages the credibility of his assessment of both films and even suggests that he may not be wholly familiar with the text that Rulfo wrote. While García is pleased by Gavaldón's adherence to established cinematic convention, Ripstein, by his own admission, saw himself as being thoroughly involved in destroying Mexican cinematic convention:

> The generation I belong to always had the idea that one had to destroy the status quo, one had to destroy tradition. Mexico is a country with great gaps in its history, so tradition has to be continually reinvented. We took upon ourselves the task of making certain kinds of films which would destroy our cinematic tradition and build a new one. (Mora 7)

With specific reference to Ripstein's film, Gabriela Yanes Gómez claims that:

> La soledad y la desolación de los personajes no es correspondida con el paisaje, que en este caso no juega un papel meramente de fondo, sino que es parte de su carácter, de su vida. *El gallo de oro* se relaciona visualmente con la secuencia fotográfica de "Los músicos". (Yanes Gómez 60)

However, Yanes Gómez seems to be referring to the series of photographs that were published in the Ediciones Era edition of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* and, particularly, to the photograph of the instruments without their musicians. Rulfo's text is full of music and he goes to the trouble of including a significant amount of song lyrics. Before the Santa Gertrudis isolation, the novel almost entirely revolves around music and festivals, and Yanes Gómez's claim that the landscape of the film does not correspond to the feeling of Rulfo's original is odd in that, most of the film, and, indeed, large portions of Rulfo's text are set indoors. Yanes Gómez also takes issue with the choice of music that is used in *El imperio de la fortuna*. While Ripstein's film incorporates some of the songs included in Rulfo's text, some noteworthy exceptions occur. The recurring theme of the film is a piece entitled 'Las rosas de mis rosales' which does not feature in Rulfo's original. And Yanes Gómez is particularly concerned with the inclusion of the Italian song 'Volare'. Nevertheless, 'Volare' is a commonly heard song in Mexico and its presence does nothing to diminish the plot.

The role of La Caponera in Rulfo's text is that of a woman who is unlucky enough to be deemed lucky by the men that surround her. Ripstein's film represents a tenacious woman, a heavy drinker with a powerful voice who wilts

uncontrollably when forced to live indoors in Santa Gertrudis. Throughout the film she is depicted as energetic and vibrant. That is, of course, until she is made to wait on Dionisio in the hacienda with only her daughter for company. When Dionisio visits Benavides in his hacienda he comments that Bernarda has been sorely missed at the cockfights, to which she replies with an element of sarcasm: 'pos aquí, acompañando a mi señor. Ahorita les traigo sus tragos.' Later, Bernarda, when briefly freed from Benavides and before she is forever tied to Dionisio after the birth of their daughter, is presented as a strongly independent figure. It is Bernarda, for example, that initiates the first sexual encounter with Dionisio. She fits the description that Rulfo provides in his text. However, the cruelty and humiliation to which she is subjected is explored in more detail by Ripstein and screenwriter Paz Alicia Garcíadiego as anti-female violence is foregrounded throughout *El imperio de la fortuna*.

While in Rulfo's text Benavides refers to Bernarda as a 'bruja', Ripstein's film is stronger in its choice of vocabulary and in the treatment that women suffer at the hands of men. Bernarda, to be sure, is not the only woman to suffer at the hands of men in this film. At the beginning of the film, Dionisio, consciously or otherwise, lets his mother die while he attends to the cockerel—he even spills a clay pot of beans on her as she writhes in agony and offers no apology. As she is dragged through the town and mocked by children and buried with only one shoe, Dionisio's mother is arguably the woman that suffers most in Rulfo's *El gallo de oro*. Ripstein, however, makes abuse of women a major concern of his film. Later, when the scavenging women try to take his cockerel home to their kitchens, Dionisio reacts violently calling them the equivalent of 'fucking whores' and even

strikes the eldest of the women across the head. When Dionisio enters a restaurant the owner slaps a young girl across the back of her head and claims that it is her fault that the cash register is stuck. One of the most poignant moments of the film comes during the first cockfight. When the first cockfight of the film begins, the camera surveys some of the audience. A toothless woman with a large bottle of beer gesticulates wildly beside a man who does the same, but as the camera moves down to the row in front a young woman sits beside a man and stares downwards. Without any interest in the fight, it seems that she is there against her will, perhaps at the behest of her male companion. This short scene lays the seed for what by the end of the film will become the major theme—the imprisonment of women by their men.

Throughout the film, Bernarda is referred to as 'puta' and 'pendeja'. At times this is done in a playful manner. When Bernarda mocks Benavides over his need to use a walking stick, he replies: 'Yo no sé ni por qué te tengo, pendeja.' Bernarda takes the comment in her stride and they both laugh loudly together. However, later, when Dionisio wins the Santa Gertrudis hacienda in a game of cards, Benavides reacts violently: 'Todo lo debes a esta pinche bruja. Tú y ella lo saben muy bien cabrones'. When La Caponera tries to stroke his face and comfort him he strikes her across the face. Oblivious, or simply uncaring, Dionisio counts the money he has just won. When Bernarda, who had not been paying attention to the stakes of the card game asks what happened, Dionisio responds by asking her what the hell she thinks happened and again she is referred to as 'pendeja.' At another point, Dionisio, now aware that her presence allows him to win card games, orders her to her chair: '¡Ándale a tu sillón!', to which she replies 'como

vaca'. Dionisio responds: 'Sí, como vaca, ¡carajo!' When Bernarda unsuccessfully flees the hacienda with her daughter, Dionisiso, when he finds her, says: 'Además de puta, pendeja, Caponera.'

In contrast to the earlier sex scene when Bernarda seduces Dionisio, she later has to beg him for sexual contact. After a brief sexual congress in the *hacienda*, Dionisio leaves her alone and destitute on a throne-like chair. She begs him to stay longer with her to which Dionisio spitefully informs her that he didn't engage in sex with her for 'puro gusto' and that she should continue on without him. Finally, in the most explicit moment of violence against her, Dionisio kicks her dead body repeatedly while screaming: '¿Por qué no me avisaste que estabas muerta, cabrona!'

This continual violence (physical and verbal) against Bernarda and other minor female characters in the film serves Ripstein well in terms of his overarching theme. The abuse of La Caponera and her imprisonment cause her to turn to alcohol (as in Rulfo's text). Her daughter, so well looked after by her doting mother in earlier scenes, is neglected by the preoccupied and avaricious Dionisio and the drunk and bewildered Bernarda. Neglected by her parents she occupies herself with the local men, getting picked up by truck drivers. In this way, in the end, Dionisio is responsible for the death of Bernarda and the fact that his daughter is despised by the locals. Through expanding the theme of imprisonment to also include physical and verbal abuse, Ripstein's film moves away slightly from Rulfo's text. Like many aspects of Rulfo's text, Ripstein takes something that is implied or sketched by Rulfo and explores in detail while never deviating from the plot structure inherited from Rulfo's novel.

El imperio de la fortuna is by no means a Surrealist film. It does, however, bear some traces of Buñuel's influence in this regard. If Breton's famous declaration that Mexico is the Surrealist country par excellence or, rather, if his Surrealist manifesto is taken at face value and then applied to a Mexican context, then some Surrealist tendencies are certainly present in Ripstein's film. The director himself states that:

> […]with Buñuel I share a love for the grotesque, the absurd, and the paradoxical. Buñuel is, we could say, the only foreign filmmaker who has really captured the true essence of Mexico. Every other filmmaker of foreign origin, from Sergei Eisenstein to John Ford, who has gone to Mexico has been baffled by the picturesque and photogenic qualities of my country. (Mora 7)

Surrealism is greatly concerned with the response to unusual juxtapositions. There are plenty to find in Ripstein's film and a few examples are presented here. When Dionisio is employed to announce the arrival of the feria in his home town he leads a bizarre procession of performers behind him—a tall figure in a bear suit, a dwarf clown with a miniature tricycle, a 'china poblana' leading a goat (decorated with ribbons) on a leash and a snake charmer dressed in faux Asian clothing with a fistful of snakes– to mention a few. Later as Dioniso walks by the dispensary of Santa Cecilia a blind man dressed in traditional suede clothing of Tamaulipas tap dances with flashing lights attached to his shirt. As Dioniso's mother dies the severed head of a religious statue that she had been clutching rolls across the floor and lands in the mess created by the spilled beans. The camera lingers on this disturbing image as the head is lit by the slowly flashing red light.

Despite these unusual juxtapositions that recur throughout the film (the camera occasionally wanders past scenes of strangely dressed dwarves performing

or at rest) the strongest traces of the influence of Buñuel are to be found in Ripstein's continual documentation of the indigence to which the characters (main characters and extras) are subjected. Douglas Weatherford has examined the opening scenes of both *El imperio de la fortuna* and *El gallo de oro* and comments upon the fact that from the offset it is clear that Ripstein intends to highlight the squalor and poverty of his protagonists' 'imperio':

> Ripstein prefiere enseñar un mundo contemporáneo tajante y es, en muchos sentidos, un heredero espiritual de los espacios caducos, sofocantes y degradantes que se encuentran en *Los olvidados* (1950) de Luis Buñuel. (Rulfo 2010: 66)

Much has been made of Ripstein's apprenticeship under Buñuel—Ripstein was his assistant during the making of *El ángel exterminador* and barraged him with questions during this period. (Mora 7) When it was put to Ripstein that *El imperio de la fortuna* might represent a sort of homage to Buñuel, Ripstein's answer was candid: 'Robé muchas cosas de Buñuel, ¡pero homenajes jamás!'[52] Whether borrowed or stolen, there is a clearly discernible debt to *Los olvidados* present throughout *El imperio de la fortuna*. Ripstein's adaptation of Rulfo's novel begins in a tiny hovel lit by the pink glow of a neon light and a Christmas decoration. The abject poverty of Dionisio is emphasised from the offset and is depicted by his tiny house in which there is just one bed and two petates. Dionisio shares this tiny abode with his sick mother and Weatherford notes how 'el mensaje es claro: esta obra va a enfatizar lo feo y lo sórdido del protagonista.' (Rulfo 2010: 67) This scene is a sign of what is to come as, throughout the film, and particularly in the latter stages as Dionisio is holed up in his hacienda at Santa Gertrudis, the claustrophobic and confined nature of indoor life is highlighted.

[52] Email correspondence with Arturo Ripstein, August 2009.

While Figueroa is continually drawn to the wide open expanse of the countryside and the unending skies, Ripstein, as Weatherford notes, keeps his camera low to the ground and, almost always, indoors in order to emphasise 'los espacios cerrados y claustrofóbicos' and to reveal 'la suciedad de la existencia humana'. (Rulfo 2010: 67) While some of the early scenes after Dionisio and his cockerel's early successes are filmed as he walks through the countryside singing to his animal and telling it about his attraction to Bernarda beneath blue skies and immense cumulous clouds, this soon ends and much of the action takes place indoors. This both serves to create the appropriate sense of claustrophobia and to highlight Bernarda's pathetic existence as Dionisio's slave/partner.

The squalid is present throughout. In the early scenes, the miserable existence of Dionisio and his mother is clearly apparent. As Dionisio makes his morning announcements ('¡Santo vs. Espectro!') the camera cuts away to some hungry children dressed in dirty clothes eating beside some wooden boxes. The image is only a second long or less but this and many other similar scenes serve to construct a poverty-stricken world around the protagonists. As La Caponera performs for the second time in the film, the camera rolls by from a distance, close to the ground. In the foreground a cow is tied to a pole and rubbish, discarded bits of wood and broken furniture, are strewn across the floor of the tent. When Dionisio's cockerel finally dies he lays it on the ground beside the other lifeless animals and goes to urinate as a dog sniffs around the dead cockerels. As he is occupied a group of women (old and young) and a young boy come around the corner and begin to collect the deceased animals in newspaper. Dionisio is horrified and reclaims the corpse of his cockerel by force, hitting the

eldest of the women across the head shouting '¡Pinches Viejas! ¿No saben cómo murieron?' Aside from the violence against women which this scene highlights (commented upon in the preceding section), the poverty of small town Mexico is glaringly apparent. Instead of leaving these dead creatures to the dog, the women cannot bear to waste fresh meat that could feed a family. Perhaps, the most obvious example of extreme poverty comes at the beginning of the film when Dionisio's mother dies. The scene, echoing the novel, is perfectly executed and as the camera cuts from Dionisio saving the cockerel to his mother dying in the house covered in the beans she had been cooking, the message is clear. Dioniso chooses the cockerel over his mother, neglecting her in her hour of need to care for the sick animal. It was Dionisio who, entering the house to hastily grab a *molcajete* stone, knocks the pot of beans onto his mother who writhes around the ground in her death throes. While Dionisio neglected his mother and tended, instead, to the animal, he is heartbroken when he discovers her dead on the floor. Utterly distraught, he wraps her in the petate upon which she has just died and drags her to the local store 'La Paz'. As he lays the wrapped corpse upon the ground in front, a man sitting on the bench with a beer notices the two human feet at the end of the petate yet does not seem to react. When the store owner, Doña Iris, appears in the hole in the wall, Dionisio explains that he needs to borrow money in order to give his mother a Christian burial. Iris tells him to ask the priest since they seem to get along so well. The priest, however (in Dionisio's time of need), is unavailable and Doña Iris, angered by Dionisio's constant begging exclaims 'No tengo, Dionisio, y si tuviera, pos tampoco tengo.' The final insult comes when Dionisio, dragging his mother's corpses across a small square passes

some young boys gambling. They laugh and shout about the fact that the corpse only has one shoe. Finally, Dionisio, buries his mother, not in the graveyard but in a corn field, covering her shoeless foot with a discarded corn husk.

While there are many differences between Buñuel's seminal film *Los olvidados* and *El imperio de la fortuna*, the persistent focus that Ripstein places on the poverty of small town, rural Mexico recalls the Spaniard's earlier film in which the squalor of urban Mexico is placed centre stage. *El imperio de la fortuna*, as has been stated previously, is a faithful adaptation of Rulfo's original text with regard to the plot. However, the squalor and poverty (absent or idealised in Gavaldón's film) that are sketched by Rulfo are fleshed out effectively in Ripstein's version. In this way the film is both true to the source material while highlighting Ripstein's concerns. This does not mean that Ripstein's adaptation is a film about poverty in rural Mexico. It is, however, a story that takes place where poverty is all around and this atmosphere by simple narrative devices—the wandering camera and the short asides that focus on the living conditions of these small towns without distracting from the story of Dionisio and Bernarda. Also, by placing the action in the 1980s or late 1970s, Ripstein manages to implicitly criticise the Mexican economy by showing how things had not improved since the time in which the *El gallo de oro* was written—in the mid1950s.

The role of the church is significant in the early stages of the film. In Rulfo's source text, the priest features briefly at the beginning, enjoying the services of Dionisio but offering little in return. Ripstein focuses his attentions on the avarice of the church on a number of occasions. After Dionisio has run through a river outside of town in order to re-capture the priest's escaped cow he

comes to the clergyman to receive his reward. When he enters, he finds his host sitting at the kitchen table watching a flickering image on the television. The father neither acknowledges the presence of the woman that serves him nor looks at Dionisio as he enters. In fact, when Dionisio attempts to address the priest by standing in front of him, the latter, eyes still glued to the television screen, ushers Dionisio to one side with his hand. When the priest finally turns to his guest and learns that the cow has been caught he thanks Dionisio and assures him that he will be rewarded in heaven: 'Se pagará allá en el cielo, que ya ves que la parroquia rinde poco'. Then, after chastising Dionisio for not prominently displaying his scapular, he gives him a blessing while again turning to look at the television. As Dionisio leaves, he offers his hand to Dionisio, who, in turn, kisses his ring. The lack of concern that the distracted churchman shows for the wellbeing of Dionisio is apparent and this scene needs no further comment. Later, when Dionisio is desperately in need of the priest to allow him to grant his mother a Christian burial, the priest is unavailable, working in 'other parishes'.

Despite the ill-treatment at the hands of the priest, both Ripstein and Dionisio get their own back by humiliating the church in their own ways. When Dionisio is about to put himself and his cockerel forward for their first fight he walks into a town past a sign that reads: 'El dispensario de Santa Cecilia se prestó a rentarse al palenque porque necesita mas fondos de dinero'. The announcement makes clear that not only is the local convent willing to provide their space for the purposes of allowing drinking and gambling, they are doing it for money. One of the cockfight organisers takes down the sign despite the protests of a nun who pleads: 'Oiga no lo quite. Es el prestigio de dios' to which the man responds

'Como crees, la gente viene a jugar'. Much to the nun's disappointment the sign is removed. Later, when Dionisio's animal finally dies, it is in a church building when the onlookers have positioned the pews close to the *palenque*. In a reversal of the debacle surrounding the burial of his mother he, once the cockerel is re-captured from the scavenging women, buries it in a Christian graveyard beside a crucifix. Throughout the film, the church is depicted as an organisation that reaps the rewards of those who adhere to their teachings without presenting anything practical in return—an organisation that is only too willing to allow drinking and gambling once there is a financial reward for their institutions. While this criticism of the church is only hinted at in the original text it permeates Ripstein's film and contributes to the overall tone of control and submission.

3.11 *El gallo de oro* On Page and Screen: Conclusions

While Gavaldón's script introduces new elements, divides the character of Rulfo's Dionisio and excises major elements of the original material, Ripstein's film is a faithful reproduction of the original, containing all the major plot elements of the novel and replicating the suffocating claustrophobia of Rulfo's extended coda played out in the rooms of Santa Gertrudis. While Ripstein keeps his camera focused on the poverty and squalor of rural Mexico, Gavaldón (and, importantly, cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa) frames his heroes against the romantic and aesthetically pleasing landscapes of Querétero state. Ripstein's characters are visibly poor, miserable and dirty, while it is rare to see a speck of dust on the costumes of the participants in Gavaldón's melodrama. Though Rulfo's text feels atemporal, Ripstein places the action in 1980s rural Mexico. Trucks, cars and electricity are present throughout. Ripstein and Garciadiego respect the source

material yet incorporate elements of social realism as well as the influence of both Buñuel and, to a lesser extent Welles. In a similar manner to Charles Foster Kane's massive collection of sculptures, there are many sculptures (mostly copies of classical works) among which the young Bernardita amuses herself. Not mentioned in the source material, Santa Gertrudis's resemblance to Kane's Xanadu comes further to the fore in *El imperio de la fortuna* than in Rulfo's original. On the other hand, Gavaldón's film is situated in 1930. The year is stated clearly on one of the posters that advertises a local fair. More importantly than being set in 1930 Mexico, *El gallo de oro* (1964), unfolds within the world of Mexican Golden-Age cinema. The large sets, spotless costumes, *charros*, attractive female characters, spontaneous musical outbursts and romanticised cinematography clearly pay homage to the films that have come before. The María Félix role, though not played by La Doña herself, identifies the film as belonging within (or actively wanting to belong within) the pantheon of preceding melodramas.

Gavaldón's film accepts the fantastic and mysterious powers that La Caponera seems to possess in Rulfo's text and easily incorporates this less believable element as the film's plot unfurls within a scarcely believable, romanticised, *Figueroan*, world. Poverty never seems too hard to swallow within Gavaldón's world. In fact, monetary riches seem to only bring misery to those who are unlucky enough to gain them. At the end of the film the only characters of note that are definitely economically prosperous are Esculapio and his sister. In other words, the only ones to possess material wealth are frigid or obese, perennially greedy or hopelessly dour. In this way, Gavaldón's film accentuates

the roots of the source material (or at least its title upon publication) in exemplary fable. The voiceover at the end confirms this as an unseen and omniscient storyteller chides Dionisio for the foolishness of ever believing he could rise above his station through dependence on fortune. In this way, Gavaldón's film accepts the cyclical nature of the wheels of fortune. Dionisio goes from poor to rich to poor and La Caponera from free to incarcerated to free again. Fortune lifts and then drops in equal measures. Of course, in Rulfo's text, the demise of both Bernarda and Dionisio, allows for no final uplifting. The cyclical nature of fortune is manifested through their daughter who carries on the tradition of La Caponera and her mother before her. Gavaldón's film is less cruel on its protagonists and, while attempting to maintain themes from the source material, lacks the intensity of Rulfo's text. In the final stages of the novel, the incarceration of Bernarda in Santa Gertrudis is long and painful and, finally, without any relief other than death for both Bernarda and Dionisio. The punishment for the wilful attempt to dominate one's object of desire through imprisonment is dementia and death. This theme, absent in Gavaldón's film, is essential to any appraisal of Rulfo's fiction in its entirety. The fact that this theme does not feature must be considered, for anyone hoping to see an accurate representation of the atmosphere of Rulfo's original text, a major flaw of Gavaldón's film which ends unsatisfactorily. While Bernarda's ultimate triumph is an interesting statement on the part of Gavaldón and his fellow screenwriters, the flat characterisations of Lorenzo and Dionisio and their exits from the action seem strangely inconsequential.

In both Rulfo and Ripstein's versions the good times end for both Dionisio and Bernarda once the pair stop travelling around the festival circuit and ensconce

themselves in Santa Gertrudis. Like Pedro Páramo, Dionisio attempts to imprison the female object of his desire against her will with the consequences being disastrous for all concerned. This is the crux of the story that Ripstein and Garciadiego recognise, devoting almost an hour of the film to the time that Bernarda spends trapped and her attempts to re-enter the travelling festival circuit. The final scene of the source text in which Bernarda Pinzón sets off on her own to follow in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother (who both met disastrous ends) is respected in Risptein's version too. However, what makes *El imperio de la fortuna* such a successful film is not only that it follows the guidelines taken from the source material. Ripstein adds much of his own making and this helps to construct a believable world in which poverty is rife, the church is aloof unless financial gain is at stake and women are continually mistreated throughout. Bernarda's magic and talismanic powers are not overly accentuated in keeping with the social realism of the film and this is, perhaps, what leads García to lament the lack of what he refers to as Rulfo's 'magical realism' (García 161). However, by presenting Bernarda's magical powers of allowing her male companions to always win at cards in such a matter of fact manner, the impact is greater and is greater felt when she dies and the 'magical realism' (entirely absent in Gavaldón's film despite the claims of García) is all the more apparent as the supernatural is presented in the same dry manner as the mundane. As Dionisio kicks La Caponera'a lifeless body it is clear that whatever trace of attraction and tenderness he once felt for her are long gone and he was only interested in her ability to allow him to gain financially. In conclusion, Ripstein's film benefits greatly from both his adherence to Rulfo's plot and themes and his own decision

(and that of Garciadiego) to pepper the film with realist detail as a scarcely believable parable unfurls within a believable world.

While it is too speculative to label *El gallo de oro* as Rulfo's conscious decision to write a cinematic version of *Pedro Páramo*, it certainly reworks the major themes of his first novel in a melodramatic fashion reminiscent of Mexican films of the preceding years. Rulfo's own words on the matter and the analysis presented in this chapter leave little doubt that the novel was written with the intention of one day being used for cinema. The folkloric elements of Mexican cinema are present—the text is punctuated with traditional songs; the action revolves around travelling carnivals and the sport of cockfighting. Also, the major role is for a dominant female in the María Félix mould. Nevertheless, the narrative arcs of both of Rulfo's novels move towards a cloistered woman's demise in the male-ruled *hacienda*. The circumstances differ but both novels at the core revolve around a power-hungry man who attempts to attain happiness through amassed power and insistence upon denying freedom to the woman he desires. In this way, Rulfo again enters new territory while simultaneously exploring pre-existing preoccupations. The carnival world of cockfighting, singing and gambling of the author's second novel is absent in Rulfo's other work and serves to situate the narrative within the domain of Mexican melodramatic cinema. In fact, the carnival atmosphere of Mexican melodramatic cinema is described by Monsváis with his list of what he refers to as The Mythological Atmospheres of Golden Age. His could easily double as a description of the atmosphere throughout the pre-Santa Gertrudis stages of *El gallo de oro*:

> The Mexican fiesta, with a plentitude of charros and china poblanas, mariachis and trios, bold women and fighting cocks. (Monsiváis 2006: 51)

The inclusion of song lyrics and the links with the oral tradition again add a new perspective to his writings. Nevertheless, Rulfo seems to situate the narrative within this melodramatic world only to cheat the reader/viewer out of hitherto expected resolutions. The similarities with *Pedro Páramo* and 'Cleotilde' allow the Rulfian investigator to identify the ultimately fruitless domination of women by besotted and brutish *hacendados* as a major theme in Rulfo as this is the dominant theme in *El gallo de oro*. True, Rulfo created a role that would have perfectly suited María Félix but he did so in order to shock the reader/viewer with her ultimate fruitless demise, void of any kind of redemption or moral lesson. Félix's characters were often resistant to male domination and, therefore, a model of female independence in the face of male chauvinism. Nevertheless, as exemplified in *Enamorada*, her characters frequently find themselves as mouthpieces for the defenders of state and family and very often become that which they superficially seem to oppose, symbols of female domination in a *machista* society. The other theme that is significant in Golden Age Mexican Cinema is that of the fetishisation of poverty. Rulfo makes his character suffer from extreme economic hardship. However, as explored in this chapter, Dionisio's destitution is never dignified. His desire for riches is entirely logical and when he achieves them he merely copies the behaviour of the rich landowner as all he knows is the poverty of the peasant and the cruelty of the *hacendado*. Neither give him any happiness and he dies in misery.

When one considers the links with the moralistic films of Emilio Fernández, in conjunction with the obvious association with Aesop and his fables, it is unsurprising that this narrative seems to suggest that it may contain a

moralistic lesson. Dionisio, blessed with the new life afforded to him by the golden cockerel, goes to great lengths to ensure the wellbeing of his creature. After all, it provides him with his livelihood. Yet, when the male cockerel is replaced by Bernarda (The Castrator), he fails to care for her in the same way. If one wants to find a message here in the tradition of Aesop one can certainly do so—had Dionisio cared for his female benefactor in the same way as he did for his male cockerel, things could have turned out far differently.

Finally, Rulfo, through playing with preconceived notions about how both poverty and a feisty female protagonist should be explored he manages to continue the vital themes of his fiction – the misery of the peasant in rural Mexico and the infelicities associated with the domination of independently minded women by their male companions.

CHAPTER FOUR: INFINITE REGIONS – CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Nothing New Here? – Rulfo's Ouroboros

Rulfo's cinematic texts are clearly collaborative projects and it may be argued that *this* provides the key to understanding the presence of previously unaddressed themes. One could argue, with particular reference to *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*, that Rulfo is treading the same ground and that it is only the work of his collaborators that makes these works stand apart. After all, Rulfo's story of an abused *campesino* murdering his abuser sounds like something lifted from *El Llano en llamas* and the characters to whom he gives voice in *La fórmula secreta* could easily have walked onto the screen straight from the pages of 'Nos han dado la tierra' or 'Paso del Norte'. One could argue that it was Reynoso who provides the bulk of the indigenous elements of *El despojo* through the soundtrack and that the fractured vision of a Mexico struggling with its identity in the face of growing cultural encroachment from the north is the vision of Gámez and not Rulfo in *La fórmula secreta*. However, this argument seems less substantial when the texts are analysed in detail as they have been throughout this investigation. Firstly, this argument fails to consider that, though Rulfo was not directly responsible for every element of the films, his decision to collaborate with these filmmakers marks a desire to be involved in works of art that differed from his own previous narrative prose. For example, upon seeing sections of the film that Gámez made and consenting to provide the monologues, he essentially agrees to allow his peculiar vision of discontented *campesinos* to exist within the multiple worlds of Gámez's mosaical vision. Secondly, that argument ignores the elements of the films that are of Rulfo's own creation. For example, the Nahual character, though

obviously inspired by Spanish misinterpretations of indigenous culture, is his own character, invented for that story and, subsequently, produced on screen by Reynoso—a collaboration, yes, but one initiated by Rulfo. Finally, *El gallo de oro*, in its novelistic form, is an entirely uncollaborative enterprise, only becoming a cinematic collaboration when eventually brought to the screen by Gavaldón and Ripstein. Then, and only then, once its cinematic versions are screened, does Rulfo lose the element of control.

Rulfo takes the thematic strands already present in *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* and allows them to both unfurl and to tangle with other, previously ignored, thematic strands in his cinematic texts. In this way, characters, born in the abandoned towns of Luvina and Comala and the scorched plains of Jalisco, walk into territory that he had not previously charted. They move into the geographically precise locations of *El gallo de oro* (San Miguel del Milagro, Tlaquepaque), they interact with archetypal songstresses from the screens of Mexican cinema, they haunt the streets of the then-predominantly Otomí village of Cardonal (though it remains unnamed throughout *El despojo*), and they clash with images of foreign influence and an urbanised and mechanised new world in *La fórmula secreta*. Salvador Elizondo, in his homage to Rulfo, describes the author's vision of Mexico as being one of the self-devouring Ouroboros existing within infinite regions inhabited by more of the same:

> Yo concebí, en ese tiempo, una visión de México en la que *El Llano en llamas* era como el complemento dialéctico, eterno del laberinto en cuyo último centro la última serpiente se muerde la cola de su propio infinito, minúsculo y regional, como el de todos, pero ligado a otros intentos de infinitos minúsculos y regionales, urbanos en sus grandes momentos del siglo xx. (Elizondo 494)

For Elizondo, Rulfo, instead of holding up a mirror to society, seems to hold up two mirrors facing each other in which regions within regions replicate acts of self-devoration in an infinitely-faceted eternity. The metaphor works well with regard to Rulfo's cinematic texts. The ground work has been done with his previous fiction. The Rulfian world of corrupt landowners, miserable *campesinos* in which treachery, deceit and murder abound, has been more than delineated in stories such as 'Nos han dado la tierra' and '¡Diles que no me maten!'; the abject misery of female characters eternally bound by the constraints of their husbands, fathers, and incestuous brothers have been described memorably in *Pedro Páramo*, 'Es que somos muy pobres' and 'La herencia de Matilde Arcángel'; and the callousness of *hacendados* and government officials has been well defined in stories such as 'El día del derrumbe'. Now, in his cinematic texts, Rulfo allows his regional work to exist within a multi-regional forum. While his Luvina and Comala are fictional constructs, it is widely understood that they are situated, realistically or imaginatively, within rural Jalisco. The worlds of *El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro* represent the previously constructed Rulfian territories making contact with the multitudinous Mexicos existing on and beyond their circumferences. Elizondo's idea of multiple regions within regions is revealing and Rulfo's cinematic texts can be seen as representing this notion. The new elements present in these texts (the indigenous elements of *El despojo*, the melodramatic exuberhance of *El gallo de oro* and the fragments within fragments of *La fórmula secreta*) represent the ways in which Rulfo's previously constructed world (miniscule, infinite and regional as Elizondo has it) reaches out to contact the other worlds within which it exists.

It is true that, of the three cinematic texts examined in this investigation, *La fórmula secreta* lends itself most easily to this kind of interpretation since, in no other Rulfian work does form represent meaning more clearly than it does within this collaborative construct. The film is punctuated by scenes of what Gámez interpreted as the Rulfian world but these scenes are surrounded by and almost consumed by clashing visions of meat, machines, priests, slaughter and lust. The characters presented by Rulfo in *El Llano en llamas* and appropriated by Gámez inhabit their world and are constantly battered by images of other worlds that exist within the boundaries of Mexico and even beyond. However, to limit this study to the Rulfo/Gámez collaboration would be to ignore the irregular nature of *El gallo de oro y otros textos*. While this study prefers to reference newer, corrected versions of the texts, the original proves the impetus for most critical examinations of these texts. Without this publication in 1980, the three works under scrutiny here would be even less well known than they currently are. This Ediciones Era publication is thematically uneven to say the least and, with its orthographical errors and glaring textual omissions, possesses a decidedly hastily-assembled feel. Yet the compendium was published during the life of Rulfo, with his permission, and to to ignore the other texts would be to fail to fully examine Rulfo's third and final book of prose. Just as the images of *La fórmula secreta* clash against each other and must be codified in the mind of the spectator, so too do the three texts collide. In the study of their differences their similarities stand out and vice versa. While these three texts all make contact with territories beyond the borders of *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, it is their shared ground that provides the final piece in the riddle posed by Elizondo. The Ouroboros, the snake

that eats its own tail is not only a symbol of eternity but also one of self-destruction. Within Rulfo's photography, as noted by de Luigi, stasis is more evident than the decisive moment of Cartier-Bresson. In the same way, within the new worlds of Rulfo's cinematic texts, the social problems seem unchanging. Each miniscule and infinite region, though differentiated by the newer elements included by Rulfo, suffer the same problems and these problems seem infinite. Within *El despojo*, the struggles of the indigenous peoples are coupled with those of the *mestizo campesinos* and they cannot be avoided. No matter how far the characters are distanced, as in the dream within a dreamlike world of *El despojo*, the protagonist, even in his own imagination cannot escape the hardships of poverty and corruption. In *El gallo de oro*, Rulfo heightens the melodrama to fever pitch and surrounds the characters with music and the carnivalesque. In this way Rulfo singles out the unbelievable and, frequently moralistic world of Mexican Golden-Age cinema and, instead of conforming to the established ideals, i.e. using art to right the wrongs of the real world, he presents a parody of the idealised screen-world. He infiltrates the world of melodrama, so greatly consumed by spectators located within the arbitrary confines of his 'muchos Méxicos' and brings it crashing down around his characters. In this way, though less obviously apparent as it occurs within his collaboration with Gámez, *El despojo* and *El gallo de oro* both represent the way in which the desperation of Rulfo's first two books is still present. Now, however, he clearly shows that its presence is not confined to the *campesinos* of Jalisco. Rather, *El despojo*, *La fórmula secreta* and *El gallo de oro*, show that the infelicities of twentieth century Mexico cannot be escaped at the border, in the indigenous *inframundo* or even

within the fantasy world of melodramatic cinema. In this way, the problems of the 'muchos Méxicos' are universally present within real and imaginary infinite regions.

4.2 New Directions

Under the stewardship of Víctor Jiménez, the Fundación Juan Rulfo has been heavily involved in changing the way in which the public understands Rulfo's work. Recent publications and investigations revolving around Rulfo's relationship with cinema and photography have been central to this process. The Fundación has been instrumental in supporting the work of investigators such as Paulina Millán Vargas, an expert on Rulfo's photography and other researchers such as Daniele de Luigi and Douglas J. Weatherford. In tandem with the work of more seasoned Rulfian scholars such as José Carlos González Boixo and Alberto Vital, the cinematic and photographic work of Rulfo has crept closer and closer to the forefront of Rulfian scholarship. By focusing on the three texts of *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine*, this research continues this process and, in providing the most in-depth analyses of the texts to date, aims to widen the scope of Rulfian criticism and expose a multitude of other artistic endeavours with which Rulfo was involved. It was originally envisaged that this investigation would include analyses of Rulfo's photographic projects. However, the constraints of attempting to provide in-depth analyses of the three films meant that the photographic work will need to provide the basis for further investigations. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the arguments made in this investigation could easily have been made about Rulfo's photographic output. Millán Vargas's work in this area is crucial to providing an understanding that Rulfo was involved in a wide range of projects

photographing train-tracks, indigenous communities of the Papaloapan region, architectural ruins among other projects, commissioned and otherwise. Before her research in this area, critical reception of Rulfo's photography tended to concentrate on presenting the pictures as mere illustrations of the canonical texts as in Howard M. Fraser's "*Inframundo*: Juan Rulfo's Photographic Companion to *El llano en llamas*" (Chasqui, 1988). Nevertheless, by only focusing on the ways in which (some of) Rulfo's photography seems to portray the forgotten towns of Rulfo's first two books of fiction, many other facets of his photographic output become disregarded, abandoned for not fitting with the established narrative that Rulfo published two books and anything else he did must be regarded only insofar as it highlights those two books. In the same way, to only follow the thematic strands that reach from *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* into the pages of his cinematic texts and, subsequently, onto cinema screens would be to disregard the newer elements. It seems that Rulfo found, through new media, both freedom and constraint. A tension is formed from his ability to represent indigenous communities, urban landscapes and other hitherto absent elements and his constant desire to address the abuses of landowners, those who govern (illegally or otherwise) and those who would attempt to confine their female partners to lives of ensconced servitude. As this research shows, this tension provides fertile ground for new interpretations of the work of Juan Rulfo.

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APPENDIX: *LA FÓRMULA SECRETA* – THE TEXT

The methodology used for the establishment of the definitive version of the text is straightforward. The two previously published versions of the text (from 1976 and 1980) are compared in conjunction with the soundtrack and all available scholarly work on the topic thus far. Discrepancies between the two published versions (referred to below as Text A and Text B) are highlighted and resolved to create a third text (referred to below as Text C. As already explained, this has now been accepted as the definitive text and published by the Fundación Juan Rulfo).

The text for *La fórmula secreta* features two separate monologues which feature in sections 3 and 7 of the film. It was first published in the 'La cultura en México' supplement of the magazine *Siempre!* in March, 1976 and, this remained its only publication until *El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine* in 1980. It is from the introduction provided in 'La cultura en México' we learn that the monologues were written by Rulfo 'a posteriori' after Rulfo had seen Gámez's images. Of the little critical attention that *La fórmula secreta* has garnered by Rulfian scholars, much of it has, naturally, centred around Rulfo's contribution and how it further re-iterates concerns and atmospheres previously articulated in stories from *El Llano en llamas*:

> Las secuencias de esta cinta relativas al hombre del campo corresponden de alguna manera a escenas de *El Llano en llamas*. Hay una toma de una hilera de campesinos que sube una cuesta muy empinada: ecos de "El hombre", de "Paso del Norte". Las tomas a cuadro de los rostros serios y herméticos nada tienen que ver con la visión folclórica del campesino mexicano que ha sido constante en las adaptaciones de Rulfo al cine. (Yanes Gómez 42-43)

However, before engaging fully with the implications of the text, the inconsistencies in the text must be addressed. From this point, we will refer to the 1976 text as Text A and the 1980 text as Text B. While the differences are small, they have yet to be critically addressed. The two texts are provided below in their entirety.

La cultura en México, ***Siempre***, 31/03/76	***El gallo de oro y otros textos para cine***, 1980
A	B
LA FORMULA SECRETA	**La fórmula secreta**
(poema para cine)	
I	I
Ustedes dirán que es pura necedad la mía,	Ustedes dirán que es pura necedad la mía,
que es un desatino lamentarse de la suerte,	que es un desatino lamentarse de la suerte,
y cuantimás de esta tierra pasmada	y cuantimás de esta tierra pasmada
donde nos olvidó el destino.	donde nos olvidó el destino.
La verdad es que cuesta trabajo aclimatarse	La verdad es que cuesta trabajo aclimatarse al
al hambre.	hambre.
Y aunque digan que el hambre	Y aunque digan que el hambre
repartida entre muchos	repartida entre muchos
toca a menos,	toca a menos,
lo único cierto es que todos	lo único cierto es que todos
aquí	aquí
estamos a medio morir	estamos a medio morir
y no tenemos ni siquiera	y no tenemos ni siquiera

donde caernos muertos.	dónde caernos muertos.
Según parece	Según parece
Ya nos viene de a derecho la de malas.	Ya nos viene de a derecho la de malas.
Nada de que hay que echarle nudo ciego a este asunto.	Nada de que hay que echarle nudo ciego a este asunto.
Nada de eso.	Nada de eso.
Desde que el mundo es mundo	Desde que el mundo es mundo
hemos andado con el ombligo pegado al espinazo.	hemos echado a andar con el ombligo pegado al espinazo.
y agarrándonos del viento con las uñas.	y agarrándonos del viento con las uñas.
Se nos regatea hasta la sombra,	Se nos regatea hasta la sombra,
y a pesar de	y a pesar de todo así seguimos:
todo así seguimos:	medio aturdidos por el maldecido sol
medio aturdidos por el maldecido sol	que nos cunde a diario a despedazos,
que nos cunde a diario a despedazos,	siempre con la misma jeringa,
siempre con la misma jeringa,	como si quisiera revivir más el rescoldo.
como si quisiera revivir más el rescoldo.	Aunque bien sabemos
Aunque bien sabemos	que ni ardiendo en brasas
que ni ardiendo en brasas	se nos prenderá la suerte.
se nos prenderá la suerte.	
	Pero somos porfiados.
Pero somos porfiados.	Tal vez esto tenga compostura.
Tal vez esto tenga compostura.	
	El mundo está inundado de gente como nosotros,
El mundo está inundado de gente como nosotros,	de mucha gente como nosotros.
de mucha gente como nosotros.	Y alguien tiene que oírnos,
	alguien y algunos más,

Y alguien tiene que oírnos, alguien y algunos más, aunque les revienten o reboten nuestros gritos. No es que seamos alzados, Ni es que le estemos pidiendo limosnas a la luna. Ni está en nuestro camino buscar de prisa la covacha, o arrancar pa'l monte cada que nos cuchillean los perros. Alguien tendrá que oírnos. Cuando dejemos de gruñir como avispas en enjambre, o nos volvamos cola de remolino, o cuando terminemos por escurrirnos sobre la tierra como un relámpago de muertos, entonces tal vez nos llegue a todos el remedio.	aunque les revienten o reboten nuestros gritos. No es que seamos alzados, Ni es que le estemos pidiendo limosnas a la luna. Ni está en nuestro camino buscar de prisa la covacha, o arrancar pa'l monte cada vez que nos cuchilean los perros. Alguien tendrá que oírnos. Cuando dejemos de gruñir como avispas en enjambre, o nos volvamos cola de remolino, o cuando terminemos por escurrirnos sobre la tierra como un relámpago de muertos, entonces tal vez llegue a todos el remedio. II Cola de relámpago, Remolino de muertos. Con el vuelo que llevan, poco les durará el esfuerzo. Tal vez acaben deshechos en espuma o se los trague este aire lleno de cenizas. Y hasta pueden perderse

II

Cola de relámpago,
  Remolino de muertos.
Con el vuelo que llevan,
  poco les durará el esfuerzo.
Tal vez acaben deshechos en espuma
  o se los trague este aire lleno de cenizas.
Y hasta pueden perderse
  yendo a tientas
    entre la revuelta oscuridad.

Al fin y al cabo ya son puro escombro.

El alma se han de haber partido
  de tanto darle potreones a la vida.
Puede que se acalambren entre las hebras
heladas de la noche,
o el miedo los liquide
      borrándoles hasta el resuello.

San Mateo amaneció desde ayer con la cara
ensombrecida.

Ruega por nosotros.

Ánimas benditas del purgatorio.

Ruega por nosotros.

  yendo a tientas
    entre la revuelta oscuridad.

Al fin y al cabo ya son puro escombro.
El alma se ha de haber partido
  de tanto darle potreones a la vida.
Puede que se acalambren
  entre las hebras heladas de la noche.
O el miedo los liquide
    borrándoles hasta el resuello.

San Mateo amaneció desde ayer con la cara
    ensombrecida.

Ruega por nosotros.

Ánimas benditas del purgatorio.

Ruega por nosotros.

Tan alta que está la noche y ni con qué velarlos.

Ruega por nosotros.

Santo Dios, Santo Inmortal.

Ruega por nosotros.

Ya están todos medio pachiches de tanto que el sol
  se ha sorbido el jugo.

Ruega por nosotros.

Santo san Antoñito.

Tan alta que está la noche y ni con qué velarlos. **Ruega por nosotros.** Santo Dios, Santo Inmortal. **Ruega por nosotros.** Ya están todos medio pachiches de tanto que el sol se ha sorbido el jugo. **Ruega por nosotros.** Santo san Antoñito. **Ruega por nosotros.** Atajo de malvados, punta de holgazanes. **Ruega por nosotros.** Sarta de bribones, retahila de vagos. **Ruega por nosotros.** Cáfila de bandidos. **Ruega por nosotros.** Al menos éstos ya no vivirán calados por el hambre.	*Ruega por nosotros.* Atajo de malvados, retahila de vagos. *Ruega por nosotros.* Cáfila de bandidos. *Ruega por nosotros.* Al menos éstos ya no vivirán calados por el hambre.

The first thing to be noted from the texts is that there are some orthographical errors as well as divergences from the film's soundtrack. In Text A, line 49 'cuchillean' should read 'cuchilean' and the 'vez' in Text B is unnecessary as the line is heard on the film's soundtrack as follows: 'cada que nos cuchilean los perros'. The verb 'Cuchilear' is not a commonly used verb and, for this reason, is included in López Mena's *Diccionario de la obra de Juan Rulfo*. López Mena describes the verb as follows:

> Verbo que tiene el significado de "perseguir" en el fragmento de *La fórmula secreta* […] Al parecer, esta palabra está relacionada con la voz *cusilear*, que registra Malaret con el sentido de "azuzar a los perros". (López Mena 70)

Víctor Jiménez describes the verb similarly:

> "Cuchilear" es un mexicanismo que equivale, más o menos, a "acosar" o "espantar", ya se trate de animales o personas a las que debe obligarse a hacer algo.[53]

Nevertheless, López Mena, despite listing the verb as 'cuchilear', does allow for the possibility of the form 'cuchillear' and explains why:

> Santamaría registra las voces *cuchilear* y *cuchillear*, e ilustra la segunda con una cita de Francisco L. Urquizo. Define así "cuchillear": "En diversas partes de Méjico, *azuzar*, que en Tabasco se dice *cuxilear*. (López Mena 70)

Despite this observation about the use of 'cuchillear', a close inspection of Sabines's voice on the soundtrack settles the argument and Jiménez dispels any doubt:

> …es sin duda la versión ("cuchilear") que usaba Rulfo: soy de Nayarit y es la misma área lingüística que Jalisco, y no sólo escuché hablar unos 20 años a Juan Rulfo, sino que continúo oyendo a su familia, donde el "cuchilear" se escucha de vez en cuando cuando se refiere a sus perros.[54]

[53] E-mail correspondence, 24/07/09.
[54] E-mail correspondence, 25/07/09.

The Jiménez definition is corroborated by Mónica Padilla in her paper *"Rulfo y el cine: La Fórmula Secreta":*

> Cuando Sabines lee el verso *"cada vez que nos cuchilean los perros",* el poema se vincula con la imagen de uno de los querubines de aspecto más perverso, y produce un evidente énfasis en el término *"cuchilean",* que es un regionalismo mexicano que significa instigar un perro para que ataque. (Padilla 10)

In Text B, line 14, there is an accent on the 'o' in 'dónde' when used to introduce a relative clause. This 'o' is not accentuated in Text A. In this case Text B is preferable and corresponds to the eighth *acepción* of the word 'donde' presented in the twenty-second edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española* where the example given is: "No sabía hacia dónde lo llevaban".

In the same section there is an error common to both Text A and Text B lines 10-14. In both Text A and Text B, the word order is incorrect with *todos* placed before *aquí*. Therefore, the text should read:

> lo único cierto es que aquí
> todos estamos a medio morir
> y no tenemos ni siquiera
> dónde caernos muertos

There are some other errors of word order and omission and they can now be highlighted. In Text A, lines 21-22 read –'hemos andado con el ombligo pegado al / espinazo' – while Text B reads – 'hemos echado a andar con el ombligo pegado al / espinazo'. In this case the version from Text A is preferable as it coincides with what is heard on the film's soundtrack. Text B, line 53 reads – 'tal vez llegue a todos el remedio' but should read 'tal vez nos llegue a todos el remedio' in order to coincide with the film's soundtrack.

A further discrepancy occurs in the second section of the text. In Text A, lines 71-72 read as follows: 'El alma se han de haber partido/de tanto darle potreones a la vida'. In Text B, the same lines read as: 'El alma se ha de haber partido/de tanto darle potreones a la vida'. In this case, neither Text A nor Text B fully coincides with the film's soundtrack. The corrected text reads:

> El alma se la han de haber partido a golpes
> de tanto darle potreones a la vida.

Up to this point, the errors, while unacceptable, are mostly of a typographical nature. Perhaps, the most surprising mistake comes in Text B when whole phrases, present on the soundtrack and in Text A, are omitted: 'Atajo de malvados, retahila de vagos' should read (as in Text A but with the correct, accentuated 'i' in 'retahíla') as follows: 'Atajo de malvados, punta de holgazanes./Ruega por nosotros/ Sarta de bribones, retahíla de vagos./Ruega por nosotros'. As Text B is undisputedly the more widely disseminated version, the omission is all the more serious and, at time of writing, persists in the Ediciones Era publication of the text after nine re-prints.

Finally, a note on the word 'atajo' is warranted. It has been suggested[55] that 'atajo' be replaced by 'hatajo'. While 'atajo' normally refers to a shortcut or a bypass, it can also be used to describe a group of livestock (and, hence, disrespectfully, a group of people) in the same way as 'hatajo':

> hatajo.
>
> 1. m. Grupo pequeño de ganado.
> 2. m. despect. Grupo de personas o cosas. Un hatajo de pillos. Un hatajo de disparates.
>
> atajo.

[55] Through email correspondence with Víctor Jiménez.

(De atajar).

1. m. Senda o lugar por donde se abrevia el camino.
2. m. Procedimiento o medio rápido.
3. m. Separación o división de algo.
4. m. Acción y efecto de atajar (‖ un escrito).
5. m. hatajo (‖ pequeño grupo de ganado).
6. m. despect. hatajo (‖ grupo de personas o cosas).
7. m. Esgr. Treta para herir al adversario por el camino más corto esquivando la defensa.
8. m. ant. Ajuste, corte que se da para finalizar un negocio. [56]

It is certainly true that, when referring to a group of animals (and therefore, disrespectfully, to a group of people) 'hatajo' would be the more common choice. Nevertheless, a previous occurrence of 'atajo' in Rulfo's '*Nos han dado la tierra'* decides the matter. The example in question reads as follows:

> Sube polvo desde nosotros como si fuera un atajo de mulas lo que bajara por allí; pero nos gusta llenarnos de polvo. (Rulfo 2006: 12)

As Rulfo uses 'atajo' to refer to a group of mules, it is not unrealistic to assume that he would also use this spelling of the word when referring to a bunch of 'malvados'. The following, more apposite, example from *'La herencia de Matilde Arcángel'* dispels any doubts:

> Lo que me dolió aquí en el estómago, que es donde más duelen los pesares, fue que se hubiera olvidado de ese atajo de pobres diablos que íbamos a verla y nos guarecíamos en el calor de sus miradas. (Rulfo 2006: 148)

While the distinction may seem overly pedantic (of course, both 'hatajo' and 'atajo' sound exactly the same) it is worthwhile to deal with all irregularities in the script together in order to negate the necessity for further changes in the future. In fact, it is essential to understand 'atajo' as a group of people or animals and not as a 'senda o lugar por donde se abrevia el camino' as this can affect

[56] www.rae.es

translations of the text. There have been two examples of this. While the German, French and Brazilian Portuguese versions of the text [57] have been correct, in the 1982 Italian translation, 'Atajo de malvados' is translated as 'Sentiero de malvagi'. (Rulfo 1982: 120) The Italian word 'sentiero' means pathway in English. In the 2005 edition from Portugal, 'Atajo de malvados' is rendered as 'Altalho de malvados'. (Rulfo 2005: 111) 'Atalho' can be translated as 'bypass' or 'shortcut'.

Finally, as the result of this analysis of the published versions of the text in conjunction with the soundtrack of the film, it is now possible to present a complete and definitive version of the text:

LA FÓRMULA SECRETA (TEXT C)[58]
I
Ustedes dirán que es pura necedad la mía,
que es un desatino lamentarse de la suerte,
y cuantimás de esta tierra pasmada
donde nos olvidó el destino.

La verdad es que cuesta trabajo
aclimatarse al hambre.

Y aunque digan que el hambre
repartida entre muchos
toca a menos,
lo único cierto es que aquí
todos
estamos a medio morir
y no tenemos ni siquiera
dónde caernos muertos.

Según parece
ya nos viene de a derecho la de malas.

[57] "Räuberbande" in the 1984 German edition entitled *Dergoldene Hahn;* "Punhado de malvados" in the 1999 edition from Brazil entitled *O galo de ouro e outros textos para cinema* and "Légions de gredins" in the 1993 French version entitled *Le coq d'or et autres textes pour le cinema,* p. 110.

[58] Since this chapter was written, this version of the text has been accepted by the Fundación Juan Rulfo as the definitive version and was published in the Fundación's *El gallo de oro* (2010)

Nada de que hay que echarle nudo ciego a
este asunto.
Nada de eso.
Desde que el mundo es mundo
hemos andado con el ombligo pegado al espinazo
y agarrándonos del viento con las uñas.

Se nos regatea hasta la sombra,
y a pesar de todo
así seguimos:
medio aturdidos por el maldecido sol
que nos cunde a diario a despedazos,
siempre con la misma jeringa,
como si quisiera revivir más el rescoldo.
Aunque bien sabemos
que ni ardiendo en brasas
se nos prenderá la suerte.

Pero somos porfiados.
Tal vez esto tenga compostura.

El mundo está inundado de gente como nosotros,
de mucha gente como nosotros.
Y alguien tiene que oírnos,
alguien y algunos más,
aunque les revienten o reboten
nuestros gritos.

No es que seamos alzados,
ni le estamos pidiendo limosnas a la luna.
Ni está en nuestro camino buscar de prisa la covacha
o arrancar pa'l monte
cada que nos cuchilean los perros.

Alguien tendrá que oírnos.

Cuando dejemos de gruñir como avispas en
enjambre,
o nos volvamos cola de remolino,
o cuando terminemos por escurrirnos sobre
la tierra
como un relámpago de muertos,
entonces
tal vez
nos llegue a todos
el remedio.

II

Cola de relámpago,
remolino de muertos.
Con el vuelo que llevan,
poco les durará el esfuerzo.
Tal vez acaben deshechos en espuma
o se los trague este aire lleno de cenizas.
Y hasta pueden perderse
yendo a tientas
entre la revuelta obscuridad.

Al fin y al cabo ya son puro escombro.

El alma se la han de haber partido a golpes
de tanto darle potreones a la vida.
Puede que se acalambren entre las hebras
heladas de la noche,
o el miedo los liquide
borrándoles hasta el resuello.

San Mateo amaneció desde ayer
con la cara ensombrecida.
Ruega por nosotros.

Ánimas benditas del purgatorio.
Ruega por nosotros.

Tan alta que está la noche y ni con qué velarlos.
Ruega por nosotros.

Santo Dios, Santo Inmortal.
Ruega por nosotros.

Ya están todos medio pachiches de tanto que el sol
les ha sorbido el jugo.
Ruega por nosotros.

Santo san Antoñito.
Ruega por nosotros.

Atajo de malvados, punta de holgazanes.
Ruega por nosotros.

Sarta de bribones, retahíla de vagos.
Ruega por nosotros.

Cáfila de bandidos.

Ruega por nosotros.

Al menos éstos ya no vivirán calados por el hambre.

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