

Thinking the Good without the True with *Pedro Páramo*

by

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a reading of Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* in relation to the Mexican Revolution. Exploring its narrative construction of a fictional world of supernatural life forms, I argue that these life stories serve to denounce the Christian worldview regarding the nature of life dominant in pre-revolutionary Mexico and to equally reject the post-revolutionary secular conception of the world that replaced it as the authoritative narrative on the reality of life and basis for social organization. I show that the novel's invented, supernatural perspectives denaturalize both definitions of reality to reframe them as en/gendered social narratives contending for conflicting vested interests. I explore the novel's invitation to reconsider the question of life's meaning and value – the question of the good in relation to life and its social organization – outside all truth-claims and the violence they justify in the name of the common good. Contextualizing the novel's emphasis on fictionality in relation to indigenous mythical worldviews as well as recent theories on the nature of life in contemporary life sciences, I read the novel's engagement with the question of co-existence outside of the logic of representation. I rely on contemporary Latin American cultural theory for the critique of modernity as a hegemonic worldview but suggest that the novel moves beyond the political impasse that characterizes representational politics, which delimit culturally specific representational claims to truth without undoing either the category of truth or of representation. Situating this view of culture as a representational system relative to an external world within the context of its emergence through scientific and cultural revolutions in modern Europe, I relativize this meaning of culture as one historico-cultural invention serving a particular value system. I argue

that the novel moves beyond both competing truth-claims between different value systems and the ethical impasse in cultural theory through a denunciation of the category of truth itself as the most dangerous fiction, in turn inviting the invention of empowering fictions as the basis for nonviolent co-existence. In the process I discuss how the novel enables a reevaluation of the critical potentials of magical realist narratives.

Introduction

Critics generally consider the novel *Pedro Páramo* by the Mexican writer Juan Rufo an important precursor to the literary genre of magical realism. Arising out of the coexistence of multiple cultural realities, magical realist novels are stories about fundamental social contradictions that form the stuff of everyday reality in postcolonial Latin America. Such superimposition of multiple realities emerged from the colonial encounter between the Spaniards and the various indigenous populations and cultures or ways of life; contradictions and conflicts that persist well beyond independence and the formation of modern nation-states.

Emerging in the 1960s out of socio-political issues specific to Latin America, the genre has gone global in recent times. A literary style that juxtaposes contradictory realities to raise questions about shared social temporalities and to critique linear historical time, and through which juxtaposition myth (magic) and history emerge as contemporaneously co-existing and conflictive cultural perceptions of time-space or reality itself, magical realist narrative techniques have been taken up by writers in numerous postcolonial nations outside of Latin America to narrate the effects of colonization and the persistence of fundamental cultural contradictions in worldviews and aspirations contemporary to their own national contexts.¹

¹ A bibliographic survey yields a large number of fictional works from every continent critically discussed through the lens of magical realism, as well as several anthologies related to magical realist narratives produced outside of Latin America. See for example Hart, Stephen M. and Wen-chin Ouyang. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2005; Linguanti, Elsa, Francesco Casotti, and Carmen Concilio. *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999; Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

While the genre is gaining widespread acceptance as a narrative tool for making visible social contradictions in various postcolonial national contexts however, a tradition of scholarly writing on magical realism centered around its emergence and relevance to the history of Latin America is simultaneously announcing the exhaustion of its critical potential.² Derived from Indian subaltern studies and their influence on post-colonial cultural criticism more generally, the field of Latin American subaltern studies has tended to read magical realist novels as narrative syntheses and representations of the discrete and contradictory fragments of cultures and worldviews that make up the reality of Latin America. Interpreting these novels as going against the grain of historical narratives – against historicization itself – in order to represent better the truth of the region’s self-contradictory spatio-temporal realities, subalternist readings of the genre show these representational claims to be necessarily as partial and limited as truth-claims based on Western forms of knowledge and historicization imposed upon it through colonization.

The insights afforded by subaltern studies are of crucial import to the question of politics or social organization given that fundamental social contradictions are implicated in questions of violence, both in the imposition of hegemonic social forms and the myriad radical as well as reactionary movements aspiring to other forms of social organization engaged in contestation with dominant social orderings. Staking their ethical position on the impossibility of truth in the recognition of the culturally specific nature of knowledge of reality and the fundamentally unequal power relation between differing cultural systems of knowledge production in the postcolonial world, subaltern studies cautions against all totalizing claims to knowledge or

² Most notable of these is Moreiras, Alberto. *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. Also see Moretti, Franco. *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*. London: Verso, 1994.

representation of the collective good whether local, national or global; against all claims to defining the premise for a more unified social organization, which would merely result in the formation of a new hegemonic social order.

The critical insight of subaltern studies is profound in its identification of cycles of endemic violence rooted in claims and counter-claims between the various contending social factions to the category of truth as justification for the power to impose its organization on co-existent and often mutually conflicting visions of the world and the attendant contradictions in the various definitions of and aspirations for a good life. Such truth-claims, they show, would universalize a social premise or common ground for social belonging based on what are in fact culture and context specific narrative perspectives and interests or systems of meaning and value. At the same time, however, this ethical position leaves at an impasse the question of agency for social transformation and the possibility of imagining or inventing a better life by those disempowered under the present global hegemonic order, specifically that of capitalist ideology of socio-economic development and progress underpinning the modern nation-state as the dominant socio-political form consolidating itself globally after the independence of former colonies. This form of social organization tends towards increasing concentration of power through predetermination of the parameters of socio-economic relations while producing ever increasing suffering through re-distribution of the costs of national and transnational capitalist development both socio-economic and environmental – costs and violence to both life itself and to other ways of life, other social forms and formations.

My work on the novel *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo begins at this seeming impasse. Published in 1955, the novel is a critique of the failures of the postrevolutionary Mexican state in its promise of socio-economic reform, development, and redress for past feudal and colonial

relations of dominance, dispossession and exploitation of the people by the ruling military, oligarchy, and the Catholic Church. Emerging out of the Mexican revolution and the widespread disintegration of social consensus, violence, and demands for conflicting forms of justice, the postrevolutionary state emerged as the institution of power through the reconsolidation of the various social fragments and demands into a modern, secular nation-state and the promise of universal equality under democratic rule of law as well as inclusion into a history of progress towards shared prosperity. National consolidation however was effected through the defeat and exclusion of demands for other forms of social organization, most notably that of regionalist as well as indigenous communal claims to autonomy from the centralized state itself. Secular rule also displaced Catholicism as the premise for governance and the state systematically imposed a cultural education program to dislodge the rural poor from their 'backward' or premodern ways, resulting in the Cristero counter-revolution that was violently put down.

By the time of the novel's publication such social contradictions as well as those produced by capitalist relations of expropriation and uneven development in the name of national progress had resurfaced to make a lie of the promise of social equality, justice, and prosperity for all. Thematically engaged with conflicting cultural systems embodied by secular, Christian, and multiply existing indigenous narratives of the meaning and value or goal and purpose of life, Rulfo's novel begins with a story that allegorizes the faith and hope invested in modernity's promise of progress towards mankind's unity and plenitude in order to lay bare the violence and exclusion that make such promise possible. This story ends half way through and the narrative passes from the troubled, secular world of unrealizable hopes of plenitude that both produce and conceal real violence and suffering into a mythical reality. Within this mythical reality emerges a story that serves to equally reject Christian mythology as a cultural value system as well as to

make visible the reproduction of its narrative logic and value system within secular ideology. Through the mythical frame of the second half of the novel distinguished from Christian mythology, what is generally considered magical, fictional, or not credible as real from the secular perspective as well as untrue and heretical from the Christian worldview emerges into an alternative story of life to make visible the process by which the secular narrative of the meaning and value of life comes to be credible and to determine the very idea of the real, to consolidate its totalizing truth-claim over the very nature of life itself.

Thematically concerned with Christian, secular, and indigenous narratives of life, the novel is a reflection on the historical question of cultural contradictions and hegemonic social formations, in other words the violent imposition of one cultural value system regarding the common good of life over another within the context of colonialism, the persistence of the established feudal order through national independence, as well as the postrevolutionary establishment of modern social organization in Mexico. It is structurally complex and I want to briefly foreground my reading of the novel's structural construction before going on to discuss in more concrete terms what the novel is doing thematically relative to these cultural and historical narratives and themes about existence and co-existence or questions of social organization.

Pedro Páramo is told in fragments without linear chronology. For the purpose of my reading these fragments can be usefully grouped into three main narrative threads. Spatially, all the stories take place in the town of Comala. The first half of the novel is primarily about Juan Preciado, and this story appears to be told from Juan's first person narrative point of view and from the time-space of secular modernity in postrevolutionary Mexico. A quest for the father and communal belonging that resonates with contemporaneous nationalist discourse and social investments in the postrevolutionary state's promise of a lawful and just, modern, national social

order, Juan's story dominates until his death half way through the novel. In the second half of the novel he is dead and buried in the grave and listening to the stories of Dorotea and Susana San Juan, two other dead and supernatural or mythical characters who become the protagonists instead. Their stories are in complimentary ways exact reversals of Juan's story: one a rejection of the feudal social order that makes visible Christian worldview's structural reproduction within Juan's secular perspective; the other an explicit rejection of Christianity as well as the secular ideology that replaced it as the social organizing principle after the revolution. Together they form the second narrative thread and point to alternative ways of being and knowing to open up possibilities for different narrative organization of life.

The third plot line is that of the story of Juan's father Pedro Páramo and of other subordinate characters. It is a story about life in Comala during Pedro's emergence into power and consolidation of his rule over the village against the established power of the church, and which narrate the historical transition from the feudal social order to the modern one. This plot line is interspersed with the other two narrative threads. It also functions as a story of the past in relation to (and provide the historical and biographical context for making sense of) Juan Preciado's story: Comala or community during the transition from the feudal to the post-revolutionary period narrated through the story of Pedro Páramo the father, in relation to Comala in the modern time as revealed to Juan Preciado the son. Pedro's story line also forms the historical and biographical past as context to the stories of the dead Dorotea and Susana -which is to say a story of their respective lifetimes before death in Comala during the period of Pedro's emergence into power, a time before their mythical or ghostly kind of presence as the undead in the second narrative thread, and which supernatural and fictional presence reveal a mythical

outside to the narrative of communal history and individual biography that structure the relation between Juan and Pedro.

The stories of Pedro the father and Juan the son play a dominant role in the novel. This is partly through the obvious reason that together they begin the novel, the first half of the novel constantly switching back and forth between these two narrative threads. More importantly however it is because these two stories more readily lend themselves to a historical reading. After all, history is often a story about the temporal passage from father to son. Significantly then, the stories of Dorotea and Susana begin as narratives of a mother and a daughter but through their deaths come to function as counter-narratives to their roles in the reproduction of individual and communal identities or of biography and history. I argue that their mythical undoing of the idea of reproduction serve to undermine the spatio-temporal continuities of both Christian and modern social orders and make them visible as narrative constructs that attempt to exclude or subsume to their respective social orders alternative relations between life and time, and thus other possibilities of life's organization and co-existence.

What I am interested in doing in this dissertation is to consider from various interpretive frameworks the enigmatic middle in the novel and the narrative displacement through which Juan Preciado goes from being alive to being dead, from being a protagonist whose point of view guides the reading of the novel to being an audience and the recipient of some kind of solace and counsel from both Dorotea and Susana San Juan, whose stories, as I have mentioned, are in different ways reversals of his own. My argument is that this narrative break and displacement work as a kind of opening and invitation to reframe the questions of and quest for lawful communal co-existence posed in the novel's first half from the perspectives and temporalities of the second one. As I will discuss in further detail below, the possibilities opened up by the stories

of Dorotea and Susana in the novel's second half far exceed the historical framework of the first half of the novel and invite us to unearth as well as invent multiple alternatives of intersecting and non self-unified spatio-temporal possibilities for social organization, and to conceive of their co-existence outside of any unity as a way to minimize needless violence. This last, moreover, is inseparable from the organizational process the novel demands from the act of reading itself, and which further require the operation of selecting and organizing the various contexts and frameworks of reference for reading. Through this process the novel itself emerges as one such non self-unified organization of meaning intersecting with multiple other narratives.

In chapter one I read the novel's engagement with the nation's feudal past and its dominant Catholic narrative meaning of life to explore the unconventional, non-secular perspective through which *Pedro Páramo* relativizes and rejects Christian reality. I show that the novel offers a view of Christianity as a narrative construction of the world whose cultural system of meaning and value – whose reality itself – it rejects, not through an alternative truth-claim to reality but through a complex denunciation of Christianity's production of suffering through its subordination of life to the promise of future plenitude in the higher teleological order of Heaven. I argue that the narrative process through which this rejection is accomplished provides an alternative framework of value: a fictional perspective on the nature of life that the novel constructs as the basis from which we are invited to read its equal rejection of the secular world and worldview, and thereby to consider a different conception or meaning of the human and its agency in order to invent other possibilities and frameworks for co-existence. At the end of the chapter I begin a reading of the novel's treatment of the historical rise of secular social organization that displaced the feudal Christian order in Mexico in order to lay out *Pedro Páramo's* exposition of secular logic as based on a parallel teleological narrative of promised

future plenitude as the basis for its truth-claim on the nature of human life's meaning and value, agency and purpose.

In the second chapter I rebegin my reading through the critical insights provided by Patrick Dove's reading of the novel, a work exemplary of subaltern studies' view regarding the culturally specific nature of all knowledge conceived as representational system. Dove's brilliant reading of the novel in relation to the cultural and socio-economic contexts of contention preceding and succeeding the Mexican Revolution forms the basis for my own reading of the narrative process through which the novel problematizes secular point of view, and which – following Dove's argument – emerges into view as a critique of the modern state's claim to the establishment of a just and lawful secular national social organization. I foreground Dove's point that secular social organization is premised upon the historically contingent interests or value system of capitalism, which point leads Dove to read the novel as a narrative delimitation of the modern scientific worldview's representational claim to a value free, objective, and universal truth regarding the nature or reality of life, and which knowledge system grounds the representational claims of secular rule and democratic social organization.

For Dove, the novel's delimitation of modern perspective marks and makes visible a historical site of political impasse, a site of mutually contradictory claims to the universal truth to the nature of life as ground for human socio-political organization. He localizes this site in the context of the historical contention over land between secular state and indigenous peoples, and which contention emerge into view in Dove's reading as mutually exclusive claims to ownership and use of the same land as the basis for different forms of territorial cultural and socio-economic self-organization – and which contending socio-cultural meaning of life include conflicting meanings and cultural subjectivation of human life itself.

My own reading of the novel in chapter two begins with this connection established by Dove between truth and territorial claims in order to suggest in the third chapter that the fictional, mythical perspectives the novel constructs works precisely against the idea of territoriality – against a conception of nature as a unity of self-reproducing relations and as object of human subjective knowledge and agency. I argue that the novel’s problematization of modern conception of natural law makes visible the very idea of truth as a value system of vested economic and cultural interest relative to nature as property and resource, and which forms the basis for the idea of human individual and cultural self-cultivation and perfection towards lawful or moral freedom as the highest ideal of social organization. I discuss these questions through a consideration of the scientific reformulation of the dualist relation between culture and nature in early modernity in Europe, which I contrast with the view of nature in contemporary life sciences as well as to mythical worldview in order to construct, through a reading of the fictional lives in the novel, an epistemological basis for thinking the good of life in its sociality outside of the idea of truth and of an investment in a lawfully self-reproducing socio-cultural relations.

In chapter three, I return to the novel and read its narrative construction of this investment in self-reproducing cultural logic or lawful social order both Christian and secular, something narrated as inseparable from the production of hierarchy and thus of violence, exclusion, or subordination. I show that the novel shows the investment in or desire for a lawful social order as guarantee of plenitude to be inseparable from willful subjection to violence and hierarchical social ordering that law justifies, and through which hierarchy of value it endlessly reorganizes social life to defer promised plenitude. The novel contrast the stories of identification and complicity with a hierarchically unified lawful order with fictional forms and views of life narrated through stories of the dead whose simultaneously world-inventive and finite agencies

invite a rethinking of the very idea of the human and its knowledge and agency outside of representational truth-claim and the dichotomy between nature and culture, and thus offer a different view on the question of sociality and co-existence outside of the illusory promise of lawful unity and plenitude. I end the chapter with a discussion of the novel's foregrounding of reading itself as a process of inventive organization of meaning and value, and which undermines the idea of pregiven reality to which a text may correspond, as well as that of self-unified textual meaning to which reading corresponds or represent. I discuss this process of reading foregrounded in the novel in relation to a revaluation of genre of magical realism outside of representational logic.

Chapter 1: Me traje la ilusión/ Illusion Brought Me Here: Fictionality, Deviation, and the Feudal Context

Originally published in 1955, when the failures of the postrevolutionary Mexican state's promises of justice had become all too apparent, the novel *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo both foregrounds the fictional character of the state's narrative account and construction of a national social order and exposes the purpose of that narrative: to homogenize the myriad ways of being and aspirations regarding social organization into one national framework, to unify and make primary the meaning of life in relation to the identity of the nation (Mexico, individual Mexicans), and to make the nation the only framework within which such life may be defined. As my reading of the novel will suggest, in its critique of the modern national social order the novel in fact foregrounds as fictive all accounts of reality and attempts to define existence by taking away place as given or ground. It undoes the idea of a reproducible people that make up the population of a place as territoriality that persists as self-same over time. It does so by making visible the parallel nature of the competing claims between the Ecclesiastical order and that of the secular state, between the Christian, mythical conception of reality and the modern, historical one in their totalizing attempts to define the very nature of life.

The novel begins with what is more or less identifiable as a first person narrative point of view of Juan Preciado recounting his journey home to Comala, a story framed as a search for Pedro Páramo or the father as the embodiment of law and justice. The character and quest of Juan Preciado is locatable in the modern time-space of postrevolutionary Mexico, the period of consolidation of secular state power over against the church, and of the state's promise of redress

for past colonial, Catholic feudal social relations of expropriation, of an end to social conflict and contradictions and the establishment of a just and unified national community as home or place of belonging. The story of Juan's quest for this promised justice and unity dominates until his abject death half way through the novel, where we find him in the grave with Dorotea, whose own story of a search for her son in a feudal village life as a Catholic parallels Juan's search for the father. The failure and end to both pursuits allows the quest narrative and the question of justice to resonate with both realities and make visible structural narrative similarities between the Christian and secular social orders.

Juan's death midway through the novel marks the moment of the novel's rebeginning, a break in narrative continuity which abruptly relocates Juan's life and story to an enigmatic frame of an afterlife to the modern social order. Within this new narrative context the preceding story not only abruptly ends but also reemerges as having been told from within the grave and in conversation with Dorotea from the very beginning. This structural displacement of Juan's story and its narrative reframing as one told within the story of Dorotea, whose own life story emerges at the midpoint of the novel as a different beginning, effects an important shift in the framework of interpretation. It also invites a different reading of the novel narratively structured around this different beginning and end, as the significance of Juan and Dorotea's stories emerge in the second half of the novel as recontextualized within other stories told by the dead. Exploring a series of enigmatic contradictions and paradoxes pertaining to the very nature of existence, space, and time that emerge at this mid-point of the novel in the story of Dorotea's afterlife, specifically as a rejection of Christian conception of life, can serve as a way to begin to grasp how *Pedro Páramo* – through the narrative of Juan's life and death – equally challenges the modern conception of existence or reality through which the postrevolutionary question of

justice is defined. In this it permits the reader to reframe the very premise for conceptualizing the ethico-political idea of the good in relation to life through a different valuation or reading of the very meaning of life and the time-space of its sociality or co-existence.

Aquí se acaba el camino¹
This is the End of the Road²

“El Cielo para mi, Juan Preciado, está aquí donde estoy ahora” (124), “For me, Juan Preciado, heaven is right here where I am now” (66, translation modified), declares Dorotea. The story as told by Dorotea to Juan is that the two are buried in a shared grave. Dorotea had helped bury him, whom another villager and herself had found dead. Dorotea then decided to end her own long suffering life, sat down to die, felt her soul leave her body when it failed to convince her to go on living-suffering, and was buried by the other villager in the same grave. Or so Dorotea says.

There are many strange things about this story of a here and now of a grave, about this Dorotea claiming to be dead and buried who is yet clearly alive and speaking, and who moreover claims to have discovered heaven by abandoning the soul. Strange this existence that she tells of: an afterlife not of the soul but to the soul which, according to herself, may as well be called Doroteo, male, without it making any difference since Juan did not know and there was no way of telling what she was. Once a poor Christian villager, Dorotea had willfully ended her life and abandoned her soul to purgatory for the sin of suicide, abandoned in other words the defining

¹ Rulfo, Juan. *Pedro Páramo*. Edición de José Carlos González Boixo. Madrid: Cátedra, 2003, 125. All section subheadings in my work are quotes from the novel. As with this citation, I have footnoted the page numbers for all subsequent quotes from the original Spanish text of the novel used as subheadings. All quotes from the novel used within each section will be parenthetically cited within the text itself.

² Rulfo, Juan. *Pedro Páramo*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Grove Press, 1994, 66. All translations are from this edition, and when used as a section subheading will be cited in the footnote. All translations used within each section will be parenthetically cited within the text itself. In some instances I have modified the translation to exchange Sayers Peden’s poetic rendition for a more literal equivalent in order to bring out the complexity of the original Spanish term to highlight the text’s complex play with polyvalence of meaning.

principle of life according to Christianity itself – the reality according to which she once lived and within which she had a soul. Yet Dorotea enigmatically continues to live and to have a better life for it. More important and enigmatic still, while this existence is deemed impossible within the Christian conception of the soul as the locus of life, this Dorotea dead and buried which the soul and the Catholic worldview by which she once lived would deem mere inanimate body or thing, this existence called Dorotea does not conversely or in any way negate the life of that soul even as her own life contradicts its very definition of what existence is, the definition by which the soul exists. Dorotea speculates that her soul must continue to exist, probably suffering, doing penance and begging living beings for prayers with continued hope of making it to Heaven.

How do we make sense of this story, this story of a strange existence in a strange here and now of a grave that is also a strange heaven? What can we make of this existence called Dorotea narratively foregrounded as one of an enigmatic life-story and point of view regarding the very meaning and value of existence, this story that Dorotea tells to make sense of and explain her existence to Juan Preciado to help him make sense of his own?

As Dorotea tells Juan, the two are dead and buried together in the grave. But this life after death, this here and now of the time-space of the grave, this togetherness, this Juan and this Dorotea are all problematic categories. To begin with:

–¿Eres tú la que ha dicho todo eso, Dorotea?
 –¿Quién, yo? Me quedé dormida un rato. ¿Te siguen asustando?
 –¿Oí a alguien que hablaba. Una voz de mujer. Creí que eras tú.
 –¿Voz de mujer? ¿Creíste que era yo? Ha de ser la que hablaba sola. La de la sepultura grande. Doña Susanita. Está aquí enterrada a nuestro lado. Le ha de haber llegado la humedad y estará removiéndose entre el sueño. (135)

“Was that you talking, Dorotea?”

“Who, me? I was asleep for a while. Are you still afraid?”

“I heard someone talking. A woman’s voice. I thought it was you.”

“A woman’s voice? You thought it was me? It must be that woman who talks to herself. The one in the large tomb. Doña Susanita. She’s buried close to us. The damp must have got to her, and she’s moving around in her sleep.” (78)

Preceding this was a monologue by another enigmatic voice claiming to be dead and buried, and whom we now find out from Dorotea must be Doña Susanita or Susan San Juan. But there is something strange with regards to time and space in this exchange. If Juan and Dorotea are buried together as Dorotea says, Juan should not be able to confuse a voice from far away with one speaking right next to him. According to Dorotea, they buried her right in his arms, where she fits perfectly. Now it may not be all that strange for Dorotea to immediately be able to tell that it must be the voice of Susana San Juan, and to be able to locate her tomb as next to theirs since she will later claim to have been there when Susana died and thus perhaps knows Susana’s burial place relative to her own. Yet it is still odd that she would know – and perhaps the point at first is that she speculates – that Susana must be moving about in her sleep because some humidity has gotten to her.

Immediately following their commentary on what Susana had said, this exchange occurs:

–Cuando vuelvas a oírla me avisas, me gustaría saber lo que dice.

–¿Oyes? Parece que va decir algo. Se oye un murmullo.

–No, no es ella. Eso viene de más lejos, de por este otro rumbo. Y es voz de hombre.

Lo que pasa con estos muertos viejos es que en cuanto les llega la humedad comienzan a removerse. Y despiertan.

<<El Cielo es grande. Dios estuvo conmigo esa noche. De no ser así quién sabe lo que hubiera pasado. Porque fue ya de noche cuando reviví...>>

–¿Lo oyes más claro?

–Sí. (136)

“When you hear her again, let me know. I’d like to know what she’s saying”

“You hear? I think she’s about to say something. I hear a kind of murmuring.”

“No, that isn’t her. That’s farther away and in the other direction. And that’s a man’s voice. What happens with these corpses that have been dead a long time is that when the damp reaches them they begin to stir. They wake up.”

“The heavens are bountiful. God was with me that night. If not, who knows what might have happened. Because it was already night when I came to...”

“You hear it better now?”

“Yes.” (79)

Dorotea wants Juan to tell her if he hears Susana speak again. In a later exchange she will tell him to report to her the words of Susana, which he will word for word, because as Dorotea claims he is younger and with better hearing. However, here she hears better than Juan something that comes from even further away, and can tell that it is a man’s voice rather than a women’s and even the direction it comes from, when Juan could not and who earlier also could not tell a voice from a distance from one literally spoken from within his arms.

Even more strange is that Dorotea seems to know a lot about what happens with the dead in the tombs surrounding them, how they are awoken by humidity, as if she has been buried there for a long time and has observed the happenings of those long dead. Yet as she relates, Dorotea was only buried right along with Juan after having helped bury him. So how is it that she knows so much more and can explain to him the almost seemingly habitual happenings in the lives of those buried in this graveyard reality? As will recur throughout their interaction, it appears that Dorotea is making sense of this reality and of herself in relation to this community by making up or inventing the significance and meaning of what goes on around them in their graveyard dwelling.

On the one hand, it would seem that this invented supernatural reality is specifically constructed in opposition to or as a departure from modern perspective on the nature of spatio-temporal reality of life itself, as everything to do with speech and hearing – the sense or perception of space, in other words of measurable distance and direction, auditory quality and level, etc. – all contradict our notion of space. This is true as well of the sense of time. Dorotea’s knowledge of what is happening to those around them – the effect of humidity on the dead and their awakening and movements – would seem from our commonplace or secular perspective to

be impossible, because told as if she had been there for long enough and longer than Juan to have observed these general occurrences over time and established their causes and significance. On the other hand however, the passage immediately following makes things even more enigmatic. This is what they hear spoken by the man identified by Dorotea as buried in a grave further away in a particular direction:

<<...Tenía sangre por todas partes. Y al enderezarme chapotí con mis manos la sangre regada en las piedras. Y era mía. Montonales de sangre. Pero no estaba muerto. Me di cuenta. Supe que don Pedro no tenía intenciones de matarme. Sólo de darme un susto. Quería averiguar si yo había estado en Vilmayo dos meses antes. El día de San Cristóbal. En la boda. ¿En cuál boda? ¿En cuál San Cristobal? Yo chapoteaba entre mi sangre y le preguntaba: “¿En cuál boda, don Pedro?” No, no, don Pedro, yo no estuve. Si acaso, pasé por allí. Pero fue por casualidad... Él no tuvo intenciones de matarme. Me dejó cojo, como ustedes ven, y manco si ustedes quieren. Pero no me mató. Dicen que se me torció un ojo desde entonces, de la mala impresión. Lo cierto es que me volví más hombre. El Cielo es grande. Y ni quien lo dude. >> (136)

“...I was covered with blood. And when I tried to get up my hands slipped in the puddles of blood in the rocks. It was my blood. Buckets of blood. But I wasn't dead. I knew that. I knew that don Pedro hadn't meant to kill me. Just gave me a scare. He wanted to find out whether I'd been in Vilmayo that day two years before. On San Cristobal's day. At the wedding. What wedding? Which San Cristobal's? There I was slipping around in my own blood, and I asked him just that: 'What wedding, don Pedro? No! No, don Pedro. I wasn't there. I may have been near there, but only by chance...' He never meant to kill me. He left me lame – you can see that – and, sorry to say, without the use of my arm. But he didn't kill me. They say that ever since I've had one wild eye. From the scare. I tell you, though, it made me more of a man. The heavens are bountiful. And don't you ever doubt it.” (79)

Juan asks whom the man is who speaks and Dorotea tells him it could be any one of the many killed in revenge by Pedro Páramo. Pedro had killed all he suspected of being involved in his father's death. The voice in the passage however insists that he knows he was not dead. Addressing an audience of *ustedes* which is the plural “you”, the man tells of how he revived, came to understand God had been with him that night, and that Pedro Páramo had only meant to scare and not to kill him.

How are we to make sense of this voice, identified by Dorotea as a man from a tomb further off, whose story contradicts everything Dorotea says, which is to say according to whose perspective he is clearly neither dead, nor buried, and certainly not alone? In other words, through the voice of the man above emerges a story that contradicts Dorotea's meaning of the already enigmatic words like life and death to bring to the fore the question of what existence itself might mean, in a here and now that begins to appear that it may or may not be a grave, or better said, to be more than one thing depending on the point of view that makes sense of and tells of it.

At this point therefore, even the idea of a common space-time, common place as ground for comparing these various perspectives and their contradictory accounts of what the reality of that place is has come undone as each point of view makes sense of where they are in ways that contradict one another in their accounts of being alive, dead, buried, or elsewhere; natural or supernatural. In other words as far as the perspective of something like a textual narratee is concerned, there is no common ground from which to make sense of these contradictory stories: no common ground between the narratee and these perspectives, and no common ground between the different perspectives themselves even while these perspectives or narratives are clearly making up a common story that is also their reality, at least between Juan and Dorotea, and thus for the reader implied by the two's points of view.

A little later, Dorotea once again asks Juan to tell her what he heard Susana say. Juan repeats, almost as if word for word even though transposed into a third person account, the words he tells Dorotea that he heard Susana speak.

–¿Qué es lo que dice, Juan Preciado?

–Dice que ella escondía sus pies entre las piernas de él. Sus pies helados como piedras frías y que allí se calentaban como en un horno donde se dora el pan. Dice que él le mordía los pies diciéndole que eran como pan dorado en el horno. Que dormía

acurrucada, metiéndose dentro de él, perdida en la nada al sentir que se quebraba su carne, que se abría como un surco abierto por un clavo ardoroso, luego tibio, luego dulce, dando golpes duros contra su carne blanda; sumiéndose, sumiéndose más, hasta el gemido. Pero que le había dolido más su muerte. Eso dice. (155)

“What is she saying, Juan Preciado?”

“She’s saying she used to hide her feet between his legs. Feet icy as cold stones, and that he warmed them, like bread baking in the oven. She says he nibbled her feet, saying they were like golden loaves from the oven. And that she slept cuddled close to him, inside his skin, lost in nothingness as she felt her flesh part like a furrow turned by a plow first burning, then warm and gentle, thrusting against her soft flesh, deeper, deeper, until she cried out. But she says his death hurt her much much more. That’s what she said.” (99-100)

The words are sexually explicit, detailed in their explicitness, and seemingly reproduced in exact details by a young man to an old woman. But is Dorotea old and is she a woman? As she has noted and as suggested through Juan’s mis/perception or mis/identification of Dorotea as a man, gender as a category no longer makes any sense or difference. In the above passage moreover, what is problematized is the narrative voice and perspective referred to by the name of Juan himself: perception and voice that are able to reproduce word for word another’s words as if having faithfully recorded or written them down rather than recounting from memory. The stylization of this narrative voice foregrounds it as written, as literary artifice, as fictional. What seems to be coming unraveled through these exchanges are any shred of human attributes we still assign to these perspectives, to these voices and their stories of enigmatic existence and co-existence whose meanings we are trying to understand.

What emerges from the above for the implied reader is that there is no reality outside of these conflicting perspectives. By reality I mean a given time and space in which things can be said to happen and by which the happening can be understood the same by everyone. Moreover, this lack of reality does not imply the privileging of individual perspectives, and the very idea of the individual, the living human subject as reality or the character that represents it has also come

undone. There is no consensus as to common reality but there are neither individual ones that often form the basis for contestation of shared or imposed social meaning as reality. The very idea of perspective has lost its mooring in the individual eye and his/her other senses located in time and space. The only thing that remains to be said of such perspectives and realities, the only sense that can be made of these stories and the here and now of their existence is that they are made up or fictive.

On the one hand, the juxtaposition of perspectives and understanding of reality between Dorotea and the unnamed man deters us from unifying their stories into any one perspective or elevating as dominant a particular one in order to define a given reality of space or time. This may be said to occur at the level of the point of view of the textual narratee. On the other hand, we can and do read Dorotea's story, foregrounded as existing in a complicated relation to other stories, and thus of any sense made from her story as existing in a complicated relation to other possible meanings and realities. As I will show in the next chapter, Dorotea's reading of her own life and the lives of those around her allows Juan's life story to take on a different meaning from what it was before his death. Dorotea's narrative allows Juan as well as the reader to re-read Juan's story from a different point of view in what will amount to a different perspective on life itself.

As initially noted and as I will discuss in further detail in subsequent sections, the story Dorotea goes on to tell Juan of her suicide narrates a rejection of the Christian reality within which she once lived, and which makes of this enigmatic existence something like an afterlife to the soul. This life story foregrounded as told by someone dead as a Christian however, and moreover as buried in the grave, is also highlighted as outside of secular perspective. This secular perspective had belonged to Juan Preciado and had guided our reading of the novel until

the novel's mid-point, and from which perspective we can initially read Dorotea's story as supernatural and thus as fictional. As I discussed above, this supernatural life and reality are also constructed as unnatural specifically through its departure from our modern perspective on the nature of human life and its spatio-temporal reality itself.

While on the one hand we are presented with Dorotea's narrative that can be read as supernatural within our secular conception of the nature of life, Dorotea's claim to this supernatural-ness is simultaneously challenged by a contradictory voice and view, and which relativizes her claim to knowledge of the nature of space and time of their existence. Thus from the view of the implied reader there are divergent meanings or points of view that emerge to render indeterminable whether or not Juan and Dorotea are really in the grave, thus whether or not their lives are supernatural, or if Dorotea's account of their supernatural life is itself fictional.

It is in this lack of narrative basis for resolving the contradiction and establishing the truth of the matter on co-existing, contradictory views of nature and of human life that I propose we consider the question of value that began our reading of Dorotea's narrative, her important remark that heaven for her is in the here and now. The question then becomes, to what purpose are Juan and the reader in their secular perspectives invited by Dorotea to think as heaven or as life' highest value a spatio-temporal reality of existence that is without any determinable or given meaning and thus inseparable from story telling and narrative invention? Within this story moreover the idea of heaven or of the good in relation to life emerges as a rejection of Christian Heaven on the one hand, and on the other can be read as an invitation to Juan and the reader to consider through a problematization of our secular reality and value system.

In the rest of this chapter and the next two I will read in detail how the sense Dorotea invents of her existence might best be understood by contrasting it with the conception of

existence, place, and time that underlie both the Christian feudal order and the postrevolutionary Mexican state's secular world and worldview, each of which contend for the power to define reality, to explain the nature of existence according to their spatio-temporal ordering of reality, including the social field; in effect *to be* reality. Dorotea's story about existence, read alongside that of Juan Preciado, offers a different view of life, one that does not claim to be an exclusive definition (which is to say an all-inclusive, unitary, and universal one), and which therefore undermines the production of dominance and hegemony based on the universalization of a particular perspective on reality.

Dorotea's existence does not belong either to the Christian narrative of the afterlife of the soul nor to the secular conception of reality that succeeded it as hegemonic social organizing principle. As I will discuss in the next chapter in a reading of Juan's story, not unlike the Christian order it claims to supersede, the secular conception of reality defines and attempts to universalize its own particular meaning and purpose of life organized around a utopia that functions much like Christian Heaven. Specifically in the context of statist discourse and national social organization, the democratic ideals of freedom, equality and justice, of social unity and harmony of individual parts and social whole – something construed as achievable through social and economic growth and progress towards shared prosperity – narrativize the modern telos or secular version of Heaven: becoming a fully developed, lawful and prosperous nation. This in turn makes of the here and now a necessarily fallen, underdeveloped state while at the same time justifying expropriations and injustices in the service of the attainment of promised utopia. The future secular Heaven comes to define, in the same way as its Christian version, the meaning and purpose of the here and now of life both individual and social by subordinating it to a higher order, to Heaven as ideal life to be attained in the future. The here and now of life of Dorotea and

Juan suggests a departure from both Catholic and secular narratives of life and narrate a mode of living and knowing outside of this ill-fated search for illusory Heaven promised by both.

Ahora que estoy muerta me he dado tiempo para pensar y enterarme de todo³
Now That I Am Dead I Have Given Myself the Time to Think and Understand Everything⁴

If on the one hand as I have discussed, Dorotea's story foregrounds the fictional character of perspective or knowledge, this notion of fiction is further complicated by the introduction of an idea of illusion. This idea further qualifies and differentiates the idea of fictional knowledge into more than one kind and emerges as a different ethical framework for conceiving the question of value or the idea of the good in relation to life, one no longer tied to the concept of truth or reality. On the thematic level, moreover, the question of illusion is also specifically related to both Juan's quest for the father and Dorotea's search for the son, the failures of both of which find them in the same grave to rebegin a different story in which both figures of father and son are understood as illusions. Dorotea asks why Juan came to Comala:

–Mejor no hubieras salido de tu tierra. ¿Qué vinist a hacer aquí?

–Ya te lo dije en un principio. Vine a buscar a Pedro Páramo, que según parece fue mi padre. Me trajo la ilusión.

–¿La ilusión? Eso cuesta caro. A mí me costó vivir más de lo debido. Pagué con eso la deuda de encontrar a mi hijo, que no fue, por decirlo así, sino una ilusión más; porque nunca tuve ningún hijo. Ahora que estoy muerta me he dado tiempo para pensar y enterarme de todo. (119)

“You'd have done better to stay home. Why did you come here?”

“I told you that at the very beginning. I came to find Pedro Páramo, who they say was my father. Illusion brought me here.

“Illusion? You pay dear for that. It made me live longer than is owed, longer than I should have. And that was the debt I paid to find my son, who in a manner of speaking was just another illusion. Because I never had any son. Now that I'm dead I've given myself the time to think and understand everything.” (60, translation modified)

³ Rulfo, 119.

⁴ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 60.

Thus far I shown that the story of Dorotea and Juan in the grave contain no truth outside of perspective and storytelling. Yet the idea of illusion or false perception emerges here as another enigma, as the concept depends on an idea of reality against which it is defined as false by lack of correspondence. What might be the nature of knowledge and understanding in Dorotea's statement that would enable her to mark a certain distinction in both meaning and value between a non-illusory perception and an illusory one regarding her son's existence, when all possible grounds for any assertion of true perception or knowledge of the reality of existence has been narratively undone, rejected, and replaced by fictional ones?

To complicate matters, the word "*ilusión*" (illusion) refers not only to the idea of false sensory perception but also to false or unrealistic hope, and in addition the Spanish term *ilusión* refers at the same time to the idea of enthusiasm, thrill, or joy. The first two meanings are especially pertinent to my reading, and share for their definition a dependence on an idea of reality against which the meanings are conceptualized or measured. At the same time the Spanish word *ilusión* also overlaps in meaning with another word for hope, the verb *esperar*, which expresses a particular relation between existence, knowledge, and time, a relation which perhaps becomes clearer in the other meanings of the same word. *Esperar* has several related meanings that are relevant to the idea of illusion in relation to perception of time or the temporal order. Meaning "to hope" on the one hand, the term also means "to wait," as well as "to expect." In the reflexive form, *esperarse* can also be used to express the act of holding or hanging on to something. What these words make visible is the idea of the future as something predictable within a series of expectable outcomes, and therefore as a continuation of present existence and knowledge. This idea of a knowable future assumes a unified temporal continuity and a

knowable order for the unfolding of life past present and future, something Dorotea and Juan's enigmatic existences will be shown to problematize.

Dorotea's statement that she now understands without illusion is important for our pursuit of the significance of the idea of heaven in the here and now in relation to both Dorotea's and Juan's stories. In the section that follows I will show that the idea of illusion does not refer to a false perception of reality in opposition to true knowledge of it but rather, quite simply, to the perception of there being one true reality and therefore to all claims to truth or to true knowledge of reality. To put it differently, I will show that the idea of illusion, both as false perspective and false hope, refers to a belief and an investment in universality or a unified temporal order. What becomes visible as illusion is the very idea of a given reality as something that can stay the same or perpetuate itself as the same over time, and which Dorotea's story foregrounds as a product of a universalized perspective.

Le perdí todo mi interés⁵
I Lost All Interest⁶

Hacía tantos años que no alzaba la cara, que me olvidé del cielo. Y aunque lo hubiera hecho, ¿qué habría ganado? El cielo está tan alto, y mis ojos tan sin mirada, que vivía contenta con saber dónde quedaba la tierra. Además, le perdí todo mi interés desde que el padre Rentería me aseguró que jamás conocería la Gloria. Que ni siquiera de lejos la vería... Fue cosa de mis pecados; pero él no debía habérmelo dicho. Ya de por sí la vida se lleva con trabajos. Lo único que la hace a una mover los pies es la esperanza de que al morir la llevan a una de un lugar a otro; pero cuando a una le cierran una puerta y la que queda abierta es nomás la del Infierno, más vale no haber nacido... El Cielo para mí, Juan Preciado, está aquí donde estoy ahora.

—¿Y tu alma? ¿Dónde crees que haya ido?

—Debe andar vagando por la tierra como tantas otras; buscando vivos que recen por ella. Tal vez me odie por el mal trato que le di; pero eso ya no me preocupa. He descansado del vicio de sus remordimientos. Me amargaba hasta lo poco que comía, y me hacía insorpotables las noches llenándomelas de pensamientos intranquilos con figuras de condenados y cosas de éstas. Cuando me senté a morir, ella me rogó que me levantara y que siguiera arastrando la vida, como si esperara todavía algún milagro que me limpiara

⁵ Rulfo, 124.

⁶ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 66.

de culpas. Ni siquiera hice el intento: <<Aquí se acaba el camino – le dije –. Ya no me quedan fuerzas para más. >> Y abrí la boca para que se fuera. Y se fue. Sentí cuando cayó en mis manos el hilito de sangre con que estaba amarrada a mi corazón. (124-5)

“After so many years of never lifting up my head, I forgot about the sky. And even if I had looked up, what good would it have done? The sky is so high and my eyes so clouded that I was happy just knowing where the ground was. Besides, I lost all interest after padre Rentería told me I would never know glory. Or even see it from a distance...It was because of my sins, but he didn't have to tell me that. Life is hard enough as it is. The only thing that keeps you going is the hope that when you die you'll be lifted off this mortal coil; but when they close one door to you and the only one left open is the door to Hell, you're better off not being born...For me, Juan Preciado, heaven is right here.”

“And your soul? Where do you think it's gone?”

“It's probably wandering around like so many others, looking for living people to pray for it. Maybe it hates me for the way I treated it, but I don't worry about that anymore. And now I don't have to listen to its whining about remorse. Because of it, the little I ate turned bitter in my mouth; it haunted my nights with black thoughts of the damned. When I sat down to die, my soul prayed for me to get up and drag on with my life, as if it still expected some miracle to cleanse me of my sins. I didn't even try. ‘This is the end of the road,’ I told it. ‘I don't have the strength to go on.’ And I opened my mouth to let it escape. And it went. I knew when I felt the little thread of blood that bound it to my heart drip into my hands.” (65-6)

As Dorotea tells it, she had sinned. Told by the priest that she will never make it to Heaven, she committed suicide, accepting the fact that she could never know Glory. Thus Heaven loses the power to determine her actions, to demand that she go on living and suffering for a hope no longer viable. The separation between her and her soul hinges on this differentiation between retracted and retained interest or investment. The soul, as if it expected that some miracle would cleanse her of her sin, continued to hope, to beg Dorotea to go on living a life of suffering and penance and not to commit the sin of suicide. When released by Dorotea, her soul continues to exist in suffering, supplicating and seeking prayers to pay for its sin in continued investment in the possibility Heaven. In committing the capital sin of suicide, Dorotea affirms and in fact through her action makes of Heaven an impossibility, renounces any interest in and turns away from what becomes through her own suicide an unrealizable, unreal, or fictional future of communion and plenitude, something for which she had until then lived her

life in suffering. Without this hope, the here and now of imperfect (and inescapably sinful) existence becomes the only one of importance and value, and Dorotea's death is an end to a life lived in suffering for an impossible future ideal which defines, devalues and justifies the degradation of this here and now of life.

Without this hope for redemption, demands for suffering and self-abnegation were no longer justifiable or tolerable. Through actively sinning in suicide and banishment of the soul Dorotea jettisons the Catholic narrative of the meaning of life, which makes of the here and now a fallen order as a result of Original Sin and loss of original paradise. In other words, Dorotea's suicide is a rejection of pain and self sacrifice sanctioned by Catholicism, whose meaning of earthly life is one of suffering and punishment for the Original Sin inherited at birth, a life lived as payment for the debt of sin owed through that inheritance, and in hope of a promised future reward or repayment in the form of recovery of that higher order of better existence and attainment of a life without pain, suffering, and death at the individual level, and without conflict and violence at the social level: communion of individual souls with Divinity.

Y todo fue culpa de un maldito sueño⁷
And It Was All the Fault of One Accursed Dream⁸

—¿La ilusión? Eso cuesta caro. A mí me costó vivir más de lo debido. Pagué con eso la deuda de encontrar a mi hijo, que no fue, por decirlo así, sino una ilusión más; porque nunca tuve ningún hijo. Ahora que estoy muerta me he dado tiempo para pensar y enterarme de todo. (119)

Illusion? You pay dear for that. It made me live longer than is owed, longer than I should have. And that was the debt I paid to find my son, who in a manner of speaking was just another illusion. Because I never had any son. Now that I'm dead I've given myself the time to think and understand everything. (60, translation modified)

⁷ Rulfo, 119.

⁸ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 60, translation modified.

If we read Dorotea's death as the death of a hope for redemption, as rejection of having being born into that life as given reality –“más vale no haber nacido” (124), “you're better off not being born” (66) – the story she tells in the here and now of existence is a re-reading of the meaning of life which understands or makes sense of that hope as an illusion, and illusion as what produces, justifies and perpetuates suffering. But the idea of illusion is more complicated than this, as we will see in the story of Dorotea's search for her son. The passage above establishes a complex relation between the idea of illusion, the figures of father and son, and the question of debt and obligation that also define a particular mode or meaning of life. As Dorotea continues telling the strange and complicated story of her son: “Ni siquiera el nido para guardarlo me dio Dios” (119), “God never gave me so much as a nest to shelter my baby in” (60). Only “esa larga vida arrastrada” (119) or a drawn out existence of wretched supplication that she had, and in which she dragged herself here and there, looking out the corner of her eyes as if trying to see past people, suspicious that this or that one had hidden her baby from her.

For Dorotea had a dream that she had a son, and as long as she lived she always believed it was true. At first she carried the baby everywhere with her, and then she lost it. Much later in life when she was already very old she had another dream in which she went to heaven “y [se asomó] a ver si entre los angeles reconocía la cara de [su] hijo. Y nada. Todas las caras eran iguales, hechas con el mismo molde” (119), “and peeked to in to see whether [she] could recognize [her] son's face among the angels. Nothing. The faces were all the same all made from the same mold” (60). There they told her they had made a mistake with her. “Que [le] habían dado un corazón de madre, pero un seno de una cualquiera” (119), “That they'd given [her] a mother's heart but the womb of a whore” (60). When she had asked about her son after not recognizing him amongst all the similar faces one of the saints “se [la] acercó, y sin decir[le]

nada, hundió una de sus manos en [su] estómago como si la hubiera hundido en un montón de cera. Al sacarla [le] enseñó algo así como una cáscara de nuez: ‘Esto prueba lo que te demuestra’”(120), “came over to [her] and, without a word, sank his hand into [her] stomach like he would have poked into a ball of wax. When he pulled out his hand he showed [her] something that looked like a nutshell. ‘This proves what I’m demonstrating to you’ (60).

Dorotea tried to tell the saint that what he pulled out was not her womb but her stomach shriveled up from poverty and hunger. But another saint came and pushed her out the door and told her to go back to earth and to try to be good so she will not have too long to spend in purgatory. That was the dream that clarified for her that she never had a son. As she was already very old and the village of Comala was becoming deserted and her life that survived on people’s charity was getting even harder, she sat down to wait for death. When she and another villager found Juan dead she decided to end her life and was buried in the same grave as him.

Dorotea’s story is not only full of strange contradictions, reversals, and splitting up of causal relations and the temporality they construct, but also tells of the strange relation between the dream of a son which produces his existence in reality on the one hand, and on the other another dream which produces the reverse effect in reality, determining the non-existence of her son. While these contradictions reinforce the fictive nature of the narrative, they also allow us to imagine a different criteria for making a distinction with regards to the question of the son’s existence, in other words to reframe the question of existence in relation to meaning and value. We are invited to distinguish not between truth and falsehood, dream and reality, but between fictions that are a blessing and fictions that are a curse, fictions that are culpable as causes of suffering and fictions that lessen pain and make for a better existence.

To begin with, Dorotea tells of having had two dreams, one in which she dreamt she had a boy and which she accepts as reality for as long as she lived. Clearly this dream was no dream as far as her perception of it was concerned. Her son existed, who at the same time owed his existence to different order of reality. The second dream however established the truth of the fact that she never did have a son. But this claim to a more truthful knowledge of existence was according to Dorotea the product of another dream. If the distinction between dream and reality holds, she could neither have had a son nor have known that she did not have a son. If the distinction does not hold, the fact that she did have a son and Heaven's clarification that she did not would be equally true. The two dreams are marked as different from each other according to Dorotea not in relation to any externally given criteria for establishing true reality from fictive, unreal or imaginary dream but between the two dreams themselves in relation to diction and decree, to words and meaning as narrative logic and law. The dream which produced her son's existence she calls a benediction, the one of Heaven and the saints which contradicts it she calls a malediction. The two mutually contradict each other, but the contra-diction is perceived and understood as pronouncement of decree by Heaven as a higher order of reality, by Heaven's diction as what lays claim to the truth, to a correspondence with and in fact determination of the nature of reality. This dreams she calls a curse.

While this contra-diction as truth in opposition to falsehood is thus established by Heaven, Dorotea says it is also based on Heaven's mistake, on God's equivocation, one literal meaning of equivocal being to call by the same name two different things, or to confuse two things or meanings because of their similarity. Dorotea's life-story makes sense of God's originary truth about the reality of existence as one established through equivocation, something which owes its unified meaning to a masking of some other meaning and which obscured

meaning would make visible possibilities of other realities. Within Dorotea's narrative, God the Father as origin of life and the order of its existence is no longer understood to be one, primal, determining cause by necessity. It becomes one amongst other possible orderings of existence.

“Esto prueba lo que te demuestra” (120), ‘This proves what I’m demonstrating to you’ (60). Or rather, “this proves what it demonstrates to you.” An odd sentence construction. As Dorotea observes: “Tú sabes cómo hablan raro allá arriba; pero se les entiende” (120), “You know how strange they talk up there, but you can understand what they are saying” (60-61). In any case and despite the declaration's contortion into seeming subjectless objectivity, the proof used to establish the truth of the non-existence of her son was no proof, as according to Dorotea what the saint pulled out as self-evident truth of her whore's womb was in fact her stomach, not the organ for life's production of another life but one for its continued sustenance and subsistence. The saint's words “this proves what it demonstrates” presupposes her ability to see what he sees and accept the premise that meaning is shared truth because seeing corresponds to a given reality that determines objectively the meaning of what is seen. But this seemingly given, physical or bodily reality as objective ground for shared meaning is precisely undone by God's ability to equivocate and by the saint's equivocation, which removes all deterministic grounds for reality. The Metaphysical narrative of physical or earthly existence becomes one possible meaning of reality amongst others. Dorotea's story affirms her ability to see differently: a stomach instead of a womb, a son instead of no son. In seeing differently Dorotea exists differently from God-defined reality, including in what her body is, does, or creates.

The figure of the son condenses many of the threads of meaning in this contradictory story. In fact, what emerges most clearly from these contradictions is that there is no one, self-unified, or true story or meaning of the son. Its polyvalent existence depends for sense-making

on multiple constructions, convergences and divergences of meaning in relation to various intersecting and contentious frameworks and context – in other word in relation to other invented stories.

On the one hand, we could say that Dorotea's story is a complex affirmation of the existence and reality of her son against God's contra-diction, which decree also denies the possibility of her reunion with it in Heaven. This contra-diction as law Dorotea proclaims a malediction: wrong (untrue, invented, fictive) and bad or malignant words. The product of a dream ambiguously occasioned and disavowed by God, the son can be read as the site of Dorotea's creative agency that (sinfully) deviates from, rivals, and in the process makes apparent God's equivocal and circumscribed (not omnipotent) Will and Creation. As she relates being informed after spending a life time in suffering with the hope for her son's recovery, it was God who had given her the heart of a mother: an affective desire or intentionality that makes of motherhood her life's highest aspiration or 'dream,' its most valued purpose or meaning. Perhaps this same heart was what made her son's loss unbearable and turned her life's highest goal to that of its recovery. But as the saint also revealed, God had simultaneously made the dream unrealizable (and thus a cause for heartache and pain) in giving her the womb of a whore. Within the (belated) account of the equivocal nature of God's intention emerges Dorotea's own creative intentionality as the dream or desire is made real –a creative power much like that of God for whom willing *is* creation, in other words where intention (dream, desire) is action or creation (but which agency, also like God's as it turns out, is partial and finite rather than omnipotent).

This act of creation moreover challenges the very order of reality in reversing its meaning and value as it deviates from God given prerogative of motherhood defined as the vehicle for the reproduction and perpetuation (as copies) of God's originary creation and intention. This

prerogative of motherhood is further implicated in the punishment for Origin Sin and defines life on earth as something eked out through the pain of productive and reproductive labor for its sustenance and continuity as God's fallen creatures. This is so until such time as, having paid off and passed on the debt of sin to the next generation, it can recover eternal life in the joy and plenitude of Heaven. In this sense Dorotea's miraculous son makes of her an agent of production or creation of life rivaling God's own power of invention, and which creation is simultaneously that of a different meaning and value of life. It may be worth nothing that within this alternate story of creation Dorotea's invented or made up son could be said to embody another sense of the term *ilusión* in Spanish as noted earlier – an empowering sense of enthusiasm, thrill, or joy.

If the birth, emergence, or coming into being of Dorotea's son narrates an empowering, creative act or a happening that deviates from God's given order of reality as told through the Judaic myths of Creation and of the Fall, her separation from her son and the inability to accept the son's loss or death narrates an identification with or investment in the promise of restoration to eternal life proffered by the Christian myth of Redemption – which continues the story of and changes the ending to the Fall narrative, thereby changing its meaning – and which forms the basis for the Catholic order in which Dorotea lived. As something lost and for which Dorotea spends her life hoping to recover, the son can thus be read to resonate with the idea of Eden, and of Dorotea's existence as fallen from and a loss of ordinary paradise, and which became one moment in the larger narrative of salvation and recovery of such existence in Heaven. The story connects the son to the soul, God, and the recovery of ideal existence in Heaven in various ways. In the dream in which the saints in Heaven contradicted the existence of her son, she had hoped to find his soul there, perhaps waiting for her to rejoin him. Dorotea had also frequently beseeched Father Rentería, the village priest, to send her to Heaven to reunite with her son after

her death. Such reunion moreover would be inseparable from the reunion or communion with God in eternal life. It is this sense of the son as lost and recoverable ideal unity of existence that Dorotea eventually rejects in a reinterpretation of her son as the illusion that had made her live too long in pain and suffering for its recovery, and which suffering was expected and justified as debt-payment and punishment for a loss which now appears as nothing less than an inherited or generationally reproduced consequence of the Fall or separation from life's Edenic unity and plenitude through Original Sin itself.

Dorotea's is an immaculate conception – there is no mention of marriage or a husband – but whose child is not recognized by the Heavenly Father either, making it (twice) a bastard and Dorotea (twice) a whore, as pointed out by the saint. In a way a story of a disowned son of God that can be read in relation to the familiar figures of the devil or the antichrist, Dorotea's disinvestment in the son shifts the emphasis to something like that of an aborted narrative of the making of a Virgin Mary/Mother. The contrasting bastard/whore narrative that emerges foregrounds the social function or meaning of mother and son (of man and of God): that of reproduction and continuity of the name and order of the Father, in other words of the patronymic logos passed down generationally through patrilineal inheritance. Furthermore, it is through the Son and Savior (in the Christian narrative of redemption) that man is given the chance of reidentifying with the Father and recovering eternal life once lost, and which re-subordinates earthly existence – its meaning and value, agency and goal – to that of the higher order. Within this narrative the (virgin) mother serves to reproduce and perpetuate both orders as well as functions as the link that facilitates and perpetuates the subordination of one order to the other. Within the social ordering of woman's subordination to man and to the reproduction of his identity as the perpetuation of the image and identity of God any deviation is threatened with

Hell as the lower order of eternally suffering existence, and which deviation encompasses the whore or any form of sexuality that produces life as different from and not a reproduction of this order. In her retraction of interest or investment in the son and thus in motherhood Dorotea's story is ultimately one of a departure from the Christian order and its hierarchical unity of earthly life under Heaven and Hell, a unity which makes of earthly life a reproduction of the productive power or creative agency of the higher order, and which subordination of agency is doubly embodied by the mother as a vehicle for the reproduction of the Father/father's identity and the social order organized around its perpetuation.

In contrast to God's contra-diction, neither Dorotea's circumvention that is also an embodiment of God's equivocal intentionality, nor her retraction from God's dual creation of mother and whore by rescinding the son altogether constitute a disavowal of the continued existence and power of God or the soul. In the same way that as a Christian woman she was considered crazy to have walked around carrying a bundle of cloth in her arms as if it were her baby, in the here and now of this enigmatic life and story she continues to be so in allowing for the existence of God and the soul in a reality apart from her own. In other words Dorotea's invented reality or life-story is foregrounded as owing itself to other invented realities rather than as their negation or replacement as the true(r) reality, and which claim would make other realities subordinate or non-existent. Her life emerges from and owes itself to the life she left behind, and her creation/son comes into being due to another creation/order of existence (dream, Heaven), an accidental consequence of God's unintended intention. And Dorotea's narrative tells of co-existent realities without forming a structuring hierarchy between them. Better said (and as will be explored in the next chapter), it does so in order undo the various historical iterations of an expropriative hierarchy that subsumes and thereby unifies multiply co-existing realities into a

dominant one, whether by predefining some as less real (less significant, meaningful, or consequential) than others, by distinguishing between (true) reality and (false) representation (appearance, perception, knowledge, meaning) of reality, or in the division of reality into higher and lower orders.

As I have been delineating, Dorotea's self-contradictory story made up of and premised upon overlapping, convergent and divergent meanings (the significance of which I am also inventing through continual reframing and adjustment of context of reading) narratively enacts the idea of equivocation and proclaims it the foundation of any given reality, against the assertion of primal origin or ordinary act of creation. But while Dorotea's story can be simply summed up as a rejection of Christian Metaphysics, the story is made complicated by the fact that rather than representing the secular perspective that historically overturned the Christian worldview and makes of it (and of God's existence) an untruth, myth, or fiction, her suicide as an abandonment of the soul or the Christian conceptions of life, death, and afterlife (life's origin, end, and rebeginning) places her existence and its meaning not in a secular humanist world but in a benevolent fictional and mythical time-space of the grave shared with Juan Preciado, whose own story which I will discuss in the next chapter similarly tells of suffering and of eventual death as an exit from the accursed or malevolent untruth, fiction or myth that is the modern worldview on the nature of life and death. What I am highlighting here is how Dorotea's renunciation of the very category of truth, an affirmation of sin (deviation as non ordinary creation), and of what will emerge into an alternative meaning and way of life outside of both Christian and secular truth-claims in the figure of Susana San Juan are thematically bound up with and narratively accomplished through the complex figure of the son, the polyvalent nature of and contention over which first opens up the question of existence to that of truth versus

fiction, but which distinction is thereby displaced onto questions of productive power of invention/creation of existence versus the circumscribed power for the reproduction of given and predetermined existence, and whereby what is defined as reproductive power becomes visible as a kind of generative, creative agency of existence subordinated to the production, organization, and self-perpetuation through time of an invented order of meaning and organization of life, which thus claims the status of timeless or universal self-sameness or truth.

**Hay esperanza para nosotros, contra nuestros pesar. Pero no para ti⁹
There Is Hope for Us, In Exchange for Our Sorrows. But Not for You¹⁰**

Dorotea had many sins. Least of it was a whore's invention of a son that the Father denied, demanding abnegation and repentance in exchange for getting back in His Good Grace, and the existence of which no one believed anyhow. Thinking her crazy and consequently as incapable of harmful deviance as God is incapable of erring or being defied, the villagers perceive her made-up son as a non-threat. As they note in relation to the similarly crazy Susana San Juan, "...a los locos no les vale la confesión, y aun cuando tengan el alma impura son inocentes" (167), "...crazy people don't need to confess, and even if they have an impure soul, they're innocents" (112, translation modified.). Dorotea's other sin however was enough to make the village priest pronounce her soul eternally damned. As we will see, Dorotea's 'real' (consequential, threatening) sin is but a small part in a much bigger rebellion against God's ordained reality. In contrast to the story of Dorotea's rather benign withdrawal, this rebellion is implicated in the historical rise of the secular worldview as a bid to overturn God's order and establish its own knowledge as truth-claim and dominion over existence. Here is the scene of Dorotea's confession:

⁹ Rulfo, 86.

¹⁰ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 25, translation modified.

La primera que se acercó fue la vieja Dorotea, quien siempre estaba allí esperando a que se abrieran las puertas de la iglesia.

Sintió que olía a alcohol.

–¿Qué, ya te emborrachas? ¿Desde cuándo?

–Es que estuve en el velorio de Miguelito, padre. y se me pasaron las canelas. Me dieron de beber tanto, que hasta me volví payasa.

–Nunca has sido otra cosa, Dorotea.

–Pero ahora traigo pecados, padre. Y de sobra.

En varias ocasiones él le había dicho: << No te confieses, Dorotea, nada más vienes a quitarme el tiempo. Tú ya no puedes cometer ningún pecado, aunque te lo propongas. Déjale el campo a los demás,>>

–Ahora sí, padre. Es de verdad.

–Di.

–Ya que no puedo causarle ningún perjuicio, le diré que era yo la que le conseguía muchachas al difunto Miguelito Páramo.

El padre Rentería, que pensaba darse campo para pensar, pareció salir de sus sueños y preguntó casi por costumbre:

–¿Desde cuándo?

–Desde que él fue hombrecito. Desde que le agarró el chincual.

–Vuélveme a repetir lo que dijiste, Dorotea.

–Pos que yo era la que le conchababa las muchachas a Miguelito.

–¿Se las llevabas?

–Algunas veces, sí. En otras nomás se las apalabra. Y con otras nomás le daba el norte. Usted sabe: la hora en que estaban solas y en que él podía agarrarlas descuidadas.

–¿Fueron muchas?

No quería decir eso; pero le salió la pregunta por costumbre.

–Ya hasta perdí la cuenta. Fueron retেমuchas.

–¿Qué quieres que haga contigo, Dorotea? Júzgate tú misma. Ve si tú puedes perdonarte.

–Yo no padre. Pero usted sí puede. Por eso vengo a verlo.

–¿Cuántas veces viniste aquí a pedirme que te mandara al Cielo cuando murieras?

–¿Querías ver si allá encontrabas a tu hijo, no, Dorotea? Pues bien, no podrás ir ya más al Cielo. Pero que Dios te perdone.

–Gracias, padre.

–Sí. Yo también te perdono en nombre de él. Puedes irte. (131-2)

The first woman in line was old Dorotea, who was always waiting for the church doors to open.

He smelled the odor of alcohol.

“What? Now you’re drinking? How long have you been doing this?”

“I went to Miguelito’s wake, padre. And I overdid it a little. They gave me so much to drink that I ended up acting like a clown.”

“That’s all you’ve ever done, Dorotea”

“But now I’ve come with my sins, padre. Sins to spare.”

On many occasions he had told her, “Don’t bother to confess, Dorotea; you’d be wasting my time. You couldn’t commit a sin anymore, even if you tried. Leave that to others.”

“I have now, padre. It’s the truth.”

“Tell me.”

“Since it can’t do him any harm now, I can tell you that I’m the one who used to get the girls for the deceased. For Miguelito Páramo.”

Father Rentería, stalling for time to think, seemed to emerge from his fog as he asked, almost from habit:

“For how long?”

“Ever since he was a boy. From the time he had the urges.”

“Repeat to me what you just said, Dorotea”

“Well, that I was the one who rounded up Miguelito’s girls.”

“You took them to him?”

“Sometimes I did. Other times I just made the arrangements. And with some, all I did was head him in the right direction. You know, the hour when they would be alone, and when he could catch them unawares.”

“Were there many?”

He hadn’t meant to ask, but the question came out by force of habit.

“I’ve lost count. Lots and lots.”

“What do you think I should do with you, Dorotea? You be the judge. Can you pardon what you’ve done?”

“I can’t, padre. But you can. That’s why I’m here.”

“How many times have to come to ask me to send you to Heaven when you die? You hoped to find your son there, didn’t you, Dorotea? Well, you won’t go to Heaven now. May God forgive you.”

“Thank you, padre.”

“Yes. And I forgive you in His name. You may go.” (73-75, translation modified)

One of Pedro Páramo’s numerous bastard children, Miguel’s mother had died in childbirth. On the priest’s insistence that Pedro take care of the child and derision that the boy has Pedro’s bad blood, Pedro Páramo decided to raise Miguel to disprove the priest’s insult. An illegitimate son arbitrarily raised as Pedro’s heir and given his last name, the young Miguel is a living reproduction of Pedro in his violence, duplicitous dealings, and incessant seduction and violation of the village girls. Inheriting a bankrupt estate and nothing but unpaid debts from his dead father, Pedro himself had risen to power through a slew of deceptions and coercions: broken promises (lies); intimidations; false, invented and baseless allegations of land encroachment (considered laughably outrageous and crazy by the neighbor/defendant Aldrete);

outright murder of Aldrete and presumably of others who stood in the way of his expanding acquisition of land and power. Sleeping with the majority of the town's women and siring countless illegitimate children, he literally and figuratively becomes the father whose will is law unto the entire village. The priest – noting his own complicity – connects these violence and violations with Pedro's growing social standing that ended up rivaling the role of the church in the village, a status reproduced and expanded in Miguel:

«El asunto comenzó – pensó – cuando Pedro Páramo, de cosa baja que era, se alzó a mayor. Fue creciendo como una mala yerba. Lo malo de esto es que todo lo obtuvo de mí: “Me acuso padre que ayer dormí con Pedro Páramo.” “Me acuso padre que tuve un hijo de Pedro Páramo.” “De que le presté mi hija a Pedro Páramo.” Siempre esperé que él viniera a acusarse de algo; pero nunca lo hizo. Y después estiró los brazos de su maldad con ese hijo que tuvo. Al que él reconoció, sólo Dios sabe por qué. Lo que sí sé es que yo puse en sus manos ese instrumento..» (127)

It had all begun, he thought, when Pedro Páramo, from the low thing he was, made something of himself. He flourished like a weed. And the worst of it is that I made it all possible. “I have sinned, padre. Yesterday I slept with Pedro Páramo.” “I have sinned, padre. I bore Pedro Páramo's child.” “I gave my daughter to Pedro Páramo, padre.” I kept waiting for him to come and confess something, but he never did. And then he extended the reach of his evil through that son of his. The one he recognized – only God knows why. What I do know is that I placed the instrument in his hands. (69)

Considered crazy by the villagers for carrying around a bundle of cloth as if it were her child, losing it, and henceforth expending her life in the quest for its recovery, Dorotea lived on handouts until young Miguel made a secret deal with her in exchange for a few meals a day, a pact only revealed upon Miguel's untimely death in Dorotea's confession to the priest above, and which pact with the devil as it were allowed her to go on living, suffering, and searching for her lost son and the ideal of life he embodies. In aiding Miguel's relentless sexual conquests and thus – much like Pedro– his weed-like self-proliferation through a growing number of bastard children, Dorotea's sin is bound up with the evil flourishing of Pedro's power over the village by facilitating this power's continuity in his heir.

Pedro's evil is involved in the historical question of epochal transference of authority from the feudal church and the economy of salvation to that of secular power and capitalist political economy.¹¹ In refusing confession, penance, and absolution for his sins, Pedro's evil seem to lie less in his sexual and economic abuses and more in the refusal to subordinate the resulting accrued status and power to church authority to shore up and perpetuate the status quo. The priest never interfered in Pedro's worldly affairs, only expected to give penance and pardon him when his confession attests to his submission to the church and reaffirms the established power hierarchy. As narrated in Father Rentería's confession to another priest from whom he himself sought absolution, when Pedro spurned such display of obsequiousness the priest lamented too late his lack of action and tacit complicity with Pedro's expanding sphere of influence that came to surpass that of the church itself, a sin of omission for which Father Rentería was not forgiven.

As will be explored in more historical detail in the next chapter, the overlap, struggle, and gradual shift in the balance of power over Comala from Father Rentería to Pedro can be read to reflect the complex processes of historical transformations leading up to and beyond the Mexican Revolution: the transition from a Catholic and feudal social order (within which capitalist economic relations was emergent) to a secular configuration of power and consolidation of bourgeois capitalism within a democratic social order, a structural reconfiguration facilitated by

¹¹ For insightful readings of the figure of Pedro Páramo as an embodiment of the rise of money economy and reconfiguration of sovereign power see Franco, Jean: "Journey to the Land of the Dead: Rulfo's Pedro Páramo" *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*. Ed. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman. Durham: Duke UP, 1999 and Williams, Gareth. "The Mexican Exception and the "Other Campaign."" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:1, Winter 2007. See also Dove, Patrick. "Exígele Lo Nuestro: Transition and Restitution in Rulfo's Pedro Páramo." *The Catastrophe of Modernity: Tragedy and the Nation in Latin American Literature*. Bucknell UP, 2004. Dove's work discusses the character of Pedro Páramo as the figure of translation or the textual figuration of the process of social reconfiguration itself.

(and through the foreclosure of the other possibilities opened up by) the Mexican Revolution.¹²

The story of Pedro's imposition of his will over the village narrates the historical reorganization of social relations, the creation of new social reality the laws of which are moreover reproduced, consolidated, and extended through his son. In this sense Miguel's alleged murder of the priest's brother and rape of his niece – the latter feat most likely with Dorotea's help – serve to dramatize how the conflict between Pedro and the priest (and its repetition down the generations) narratively embody the violent transference of power: the historical subsumption of one self-reproducing or perpetuating social configuration of power (established social order) by another.

Yo no estoy para resignaciones¹³
I Am Not One for Resignations¹⁴

–Y sin embargo, padre, dicen que las tierras de Comala son buenas. Es lástima que estén en manos de un solo hombre. ¿Es Pedro Páramo aún el dueño, no?

–Así es la voluntad de Dios.

–No creo que en este caso intervenga la voluntad de Dios. ¿No lo crees tú así, padre?

–A veces lo he dudado; pero allí lo reconocen. (130)

“And yet, Father, they say that the earth of Comala is good. What a shame the land is all the hands of one man. Pedro Páramo is still the owner, isn't he?

“That is God's will.”

“I can't believe that the will of God has anything to do with it. You don't believe that, do you, Father?”

“At times I have doubted; but they believe it in Comala.” (72)

From one perspective a story of sin and social degeneration, the structural processes of transformation from the predominantly Catholic feudal social universe to a secular one is narrated through the perspective and life-story of Pedro Páramo himself as an overcoming of debt and servitude towards the attainment of free will and self-determination. The story of Pedro's childhood paints a symbolic picture of feudal filial and social relations: a dwindling

¹² For a discussion of the historical processes of socio-economic transformations leading to and from the Mexican Revolution see Wolf, Eric R. “Mexico.” *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

¹³ Rulfo, 82.

¹⁴ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 20, translation modified.

family fortune overburdened by the debt-obligation of tithe to the church; a father whose investments in the family estate produced not surplus but more crippling debt, but who proclaims the inconsequential worth of his son for his ungrateful disdain for work (whether on the father's estate or his suggestion of priesthood), but where work is visible as nothing but laboring to service debt; a mother inscrutably tragic, resigned equally to the drudgery of work and prayer and (along with the grandmother) to making sure young Pedro submits his life to the same.

The death of both parents in Pedro's adolescence marks a turning point in this narrative and the moment of Pedro's emergence from a relation of dependence on his family into independent adulthood as he shakes off the yoke of inheritance of his parents' debt-relations with the community, the church, and with God, and in the process breaks the generational self-reproduction and continuity of the established order of social relations. By reinventing (rewriting) his relation to the past through deceitful (invented falsehoods) and violent erasures of ownership and owed debts and through active forgetting of both parents, Pedro recreates the world as he reorganizes Comala's social and economic relations and reality around his own God-like will and rule, which came to replace that of the Church.¹⁵

On the one hand a story of liberation from subjection to relations of debt and dependence, Pedro's narrative links this free will to a reversal of power hierarchy and to his dominion over the village. Thus while a narrative of a break with the established order it is also a story of a structural repetition or reproduction of hierarchical social ordering, a replacement of one dominant power with another—a notable contrast with Dorotea's story. More importantly, Pedro's imposition of his will over the village is carried out in the interest and with the purpose

¹⁵ See Dove, previously cited, for an extensive reading of the process of erasure and reinscription of meaning of ownership through which Pedro Páramo consolidates and justifies his rise to power and the historical resonance of this character with the postrevolutionary state as well as the pre-revolutionary figure of the cacique or local strongman common to rural social organization in Mexico.

of making possible his recovery of Susana San Juan, a childhood love whose loss is narrated in terms that further recalls the story of Dorotea's son and the complex narrative configuration of the quest for the recovery of Eden in Heaven.

<<A centenares de metros, encima de todas las nubes, más mucho más allá de todo, estás escondida tú, Susana. Escondida en la inmensidad de Dios, detrás de su Divina Providencia, donde yo no puedo alcanzarte ni verte y adonde no llegan mis palabras.>>
(74-75)

Hundreds of meters above the clouds, far, far above everything, you are hiding, Susana. Hiding in the immensity, behind His Divine Providence where I cannot touch you or see you, and where my words cannot reach you. (12-13)

The locus of his childhood love and affective bond, Susana functions as replacement for Pedro's family as the site of belonging and oneness. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, Susana functions to bring together within Pedro's story the parallel Christian and modern secular narratives of prelapsarian and prepubescent unity of self and world, a certain idea of childhood as innocent of separation, differentiation and conflict prior to the Fall (or growth into an individual as differentiation from the family as a unit), and which sense of oneness is recoverable and reproducible through time through development of social bonds of belonging to the larger community and its perpetuation through founding of a new family, or as promised timeless communion in Heaven.

Pedro's memory of separation and pain in the above passage recalls Dorotea's longing for her son, similarly placing Susana in Heaven as Divinely promised destiny of recovery of communion. But it also makes visible a process of contestation that replaces the Christian narrative with a secular one of reunion as self-reproducing filial and communal oneness. Pedro's rejection of and thus barring from Heaven and its promise of everlasting unity defined as life's destiny or its highest goal and value narrates equally the transition from the Christian universe to the secular one of Man's free will and determination over his own destiny or end, and which idea

of self-determination is tied to filial union and communal oneness or another narrative of communion defined as life's highest meaning and value. With his near limitless resources – and in an enactment of sovereign will over his own destiny – Pedro tracks down and recovers Susana San Juan. In a more secular circumvention of will and usurpation of power Pedro has Susana's father killed to prevent him from taking her away again, and in order to place the now orphaned Susana under his own dominion conceived and justified as protection and care over her life and its well being. Thus Pedro takes on the function of and replaces both Divine Providence and Susana's father as sovereign provider through assuming the role of her husband.

Esperé a tenerlo todo¹⁶
I Wanted to Have It All¹⁷

<<Esperé treinta años a que regresaras, Susana. Esperé tenerlo todo. No solamente algo, sino todo lo que se pudiera conseguir de modo que no nos quedara ningún deseo, sólo el tuyo, el deseo de ti..>> (139)

I waited thirty years for you to return, Susana. I expected to have it all. Not just something, but everything there was to have, to the point that there would be nothing left for us to want, no desire but your wishes. (82, translation modified)

As I have read it so far, the basic narrative arc of Pedro's life-story as a search for Susana San Juan reproduces that of Dorotea's: a narrative of the Fall as original separation and loss of unity, and wherein filial union (and reproduction) grounds both the possibility of Christian communion and secular communal self-perpetuation as oneness. This desire is expressed in the above passage as a wish for perfect reciprocity as the very end of desire, intentionality or capacity for differentiation and thus production of separation and change, in other words a desire for the very end to time in an eternally self-enclosed oneness or unity. As will be discussed further in the next chapter this passage encapsulates an aspect of the secular idea of sovereign or

¹⁶ Rulfo, 139.

¹⁷ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 82.

free individual will which finds its teleological end or destiny in perfect reciprocity with the collective will or communality, an idea of shared communal (national) identity that is invested in the desire for timeless self-reproduction as one, and which logic reproduces the Christian telos of communion which Dorotea's cautionary tale foregrounds as destructive and disempowering illusion.

Dorotea's and Pedro's stories narrate divergent paths of reorganization or invention of realities. As I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, Pedro's story and its narrative resonance with the historical process of displacement of the Christian feudal social order by the modern one in Mexico is implicated in an ontological shift in world and worldview accompanying the rise to dominance of scientific narrative of life between the 16th and 17th century in Europe, and which enabled Europe's own passage from feudal to modern form of social organization. The gradual emergence of various scientific narratives about the nature of the universe, of the earth's natural life, and of human life itself eventually replaced the Christian world and worldview. In replacing Genesis and the Fall as stories of the origin of the world and of human life, scientific knowledge of the world comes to proclaim God and God's world as never having existed and thus as fictional. As the story of Pedro Páramo makes visible however and as I will discuss in the next chapter, this ontological shift replacing Christian truth or Divine law with scientific and secular one is implicated in the reproduction of the utopian narrative of communion through a continuity of the idea of sovereign power or freedom of self-determining existence translated from God to Man, and which promise of human existence and co-existence as communal (national) unity and plenitude emerges into another destructive logic of dominion that subordinates and overdetermines all other life forms and realities to its own self-reproduction as truth and sovereign law.

Within early 20th century Mexico the postrevolutionary consolidation of secular state power over against the feudal Catholic social order grounds itself on the prevailing scientific worldview for the establishment of its legitimacy as a lawful social organizing principle. In the next two chapters I discuss the complex consequences of the emergence of the secular state not only as a violence against Christians and their world and worldviews that also reproduces Christianity's teleological narrative but in contrast with preexisting indigenous cultures and their mythical realities equally marginalized by both the Christian and secular orders. For this I initially rely on Patrick Dove's reading of the story of Juan Preciado as a critique of state power, and which story makes visible secular rule of law as a hegemonic social formation and violence against alternative ways of life. My own reading of the novel suggests however that Dove's critique of modernity implicitly reproduces an investment in the possibility of oneness and plenitude as the highest ideal of existence. As I will show, this ideal is premised on the idea of human knowledge as cultural system of representation of given and lawful reality of existence and is implicated in 17th century scientific rationality and its claim to the truth of the nature of existence or natural law. This truth's technological and economic translation into dominion over nature can be said to reverse the Christian narrative of the Fall as loss of such dominion and subjection of humans to nature's power, and which reversal and recovery places Man in the position of God. As I have shown with *Dorotea* and will return to discuss in chapter three in the figure of Susana San Juan, it is this logic of sovereign dominion that the novel works to undermine

Chapter 2: Los retratos eran cosa de brujería / Representations Were a Tool of Witchcraft: Cultural Politics and the Modern Myth of Origin

In a certain sense, Juan Preciado's story is a story of his mother Dolores in much the same way Dorotea's story is a story of her son, and Pedro Páramo's is that of Susana San Juan. No less enigmatic, this story is similarly a narrative enactment of divergences and convergences of meaning constructed around the illusion or harmful fiction of Eden/Heaven, a plenitude of eternal Oneness defined as both origin and end/goal of existence. As I have shown, the complex figure of Dorotea's son embodies the prerogative of motherhood as self, filial, and social reproduction of earthly life and of Heaven. This son (or her role in the reproduction of the established social and metaphysical order) was ideally to have performed the function of her conduit to Heaven as promised by God. Pedro Páramo similarly spends his life accumulating and expending near infinite resources in a search for the recovery of a lost childhood paradise identified with the figure of Susana San Juan. As I will discuss in the next chapter, standing both as the locus of childhood affection (in place of the mother) and the reproduction/recovery of this filial love as desired future wife, Susana's return to Comala relates and simultaneously undercuts the narrative of Pedro's sovereign will. In the preceding chapter I have contextualized this will in relation to the momentous historical reconfiguration of power and social organization: the displacement of the will of God by that of the modern discourse of the sovereign will of man, socio-culturally organized into unified and sovereign nations.

“Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre: un tal Pedro Páramo” (65); “I came to Comala because I had been told that my father, a man named Pedro Páramo, lived there”

(3), begins Juan through the first person narrative point of view in the first words of the novel. Juan recounts his mother Dolores's dying wish that he return to her village to search for his father. Within this story, mother and son together form a similar narrative of the search for the promise of communion or belonging to a community as self-reproducing and timeless identity. The father's recognition would restore Juan to his place in the community as a legitimate son, heir and reproduction of his father's identity. The reproduction of the identity of the father as production of social continuity is also Dolores's promise of communion. In other words, Juan functions for Dolores as her afterlife/soul and conduit towards Comala/community as the sphere of social transcendence of individual identity (an overcoming of individual death through identity reproduction), in much the same way that the existence of Dorotea's son is entangled with that of the soul and the transcendental order of eternal life after death in a hierarchical union with the identity of the Divine. Within both narratives, the promise of communion and communal self-reproduction makes visible the hierarchical nature of the union: the subsumption of the identity of the mother to that of the father or husband much like that of individual souls to that of God.

The story emphasizes the superimposition of will and intentionality, knowledge and agency of mother and son (stylized through the use of italics) in this quest for social identity through which the mother is restored to her rightful but subordinate place and role in the family and community and the son to the place of the father as his rightful inheritance.

Yo imaginaba ver aquello a través de los recuerdos de mi madre; de su nostalgia, entre retazos de suspiro. Siempre vivió ella suspirando por Comala, por el retorno; pero jamás volvió. Ahora yo vengo en su lugar. Traigo los ojos con que ella miró estas cosas, porque me dio sus ojos para ver: <<Hay allí, pasando el puerto de Los Colimotes, la vista muy hermosa de una llanura verde, algo amarilla por el maíz maduro. Desde ese lugar se ve Comala, blanqueando la tierra, iluminándola durante la noche. >> Y su voz era secreta, casi apagada, como si hablara consigo misma...Mi madre. (66)

I had expected to see the town through my mother's memories, through her nostalgia – nostalgia laced with sighs. She had lived her lifetime sighing about Comala, about going back. But she never returned. Now I had come in her place, I was seeing things through her eyes, as she had seen them, because she had given me her eyes to see. Just as you pass the gate of Los Colimotes there's a beautiful view of a green plain tinged with the yellow of ripe corn. From there you can see Comala, turning the earth white, and lighting it at night. Her voice was secret, muffled, as if she were talking to herself...My mother. (4, translation modified)

Resonating with the teleological narrative of the Fall and Redemption, the narrative voice and point of view of Juan Preciado through which the story unfolds is overlaid with the voice and vision of his mother whose anecdotes about her village as lost Edenic past propels Juan's journey home in her place and structures his expectations of the future as that of its recovery.

Maldita y condenada Justina¹
Perverse and wicked Justina²

Patrick Dove's seminal work on the novel provides a compelling reading of the story of the mother and son's superimposed quest for lost communal oneness and the hierarchical social relation it implies as an allegory of the process and problems of secularization and nation building in postrevolutionary Mexico. His work, "Exígele lo nuestro: Transition and Restitution in Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*"³, reads as both problematic and potentiating the subsumption of the mother as natural and self-reproducing life to the production of the father's identity as social organizing principle, culture, and law, and which patronymic law reproduces itself through inheritance and functions as the basis for the social order's continuity. On the one hand, this dual premise allows Dove to use Dolores's quest for justice to problematize modern form of social organization and subject constitution, which posits the sovereign individual as the basis for a sovereign national order. It allows him to critique and delimit modern state logic based on

¹ Rulfo, 145.

² Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 88.

³ *The Catastrophe of Modernity: Tragedy and the Nation in Latin American Literature*. Bucknell: UP, 2004.

secular rule of law whose legitimacy is based on the claim to include and represent all individual national subjects whose wills equally constitute the law. On the other hand it permits him to read her demand for (and failure of) justice as an opening up of thought, reading or cultural system of meaning itself to possibilities of emergence or invention inconceivable within patronymic cultural logic or system of representational knowledge.

Using the figure of the exiled and excluded mother to critique of the universalist claim of modern social organization, Dove's reading of the novel is framed within the question of Mexico's postcolonial cultural contradictions, which he articulates in relation to the subsumption of indigenous cultural way of life to modern form of sociality. An incisive reading of the stories of Juan Preciado and Pedro Páramo in relation to questions of law, community and cultural contradictions in the historical context of social transformations in Mexico, Dove's work on the novel lays an important groundwork that makes possible my own discussion of the novel's use of indigenous culture – or more precisely of mythical imagination – in order to invite an alternative constructions of forms of relation and co-existence outside of the framework of culturally self-reproducing relations of lawfulness and self-determination as ideal form of sociality.

In this chapter I begin by framing my own reading of Juan Preciado's story through Dove's conceptualization of its allegorical relation to and exposition of historical contradictions preceding and succeeding the Mexican revolution. His insightful historical framing of the novel provides an important context for making sense of Juan Preciado's story. Partly following his conceptual discussion of the issues I begin my work in this chapter by reading the trajectory of Juan's story as a narrative movement from the quest for justice that begins the novel to that of a problematization of law (on which justice depends), a problematization that is further displaced onto a questioning of the very possibility of truth (on which law depends), and which -upon

Juan's death midway through the novel- serve to undermine the postrevolutionary state's promise of a lawful, just, and unified communal order.

The novel begins with Juan's return journey to Comala narrated as a quest for the righting of the father's wrong and restoration of justice. In Dolores's words to Juan:

--No vayas a pedirle nada. Exígele lo nuestro. Lo que estuvo obligado a darme y nunca me dio...El olvido en que nos tuvo, mi hijo, cóbraselo caro. (65)

Don't ask him for anything. Just what's ours. What he should have given me but never did... Make him pay, son, for all those years he put us out of his mind. (3)

An abstract appeal, Dolores's words articulate the desire for something like the return or repayment of a debt, fulfillment of some (over)due obligations, and which involve the possibility of enforcement of and retribution for broken (false or forgotten) promises, all of which terms connote a rightful demand and imply lawful relations as well as their enforcement as guarantee of justice and unity.

Immediately upon arrival in Comala, however, Juan finds out from his guide Abundio that Pedro Páramo is dead. His sojourn in Comala reveals a community decimated and abandoned to ruin and desolation, and the villagers dead or departed. While Dolores's reminiscences (and Juan's expectations) reiterate images of past/future communal harmony embedded within an image of timeless natural abundance, the Comala that progressively emerges in Juan's narrative voice and perspective is revealed as a place of strife and discord, exploitation and complicity, poverty and suffering. Through Juan's encounter with the few remaining villagers and the stories they tell (as well as through the interspersed narrative thread of Pedro Páramo), a divergent story of Comala's past emerges in juxtaposition to Dolores's idyllic vision. As it is progressively revealed to Juan and the reader, Pedro Páramo had tricked Dolores into marrying him with a false declaration of love, their filial union (and promised legal

obligations) a subterfuge for Pedro to wipe out the debt his father owed her father. Subsuming her considerable property under his legal status as her husband, Pedro Páramo subsequently sent her and their infant son away to live in exile and poverty. The story of a husband/father's injustice to his wife and son is further revealed as embedded within stories of Pedro's injustice to the entire community. As previously discussed, Pedro Páramo had wiped out his family's debt and risen to power through many other similar machinations and violence against anyone who would stand in his way, including through seduction and violation of the village women and girls who bore him numerous bastard children. Appropriating the village's productive and reproductive resources Pedro Páramo end up reorganizing Comala's social relations and recreating the community in his image, imposing his will upon it as law.

Juan's encounter with Abundio early on in the novel exemplifies this narrative displacement of the issue of filial injustice onto something like a problematization of lawful or harmonious social relations itself. Upon learning that Juan is journeying to Comala to look for his father, the guide Abundio announces that he, too, is Pedro Páramo's son and that, in fact, the community abounds in Páramo's bastard children. Abundio goes on to point out to Juan the extent of the Media Luna, Pedro's vast estate comprising nearly all the land in the village. He contrasts Pedro's wealth with the abandonment to poverty of the mothers (whores) of Pedro's bastard children:

Bueno, pues eso es la Media Luna de punta cabo. Como quien dice, toda la tierra que se puede abarcar con la mirada. Y es de él todo ese terrenal. El caso es que nuestras madres nos malparieron en un petate aunque éramos hijos de Pedro Páramo. Y los más chistoso es que él nos llevó a bautizar. Con usted debe haber pasado lo mismo, ¿no? (69)

Well, all that's the Media Luna. From end to end. Like they say, as far as the eye can see. He owns ever' bit of that land. We're Pedro Páramo's sons, all right, but, for all that, our mothers brought us into the world on straw mats. And the real joke of it is that he's the one carried us to be baptized. That's how it was with you, wasn't it? (6-7)

Abundio's remark exposes Dolores's rightful demand of a legal wife and Juan's status as legitimate son and rightful heir to a community of illegitimate relations, of women violated, or, not unlike Dolores herself, seduced under false pretenses/promises and similarly abandoned to poverty along with their children. These children of illicit sexual relations are however without recourse to law for justice.

In a manner similar to Dorotea's story of Divine Law as equivocal production of mother and whore (and which is implicated in questions of good and evil, Heaven and Hell), the narrative of Juan's quest for justice foregrounds this relation between lawfulness and its underside: what the law both produces and defines as illicit in order to establish itself as law. Following Hegel, Dove describes this production process as the absolute identity between Law and Crime. Juan's encounter with Abundio implicates his lawful quest for justice in this production and exclusion of illicit social relations. But the narrative implicates Juan in this injustice in order to further displace the question of social organization and co-existence from that of justice and law onto that of truth (and which recalls and anticipates the contested truth-claims to the existence of Dorotea's son). As in the course of emergence of these stories of law as generalized injustice Juan's journey takes a fantastic turn. In the process the above accounts of communal life that seemed to challenge Dolores's idyllic version and offer a truer story of the past is further complicated by another level of narrative reversal and divergence in meaning. As it turns out, the stories of the village's past are revealed alongside Juan's discovery that Comala in the present of his experience and perspective is a village of the living-dead. Beginning with Abundio and in a succession of enigmatic turn of events, each character Juan encounters is immediately after revealed to him and the reader as already dead by the next character he meets, who in turn is revealed as also already dead by the next character and so on. As these characters

are revealed as ghostly or supernatural beings whose very existences are hardly credible, incomprehensible, and inexplicable (crazy) from Juan's bewildered narrative point of view (within which these multiply embedded stories unfold), their stories about Comala too lose any basis for credibility. In what amounts to a narrative undoing of all possibility of truthful knowledge about community or the past and present of Comala (and its expected future), Juan and the reader are left with nothing but incredible accounts: false, partial stories or multiple fictional versions without any premise for ascertaining truth.

The story ends with yet another twist however. Crazed with fear, Juan wanders the village hearing fragments of stories from and about the past until he encounters an unnamed woman he is convinced (and makes a point of ascertaining) is really alive. Through a series of complicated interactions he ends up in bed with her, and in another reversal during their sexual union her body inexplicably dissolves into sweat and mud while Juan suffocates in the heat. At this point exactly half way through the novel in a climactic turn of events that is also another crucial moment of narrative divergence, Juan inexplicably both dies, and -much like with other characters- is revealed after the fact as having been dead all along. At this point the very narrative point of view that had governed the reading/meaning of the story thus far is itself revealed to be without credibility, as the reader suddenly discovers Juan in the grave with Dorotea, talking to her as if he'd been telling her the story this whole time. More importantly, within this emergent story, Juan is contradicted by Dorotea regarding the manner and place/time of his own death, and which narrative of death. He revises into a different version. Through a death that both ends the story and replaces the story's beginning with a different one – and in the process replacing its ending or death with a different story of life – Juan's story and role so far

comes to be reframed as one more fiction amongst others within the fictional stories of Dorotea and Susana San Juan – which dominate the second half of the novel.

As noted earlier, resonating with the complex question of justice in postrevolutionary Mexico, Juan's story is told from within the time-space of the modern nation. The above problematization of truth begins as a confrontation between Juan's secular point of view with stories and realities it cannot credit or comprehend. This include stories and appearances of lost souls belonging to the Christian world discredited as fiction by modern worldview, as well as other supernatural beings who, I argue, are – like Dorotea – clearly differentiated from these suffering souls condemned to remaining in a Comala that their very pursuit of communion in Heaven has turned into a hellish purgatory, and which logic is encapsulated by the story of Dorotea's abandoning of her soul to God's abandonment. This confrontation however gives way to a narrative undermining of Juan's realist point of view itself, and of the narrative meaning of the story thus far constructed through identification of the reader with this character as representation of the modern individual and its realistic first person point of view as it encounters fantastic tales and events. As noted this moment of Juan's fantastic death in the novel forms a narrative break that both ends and rebegins the novel as a different version or organization of meaning of Juan's story, one in which Juan is replaced as the protagonist by Dorotea and Sususana San Juan. As we will return to discuss in the next chapter through Tzvetan Todorov's classical formulation, the narrative sequence in this dual problematization of truth can be read as a narrative movement from the genre of the fantastic (of the supernatural as told within the framework of a realist point of view) to that of the magical (of supernatural and mythical stories told without reference or subordination to realist framework). This second move recasts the novel within a mythical point of view, a narrative perspective I have shown to be carefully

narratively highlighted as fictional, and through which the novel works to expose the very category of truth itself as illusion. I will return to discuss this point further in the next chapter through a reframing and rereading of Juan's story.

La ley de ahora en adelante la vamos a hacer nosotros⁴
From Now On, We Are the Law⁵

To return to the questions of justice, law, and truth, the complexity of Juan's story above resonates with the secular quest for promised justice and questions of rightful belonging to a lawful community within the emerging democratic national order of postrevolutionary Mexico. Premised upon the consolidation of the postrevolutionary modern nation-state, the promise in question offers the fulfillment of the Enlightenment's emancipatory ideals and modern project of democracy and equal representation, of inclusion into the sphere of law-making through national representational politics founded upon the idea of individual self-determination and self-governance as the condition for a free, just and unified society.

This promise is predicated on an ideal of national progress and development towards emancipation of individuals from hierarchical feudal ties and from the accompanying politico-cultural ideology that justifies usurpation and concentration of land and other resources in the hands of the national oligarchy. This ideal of emancipation is further grounded in the belief that capitalist development of natural national resources provides a way to overcome poverty and scarcity towards shared economic plenitude, and thus to social accord for all members of the nation. Through self-development into modern individuals, the newly formed national citizenry would thus be liberated from Catholic-feudal ideology and traditional forms of subjection to

⁴ Rulfo, 100.

⁵ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 40.

unequal, hierarchical social relations and instead fulfill the promise of self-realization as free and sovereign individuals within a free and sovereign nation.

An institutional embodiment of such a promise, the postrevolutionary state emerged out of the Mexican revolution, an inchoate period of widespread social fragmentation and violence which erupted against the alliance of power between the military dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, the national oligarchy, and the Catholic Church --the established feudal social order that had continued in Mexico up until the time of the revolution in 1910, despite formal independence from Spain almost a century earlier.

On the one hand, the Mexican Revolution was the result of a disintegration of social consensus resulting from conflicting economic interests of various sectors that had evolved and diversified under the proto-capitalist national economy of the Diaz dictatorship. Diaz's policy of "pan y palo" or "bread and cudgel" rewarded with privileges and concessions those who collaborated with the interests of the oligarchy and foreign investment and kept the majority of the social underclass -on whose dispossession and exploitation the power of the oligarchy depended- in check through violence and intimidation. The Revolution was also a claim for social justice through restitution of land and a demand for an end to systemic dispossession and exploitation of labor in the agrarian sector, as well as for fair wages and protection of national industries over against foreign ownership and dominance.⁶

More than a conflict of economic relations and interests however, the social fragmentation that resulted in the revolution entailed the disintegration of consensus regarding the very question of co-existence, and thus of ideologies regarding social organization itself. The Revolution expressed a conflict among different versions of the politico-cultural forms upon

⁶ See Wolf's discussion of the fragmentation and reconsolidation of the nation in "Mexico." *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

which to organize socio-economic relations. While there were many alliances of interests established throughout the period of the revolution there was no clear common ground or agreed upon premise based upon which to unify them into one social framework. The eventual consolidation of the postrevolutionary state and its universalist claim to include and mediate all conflicts of interest and establish a common ground for overcoming social contradictions and violence at the national level was in fact achieved through its exclusion of alternative visions for social organization. The centralized Mexican state established itself by excluding as possible grounds for social organization indigenous demands for autonomous communal existence, as well as through the defeat of various other claims for regional autonomy. It also consolidated itself through economic liberalization and social reforms aimed at dismantling the power of the clergy through confiscation of Church property and criminalization of many of the clergy's former functions including that of education, a reform aimed at dismantling the pre-existing feudal social structure grounded in a Catholic cultural worldview regarding the meaning and purpose of individual and communal life.⁷

The Cristero rebellion of 1927, in which peasants in the South and Southwest of Mexico who had earlier revolted against the Diaz regime fought the newly consolidated secular state in the name of Christ and conservative ideology, was a reaction against such liberal policies enshrined in the constitution of 1917, as well as against the state's education program that sought to dislodge the peasant populace from their world and "backward ways" by imposing a cultural education that the state hoped would produce modern individuals whose worldview and economic self-interest would align with that of the secularizing national economy and within a social structure founded on progressive ideals based on private property and capitalist

⁷ See Tuck, Jim. *The Holy War in Los Altos*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1982.

development. The defeat of the peasants and the deal brokered between the church and the state finally established Mexico as a centralized, modern nation-state committed to the ideals of individualism and capitalist development as the basis of national progress towards shared economic plenitude; a state, however whose universalist claim to unification, justice and inclusion of all individuals as equals within the social structure already excluded claims to alternative forms of politico-social organization based on other economic and social relations, and which organizations are made illegitimate by the emergent order.

Tanteando todo los terrenos⁸
Getting the Lay of the Land⁹

As previously noted, one Patrick Dove's focus in reading the novel is historically localized on the indigenous axis of exclusion in the foundation of an ostensibly universally or objectively lawful and just national social order. Dove reads two historical sites of production of legitimacy through which the modern state include indigenous people and culture into the representational apparatus of national, democratic self-governance in order to exclude the possibility of their (pre- or non-national) cultural autonomy and communal self-organization. The first site pertains to the cultural discourse of *mestizaje*. Dove attends to the historical process whereby the postrevolutionary state invented an idealized, indigenous cultural past that it then incorporates as national heritage into an idea of *mestizo* Mexicanness – a synthesis of hispanic and indigenous cultures forming a new national cultural identity shared by both. The outpouring of state sponsored modernist cultural productions that harkened back to the pre-colonial past and blended pre-Columbian images and themes with modernist aesthetics in the various literary, artistic, and intellectual spheres – while creating the image of recovery of lost or subsumed

⁸ Rulfo, 162.

⁹ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 107.

culture (under colonial Catholicism) and its restoration to the rightful place as origin of the nation – in fact served the interest of the state in its self-legitimation as an inclusive or universal representational political system, that is to say a representational apparatus that transcends particular cultures in representing and mediating the interests of both. This in turn serves the telos of cultural and economic modernization justified as a unified national development in the equal interest of all. As Dove writes regarding the claim to inclusion of indigenous cultures into a unified national origin and identity that serves the telos of modernization as promise of future utopia, and which promise grounds the state's self-legitimation:

The increased interest in indigenous and pre-Columbian traditions and iconography following the revolution --a tendency strongly promoted by statist institutions-- is far from a simple, disinterested hearkening back to an earlier time. This renewed interest in the past in fact constitutes an *invention of tradition* that operates in the interests of the state. The state's claim to have recovered and preserved the past in its meaning or value serves as a pretext for this (re)production process: behind the image of a restored national tradition unfolds a second space, a space that will in turn be occupied by the state --which henceforth proclaims its legitimacy as curator, protector, and guarantor of this inheritance. The state's role is that of a fabulist, projecting a field of legibility in which the failures and limitations of the present moment can be passed off as merely temporary and epiphenomenal, a necessary collective sacrifice in the process of realizing what the historian Hector Aguilar Camin terms 'the true Mexico...the one that had not yet appeared and was to be conquered in the future.' (Aguilar Camin and Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution*, 159, quoted in Dove, 106)

He further adds:

As curator of tradition, the state simultaneously justifies and effaces its presence. It legitimates its own existence as well as the dissymmetries it permits and propogates on the dual basis of a past to be recovered and a future to be realized. At the same time, it masks the fact that it only represents certain particular interests by passing itself off as universal law or necessity. A crucial sleight of hand relegates social negativity -that is, the moment of loss, violence, uncertainty and contingency that are part of any national history- to a merely temporary or accidental existence, or to a condition that the nation, thanks to the uplifting power of the state, will some day surpass. Through its orchestration of cultural production, the state posits the *being* of the nation as offstage, as a reserve -and thus removed from the transitory nature of history. Cultural production following the revolution was, whether knowingly or not frequently complicit in these rituals of legitimation. One could examine any number of examples of such complicity between culture and the state: for instance, with the rise of Muralism in the 1920's, which

often claimed to realize a harmonious unification of the pre-Columbian symbolic world with revolutionary and modernizing projects; or, similarly, in the essay tradition founded by Samuel Romos, Jose Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, and Paz, which envisioned and celebrated a timeless national character or *mexicanidad* [‘Mexicanness’]; and, likewise, with the literary tradition known as *la novela de la revolucion* [the Novel of the Revolution], which frequently memorialized the revolution in the form of heroic fables. (106)

Dove makes empathatically clear that this claim to inclusion of indigenous cultures produces and legitimizes their continued subsumption under a different cultural logic, a cultural subjection to a hegemonic socio-cultural form that becomes visible in the politics of land appropriation and redistribution. In this second historical site of the state’s invention of its legitimacy Dove focusses on competing cultural claims to land ownership and mode of its use and cultivation as the basis for social organization. As he notes, particular to the context of post-revolutionary Mexico, the founding exclusion to statist universalist representational claim is visible in the conflicting claims over land and in state land reform policy. Mexican history is one of repeated, systemic land appropriation and dispossession of the indigenous people, which formed one of the impetus behind the early twentieth-century revolution. Land reform and redistribution formed one of the promises of redress and justice that legitimated the emergence of the postrevolutionary state as mediator between the various social sectors and interest groups. Dove’s reading of the above question of land makes visible the inseparable nature of capitalist property relations and mode of production from modern institutional forms of knowledge and subject constitution of the national people into modern individuals, and which logic underpin and justify sovereign state rule of law.

As has already been noted, debate over land tenure and ownership forms a fundamental axis in Mexican history. In the colonial period, and likewise following the wars of independence and with the emerging issues of national sovereignty and unity, *la tierra* marks an intersection for conflicting understandings of ownership, possession, culture and use: for instance, between European and indigenous conceptions of property and cultivation; and between capitalist and premodern modes of production. Moreover, *la*

tierra is overdetermined in each of these systems, comprising a nexus of multiple and potentially conflicting significations. On one hand land presents an indisputably concrete element for potential struggle, and it is part and parcel of the world that humans set out to transform. At the same time, land - as home, territory, and soil- operates as an index of transcendence in national and prenational Mexican history, designating a communal or national good or right. As a register of transcendence, the land is not a reservoir of permanent meaning but the condensation of a surplus of meaning: the significance of la tierra is always more than the sum of its calculative appropriations and valuations. (133)

The process of modernization facilitated capitalist incursion into rural parts of Mexico and effected a “the displacement of previous systems and practices of land tenure, many of which were based on indigenous forms of communal ownership” (Dove, 133). These communal land holdings were once granted special protection by the Spanish crown. In the wake of national independence, communal form of ownership was eroded in the various waves of national agrarian modernization programs aimed at privatization of land for individual ownership to facilitate surplus production and accumulation for national growth.

As Eric Wolf details in *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*¹⁰, the various liberal reforms were aimed at breaking up large landholdings that had worked in the favor of Spanish colonial interests. Along with other monopolistic economic activities legally protected by law, large land holdings or estates were encouraged and granted corporate status and socio-political autonomy in exchange for economic contributions in the forms of dues and tributes to the Crown. Under this feudal structure prior to independence land was concentrated under the Church, large landed estates or haciendas, and indigenous communal land holdings. While continually under threat of encroachment and credit bating by the church and especially the big haciendas – which decreased the size of their communal land and often turned indigenous population into indentured laborers on larger estates to supplement their economic production – indigenous communal land holdings were significant in size and number and the majority of the

¹⁰ “Mexico.” *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

indigenous population lived within and maintained their culturally separate socio-political organization at village level despite decreasing measure of relative economic autonomy.

Intended as a way to create small, private family farms and encourage the emergence of a viable middle class in the post-independence period, successive new governments and waves of reform broke up corporate landholdings, but in fact ended up concentrating land as private property in the hands of the new oligarchic elite that emerged through close ties with and concessions from the government. In effect, the reforms freed up labor from feudal structure of debt peonage and from indigenous communal ties to work as landless free wage laborers both in the agricultural sector and in the diversifying and industrializing economy. Within the context of increasingly internationalized relations of production and subjection to fluctuation in global prices, the small number of family farms that did emerge in the process were often forced into debt, and which indebtedness invariably resulted in further loss of land to big private estates with more resources as leverage.

In the context of Indian communities the loss of social organization bound to communal holding produced a restructuring of social organization of communal ties and obligations relative to economic activities. This restructuring worked against their ability to maintain both land and communal self-organization. Most importantly Wolf identifies the cause of land loss to the restructuring of traditional processes of communal leadership that displaced the burden of its expenses onto limited, privatized resources. He states:

The Spaniards had reinforce the cohesion of the Indian communities by granting them a measure of land and demanding that they make themselves responsible collectively for payments of dues and for the maintenance of social order. The communities had responded by developing, within the framework of such corporate organization, their own internal system of political organization, strongly tied to religious worship. Nearly everywhere, sponsorship of a sequence of religious festivities qualified a man to become of the decision makers for the community as a whole. A man who sought power, therefore, had to do it largely

by meeting criteria laid down by the community; when qualified he had to do so through participating on a committee of elders like himself who acted and spoke for the community. Power was thus less individual than communal. With the coming of new land law, however, the very basis of this system was undermined. Not only did haciendas seize much Indian land, but Indians themselves began to pawn land, to which they were now entitled individually, in order to meet the ordinary expenses of living and the extraordinary expense of religious sponsorship. The very mechanism which at one time had guaranteed the continued solidarity of the community now turned into a means for destroying it. (Wolf, 17)

This intensified social restructuring in the agrarian sector had its counterpart in the complex expansion of the industrial sector dominated by foreign ownership, and which depended on the multitude of landless peasants as cheap source of wage labor. This process of consolidation of capitalist relations of production would lead to a deepening socio-economic polarization and crisis, the social disaffection with which ignited the revolution during the Diaz regime.

Dove's reading of the promise of justice through renewed commitment to redistribution of land – which promise legitimated the consolidation of the postrevolutionary state – is focussed on showing the repetition of a cultural imposition or rewriting of the meaning of land itself. As Wolf notes, initial, limited reform measures granting communal land to indigenous population were gradually displaced by private property laws as the postrevolutionary state emerged from dependence on negotiated relations between different sectors of economic, cultural and regional interests and identities through successive governments to consolidated its power as the institutional representation and management of their conflict over the nation's resources, but which was organized to the benefit of larger estates and industries and justified through the logic of capitalist and national development and progress. Thus consolidation of state power and enforced inclusion into the logic of national modernization effectively eroded the relative socio-cultural autonomy of indigenous population, further disempowering them under the guise of

inclusion into democratic self-determination as individual property owner whose self-interest is represented by the modern state.

Entonces ¿qué esperas para morirte?¹¹
Then, what are you waiting for to die?¹²

Dove's focus on the indigenous axis of exclusion is elaborated within the contemporary critical lens of cultural politics. Consonant with much contemporary poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking (albeit the latter term has fallen out of favor), Dove's is an attempt to critique, contextualize, and relativize modern form of knowledge and perspective: in other words to delimit the truth-claims (to objectivity) of scientific rationality that allowed the emergence of modern perspective and secular cultural logic, wherein scientific secular knowledge replaced both Christian and indigenous myths as the principle for social organization. As I will discuss in more detail in a subsequent section, the rise and consolidation of a scientific worldview between 16th and 17th century in Europe revised and replaced the Christian view of the world as the truth regarding the nature of existence. As scientific elaboration of the idea of natural, physical law came to displace Divine or metaphysical law as the principle governing life, science's claim to a more truthful, rational or objective knowledge of the nature of existence enabled the gradual emergence of myriad institutions of modern knowledge (medical, educational, juridical, penal, economic, historical, etc) which further consolidated themselves into a biopolitical regime explaining, regulating, and managing social life through the subjectivation of human life itself under its own particular cultural logic or worldview on the meaning of life natural and social.¹³ This in turns underpins and is inseparable from the self-justification of secular rule, which

¹¹ Rulfo, 164.

¹² Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 109.

¹³ See Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977.

depends on these institutional forms of modern knowledge and subjectivation to legitimize itself as a neutral mediating principle for social organization of human co-existence. Claiming to objectively represent what emerged at the center of this biopolitical organization of life into a modern conceptualization of man as a purportedly sovereign or self-determining individual subject, organized into different linguistic/national collectivities or communities, secular rule of law replaced earlier human subjection to Divine Rule as an ostensibly universal principle for the reorganization of both the human and the natural world.

Dove's reading of the novel seeks to relativize this scientific and secular modernity as one cultural worldview on reality or nature amongst others. In doing so his work also makes visible capitalist private property relations and mode of production as an historically and culturally specific system of value or interest underpinning secular rule of law and socio-political form of the modern nation-state as the basis for seemingly free national, human cultural self-organization and development. As he makes clear, however, this conception of culture and organization is based on a universalized cultural inscription of the meaning of human life and its co-existence or sociality into that of sovereign national collectivity (and shared linguistic/cultural identity) of sovereign, self-interested and self-governing private individuals. Situated in the context of a similar but belated passage from Christian to secular rule in postrevolutionary Mexico in early 20th century, Dove's work is a critique of the totalizing and self-universalizing tendency of modernity, and which opens up the possibility for a reevaluation of premodern cultural conceptions of the world subsumed to its logic: a political opening up of questions of sociality to alternative forms of human subjectivity, knowledge, agency, and social organization.

Dove's contextualization of this relativization of modern cultural logic to the history of contention between the secular state and indigenous cultural claims to other forms of social

organization allows us to make sense of Juan's encounter with the supernatural beings in the novel as an encounter with other cultural forms of human existence and perception, other ways of seeing and of being in the world perceived as unnatural or supernatural (unreal, fictional) by modern narrative regarding the very nature of life human, social, and natural, and which makes visible as historical remainders earlier forms of aspirations and organizations of life both Christian and indigenous that modern cultural logic and social ordering tries and fails to eradicate, supersede, or subject to its own regime of biopolitical inscription and regulation, and within which parameters of social law and ordering the novel's quest for justice begins. This framing allows me to read Juan's death and the end of this encounter between his modern perspective and the forms of life that makes visible the underside of its cultural point of view as premise and social parameters for the promise of a just and lawfully self-unified social order as an end to and passage out of the secular worldview as truth-claim to the nature of the world on the one hand, and through association with Dorotea emerges into a narrative rejection of Christian truth and reality on the other. As I will return to discuss at the end of this chapter, the emphasis on fictionality in the second half of the novel in the characters of Dorotea and Susana in opposition to the (mutually) exclusive truth-claims to reality of both the secular and Christian order emerge into resonance with a mythical view of the world that can be associated with indigenous cultures, and in which cultural conception the very relation point of view/knowledge and world/reality emerges into a different framework and makes of truth itself a fiction.

Los retratos eran cosas de brujería¹⁴
Representations were a tool of witchcraft¹⁵

Dove's work does not consider the stories of the dead in the novel as an alternative framework of reading. In fact he cautions against any attempt to make sense of the meaning of death and madness in the novel other than as delimitation of modern perspective, valuing them as narrative markings of the sites at which the culturally contingent parameters of modern perspective and representation of reality emerges into visibility. This injunction by implication locates the reader within the same modern cultural perspective, a location or *point* of view seemingly encouraged by the novel itself in its construction of Juan's modern, first person narrative of point of view and implied reader as the guiding narrative perspective for the unfolding of the story. As I will return to discuss in the next chapter however, the first person point of view is also a staging of a particular reading process that is based on assumptions of narrative representation and identification, a staging or dramatization that problematizes this narrative point of view's implication in modern claim to representation of reality not only to delimit it – as Dove argues – but in order to enact and reveal the complicity, investments and implicit cultural self-positioning of the reader (and his/her view of reality) tricked into identifying with it, and thereby showing such reader's knowledge and reality to have always already been identified with and invested in a particular cultural subject position.

Dove's work is grounded upon the linguistic turn in psychoanalysis, which understands human knowledge, subjectivity, and agency as constituted within discursive systems of symbolic cultural meaning that are social constructs and thus culturally specific, rather than an objective mirror of reality. But while socially constructed and culturally varied, representational

¹⁴ Rulfo, 68.

¹⁵ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 6, translation modified.

knowledge systems function more or less through approximation of correspondence to the externally given reality (natural, universal), which forms each culture's origin or point of departure for its development. Each cultural system of knowledge thus borders on other cultural representations of the same originary nature, at which site of contact between cultures the meaning and value of each cultural-linguistic system is visible as limited in its truth-claim to correspondence with or representation of natural reality.

This representationalist framework that forms Dove's starting premise emerges into significance for questions of cultural politics itself in two key moments which connects Dove's reading of the mutually exclusive cultural contention over the meaning, use, and territorial communal ownership of land between the state and the indigeneous people to his reading of the figure of the exiled mother in the novel. Within Dove's reading Dolores emerges through Juan's death and the impossibility of inclusion within secular law and justice to stand for and narratively mark the site of cultural conflict without resolution itself. As he writes regarding the question of land in a passage which I have cited previously:

In the colonial period, likewise following the wars of independence and with the emerging issues of national sovereignty and unity, *la tierra* marks an intersection for conflicting understandings of ownership, possession, culture, and use: for instance, between European and indigenous conceptions of property and cultivation; and between capitalist and premodern modes of production. Moreover, *la tierra* is overdetermined in each of these systems, comprising a nexus of multiple and potentially conflicting significations. On the one hand, land presents an indisputably concrete element for political struggle, and it is part and parcel of the world that humans set out to transform. At the same time, land - as home, territory, and soil- operates as index of transcendence in national and prenational Mexican history, designating a communal or national good or right. As a register of transcendence, the land is not a reservoir of permanent meaning but the condensation of a surplus meaning: the significance of *la tierra* is always more than the sum of its calculative appropriations and valuations. (Dove, 133)

As is visible the idea of land (which figuratively stands for all natural forms and forces of life organic and inorganic, conceived as terrestrial space, territory, geography) is on the one hand

posited as objectively existing as “concrete element,” “world,” or a materiality of life grounding human social organizations. This objective world or given external reality is understood as the site for cultural inscription of human meaning and contextualized within contending forms of human knowledge production, each of which make sense of as it makes use of and transforms nature for human ends. Land is thus a site of culturally specific production of meaning and values of land, (its use, goal, purpose) which forms the basis for the production of meaning of the human in its knowledge, agency and social organization. We could say that different cultural production of the meaning of natural life and human life ground different social systems of knowledge and truths about the very nature of reality, which grounds different organizations of human social relations in relation to nature.

In his reading of Juan’s sexual union with the unnamed woman, whose fantastic physical dissolution precedes Juan’s own death, Dove describes the moment as an emergence of a physical or bodily materiality of human life outside of language and meaning, and wherein the human body emerges in a counterpart to land as materiality of natural existence prior to and constitutive of culture and as site of cultural contention or inscription of meaning. The disruptive emergence into language of the woman’s body narratively functions – much like land itself – to mark the limit of modern cultural logic’s universalized view of natural, physical reality natural and human. Posited as the constitutive outside or ground for cultural production of meaning itself, the body for Dove marks the limit of all cultural perspectives or symbolic knowledge production, marks natural human life as originary or prior to, exceeding, and – as part of nature – constitutive of all social narratives regarding the meaning or nature of life human and natural. Dove reads Juan’s sexual union with the nameless woman and the dissolution of her body that precedes his own death as a dissolution of cultural meaning itself, in other words as the moment

where language or meaning production comes undone to make visible the corporeal female body in its reproductive capacity over which Juan's particular modernist perspective on the meaning of life (and death) is inscribed and through which reproduces itself. This materiality emerges into visibility, into perspective or sense, only as language and meaning's constitutive outside, the natural ground for the very possibility of human culture as its representation on the one hand, and which representational claim is simultaneously made visible as a cultural or biopolitical production and inscription of its own particular meaning and value. As Dove writes:

...in the reflexive *desbaratarse* ('to fall apart,' 'to go to pieces'), which Juan Preciado uses to describe a shattered intimacy with the other, we can also hear one of the intransitive forms of *desbaratar*: 'to speak non-sense' as opposed to the voice of reason. The body of the other performs a double and paradoxical function in organizing the presentation of catastrophic dissolution. With the allegorical presentation of a kind of horror *vacui*, the somatic body has been evacuated of its transcendence, its spirit or soul. Hollowed out or deprived of its transcendent ground, the body appears to collapse under the weight of its own nothingness. At the same time, however, the body- or the corpse- begins to perform a second function that is antithetical to the first, negated possibility: as its capacity to function as a sign in exhausted, what remains or emerges is the insistence of the body in its materiality. This somatic-corporeal dissolution 'speaks' its own 'language' precisely as its being exhausts itself. (Dove, 154)

Dove's assumption of a materiality of life belonging to a natural order of timeless or originary unity prior to the time of human cultural self-reproduction, organization, and development as subjects of history or agency helps illuminate the importance of the maternal figure in his reading of the novel, which is this same site of originary unity or sexual reproduction/birth of the human as natural life prior to its entry into the symbolic order of the father, in other words prior to and constitutive of the process of subjectification through language as symbolization of difference founding the possibility of social relation where communication or shared cultural meaning, value, and social accord functions as the basis for oneness of a self-reproducing communal identity and thus as timeless communion.

Within the framework of knowledge as representation, this originary unity prior to entry into language as social subjectivation makes of the maternal figure the site of contact between culture and nature (land), and which functions to open every cultural logic and meaning up to its constitutive and generative outside that allows for its generational reproduction and thus for social continuity, and which at the same time makes its particular social order visible as limited in relation to other cultural inscriptions of meaning of the same natural regenerative process that grounds its own system of meaning production. Within the novel, the maternal figure for Dove points to the cultural inside/outside of modernist logic, the impropriety that founds its order and promise of proper communal belonging or inclusion. Thus Dove reads Juan's death and narrative end to modernity's universalizing claim to representation of the very nature of life as allowing the mother's demand for justice to emerge, much like land itself, as the constitutive limit of modern cultural logic and thus to make visible claims to justice that exceed the distributive logic of return of land and property within modern social parameters of law. It thus emerge into resonance with indigenous cultural claims to autonomous, territorial communal self organization and self-reproduction on the one hand, while simultaneously marking indigenous culture itself as one exclusive cultural claim to the same land as territory and resource for its self-reproduction.

Dove's injunction against the attempt to read and make sense of the alternative perspective offered by the novel is on the one hand a caution against his own implied reader's modern worldview's reproduction of the violence of subordination of other cultural forms of knowledge and ways of being – narrated in the text as through death and madness as the outside of modern truth and logic – to modern representational system of meaning making or reading. It is at the same time a caution against reversal of cultural valorization which would replace one hegemonic cultural imposition over others with another, equally dominant one. Within this logic of

representation and its external delimitation relative to other cultures, the very idea of culture emerges as a monolithic discursive system seemingly internally unified, self-enclosed, and self-reproducing (as self-consistent continuity of development): a totalizing system of inscription of social meaning and reality that Dove both critiques as hegemonic, reproduces and affirms its reproduction as inevitable, and simultaneously holds out as deferred and indeterminable future possibility of emergence of what amounts to another version of self-reproducing cultural unity. Dove ends his reading of Mexico's postcolonial politics of cultural contradictions with the a desire for what he began by critiquing: a (different) cultural form or a unified and common we that could somehow move beyond hegemonic social formation and be more lawfully inclusive and just, a more lawful oneness of shared cultural meaning that through assuring a better sharing of prosperity could gurantee against conflicting values, interests, and violence, in other words an automous or self-determining and self-reproducing social order of lasting (timeless) peace and shared economic justice. An emergence inconceivable withint present form of knowledge and logic of representation and left open to an indeterminate future possibility of invention or emergence, this possibility of emergence Dove associates with the maternal function as the site of contact between nature and culture that can allow for the birth or emergence of a new cultural order inconcievable within representational logic.

As I will discuss in the context of emergence of modernity in Europe itself in the next section, Dove's critique of modern culture's self-universalization and totalizing claim to knowledge of reality and management of life in fact reproduces the modern conception of culture itself. In other words, what remains universalized in Dove's attempt to relativize this logic to other cultural forms is the modern conceptualization of the very idea of culture. In the next section I discuss the emergence into prominence of the idea of Bildung as a particular modern

conception of culture. Meaning form and formation, culture and cultivation – both product and process – and thus denoting an idea of organic self-development, the term played a key role in the cultural formulation of ideals of human freedom and democratic, moral or lawful, national self-governance as Europe itself emerged from a feudalist social order and worldview based on Divine Law and predestination through a complex historical transformation based on colonization, the emergence of scientific rationalism, the rise of capitalism, and Enlightenment ideals for human socio-cultural freedom.

**Se llama de este modo y de este otro¹⁶
Some Call Him One Thing, Some Another¹⁷**

In the most succinct terms, the function of Bildung is that of mediation between the self and (national) society. In “Clef a Roman: Some Uses of Human Rights and the Bildungsroman”¹⁸ Joseph Slaughter provides a useful initial summary of its meaning and role based on Wilhelm von Humboldt’s widely influential elaboration of the concept. “Bildung...is both the collective culture of a people (a national culture for Humboldt) and the process by which one internalizes the dispositions of that culture as part of the propulsion and volitional engines of self-expression and ‘self-perfection’” (2-3). Slaughter further clarifies Humboldt’s formulation of bildung as the ideal vehicle for the socialization or modernization of the subject:

Bildung, for Humboldt, is the fundamental individual capacity by which a Habermasian public sphere is to be animated and legitimized. For him culture and cultivation (bildung) offer the means by which the antagonism between the individual and society is to be mediated; it negotiates the anarchism of individual volition (seen in a capitalist sense as vulgar economic self-interest) and social determinism (seen as economic system-interest) by reconciling the individual to the social through culture such that culture makes some aspect of society’s interests in the individual the individual’s interest in him/herself. (3)

¹⁶ Rulfo, 65.

¹⁷ Rulfo, Sayers Peden, 3.

¹⁸ Politics and Culture 4.3 (2003).

That culture plays a central role in the process of socialization, in fact as increasingly totalizing biopolitical inscription, is a familiar notion. In eighteenth century Germany this specific meaning of culture as cultivation -as both process and product of self and social formation- was elaborated and emerged into prominence. The historical significance of the emergent formulation of *Bildung* and the period of German Classicism itself to cotemporary social reality and political thoughts can hardly be exaggerated. As Hans Georg Gadamer observes: “The concept of *Bildung* most clearly indicates the profound intellectual change that still causes us to experience the century of Goethe as contemporary, whereas the baroque era already appears like a *primaeval* age of history” (10). Cultural reflections of this period are characterized by a turn away from earlier rationalism of the Enlightenment, which had conceived the relation between self and society in terms of abstract social principles modeled on universal natural law posited as perfectly representable or understandable through human reason. In the introductory first chapter to *Truth and Method*¹⁹ Gadamer contextualizes *Bildung* as a move away from formal rationalism within other cultural articulations defending the human and historical sciences against the new methodology and exclusive truth-claim of seventeenth century natural sciences and Cartesian logic, on which social rationalism was based. His reading of Giambattista Vico’s works and its valuation of “*sensus communis*” or communal/common sense as a sphere of knowledge set apart from scientific empirical reasoning based on the senses for example provide a useful overview of the question of community, morality and freedom at stake in the distinction between the human and natural sciences, and which grounds the later formulation of the idea of *Bildung*:

¹⁹ “Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.” *Truth and Method*. Trans. Garrette Barden and John Cumming. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

[Vico] does not dispute the positive aspects of modern critical science, but shows their limitation. Even with this new science and its mathematical methodology we still cannot do without the wisdom of the ancients and their cultivation of prudentia and eloquentia. The most important thing in education is still something else, the training of the sensus communis, which is not nourished on the true, but on the probable. The main thing for our purposes is that sensus communis here obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men, but the sense that founds community. According to Vico, what gives the human will its directionality is not the abstract generality of reason, but the concrete generality that represents the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race. Hence the development of this sense of community is of prime importance for living. (20-21)

Gadamer explores similar ideas found in Shaftesbury, and whose work was highly influential in the eighteenth century. In a similar vein the concept of Bildung was elaborated against ideals of abstract rationality and universal laws governing social relations to bring to the fore questions of freedom and moral duty, and wherein aesthetic criticism and cultural judgment play important roles in mediating and reconciling individual will to social law governing the common good. Gadamer's account of the evolution of the term is illustrative:

The first important observation about the familiar content of the word Bildung is that the earlier idea of a 'natural shape' which refers to external appearance (the shape of the limbs, the well-formed figure) and in general to the shapes created by nature, eg a mountain formation-- Gebirgsbildung) was at that time detached almost entirely from the new idea. Now Bildung is intimately associated with the idea of culture and designates primarily the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities. Between Kant and Hegel the form that Herder had given to the concept was perfected. Kant still does not use the word Bildung in this connection. He speaks of the 'culture' of a capacity (or of a 'natural talent') which as such is an act of freedom by the acting subject. Thus among the duties to oneself he mentions not letting one's talents rust, without using the word Bildung. Hegel, however, already speaks of Sichbilden ('educating or cultivating oneself') and Bildung, when he takes up the same Kantian idea of duties towards oneself, and Wilhelm von Humbolt, with his sensitive ear, already detects a difference in meaning between Kultur and Bildung: 'but if in our language we say Bildung, we mean something both higher and more inward, namely the attitude of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavor, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character' Bildung here no longer means 'culture', ie the development of capacities or talents. The rise of the word Bildung calls rather on the ancient mystical tradition, according to which man carries in his soul the image of God after whom he is fashioned and must cultivate it in himself. (11-12)

In Hegel, Bildung becomes a task for mankind, the cultivation of a truly free consciousness through sacrifice of particularity for the sake of the universal. “Man is characterized by the break with the immediate and the natural that the intellectual, rational side of his nature demands of him. ‘In this sphere he is not, by nature, what he should be’-- and hence he needs Bildung” (Gadamer, 13). For Hegel Bildung functions to teleologically mediate and reconcile man’s intellect and volition with culture (as a higher nature), his freedom with universal law, himself with himself through society -the particular national-cultural form of human universality. This is achieved through cultural work, labor, and formation of things, in which process of self-awareness and consciousness lie self-formation (13-14).

Thus on the one hand, the idea of Bildung is defined against mechanistic rationality applied to the social sphere. It inscribes the intellect within an idea of culture conceived as a kind of teleological directionality of will cultivated towards a ‘sensus communis.’ On the other hand, however, this conception of human culture emerges out of and depends on natural science and mechanistic philosophy’s conception of nature as a realm of lawful and necessary relations, against which human culture (‘the intellectual side of his nature’) is defined as freedom. This freedom moreover achieves lawfulness or social order on a higher plane through freedom’s reconciliation with social, moral necessity defined in a complex relation of both control and overcoming of as well as a return to (higher form of) natural necessity (as cultural law).

Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*²⁰ delineates a profound redefinition of the concept of nature that took place between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and which forms the basis for eighteenth century redefinition of the idea of culture we have been discussing. This reconceptualization of nature is

²⁰ San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.

part of a larger, complex, and accelerated process of socio-political transformation in Western Europe within this period: the ‘discovery’, colonization and exploitation of the Americas, the expansion of production and trade, the emergence of market-oriented economy, as well as the spreading use of money as a reliably uniform medium of exchange and store of value, all of which facilitated open-ended accumulation of surplus, and which in turn stimulated intensified exploitation of natural resources and labor both within Europe and the Americas.

This period of nascent capitalism involves a complex restructuring of economic production relations and of socio-cultural ideologies justifying new forms and increasing degrees of exploitation and disparity in wealth, power, and status on the one hand, and on the other a multitude of social reform and revolutionary movements and alternative formulations of socio-economic and socio-political ideologies and organizations that emerged in reaction to such changes. Towards the end of the seventeenth century and inseparable from this restructuring of production relations, the Scientific Revolution had produced what could be called an ontological shift in the predominant meaning of the world, a redefinition of the relations between God, nature, and the place of the human within the physical and metaphysical orders. Mechanistic science and philosophy arose to displace the premodern conception of the earth as a living organism. The premodern conception comprise a broad spectrum of preexisting cultural worldviews regarding nature’s vitality, activity, and sensitivity, its life-force and generative capacity whether as inherent to matter (monism) or in various formulations of a transcendent principle that mediates and actualizes God’s Law or Will within matter (dualism). This cultural system defining the meaning, value, and an implicit system of sanction over human use of nature defined as an organically alive and sensitive mother earth was replaced by a mechanistic worldview which, rewriting or translating the dualistic organicist notion, conceives of nature as

passive and inanimate matter movable only by external force and following mathematically predictable mechanical law, manipulable by human rationality, and which underwrites and justify its management and exploitation for capitalist and cultural development.

As Gadamer noted, in the eighteenth century the meaning of *Bildung* shifted from that of well formed natural shapes to an idea of cultural self-formation. As becomes visible this process entails a transference of the organicist idea of vitality or life-force from the realm of nature (and God) to that of human culture defined as an inherent, organic power of teleological self-cultivation. Something like an appropriation of agency through redefinition is visible in the writings of Goethe, whose work moreover was highly influential on Hegel in his work on history.

Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)*²¹ traces the development of Goethe's conception and novelistic representation of time-space. In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* -the prototypical Bildungsroman, which Bakhtin describes as a genre definable through the idea of "man's essential becoming" – nature is conceived as a realm of timeless harmonious order and spatialized as territory, geography, or terrestrial space, forming a background to the dynamic temporary of man's individual and historical emergence and development. Tracing the genre through various stages to its last, most realistic novelistic type that begins with Goethe's famous work, Bakhtin follows the development of the genre through an idea of man's growth as something embedded within cyclical, natural time to the emergence of a more individualistic biographical time, and which later becomes embedded within a larger historical temporality. By the time of Goethe and in *Wilhelm Meister*:

²¹ *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas Press, 1986, 10-59.

[human emergence] is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man. The organizing force held by the future is therefore extremely great here -and this is not, of course, the private biographical future, but the historical future. It is as though the very foundations of the world are changing, and man must change along with them. Understandably, in such a novel of emergence, problems of reality and man's potential, problem of freedom and necessity, and the problem of creative initiative rise to their full height. The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature (within certain limits of course) and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence. Such is the last, realistic type of the novel of emergence. (24)

Marianne Hirsch provides a generic model of the Bildungsroman deriving from Goethe's prototypical novel, from which we can derive further distinctions based on this solidifying division between cultural agency for transformation and nature as timeless law of self-reproduction. In "The Novel of Formation as a Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions"²² Hirsch notes that this type of novel "is a story of a representative individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order...The novel's concern is both biographical and social. Society is the novel's antagonist and is viewed as a school of life, a locus for experience...[The] plot is a version of the quest story; it portrays a search for a meaningful existence within society, for the authentic values which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities...It is the development of selfhood that is the primary concern of the novel of formation...this type of novel is a story of apprenticeship and not a full biography. Its projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society" (297-8). Often also known as a coming-of-age novel, this process of social education as individual development typically begins at adolescence: a young boy leaving the domesticity of affective filial relations of natural necessity, bodily growth and nascent individual volition to enter the impersonal social or public world in

²² Genre 12 (Fall 1979), pp. 293-311.

which his will and intellect is socialized towards a higher moral freedom. Biographical growth linked to historical emergence begins through entry into the sphere of culture, the temporality of development from which the private sphere of nurture and the women associated with them are excluded.

In their introduction to the anthology *The Voyage In: Fiction of Female Development*,²³ Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland make explicit the problematic relation between women and culture within this formulation. “Even the broadest definitions of the Bildungsroman presuppose a range of social options available only to men. Only male development is marked by a determined exploration of a social milieu, so that when a critic identifies the ‘principal characteristics’ of a ‘typical Bildungsroman plot,’ he inevitably describes ‘human’ development exclusively in male terms” (7). But this adult male world of socially integrated individuals is also defined through other exclusions. The utopian vision of universal development towards human freedom, social integration and unity aside, the reality of the eighteenth century is one of colonization and slavery, the exploitation of natural resources of the colonized nations and of the material labor of the colonized, which, through association with the realm of natural immediacy and necessity are founding exclusions to the very conception of culture as self-development.

Defined as natural capacity for organic self-development or cultivation towards a higher sphere, the mediating or socializing function of Bildung in fact depends on the construction of intermediate spheres associated with nature which production of value is appropriated as resource that provides directionality for development, while the naturalized sphere itself is devalued and excluded from this temporality. Thus slaves, women, children, the poor, the

²³ Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1983. 3-19.

uneducated (uncultured), racial and ethnic others belong to a naturalized, spatialized sphere are excluded from the historical temporality of development the self-universalization of which depends on their very exclusion.

In this regards Susan Buck-Morss in “Hegel and Haiti”²⁴ makes a convincing argument for Hegel’s obvious knowledge not only regarding the economic system based on slavery and slave trade that grounds the social reality of his own time but specifically about the Haitian revolution, which justified itself in terms of European ideas of universal human freedom and which in fact, Buck-Morss argues, informed Hegel’s formulation of the master slave dialectic and the movement of spirit. Yet this revolution and Haiti’s freedom, only years after the French revolution, was ‘unthinkable’ or unassimilable by Enlightenment thinkers of freedom. As I have been delineating this is because it disrupts the invention and naturalization of the organicist notion of human individual and social development from nature to culture by breaking out of the hidden intermediate spheres the disavowal of which allows for the appearance of temporal continuity between natural birth and freedom for organic self and cultural development of the human as both natural and exceptional in relation to nature based on its intellect, mind, or the ability to use language to represent natural reality itself. This relation between nature and mind, language, or culture depends on a naturalization (thus dehumanization) of women as well as of class, racial, and cultural others, which naturalized existences form the intermediate sphere of corporeal human physicality as capacity for labor productive and reproductive, which together with nature form the founding exclusion to the very category of the human defined through its freedom for self-determination invented within this narrative. As Buck-Morss discusses, the unassimilable nature of emergent claimants to inclusion within the universalist formation of a

²⁴ Critical Inquiry, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 2000), pp. 821-865.

socio-cultural meaning and place of the human that depends on its subordination as resource eventually compels the latter Hegel to dismiss Africans as ‘immature’ and ‘childlike,’ as culturally lagging behind (and closer to nature) within the developmental trajectory of universal human history, and thus, like women and children, incapable (yet) of attaining moral autonomy or cultured, socially responsible freedom.

The deeply entrenched nature of mechanistic truth-claim to the knowledge of nature and the cultural logic of Bildung derived from it becomes clearer when we note that they are implicated in both the rise and justification of capitalism and the most prominent form of its critique. John Locke’s foundational formulation and theoretical justification of private property – which facilitated the consolidation of capitalism and its central role in modern social organization and development – is inseparable from the worldview of mechanistic science and based on the idea of nature as objectively without value, where value is conceptualized as a product of human labor²⁵. Its legacy informs Karl Marx’s equally far-reaching critique of the logic of capital, but which is premised on the same labor theory of value and view of nature as object of human labor as producer of value.²⁶

Tú eres mi hija. Mía²⁷
You Are My Daugther. Mine²⁸

Over the last century contemporary work in the life sciences have begun to challenge the mechanistic view of the world and the conceptual constellations it gave rise to grounded on the dichotomy between nature and human culture. As we have seen above within this conceptual framework man emerges as both natural and exceptional or set apart from nature, in other words

²⁵ See Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government*. Ed. Thomas P. Peardon. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc: 1952.

²⁶ See Ed. Tucker, Robert C. *The Marx and Engels Reader*. New York: Norton & Company, 1978.

²⁷ Rulfo, 141.

²⁸ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 84.

as naturally self-reproducing life form and as subjects of agency and of history in its cultural overcoming and development away from natural constraints and limits, and simultaneously towards the reproduction of objective lawfulness of relations expressed in nature on a higher cultural sphere. This process involves both a cultural translation of preexisting dualist and metaphysical ideas of the universe into a modern version of natural law, wherein the entire life-world emerges as timeless, changeless unity and idealized harmony to be approximated by the social order on the one hand, and the devalued as territory, property and resource for human national-cultural self-transformation and self-recreation on the other. Within this framework moreover the claim to truthful and increasing or cumulative nature of scientific and representational knowledge of the natural world/universe serves as justification for nature's transformation and increasing destruction towards idealized and universalized human ends, and which ends justify increasing destruction, violence and subordination of all life forms human and natural to this cultural ideal.

Patrick Dove's project of relativizing cultural truths and delimitations of representational claims by the modern secular state to make visible cultural violence is inseparable from the shift in scientific paradigm I discuss below. As becomes visible however, Dove's critique of modernity and capitalist logic is at the same time deeply invested in many of the assumptions of Enlightenment humanism, the most important of which is the representationalist framework itself and the dualist relation between culture and nature it expresses. This framework for conceiving knowledge binds his reading of nature (through the figure of the reproductive mother and natural or corporeal physicality in the novel and of land in Mexican history) to the modern invention of the very category of the human and of culture, and as such to the ideal (now pluralized) of cultural freedom for self-determining and lawful social organization as the basis for social accord

as well as implied promise of self-reproducing unity and plenitude through sovereign dominion over nature. The representationalist framework for conceiving knowledge also binds his reading of cultural politics and ethical, historical agency to truth, which loss through cultural relativization of forms of knowledge would seem to remove the ground for both criticism and action or agency for production of alternatives and more pluralist forms of co-existence and can curtail and mitigate the problems of escalating destruction and violence both social and ecological.

As I will discuss below, while contemporary work in the life sciences challenging mechanistic rationality offers a view of the world that undoes the assumptions foundational to modernity as elaborated above, it also resonates with premodern mythical worldview in its undermining of truth-claims, in the undoing of the representationalist framework of knowledge and reversal of the relation between knowledge and agency, as well as in a dismantling of the dichotomy between nature and culture itself. As such it emerges into resonance with the novel in its use of fiction and myth as the basis for elaborating alternative possibilities for thinking co-existence outside of competing territorial truth-claims. The figure of Dorotea as I have discussed works to problematize both the idea of reproduction and of nature or natural life. In the figure of Susana San Juan in the next chapter I will discuss the novel's rejection of the idea of lawful relations of meaning and well as of social organization.

Ves visiones, Susana²⁹

You're Seeing Things, Susana³⁰

The paradigm that is now receding has dominated our culture for several hundred years, during which it has shaped our modern Western society and has significantly influenced the rest of the world. This paradigm consists of a number of entrenched ideas and values, among them the view of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary building blocks, the view of the human body as a machine, the view of life in society as competitive struggle for existence, the belief in unlimited material progress to be

²⁹ Rulfo, 145.

³⁰ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 88.

achieved through economic and technological growth, and -last, but not least- the belief that a society in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male is one that follows a basic law of nature. All of these assumptions have been fatefully challenged by recent events. And, indeed, a radical revision of them is now occurring. (Capra, 6)

Fritjof Capra's *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*³¹

provides an overview of the advances made in the various scientific branches of knowledge regarding the very question of the nature of life. He discusses the displacement mechanistic science's suppositions of fundamental laws through new discoveries in the last century in organismic biology as well as in the field of chemistry, neuroscience and cognitive theory, and which interconnection with the emergence of quantum mechanics provides a profound reconceptualization of the nature of life.

While on the one hand, as I have tried to show, in a translation of earlier dualist tradition in the human sciences against mechanistic rationality applied to human social organization, modern conception of human life and culture as exceptional life form and organization founded itself on mechanistic science to emerge into an organicist life force replacing God as the purposive mover of the world towards teleological ends. On the other hand the dualist concept of world evolved in other branches of science itself, and the study of the lifeworld in biology contain both monist and dualist theories. It is significant therefore that Capra notes that contemporary thought in the related branches of science can be understood as a paradigm shift from a dualistic to a monistic view of the world. Capra writes of the 19th century debate between mechanist and vitalist biology and their overcoming through an emerging monist theory of life:

While mechanists hold that all biological phenomena will eventually be explained in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry, vitalists postulate the existence of a nonphysical entity, a causal agent directing the life processes that defy mechanistic explanations. Teleology—from the Greek *telos* (“purpose”)—asserts that the causal agent postulated by vitalism is purposeful, that there is purpose and design in nature. By

³¹ New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

strenuously opposing vitalist and teleological arguments, the mechanists still struggle with the Newtonian metaphor of God as a clockmaker. The currently emerging theory of living systems has finally overcome the debate between mechanism and teleology. As we shall see, it views living nature as mindful and intelligent without the need to assume any overall design or purpose.” (107)

Within a monist view of life matter is inseparable from mind, from the process of cognition or perception and knowledge, and which process in fact defines life itself. Before discussing the above ideas in cognitive science it is worthwhile to contextualize this emergent theory of life as intelligent self-organization within an earlier discussion of the lifeworld itself as an integrated system of organic and inorganic life forces and energy, and which displacement of mechanistic view relate not only to biological or organic life but equally to inorganic life. In mid 1960s, James Lovelock through his Gaia theory builds on earlier dynamic theory of living systems as both self-organizing systems and open systems (through feeding or continual flow of matter and energy through the system -food, water, air, chemical compounds, etc) to produce an integrated view of the process of life, which spans individual organisms and their parts as well as their social and ecosystems, and which are moreover tightly interwoven with the nonliving systems (rocks, ocean, air, etc). Lovelock invites us to reconsider the Earth itself “as a real system, comprising all of life and all of its environment tightly coupled so as to form a self-regulating entity” (James Lovelock quoted in Capra 103), instead of a dead planet of inanimate matter inhabited by life.

Simply stated, the [Gaia] hypothesis says that the surface of the Earth, which we’ve always considered to be the *environment* of life, is really *part* of life. The blanket of air—the troposphere—should be considered a circulatory system, produced and sustained by life...When scientists tell us that life adapts to an essentially passive environment of chemistry, physics, and rocks, they perpetuate a severely distorted view. Life actually makes and forms and changes the environment to which it adapts. Then that “environment” feeds back of the life that is changing and acting and growing in it. There are constant cyclical interactions. (Lovelock quoted in Capra, 106)

Expanding on the view of living systems above in relation to questions of knowledge and perception, the collaborative work of Chilean scientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela on cognitive theory (sometimes called the Santiago theory) identifies the process of life itself with cognition, and through which view life emerges as an autopoietic system of self-invention and self-organization. Their theory proposes to understand “the organizing activity of living systems at all levels of life [as] mental activity. The interaction of a living organism – plant, animals, or human – with its environment are cognitive, or mental interactions. Thus life and cognition become inseparably connected. Mind – or, more accurately, mental process – is immanent in matter at all levels of life” (Capra, 172).

In this view, rather than a representation of reality perception or cognition specify its own reality. Moreover, rather than mental thought processes, this view of cognition involves the entire life process and include perception, emotion, and behavior, and does not depend on a brain or a nervous system. As Capra clarifies:

Since cognition traditionally is defined as the process of knowing, we must be able to describe it in terms of an organism’s interaction with its environment. Indeed, this is what the Santiago theory does. The specific phenomenon underlying the process of cognition is structural coupling. As we have seen, the autopoietic system undergoes continual structural changes while preserving its weblike pattern of organization. It couples to its environment *structurally* in other words, through recurrent interactions, each of which triggers structural changes in the system. The living system is autonomous, however. The environment only triggers the structural changes; it does not specify or direct them.

Now, the living system not only specifies these structural changes, it also specifies *which perturbations from the environment triggers them*. That is the key to the Santiago theory of cognition. The structural changes in the system constitute acts of cognition. By specifying which perturbations from the environment trigger its changes, the system “brings forth a world,” as Maturana and Varela put it. Cognition then, is not a representation of an independently existing world, but rather a continual *bringing forth of a world* through the process of living. The interactions of a living system with its environment are cognitive interactions, and the process of living itself is a process of cognition. In the words of Maturana and Varel, “To live is to know.” (267)

This world brought forth is moreover specific to each living organisms, since “not all disturbances from the environment cause structural changes. Living organisms respond to only a small fraction of the stimuli impinging on them” (269) and there are many disturbances that are foreign and thus unperceived by the system.

In this way each living system builds up its own distinctive world according to its own distinctive structure. As Varela puts it, “mind and world arise together.” However, through mutual structural coupling, individual living systems are part of each other’s worlds. They communicate with one another and coordinate their behavior. There is an ecology of worlds brought forth by mutually coherent acts of cognition.

In the Santiago theory cognition is an integral part of the way a living organism interacts with its environment. It does not *react* to environmental stimuli but *responds* with structural changes in its nonlinear, organizationally closed, autopoietic network. This type of response enables the organism to continue its autopoietic organization and thus to continue living in its environment. In other words, the organism’s cognitive interaction with its environment is intelligent interaction. From the perspective of the Santiago theory, intelligence is manifest in the richness and flexibility of an organism’s structural coupling. (269)

In other words, each organism in the process of living brings forth “not *the* world but *a* world, one that is always dependent upon the organism’s structure. Since individual organisms within a species have more or less the same structure, they bring forth similar worlds. We humans, moreover, share an abstract world of language and thought through which we bring forth our world together” (270).

As Capra further elaborates, Maturana and Varela do not maintain that we create matter out of the void, but that the material world has no predetermined features. “The authors of the Santiago theory do not assert that “nothing exists”; they assert that “no things exist” independent of the process of cognition. There are no objectively existing structures; there is no pre-given territory of which we can make a map— the map making itself brings forth the features of the territory (271).

Contemporary science offers a view of all living systems as a dynamic process of self-organization but which organization – through systemic changes in the environment or the flows of energy – are capable not only of self-maintenance far from equilibrium or stability but also of completely unpredictable evolutions and mutations (85), and within which no teleological relation between past present and future is possible. Within this system view the properties of the parts are not intrinsic but can only be understood relationally to the whole, but wherein the whole itself is open and not given or static outside of the changing relations between the parts themselves. We can see therefore how the idea of a primal or timeless totality of all relations of life as Truth or Being to which representational knowledge may or may not correspond, and which forms the yardstick for action and social organization emerges as a historically and culturally contingent social construct. As Capra discusses with regards to scientific knowledge itself

The notion of a scientific knowledge as a network of concepts and models, in which no part is anymore fundamental than the others, was formalized in physics by Geoffrey Chew in his ‘bootstrap philosophy’ in the 1970’s. The bootstrap philosophy not only abandons the idea of fundamental building blocks of matter, it accepts no fundamental entities whatsoever - no fundamental constants, laws, or equations. The material universe is seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events. None of the properties of any part of this web is fundamental; they all follow from the properties of other parts, and the overall consistency of their interrelations determines the structure of the entire web. (39)

Capra’s work is intended as a scientific justification for an ecological view that can mitigate the destructiveness of modern way of life, and is particularly aligned with deep ecology as a movement whose idea of sustainability goes beyond the conceptualization of nature as the environment for human life and the anthropocentric values that govern its management. Capra’s work on the life sciences invites the consideration of a new and holistic ecological subject advocated by deep ecology, which assigns inherent value to nature itself. An attempt to synthesize the various emergent theories of life into a new scientific view on the nature of life,

Capra's work on the one hand can be read as another scientific truth-claim, one that would mask the specificity of its own cultural value and knowledge system. The alignment with deep ecology can also be problematized. In an important cultural analysis of deep ecology's that makes visible its essentialist view of nature, Peter van Wyck³² makes a convincing argument much of the discourse within the movement is based on universalization of the human subject, a naturalization of the category of the human in its meaning and value outside all historical cultural specificity. One could read Capra's own discussion of deep ecology as presuming the same value-free scientific and ecological knowledge as neutral basis for human action.

On the other hand however, Capra's work is also clearly value specific and goal oriented, an attempt at persuasion and influence over human social behavior away from the destructive modern logic and way of life and the ecological and social disintegration such worldview has produced. Moreover, we take can as valuable Capra's overview of cognition, perception and communication as coordination of behavior amongst interdependent systems towards specific goals (rather than value or interest free knowledge), and which goal is existence and co-existence through negotiation between conflicting values and forms of organization outside of given truth or reality. Furthermore this body of knowledge can be read to resonate with premodern mythical and monist view of the world, which also could be said to function through contingency of goals and praxis rather than on truth. Together they provide the basis for thinking the problem of knowledge relative to questions of agency through something like an epistemological granting to nature not of (timeless) value in itself but of value to itself as process of self-organizing perception and life. It is to this narrative of reality as value specific invention of relations oriented towards empowerment within an interdependent context of coexistence and negotiations

³² Van Wyck, Peter C. *Primitives in the Wilderness: Deep Ecology and the Missing Human Subject*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.

of value and violence that the stories of the dead in Pedro Páramo points, and most specifically outside of both Christian and modern invention of the meaning of human life and their (ostensibly universal or neutral) value system, which the novel shows to be deeply destructive.

Se ha de haber roto el cajón donde la enterraron³³
The Box Buried Her In Must Have Split Open³⁴

Coexistent with Christian mythology, its cultural imposition, as well as the various waves secular liberal reforms and modernization were various indigenous myths or stories about the meaning of existence. As discussed earlier Eric Wolf provides an account of the disintegration of indigenous social organization brought on by successive attempts to break up their communal land into private holdings. While Wolf speaks of Indian communities and communal power in terms that may at first be read as that of aggregates of individuals, his emphasis on the religious basis of communal power as well as on the fact that there is no uniform Indian culture points to multiply existing sociopolitical organizations based on myriad mythical conceptions of the world and of the place of the human and its agency within it.

We can posit without claiming to represent any particular indigenous myth or all myths as sameness that mythical imagination often include a conception of nonhuman agency³⁵ (which may be malignant or benign), where animals, trees, rocks, water bodies, etc, and the various shamanistic spirits they are imbued with -and which may also include the spirits of human ancestors who may also be animals and vice versa- are capable not only of self-transformation

³³ Rulfo, 156.

³⁴ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 100.

³⁵ See for example a Deleuze inspired discussion of Amazonian myth in Viveiros De Castro, Eduardo. "The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits." *Inner Asia* 9 (2007): 153–172; Also Deleuze inspired, see Castro-Klarén, Sara's analysis of Andean myth in the novel of Jose Maria Arguedas in "'Like a Pig, When He's Thinking': Arguedas on Affect and on Becoming an Animal." *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*. Eds. Julio Ortega et al. U of Pittsburgh P, 2000. 307–323.

but also of transformation of humans as beings that exists in a complicated relation within the natural world rather than as above and exercising dominion over it.

Within this conception of the world the idea of human personhood and agency is a complicated relational position within a web of other agencies and human social organization is embedded within the same. The idea of animal ancestors of humans and human ancestors of animals found in many myths for example departs from the idea of human sociality as an autonomously self-reproducing domain both natural and simultaneously exceptional or set apart from and above the rest nature because also self- transformational through cultural development, albeit inscribed in a trajectory towards the telos of recovery of self-sameness.

Within such a mythical perspective, whatever cultural meaning of possession or property exists, it is not that of sovereign rule over land objectified as resource for human self-transformation and self-recreation. The question of boundary is complicated as well, as while each community makes use of a delimited area of land (where there is cultivation) they share common areas of forests and rivers (as we do air today) that form part of community's use (for example for hunting of game, gathering of food, wood, medicinal herb, etc, and which supplement cultivation where there is cultivation) but which is not a domain proper to any community whether owned or through exclusive use rights, but functions as a buffer zone that both separates the communities and join them as the commons that is neither property of any community nor improper to it in the sense that they are an integral part of the community's economy, production and social organization. Such forest land as both outside and inside of each communities productive economy is also home to the spirits, wild games, dead ancestors, and other beings who also have a crucial function within the community's conception of the world, the order of its meaning production -beings neither entirely inside nor outside of community as

human sociality- which owes its existence as well as socio political and economic organization to this indeterminate zone that both belong and does not belong to it, while also belonging and not belonging to other communities both human and that of other beings animal and spirits who all share common origins with that of the human as a specie. The very idea of the human and its community then does not fit that of the idea of self-same and self-reproducing place and people because it is always open and owing itself to its own outside or to what is different from itself. Community is simultaneously both bounded on the one hand, and ontologically open to other communities as well as other species or forms and forces of life that borders on, influences and transforms it on the other, rather than bounded and closed off from it.

Within such a cultural perspective, conflict, contradictions and discords are not improper to existence. Without a claim to boundless agency, a conception of finitude that is not only that of death but of each life form within the complexity of overlapping, conflictive yet mutually determining and transforming sphere of co-existence, the very idea of plenitude as accord and unity based on the sharing of resources inscribed as the overcoming of natural limits, human scarcity and lack emerges as a dangerous illusion which would make co-existence itself impossible.

Pero cuál era el mundo de Susana San Juan³⁶
But What World was Susana San Juan Living In³⁷

It the next chapter I rebegin by reading the story of Susana San Juan. As I have noted this story is a reversed image of the story of Juan Preciado. Beginning similarly through a recalling of a dead mother only to reject its social function of social reproduction, it equally rejects the father as law or social organizing principle. Moreover, as Pedro Paramo's lost love and idealized

³⁶ Rulfo, 151.

³⁷ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 95.

conception of romantic unity, and whose loss precipitates his ruthless rise to power in order to recover and reunite with her, Susana is on the one hand the only other character in the novel whose story is structured similarly to Juan's through departure and return to the village, and on the other hand as the antithesis of Dolores Preciado in her union with, betrayal by, and demand for justice from Pedro Paramo as figuration of law and promise of filial and social unity.

As I will show, the story of Susana San Juan is that of a rejection of all fathers as figures of law, and which undermines the logic and makes visible as a question of destructive illusion of plenitude the ideal of social unity and inclusion into a lawfully self-reproducing social order. It further narratively stages the violence of competing truth-claims between the Christian and secular order precisely in terms that undermine the idea of naturally self-reproducing yet exceptional human that belongs to both, which is to say of patronymic cultural logic itself, and which makes visible patrilineal filial reproduction as linked to territorial communal consolidation. In fact as I will argue, within the novel the idea of law emerges as guarantee or promise of privileged access to resource, and communal identity becomes visible as identification with a system of vested interest. The illusion of objective nature as ground for boundless human agency and self-development however turns the promise of plenitude into justification for violence and marginalization.

Chapter 3: Tampoco los muertos retoñan / The Dead Do Not Reproduce Either: Lawlessness, Knowledge and Co-existence

Estoy acostada en la misma cama donde murió mi madre hace ya muchos años; sobre el mismo colchón; bajo la misma cobija de lana negra con la cual nos envolvíamos las dos para dormir. Entonces yo dormía a su lado, en un lugarcito que ella me hacía debajo de sus brazos.

Creo sentir todavía el golpe pausado de su respiración; las palpitaciones y suspiros con que ella arrullaba mi sueño... Creo sentir la pena de su muerte...

Pero esto es falso. (133)

I am lying in the same bed where my mother died so long ago; on the same mattress, beneath the same black wool coverlet she wrapped us in to sleep. I slept beside her, her little girl, in the special place she made for me in her arms.

I think I can still feel the calm rhythm of her breathing; the palpitations and sighs that soothed my sleep... I think I feel the pain of her death... But that isn't true. (75-6)

Pero si ella ni madre tuvo...¹

But she didn't have a mother...²

Susana San Juan's story, told from the grave (that may not be a grave), opens with the words above which both mirror and immediately overturn the terms and premise set up in the story of Juan Preciado. Juan's story is that of a unity or "we" of the mother and her child. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this unity is narratively constructed through superimposition of their voices and visions, knowledge and agency as what propels Juan's journey in search of the father as guarantee of a lawful community. This constructed oneness resonates with prevailing modern cultural narrative of the private or pre-political sphere of natural filial affections preceding a child's separation in adolescence and entry into the adult social world of impersonal, rational, culturally mediated socio-political relations. This idea of originary oneness equally

¹ Rulfo, 135.

² Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 78.

underlies much contemporary cultural theory and critique of modernity premised on psycholinguistic theory, i.e. the conception of a child's prelinguistic existence as a kind of natural oneness or lawful, immediate material relation with the mother prior to the stages of differentiation and cultural subjectivation through language.

Susana's very first sentence is constructed around the idea of this unity through the repetition of the word 'misma' or sameness, the memory of sharing the mother's place evoking various narratives of the pain of lost unity and desire for its recovery. This desire would imply the teleological directionality of growth of the daughter as that of coming to occupy the place, or function, of the mother in the social order's self-reproduction and continuity as self-same oneness of community overtime.

But this is false. The very first words of Susana's story both mirror and immediately reverse the terms set up in Juan's narrative. It similarly begins with the death of the mother and rearticulates the teleological narrative of loss and recovery of oneness only to reject it as premise and recast it as falsehood. This rejection of falsehood, however, is equally false. Because Susana San Juan is dead.

Pero esto es falso.

Estoy aquí, boca arriba, pensando en aquel tiempo para olvidar mi soledad. Porque no estoy acostada sólo por un rato. Y ni en la cama de mi madre, sino dentro de un cajón negro como el que se usa para enterrar a los muertos. Porque estoy muerta. (133)

But this isn't true.

Here I lie, flat on my back, hoping to forget my loneliness by remembering those times. Because I am not here just for a while. And I am not in my mother's bed but in a black box like the ones for burying the dead. Because I am dead. (76)

The immediate revelation of Susana's story as told by someone already dead recasts her account above itself as fiction or untruth, and thereby undoes whatever truth-claim might be implied by the pronouncement of the falsehood above. Once again we are in the realm of a life-

story whose meaning has no referential claim to truth or reality outside itself, and the significance of which must be constructed and framed in relation to multiple other narratives within, as well as external, to the novel.

To be sure, Susana's story is not a rejection of the value of or the relation with the mother. Her story walks a fine line between a bond with the mother and a rejection of her significance as naturalized oneness or harmony of relations of life prior to differentiation as deviation, discord, conflict, suffering, and through which emerges the telos of recovery or reproduction of a timeless or self-reproducing lawful relations as the highest value and goal of social organization and as justification of the subordination of all other values of life. Between descriptions of the indifference of the men hired to bury her mother and her nursemaid Justina's inability to accept this death, Susana's account depicts her mother's love as well as the peace of her closed eyes, lips, and quieted heart. This is in explicit contrast to the voice and vision, wish and expectation of Juan's mother superimposed upon and reproducing itself as Juan's perception and agency, and wherein his will emerges as undifferentiated from or subordinated to that of his mother's, whose command to search for the father mandates both differentiation and is directed at reconciliation with the higher social law of the father as promise of a return to or restoration of lost unity.

As Susana tells it, her mother died in a spring time of abundance and life, including that of Susana's own sexual awakening. The narrative structure reinforces a rejection of the idea of undifferentiated or lawful, timeless oneness of life lost with the mother's death by embedding the declaration "[m]i madre murió entonces" (134); "[t]hat is when my mother died" (76) in the middle of two long passages detailing her remembrance of the playful joys of animal and plant lives in the wind and rain, but which narrative include images of death and destruction: wind

breaking branches, fallen and dried up fruits, butterflies being chased by laughing sparrows. Within this narrative of life (the exuberant thriving of which does not exclude but, in fact, depends on death) are embedded images of her own bodily pleasures. Rather than a narrative of adolescence or puberty as a moment of transition from childhood to adulthood, nature to culture, or a loss of innocence recalling sin and the fall from Eden, Susana's sensual physicality is embedded within a joyful relation with nature and seems to both precede and exceed sexuality itself, and to surpass the idea of sexuality tied to filial reproduction. In a later section, I will return to this narrative construction in relation to the novel's thematic overturning of the virgin/whore dichotomy, wherein various narrative iterations and valuations of the whore work against the prerogative of virtuous (and near virgin) motherhood as the basis for patriarchal social self-reproduction based on territorial control over the lifeworld.

Mi madre murió entonces.

Que yo debía haber gritado; que mis manos tenían que haberse hecho pedazos estrujando su desesperación. Así hubieras tú querido que fuera. ¿Pero acaso no era alegre aquella mañana? Por la puerta abierta entraba el aire, quebrando las guías de la yedra. En mis piernas comenzaba a crecer el vello entre las venas, y mis manos temblaban tibias al tocar mis senos. Los gorriones jugaban. En las lomas se mecían las espigas. Me dio lástima que ella ya no volviera a ver el juego del viento en los jazmines; que cerrara sus ojos a la luz de los días. ¿Pero por qué iba a llorar? (134)

That is when my mother died.

I should have wailed. I should have wrung my hands until they were bleeding. That is how you would have wanted it. But in fact, wasn't that a joyful morning? The breeze was blowing in through the open door, tearing loose the ivy tendrils. Hair was beginning to grow on the mound between my legs, and my hands trembled hotly when I touched my breasts. Sparrows were playing. Wheat was swaying on the hillside. I was sad that she would never again see the wind playing in the jastmines; that her eyes were closed to the bright sunlight. Btu why should I weep? (76)

A refusal to mourn the mother's death as a loss of undifferentiated or lawful oneness idealized as life's highest value, or to subordinate all other values to its recovery, Susana's account may at first appear to place the meaning of life (and death) within a cyclical naturalist

frame. However, the account of her own death and the supernatural framework of her life story as that of an afterlife differentiates it from secular naturalism. Susana's story places her life within a mythical framework while differentiating this mythical existence from the Christian one through association with Dorotea.

No es cierto³
It isn't True⁴

Es, según yo sé, la pura maldad. Eso es Pedro Páramo.

—¿Y yo quién soy?

—Tú eres mi hija. Mía. Hija de Bartolomé San Juan.

En la mente de Susana San Juan comenzaron a caminar las ideas, primero lentamente, luego se detuvieron, para después echar a correr de tal modo que no alcanzó sino a decir:

No es cierto. No es cierto.

Este mundo que lo aprieta a uno por todos lados, que va vaciando puños de nuestro polvo aquí y allá, deshaciéndonos en pedazos como si rociara la tierra con nuestra sangre. ¿Qué hemos hecho? Por qué se nos ha podrido el alma? Tu madre decía que cuando menos nos queda la caridad de Dios. Y tú la niegas, Susana. ¿Por qué me niegas a mí como tu padre? ¿Estás loca?

¿No lo sabías?

¿Estás loca?

Claro que sí, Bartolomé. ¿No lo sabías? (141)

“...He is, I haven't a doubt of it, unmitigated evil. That's who Pedro Páramo is”

“And who am I”?

“You are my daughter. Mine. the daughter of Bartolomé San Juan.”

Ideas began to form in Susana San Juan's mind, slowly at first; they retreated and then raced so fast she could only say:

“It isn't true. It isn't true.

“This world presses in on us from every side; it scatters fistfuls of our dust across the land and takes bits and pieces of us as if to wather the earth with our blood. What did we do? why have our souls rotted away? Your mother always said that at the very least we could count on God's mercy. Yet you deny it, Susana. Why do you deny me as your father? Are you mad?

“Didn't you know?”

“*Are you mad?*”

“Of course I am, Bartolomé. Didn't you know?” (84-5, italic in original)

³ Rulfo, 141.

⁴ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 84.

The account of the mother is contextualized within a narrative of disillusionment with and renunciation of the father and leads to a declaration of paternity itself (and by association God the Father) as untruth. This renunciation is repeated in Susana's relation to all the father figures in the novel: her father Bartolomé San Juan, Pedro Páramo, Father Rentería, and God himself. In the above passage, the pronouncement of the fictionality of paternal lineage and identity is framed as madness, as knowledge and action without correspondence with truth or reality, and narratively functions to emphasize the fictionality of Susana's narrative perspective or story. Susana's rejection of the father can be read to resonate with the complex process of social reorganization of laws of filiation through which inheritance of property was transferred from maternal to paternal lineage, which involves the institution of monogamy and regulation of female sexuality to ensure paternal identity of the offspring through which wealth and power was transferred – in other words, the emergence of patriarchal social order. As Friedrich Engels writes in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*⁵:

It develops out of the pairing family, as previously shown, in the transitional period between the upper and middle stages of barbarism; its decisive victory is one of the signs that civilization is beginning. It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs. It is distinguished from pairing marriage by the much greater strength of the marriage tie, which can no longer be dissolved at either partner's wish. As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it, and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secured to him, at any rate by custom (the Code Napoleon explicitly accords it to the husband as long as he does not bring his concubine into the house), and as social life develops he exercises his right more and more; should the wife recall the old form of sexual life and attempt to revive it, she is punished more severely than ever. (92-3)

And further:

⁵ London: New York: Penguin, 2010.

[Monogamy emerges] not as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such reconciliation. Quite the contrary monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of one sex by the other...The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. (96)

This rejection of patriarchy as social invention however does not reestablish identity derived from the mother as the basis for claiming maternal lineage of inheritance as a more natural state of being and social ordering. Instead, it gives rise to Susana's willful death and a mythical narrative of existence outside of any such naturalization, and within which the above narrative of the mother emerges. As with the undermining of the truth value of the idea of the maternal as primal or natural unity, an unmasking of the father as legal fiction is framed as madness and thus proclaimed as fictional – in other words, as expressedly contrary to any interest or investment in the establishment of a counter truth-claim that would install a new (and truer) regime of representation of or lawful correspondence with reality, a new or older (more natural or more just) law of identity as the basis of inheritance, an alternate symbolic system of authority as the organizing principle for socio-cultural self-reproduction.

The significance of Susana's denial of the father's identity emerges through a complex story of father-daughter relation and their relation to questions of community in the context of the changing social order in Mexico, and thus in relation to Pedro Páramo. If Comala as a territorial community forms the ground of contention between Pedro and the church or secular and Christian truth-claims over the meaning of life, the conflict between Bartolomé and Pedro forms a counterpart to this conflict and plays itself out over Susana San Juan as the naturalized sexual ground for filial and communal self-reproduction of human life as subject of agency over objectively self-reproducing nature. As I have discussed in chapter one, Susana San Juan stands

as the teleological end or goal of Pedro's rise to power, an end conceived in terms of the establishment of a lawfully self-enclosed and self-reproducing order. A vision of totality that both displaces and reproduces the ideal of plenitude of timeless oneness or communion, this teleological narrative is implicated in the violent process of dismantling of the earlier feudal order on the one hand, and the promise of a establishment of a unified national oneness of shared cultural identity as the basis for sharing the benefits of economic development towards prosperity in postrevolutionary Mexico on the other. Susana's rejection of both orders and their contention is a rejection of their shared premise or ground – that of natural reproduction as the basis for socio-cultural self-reproduction and for self-transformation through accumulation of goods or good deeds for social development or the overcoming of sin. As I have suggested and will discuss in details in a later section, this rejection is not that of any particular social order, but of lawful social ordering itself, which emerges as inseparable from violence and thus from lawlessness.

Susana's complex story emerges through various characters' often contradictory perspectives. Through Pedro's account – who tracks her whereabouts – we learn that Susana left Comala as a child with her father after her mother's death, married, became widowed, and went back to living with Bartolomé. Father and daughter moved from town to town and eventually settled in isolation in self-imposed exile from Comala and other communities near an abandoned mine, before finally returning to Comala at the first signs of revolutionary unrest – for Susana's safety and protection, as Bartolomé informs Pedro.

Their lives in isolation at the mine are framed by hints of incest. Pedro's estate manager Fulgor Sedano mis/identifies Susana as Bartolomé wife upon their return to Comala. “Pues por el modo como la trata más bien parece su mujer” (138). “Well, the way he treats her, she seems

more like his wife” (82). Bartolomé himself, in an attempt to thwart Pedro and Susana’s reunion mis/identifies himself to Pedro as Susana’s husband: “Le he dicho que tú, aunque viuda, sigues viviendo con tu marido, o al menos así te comportas” (141). “I’ve told him that although you’re a widow, you are still living with your husband – or at least you act as if you are” (84). Susana herself recalls an event that occurred at the mine, but her version situates the event in her childhood and tells a complex tale of violence. Bartolomé had lowered her through a hole into the boarded up and entombed mine to search for remainders of gold.

Mucho años antes, cuando ella era una niña, él le había dicho:

– Baja, Susana, y dime lo que ves.

Estaba colgada de aquella sogá que le lastimaba la cintura, que le sangraba sus manos; pero que no quería soltar: era como el único hilo que la sostenía al mundo afuera...

Y ella bajo y bajo en columpio, meciéndose en la profundidad, con sus pies bamboleando en el <<no encuentro donde poner los pies>>

– Mas abajo, Susana. Mas abajo. Dime si ves algo.

Y cuando encontró el apoyo allí permaneció, callada, porque se enmudeció de miedo. La lámpara circulaba y la luz pasaba de largo junto a ella. Y el grito de allá arriba la estremecía:

– Dame lo que está allí Susana!

Y ella agarró la calavera entre sus manos y cuando la luz le dio de lleno la soltó.

– Es una calavera de muerto –dijo.

– Debes encontrar algo más junto a ella. Dame todo lo que encuentres.

El cadáver se deshizo en canillas; la quijada se desprendió como si fuera de azúcar. Le fue dando pedazo a pedazo hasta que llegó a los dedos de los pies y le entregó conyuntura tras conyuntura. Y la calavera primero; a aquella bola redonda que se deshizo entre sus manos.

– Busca algo más, Susana. Dinero. Ruedas redondas de oro. Buscalas, Susana.

Entonces ella no supo de ella, sino muchos días después entre el hielo, entre las miradas llenas de hielo de su padre. (147-148)

Many years earlier, when she was just a little girl, he had said one day:

“Climb down, Susana, and tell me what you see.”

She was dangling from a rope that cut into her waist and rubbed her hands raw, but she didn’t want to let go. That rope was the single thread connecting her to the outside world...

She bumped lower and lower, swaying in the darkness, with her feet swinging in empty space.

“Lower, Susana. A little lower. Tell me if you see anything.”

And when she felt the ground beneath her feet she stood there dumb with fear. The lamplight circled above her and then focused on a spot beside her. The yell from above made her shiver:

“Hand me that, Susana!”

She picked up the skull in both hands, but when the light struck it fully, she dropped it.

“It’s a dead man’s skull,” she said.

“You should find something else there beside it. Hand me whatever’s there.

The skeleton broke into individual bones: the jawbone fell away as if it were sugar. She handed it up to him, piece after piece, down to the toes, which she handed him joint by joint. The skull had been first, the round ball that had disintegrated in her hands.

“Keep looking, Susana. For money. Round gold coins. Look everywhere, Susana.”

And then she did not remember anything, until days later she came to in the ice: in the ice of her father’s glare. (90-91)

A counterpart to the story of Pedro’s lawless rise to power through deception and false promises, violence and violations, and through which the character emerges as the figuration of law organizing social relations of production and reproduction, the above superimposition of Susana’s sexual and economic abuse at the hands of Bartolomé tells a similar tale of the relation between law and lawlessness. Rather than that of a crime at its founding moment, however, the story makes visible the ongoing violence of law’s self-reproduction and self-preservation against deviation or threat to its established order. Within this story, incest, or violation of law’s own founding taboo and demarcation of the illicit from the licit, emerges as the means for the perpetuation of an established order’s regime of socio-economic relation, a self-perpetuation against the threat posed by emergent capitalist relations and its institutional consolidation under secular rule after the revolution, and which emergent order is embodied by Pedro Páramo. One could thematically associate Bartolomé’s self-exile from Comala and the rejection of other communities for a life of isolation with Susana at the mine as an attempt to preserve the established paternal authority of the Christian order he embodies, against the complex reorganization and modernization of social, cultural and economic relations both preceding and succeeding the revolution. Bartolomé’s attempt to return the mine to profitable operation and the

reference to gold coins associate this work with Spanish colonial relations of production as perhaps the attempt to revive the gurantee of feudal authority.

Susana's story of the event at the mine dramatizes the violent subjection of both her reproductive and productive labor to the management and control of the feudal order for the preservation of its socio-economic regime of production. This exploitative cultural logic is dramatized through Susana's narrative of danger, pain and fear as well as in the remains of the dead miners. The story further emphasizes violence and sexual violation as something committed in the service of self- reproduction of paternal identity and law through Susana's account of herself as a child dependent upon, and subjected to, the will of the father.⁶

The transference of Susana from Bartolomé to Pedro narrates a repetition of her subjection within the new patriarchal order, her (enforced) inclusion into the new order as naturalized reproductive ground for the self-reproduction of a new people that will function as ground for the emergent order's self-perpetuation. Giving the command to have her father killed, Pedro reiterates Susana's dependent position relative to paternal law in its management of social relations. "Ella tiene que quedarse huérfana. Estamos obligados a amparar a alguien" (142); "She must be left an orphan. We're called on to look after those in need" (85, translation modified). In contrast to what would conventionally be the transfer of a daughter from the father to her husband as provider and protector – which forms the very basis for the continuity of the social order whose law is embodied by the father/husband – Susana's violent tranference from Bartolomé to Pedro emerges here into a story of a violent transformation of the social order itself on the one hand, and as a continuity of paternal law as providence on the other.

⁶ Jean Franco discusses the episode of the mine as Susana's counterpart to Juan's journey to Comala, both of which lead to an encounter with the dead and narrate the violence of paternal figures who sacrifice affection for their children for the sake of money. See "Journey to the Land of the Dead: Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*" in *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*. Ed. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.

Pero ¿cómo viviremos?⁷
But How Will We Live?⁸

We can explain the significance of Susana's rejection of lawful social ordering by contrasting her story to another story of incest in the novel, which is similarly embedded in a complex question of social transformation as replacement of one lawfully self-reproducing social order with another. This contrasting story narrates not a rejection of but a willful submission to and investment in lawful social relations, which narrative makes law visible as violence and identification with law as complicity. At the novel's midpoint and culmination of his journey Juan meets what he believes to be a real live woman, who claims to be in an incestuous relationship with her brother. As she informs him of the plight of the community and of its few remaining people:

...todavía hay algunos. ¿Dígame si Filomeno no vive, si Dorotea, si Melquiades, si Prudencio el viejo, si Sóstenes y todos éstos no viven? Lo que acontece es que se la pasan encerrados. De día no sé qué harán; pero las noches se las pasan en su encierro. Aquí esas horas están llenas de espantos. Si usted viera el gentío de ánimas que andan sueltas por la calle. En cuanto oscurece comienzan a salir. Y a nadie le gusta verlas. Son tantas, y nosotros tan poquitos, que ya ni la lucha le hacemos para rezar porque salgan de sus penas. No ajustarían nuestras oraciones para todos. Si acaso les tocaría un pedazo de Padre nuestro. Y eso no les puede servir de nada. Luego están nuestros pecados de por medio. Ninguno de los que todavía vivimos está en gracia de Dios. Nadie podrá alzar sus ojos al Cielo sin sentirlos sucios de vergüenza. Y la vergüenza no cura. Al menos eso me dijo el obispo que pasó por aquí hace algún tiempo dando confirmaciones. Yo me le puse enfrente y le confesé todo:

>>—Eso no se perdona —me dijo.

>>—Estoy avergonzada.

>>—No es el remedio.

>>—¡Cásenos usted!

>>—¡Apártense!

>>Yo le quise decir que la vida nos había juntado, accorranlándonos y puesto uno junto al otro. Estábamos tan solos aquí, que los únicos éramos nosotros. Y de algún modo había que poblar el pueblo. Tal vez tenga ya a quién confirmar cuando regrese.

>>—Sepárense. Eso es todo lo que se puede hacer.

⁷ Rulfo, 112.

⁸ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 52.

>>–Pero ¿cómo viviremos?
 >>–Como viven los hombres. (111-112)

...there are still a few people around. Haven't you seen Filomeno? Or Dorotea or Melquiades or old Prudencio? And aren't Sostenes and all of them still alive? What happens is that they stay close to home. I don't know what they do by day but I know they spend their nights locked up indoors. Nights around here are filled with ghosts. You should see all the spirits walking through the streets. As soon as it's dark they begin to come out. No one likes to see them. There's so many of them and so few of us that we don't even make the effort to pray for them anymore, to help them out of their purgatory. We don't have enough prayers to go around. Maybe a few words of the Lord's Prayer for each one. But that's not going to do them any good. Then there are our sins on top of theirs. None of us still living is in God's grace. We can't lift up our eyes, because they're filled with shame. And shame doesn't help. At least that's what the Bishop said. He came through here some time ago giving confirmation, and I went to him and confessed everything:

“I can't pardon you” he said.

“I am filled with shame.”

“That isn't the answer.”

“Marry us!”

“Live apart!”

“I tried to tell him that life had joined us together, herded us like animals, forced us on each other. We were so alone here: we were the only two left. And somehow the village had to have people again. I told him now maybe there would be someone for him to confirm when he came back”

“Go your separate ways. There's no other way”

“But how will we live?”

“Like anyone lives.” (51-52)

The woman's story iterates in similar terms the story of a community threatened by life forms different from its own and improper to its community and identity, its shared meaning and social ordering of life. It reiterates the self-imposed isolation as protection visible in the story of Bartolomé San Juan and similarly narrates incest as the necessary evil for the reestablishment and perpetuation of its own particular social order against threatening difference. Within this context, the social ordering is based on the reproduction of God's children that will, in perpetuating God's order, ensure salvation. The story links the question of community to that of counting and accounting for of its productive resources to be accumulated towards this promised communal ends, the insufficiency of prayers to ensure their passage to Heaven in order for the

still living to not end up abandoned by God like the lost souls. It does so in contrast to both Susana and Dorotea in their abandonment of the soul and disinvestment from the teleological temporarily of competing accumulation towards the plenitude of life promised by the Father/father.

The priests's refusal to legitimate woman's incest or her hope for confirmation and sanction through the reproduction of God's children leads the woman to solicit that Juan replace her brother as the legitimate founding father of a lawful community, which legitimacy she believes would rescue her from damnation. As she informs him, claiming Donis's agreement with her desire for a legitimate social order:

Él siempre ha tratado de irse, y creo que ahora le ha llegado su turno. Quizá sin yo saberlo, me dejó con usted para que me cuidara. Vio su oportunidad. Eos del becerro cimarrón fue sólo un pretexto. Ya verá usted que no vuelve.

Quise decirle: <<Voy a salir a buscar un poco de aire, porque siento náuseas>>; pero dije:

–No se preocupe. Volverá. (115)

–Donis no volverá. Se lo noté en los ojos. Estaba esperando que alguien viniera para irse. Ahora tú te encargarás de cuidarme. ¿O qué, no quieres cuidarme? Vente a dormir aquí conmigo.

–Aquí estoy bien.

–Es mejor que te subas a la cama. Allí te comerán las turicatas.

Entonces fui y me acosté con ella. (116)

He's been trying and trying to leave, and I think this is the time. Maybe, though he didn't say so, he left me here for to take care of. He saw his chance. The business of the stray was just an excuse. You'll see. He's not coming back. (56)

“Donis won't come back,” she said. “I saw it in his eyes. He was waiting for someone to come so he could get away. Now you'll be the one look after me. Won't you? Don't you want to take care of me? Come sleep here by my side.

“I'm fine where I am.”

“You'd be better off up here in the bed. The ticks will eat you alive down there.”

I got up and crawled in bed with her. (57)

The passage above highlights in complex ways the self-interested and willful nature of the woman's seeming submission to the will of law as premise for and promise of community or

the telos of the common good. On the one hand, the passage tells of the woman lending herself as reproductive ground for the founding of legitimate paternal authority. Rather than her subjection to law however, it is her will that reestablishes the law which, within this Christian context, would restore her to God's grace and salvation. As is the case with his own mother's demand for Juan to inherit the place of the father and restore her place in the community that can similarly ensure her own transcendence over death, it is Juan who is subjected to their will in the production of law. In the above passage, this will emerges as the desire for the institutionalization of a providential promise of "care" over the woman's well-being or the guarantee of a good life without end on earth and in Heaven. Within the context of Dolores's demand as superimposed will and intentionality, Juan's own journey had begun with the same investment in the father as law or guarantee of a good life, despite his initial rejection of the mother's desire. As he stated after having promised his mother:

Pero no pensé cumplir mi promesa. Hasta que ahora pronto comence a llenarme de sueños, a darle vuelo a las ilusiones. Y de este modo se me fue formando un mundo alrededor de la esperanza que era aquel señor llamado Pedro Páramo, el marido de mi madre. Por eso vine a Comala. (65)

I never meant to keep my promise. But before I knew it my head began to swim with dreams and my imagination took flight. Little by little I began to build a world around a hope centered on the man called Pedro Páramo, the man who had been my mother's husband. That was why I had come to Comala. (3)

A narrative that repeats all the terms of the story of Dorotea's son, which began Juan's quest for justice for his mother through his own investment in the illusion of a lawful social order as a reordering and inventing of a world itself, the above equally narrates the passage from the Christian world to the secular one as a new possibility of organization of social relations through modernity's promise of transformation of the world for common, national human ends through economic and social development. To put the destructive effects of the illusion of the father as

secular social order and the promise of modernization in the novel in capitalist, ecological and ideological terms, what is promised in the process of intensified exploitation of natural resources and of labor and the overcoming the complex web of existing interdependence of life and death to produce this new ordering of social relation is the very possibility of overcoming of constraints or limits on human life in its freedom and independence. At the social level, this translates to a desire for the overcoming of all limitations not of its own cultural invention, where culture is posited as the embodiment and sole limit to freedom in exchange for the promise of transcendence through self-reproduction of identity. We could say that the invention of and the investment in lawful socio-political organization serves as a means for the self-perpetuation of a socio-economic regime of production that promises to ensure human self-determination over its own life and death through sovereign control over the entire lifeworld. Within the novel this beginning culminates in the Christian order at the heart of community as the mirror reflection of modernity's promise of self-reproducing cultural order of life as timeless national identity. It makes visible within both orders the production and justification of endless violence and destruction towards that end through Juan's encounter with a destroyed Comala culminating in the women's desire for its reestablishment through further violence and exclusion of forms of life outside of this logic of territorial cultural self-reproduction.

In seemingly lending herself as reproductive ground for the re/production of the paternal order and sovereign law, the woman willed the expulsion of her brother from the community in order to ensure her own salvation, much as through its self-reproduction the community would expell the dead as other possibilities of life. But this willing and creation of a teleological order is made visible as the groundless counterpart to the lawlessness and violence that establishes Pedro's law itself through the story of Donis the brother, whose perspective contradicts and

relativizes every single component of the woman's story (much like Dolores's own story and investments are contradicted by the stories Juan encounter in Comala, and like the unnamed man in Dorotea's story who contradicts her view of the time-space of community). Most importantly, Donis does not seem to acknowledge as ghostly or improper the forms of life outside of this cultural logic within Comala, and thus remains entirely outside of the telos of community. In fact, according to Dorotea and contrary to the woman's account which emerges as a deception, Donis does return and in fact both discovers and helps Dorotea bury the dead Juan (and later Dorotea herself), putting an end to the destructive narrative of community that had dominated in the novel until this point.

Vamos a ponernos de acuerdo⁹
We can make a deal here¹⁰

La verdad es que esperaba una recompensa. Había servido a don Lucas, que en paz descansa, padre de don Pedro; después a don Pedro, y todavía; luego a Miguel, hijo de don Pedro. La verdad es que esperaba una compensación. Una retribución grande y valiosa. (158)

Se acordaba de don Lucas, que siempre le quedó a deber sus honorarios. De don Pedro, que hizo cuenta nueva. De Miguel su hijo: ¡cuántos bochornos le había dado ese muchacho!

Lo libró de la cárcel cuando menos unas quince veces, cuando no hayan sido más. Y el asesinato que cometió con aquel hombre...Eso nomás ¿cuánto le hubiera costado a don Pedro si las cosas hubieran ido hasta allá, hasta lo legal? Y lo de las violaciones ¿qué? Cuántas veces el tuvo que sacar de su misma bolsa el dinero para que ellas le echaran tierra al asunto; ¡Date de buenas que vas a tener un hijo güerito!, les decía. (159-60)

The truth was that he had expected a reward. He had served don Lucas – might he rest in peace – don Pedro's father; then, and up till now, don Pedro. Even Miguel, don Pedro's son. The truth was that he expected some recognition. A large, and welcome, return for his services. (102-30)

He was remembering don Lucas, who had always put off paying his fees. And don Pedro, who's started with a clean slate. And his son Miguel. What a lot of trouble that boy had caused!

⁹ Rulfo, 153.

¹⁰ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 97.

He got him out of jail at least fifteen times, if not more. And there was that time he'd murdered that man...How much would just that one time have cost don Pedro if things had moved ahead to legal proceedings? And what about all the rapes, eh? Think of all the times he'd taken money from his own pocket to keep the girls quiet. "You should be thankful," he'd told them, "that you'll be having a fair-skinned baby." (104)

Complicity with law as guarantee of vested interest seems to characterize Comala itself.

The words above belong to Gerardo, Pedro's lawyer, who speaks of having helped Pedro and his son evade the law on numerous occasions, saving them from having to repay for what is done or owed to others, often paying out of his own pocket as advance for the expenses incurred, advocating for and reinterpreting the meaning and value of their action (violation as gift of a worthy son), always in the hope of a worthwhile repayment for his services. His relationship with Pedro Páramo entails service in violation of established law (or the social accord with the larger community), expectation of a share in what Pedro acquires by violating the legal obligation of repayment and, ultimately, powerless disillusionment in the face of Pedro's violation of the accord – his failure to honor their agreement – to repay the debt to Gerardo himself. This relationship is generalizable to varying degrees, with few exceptions, as the relationship between the villagers of Comala and Pedro, and is what makes possible the emergence of Pedro as patron/father and law. It further extends to the community's relationship with Miguel Páramo, one of Pedro's many illegitimate sons that he arbitrarily decides to recognize as heir.

The men and women of Comala seem to aid and abet Pedro's and Miguel's economic and sexual exploits. Father Rentería tells of his confessional booth being always filled with women who come to confess their sins for having transgressed moral and social codes in sexual service to the married Pedro Páramo. "Me acuso padre que ayer dormí con Pedro Páramo." "Me acuso padre que tuve un hijo de Pedro Páramo." "De que la presté mi hija a Pedro Paramo" (127); "I

have sinned, padre. Yesterday I slept with Pedro Paramo.” “I have sinned, padre. I bore Pedro Paramo’s child.” I gave my daughter to Pedro Paramo, padre” (69). Significantly, Fulgor Sedano, the overseer for his estate who begins with a sense of superiority in the knowledge – perhaps known only to him – that Pedro, in fact, owns nothing but debt (which gives the appearance of wealth), decides to work as a subordinate for him, seeing in Pedro a promising youth and expecting to benefit from Pedro’s ability to turn his debt into property. Fulgor helps Pedro trick Dolores, his creditor, into marrying him with promises of love – something Dolores views as elevating her above the rest of the girls in the village all of whom seem to desire him – and putting her property into his hands. Fulgor also helps Pedro kill Aldrete who wants to delimit the boundary of Pedro’s ever expanding expropriation of land.

Even Father Rentería the village priest sees himself as complicit in Pedro’s rise to power and considers himself a sinner. From the poor he gets nothing, and Pedro provides for his subsistence in exchange, as he says, for his soul. In Ana, the priest’s niece, the idea of complicity comes to take on larger dimensions. Ana’s father was killed by Miguel Páramo . She herself was violated by him, something ambiguously claimed by her, believed by the priest, and contested by Pedro. But much like the unnamed woman’s story of incest as both violation and complicity, the question of violation here comes to take on extreme ambiguity as the priest’s questioning of his niece in his need for certainty and proof of the identity of the violator unearths uneasy ambiguities regarding the very claim of being violated.

- Estás segura de que él fue, ¿verdad?
- Segura no, tío. No le ví la cara. Me agarró de noche y en lo oscuro.
- ¿Entonces cómo supiste que era Miguel Páramo?
- Porque él me lo dijo: <<Soy Miguel Páramo, Ana. No te asustes.>> Eso me dijo.
- ¿Pero sabías que era el autor de la muerte de tu padre, no?
- Sí, tío.
- ¿Entonces qué hiciste para alejarlo?
- No hice nada.

Los dos guardaron silencio por un rato. Se oía el aire tibio entre las hojas del arrayán.

–Me dijo que precisamente a eso venía: a pedirme disculpas y a que yo le perdonara. Sin moverme de la cama le avisé: <<La ventana está abierta.>> Y él entró. Llegó abrazandome, como si ésa fuera la forma de disculparse por lo que había hecho. Y yo le sonreí. Pensé en lo que usted me había enseñado: que nunca hay que odiar a nadie. Le sonreí para decírselo; pero después pensé que él no pudo ver mi sonrisa, porque yo no le veía a él, por lo negra que estaba la noche. Solamente lo sentí encima de mí y que comenzaba a hacer cosas malas conmigo.

>>Creí que me iba a matar. Eso fue lo que creí, tío. Y hasta dejé de pensar para morirme antes de que él me matara. Pero seguramente no se atrevió a hacerlo.

>>Lo supe cuando abrí los ojos y vi la luz de la mañana que entraba por la ventana abierta. Antes de esa hora, sentí que había dejado de existir,>>

–Pero debes tener alguna seguridad. La voz. ¿No lo conociste por su voz?

–No lo conocía por nada. (89)

“You are sure he was the one, aren’t you?”

“I am not positive, Uncle. No. I never saw his face. He surprised me at night, and it was dark.”

“Then how did you know it was Miguel Páramo ?”

“Because he said so: ‘It’s Miguel Páramo , Ana. Don’t be afraid.’ That was what he said”

“But you knew he was responsible for your father’s death, didn’t you?”

“Yes, Uncle.”

“So what did you do to make him leave?”

“I didn’t do anything.”

The two sat without speaking. They could hear the warm breeze stirring in the myrtle leaves

“He said that was why he had come: to say he was sorry and to ask me to forgive him. I lay still in my bed, and I told him, ‘The window is open.’ And he came in. The first thing he did was put his arms around me, as if that was his way of asking forgiveness for what he had done. And I smiled at him. I remembered what you had taught me: that we must never hate anyone. I smiled to let him know that, but then I realized that he couldn’t see my smile because it was so black that I couldn’t see him. I could only feel his body on top of me, and feel him beginning to do bad things to me.

“I thought he was going to kill me. That’s what I believed, Uncle. Then I stopped thinking at all, so I would be dead before he killed me. But I guess he didn’t dare.

“I knew he hadn’t when I opened my eyes and saw the morning light shining in the open window. Up until then, I felt that I had in fact died.”

“But you must have some way of being sure. His voice. Didn’t you recognize him by his voice?”

“I didn’t recognize him at all.” (27-8)

From active complicity to extreme resignation, the villagers of Comala seem to live out a way of life his grandmother tried to inculcate in Pedro as a young boy, but which, like his

father's debt, Pedro refuses to inherit. Pedro's grandmother tries to teach him the necessity of subordination to the rule of exploitative power for the sake of a share of that power in the future. In contrast to Pedro's power of self-reinventing through reinvention of the world¹¹, however, power here significantly takes the specific form of inclusion into culture as promise of inheritance of both property and social position or place of self-determination within the community, and which promise justifies the expropriation of labor narrated as both violence and complicity, as self-subordination through apprenticeship defined as socialization.

—¿Que haces aquí a estas horas? ¿No estás trabajando?
 —No, abuela. Rogelio quiere que le cuide al niño. Me paso paseándolo. Cuesta trabajo atender las dos cosas: al niño y el telégrafo, mientras que él se vive tomando cervezas en el billar. Además no me paga nada.
 —No estás allí para ganar dinero, sino para aprender; cuando ya sepa algo, entonces podrás ser exigente. Por ahora eres sólo un aprendiz; quizá mañana o pasado llegues a ser tú el jefe. Pero para eso se necesita paciencia y, más que nada, humildad. Si te ponen a pasear al niño, hazlo por el amor de Dios. Es necesario que te resignes. Que se resignen otros, abuela, yo no estoy para resignaciones. (82)

“What are you doing here at this hour? Aren't you working?
 No, Grandmother. Rogelio asked me to mind his little boy. I am just walking him around. I can't do both things - the kid and the telegraph. Meanwhile he's down at the pool room drinking beer. On top of everything else, he doesn't pay me anything.
 You're not there to be paid. You're there to learn. Once you know something, then you can afford to make demands. For now you're just an apprentice. Maybe one day you will be the boss. But for that you need patience and, above all, humility. If they want you to take the boy for a walk, do it, for heaven's sake. You must learn to be patient.
 Let others be patient, Grandmother. I am not one for patience.” (20)

As Dorotea later tells Juan, those who remained in Comala when the village became deserted years later because Pedro had left his fields to rot and the revolution had swept up the remaining people stayed in hope of inheriting Pedro's land, which they claim he had promised them. In the novel, the idea of inheritance brings together the various economies of hope as

¹¹ Carlos Blanco Aguinaga discusses Pedro Páramo as the only active character in the novel, having both an interior life and exterior action, in contrast to the rest of the characters who he sees as possessing only interiority and who function almost as nature to Pedro's historical actions and temporality. See “Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo.” *La narrativa de Juan Rulfo*:

expectation and the teleological investment and patient waiting for a return: the self-abnegating goodness and prayers to pay off inherited debt of original sin in order to inherit the Kingdom of God and the fulfillment of Pedro's promise of a future share of what however comes to be continually reproduced and augmented as the basis of the father's production of authority (though produced by, and owed to, others).

The limited account of the revolution within the novel is inscribed within the same logic of expectation of redistribution and inheritance which would emerge into the conflicting factional violence vying for the domain of law as inscription over land or contested territorial claims over resource, and which would eventually emerge into the postrevolutionary state. An account given to Pedro Páramo by his henchman Damasio or El Tilcuete – whom Pedro had made leader to a band of revolutionaries of indeterminate faction through striking a deal with them – describes the Villistas they had encountered thus:

–Vienen del Norte, arriando parejo con todo lo que encuentran. Parece, según se ve, que andan recorriendo la tierra, tanteando todos los terrenos. Son poderosos. Eso ni quien se los quite. (162)

“From the North, leveling everything they found in their path. It seems, as far as we can make out, that they're riding all through here getting the lay of the land. They're powerful. You can't take that from them.” (107)

The terms are suggestive of what would emerge into the claim to legitimacy of the modern democratic state and its promise of redistribution and reform, that of leveling or equalizing and most specifically through a sizing up or measurement of land as resource to be redistributed, a promise continually undercut and postponed to be sure, but which makes visible the underpinning idea of property as its ground for legitimate social self-reproduction. Within the novel, this logic of the domain of law as the condition for justice through management and distribution of land – both as territory and resource that would ground the production of national

unity and progress through production and assignment of the places of the national people within a particular set of production relations – is visible as common to all the various contradictory factional interests with various claims to the inscriptions of the meaning and content of the body of law and the terms of distribution. The men fighting under El Tilcuate move easily from fighting for one faction to the next, including that of the cristero rebellion itself.

El Tilcuate siguió viniendo:

- Ahora somos carrancistas.
- Está bien.
- Andamos con mi general Obregón.
- Está bien.
- Allá se ha hecho la paz. Andamos sueltos.
- Espera. No desarmes a tu gente. Esto no puede durar mucho.
- Se ha levantado en armas el padre Rentería. ¿Nos vamos con él, o contra él?
- Eso ni se discute. Ponte al lado del gobierno.
- Pero si somos irregulares. Nos consideran rebeldes.
- Entonces vete a descansar.
- ¿Con el vuelo que llevo?
- Haz lo que quieras, entonces
- Me iré a reforzar al padrecito. Me gusta cómo gritan. Además lleva uno ganada la salvación.
- Haz lo que quieras. (171-2)

El Tilcuate continued to report:

- “We’re with Caranza now.”
- “Fine.”
- “Now we’re riding with General Obregon.”
- “Fine.”
- “They’ve declared peace. We’re dismissed.”
- “Wait. Don’t disband your men. This won’t last long.”
- “Father Rentería’s fighting now. Are we with him or against him?”
- “No question. You’re on the side of teh government”
- “But we’re irregulars. They consider us rebels.”
- “Then take a rest.”
- “As fired up as I am?”
- “Do what you want, then.”
- “I’m going to back that old priest. I like how they yell. Besides, that way a man can be sure of salvation.”
- “I don’t care what you do.” (117)

The moment most critical of this logic of property within the novel comes earlier, however, at the very moment of the tyrant striking a deal with the revolutionaries. A band of men arrive at Pedro's estate, where he feeds them and through the false promise of financing their cause turn them into men protecting his property and raiding neighboring villages for their own upkeep: "Necesitamos agenciarnos un rico pa que nos habilite, y qué mejor que el señor aquí presente." (154)' "We need to get us a rich man to help outfit us, and who better than this señor here" (97). As with Gerardo, the accord or deal they strike for seemingly mutual benefit is purported to trade Pedro's promise or guarantee that far exceeds their expectation for the immediate benefit of keeping his land as basis of production which would enable him to redistribute surplus to them. This accord and the men's willful complicity and self-subjection in fact elevates Pedro to the status of the providential father through which elevation he would, once again, refuse to honor his side of the deal or pay his debt.

The failure of the revolution is thematized as following an economy of expectation invested in the law and hinges upon the illusory possibility of common accord as fair share in a national field of belonging, an economy which ends up reinstating law as guarantee or territorial communal management of property, where promise of progress, debt payment, and the inheritance of the benefits of development as inclusion is also presupposed are defined as national or cultural inclusion.

Yo veo borrosa la cara de la gente¹²
I see people through a haze¹³

An alternative to the logic of complicity above, Susana's story replaces the disempowering fiction of law as guarantee of unity and plenitude with the empowering fiction of

¹² Rulfo, 134.

¹³ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 77.

a lover. Rather than an illusion of perfect unity or reciprocity of lawful relations as guarantee of plenitude however, it is a fiction of a dead lover, which introduces loss and finitude into this alternate story of relational belonging in opposition to that of communion and plenitude.

Susana's life under Pedro's roof is spent in a world of memory or imagination and madness, in sleep and "dreams" of a lost lover Florencio.¹⁴ In a narrative repetition of the logic of Dorotea's dream as reality, Susana emphatically declares to her nursemaid Justina that she never dreams and proclaims her lover's reality. This reality alternates between torpid desire, love and affection, and the pain of loss through his death. However, her pain is significantly narrated as guarded against all consolation and illusory promises of its erasure through recovery (both of what is lost and from pain of separation). Susana's invented reality embracing both joy and pain is moreover inaccessible to Pedro as well as to the priest who, when he came to console her for her father's death is received thus:

<<Se te está muriendo de pena el corazón –piensa–. Ya sé que vienes a confortarme que murió Florencio pero eso ya lo sé. No te aflijas por los demás no te apures por mí. Yo tengo guardado mi dolor en un lugar seguro. No dejes que se te apague el corazón.>>
(149)

"Your heart is dying of pain," Susana thinks. "I know that you've come to tell me Florencio is dead, but I already know that. Don't be sad about anything else, don't worry about me. I keep my grief hidden in a safe place. Don't let your heart go out!" (92)

Susana's story of a dream/desire made reality includes rather than rejects death, pain, loss, and separation, in marked contrast to the initial illusions of Juan and Dorotea whose stories began as bound up with the promise of overcoming of separation through death and loss. It also forms a contrast to Pedro's own story of her recovery. The novel correlates this world without

¹⁴ Textual ambiguities do not allow us to establish whether Florencio is Susana's dead husband, in fact whether the husband was not itself an invention. Jose Boixe Gonzales discusses in the footnote he provides to the episode of Susana and Florencio at the beach that the reference to the tropical birds not found in Mexico would suggest that the name of the bird was made up. My own suggestion is that this reference invites us to read the account of the beach itself as invented. See the editor's footnote 100 in the Madrid: Cátedra 2003 edition of the novel.

the illusion of oneness with the powerlessness of law in the figure of Pedro Páramo, who, despite assuming the role of her provider and protector and whose story narrates an earnest desire to console and erase her pain, cannot bring Susana into relation with him without her investment in his promise of restoration of plenitude.

The story of the lover Florencio, in contrast to the father/husband moreover, places Susana unrepentantly on the whore side of the (virgin) mother/whore dichotomy. It is a relation of love and joy that appears as uncoupled from the prerogative of reproduction as it is from fidelity. The sexualized narrative of Susana giving herself to the sea further serves to undermine the naturalization of patriarchal human self-reproduction as the sole basis for relationality and co-existence and reenacts the earlier story of her sense of connection with larger forces and forms of life.

Perhaps this can be used to explain Susana's outcry against God at Florencio's death: a narrative staging of the challenge posed by the illicit figure of the lover to the self-reproduction of the Father's order much like with Dorotea's bastard son, and which sinful or deviating existence God refuses to protect or let live in the same way He denied life and reality to the son of Dorotea.

Señor, tú no existes! Te pedí tu protección para él. Que me lo cuidaras. Eso te pedí. Pero tú te ocupas nada más de las almas. Y lo que yo quiero de él es su cuerpo. Desnudo y caliente de amor hirviendo de deseos; estrujando el temblor de mis senos y mis brazos. (156)

God, you do not exist! I asked You to protect him. To look after him. I asked that of You. But all You care about is souls. And what I want is his body. Naked and hot with love; boiling with desire; stroking my trembling breast and arms (100, translation modified).

Susana denounces God in terms that make explicit the link between lawful sexual relations, procreation and the paternal order of social and metaphysical self-reproduction and

transcendence. A rejection that declares this narrative of life as fictional, the declaration is at the same time complexly highlighted as fictional itself, in other words as without a counter truth-claim that would negate God's existence, word, or world by replacing it with a more truthful conception of reality.

Contla no existe¹⁵

Contla does not exist¹⁶

Bueno, pues eso es la Media Luna de punta cabo. Como quien dice, toda la tierra que se puede abarcar con la mirada. Y es de él todo ese terrenal. El caso es que nuestras madres nos malparieron en un petate aunque éramos hijos de Pedro Páramo. Y los más chistoso es que él nos llevó a bautizar. Con usted debe haber pasado lo mismo, ¿no? (69)

Well, all that's the Media Luna. From end to end. Like they say, as far as the eye can see. He owns ever' bit of that land. We're Pedro Páramo 's sons, all right, but, for all that, our mothers brought us into the world on straw mats. And the real joke of it is that he's the one carried us to be baptized. That's how it was with you, wasn't it? (6-7)

Juan's first encounter was with Abundio, who guided him to Comala. As discussed earlier, the above passage following Abundio's revelation that he, too, is a son of Pedro Páramo mark the first moment of problematization of the possibility of justice, something visible as that of conflicting claims to inheritance of the father's law of the land, and through Abundio's attempt to include Juan into the category of Pedro's illegitimate children and thus preempt the claim of the legitimate heir which would disinherit the rest of the community and reproduce the violence of the father. Abundio's question above that functions more as claim (he became angry when Juan answered ambiguously) over Juan as one of the 'we' of the illegitimate children, however, would disinherit Juan himself. Most significantly it would cancel out the mother's claim to the father's obligation as legitimate wife and rightful member of the community entitled

¹⁵ Rulfo, 84.

¹⁶ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 22, translation modified.

to the benefits and privileges that comes with Pedro's social position and of Juan's rightful place as heir to it.

Within this initial meaning, one dependent on Juan's perspective, we can contextualize the contention within the land reform debate and the mutually contradictory claims to private and communal property. More importantly, the conflict resonates with the mutually exclusive nature of the claim to communal property and identity in relation to the state's territorial claim over the nation as the sole legitimate community through modern cultural logic within which all are free and responsible before the law as individual Mexicans.

The novel sets up these mutually contradictory territorial claims to organization of social relations based on different cultural claims to nature as territorial ground and resource for communal self-reproduction. But it does so in order to move Juan beyond the impasse through the revelation of Abundio's and the rest of the community's death –whose mythical existences are therefore no longer proper to the grounded temporality of social continuity.

Within this reframing the above passage emerges into a new light. Translated above as “brought us into this world,” the term *malparieron* has a range of meanings that render the above passage more complex than at first appears. The verb *parir* in Spanish means to give birth, and in a related sense it also means to create or to come up with something. *Malparir*, combining bad (*mal*) and birth, can on the one hand be read within the provided context of poverty (straw mat) as being born under bad conditions. The term is also colloquially used to refer to unwanted children, and thus can be associated with the thematic question of illegitimacy or bastardy we have discussed. In this sense *malparir* can also function as an insult.

The literal meaning of the verb, however, is to be born before due time, in other words meaning either abortion or miscarriage. For our discussion this could be further explicated as

coming, or being delivered, into the world already dead. Further, the idea of being birthed before due time has thematic resonance through the suggestion of an aborting or shortcircuiting of a predetermined or teleological temporal order. Within the framework of Abundio's mythical life after death, as well as in relation to the thematic repetition of the idea of suicide – in Dorotea (as a path to a different heaven), in Eduvigis (who speaks of suicide as forcing the hand of God, as dying before God appointed due time, and of such death as a shortcut to a different heaven), and in Susana who too willed herself a serene death – it is the literal meaning of the verb *malparir* that emerges into significance in opposition to the idea of natural birth into the Christian or modern meaning of human life, or better said, in opposition to a naturalized idea of human life's birth and death as the beginning and end of time. We could say that like Susana's life protected from law's teleological promise, this life is neither son nor bastard, but prior to relation with law because outside of invented or culturally specific notions of both natural and metaphysical laws as timeless unity and origin dominant in Western tradition, and thus without the idea of human temporality as deviation from and recovery of lawful oneness. A life outside of relation with law, and which relation as necessary to law's production of both the licit and illicit for its own self-reproduction as narrated through Pedro taking them to be baptized before their abandonment, Abundio's remark emerges as a commentary on the ironic nature of the desire for or investment in lawful relations. Abundio's patricide at the end of the novel and his own afterlife to the reality defined through the father as law narrates the liberation from this logic.¹⁷

¹⁷See Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the relation between sovereign power, the juridical order of law, and life from the perspective of force and regulatory power of law in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford UP, 1998 and *State of Exception*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2005.

**No puede ser¹⁸
It Cannot Be¹⁹**

As I have noted, Juan's story can be summed up as a staging of Mexico's secular perspective's naturalized idea of the reality of human life coming face to face with its own fictionality. The novel's trajectory from the story of Juan Preciado to that of Dorotea and Susana can be read as a movement from the genre of the fantastic (which narrates an encounter with supernatural reality through a realist narrative perspective) to that of the marvelous or magical (wherein the supernatural is not subordinated to a realist point of view), the narrative perspective of which I have been calling mythical while highlighting its fictional character, i.e. a creative worldview without a representational truth-claim. As I will argue below, the second half of the novel invites a rereading of the first half of the novel in order to undo the idea of a given or unified point (location, ground, as well as premise) from which one views or reads in order to reframe the question of reading, meaning making, and valuation that undoes the illusion of lawfully determined relations of shared meaning and value itself.

Patrick Dove's reading of the novel is based on a fundamental distinction between the modern and realist narrative point of view of Juan Preciado and those narratively framed as supernatural in order to warn against representing cultural others. Dove cautions against a testimonial reading as restitution that would claim to give voice to those silenced by the social ordering and cultural logic forming the premise of reading itself. However, as I have already shown, the second half of the novel resists a representational reading while thematic making visible fiction as the basis for the organization of meaning. As I will further show, it invites a

¹⁸ Rulfo, 78.

¹⁹ Rulfo, trans. Sayers Peden, 16, translation modified.

reconsideration of the representational framework of the first half of the novel itself to reveal the complicity of the reading process identified with the narrative point of view.

Tzvetan Todorov's "Definition of the Fantastic"²⁰ provides a useful starting point for our discussion. His conceptualization of the term makes visible a secular perspective as its naturalized premise. As he elucidates in an initial formulation of the relation between the real and the fantastic, locating the protagonist (as well as the reader) within modern reality and worldview:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings – with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny [in which the fantastic is revealed as merely imaginary], or the marvelous [in which known laws of nature do not apply]. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (14-15)

Juan Preciado's story closely follows this formulation. His initial encounter with Eduviges sets up a realist point of view as narrative premise. Abundio had recommended he look up Eduviges, his old acquaintance but, upon meeting her, Eduviges instead tells Juan that the Abundio she knew was deaf, and moreover already dead, and thus must not have been the man he had met. "No debe ser él. Además, Abundio ya murió. Debe haber muerto seguramente. ¿Te das cuenta? Así que no puede ser él" (78); "Then it can't have been him. Besides, Abundio died. I am sure he's dead. So you see? It couldn't have been him" (16). While the words belong to Eduviges, they convey the perspective of Juan Preciado, the story's guiding first person narrative

²⁰ *The Horror Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder. London ; New York: Routledge, 2000.

voice/point of view, and Juan affirms her view on the matter. “Estoy de acuerdo con usted” (78); “I agree with you” (16, translation modified). It cannot be him.

The phrase “no puede ser” or “it cannot be” delimits a particular notion of reality that initially guides Juan’s reading, interpretation, and accounting for or narration of events and, with it, the perspective of the textual narratee it constructs and addresses. The phrase makes apparent as given and shared starting narrative premise between protagonist and implied reader the secular worldview and narrative meaning of life gaining currency in the newly reconsolidated Mexico – over against the earlier dominance of Christian worldview and cultural reality that it supplanted on the one hand, and to the continued exclusion of indigenous, mythical worldviews and cultural ways of life on the other.

Juan’s subsequent conversation with Eduviges – whose own point of view quickly turns problematic – attests to and delineates the parameters of this secular perspective. This naturalized idea of reality defines and delimits what can be: a totality of the possible past, present, and future delimited against what it defines as impossible, unnatural, and which cannot be, and further forms the premise for assessing claims, narratives, or accounts of reality deemed untrue whether as fictitious, imaginary, crazy, magical, mythical or in any other way not credible because it has no correspondence to its meaning of natural and human life.

In this initial framework of reading, Eduviges’ various strange and self-contradictory remarks and anecdotes – while serving many thematic and structural functions – work as a counterpoint to Juan’s modern conception of reality to highlight it as narrative premise. Juan is baffled by Eduviges’ claim to have recently been in communication with Dolores, Juan’s dead mother. She makes contradictory statements about having a room always ready for a guest, and then not having a room ready because Dolores had not informed her of Juan’s coming until just

then. Upon being told that Dolores is dead Eduvigés suddenly ‘understands’ why her voice had sounded weak and distant. Then there is her declaration – initially incomprehensible from Juan’s point of view (but which resonates with the later story of Dorotea): “Sólo yo entiendo el lejos que está el Cielo nosotros; pero conozco cómo acortar las veredas. Todo consiste en morir, Dios mediante, cuando uno quiera y no cuando Él lo disponga. O, si tú quieres, forzarlo a disponer antes de tiempo” (73); “No one knows better than I do how far heaven is, but I also know all the shortcuts. The secret is to die, God willing, when you want to, and not when He proposes. Or else force Him to take you before your time” (11). And, finally, the remark that she would catch up with Juan’s mother on the way to eternity. In reaction to the above, Juan at first “no sup[o] qué pensar” (72) or “did not know what to think” (10). By the end of their conversation Juan, as a matter of course, “creía que aquella mujer estaba loca” (73); “wondered if she were crazy” (11). In Juan’s modern understanding, Eduvigés’ understanding of the world – which references the Christian world and includes the existence of God and the soul– bears no relation to reality.

From a different framework of reading organized around the supernatural stories of the dead however, we can already make sense of Eduvigés’ idea of suicide alongside Dorotea’s as a circumvention of God’s intentionality and temporal order, what the village priest would proclaim and act against the will of God through which she lost all her accumulated ‘bienes’ or acquired goodness as property of the soul necessary for her salvation. Furthermore, Eduvigés’ suicide similarly involves questions of illicit sexual relations and the story of a son no father would recognize, which recalls and anticipates the story of Dorotea’s rejection of the very order of the Father/father.

Set up as located in modern reality, the point of view of Juan and the reader within an initial reading does not allow these remarks to emerge into significance (value or meaning). But

this point of view in an encounter with what appears to be senselessness or craziness is confronted with the fantastic. Juan's initial encounter with accounts that make no sense and "cannot be true" yields to a series of encounters with a reality that, according to him, "cannot be," and with beings that "cannot exist." First, a dead man's scream from the past in a condemned room Juan should not have been able to enter to begin with. Then, the appearance of Damiana who tells him Eduvigis is already dead. Damiana recounts for Juan her own encounters with the many lost souls roaming the village begging living beings for prayers, seeming to forewarn him against becoming afraid. When she questioned whether she herself was alive, Damiana disappears into thin air. As Juan is left alone to wander the streets he comes across other supernatural presences that defy reason and understanding within the signaled conceptual parameters of what can and cannot be, what can or cannot exist. Presences of beings without unity or coherence: audible voices without perceptible bodies; things present/visible but without continuity or permanence in space and time and capable of disappearing into thin air; sounds of rustling leaves, barking dogs, and human conversations where the eyes can see nothing.

The narrative trajectory of the fantastic is one of accumulation and heightening of uncertainty about the nature of reality. "*I nearly reached the point of believing*": that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life" (Todorov, 18, italic in original). In Juan's case, this lack of certainty, the creeping suspicion that one's knowledge or perception lacks correspondence with reality, presents itself as fear of madness or dissolution of (the established order of) sense and meaning. As previously discussed in the stories of Dorotea and Susana, madness in the novel is the name given to the function of creative deviation from the established order of meaning and reality that does not establish a new truth claim as it has no

grounding in external reality, and does not claim to represent reality outside its own perspective as knowledge and way of being. It functions thus in opposition to both established truth and to counter truth-claims and establishment of a new order.

In Juan's case as within Todorov's parameters of fantastic narrative, the assumed premise of representational knowledge produces what the novel characterizes as fear and paralysis in the face of a dissolution of certainty of truth, leading to attempts to reestablish the order of things. The protagonist of the fantastic is not "convinced of the existence of supernatural forces: a conviction which would have suppressed all hesitation (and put an end to the fantastic)" (Todorov, 16). He attempts to find a natural explanation, to naturalize the experience of supernatural events.

Juan is found and taken in by the nameless woman and her brother/husband, who heard him moaning and banging his head against the door. In the light of day, his rationality reasserts itself and Juan ascertains the difference between objective reality and what he had earlier experienced, which comes to seem like a dream or a product of the imagination, an experience outside of the physical realm of sensory experience and knowledge (as representation) of an objective world.

La madrugada fue apagando mis recuerdos.

Oía de vez en cuando el sonido de las palabras, y notaba la diferencia. Porque las palabras que había oído hasta entonces, hasta entonces lo supe, no tenían ningún sonido, no sonaban; se sentían; pero sin sonido, como las que se oyen durante los sueños. (107)

My memories began to fade with the light of dawn.

From time to time I heard the sound of words, and marked a difference. Because until then, I realized, the words I had heard had been silent. There had been no sound, I had sensed them. But silently, the way you hear words in your dreams. (47)

Assured that he had found what his senses are able to construe to be, at last, real live people, Juan however ended up rediscovering the lack of validity or credibility of his own

sensory perception. In a sexual union with the woman that forms the narrative climax previously discussed as implicated in the reproduction and reestablishment of the naturalized communal order against the presence of the supernatural dead or other cultural organization of the relation between the social and nature, Juan finds the woman's body falling apart and (re)turning to mud while he suffocates and feels his life breath slip away. At this point, the story abruptly rebegins as one being told from a third person narrative point of view in the fictional time-space of the grave and to Dorotea as interlocutor.

¿Quieres hacerme creer que te mató el ahogo, Juan Preciado? Yo te encontré en la plaza, muy lejos de la casa de Donis, y junto a mí también estaba él, diciendo que te estabas haciendo el muerto. Entre los dos te arrastramos a la sombra del portal, ya bien tirante, acalambado como mueren los que mueren muertos de miedo. De no haber habido aire para respirar esa noche de que hablas, nos hubieramos faltado las fuerzas para llevarte y contimás para enterrarte. Y ya ves, te enterramos. (117)

Are you trying to make me believe you drowned, Juan Preciado? I found you in the town plaza, far from Donis's house, and he was there, too, telling me you were playing dead. Between us we dragged you into the shadow of the arches, already stiff as a board and all drawn up like a person who'd died of fright. If there hadn't been any air to breathe that night you're talking about, we wouldn't have had the strength to carry you, even less bury you. And, as you see, bury you we did." (58)

The above interjection into the story by Dorotea at the novel's mid point forms a break in the plot that changes many things. It interrupts the story of Juan Preciado told up to this point by a shift in narrative perspective, its location in the place and time of the grave, while – as I have discussed in the first chapter– undoing the very idea of the grave as ground or 'reality' of given space-time to which perspective might correspond, making it visible as a construct of perspective itself. This story, told from a limited third person point of view through presentation of multiple perspectives ungrounded in any pre-given conception of shared reality, also supplants the earlier story of Juan as the true beginning, space-time, and perspective of its telling. Like Juan's first person narrative point of view in the first half, the second narrative thread makes a claim to being

the real story, one that contradicts Juan's first person narrative account leading up to this point by Dorotea's interrogation of the truth of his story of the moment of his death. Dorotea tells a different story of where she found him and how he died and it appears that it is Juan's account of his death that "cannot be true." Juan revises his testimony and tells a different story corresponding to Dorotea's version of how and where he really died: through an encounter with the lost souls who, much like his mother, demands/begs for his intervention in order that they may be restored to Heaven. Between Dorotea and Juan there emerges a narrative that, on the one hand, appears to be more truthful and accurate explanation or account of "what really happened" at the moment and place of Juan's death while simultaneously – as with other instances of reversals and divergences of meaning – problematizing the very idea of reality and truth through the two's fictional existences, their lives confounding the very meaning of the word death the moment and manner of which they claim to tell better, and which now appears as or rather can be reorganized and understood as but one meaning of death (as the end of one meaning of life) that had been naturalized until then.

The relocation of Juan and his narrative voice from the natural to supernatural or mythical time-space without representational truth-claim, Dorotea's discrediting of Juan's account, and Juan's own affirmation of the untruth or partial account of his earlier story invite a narrative rereading of the first-half of the novel. Taking the novel's invitation to read the second-half as another, more useful beginning based on its thematic problematization of the idea of given, teleological oneness of origin and end – and which invites a rereading through which a different organization of meaning may emerge – we can reread Juan's story to trace out the various narrative divergences that emerge between the first person narrative point of view and

the implied reader itself to problematize the idea of perspective as representation of meaning within Juan's own story.

As I discuss below, Juan's perspective – as is now foregrounded through Dorotea's interrogation of its accuracy but was always implicitly visible – was never adequate to the meaning of the first half of the novel. It is through novelistic convention that the perspective appears or can be read to organize and unify the story, to tell it as one story. It was, in other words, staged as the dominant perspective claiming to represent or narrate the story both of Comala and of Juan's experience of Comala, narrative identification with which implicates the reading process itself in the reproduction of hegemonic ordering of meaning.

At the most obvious level and as I have noted in relation to the novel's structure, Juan Preciado's story is legible only within the context of the interwoven narrative thread of the story of Pedro Páramo and of Comala as the biographical and historical past. This context, outside of Juan's own narrative point of view, informs our ability to make sense of Juan's story in relation to it. Moreover, within Juan's story certain narrative divergences emerged that went unmarked by the narrative point of view. Abundio's contradictory remarks as he guides Juan to Comala, both that the villagers will be happy to see him no matter who he is and also that no one lives in the village, are a first indication not only of a self-contradictory perspective that will emerge into something more fantastic, but also of a contradiction not registered by the narrative point of view. This contradiction already sets up (more than) a way of reading that diverges from and delimits the referential truth-claim of this guiding perspective to the story that emerges. Within the narrative point of view itself certain stories that emerge through his encounter with the various characters later revealed as supernatural are often both self-contradictory and in contradiction with the story told through the plot-line of Pedro and Comala. As I have argued, within Juan's

story their mutually contradictory as well as fantastic nature emerges as a lack of credibility to problematize Juan's very ability to make sense of existence and community. The implied reader however relies on these contradictory and supernatural stories to make sense both of the story of Comala past and present and of Juan's story and death. In this process, not only does reading emerges as a selective process of organization of meaning through glossing over of inconsistencies and contradictions (which is to say not reading certain elements as significant or meaningful), but the measure and selection of what is meaningful would seem to be based on their correspondence to the readers' own assumptions of meaning and sense itself. In other words, any meaning of the first half of the story that emerges as legible through a secular point of view is legible through its correspondence to the secular reading perspective itself, rather than through perspective's correspondence to any textually given unity of story or narrative.

This point is most clearly foregrounded in the novel through the figure of Donis. Much like the unnamed man in Dorotea's story, the narrative point of view of Donis serves to problematize Juan's naturalized secular perspective that narrates his journey to Comala as an encounter with the fantastic. Donis, it would seem, does not acknowledge the existence of ghosts in Comala. Better said, his point of view does not mark a distinction between natural supernatural forms of life as proper or improper to co-existence. Confronted with Juan's fear, Donis at first declares him drunk, and later disparages him as a mystic in search of what Providence has promised. In this it highlights Juan's perspective's complicity with the idea of lawful social ordering and which forms the counterpart to both his mother and the unnamed woman's investments. Juan's death and burial by Donis (who significantly declares him to be playing dead rather than actually dead) narrates an end to this logic and passage to a different one in the figures of Dorotea and Susana San Juan.

The novel constructs what appears to be a first person narrative point of view in order to problematize it as well as any narrative identification with it. In fact, Juan's first person point of view is effectively indistinguishable from the third person point of view in the novel, and is highly stylized and foregrounded as literary artifice. Rather than a recounting of his own experience, the perspective assumes and directly presents the points of view of others in the same way as the third person objective presentation of characters' voices through dialogues and monologues. This objective presentation of other's accounts is embedded within the supposedly first person narrative of Juan. On the one hand, the objective parts of the narrative exceeds the bounds of its parameters defined as first person perspective, presenting directly the speeches of other characters instead of paraphrasing, summary, or other indirect presentation. On the other hand, the first person subjective account is full of unexpected gaps, as when Abundio reveals himself to be Pedro Páramo's son. Rather than a reaction or a reflection, there is a highly stylized image of crows flying overhead in a gothic moment of suspense. Similarly, when Juan sees the woman in rebozo disappear right before his eyes, the reaction is again not an internal reflection/recounting of bewilderment or questioning, but stylized as an objectivized description of his footsteps resuming after a suspended moment in time.

The third person narrative point of view that replaces the first person account in the second half of the novel thus barely registers as a change because it functions through limited but direct presentation of the voice of the characters in the same way. Through this stylization and other ways of delimiting the truth-claim of Juan's first person point of view, not only in relation to the fantastic tales and events but through a staging of the fictionality of the first person point of view itself, it would seem that the novel uses the first person narrative point of view to stage the disabling assumption of knowledge as representation itself in order to make visible a proces

of reading invested in the possibility of communion as plenitude of shared meaning, which vested interest naturalizes into an objectively given textual meaning with its own complex and empowering process of invention.

Conclusion

As I have discussed, the novel *Pedro Páramo* can be read within the framework of the genre of the fantastic and as a narrative movement from the fantastic to the magical, from a reading of the supernatural within a realist framework to a perspective that is, within this framework, supernatural. Through this movement that also reframes the thematic question of politics or co-existence, the novel invites a reconsideration of the relation between the two perspectives and invites our rethinking of mythical perspective and relation outside of the representationalist framework and the modern cultural view of nature that frames it, and which claim to the truth of nature would make magical forms of relationality and knowledge appear as unnatural or supernatural. As I have shown the mythical perspective the novel opens on to resonates with new advances in contemporary science that problematizes modern epistemological framework in both the sciences and the humanities and challenges established understanding of ontology. Through its own narrative problematization of truth-claims to ontology from within a mythical view the novel opens up a new basis for seeing and engaging with the world.

In relation to the above, it is significant that Rulfo's novel is considered an important precursor to the genre of magical realism as it emerged in Latin America. Taking as a starting definition Amaryll Beatrice Chanady's view¹ that magical realism is an antinomy between natural and supernatural reality in a non-hierarchical relationship – and which lack of hierarchy

¹ *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*. New York: Garland, 1985.

distinguishes it from the fantastic – my own reading of Rulfo suggests that the novel in fact goes further than a view of the relationship between the co-existent worlds as different cultural codes or representational frameworks to invite an undoing of the distinction between natural and supernatural itself in order to move politico-cultural thought beyond naturalized territorial ground of contestation for cultural productions that have resulted in destructive cultural forms and crisis of social and ecological relations. In fact as I have shown, in rejecting the cultural premise based on territorial nature and representational knowledge the novel allows us to reconsider the premise for such conceptualization of cultural difference itself as culturally specific, and which I have discussed in the context of European modernity's cultural self-universalization through a complex process of promise and invitation to invest in the illusion of human sovereignty relative to the complex relation of co-existence within the larger lifeworld in which human cultural self-organization is but one part in a dynamic balance.

By the time of the novel's publication in mid twentieth century postrevolutionary Mexico, the destructive logic of secular capitalism as the basis for social organization in Mexico and elsewhere was already very much in evidence, and have only continued to escalate in the present day. In presenting the parallel logic of Christian and secular narratives of life in order to reconsider possibilities opened up during the Revolution for other forms of human cultural organization foreclosed by the establishment of the postrevolutionary state, the novel opens up the possibility for reconsidering the revolutionary demand for land outside of the logic of return of property but as a relinquishing of lawful rights to property whether individual or communal as the very basis for social organization itself, and to open up questions of use of resource for the production of life itself within a framework of finite and contingent relations of knowing and of living. As I have tried to show this view finds resonance with contemporary science and more

specifically can be considered through the terms of systems theory as a model for contingent knowledge within a dynamic network of relationships. I suggest that it also resonates with anarchist theory of social relations that can move beyond the secular bias in the very conception of the human in its agency and knowledge. Finally it invites us to begin with life itself rather than with truth as the basis for invention of multiply intersecting and relationally contingent systems of meaning and value.

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