

The symbolism of *La Tierra* in The Work of Juan Rulfo

*“After walking so many hours without coming across even the shadow of a tree, or a seedling of a tree, or any kind of root, we hear dogs barking.”
—“They gave us the land”*

WLC Capstone

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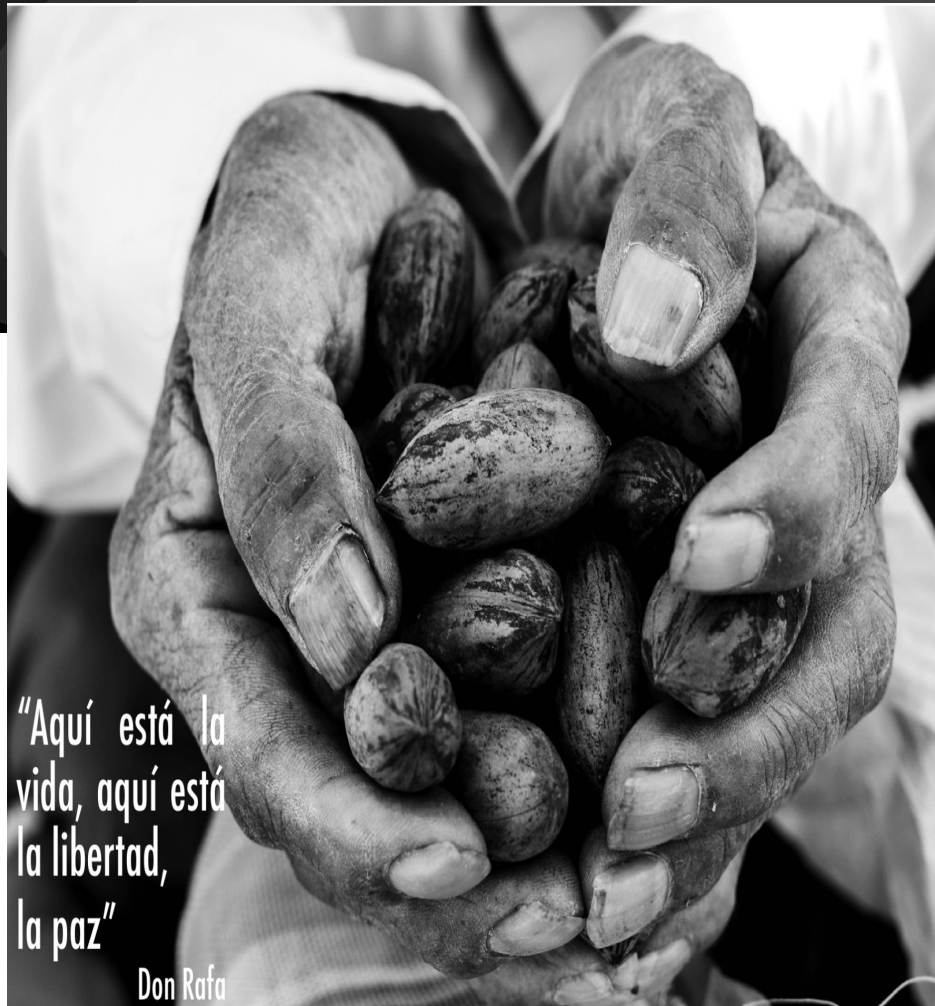
Analysis Purpose



- Presenting the symbolism of la *tierra* through paradoxes and metaphors in the work of Juan Rulfo
- La *tierra* is a constant leitmotiv in each one of the stories of *The Burning Plain and Other Stories* and the novel *Pedro Páramo*.

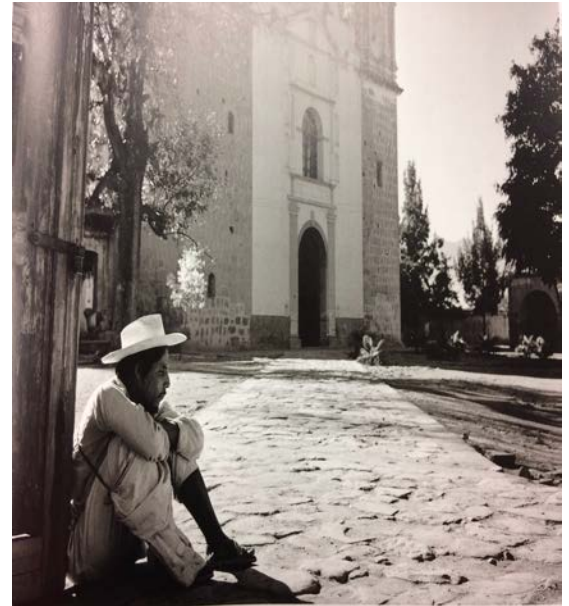
La tierra

- *La tierra* is life
- *La tierra* is hope
- *La tierra* is love
- *La tierra* is voice
- *La tierra* is peace

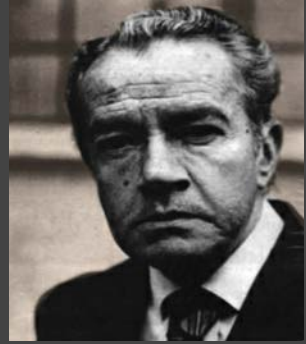


Research Questions

- What is the connection of the mexicano towards the Madre *tierra*?
- Who are the owners of *la tierra*?
- How were Mexican taken away *la tierra*?
- How do mexicans express their need of *tierra*?
- What is the hope of the campesino?
- Where is the drought of *la tierra*?
- How was the abandonment of *la tierra*?
- When do we hear the voices of *la tierra*?
- Where do ghosts over *la tierra* appear?



Juan Rulfo



- Juan Rulfo, writer, screenwriter and photographer was born on May 16, 1917 in Apulco, Jalisco, located in the Mexican country.
- Juan Nepomuceno Carlos Pérez Rulfo Vizcaíno.
- In 1962, he coordinated and directed the National Institute for Indigenous Studies
- Rulfo died on January 7, 1986 in Mexico City.
- His work has been translated into more than forty languages.

Rulfo, *The Boom* and The Magical Realism



- One of the great masters of Latin-American literature, as well as he is one of the great exponents of the *Latin-American Boom* in Mexico.
- Rulfo made his own *boom* on their own, and the famous *boom* is just a publishing phenomenon.
- Characteristics of the magical realism are the fusion of the real in fantastic or magical
- The presence of the sensory elements, such as hearing, sight, and touch predominate in the work of Rulfo.
- Rulfo writes extraordinarily and fantastic stories and victims of social injustice and the ruthless nature.

Awards



- In 1970, was awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura de México.
- In 1976, became part of the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua.
- In 1983 was awarded the Príncipe de Asturias de España de la Letras
- In 1985, was awarded the Premio Honoris Causa by the UNAM
- In 1986, was awarded the Premio Gramio for his work on the Instituto Indigenista.

Outstanding Work



- His book, *The Burning Plain and Other Stories*, a collection of tales published in 1953
- His novel, *Pedro Páramo*, published in 1955,
- The screenplay, *El Gallo de oro*, written in 1963 and taken to the cinema in 1980.
- *Paloma Herida* another screenplay written in 1963.
- *The Cordillera* written more or less in 1965 and which Rulfo was not encouraged to publish.

The Burning Plain and Other Stories (1953)



- Juan Rulfo presents the life of Mexicans
- The influence of the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion in seventeen short stories
- This book is not as successful as the novel
- *Campeños* fighting for their land
- Social and personal anecdotes of the writer
- The misery of *la tierra*/land they have given us

Pedro Páramo (1955)



The protagonist of the novel, Juan Preciado, arrives at the ghostly village of Comala looking for his father, Pedro Páramo, whom he does not know. **The voices of the inhabitants speak to him and reconstruct the past of the town and its cacique, the grudge, Pedro Páramo;** Preciado does not imagine that all the villagers who he has talked to are ghosts, and even he is a ghost that narrates most of the story from the grave. The novel continues its course, with new monologues and conversations among the souls in pain who draw the overwhelming portrait of a Comala that was ruined by misery and moral degradation once the cacique Pedro Páramo decides to cross his arms to let Comala die. The ardent and infertile Comala becomes the mythical space that reflects the tragic historical development of the country, from the Porfiriato to the Mexican Revolution and beyond the Cristero Rebellion.

Topics



The themes presented in the work of Rulfo are in itself a leitmotiv that certainly represent:

- Death
- hope
- sin
- guilt
- religion
- violence
- sadness
- humor
- love
- power
- ghostly
- the illusion

Symbolisms in Rulfo's Work



- **The water** has its dominant qualities in fertilization and purification.
- **Rain** has a first and obvious sense of fertilization, associated with life.
- **The moon** paradoxically symbolizes human fertility, but with a constant infertility of the land.
- **The drought** in the work of Rulfo is more than the drought on vegetation, is a personal drought, since it represents the loneliness and emptiness of each of the characters who are the protagonists of heartbreaking and bleak stories.
- **Souls** are the only ones who remain on *la tierra* and most of the time presents it in the villages of Luvina and Comala.
- **The wind** which is the symbol of purification simply dragged with them the agony of those ghostly souls who yearned for a place to rest in peace.

Language



- The language is coherent, very understandable, and simple.
- It is the popular language that denotes regionalisms of the southern Mexican States, especially the state of Jalisco.
- The diminutive language of the campesino as he sees the related things of the “campo” from an affectionate point of view.
- The language is rustic, popular, and poetic.

Characters



- Rulfo was afraid of writing because he considered his characters as very complex or artificial.
- He later created simple characters with a popular language representing poor and desolate campesinos.
- The characters of Rulfo present a severe pessimism.
- The characters lose the illusion of life; perhaps, death only symbolizes a better world or at least the rest.
- They are souls who suffer and continue wandering without finding rest.

The Meaning of *la tierra*



- Dualism is formed by *cielo y tierra*
- The fertility of *la tierra* is a parallel with humans, so *la tierra* becomes identified with a feminine side.
- *La tierra* is a giver of life, and at the same time, it has on its hands the power to finish it.

Our Mother *Tierra*...



- *La tierra* as a maternal symbol
- Juan Preciado represents the feeling of the Mexican orphan
- Macario is the representation of the loneliness of an orphan without a mother because *la tierra* is the mother of the Mexican

“I’m always hungry and I never get filled up—never, not even when I eat up her [Felipa’s] food. They say a person does get filled up eating, but I know very well that I don’t even though I eat all they give me... They say in the street that I’m crazy because I never stop being hungry” (“Macario,” p. 4).

Owners of *la tierra*...



- It was necessary to kill those who believed the land was theirs...

“All that is part of Media Luna, from one side to the other. As one says, all of the territory you can see with your eyes. And all that land belonged to him.” (*Pedro Páramo* p. 2)

“And nevertheless. . . *la tierra* of Comala is fertile. It is too bad that it is all in the hands of one man.” (*Pedro Páramo* p.37)

La tierra and Its Limits...



- *La tierra* should not have limits.

“It’s about the boundaries. He [Pedro Páramo] already tried to set them up, and now he is asking us to give him **the fence pieces he needs to divide *la tierra*.**” “***La tierra* is not going to be divided.**”

(*Pedro Páramo*, p.18)

The Ruin of the Cacique...



- Once the cacique decided to cross his arms, *la tierra* became in miserable ruins.

“The sunlight was falling over things, bringing back their form. **In front of him the empty *tierra* was in ruins... He hit *la tierra* and crumbled, as if he were nothing more than a pile of stones”** (*Pedro Páramo*, p.64).

The Abandonment of *la tierra*...



- Luvina can be compared with Comala because both were abandoned.

He abandoned his lands and ... **after that *la tierra* became a wasteland and was in ruins... People lost interest in *la tierra* and went to find other more attractive places...** Comala was filled with goodbyes... **years passed, and he [Pedro Páramo] was still alive, always there, like a scarecrow in front of the gate of the empty land of Media Luna.** ‘And then, when it was getting closer to the time for him to die, the wars of the Cristeros broke out and their army took in the few men who remained” (Pedro Páramo p. 41).

Comala as its name implies is a comal (a griddle); it is a land that is in fire. The only remaining people in Luvina are the elderly because they cannot leave and abandon their dead.

The Hellish in *la tierra*...



“After we rounded the hills, we descended even further. We had left the warm air up higher and we were sinking deeper and deeper into the heat, without any wind to cool it. Everything seemed to be waiting for something. “It’s hot here...” That isn’t the worst of it...” **That place sits on the coals of la tierra at the very mouth of hell...** Many of those who die there come back to get a blanket after going to hell” (*Pedro Páramo*, p. 2).

La tierra and Its Drought...



- The drought is most of the time comes from inside.

“It doesn’t rain too much there... No, it doesn’t rain much. Hardly at all, so that *la tierra*, besides being all dried up and shriveled like old leather, gets filled with **cracks and hard clods of *tierra* like sharp stones, that prick your feet as you walk along, as if *la tierra* itself had grown thorns there...** — Luvina...is a sad place... It’s the place where the sadness nests. **Where the smiles are unknown as if people faces has been frozen”** (“Luvina”, p. 113)

La tierra and Its Voices...



- The voices are whispers that kill.

“*La tierra* around there is always white and brilliant... In Luvina the days are cold as the nights and the dew thickens in the sky before it can fall to *la tierra*... And *la tierra* is steep and slashed on all sides by deep barrancas... In Luvina, one’s dreams come up from those barrancas: but the only thing I’ve seen come up out of them was the wind... A wind that doesn’t even let the dulcamarras grow: those sad little plants that can live just a bit of *tierra*, clutching with all their hands at the mountains cliffsides. (“Luvina,” p. 111).

Mexicanos to the cry of war, they have taken away our *tierra*



- La tierra that was promised does not exist...

“***La tierra*** is all washed away and hard... **So they’ve given us this *tierra*.** And in this sizzling frying pan they want us to plant some kind of seeds to see if something will take root and come up. But nothing will come up here. Not even buzzards. You see them out here once in a while, very high, flying fast, trying to **get away as soon as possible from the hard white *tierra*, where nothing moves and where you walk as if losing *tierra*”** (“They have given us the land,” p.14).

La tierra Is Not Useful...



- La tierra they have given is a wasteland...

“No, **the plain is no good for anything**. There’re no rabbits or birds. There’s nothing. Except a few scrawny huizache trees and a patch or two of grass with the blades curled up; if not weren’t for them, there wouldn’t be anything... I turn in every direction and look at the plain. **So much *tierra* all for nothing**” (“They have given us the land.” p. 12).

La tierra We Were Given Is Beyond...



- La tierra that was given is not from this world. It is located in the heaven.

“As we descend, *la tierra* becomes good... After tromping for eleven hours in the hard plain, we’re pleased to be wrapped in that thing that jumps over us and tastes like *tierra*... ***La tierra they’ve given us is back up yonder***” (They Have Given Us The Land,” p.16).

La tierra Smells to People...



- The hope is to find tierra soon.

“At times, along this road with no edges, it seemed like there’d be nothing afterward, that nothing could be found on the other side, **at the end of this plain** split with crack and dry arroyos. But there is something. **There’s a town. You can hear the dogs barking and smell the smoke in the air, and you relish that smell op people as if it was a hope**” (“They Have Given Us The Land,” p.11).

La tierra Is the Hope of Listening the Bark...



“At last, the town. He saw roofs shining in the moonlight. He felt his son’s weight crushing him as the back of his knees buckled in the final effort. When he reached the first dwelling, he leaned against the wall by the sidewalk. He slipped the body off, dangling, as if it had been wrenched from him. With difficulty he unpried his son’s fingers from around his neck. When he was free, **he heard the dogs barking everywhere. “And you didn’t hear them, Ignacio?” he said. “You didn’t even help me listen”** (“No Dogs Bark,” p.143).

La tierra at the End of the Life...



- Everything sleeps in *la tierra*, and everything wakes up in *la tierra*.

“The wind blew slowly, whipping the dry *tierra* back and forth, which was filled with that odor like urine that dusty roads have. **His eyes that had become squinty with the years were looking down at *la tierra*, here under his feet, in spite of the darkness. There in *la tierra* was his whole life.** Sixty years of living on it, of holding it tight in his hands, of tasting it like one tastes the flavor of meat. For a long time, he’d been crumbling it with his eyes, savoring each piece as if it were the last one, almost knowing it would be the last” (“Tell Them Not to Kill Me”¹⁰³).

Conclusion

- We all are primitive material, and when we discover Rulfo's world, we discover ourselves.
- Reading allows us to fly to places that perhaps do not exist.
- Literature is delightful, intense, perfect, and fruitful.
- Juan Rulfo said: "Literature that opens paths and transforms the past literature is worthy literature."



Selective Pictures' Bibliography



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Thanks



- “There is nothing better than living on this little piece of land.” —Don Rafael Hernández