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Appropriating Juan Rulfo: The Film Score of *Los confines* as Adaptation

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Appropriating Juan Rulfo: The Film Score of *Los confines* as Adaptation

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Mitl Valdez's film *Los confines* (1987) is an adaptation of several works of fiction by the Mexican author Juan Rulfo. The director chose to adapt two short stories ("Talpa" and "¡Diles que no me maten!") and an episode from the author's first novel, *Pedro Páramo*. Valdez's intent was to "capturar el sentido" of the Jaliscan author or, in other words, to remain faithful to certain elements of his writing while adjusting them to the filmic medium. The musical score of *Los confines* is the method of appropriation that this study endeavors to investigate, since it shares common themes, metaphors, and imagery with the source texts. The musical language of *Los confines* not only communicates meaning within the film, but echoes elements of Rulfo's writing as well. Musical motifs in the score evoke concepts and symbols that form part of the writer's fictive universe and illustrate how Valdez finds "un equivalente en la expresión cinematográfica" for Rulfian material (qtd. in Pelayo).

Keywords: El Llano en llamas, Pedro Páramo, film music, Juan Rulfo adaptations, Los confines, Mitl Valdez

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Introduction

Ya viene. ¿Lo oye usted?

—Sí, lo oigo.

Pedro Páramo

Julio Estrada credits Juan Rulfo's (Mexico, 1917-1986) extensive use of sound imagery as being one of the major challenges that filmmakers face when adapting that author's works to the big screen:

Una inestabilidad de las imágenes visuales y una permanente abstracción de la realidad –como si fuera música– dificultan la concreción de *Pedro Páramo* en versiones en teatro o filmación cinematográfica. Y sin embargo, casi toda la novela podría ser sólo *escuchada* a través de sus distintas sonoridades. (207)

Estrada is referring specifically to Rulfo's first novel, *Pedro Páramo* (1955), but sonorities are plentiful in many of the author's other works as well. In fact, Rulfo places so much emphasis on the audible that it is difficult to imagine an adaptation of his writing that does not employ sound or music meaningfully. In the 1987 film *Los confines* (written, directed, and edited by Miti Valdez) music plays a crucial role in the film as a means of recreating the original fictive world that Rulfo imagines. Antonio Zepeda is the composer of the rich and vibrant score of *Los confines*, which Valdez weaves throughout the entire film. *Los confines* adapts two short stories ("Talpa" and "¡Diles que no me maten!") from the collection *El Llano en llamas* (1953) and an episode of *Pedro Páramo* in which a "forastero" (Juan Preciado from the novel, although he is never identified by that name in the film) looking for shelter encounters a house inhabited by a pair of incestuous siblings. This fragment from *Pedro Páramo* divides the movie into three separate parts and acts as an introduction, interlude, and epilogue, while the adaptations of the short stories ("¡Diles que no me maten!" followed by "Talpa") form two distinct but thematically related narratives.

Adaptations of Juan Rulfo

Los confines succeeds both as a film and as a filmic version of Rulfo's fiction. According to the July 1994 edition of *Somos* magazine, Mexico's top critics considered the work to be among the one hundred best films of Mexican cinema (Peña). Verónica Maldonado attests that Valdez's film "[encuentra] el vehículo ideal para lograr la atmósfera rulfiana" (24). According to an interview that Patricia Torres conducted with Mitl Valdez the project that would eventually become *Los confines* began as an idea for a "documental-ficción," where Valdez would interview and film Juan Rulfo as well as feature clips of dramatized versions of Rulfo's fiction. Ever shy and retiring, Rulfo did not agree to be filmed and the project took the shape of a purely fictional work adapting three of Rulfo's short stories: "El hombre," "Talpa," and "¡Diles que no me maten!" (Valdez filmed "El hombre" separately as the short *Tras el horizonte* in 1984) (19). What began as an academic project became the film entitled *Los confines* that was nominated for four *Arieles* and three *Diosas de Plata*, Mexico's highest national film awards ("Awards").

In an important move, Valdez enlisted the talents of Carlos Aguilar as sound director and Antonio Zepeda as composer of the film's musical score. Zepeda, a masterful and unique Mexican musician, is known for his use of pre-Columbian instruments. He composed the music for *Retorno a Aztlán* (1989, dir. Juan Mora), and won an *Ariel* for his work on *Ulama, el juego de la vida y de la muerte* (1985-86, dir. Roberto Rochín). Very little published information exists about Zepeda's involvement with *Los confines*. The various interviews that Valdez gave and the sources concerning Zepeda do not document the extent to which Valdez influenced Zepeda's composition, although no doubt both of them worked together on some level on a score that would adequately illumine and enhance the world of *Los confines*.

Filmic adaptations of Juan Rulfo's fiction began to appear the year the Jalisco native published his novel *Pedro Páramo* and two years after the publication of his short fiction collection, *El Llano en llamas*. Alfredo B. Crevenna was the first director to attempt to translate Rulfo's fiction to cinema when he shot *Talpa* in 1955, an adaptation of the story by the same name. By 1966, both of Rulfo's novels had appeared on the silver screen, bearing the same titles as the original texts: *El gallo de oro* (1964, dir. Roberto Gavaldón) and *Pedro Páramo* (1966, dir. Carlos Velo). During this time (1955-1964) Rulfo himself was interested in the production of cinema and participated in the creation of at least eight films (Weatherford, 'Texto para cine' 53). The earliest adaptations of Rulfo's work (*Talpa*, *El gallo de oro*, and *Pedro Páramo*) received uneven reviews, and, as Douglas J. Weatherford notes, led Rulfo to significantly decrease his involvement with cinema ("'Texto para cine'" 55). "Afortunadamente," asserts Weatherford, "nuevas generaciones de directores se han acercado a Juan Rulfo para ofrecer cintas basadas en la vida y obra del escritor jalisciense que son creativas, interesantes y logradas, y que confirman que la ficción de Juan Rulfo sí ofrece un campo fértil para los practicantes del séptimo arte" (60). In the same study, "'Texto para cine,'" which addresses Rulfo's second novel and its role in Mexican cinema, Weatherford points to the success of *El imperio de la fortuna* (1987, dir. Arturo Ripstein) as one example of the ability of newer generations of filmmakers to "acercarse a Juan Rulfo" (60). *Los confines* falls into this latter category of more recent adaptations that establish themselves as unique aesthetic creations while still remaining faithful to the Rulfian universe.

Even though critics and journalists have examined adaptations of Rulfo's fiction and the broader subject of the writer's involvement with cinema, I have found no full-length academic study specifically dedicated to *Los confines*.¹ Nor have I encountered any film review, interview

with the filmmakers, or discussions of the film that takes up an extended analysis of the importance of music in that film. This study endeavors to begin a critical dialogue about one of the most successful films to translate Juan Rulfo's fiction to the silver screen. Specifically, I intend to investigate the score of *Los confines* and its role as an essential part of the film's attempt to adapt one of Mexico's most important authors. The music echoes images, motifs, metaphors, and themes from Juan Rulfo's works. The score permeates the film with a musical language that adds meaning and richness, while harnessing the same creative and metaphorical power of the adapted texts. This study seeks to do a close, concrete reading of the texts and a comparative analysis of the many similarities of theme, metaphor, and characterization between the music and Rulfo's works.

***Los confines* as an adaptation**

Linda Hutcheon writes in *A Theory of Adaptation* that new versions of prior works are both "aesthetic objects in their own right" as well as adaptations, particularly if the reader or viewer is familiar with the prior work (6). She goes on to comment on the notion of fidelity: "an adaptation's double nature does not mean that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis" (6). Instead, the focal point of an examination could be on the features (such as characters, plot structure, themes, or metaphors) that the adaptation appropriates from the prior version and the methods involved in doing so. In other words, an insightful exegesis of an adaptation might investigate *what* is adapted and *how*.

For the present study the notion of fidelity is not a major focus, although it is a consideration. However, it would be difficult to discuss an adaptation without at least allowing for the issue of faithfulness. Valdez states that his intention was to "capturar el sentido de la obra

literaria, y encontrarle un equivalente en la expresión cinematográfica” (qtd. in Pelayo). It is important to note that although his plan was to be true, in a sense, to Rulfo, Valdez’s coordinate goal was to find cinematic expression for the author’s writing. In the case of book to film adaptations this involves transposing features of an author’s writing into a different medium (such as transforming written descriptions of a character’s appearance into the visual image of someone made to look like that character). This study compares representations of a particular theme or metaphor, for example, in the music of *Los confines* to those in Rulfo’s writing and examines the effect that adapting Rulfo in this way (musically) has on the film.

For the purposes of this investigation, I view *Los confines* as an adaptation, which means that not only does the music have meaning within the film, but also as a component of the overall adaptation that is *Los confines*, which participates in the process of appropriating Rulfian materials into a new medium. As Linda Hutcheon suggests: “When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works” (6). If someone is familiar with the adapted work then it is only natural to read or view the newer version in relation to the prior one. By way of definition Hutcheon asserts that “an adaptation can be described as the following:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8).

Los confines participates in an acknowledged and extended engagement with Rulfo’s original texts, and Valdez interprets and creates in “an act of appropriation.” “Appropriation” is an important term for the present investigation because it illustrates the notion that the artist doing the work of adaptations builds a new version from the ground up as a unique creation, but still

might employ many of the same aesthetic features of the adapted work. In the case of *Los confines* and the original texts, the specific components of Rulfo's writing (imagery, themes, metaphors, etc.) and how the score transforms them into a different medium comprise the subject of this study. Since I view the film as an adaptation of Juan Rulfo's works I also view the music as being essential to the process of appropriation. I can partially answer the questions of *what* Valdez adapts and *how* by examining the music and seeing it as a component of the overall adaptation. Hutcheon uses another word that describes the process of transformation from text to text, or from medium to medium: "In many cases, because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions" (15). The music of *Los confines* takes Rulfo's printed words and "re-mediate" them into the audible world.

Music and sonic imagery

Music in cinema has been the topic of academic research for many decades. Claudia Gorbman describes its role as "[referring] *to the film* —that is, it bears specific formal relationships with coexistent elements in the film" (185). The experience of hearing music in a movie is different from listening to a symphony in your car: it signifies within the context of the film. Music also works together with the images on screen. As Michel Chion states: "Added value works reciprocally. Sound shows us the image differently than what the image shows alone, and the image likewise makes us hear sound differently than if the sound were ringing out in the dark" (21). Claudia Gorbman draws the comparison between signification in language and film music: "Whatever music is applied to a film segment will *do something*, will have an effect —just as whatever two words a poet puts together will produce a meaning different from that of

each word separately” (189). Not only does the music of *Los confines* mean something, but, together with the onscreen images, it means something in relation to the film.

The score of *Los confines* is extradiegetic (the characters do not hear it, nor does it originate from an onscreen source within the events shown on screen), but it still belongs to the narrative world of the film. Distinguishable sound imagery is abundant in the music. José Navarro’s description of Antonio Zepeda’s style points to the fact that it contains definite forms, such as birds, insects, and other natural phenomena:

A través de un minucioso trabajo de investigación en comunidades indígenas de [México], Antonio Zepeda ha logrado rescatar el sonido prehispánico y dar relevancia a expresiones musicales de esa época. En su música, además de utilizar instrumentos prehispánicos, se ha inspirado en el canto de las aves, el ulular del viento, la respiración del mar, el sonido de la lluvia y zumbidos de insectos. (25)

Although this is a broad portrayal of Zepeda’s music, it accurately describes the film score of *Los confines* and gives information about the musician’s creative process. Film music often sets a mood or a tone for the onscreen action, and this score certainly does that. However, in addition to that function, the music of *Los confines* contributes motifs, metaphors, and themes to the overall work and connects to Rulfo through these aesthetic elements. By way of example it might be helpful to briefly consider how visual symbols in the film connect to the original texts.

In many instances throughout *Los confines* Valdez directs his viewers to a visual image that is meant to allude to a larger concept that both the film and Rulfo’s works have in common. Examples of this tendency include two scenes that feature rags or dirty clothing in the section of the film that adapts “Talpa.” The adulterous wife and brother (Natalia and Ignacio) of a dying man (Tanilo) walk him to his death on what is supposed to be a spiritually healing journey to the

sacred site of the Virgin of Talpa. He expires shortly after arriving at their destination and the couple is so overcome with remorse and frightened by Tanilo's memory that they sever their affair. The imagery of dirty clothing or rags in the film points to the spiritual condition of Ignacio and Natalia. When a shot shows Natalia scrubbing her dress (which she wore along the journey to Talpa) on the washboard in view of her mother, it implies Natalia's attempt to expiate her remorse. Another shot shows a container full of rags. The camera angles down and stays focused solely on the bucket for a few seconds. The shot of the rags and that of Natalia washing her dress are visual references to the line from Rulfo's version where the narrator says: "porque yo también sentí ese llanto de ella dentro de mí como si estuviera exprimiendo el trapo de nuestros pecados" (50). The function of these symbols is twofold: they have meaning within the context of the film and they exemplify the appropriation of Rulfian material.

Valdez's tendency to emphasize small but symbolic details from Rulfo's original texts through *mise-en-scène* demonstrates how I might analyze the filmmaker's approach to adapting Rulfo by way of music. Although Rulfo's original line about the rag never appears in the dialogue or in the voiceovers of the motion picture, Valdez still appropriates a metaphoric imagery that visually communicates a similar message, adjusted to fit his filmic world. The music works in much the same way: sonic images within the score echo themes, metaphors, and sound imagery in Rulfo's writing.

Julio Estrada emphasizes the importance of the audible in Rulfo's fiction in his book *El sonido en Rulfo: "El ruido ese."* My intention is not to investigate sound in the fiction of Rulfo, although I will occasionally point to moments where the film score of *Los confines* resembles a noise from the Jaliscan author's works. To be sure, an investigation into sound in *Los confines* and its coincidence with the same phenomenon in Rulfo could perhaps fill another volume.

Instead, my focus here is on the music of the film and its thematic relationship to the adapted texts. That is not to say that Rulfo's emphasis on noise and hearing is not important for this study; indeed, it justifies an investigation into the significance of the film score even more. "Es muy difícil aproximarse a Rulfo," Valdez would claim in one interview (Torres 19). I argue that some of the filmmaker's success at overcoming this difficulty of translating Rulfo to the big screen hinges on his creative use of music.

Valdez's film engages in an overt and extended relationship with "¡Diles que no me maten!," "Talpa," and a fragment from *Pedro Páramo* (the episode that presents Donis and his sister). Additionally, I suggest that there are echoes of other Rulfian texts (the story "Luvina," for example). Through Rulfo's literary canon there are many manifestations of interconnectedness. Lanin Gyurko, for example, identifies "Luvina" as a "narrative antecedent" of Rulfo's subsequent novel *Pedro Páramo* because of the many similarities between the two (451). Valdez also states that it was his intention to do a more holistic adaptation of Rulfo's works. He chose the two short stories that are, in his judgment, "los cuentos más importantes de la obra de Rulfo en tanto que expresaban sus aficiones temáticas y su universo con más claridad" (qtd. in Pelayo). If Valdez's desire was to express the "aficiones temáticas" and the "universo" of the Jaliscan author then his film must contain reverberations of other Rulfian texts besides the ones with which the film bears an overt connection.

Just as one short story of Rulfo's might coincide in many ways with another, *Los confines*, as an appropriation of the author's fiction, might contain connections to other Rulfian works besides the ones that are explicitly adapted. This is a feature of the Jaliscan author's writing that Valdez appropriates. A non-musical example includes the sound of barking dogs as the "forastero" approaches the incestuous siblings' house. There are no dogs barking in the

section of *Pedro Páramo* that appears in *Los confines*. And yet the sound of dogs is a frequent motif throughout Rulfo's *oeuvre*, especially in one particular short story from *El Llano en llamas*. Barking is so prominent in this story, in fact, that it forms part of the title. Valdez does not adapt "No oyes ladrar los perros" in his film, of course, and yet the director offers a clear allusion to that story. It should not surprise, then, that the film score includes reverberations of other Rulfian texts besides those on which Valdez overtly bases his screenplay.

Through my investigations I found the musical score of *Los confines* to be rich and to afford so many thematic and metaphorical connections to Rulfo's work that I needed to narrow my focus. The first chapter of this study focuses on one musical theme that I contend is a leitmotif for the primary characters of the film segment based on "Talpa." This Ignacio-Natalia theme reveals and foreshadows the pair's haunted state and infernal existence. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tune's timing within the film. Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá and Jean-Pierre Barricelli analyze time in *Pedro Páramo* and contend that the novel's characters exist in a hellish atemporality, suspended for eternity in the acute awareness of their crimes, unable to move backwards or forwards. Ignacio and Natalia's theme indicates that this is true of them as well, and it is another example of the process of appropriation. In addition to infernal time, the first chapter addresses other archetypes pertaining to hell in Rulfo's fiction that have been adapted to this particular theme. Hell, as it appears in this part of the film score, reveals the innermost realities of the film's two protagonists and harnesses the same metaphorical power used by the Jalisco author to situate his original characters in one of the most infernal of human conditions: guilt.

The second chapter explores the theme of fatalism in the music of *Los confines* and how it relates to the same subject in Rulfo's short stories, "¡Diles que no me maten!" and "Talpa."

The sonic image of death and its inevitability appears in two pieces of similar music found in both of the short story sections of *Los confines*. This image suggests a connection between representations of mortality in both the film (seen in the musical score) and Rulfo's fiction, and it elucidates the overall theme of fatalism in both works. I conclude that Valdez adapts Rulfo's fatalism for his film by way of the music, which has the effect of bringing about heightened pathos.

Valdez's intention was to make a film that included some of the most important themes in Juan Rulfo's literary universe. In doing so he made a powerful cinematic creation that is unique and independent, but which still employs the Jaliscan author's themes, imagery, and motifs. The music is an indispensable signifier in *Los confines* and any assessment of the film as an adaptation of Rulfo's fiction would be incomplete without an understanding of its importance.

Note

¹ Here it is worth mentioning that though, for brevity's sake, I limit the focus of the present study to the musical score, the non-musical sound track of *Los confines* is important and meaningful as well. For example, the sound of the horse neighing in the first sequence of the *Pedro Páramo* segment is likely an allusion to the restlessness of Miguel Páramo's horse in Rulfo's first novel. The sound of frogs and insects that accompany Ignacio and Natalia in the opening scenes of the "Talpa" segment could recall Rulfo's story "Macario." In another way, non-musical sound is significant in *Los confines* because the music is reminiscent of organic sound imagery. Indeed, the line between diegetic sound and non-diegetic music is blurry. However, Zepeda's compositions are deliberate and subtly layered, texture upon texture. Although the music does not contain complex melodic structures and chord progressions, it is clear that the sound components (whistles, rattles, drums, for example) are part of a whole piece. I assert that Zepeda is mindful of the musicality of his compositions while still referring to the natural world, and that while a component of the music might sound like a diegetic or non-diegetic "noise" it remains a part of the score. A discussion of the organic, somewhat stripped-down nature of Zepeda's score, in conjunction with a consideration of Rulfo's own love of indigenous Mexico would be fascinating and worthwhile. Presently, a lack of published material about the collaborative efforts of those involved in the sound and music aspect, as well my desire to focus on a close-reading of Valdez and Zepeda's score as tool for adapting Rulfo's art limit the scope of this study.

Chapter I

Echoes of Hell: Characterization of Rulfian Infernal Spaces in the

Film Score of *Los confines*

¿No oyen ese viento?

El Llano en llamas, “Luvina”

Juan Rulfo was adept at defining the spaces in his fiction and creating a peculiar and definite spatio-temporal existence for the inhabitants thereof. Often he used ambient motifs to carve out a cohesive and distinguishable place for his characters. Cida Chase, for example, notes that “explicit atmospheric motifs, as they recur, constitute valuable elements of unity in the work” (97). Occasionally these atmospheric motifs are of an audible nature. “El juego entre lo real y lo mágico, verdad o ficción,” writes Julio Estrada, “surge en el mundo sonoro rulfiano a través de la conjugación de los sonidos reales con sus apariciones, los ecos” (199). Estrada notes that sonic imagery can guide the reader through the stylized spaces of Rulfo’s fiction: “La experiencia auditiva ha sido vivida y registrada cuidadosamente por el escritor; es *su oído* el que conduce al lector por el lugar y, casi sin dejarlo ver, reafirma la jerarquía de la audición como el *sentido guía*” (201). Mitl Valdez is also skilled at defining spaces in his film *Los confines*, and this ability is not limited to the visual realm of camera angles and physical setting. The film score is essential in the creation of psychic spaces in which the characters exist.

Out of the many instances of sonic imagery in both Rulfo and Valdez’s works, there is a particular image that is of importance to the characterization of space in the “Talpa” section of *Los confines*. A distinct wind-like sound resonates as part of a leitmotif that identifies the two primary characters, Ignacio and Natalia. The theme changes as the film progresses, but this wind element remains an important component of the music that is associated with the pair. This wind imagery is one of the ways that Valdez is able to connect his film to Rulfo’s broader body of work, specifically to the short story “Luvina.” Wind is a prevailing motif in that story just as it is in the music of Valdez’s film.

The music of the motion picture appropriates this Rulfian image to reveal the inner lives and psychic space of Ignacio and Natalia. Through music Valdez harnesses the same

metaphorical power that Rulfo employs in “Luvina.” The landscape of Luvina is one of infernal desolation, typified by the howling gale; similarly, for Natalia and Ignacio the sound of wind signifies a spiritual and mental netherworld that the pair creates for themselves. The wind motif in the film score represents their bleak existence. That atmospheric motif is not the only way in which the score portrays hell: the timing and placement of the musical theme in the “Talpa” section suggests the miserable stagnation of Natalia and Ignacio, reminiscent of the asphyxiating torment that some of the characters in Rulfo’s novel *Pedro Páramo* experience. Through its music, *Los confines* conveys infernal space in a way that is comparable with that of prior texts, specifically Rulfo’s body of work and Dante’s *Inferno*. An examination of the infernal aspects of the film score, and how they relate thematically to other texts will provide an outlook on the internal realm in which Ignacio and Natalia dwell and the effect that such an existence has on them.

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá and Jean-Pierre Barricelli’s article “Dante and Rulfo: Beyond Time through Eternity” explains how considering Dante allows for an interpretation of the Jaliscan author. Their assertion is that the residents of Comala in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* exist in an hellish sphere of time: “Given [the] conceptual similarity with Dante, a comparison based on the notion of time in the *Divina Commedia* and specifically in the *Inferno* serves to provide a viable perspective on the novel. The result is that it places Rulfo’s fictional town squarely in the context of an other-worldly eternity” (7). I suggest that this interpretation of Rulfo’s novel applies to Natalia and Ignacio in the “Talpa” section of *Los confines*, specifically because of the placement and timing of their music within the film. The score signifies a stagnant condition of “issueless remorse,” as Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli phrase it, for the couple (13). It is, in part, Valdez’s score that establishes the tormented mental state of the two main

characters. Julio Estrada, as I already indicated, demonstrates how sound guides readers of Rulfo through spaces in the text. Similarly, in *Los confines* the music acts as an example of Estrada's notion of "el sentido guía," which, in this case, conducts the viewer through the miserable psychic realms of the characters.

Infernal Archetypes in Juan Rulfo

The link that both the novel *Pedro Páramo* and the short story collection *El Llano en llamas* have to the *Divine Comedy* has not gone unnoticed in Rulfo scholarship. Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli, for example, assert that "Dante's *Inferno* is without a doubt the archetype that informs the world of *Pedro Páramo* —unequivocally and unquestionably" (16).

Pilgrimages, "ánimas en pena," infernal landscapes, sin, death, and hell are just some of the many connections that seem to be unmistakably Dantean. However, another scholar points out that there are several concepts too universal to be tied down to the influence of a single author. In considering the possibility of Rulfo being directly influenced by Dante, Manuel Durán states: "Muy posiblemente una interpretación jungiana puede ser la correcta: es el inconsciente colectivo, con sus mitos universales, el que influye en Rulfo, aunque quizá algún detalle concreto (el aire sin luz, el viento sin tiempo) pueda proceder, en forma consciente o no, de su lectura de Dante" (108). Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli contend that the relationship between Dante and Rulfo is unmistakable, and I too make that assumption here, though there are other texts to which infernal aspects of his writings bear an association. The *Popol Vuh* is one of them. Nahum Megged elucidates a connection between the infernal space of the Mayan underworld of Xibalba and the Jaliscan author's works in his article "Fondo indígena, antisímbolo y problemática moderna en *Luvina* de Juan Rulfo." Fabio Jurado Valencia is another scholar to point out a

relationship between Rulfian texts and Xibalba. Therefore, although I agree that Dante's *Inferno* is an "archetype that informs the world of" Juan Rulfo (Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli 16), I agree with Manuel Durán's more nuanced view that it is merely one among many that relate to the overall archetype of the inferno itself.

Ignacio and Natalia's Theme

The basic plot of the "Talpa" section of *Los confines* is similar to that of Rulfo's story. A family consisting of a married couple, the wife's mother, and the husband's brother live together in Zenzontla. The husband, Tanilo, has an unspecified illness that causes sores or ulcers (*llagas*) to form on his arms and legs. They ooze yellow fluid, require constant attention, and cause him a great deal of pain. One day Tanilo presents the idea of making a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Talpa so that she might heal his wounds. His wife, Natalia, and his brother, Ignacio, agree to make the journey with him in the hopes that the walk will kill him. Ignacio reveals that he and Natalia have been carrying on an affair and view Tanilo as an impediment to their being together. The three of them set out for Talpa. Tanilo struggles and begs to turn back, but Natalia and Ignacio push him forward and sneak off together nightly while Tanilo sleeps. When they arrive at the chapel of the Virgin of Talpa, Tanilo has weakened significantly. Nonetheless, he completes the last part of his journey with full devotion: on his knees with nopal leaves hanging over his chest and a crown of thorns on his head. Natalia and Ignacio carry the infirm pilgrim into the chapel and the three kneel at the altar to recite their prayers. These efforts are for naught, however, as the exhausted Tanilo dies at the feet of the virgin and the unfaithful couple bury his body in the cemetery of Talpa. Upon their return to Zenzontla, Natalia turns to her mother for comfort and she and Ignacio cease to speak to one another. Now that Tanilo has died "las cosas

se ven de otro modo,” meaning that in her grief for her husband Natalia “se ha olvidado de” Ignacio. The haunting memory of Tanilo keeps them apart and isolated in their “remordimiento” (*Los confines*).

An important function of the music in the portion of *Los confines* dedicated to “Talpa” is to reveal the emotional, mental, and spiritual states of the characters. There are at least two musical themes that run throughout *Los confines*, and they are as variable and complex as the characters themselves. The music that I will examine in this chapter is the theme that relates to Ignacio and Natalia. There are several permutations of the Ignacio and Natalia theme as it changes throughout the progression of the narrative, but it is not difficult to distinguish the leitmotif as being unique to them. Some of its defining attributes are chimes, arrhythmic drumbeats, whistles or flutes, a shrieking noise, and a howling wind-like sound. Not all of these features occur in the theme in every sequence; there is quite a bit of variation. The Ignacio and Natalia theme is mostly free of melody, save in the last scene of the “Talpa” section where there is a brief melody that resembles that of the music featured in the fragment from *Pedro Páramo*. There is another musical theme in “Talpa” that is connected to Tanilo, which will be the subject of analysis in the next chapter.

Michael Chion illustrates the importance of musical themes and how they relate to the characters of a work of art by drawing on the composer Richard Wagner’s use of leitmotifs: “in Wagner’s work there are themes in the orchestral fabric that embody a character’s unconscious, giving voice to what the character does not know about himself” (53). Rather than simply announcing the presence of a protagonist, for example, a leitmotif can reveal metaphorical and thematic elements of a narrative relating to those characters that it represents. Although I do not

intend to examine Ignacio and Natalia's unconscious per se, I do assert that music plays an important role in illuminating underlying conditions and motives.

A previous quote from Chion in the introduction to the present study emphasizes the "reciprocal value" of images and sound. Throughout Natalia and Ignacio's theme there are moments of image/music syncing where a gaze by one of the characters lines up with a feature of the music. This is most prominent when Natalia peers up or over at Ignacio. Often there is a sharp rise in pitch of the musical instrument being played when Natalia's gaze is directed at Ignacio. Though syncing and reciprocal value are always important features of film music and, indeed, the notion of the gaze appears to be a significant motif for Valdez in this film, the particular example of Natalia's look is relevant for this chapter. A person's face and eyes reveal what is inside and this musical theme is an additional "window to the soul" for the pair, bringing to light the psychic space in which they exist.

Wind in "Luvina" and *Los confines*

The wind sounds in Ignacio and Natalia's theme carry marked aspects of an inferno as defined through Juan Rulfo's "Luvina." I suggest that this musical imagery participates in creating an infernal space for the characters. The composition on its own is enough to evoke fear and haunting and imply a tormented state of being for the couple, but there are also echoes of another text that employs the same metaphor to characterize a particular space as infernal. The wind sound derives significance from "Luvina." In Rulfo's story the wind creates a desolate and lonely landscape, replete with demonic influence. Natalia and Ignacio's theme uses comparable symbolic power to produce a sense of spiritual depletion, haunting, and despair surrounding the pair.

The town of Luvina sits atop a desiccated and wind-battered hill. “Luvina es un lugar muy triste,” remarks the solitary narrator to his silent interlocutor, “[y] usted, si quiere, puede ver esa tristeza a la hora que quiera. El aire que allí sopla la revuelve, pero no se la lleva nunca” (102). Nothing grows in the town: “Todo el lomerío pelón, sin un árbol, sin una cosa verde para descansar los ojos; todo envuelto en el calín ceniciento” (101). The narrator describes the sad, gray place as “el purgatorio. Un lugar moribundo donde se han muerto hasta los perros” (109). Nahum Megged, however, contends that “el viaje a Luvina no es un descenso al purgatorio sino uno de los aspectos de Xibalba, el infierno, según el *Popol Vuh*, un terrible infierno” (103). Megged suggests that Luvina’s wind is one of the symbols that distinguishes the town as an inferno: “El viento de Luvina está visto por los habitantes del lugar como la personificación del diablo” (107). Although that critic does not cite the wind motif from the *Popol Vuh*, there are lines in the Mayan text that describe a haunting gale: “The second is named Shivering House, for its interior is thick with frost. A howling wind clatters there. An icy wind whistles through its interior” (112). Both “Luvina” and the *Popol Vuh* feature wind as an atmospheric motif that sets the fictional settings apart as infernos. Although the physical locations in which Valdez’s subjects dwell are infernal, the musical gusts that form part of Natalia and Ignacio’s theme help to carve out a hellish space for those characters in the form of psychic suffering.

The wind noises in the music are unsettling: they rise, fall, and intensify unpredictably, at times almost reaching the pitch of a scream. The sound is a turbulent gale rather than a gentle breeze. The music seems to wail and shriek at the characters, as if they were living among fiendish entities. It haunts them at every juncture in the “Talpa” portion of *Los confines*. The sonic motif also derives significance from “Luvina” (and by extension the *Popol Vuh*). In Rulfo’s story the wind creates a desolate and lonely landscape, replete with demonic influence.

Natalia and Ignacio's theme uses comparable symbolic power to produce a sense of spiritual depletion and despair surrounding the couple.

Natalia and Ignacio's music resembles the sonic descriptions of Luvina's wind. Many of the words that Rulfo's narrator uses to depict the evil gusts relate to sonority. Indeed, he uses his sense of hearing to construct a figurative description of the wind: "Luego rasca como si tuviera uñas: uno lo oye a mañana y tarde, hora tras hora, sin descanso, raspando las paredes, arrancando tecatas de tierra, escarbando con su pala picuda por debajo de las puertas, hasta sentirlo bullir dentro de uno como si se pusiera a remover los goznes de nuestros mismos huesos" (100). The raspy, scratching quality of Luvinian wind echoes in Natalia and Ignacio's music. A prominent element of the couple's theme is a hollow, breathy, whooshing noise (likely made by a flute). Usually this particular component rises and falls like wind, or waves. During more intense moments in the music the wind-like sound hisses and seethes ("hasta sentirlo bullir" as Rulfo phrases it).

Rulfo's narrator points to further qualities that the wind possesses: "Lo estuvimos oyendo pasar por encima de nosotros, con sus largos aullidos; lo estuvimos oyendo entrar y salir por los huecos socavones de las puertas; golpeando con sus manos de aire las cruces del viacrucis . . . amarradas con alambres que rechinaban a cada sacudida del viento como si fuera un rechinar de dientes" (105). "Aullidos," "golpear," "rechinar de dientes" are verbs that depict the sonority of the wind. Some of these same words might be used to describe Ignacio and Natalia's music. The couple's theme features a percussion instrument that thumps and knocks, similar to a wooden boat at sea. This instrument is reminiscent of Luvina's wind "golpeando" against the Stations of the Cross in the church. The final sequence of the "Talpa" section of *Los confines* portrays a shot of the couple in the Talpa graveyard attending to Tanilo's corpse (although Valdez doesn't show

the action on camera the scene suggests that they are trying to close the deceased Tanilo's mouth). Natalia struggles unsuccessfully and then looks up at Ignacio. As her gaze meets his a shrieking howl noise in the music, which has been sounding on and off since the beginning of the shot, intensifies and rises in pitch, like a sharp yowl (*aullido*). These examples of the coincidence of specific sonorities of the wind phenomenon in both "Luvina" and in *Los confines* show the similarity of the motif in both works. Additionally, the overall effect that the atmospheric image has on the two narratives is analogous: it characterizes both the physical location of Luvina and the psychic realms of Ignacio and Natalia as being frightfully hellish. The concurrence of the motif in the two texts opens further interpretations of the significance of the phenomenon in *Los confines*.

The wind in "Luvina" is a destructive element that actively prevents life from taking hold. The narrator describes it as "[u]n viento que no deja crecer ni las dulcámaras" (100). Ignacio and Natalia's love affair is as barren as the ground in Luvina. The gusts wipe away any promise of future growth, just as the music, with its wind-like howling, implies the destruction of the affair even as it is taking place. The wind motif that dominates their theme paints a bleak sonic landscape and indicates that Ignacio and Natalia exist in an infernally desolate place, although it is one that they inhabit mentally and spiritually. An examination of two scenes, one in the middle of the "Talpa" narrative in *Los confines*, and one at the end, illustrates this point. The first of these sequences shows Tanilo, Natalia, and Ignacio camped at night on the way to Talpa. The opening shot of the camp scene begins with a blackout and a voiceover by Ignacio. Against the darkness on screen we hear a hollow hissing sound. This whooshing noise continues as the screen changes to show Ignacio walking toward a campfire. Then there is a shot of Ignacio tending to the fire. The percussive rattles and flute whistles chime in intermittently. The camera

changes to a medium shot of Ignacio looking down, and then looking up and gazing intently at something off-screen. When his gaze rests on whatever he is staring at the hissing rises sharply, and soon we see that it is Natalia that has his attention. The camera shows Natalia and Tanilo lying on the ground with their eyes closed. She opens her eyes and looks up at Ignacio as a high-pitched screeching syncs with her gaze. It is almost like a human scream, although it is apparent that the sound is part of the music and is extradiegetic. The shrieking continues throughout this section of music. The shot changes to a close-up of Ignacio's intense stare and, at this instant, the hissing sound intensifies as well. The music continues to play until the scene ends with the adulterous couple walking off into the shadows.

In a scene in which the lonely couple takes solace in each other's company, why does the music display such an alarming, haunting nature? There are two other sequences that show the couple engaged in their affair and the music is pleasant and sensual. I suggest that the music in the camp scene is an indication that the affair was doomed from beforehand. Ignacio and Natalia's love could not take hold because of the barren ground on which they planted: it is an affair whose continuance hinges on bringing about the demise of Tanilo, but the very memory of his death, and specifically of his body, prevents the pair from being together. The final sequence of the "Talpa" section contains a similar version of Ignacio and Natalia's theme as in the camp scene that I describe above. In one of the final shots the camera pans downward to rest for a moment on the pair as they struggle with Tanilo's corpse. In a voiceover Ignacio explains why the two no longer speak to each other: "Tal vez los dos tenemos muy cerca el cuerpo de Tanilo." The similarities in music in both the camp and the graveyard scenes, its frightening tone and connection to the destructive wind in "Luvina," indicate that the relationship was haunted with ruin even before Tanilo died.

In addition to illustrating the ruination of Ignacio and Natalia's relationship, the embodiment of the wind in demonic form in "Luvina" also brings to light the idea of spiritual wounds in the film narrative. The gusts that assault the town are more than just a natural phenomenon, they comprise a living being that seeks to do harm. The narrator says: "Se planta en Luvina prendiéndose de las cosas como si las mordiera Luego rasca como si tuviera uñas: uno lo oye a mañana y tarde, hora tras hora, sin descanso, raspando las paredes" (100). With teeth and claws that allow it to bite and scratch, the wind in Luvina has the potential to wound a person. Ignacio and Natalia seek to do harm to Tanilo by exacerbating his illness through forcing him to walk. Just as the wind torments the residents of Luvina, so do the two inflict pain and anguish on their victim. They knowingly encourage him to make a pilgrimage that will exhaust his body and cause further damage to his already weeping ulcers. Tanilo's external wounds reflect the internal, spiritual wounds that Ignacio and Natalia undergo in the process of their sinister plan. Their theme, through its connection to the wind motif in "Luvina," is indicative of psychic wounds, self-inflicted, but nevertheless painful and tormenting.

There is a sequence in the "Talpa" section of *Los confines* that draws the connection between Ignacio and Natalia's plot and the phenomenon of demonic wind. Tanilo is reclined in bed with Natalia sitting at his feet attending to his sores. He expresses a desire to "ir a ver a la virgen." Ignacio sits opposite Natalia on the other bed. As Tanilo continues to talk of "aliviar[se] para siempre" the camera changes to a close-up shot of Natalia's face. She looks up from what she is doing as a look of realization spreads across her face. A hollow hissing sound begins to play and is shortly followed by a sharp flute noise. She first looks at nothing in particular as if she is considering a slowly evolving idea. Then she peers over at Tanilo, glances away, and looks over at Ignacio (off screen). The blustery noise ebbs and swells, the flute continues, and

drums flicker arhythmically. The scene has changed from one of benign domesticity to that of a plot to bring Tanilo to his death, and a key marker of that change is found in the presence of the music.

Fabio Jurado Valencia does a double reading of the journey in Rulfo's "Talpa," referring to the work as a "passion." He compares the sacrificial journey of Tanilo with the profane journey of the narrator and Natalia (74). He also contends that sin is often represented outwardly by a physical artifact (73). Although not explicitly stated by Jurado Valencia, it is possible, when reading the story in his two-fold approach, to see Tanilo's physical sores as if they were a mirror reflecting the self-inflicted spiritual wounds suffered by the two protagonists because of their transgression. Jurado Valencia points out that the price of sin is self-condemnation: "El pecado . . . genera complejos de culpa y autocondenas en la narrativa de Rulfo" (73). In Valdez's film Tanilo's illness is made a spectacle and, as repugnant as Tanilo's physical state is, so is the spiritual condition of self-blame that Ignacio and Natalia suffer. Their actions have a dual nature: they inflict pain on Tanilo and torment on themselves. The wind imagery in their leitmotif is symbolic of the physical wounds as well as the spiritual. Like the motif in "Luvina" at times the musical gale seethes and howls almost as though "se pusiera a remover los goznes de nuestros mismos huesos" (100). Bodily harm, as well as spiritual, is evident in the motif in both works.

Lust in the Music of *Los confines* and Dante's *Inferno*

The emptiness of the affair between Ignacio and Natalia is connected to the wind motif of their music in another way. Not only does wind imagery imply that their love is barren like the earth in Luvina, it also points to notions of lust and sin. It is this particular concept that has ties to Dante's *Inferno*. The music forges a symbolic connection to the wind of the Second Circle of

Hell, which is both representative of the experience of lust and a punishment for it. Although neither Valdez nor Rulfo seems to judge his characters, the importance of shame and guilt are not lost in either the story nor the film version of “Talpa.” Morality and the ethics of family do matter to Ignacio and Natalia, and the decisions they make weigh heavily on them, even if they are not condemned by any outside agent.

The characterization of hellish space in the Second Circle of the *Inferno* is achieved through the use of wind as a metaphor for lust. Renato Poggioli attests: “Unlike the tempests raging over our earth, the infernal hurricane knows neither interruption nor end: so that the sinners can expect neither that their ordeal will cease, nor that the implacable wind whirling and smiting them will grant respite” (314). Furthermore, as a punishment for the sin of unchaste desire, wind befits the crime. According to Poggioli this is:

. . . the law of contrapasso, or “retribution,” wherein the punishment fits the crime, by a parallel or contrasting analogy with the very nature of the sin. Since the tempestuous violence of their lust led them astray, they are punished by being dragged by a wind which, unlike the storms of our flesh and blood, will never pause or rest. The infernal hurricane is thus to be understood as a reality both physical and metaphysical, operating on the literal as well as on the figurative plane. (315)

The wind motif in Ignacio and Natalia’s theme is figurative rather than literal, being a component of the extradiegetic music. However, the parallels between the sound of their music, (often violent and tempestuous) and the “infernal hurricane” in Dante’s work, as well as between the couple’s transgression and that of the souls in the Second Circle, provides an interpretation of

the pair's psychic state. The wind motif in Natalia and Ignacio's music represents their lust for each other and their personal, self-created inferno.

In both versions of "Talpa" two of the main characters engage in an extramarital affair.¹ In Juan Rulfo's short story, the couple relies on each other to dispel loneliness: "la soledad aquella nos empujaba uno al otro" (52). Donald L. Shaw enumerates several tendencies that exist in the Latin American Boom novel that differ from the previous movement, which that critic terms "Old Regionalist" (109). One of these trends is the "absence of love as a source of existential support and emphasis on sexual activity as a means to overcome solitude" (109). Natalia and Ignacio's affair is defined by the desire to escape both from the isolation that they feel and the burden that the infirm Tanilo presents, not by their genuine interest in being in love with each other. Neither the film nor Rulfo's story ever mentions the notion of *love* between these two characters. Rulfo's narrator makes the point that the couple's affair is a means of physical and emotional relief, at least for Natalia: "a ella eso le servía de remedio. Sentía como si descansara; se olvidaba de muchas cosas y luego se quedaba adormecida y con el cuerpo sumido en un gran alivio" (52).

Evidence that the pair lusts after one another is abundant in Rulfo's story. "Así una y otra vez," Ignacio recounts, "noche tras noche" while on the road to Talpa he and Natalia find solace in an ardent embrace (52). His descriptions of their nightly encounters involve heat as a symbol of passion: "Siempre sucedía que la tierra sobre la que dormíamos estaba caliente. Y la carne de Natalia, la esposa de mi hermano Tanilo, se calentaba en seguida con el calor de la tierra" (52). He explains that her body and the ground are so hot that "lo hacían a uno despertar de su sueño" (52). It is only until "llegaba la madrugada y el viento frío apagaba la lumbre de nuestros cuerpos" that their lust subsides for a time (52).

In the film there is no dialogue that includes the word “soledad,” but there is evidence that the adulterous pair was driven together by loneliness, as well as by sexual longing. One telling scene begins with a shot of a photo of Natalia and Tanilo on the wall, and then slowly pans down to show Natalia reclined in bed. She sleeps in the same room as her husband, but does not share a bed with him. The music that plays, as the camera pans down to show Natalia sleeping restlessly, begins with a hollow hissing noise, which fades in and out, followed by the inclusion of intermittent drums and a low wind-like sound. Ignacio, in a brief voiceover, says: “yo ya sabía desde antes lo que había dentro de Natalia.” Her eyes open and there are some faint notes from flutes or whistles. The hissing noise takes on a whirring, spiraling movement. A louder flute sound appears and plays two long notes. The music fades into the diegetic sounds of nighttime: crickets and other insects, and perhaps frogs. Natalia looks over to see that Tanilo is sleeping and gets out of bed to retrieve a drink of water from the well outside.

In Rulfo’s “Talpa” the narrator articulates the same line about Natalia and continues: “Sabía, por ejemplo, que sus piernas redondas, duras y calientes como piedras al sol del mediodía, estaban solas desde hacía mucho tiempo” (51). As another example of heat as a symbol for lust in Rulfo’s “Talpa,” the comparison of her legs to that of warm stones is sexually suggestive and represents physical longing. Although such references to body heat are absent in Valdez’s film, the music is one way in which Valdez develops and illustrates the desire between these two characters. Natalia is almost summoned out of bed by her yearning. The flute sounds, although extradiegetic, evoke a primal call that is so strong it seems to wake her from sleep.

After Natalia rises from her bed the camera shows her walking from her bedroom into the courtyard of the house. She approaches a well and peers inside. The shot changes to a high-angle view of the water, which contains a reflection of the moon. With the change of shot to that of the

water there is the sound of small chimes, with even more chimes added in the following seconds. Up to this point there had been only the diegetic sound of nocturnal insects in the background, but at this moment the line between diegetic and extradiegetic blurs. Does Natalia hear the initial chime sounds? It is uncertain, but as the music adds more chimes and drums start to beat as well it becomes clear that these sounds are organized into music that is part of the extradiegetic structure of the film. Natalia fills her containers with water and sets them aside. When she reaches toward the water with her hand we hear two notes of a low flute sound. There is also a drum that has not appeared in the music before; it is a “wet” drum beat, meaning that there are audible reverberations after each strike. The music continues as Natalia submerges her hand in the water and then sensuously touches her chest.

This particular variation of Ignacio and Natalia’s theme differs from the ominous hissing and shrieking that occurs in other scenes. This music is sensual and calm and the interplay between song and image is sweetly poetic. It explains the depths of Natalia’s longing, not as something shameful but as a natural human desire. There are (at least) two facets of the sexual relationship in which the pair engages. One emerges as a simple urge for adult company and escape that draws Ignacio and Natalia together. Another, represented in the more intense variations of their theme, is evocative of lust and punishment for that lust. An example of the latter is one of the shots I describe above where Natalia is reclined in bed. In that shot there are no soft chime or low flute sounds; instead there is howling wind. This version of their theme is similar to that of the camp scene depicted earlier in this chapter. I suggest that the wind noises in the camp sequence are reminiscent of the gusts in “Luvina” and that they connote desolation and barrenness. The same noises also evoke lust and hell. Throughout the camp scene Ignacio and Natalia gaze at each other while the music howls around them. The blustery squalls sync with the

look on Natalia's face as she stares over at Ignacio. Like the music that plays while Natalia is still in bed, this segment is not calm or sensual. It represents a fierce tempest that seems to sweep the couple off into their lustful affair.

There is an aesthetic connection between Ignacio and Natalia's music and Dante Alighieri's descriptions of the Second Circle, an area of Upper Hell and the home of souls who had been overcome with lust. Two spirits, Paolo and Francesca, were killed by her husband (Paolo's brother) when they caught them in the act of love. They were swept away by sexual desire one day while reading about Lancelot and Guinevere. Their lot is to be borne to and fro by the "infernal hurricane" (Canto V: 31). While relating their account to Dante, Francesca uses verbs to describe the experience of lust that evoke the act of being physically carried away: "Love, that can *quickly seize* the gentle heart, *took hold*" and "Love *led* the two of us unto one death" (Canto V: 100-106, emphases mine). Her use of language illustrates how the motion of the wind is symbolic of illicit passion.

In "Talpa" the wind-like sound combines with the images on screen to represent the "tempestuous violence" of lust. In the camp scene the camera focuses on Ignacio's gaze directed at Natalia while the pitch of the wind (sound) reaches new heights. Natalia opens her eyes and the music does a similar sharp uptake while the shot remains focused on her face. The intensity of the noise mirrors the concentration of their gazes and evokes Dante's wind in the sense that they are caught up in their mutual desire. As I explained above, wind is both representative of lust and its condemnation (as in the case of Paolo and Francesca). Here, the sin that Natalia and Ignacio are committing is not simply adultery but homicide, though the second crime is motivated by the first. That the wind sound takes place in a scene in which the couple is not together in the capacity of lovers, but rather as conspirators, (namely the bedroom scene when

Tanilo comes up with the idea to go to Talpa) indicates that the sound corresponds to their punishment. The wind noise is woven throughout the film narrative as it foreshadows their crime and signals their penalty as well. In Dante and Valdez the sensory experience of wind, whether it is an image conveyed by the poet, or a noise brought out through the music, signifies lust and the repercussions of succumbing to lustful desires.

Wind represents hell in that it typifies desire and punishment, but it is important to distinguish between the notion of Christian condemnation and the more esoteric self-inflicted guilt and agony that Valdez's characters experience. The music is a key element in the portrayal of the mental states of Ignacio and Natalia. They live in a perpetual inferno; not the kind that is imposed on them by an outside agent, but rather a self-created psychic landscape. Both Rulfo and Valdez are adept at placing their subjects in an infernal realm of "gran remordimiento" and isolation. Rulfo depicts a couple on an arduous, "lenta y violenta" journey that never ends because they cannot escape "del remordimiento y del recuerdo de Tanilo" (59). As I suggest, Valdez uses the music to convey similar notions of hell. Ignacio and Natalia are fated to be blown about by the gusts to which they succumbed and to never encounter peace. They live in a state of perpetual self-condemnation—a state that is reflected in the music.

Infernal Time and Stagnation in Natalia and Ignacio's Theme

The perpetuation—or stagnation—of Natalia and Ignacio's existence features prominently in the timing and placement of their music. Veronica Maldonado points out that the music, "de claras reminiscencias prehispánicas, nos dice con su sabio eco de eternidad que siempre ha sido así en esta desencantada tierra (24). She is referring to the music of *Los confines* in its entirety, but for Natalia and Ignacio's theme the concept of "eternidad" is especially

significant. Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá and Jean-Pierre Barricelli's article "Dante and Rulfo: Beyond Time through Eternity" offers a possible interpretation of the stagnating quality in the couple's music. A comparison between Dante's *City of Dis*, Juan Rulfo's *Comala*, and the psychological realm in which Natalia and Ignacio exist reveals that the couple's emotional world is one of infernal inertia. Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli's study illustrates temporality in Rulfo's writings and how it compares to that of the *Inferno*. They analyze how time is conceptualized differently in Dante's poem depending on the level of afterlife (heaven, purgatory, or hell). I say "time" but as Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli point out, only in Purgatory and mortal existence does earthly forward movement take place; in hell and heaven it is non-existent. Instead, those realms reside in a sempiternal or eternal state (8). As laid out by these authors, the souls that reside in Paradise perceive existence as "the perfect equilibrium between desire and satisfaction," or, in relation to time, they no longer aspire to attain a future goal, nor look backwards with regret of sin (10). The spirits in hell, on the other hand, experience almost an inversion of the same concept. "Time" for them is motionless and stagnant. As Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli posit, human perception of time (the present and the immediate past and future) is a "fundamental quality of existence [that] is denied the shades in Hell" (13). They also live in an eternal realm, but rather than continuous bliss they experience "a reminiscing sense of a life of error, guilt, and sin, in a festering and aoristic existence of issueless remorse" (13).

Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli contend that the characters in the fictional town of Comala in Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* languish in an infernal suspension of time. The critics cite Rulfo as having said that Comala "es un pueblo muerto donde no viven más que ánimas, donde todos los personajes están muertos Entonces no hay un límite entre el espacio y el tiempo"

(23). They also write that because the residents of Comala are timeless it “makes it possible to eternalize evil, guilt, frustration, remorse and all the somber aspects of the human condition. They are made forever *present* in the sinners’ consciousness because the eternal is perpetually existing in the present” (23). The town is populated by tormented souls who live in continual regret thereby distinguishing Comala as an infernal space reminiscent of Dante’s imagining of inferno.

There is a distinction, however, between the characters in “Talpa” (both versions) and those in *Pedro Páramo*. Comala’s residents are physically dead and exist in a netherworld. This is not the case with Ignacio and Natalia as they are still mortal. Although death is not the end of existence for the inhabitants of Comala, it is a separate condition from that of being alive. The case that I put forth for Ignacio and Natalia in Valdez’s version of “Talpa” is that they live (physically) in an inferno of their own creation, similar to that of Comala or the City of Dis, without actually being dead or on another plane of existence. Much like the residents of those two cities, Ignacio and Natalia languish in a perpetual condition of regret and loss. It is their own remorse and grief that prevent them from experiencing anything other than an infernal state of stagnation. The music is the strongest indication of this condition. It is not only the instrumentation and composition of the music that signify an inferno, but it is also the timing and placement of the leitmotif throughout the film that reveals the inert state in which they exist.

The first scene of Valdez’s “Talpa” opens immediately with Ignacio and Natalia’s theme and shows the pair returning to their home in Zenzontla. Actually, the first few notes of the piece sound even before the scene opens, during the last seconds of the previous scene (the end of the *Pedro Páramo* fragment that opens the film). The music follows the pair to the gateway of their home where they pause momentarily. Natalia looks over at Ignacio and a high flute syncs with

her movement. Ignacio stares back and she looks down uneasily. The scene switches to a shot of Natalia's mother and when she learns that Tanilo did not return with them her gaze turns away from her daughter and she slowly looks down at her sewing. Their leitmotif is steady throughout this series of shots. This shot is almost the end of the chronological narrative, after most of the events of the plot have already transpired, but it is the first sequence of the "Talpa" section of *Los confines*. The first of the main events in "Talpa" is Natalia and Ignacio's plot to bring Tanilo to Talpa. The music in this particular part has been described above; here it is sufficient to point out that it features prominently in the opening "Talpa" scene and marks the beginning of the action in the plot.

There are other scenes in which Natalia and Ignacio's leitmotif is featured; and at the very end of the "Talpa" narrative it has an especially prominent presence. The final sequence of "Talpa" shows a series of shots: first, Ignacio watching Natalia in the mirror of the bedroom wardrobe; then a flashback to the pair struggling to close Tanilo's mouth; a shot of Natalia, dressed in black and cleaning the room she once shared with her husband; then back to Ignacio now contemplating himself in a mirror. Natalia and Ignacio's theme plays throughout all of these moments of the final scene. It also features in the first and last sequences of the "Talpa" section, as well as appearing at the first and last major events of the plot, thereby encapsulating the narrative.

Veronica Maldonado mentions that the music of *Los confines* has "ecos de la eternidad," and, indeed, the Pre-Hispanic style of the music is elemental and, at times, visceral. It encloses the "Talpa" section of the film and ties it together musically. Ignacio and Natalia's theme changes throughout the film, but ends up where it began, much like the characters. The frustrating stagnation that they experience is nowhere more evident than in the music, although it

is also reflected by the narrative structure of the “Talpa” episode. The couple is suspended in their isolation with the memory of Tanilo weighing on their minds.

The circularity of the plot structure is something that Valdez appropriated from Rulfo. The first and last sections of the tale deal with the couple’s return to Zenzontla and a recounting of how they buried Tanilo. Aside from the enclosed narrative structure, Rulfo indicates that Natalia and the narrator (Ignacio) end up as they began: with frustrated desires and the weight of Tanilo on their consciences. Both characters undergo changes throughout the story. Rulfo’s narrator says, for example, that they are both “arrepentidos” for what they have done. Their relationship does not continue and, after Tanilo’s death, they experience remorse (*remordimiento*)—something they did not feel before. In a line that Valdez appropriates in the film, Ignacio says: “Había algo dentro de nosotros que no nos dejaba sentir ninguna lástima por ningún Tanilo,” though by the time they reach the chapel of the Virgin of Talpa the narrator says that he feels sadness (*Los confines*). In Rulfo’s “Talpa” the narrator even claims that willing Tanilo’s death is “algo que no podemos entender ahora; pero entonces era lo que queríamos” (52).

Despite the change of heart that Natalia and the narrator experience, their situation is one of perpetual agony and frustration. What they wanted was for Tanilo to no longer be “un estorbo” for them (a word that both Rulfo and Valdez use), yet he looms as large in death as he did in life. Rulfo also indicates that what they want, but cannot have, is peace. The narrator felt that while Tanilo was alive and Natalia cared for him that “siempre la sombra de Tanilo nos separaba: sentíamos que sus manos ampolladas se metían entre nosotros y se llevaban a Natalia para que lo siguiera cuidando. Y así sería siempre mientras estuviera vivo” (51). But after his death “la sombra de Tanilo” separates the pair permanently, as he continues to be a burden for

them in the form of a haunting memory and a great debt of penance. “Ella dice que ha sentido la cara de Tanilo estos últimos días,” says the narrator of Natalia, “pidiéndole, con una voz apenitas, que lo ayudara.” She wants him to see “todo el gran remordimiento que lleva encima de su alma” (53). All of their contrition won’t save them “del remordimiento ni nos dará ninguna paz ya nunca” (51). The narrator has the body of his brother in his memory continually and is unable to escape from the guilt “ya nunca.” They are suspended in this condition provoking the sentiment that it is as if they had not arrived “a ninguna parte” (59).

This suspension of suffering is similar to what the ghosts in Comala experience (Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli 20).² Although Natalia and the narrator (Ignacio) live in space and time, their reality is one of damnation where the weight of their actions and the memory of Tanilo exist perpetually for them and they remain mired in their pain without hope of peace. Valdez utilizes the film score to represent the permanency of their miserable condition. It appears at the beginning, end, and throughout the film segment dedicated to “Talpa” and encloses them in a music that, by its composition and instrumentation, represents inferno.³ Its placement within the filmic narrative echoes Dante’s notion of time in hell: that it is eternally present without forward progression.

This is not to say that Natalia and Ignacio’s theme is the same throughout the “Talpa” film segment. Like a Wagnerian leitmotif that evolves with the character it represents there are differences between the variety of permutations of the couple’s piece. One notable distinction is that the music at the end of “Talpa” resembles that of the opening and closing credits of *Los confines* in that it contains the flute melody. It is distinguishable as the couple’s theme, but it adds the flute melody. Perhaps overlapping two musical pieces (one from the “Talpa” segment and one from the closing and opening credits of the film) is a small detail, but by connecting to

the broader narrative of this film, Natalia and Ignacio's motif indicates that the characters in Valdez's "Talpa" sequence have a correlation to those in the *Pedro Páramo* episode in *Los confines*. "¿Cómo se va uno de aquí?" asks the *forastero* of the ghostly woman. In another reference to the underworld (appropriated from Rulfo) the incestuous sister points to the hole in the ceiling. Writing of Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* Rodríguez-Alcalá and Barricelli claim that the image of Donis's sister indicating that one path out of Comala is through her ceiling "recalls the final passage of the last canto of the *Inferno*" where Dante and Virgil "espy (through a round hole) the beautiful things that the sky contains" (20). The pilgrim and his guide look up into another world from the vantage point of hell. "Talpa," through its musical association with the characters in the *Pedro Páramo* fragments, suggests a hellish existence for Ignacio and Natalia, or at least that in the "multitud de caminos" that cross through this land there is not one that gets them to "ninguna parte" (*Los confines*).

Conclusion

"Y yo comienzo a sentir como si no hubiéramos llegado a ninguna parte," Ignacio remarks in a voiceover during the final shot of the section of *Los confines* dedicated to "Talpa." The feeling that he has of never arriving anywhere is reflected poignantly in Juan Rulfo's short story "El hombre" when the man on the run says "camino y camino y no ando nada" (37). The stagnant nature of Ignacio and Natalia's existence is signified by the couple's music, which surrounds them in a mental and spiritual sphere. By typifying the pair's inertia through its placement in the film narrative, as well as by employing the power of the wind metaphor found in several related texts, the theme brings to light Ignacio and Natalia's personal hell. One of the functions of the music in this segment is to distinguish the couple's physical space as being one of

torment, guilt, and self-punishment, and it represents the spiritual prison that the pair inhabits. The music captures Rulfo's use of atmospheric imagery to expose the inner lives of his characters and appropriates the Jalisco author's masterful stylization of space.

One final example of the role of Ignacio and Natalia's theme in adapting Rulfian techniques will illustrate how the music enhances the strong connection that *Los confines* has with Rulfo's fiction. The film score often reveals the internal states of the characters, so it is fitting that Valdez accompany his use of music with the gaze, which is another window into the soul. The final scene of the "Talpa" sequence of *Los confines* begins with a shot of an arm pulling out a shirt from a wardrobe as Ignacio and Natalia's theme starts in almost immediately. The camera pans slowly left to show that the arm belongs to Ignacio who, standing in front of a mirror, begins to button his shirt. The shot rests almost over Ignacio's shoulder with a full view of Natalia in the mirror attending to the bed linens. He pauses to look at her reflection, but she doesn't see him. With the music still playing, albeit gaining intensity with shrieking sounds, the shot changes to the moment that the pair is struggling to bury Tanilo's decomposing corpse. The following shot returns to the present moment as Natalia, while dusting her bedroom, pauses mournfully on a portrait of herself with Tanilo. The camera returns to Ignacio who is still staring into the mirror although Natalia has left the room and her reflection is no longer visible. The camera, that has been showing both Ignacio and his image, slowly closes in until only the reflection is visible on screen. Solemnly, he contemplates his likeness while the music continues to play. The music gives continuity to this final series of shots, indicating that perhaps they are closely connected. In fact, I suggest that parts of the sequence are Ignacio's memories and observations; specifically the shot of Tanilo in the graveyard and those of Natalia completing her domestic chores. In Rulfo's narrative the narrator finishes his retelling of events with a vivid

description of his brother's corpse, while earlier he indicates that it is the memory of Tanilo that keeps him and Natalia apart. In Valdez's film the final scene reflects Ignacio's trauma over having to bury his brother and his bitterness at losing his relationship with Natalia. As he stares into the mirror he watches himself remembering Tanilo's body and observes Natalia's indifference towards him.

The symbolism of Ignacio's gaze is enhanced by Valdez's use of music. It is as if Ignacio were observing his own suffering, represented partially by the music. With all of the implications that the music bears, the shot of Ignacio's self-reflection sums up the stagnation and torment that he and Natalia endure. The notion of viewing one's own affliction has its counterpart in Rulfo's original text. As Tanilo lies dead in the graveyard his corpse has "ojos muy abiertos como mirando su propio muerte" (59). Rulfo's subjects feel their pain on many levels and, as an interpreter of Rulfo, Valdez is skilled at capturing the protagonists' inner turmoil. The music plays a large part in conveying the labyrinthine emotional world that is also typical of Rulfo's characters in his "Talpa." The film score, with its accompanying camera work and connections to other texts, appropriates a wide breadth of Rulfian materials, especially the torment of his characters.

Notes

¹ Ignacio suggests that he and Natalia had been together sexually many times during Tanilo's illness. The film shows them together as lovers possibly before Tanilo comes up with the idea to go to Talpa.

² Luvina also contains indications of being a place that is suspended in an infernal temporality. The narrator is not sure how much time he actually spent there because, as he states, "Perdí la noción del tiempo desde que las fiebres me la enrevesaron; *pero debió haber sido una eternidad*" (106; emphasis added).

³ A further investigation of Pre-Columbian pipes reveals a certain flute that is capable of making a wind-like noise. How this sound is made is only important for this particular discussion insofar as it aids in understanding the noise itself. The Princeton University Art Museum hosts an informative website that contains many examples of Pre-Columbian instruments (see "Music from the Land of the Jaguar" at <<http://mcis2.princeton.edu/jaguar/jaguar.html>>).

Chapter II

Death Imagery, Fatalism, and Pathos in the Film Score of *Los confines* and Juan Rulfo's "Talpa"
and "¡Diles que no me maten!"

That we shall die we know; 'tis but the time
And drawing days out, that men stand upon.

William Shakespeare, *Julius Cæsar*

Images of death frequent the passages of Juan Rulfo's fiction. From the family cow *La Serpentina* floating "patas arriba" in the river of "Es que somos muy pobres" to the final lines of *Pedro Páramo* where the *cacique* stumbles, falls, and crumbles into rocks against the dry ground, the Jaliscan author makes use of the motif throughout his body of work. One of the broader concepts that images of death evoke is that of fatalism. Robert C. Solomon provides a particular definition to a word that may be applied to a wide array of ideas and situations. He describes fatalism as "involving a peculiar sense of [narrative] necessity" (435). In other words, it is the notion that despite someone's best efforts the event or circumstance they were trying to avoid or prevent was bound to happen anyway. That is why mortality evokes fatalism: the narrative necessity of human life, one might say, is its termination.

In Rulfo, death is often linked to fatalism. For example, in "¡Diles que no me maten!" the very fate that Juvencio Nava is trying to avoid is his own execution. However, futility in the face of an inevitable outcome is not limited to bodily demise. In the case of Tacha in "Es que somos muy pobres" it is not death that she faces (yet), but poverty and the possibility of the consignment to prostitution. For her this was a *necessary outcome*, in the sense that despite the best efforts of the family to prevent their last daughter from following her older sisters into the oldest profession (her father purchases a cow hoping that it will entice "buenos hombres" to marry her), it still comes to pass. Rulfo's fascination with representations of death and futility evoke a broader concept of fate and fatalism. Mitl Valdez's film *Los confines* appropriates this salient Rulfian theme through funerary imagery in the film score.

Depictions of mortality can be a symbol and a reflection of other fatalistic outcomes or unhappy endings that overtake the characters in spite of their best-laid plans. Two pieces of music in particular in *Los confines* offer a fascinating example of the power of sound imagery to

represent death and its inevitability. In my previous chapter I highlighted the significance of a leitmotif for Ignacio and Natalia and the implications for their spiritual condition and destiny. In this chapter the main objects of examination are two pieces of music whose composition, timing, and synchronization with the action on screen evoke the idea of death. These pieces reflect depictions of mortality both within the film and in the adapted stories and illuminate the fatalism that is characteristic of both Rulfo and Valdez. Through the juxtaposition of death imagery in the music (signifying the inevitability of death and, by extension, other negative outcomes) with the unrelenting efforts of his subjects, Valdez brings out underlying pathetic tensions that lend poignancy and emotion to his film. The characters' struggle against an unhappy outcome that they are powerless to change elicits a sympathetic emotional response.

Although death imagery does not offer the only source of pathos in his works, Rulfo is masterful at conveying a sense of hopelessness while simultaneously portraying the abiding efforts of his characters who press forward in the face of certain demise. *La Serpentina*, in "Es que somos muy pobres," for example, "[b]ramó como sólo Dios sabe cómo" as the floodwater "le golpeaba las costillas" (25). Even as she is being overtaken by the black floodwaters, the cow cries out for help. Rulfo's subjects are almost invariably defeated in their tasks, but they are relentless in their attempts to change the outcome. The characters' almost heroic attempts to alter their own fate has the result of making their failure poignantly tragic. Valdez seems to capture this unique aspect of Rulfo's writing. The music, which is found in two separate themes (one in the "¡Diles que no me maten!" section of *Los confines*, and the other in the "Talpa" section), is foreboding and somber. It indicates that, in spite of attempts to overcome execution, illness, or even loneliness, the fates of his characters are inescapable. It offers the counterpoint to the efforts and hopes of Valdez's subjects in overcoming their trials.

Los confines adapts three texts by Rulfo: “Talpa” (the subject of the first chapter of this study), “¡Diles que no me maten!,” and an episode from the novel *Pedro Páramo*. Valdez’s version of “Diles” is the story of the murderer and fugitive Juvencio Nava. Juvencio asks his *compadre* Guadalupe Terreros for the use of his pastures during a dry spell in which his own lands can no longer sustain his cattle. When Guadalupe refuses to grant such permission, Juvencio sneaks his animals onto his neighbor’s land anyway. Upon discovering the intrusion, Guadalupe warns Juvencio that he will shoot his cattle if he discovers them on his property again. Juvencio responds that the animals “son inocentes” and that if Guadalupe kills them he will answer for it. When Juvencio repeats the same crime a *peón* in Guadalupe’s employ kills one of the offending cows. Enraged, Juvencio murders Guadalupe Terreros and faces the punishment of the justice system. After his attempts to bribe his way out of being pursued by the law prove fruitless, Juvencio loses all that he owns and spends the next thirty-five years on the run. Eventually he settles on a piece of land where he raises corn (in Rulfo’s version it is a small plot of land that his son and his family inhabit, but this is not mentioned in the film). Already an old man when a group of soldiers come to arrest him, he pleads for his life as they take him to town to be executed. Juvencio is brought to *el coronel* who does not show himself but for his shadow on the wall. When asked if he knew Guadalupe Terreros the aged prisoner responds by saying that he did but that he had died. The shadow figure of *el coronel* laughs, reveals that Guadalupe was his father, and orders Juvencio executed despite his protests. The final shot of the sequence is of Juvencio’s son, Justino, loading his father’s lifeless body onto a *burro* and leading it away.

The piece of music from “Diles” that I will examine in this chapter only appears in the scene that shows the funeral services of Guadalupe Terreros’s wife (who presumably has died of

grief after her husband's murder). A similar, though not identical, piece of music weaves through the section of *Los confines* that adapts "Talpa." These specific themes in both the "Talpa" and "Diles" segments of *Los confines* have ominous funerary qualities and contain death imagery. Furthermore, the instrumentation and composition of the music, as well as its timing and placement within the film, afford a pathway to understanding the fatalism that is so essential to the development of these works.

Death in Rulfo

The Jaliscan author writes about at least two distinct experiences of death. The first is of the dead themselves who have continued to exist (albeit unhappily), while the second is of the still-mortal character who is anxious about preserving his life as it currently stands. These two Rulfian approaches to death are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both are present simultaneously in Rulfo's body of work, sometimes within the same story. The distinction is important since those who continue to exist as *ánimas* have a different set of concerns than those who are still living and are faced with bodily demise. In Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* many of the deceased are buried and trapped within their own graves. Juan Preciado and Dorotea are fated to remember their frustrated desires and goals in life: for Juan that of finding his father, for Dorotea that of having a child (see *Pedro Páramo* 64). Being caught in an infernal and perpetual state of remembrance is unpleasant, but distinct from the fear of the end of one's life. Those who are still living in Rulfo's works are often very much preoccupied with holding on to their existence in the mortal realm. Valdez and Zepeda masterfully capture this existential angst in the funerary music that runs through both the "Talpa" and "Diles" sections of *Los confines*.

In the film Juvencio and Tanilo fall into the latter category of those who view death as something to be avoided at all costs. Dodging the final result of mortality is a defining element of their stories. To be sure, Valdez notes that he chose to adapt “Diles” because of the archetypal “huída de la muerte” that is so prominent in that story and that is characteristic of the human condition (qtd. in Pelayo). Notably, these two characters who try to escape death face an early or violent demise, not a peaceful passing that follows a long life. Tanilo desperately struggles to fight the illness that will eventually kill him while Juvencio is a fugitive trying in vain to evade the law and certain execution. Significantly, both narratives are grounded on the exploration of human anxiety in the face of death.

Valdez translates this anxiety onto the big screen in various ways, including the musical score. The pieces that I discuss in this chapter portray the horror and despair that come from the anticipation of death that, in the film score, stand for the fatalism that pervades the film. When demise is viewed as the end of life, rather than a passage to the next plane (as in *Pedro Páramo*), it is a symbol that represents the futility of human action to prevent fate from taking its course. The end of physical existence is the “outcome” of all living things, and so may signify other unhappy, seemingly unavoidable events as well, such as natural disasters, divorce, and so on. To the extent that the music of *Los confines* depicts death, it points to fatalism—a peculiar sense of “narrative necessity” that highlights the themes of futility and hopelessness in this motion picture and ultimately contributes to the pathos that is characteristic of both Rulfo and Valdez’s works.

Fatalism

The particular definition of fatalism that I use has to do with the inevitability of certain events. Robert C. Solomon distinguishes fate and fatalism from other ideas, such as determinism,

as well as from colloquial, superstitious notions of fate. For Solomon, fate is the justification of an outcome, while fatalism is the doctrine (442). He points out that fate is often a personified character in literature; one to which both gods and men frequently defer (442). However, he believes it possible to think of the concept “without acknowledging any mysterious agency” (442). In other words, it is an abstract idea devoid of agency or will. “Fatalism,” he writes, “is the thesis that some event must happen, and no further explanation, notably no causal explanation, is called for” (443). Narrative necessity does not imply that the characters are being “punished” for some sort of misdeed, or that someone or something is imposing on them.

When considering the events that transpire in the adapted short stories that make up Valdez’s film, it is easy to notice that the varied paths that his characters take all lead to similar endings —sadness, isolation, frustration, failure, and, in some cases, death. What of free will? I suggest that the outcomes Valdez’s subjects experience are never within their control and that whatever effort they make to prevent the conclusion is futile. This does not mean, however, that free will does not exist in Rulfo or Valdez since fatalism (the necessity of a particular outcome) is not incompatible with free will. As Solomon notes: “It is not as if fatalism denies the relevance of causal etiology or insists (absurdly) that ‘it does not matter what anyone does,’ much less that ‘no one can do anything about anything.’ Fatalism is just concerned with the significance of the outcome rather than the causal path that brought it about” (443). The characters may exercise their free will as much as they choose (and it is evident that they do) but that does not prevent them ultimately from experiencing an inevitable outcome. In addition, as Solomon says: “fatalism . . . need not be a global thesis and need not apply to every situation and event” (436). Therefore, characters may act as they will in some situations without being acted upon by fate.

Solomon's notion of fatalism is one that looks ahead to the outcome that could not be avoided; it does not look back at each step along the way nor does it dismiss the causal factors but emphasizes and insists upon the necessity of the finale. This is not to say that an examination of the events leading up to the end would be of no value. In fact, an analysis of the effort and hopes of the characters is essential to understanding how fatalism is depicted and how the music plays a vital role in bringing about pathos. There is no question that these fictional individuals believe they may alter their ending. However, the final outcomes of the plots are evidence that, in the world inhabited by Valdez's subjects, there is simply nothing that any of them can do to change their unhappy fate.¹

Nihilism, Negativity, and Fatalism in Juan Rulfo

Critics of Rulfo have noted the "narrative necessity" of events in Rulfo's works. Martha Elia Arizmendi Domínguez, for example, examines the workings of fate in Rulfo's novella *El gallo de oro* looking specifically at how it affects the main character Dionisio Pinzón. Referring to this protagonist she writes: "los pasajes más sobresalientes de su vida, incluso el de su muerte, están predeterminados, parecería que su final era conocido desde antes" (18). This reading reflects the "peculiar sense of necessity" —as Solomon would put it— that inhabits many of Rulfo's fictive works (435). The words fatalism and fate have a specific definition for the present investigation, but there are other interpretations of these particular terms, or of related concepts in the Jaliscan author's works (and, by extension, *Los confines*) that have been addressed by critics in various studies. For the present investigation it is helpful to briefly take into account some of the related terms and concepts as a means of distinguishing the theme of fatalism that I borrow from Robert C. Solomon.

Lanin A. Gyurko contends that *Pedro Páramo* and several of the novel's precursors in the collection *El Llano en llamas* (as well as in Rulfo's entire body of work) consist "of a deliberate and masterful construction of a world in chaos" —essentially, nihilism (454). He mentions "nullity" and "futility" as being inherent in the structure of Rulfo's art and points to several examples of fatalism. Gyurko's view of fatalism is more in line with Robert C. Solomon's definition of determinism, which seeks to look back at events leading up to an adverse ending and identify them as the cause. His examples include that of Macario (from the story that bears this protagonist's name), whose genetics (according to Gyurko) have caused his unhappy outcome: "Ironically, the destiny that he fears so much is self-exacerbated. The idiot boy creates within himself the hell of existence that he fervently hopes to avoid. His character has become his fate" (453). The distinguishing characteristic of Gyurko's view of destiny or fate is the emphasis on the causes versus merely the outcome. The variety of fatalism that is pertinent for this chapter is the type that does not look backward to determine the cause of the outcome but instead insists on the narrative necessity of the final events.

Although he touches on such subjects as fate and determinism, Gyurko's main focus is the subject of nihilism, which is a doctrine that posits that life has no inherent meaning, as well as a way to refer to negative outlooks and outcomes, defined by Jonathan Tittler in an essay that responds to Gyurko's study (8). Tittler questions whether or not destruction and pessimism are represented "en forma pura" in the novel (1). He associates nihilism with negativity and pessimism and reads Gyurko's contention as one that puts forth a purely negative interpretation of Rulfo's works. Tittler's conclusion is that *Pedro Páramo* (and possibly by extension the author's short fiction) is not purely negative or pessimistic. Instead, there is a tension between

opposing forces. This critic cites from *Pedro Páramo* to illustrate the opposing deaths of Pedro and Susana:

Pedro Páramo es, pues, escatológicamente bifurcada. Tiene un *terminus* masculino (las escenas en que muere Pedro) que cierra la narración y la devuelve a su origen macabro y petrificado. Y tiene un *terminus* femenino (la escena del ruido de Susana), una apertura etérea a la significación perpetua alrededor de un referente siempre ya perdido. El desenlace masculino, pesimista y solipsista, ya es negado implícitamente por el acto de simbolizar . . . Y ese acto mismo de simbolizar se representa en el fin femenino. (7)

Tittler asserts that the nihilism of Rulfo's fiction carries within it its own opposite, as seen in the example from the novel described above (8). Tittler's notion of dualities is compatible with what Arthur Ramírez contends in an article titled "Dialectics and the Despairing Optimist." "Paradoxically," Ramírez claims, "Rulfo is really a despairing optimist who actually implies their opposites when he writes of hate, violence, destruction, and hopelessness" (580). To Ramírez's list I could also add nihilism (which posits that life has no inherent meaning and is often evoked when circumstances are negative or pessimistic) and fatalism (which refers to an unavoidable conclusion that is contrary to the characters' wishes). Therefore, an investigation into the representation of fatalism need not demand the fact that Rulfo's fiction and Valdez's film are purely negative, pessimistic, or gloomy.

Ramírez makes the point that much of the despair in Rulfo's works comes from disillusion: "Rulfo's world view, then, is characterized by the idealist's despair at the destruction of his illusions. But disillusion could not be a strong and natural reaction were it not for the author's dedication to the ideal" (580). The illusion of hope, salvation, love, or any positive

outcome is one element that makes the ultimate fate of Rulfo's characters so exquisitely disappointing. The emotional gravity of the fatalism in both the stories and the film would not exist if it were not for the illusion of a character's ability to map out his or her own destiny and achieve happiness. Thomas C. Lyon, writing of the motif of the endless journey in Rulfo as an ontological phenomenon, notes that "confronted with this seemingly futile march, all of Rulfo's men [and women] continue; they are, in this sense, true heroes, not giving up in despair or lethargy. Life is movement and man struggles to find purpose to existence by keeping constantly on the move. He is not 'petrified [static] before an implacable destiny'" (163). As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Rulfo's subjects do not rescind their efforts in the face of adversity, thus making their plight against the unavoidable poignant and tragic, but also imbuing it with a heroic aspect.

Therefore, far from being a study in pessimism, this chapter endeavors to explore the tension between opposing forces that is revealed through fatalism and shuns the idea that pure negativity is the order of the day in any of the works examined. Speaking about *Pedro Páramo*, Carlos Fuentes has suggested that "toda alegría lleva su propio llanto" (qtd. in Ramírez 580). The music examined in this chapter is a *llanto* that carries the implication of joy and hope. It also illuminates the dynamics of determination and futility, illusion, and reality, in both *Los confines* and in Rulfo's stories that inspire that film.

Hope and despair in "Talpa"

Los confines exhibits a vivid juxtaposition of hope and defeat in the character of Tanilo in Valdez's version of "Talpa." The faith that he puts in a journey of spiritual healing contrasts starkly with the eventual outcome. The music signifies Tanilo's fate and represents the

inevitability of his death, which stands in opposition to his anticipation of a cure. Two images emerge as the section progresses: on one hand there is Tanilo's tremendous effort to stay alive and his unabashed faith in the Virgin of Talpa, depicted visually on screen and through dialogue; on the other there is the funerary music, which contradicts his expectation of a cure and the continuation of his life and imbues the section with a sense of ominous foreboding as if to indicate the narrative necessity of Tanilo's death.

There are two distinct pieces of music in "Talpa." Natalia and Ignacio have their own motif that is unique to them thematically, which I examine in the first chapter. The other musical piece in "Talpa" is more specific to Tanilo. The theme is complex and consists of several musical components, one of which is a distinct buzzing noise. This quasi-melody is a droning, bee-like sound that begins low, rises in pitch for a measure, and then starts over again. Another guttural "voice" resonates at a slightly higher pitch and does not appear to have any distinct melody. The chant-like droning evokes meditation and prayer and creates a ritualistic feel. Despite this sacred quality, the tone of the music is one of gloom and foreboding. A slow, steady bass-drum beat imbues the music with a sense of anticipation and uneasiness while the tune of the lower buzzing noise is simple and gloomy, like a dirge. In addition to the overall sentiment of the music, images of death populate the theme and point to the broader idea of fatalism.

Rulfo's narrator in "Talpa" describes Tanilo's body as being "lleno por dentro y por fuera de un hervidero de moscas azules que zumbaban como si fuera un gran ronquido que saliera de la boca de él" (59). This picture of decay is appropriated for the film in the form of Tanilo's theme. The distinct buzzing quality mimics the sound of the flies that surround Tanilo's lifeless body in the literary version. The *zumar* of the flies in both works evokes death and decay, specifically the decomposition of Tanilo's body. This example shows how the music represents

death and, by extension, fatalism. In Rulfo's version of "Talpa" the buzzing of insects is linked to Tanilo's will to live. The narrator says that his mouth, in addition to being full of flies, was difficult to close: "aquella boca . . . que parecía querer respirar todavía sin encontrar resuello" (59). Tanilo's corpse seems to try to hang on to life even after the fight is over, but the flies are an indication that he has lost. They represent death and decay and, in doing so, contrast with Tanilo's determination. The musical image in the film has a similar implication. As a symbol of decomposition, the buzzing sound negates Tanilo's constant efforts to keep going. He struggles for life, but the music tells us that he is headed toward the grave.

Tanilo's theme further enforces a connection to bodily demise through the reoccurring use of a slow and steady drumbeat. This musical motif suggests a death march and represents the fatal aspect of Tanilo's pilgrimage since the act of walking will lead to his end. In Rulfo's story the narrator says that, after a short time on the road to the sacred site, "[I]a carne de sus pies se había reventado y por la reventazón aquella empezó a salirse la sangre" (55). Both the film and short story indicate that the journey causes Tanilo to lose blood and exhausts his already depleted body. Valdez highlights the connection between the physical act of walking in which all three characters participate and the drum motif in Tanilo's theme. The first appearance of this particular piece of music occurs in the scene where Ignacio, Natalia, and Tanilo are on the road to Talpa and Tanilo falters and asks to return to Zenzontla. His wife and brother urge him to continue, knowing that the walk will kill him and wanting this to be so. Ignacio says in a voiceover that the two "queríamos llegar con él a Talpa, porque a esas alturas, así como estaba, todavía le sobraba vida" (*Los confines*). Right before he says "todavía le sobraba vida" the camera changes to a shot of a backlit yucca palm and the music begins, thus forging a link

between the notion of walking Tanilo to death and the music. In order to get rid of the life that still remains in him, it is necessary for the couple to ensure that he keep marching toward Talpa.

The music's connection to the act of walking as a means of annihilation is reinforced by the subsequent scene. Immediately following the shot of the yucca palm, the camera shows the legs and feet of the trio. Natalia and Ignacio's steps are steady (like the drum beat) but Tanilo's are halting. In fact, Ignacio's pace synchronizes with the beat of the drum. More than being simply a reflection of Tanilo's death brought about by the act of walking, the music's association with his demise points to its own fatalistic nature. Tanilo believes that the journey will save him, but this contrasts sharply with what we know as an audience and with the intentions of Ignacio and Natalia.

Besides its connection to two contrasting views surrounding the pilgrimage to Talpa (that of Tanilo's expectation of a cure and of Natalia and Ignacio's plan to cause his death) the theme has an allusion to another sonic image in Rulfo's version. Upon reaching the religious site of the Virgin of Talpa, Tanilo joins in a carnivalesque festival where the dancers move about furiously.² Tanilo joins the frenetic celebration and dances "con la larga sonaja en la mano, dando duros golpes contra el suelo con sus pies" (57). Natalia and Ignacio also see him "alzar los brazos y azotar su cuerpo contra el suelo" (57). In this passage from the short story, Tanilo's body becomes a percussion mallet that strikes the ground. His feet also produce "duros golpes" reminiscent of a drum. The actions *azotar* and *dar golpes* are indicative of percussion instruments. As Julio Estrada points out, "en Rulfo . . . las descripciones de movimiento dan por sí solas la idea de una música" (120). These musical descriptors from Rulfo's "Talpa" are evoked by Tanilo's theme in *Los confines*, even though the filmic beat is slow and lugubrious and not frantic like Tanilo's dancing in the story. The connection between the drum sound in the film and

the festive dance of the written version suggests the inversion of life/death that is experienced in carnival: the drum beat in the music signals a death march and Tanilo's participation in the dance is evidence of "un último esfuerzo por conseguir vivir un poco más" (57). By signifying two separate concepts (death and the will to live) Tanilo's theme upholds the fatalistic message of both the short story and the film. The drum beat signals the grinding inevitability of death as well as the frenetic dance of life. There would be no sadness or disappointment in death (fate) if it were not for the frustrated hope of being able to "vivir un poco más."

An important aspect of fatalism is the fact that it is impossible to change the outcome of a fatalistic event despite the efforts of those involved. In both versions of "Talpa," Tanilo attempts to extend his life through faith but fails. This calls into question the efficacy of religious devotion in "Talpa." Fabio Jurado Valencia has noted that Juan Rulfo's short story simultaneously affirms and negates religion (72). I suggest that Valdez's film does the same. Through the negation of the power of faith to change fate, both works uphold their fatalistic stance.

There is a component of Tanilo's theme that implies a denial of religious power. The constant and repetitive chanting sound (although it is important to note that it is not distinguishably verbal) mimics prayers being recited, or *rezar*. The intoning noise vibrates and hums around its simple melody. It almost sounds like the murmur of many prayers. A similar sonic phenomenon is found in *Pedro Páramo*. Susana San Juan, the emotionally troubled wife of the title character, suffers loss and abuse throughout her life and maintains a pessimistic view of the afterlife and of religion. Addressing Justina, her caretaker, Susana reflects on her mother's death and the aftermath: "Tú y yo allí, rezando rezos interminables, sin que ella oyera nada, sin que tú y yo oyéramos nada, todo perdido en la sonoridad del viento debajo de la noche" (82).

The sonority of the passage from the novel is reflected in the music for Valdez's "Talpa." The "chanting" mimics the confused "rezar" of Susana and Justina, which is blotted out by the wind.

Cacophonous prayers are an example of Michael S. Jordan's notion of frustrated communication throughout the works of Juan Rulfo. The prayers of Susana go unheard, lost in the noise of the wind. According to Jordan this renders them ineffective. He writes, "[h]erein lies the crux of the problematic status of communication in Rulfo's works, since in order for communication to be effective there must exist the possibility that a hearer will receive and understand the message that is sent" (116). Susana's prayers go unheard and therefore unanswered, just as Tanilo's sacred journey profits him nothing.

Susana San Juan's futile prayers are not the only example of a connection between the chanting sound in Tanilo's theme and Rulfo's fiction. The narrator of "Talpa" says that while camped on the way to Talpa all of the sojourners "rezaba[n] el rosario, con los brazos en la cruz, mirando hacia el cielo de Talpa. Y se oía como el viento llevaba y traía aquel rumor, revolviéndolo, hasta hacer de él un solo mugido" (56). Further along in the story when the trio is kneeled in the chapel after listening to the priest's sermon, the *rezar* of the congregation is described as "un ruido igual al de muchas avispas espantadas por el humo" (58). In these passages the prayers are heard (unlike those of Susana) but they are, nonetheless, unintelligible. They are an expression of the hope that the pilgrims have of procuring help from the Virgin, but they are made mute by the wind and the mixing together of other supplications. Prayer is an act of trust and hope, which is negated by the cacophonous quality of the noise and thereby made futile. The "mugido" in Rulfo's story is reflected in the non-verbal chanting of the music. The droning chant of Tanilo's theme represents the character's path: he acts on faith and anticipation, both of which prove to be ineffectual and null. Communication with heaven cannot change the

course of fate for Tanilo. His death is necessary in a fatalistic sense and the music conveys the senselessness of Tanilo's efforts in the face of inevitability.

The binaries of faith/hopelessness, communication/confusion, and life/death create emotional tensions in *Los confines*, just as they do in Juan Rulfo's fiction. Arthur Ramírez states that, although Rulfo's artistic vision is full of dualities, "the total effect is one of coherence" (580). The fatalism that is characteristic of the film and story is brought out by a tension between hope and gloom. Tanilo's struggle is an encapsulation of a coherent whole made up of two contradictory ideas; namely, that of the anticipation and struggle of preserving one's life and the eventual loss of mortal existence. This conflict is also a means of creating drama and poignancy. The music is one way in which Valdez imbues the text with the sense of necessity that is characteristic of fatalism. Valdez's "Talpa," like a certain novel by Gabriel Garcia Márquez, is a chronicle of a death foretold. This allows the audience to witness the futility of Tanilo's efforts. He will die on the path to Talpa, but as he is unable to know such a thing he maintains a hopeful attitude until the end (although notably he tries to give up at one point and is convinced by Ignacio and Natalia to continue).

One especially devastating scene is the one in which Tanilo prepares to enter the chapel of the Virgin of Talpa. He binds his arms so that they splay outward and wears a crown of thorns on his head. He attaches nopal leaves to strings that hang down his chest and, as he moves forward on his knees towards the chapel, they sway and prick him. Although there is no music in this shot, it exhibits Tanilo's tremendous efforts to stay alive in the face of almost certain demise. The next shot does feature music as Natalia and Ignacio carry Tanilo with his arms draped over their shoulders into the chapel. The camera follows them as they come in, kneel down, make the sign of cross, and begin to pray. The shot then jumps to a view of the Virgin, all while the music

plays. The camera returns to the trio. Natalia lights a candle and hands it to Tanilo. Ignacio then says in a voiceover that “entonces fue cuando me dio a mí tristeza. Ver a la Virgen allí, mero enfrente de nosotros, dándonos su sonrisa. Y ver por el otro lado a Tanilo, como si fuera un estorbo” (*Los confines*). The camera shows Ignacio gazing up at the statue of the virgin and then turning to look at his brother. Seeing the Virgin, a symbol of Tanilo’s hope, and then looking over at the near-dead Tanilo causes Ignacio to feel sadness. It is the juxtaposition of the two images that causes his grief, and the same contrast is portrayed by the music. The moment they reach the chapel should have been a time of spiritual healing and peace for Tanilo, according to his expectations and hopes. This is symbolized, as I say, by the shot of the image of the Virgin. However, it is precisely this moment when Tanilo’s “miedo de ya no tener remedio” comes to pass. The dirge music signifies the futility of his efforts and the inevitability of his death. It is significant that the instant Tanilo’s candle audibly drops to the floor that the music ends. It no longer needs to signify or presage the inefficacy of his labors, since they have ceased altogether. The drama and poignancy of this moment are created by two opposing forces: Tanilo’s hopeful, desperate attempt to hold on to health and life and the unavoidable fate of illness leading to death. An overarching thesis of the film segment of “Talpa” is that an adverse ending is unavoidable, despite what the characters may think or do. Tanilo’s theme is evidence of this as it underscores the characters’ actions with the despairing effect of the music.

Tanilo’s goal, both in the short story and the film, is to recover from his illness and preserve his life. It is not that any other outcome was impossible besides his death. At the end of his story, however, anything that he had done was in vain. As Solomon notes: “fate involves a peculiar sense of necessity,” (415) and, at the end of the story, there is a sense that Tanilo’s death had to happen. The same applies to Ignacio and Natalia’s outcome. Tanilo’s demise is

inextricably linked to an ultimate inevitability (mortality), as well as being his own personal unhappy ending, dying as he did through illness. Although Ignacio and Natalia's fate at the end of the film segment is not that of death, it is, nonetheless, one of unhappiness and alienation. The hopelessness that the music projects could belong just as much to them as it does to Tanilo since it is the latter's death that crushes them and their love affair with the burden of remorse. Just as Tanilo's anticipation of healing was in vain, Ignacio's justifications of his actions in order to alleviate his guilt are futile. He says: "no podrá tranquilizarnos saber que Tanilo se hubiera muerto de todos modos porque ya le tocaba . . . pues casi es seguro de que se hubiera muerto igual allá que aquí, o quizás tantito después aquí que allá" (*Los confines*). Ignacio observes that Tanilo would have died anyway. Similarly, his love affair with Natalia may have ended no matter what. Often, dalliances flourish only under particular circumstances and, had Tanilo died on his own, they may have separated anyway, driven apart by the grief of losing a husband and a brother.

Whether or not it is useful to speculate about alternative outcomes, it is important to emphasize that the film itself implies the necessity (i.e. inevitability) of both Tanilo's early death from illness as well as the end of Ignacio and Natalia's love affair. The music is an echo of this necessity, an ominous undertone that echoes the fate of the characters. Tanilo's theme is an indirect indicator of the failure of Ignacio and Natalia to form a loving relationship. Just as death imagery in the music points to the fatalistic outcomes of the characters, it is the memory of Tanilo's decomposing body that haunts the narrator in Rulfo's "Talpa" and prevents him from finding peace. He says: "Tal vez los dos tenemos muy cerca el cuerpo de Tanilo, tendido en el petate enrollado; lleno por dentro y por fuera de un hervidero de moscas azules que zumbaban" (59).

There is another character in *Los confines* for whom the music projects an ominous ending: Juvencio Nava. Much like that of Tanilo, Juvencio's eventual fate is a death that is both untimely and greatly resisted. Tanilo's faith turned out to be an illusion and it is Juvencio's nurturing of a fantasy of his own that makes his downfall so hard and heavy. The notion of fatalism in Juvencio's music brings out this tension between the illusion that he harbors and the grim reality that he faces.

Illusion in “¡Diles que no me maten!”

In *Pedro Páramo* Juan Preciado tells Dorotea that it was illusion that brought him to Comala. Dorotea responds: “¿La ilusión? Eso cuesta caro” (64). This fancy leads Juan Preciado to a ghost town and eventually to his death. In the novel it seems that holding on to a dream is not only futile, but dangerous and “costly.” The notion of a dangerous illusion appears in Rulfo's short story “¡Diles que no me maten!” and in the segment of Valdez's *Los confines* that is based on that original narrative. In Rulfo's version, Coronel Terreros claims that Juvencio Nava has been “alimentando su alma podrida con la ilusión de la vida eterna” (96). As a fugitive he has been harboring the hope that he might escape a gruesome conclusion, just as Tanilo maintained the expectation until the end of his life that he would recover from illness. Through a particular piece of music Valdez expresses just how much of an illusion—or delusion—Juvencio's way of thinking is, thus upholding the pervasive concept of fatalism. The musical piece from *Los confines* that I examine appears during the scene in “¡Diles que no me maten!” that shows the funeral of the wife of Guadalupe Terreros who has died of grief after Juvencio Nava murdered her husband.

The music is more scant in the “Diles” section than in “Talpa,” and consists of two distinct themes. One appears in shots that capture Juvencio physically running from law enforcement. The other, which features in only one scene, is the somber music of the funeral sequence, which is the subject of this chapter. Like Tanilo’s theme from the “Talpa” sequence, there is a very slow bass drum beat that strikes every few seconds. A vocalist intones a wordless melody that is simple and melancholy, with a small range of notes in a low octave. There is also the faint sound of a breathy flute. A percussive rattle ebbs and flows in intensity, imbuing the music with a rising and falling movement.

The score’s connection to death is clear, but it relates even more subtly to Juvencio’s demise. The scene begins with a panoramic shot of the funeral attendees. The music starts immediately, setting a dismal tone over an equally dreary cinematographic landscape. The ceremony proceeds and the camera alternates between a wide shot of the setting and a close-up of Guadalupe’s young son. The boy is shown with his younger sister and their nanny, although the camera noticeably focuses on him. The following shot features the young Terreros and the relatives who, as Juvencio indicates in a voiceover, will soon take the children to live with them “muy lejos.” Before the children get in the car to leave they say goodbye to their nanny. They embrace the woman so fiercely that their relatives must pry them away from her. At this point the music swells, reflecting the intensity of emotion on screen. The nanny sobs with grief as they walk away.

This funerary theme connects the past to Juvencio’s current fate. Unlike Tanilo’s destiny in “Talpa,” Juvencio’s conclusion is not fully known until the end of the narrative (in both the film and Rulfo’s short story). The somber piece presages Juvencio’s demise and links his death to Guadalupe’s son. When the film reveals that the shadow ordering Juvencio’s execution is

Guadalupe's son it becomes clear that Juvencio's belief that he might evade execution was an illusion.³ From the very moment that Juvencio killed Guadalupe his fate was sealed. The music brings this fact to light as it is not just the Terreros' deaths that are signified in that scene by sonic imagery, but Juvencio's as well and, by extension, his fate of a violent end.

Through the music and camera work in the funeral scene Valdez emphasizes how Guadalupe's son is affected by the murder of his father. As I discussed previously, bodily demise is symbolic of fate itself, since mortality is mankind's ultimate destiny. The tune played during the Terreros interment signifies death through its instrumentation and composition and it represents, by extension, other unhappy endings. Juvencio's execution is inextricably linked to the archetypal fate of the loss of life while still retaining its personal nature. Of course Juvencio is predestined to die no matter what, as we all are. However, he had hoped and struggled for thirty-five years to die peacefully and unnoticed. He attempted to avoid at all cost the ignominious and terrifying experience of being executed. His anxiety about his sentence is apparent as he begs the coronel not to kill him: "Ya no valgo nada. No tardaré en morirme solito, derregado de viejo. ¡No me mates!" (*Los confines*).

Juvencio was under the illusion that Terreros's children were somewhere "muy lejos" and that they would not exact revenge on him. He counted on their physical distance, the amount of time that had lapsed, and on all that he had sacrificed to evade the law. All of the obstacles that he had put in the path of fate turned out to be illusions. Despite the passage of thirty-five years nothing stands in the way of final justice. Indeed, not even his son Justino is able to intercede for him. Juvencio says, as he looks back with regret, that "no me valieron las diez vacas que di al juez, ni el embargo de mi casa para pagarme la salida de la cárcel" (*Los confines*). Later, when his wife leaves him, Juvencio refuses to go into town to look for her for fear that he will be seen.

Juvencio's tireless desperation devours most of his livelihood, his home, and his marriage and even threatens the safety of his son, whom he is willing to sacrifice on the off chance that his captors will heed Justino's plea not to kill his father.

Neither Valdez nor Rulfo judge Juvencio harshly. The film segment is narrated by Juvencio and is focalized through him so that the audience might sympathize with him. Additionally, the film is clear in suggesting that the livelihood (and therefore the life) of Juvencio is threatened by Guadalupe, a man who should have been willing to offer assistance to his neighbor and godson. When the wealthy man denies him access to his pastures he is issuing a death sentence to Juvencio's cattle and possibly to Juvencio's family. Although he is eventually captured by the law and executed by agents of the government, it is evident in the film that this sentence was not an example of justice without passion. It was revenge on the part of the young Terreros. This eliminates the possibility that Juvencio's fate was one of righteous retribution. A disorganized and corrupt government chooses to forget the crimes of an elderly man who has bribed his way out of execution with everything that he has, until the person in charge happens to be the son of the murdered man. Clearly it was not justice that brought Juvencio to his end.

In Valdez's version of "Diles," as in Rulfo's original story, Juvencio functions as a first-person narrator who looks back on all that has happened in his life. This has the effect of showing us the extremity of Juvencio's desperation and hope and juxtaposing it with his fateful demise. It is this hindsight that shows Juvencio that his years on the run were in vain. He says: "todavía después se pagaron con lo que quedaba no más por no perseguirme, *aunque de todos modos me perseguían*" (*Los confines*; emphasis added). Furthermore, Juvencio's illusion is initially introduced at this moment, since the fugitive thinks that the children are long gone. In Rulfo's version, Juvencio unwittingly identifies his own fatal misjudgment: "por parte de ellos,

no había que tener miedo” (92). The funeral piece indicates that the seeds of revenge and fate take root early in the son’s life and it grounds Juvencio’s situation in a reality of ultimate vengeance that stands in contrast to his illusion. While Juvencio labors under the notion that in his old age he is free from worry about execution, the music shows that, in reality, he has never been free. It is representative of death (the death of several characters) and, therefore, it is symbolic of the horrible fate that Juvencio suffers. The talented actor Ernesto Gómez Cruz portrays Juvencio’s anxious suffering through skillful facial expressions and hand ticks. He shows us that his character never fully accepts his fate, but hangs on to the very end to “alguna esperanza” that he might escape. The music shows us, nonetheless, that his ending was inevitable.

Conclusion

An investigation into the workings of fatalism in *Los confines*, “¡Diles que no me maten!” and “Talpa” reveals underlying pathetic tensions that infuse the works with poignancy and emotion. Valdez utilizes music to elucidate fate as a theme in his film. The two pieces of music examined in this chapter represent death and its inevitability, thus reflecting representations of mortality in the film and stories and illuminating the fatalism that is characteristic of *Los confines*. Death in this symbolic musical form may stand in for other fatalistic outcomes—other unhappy endings that overtake the characters despite their greatest efforts, such as the termination of the love affair between Ignacio and Natalia, as well as the violent aspect of Juvencio’s death. In emphasizing the narrative necessity of the characters’ conclusions through music Valdez captures Rulfo’s emotional gravity.

Fatalism, as seen through representations of death in the film score, exposes the tension between the characters’ futile attempts to alter their fates and the grinding inevitability that is

their end. Through the use of the music Valdez creates pathos by means of the dualities of hope/despair and illusion/stark reality. The outcomes for Rulfo and Valdez's characters are inevitably unhappy: Tanilo and Juvencio die despite their tremendous efforts to stay alive, while Ignacio and Natalia are self-condemned to lives of isolation and loneliness. The musical themes that I examine here demonstrate that the drama in the film depends on emotional tensions and contrasts. The unabashed hope of the characters finds its counter-point in the violence and anguish of the actual outcome of events.

Juvencio's death would not be so poignant if it were not for his frantic hope and desire to continue living. As he is taken away to be executed, Juvencio says in a voiceover: "tiene que haber alguna esperanza. En algún lugar debe quedar alguna esperanza" (*Los confines*). The funerary music indicates that his fate has its origin in events that took place long before his capture. In "Talpa," meanwhile, the audience understands that Tanilo is not only fated to die, but that he dies, in essence, at the hands of his loved ones. He invests all of his anticipation in the Virgin of Talpa; nevertheless, as a symbol of his hope she is out of his reach.

Returning briefly to the motif of muffled prayers and confused chanting found in both the music of the film and in several of Juan Rulfo's works, there is one final quote that demonstrates the beautiful tension between lament and joy that is brought out by fatalism. In the short story version of "Talpa" a priest delivers a sermon to the pilgrims who have arrived at the sacred site. In a passage that illustrates the importance of sound for Rulfo and the capacity of sonic phenomena in conveying pathos, the priest describes the prayers of the ailing who look to the Virgin to find aid: "desde nuestros corazones sale para Ella una súplica igual, envuelta en el dolor. Muchas lamentaciones revueltas con esperanza" (58).

Notes

¹ Robert Solomon does discuss fatalism in reference to the narrative structure of a work of fiction. He calls it “narrative necessity” meaning that the outcome of a particular story or novel has a significant ending that was “fated” to take place. He relates this to human beings operating in the world outside of fiction, suggesting that we impose a narrative onto our own lives in which anything of significance that occurs is said to have “had” to happen for some ultimate purpose (438).

² Friedhelm Schmidt devotes a section of an article to the carnivalesque aspect of Rulfo’s story “Talpa.” This scene is mentioned in particular detail.

³ The realization that the mysterious “coronel” is in fact the younger Terreros is marked by music. It is the same theme that plays in the scene in which Juvencio kills Guadalupe and in another in which a *peón* shoots Juvencio’s cattle. Although I do not examine this piece in the present study it would make for an interesting investigation into the concept of “venganza” in this section of the film.

Conclusion

No se oye sino el silencio que hay

en todas las soledades

El Llano en llamas, "Luvina"

In the opening of his book *El sonido en Rulfo: “el ruido ese”* Julio Estrada offers an anecdote about the experience of reading *El Llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* close to the city of Talalpa. He writes:

A partir de la vivencia del lugar me sorprendía la presencia de rumores incesantes de la realidad, al tiempo que las páginas de mi lectura de Rulfo comunicaban de manera directa con los sitios y, en particular, a causa de las numerosas alusiones de los textos, con todo el ambiente sonoro. (11)

Estrada’s particular attention to the “audible environment” as seen through the pages of Rulfo’s works is an example of how sound can create a distinct space. Rulfo writes of the sounds of his native Jalisco, but these echoes also create narrative space in his fiction. From the *murmillos* of Comala to the *gritería de las ranas* in “Macario,” sound is a device that defines where the characters are and, in many cases, who they are.

The importance of sound in Rulfo is not lost in Mitl Valdez’s *Los confines*. In this study I have examined how the musical score of that film re-appropriates and adapts Rulfian themes, metaphors, and imagery. I have already explored the idea that sonic imagery in the music of *Los confines* echoes themes and metaphors in the adapted texts, thus creating points of contact between Rulfo and Valdez. However, the very process of re-mediation through music is a reverberation of Rulfo’s own techniques. If the essence of Rulfo’s fiction is impossible to pin down, then the most concrete way to determine an adapter’s success may be to compare and analyze the techniques of both creators in constructing unique aesthetic objects that stand alone, but that share common materials. What were the materials that Valdez used and grafted from Rulfo to construct his film? What were his methods and techniques? It was my aim throughout this study to answer these questions by examining the musical score. What I found was that both

artists rely on the use of imagery, whether visual or, in the case of Valdez and for the purposes of this study, aural, to reveal their protagonists and allude to the important themes in the respective works.

“Es difícil aproximarse a Rulfo,” says Mitl Valdez in an interview in *Dicine*, meaning that film adaptations of Juan Rulfo’s works are hard to do (Torres 19). Julio Estrada echoes that idea in a quote that appears in the introduction to this present study: “Una inestabilidad de las imágenes visuales y una permanente abstracción de la realidad –como si fuera música– dificultan la concreción de *Pedro Páramo* en versiones en teatro o filmación cinematográfica. Y sin embargo, casi toda la novela podría ser sólo *escuchada* a través de sus distintas sonoridades” (207). If Rulfo’s texts (including but not limited to *Pedro Páramo*) are “como si fueran música” then it makes sense that a filmic adaptation would include music that represents Rulfo’s works. That is what the film score of *Los confines* does; it transforms imagery, metaphors, and themes from the author’s written word and expresses them musically.

I conclude my analysis of the musical score of *Los confines* in relation to the adapted texts belonging to Juan Rulfo by returning to what seems to be an almost irresistible question for viewers of Rulfian adaptations: as an adapter, how does one get close to Rulfo’s fiction? Is it possible to inhabit Zenzontla and Talpa and Comala and recreate the ephemeral universe of the Jalisco author? This is perhaps a broader question that applies to all subsequent versions of any text where viewers (or readers) are familiar with the prior one. It seems to be in our nature to compare and contrast different variations of a familiar story, and filmic manifestations of Rulfo’s writings are no exception. Although these questions were not central to my investigation, since I chose to focus on the *what* and *how* of *Los confines*, I believe that they lurk behind all

discussions of Valdez's methods and techniques, or for that matter, those of any would-be adapter.

After all, Valdez is first an interpreter of Rulfo, and then a creator (Hutcheon 18). As the filmmaker says in an interview in *Dicine*: “Aunque parezca contradictorio, la figura de Rulfo pesó mucho” implying a tension between the act of interpreting another artist's creation and the act of creating an independent work of art (Torres 19). As I say in the introduction, the words “appropriation” and “salvaging” imply a sort of re-using of the same materials, although the creation itself is new and unique. It should be noted, however, that although *Los confines* stands on its own as an accomplished film, Valdez was far from being a “salvager.” Instead, he skillfully adjusted Rulfo's techniques to make them more cinematically appropriate.

In the introduction I briefly mentioned Veronica Maldonado's review of *Los confines* and how she suggests that Valdez had captured the *atmósfera* of Rulfo's fiction. In fact, Maldonado analyzes Valdez's methods of adaptation and filmmaking and thoroughly treats *Los confines*, as Linda Hutcheon says, as “an aesthetic object in (its) own right” (6). Her review shows us where further research into *Los confines* could go; namely with more detailed analysis of other filmic techniques besides music. But the combination of an assessment of the proximity to the Rulfian original (Hutcheon might call it a judgment of fidelity), and an examination of Valdez's filmic techniques show that the questions, “what?” “how?” and “is it faithful?” often go hand in hand.

One of Hutcheon's assertions is that, in order to be successful, an interpreter/creator should take the adapted work and make it his or her own. “Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations,” she notes, “is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous” (20). I believe that in order to succeed as an adaptation of Rulfo, *Los confines* needs to be a successful film—a

unique creation of its own. And it certainly is that. Valdez puts it succinctly when he says: “mi idea no era hacer una adaptación servil, sino volcar mis preocupaciones cinematográficas” (Torres 19). *Los confines* is autonomous without departing from the adapted version with “falsos lirismos” as other cinematic variations of Rulfo’s fiction have done (Maldonado 24). As a talented filmmaker above all, Valdez uses what he knows of cinema to build a new work with some of the same materials as the adapted texts.

As independently creative as he is, Valdez is deferential to Rulfo. His film seeks to pay homage to the Jaliscoan writer by condensing Rulfo’s works and boiling them down to what the filmmaker considers to be “a mi juicio, los cuentos más importantes de la obra de Rulfo en tanto que expresaban sus aficiones temáticas y su universo con más claridad” (qtd. in Pelayo). This is perhaps one reason for the *Pedro Páramo* episode. Adapting one of the more mythic scenes from the novel, Valdez sends the *forastero* from the archetypal crossroads, inhabited by the incestuous Adam and Eve-like couple, into a Rulfian underworld populated by some of the author’s most salient characters. In the final scene of the film the *forastero* asks about the nature of the couple’s relationship, to which the brother responds that he should not interfere. There is a close-up shot of the stranger who looks straight into the camera and says: “Yo lo decía en plan de entendimiento, no por otra cosa.” Like an everyman struggling to comprehend reality, the *forastero* is confronted with the question “¿qué entiende usted?” (*Los confines*). The episode encapsulates some of the writer’s most important themes and goes so far as to challenge our understanding as readers of Rulfo’s narratives and viewers of Valdez’s film.

Other adaptations have not been so successful and there are perhaps many reasons for that, which I will not explore in depth here. Jorge Ayala Blanco writes that filmic adaptations of Rulfo’s texts up to that point had been “mediocre y serviles, cuando no grotescas o muy alejadas

versiones de sus obras narrativas” (11).¹ In the 1956 film *Talpa* (dir. Alfredo B. Crevena), for example, the only remnants of Rulfo’s original story are some bare-bones plot similarities. It is a film apart from most characteristics of Rulfo’s works and perhaps has more in common with other movies of that era than with the author’s fiction. Valdez resists the trappings of some other Rulfo adapters by being neither “servile” nor “muy alejado” from Rulfo’s art.

What Valdez does achieve with the film score is the creation of a psychic space for his characters. In the segment “Talpa” it is that of an infernal temporality, which has its victims suspended and unable to move forward or backward. In “¡Diles que no me maten!” Juvencio’s fate is foretold in a gloomy theme, indicating the futility of his run from the law and making his efforts seem that much more desperate and poignant. The music conveys underlying and even unconscious aspects of the characters and so much of its role in this capacity is to create spaces for them: ones that they inhabit and psychic ones that they create for themselves. As Verónica Maldonado notes, the music contains a “sabio eco de la eternidad” (24). In the “Talpa” segment the music is omnipresent. In “Diles” it foretells future events. In the final segment of the film it reflects the ethereal presence of the incestuous siblings and the mysterious *forastero*. Ultimately, in the last shot of the film the music is a disembodied voice that echoes in the empty, ruinous room while we as viewers contemplate the question: “¿qué entiende usted?”

Note

¹ Jorge Ayala Blanco notes two exceptions to the mediocrity of Rulfo adaptations before 1980: *El despojo* and *La fórmula secreta*. Douglas J. Weatherford suggests that Carlos Velo's *Pedro Páramo* (1966) "no es tan pobre como han sugerido algunos" (70). Other sources of critical studies of Juan Rulfo film adaptations include, "'Texto para cine'" by Douglas J. Weatherford, *Juan Rulfo y el cine* by Gabriela Yanes Gómez, and an article on the Juan Rulfo home page hosted by the Fundación Juan Rulfo, also by Weatherford, entitled "Juan Rulfo y el cine."

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