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Literature

The dying condition of the Luvina region.

La condición agonizante de la región de Luvina.

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Abstract:
Juan Rulfo maintains that writing the short story "Luvina" gave him the key to entering the strange atmosphere that characterises his novel *Pedro Páramo*. The novel's dark atmosphere is related to the mysterious region of death, symbolised by the village of Comala, as well as the gloomy characters in the work. This article discusses how writing "Luvina" may have allowed Rulfo to delve into the strange and sinister atmosphere of the novel. It is proposed that the story presents strange settings, characters, and events that allow for a reading with sinister connotations; that is, "Luvina" represents a dying region that is close to the dimension of death embodied in the ghostly Comala.

Keywords: Agony. Death. Mist. Estrangement.

Resumen:
Juan Rulfo sostiene que la redacción del cuento "Luvina" le dio la clave para entrar en esa atmósfera rara que caracteriza su novel *Pedro Páramo*. La atmósfera oscura de la novela se relaciona con la misteriosa región de muerte, simbolizada en el pueblo de Comala, al igual que con los personajes lúgubres de la obra. Este artículo aborda un sentido en que la escritura de "Luvina" pudo permitirle a Rulfo adentrarse en esa atmósfera rara y siniestra de la novela. Se propone que el cuento presenta escenarios, personajes y sucesos extraños que permiten una lectura de connotaciones siniestras; es decir, "Luvina" representa una región moribunda que es próxima a la dimensión de muerte encarnada en la fantasmal Comala.

Palabras clave: Agonía. Muerte. Bruma. Extrañamiento.

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[…] it is not my eyes' fault that everything seems faded to me. On the contrary, a nefarious fate has cast a murky blanket of clouds over my life, and perhaps only death will dispel it.

E.T.W. Hoffmann.

Introduction

Juan Rulfo considers the short story "Luvina" to be one of the closest to *Pedro Páramo* because its writing allowed him to delve into the sinister world of Comala. The Jalisco writer states that he wrote the stories as an exercise to find the language and atmosphere of the novel. For a period of ten years, Rulfo meditated and conceived certain key elements of *Pedro Páramo* before its publication. The idea for the work, the characters, and the setting had already been conceived, but the atmosphere and mode of speech were still missing. The writing of short stories would serve as preparation for finding those sought-after elements. This writing exercise began in 1945, and in July, "Nos han dado la tierra" was published in issue 2 of *Pan. Revista de Literatura*. A month later, in August, the story also appeared in issue 42 of the magazine *América* (*cf.* López, 1996, pp. 505-507).

Rulfo continued to write short stories over the following years and between 1945 and 1951 he published six more stories in *América* magazine, including "Es que somos muy pobres" (We Are Very Poor), "El llano en llamas" (The Burning Plain) and "Diles que no me maten" (Tell Them Not to Kill Me). In September 1952, he joined the Mexican Writers' Centre as a fellow and wrote eight more short stories, including "Luvina" and "No oyes ladrar los perros" (You Can't Hear the Dogs Barking). The fifteen stories were published in September 1953 in a collection entitled *El llano en llamas* (The Burning Plain). That same year, he returned to the Mexican Writers' Centre on a scholarship and wrote his famous *Pedro Páramo*, which was published in March 1955 (*cf.* López, 1996, pp. 510-512). Thus, nearly a decade passed between the writing of the short stories and the publication of the novel.

Of the collection of short stories, "Luvina" holds a special place, as its writing gave him the key to delving into the strange atmosphere that characterises his novel. The author expresses it as follows: "*El llano en llamas*, in one of the stories, called 'Luvina', was more of an exercise in entering a world that was a bit like that, sombre, sinister even, with the strange atmosphere of *Pedro Pára*mo"

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(Rulfo, 2017, p. 392).[1] The novel's strange atmosphere is related to the mysterious region of death, symbolised by the ghostly Comala. The inhabitants of this village are sombre figures ranging from active deceased people who talk to each other in their graves and reminisce about their past lives, to souls in torment who wander the streets of Comala, to a few residents who still seem to live there.

This article explores one way in which the short story "Luvina" may have allowed Rulfo to delve into the novel's strange and sinister atmosphere. It is proposed that the short story presents strange settings, characters, and events that allow for a reading with sinister connotations. "Luvina" is about a dying region adjacent to the dimension of death that is Comala. The story offers a representation of a disturbing aspect of human existence, namely, the condition of agony. The elements that make it possible to read it from this perspective are: the desolation of the natural environment, the gloomy character of its inhabitants, a grey mist covering the horizon, and a disturbance of the sense of time and space that occurs in the area.

The strange atmosphere of Comala

The sinister and dark environment of *Pedro Páramo* stems from the particular condition of the characters in the work and the strange dimension in which they find themselves and from which they speak. The inhabitants of Comala are buried dead who converse with each other in their graves or speak aloud, reminiscing about their past lives. The dead do not lie inert in their graves, but are active beings who wake up, move, complain, speak aloud and converse with each other. The novel begins with a narration by Juan Preciado that seems to address us as readers, but then we discover with astonishment and horror that it is actually addressed to Dorotea *la Cuarraca*, his grave mate. Juan Preciado is dead and his body is buried next to Dorotea's in the same grave. The two deceased converse with each other, reminisce about their past lives and try to enjoy themselves, because they know they are going to be "[...] buried for a long time" (Rulfo, 2005b, p. 65). Their conversation is suddenly interrupted by a voice coming from a nearby grave. It is Susana San Juan, who recalls aloud the death of her mother and her wake, which no one attended. Susana is also aware that she is dead and that she is buried in a black coffin and not in her mother's bed, as she initially begins to recall.

[1]See also the interviews: 'Juan Rulfo: Literature is a lie that tells the truth. A conversation with Ernesto González Bermejo' and 'Juan Rulfo. Inframundo. Sylvia Fuentes', in Fell, Claude (ed.) (1996). *Juan Rulfo. Complete Works*, Mexico: Archives/UNESCO, pp. 462 and 474, respectively.

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But the residents of Comala are not only active dead in their graves, they are also souls in torment who wander the streets of the town in search of living beings to intercede for them. The deceased Dorotea confesses that her soul must be wandering the world in search of someone to pray for her salvation, but that no longer concerns her because the grave where her body rests represents Heaven itself for her. When Juan Preciado arrives in the region of Comala, the many encounters he has are precisely with souls in torment. The first of these is with Abundio the mule driver, whom he meets at the crossroads of Los Encuentros. Jean Chevalier (1999) states that crossroads are places conducive to "[...] the passage from one world to another, from one life to another, or from life to death" (p. 446). Juan waited, disoriented, at the crossroads, not knowing which direction to take to get to Comala. The mule driver suddenly appears, as if out of nowhere, and tells him that he is going in that direction, so he ends up being his guide. Carlos Fuentes argues that the mule driver plays the role of Charon by leading Preciado to the afterlife, represented by the ghostly Comala (*cf.* Fuentes, 2010, p. 253).

Before saying goodbye, Abundio recommends that Preciado find lodging at Eduviges Dyada's inn. The innkeeper welcomes him and puts him up in a completely empty room. The woman tells him that she only just found out about his visit and therefore did not have time to prepare the room properly. She tells him that her mother and she were very close friends when they were young and had made a promise to die together so they could be together. She also confesses that she was about to become his mother when she replaced Doloritas on her wedding night. The young man listens, overwhelmed, to everything this woman with a transparent face and veiled gaze tells him. But at one point in the conversation, she asks him if he has ever heard the moan of a dead person, to which he replies no. "You'd better not, son. You'd better," she replies (Rulfo, 2005b, p. 35). Juan does not appreciate this warning and has the misfortune of hearing the terrifying scream of Toribio Aldrete, the hanged man. Fulgor Sedano murdered him and left his body hanging in that very room. In that moment of horror and despair, someone suddenly enters the room: it is Damiana Cisneros, the forewoman of the Media Luna.

Damiana invites him to sleep at the hacienda, and as they walk through the streets towards it, she reveals something sinister about Comala. "This town is full of echoes. It's as if they were trapped in the hollows of the walls or under the stones" (p. 44). She tells him that sometimes you can hear footsteps behind you without anyone walking, or the rustling of leaves in the wind where there

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are no trees. Preciado asks her how she found him and if she is alive, at which point Damiana Cisneros simply vanishes. Juan shouts her name and the empty streets echo his own voice. However, his cries are heard by the gloomy inhabitants of the town. Suddenly, barking, voices, noises, songs and rumours can be heard everywhere. The residents of Comala seem to awaken with the young man's vital presence. Around one corner, two young girls can be heard talking about a certain Filoteo Aréchiga. Around another, a man tries to convince his girlfriend Chona to leave her father and run away with him. Further away, distant songs can be heard. But the young man not only hears voices and noises, he also sees shadows appearing in front of him. He sees empty carts pulled by oxen and men walking as if asleep. "And the shadows. The echo of the shadows" (p.50). All this spectral turmoil happens suddenly in the abandoned village of Comala.

Juan Preciado is on the verge of collapse when he feels someone touch his shoulder and hears a voice inviting him into a house: it is the enigmatic couple Donis and his sister. Preciado's encounter with the brother-husband and wife is particularly mysterious (*cf.* Bárcenas, 2019, pp. 616-620). Their presence suggests that Comala is not populated solely by buried bodies and souls in torment. It seems that some people still live there, such as Filomeno, Melquíades and old Prudencio. The siblings welcome Juan Preciado into their home, a house with half the roof collapsed,[2] where the young man can sleep, talk to people and eat some of the food they offer him. The woman confesses that they are brother-husbands and that she does not go out on the street out of shame, as her face is stained by sin. But when he looks closely, all he sees is a normal face like any other. Later, Donis goes out on the street in search of a wild sheep, and Juan is left alone with the sister. Night falls and Donis does not return, so the young woman invites him to sleep in her bed. At first Juan resists, but soon he accepts and lies down with her. The couple is asleep when, at the stroke of midnight, a disturbing event takes place. The heat and sweat wake Preciado, and he notices that the woman next to him is melting into mud, as if her body were made of earth and the moisture from his sweat were dissolving it. This event takes his breath away, and he gradually loses his breath until he suffocates to death. Juan describes it as follows:

[2] Georg R. Freeman highlights the biblical connotations of the brothers/husbands; their nakedness and loneliness, representing the primal state of Adam and Eve, and the semi-ruined state of the dwelling, symbolising the fall from grace of humankind (*cf*. Freeman, 1974, pp. 68-71).

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> I had to suck in the same air that came out of my mouth, stopping it with my hands before it left. I felt it coming and going, less and less, until it became so thin that it slipped through my fingers forever. (p. 61).

Suddenly, Preciado's narration is interrupted by a voice that questions what he is saying. "–Are you trying to make me believe that suffocation killed you, Juan Preciado?" (p. 62). It is the voice of his grave mate, Dorotea, who reminds him that she and Donis found him lying in the town square, stiff and cramped, as those who die of fear end up. Faced with this accusation, Preciado admits that he did not die of suffocation but of fear, a fear that had been building up since his arrival in Comala until his encounter with the horde of spectral whispers that besieged him to death. "It's true, Dorotea. The whispers killed me" (p. 62). The young man travelled to Comala to die there in place of his mother Doloritas. His mother, who lived a long time longing to return to her beloved village, that idyllic place of her memories with the scent of orange blossom and the smells of alfalfa, honey and baked bread. "A village that smells of spilled honey..." (p. 21). When Juan Preciado arrives in Comala, he does not find the paradise of his mother's memories, but instead encounters a hellish place: a village devastated by violence and the atrocious rancour of the landowner *Pedro Páramo*.

Luvina, a dying region

The novel introduces us to this dark dimension of death, symbolised by the village of Comala. The inhabitants are the living dead in their graves, souls in torment who wander the world, and some shadow beings who still seem to live in the village. The novel's strange atmosphere is linked both to the bizarre region of death that is Comala and to its gloomy inhabitants. Rulfo states that writing "Luvina" gave him the key to entering the sombre environment of Comala, so the story is particularly close to *Pedro Páramo*. This closeness is due to the fact that the short story represents a condition of human existence close to death: the state of agony. "Luvina" is about a desolate and dying region in which certain sinister elements predominate, such as the devastation of the natural environment, the gloomy condition of its inhabitants, a mist that constantly veils the horizon, and a certain disturbance of the sense of time and space.

The narrator of the story is a teacher who seems to be sharing his experiences with another person who is about to leave for that place. The first line of the story reveals the geographical location

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of Luvina. "Of the high hills of the south, Luvina is the highest and most rocky" (Rulfo, 2005a, p. 99). The opening statement reveals an undefined spatial position, in which it is unclear which hills in the south are being referred to. Throughout the story, the imprecise location of the region remains. In addition to the indeterminate geography, access to Luvina is complicated because it is located in a remote and elevated area, with steep and rocky terrain. The teacher recounts that the first time he went to Luvina, he had to hire a mule driver to take him and his family there. The mule driver, like Abundio, acts here as a guide who leads the teacher to a distant and strange region. But as soon as they arrive in the village of Luvina, the mule driver hurries to leave, without letting his animals rest for a moment. The man explains that they would suffer further damage there, and he leaves hastily with his animals "[...] as if fleeing from a place possessed by demons" (p. 103).

At first, the professor does not understand what motivates the mule driver's strange behaviour. What he is about to discover is that Luvina is a hostile place, a region where life can barely survive. The difficulty in recognising the nature of the place he has arrived at arouses a feeling of strangeness in the professor. This strangeness is reflected in the question he asks his wife: "What country are we in, Agripina?" (p. 103). One meaning of the concept of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*) is precisely related to the strange and alien. The German word Heimlich refers to the familiar, the known, the domestic; thus, its antonym *Unheimlich* alludes to the strange, the unknown, the alien (*cf.* Freud, 2007, pp. XI-XVII). "*Unheimlich* is something disturbing, which provokes atrocious terror; to feel *unheimlich* is to feel uncomfortable" (Trías, 2006, p. 45). The confusion that overwhelms the professor when he arrives in Luvina is linked to this sense of the uncanny. The feeling of strangeness arises not only from the fact of arriving in a desolate and abandoned place, but also from the suspicion of finding oneself in a dimension that is hostile to life and close to death. The region of Luvina seems to symbolise the condition of agony; that grey threshold adjacent to death.

One feature of Luvina's agonising condition is the desolation of the natural environment. The region is made up of rocky, dusty hills, devoid of vegetation on their slopes. Not even in the town square is there a tree or bush to give the place a little life. The only plant that sometimes manages to survive in such an adverse environment is the chicalote, but only where there is a little shade between the rocks. In Luvina, it is also impossible to find wild or domesticated animals to feed on. They do not even have the faithful company of dogs, because even these have disappeared. This bleak image of Luvina's natural environment is described by the teacher as follows: "those hills, dull as if they were

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dead" (Rulfo, 2005a, p. 101). It is important to pay attention to the phrase "as if they were dead" because, in effect, the region of Luvina is not a dimension of death like Comala, but it is close to it.

In addition to the desolation of the natural environment, the village of Luvina is in a state of abandonment and extreme poverty. Social institutions are non-existent there. The teacher and his family were unable to find an inn or tavern to stay at and get food. Medical care is non-existent, as is spiritual assistance, since the church is just an empty hut with no doors or images to pray to. The family unit is disintegrated, as only the elderly and single women live in the village. The men leave in search of work to earn a living for those left behind, and the children do the same as soon as they can: "[...] they leap from their mother's breast to the hoe and disappear from Luvina" (p. 107). The men who emigrate have a habit of returning once a year with food for their families. Then the village seems to come back to life a little, with noises and murmurs everywhere, but it soon dies down again when they leave. What Luvina does seem to have is a school, given the very presence of the teacher in the village. But what is the point of a school in a place that is dying of hunger? Perhaps this points to the limitations of José Vasconcelos' educational crusade, summed up in the slogan "alphabet and soap". Teaching the alphabet, the bread of the soul, is meaningless if the body's sustenance is not provided at the same time. With this in mind, Alfonso Reyes proposes expanding Vasconcelos' slogan to: "alphabet, bread and soap" (Reyes, 2005, p. 201).

On the other hand, the region is lashed by a dark gale that blows incessantly at all hours. The wind plays a central role in the story, to the point that it acts as one of the main characters. It is an active agent that imposes conditions on everything else that exists. The gale clings to things as if it had nails and teeth, tearing strips of earth from the worn walls or even carrying away the roof of a house. The strong wind blows incessantly and at all times, from morning until nightfall, to the point that the teacher says it feels "[...] like it is stirring inside us, as if it were shaking the hinges of our very bones" (Rulfo, 2005a, p. 100). The active and constant presence of the wind has led the elders of Luvina to consider it a special inhabitant of the place. On full moon nights, they say it is possible to see it walking through the streets of Luvina, wrapped in its black blanket that it drags behind it. This conception of the wind as an active entity that imposes conditions on everything else and even

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manifests itself visually makes it a more substantial character than the human residents of Luvina themselves.[3]

The brown wind that lashes the region is not the only sinister presence in Luvina. The human beings who inhabit the village are equally sombre figures. The elderly and women subsist in conditions of extreme poverty. Their chronic malnutrition is evident in their frail and weak bodies. The inhabitants resort to chewing dry mesquite husks in an attempt to stave off hunger. The old people of Luvina are sad and dull figures who spend most of the day sitting on their doorsteps, watching the sun rise and set. And when they decide to move, they glide through the streets of the village, clinging to the walls of the houses, like shadows afraid of being swept away by the strong wind. The elderly are not concerned about how the hours and days pass, as they live withdrawn into their inner selves, in that internal reality where time seems not to exist. Nor do they seem to be bothered by the hostile conditions of the region, such as the aridity of the place or the strong winds. In relation to the wind, for example, they endure it with resignation and affirm that: "It lasts as long as it must. It is God's will" (p. 108). But they not only resign themselves to the constant presence of the wind, they even value it positively, saying that it is better this way. The strong wind, they say, keeps the sun at bay and prevents the heat from absorbing the blood and what little water there is in their bodies.

The women of Luvina are also sombre figures. Like the elderly, they suffer from chronic hunger and their bodies are weak and thin; like them, they glide through the streets of the village stealthily, as if they were shadows. The professor does not forget the encounter he had with them on his first night in Luvina, when he had to take shelter with his family in the village church. Most of the time they could not sleep, listening to the strong gale lashing the temple; they lay awake hearing its long howls and the creaking of the mesquite crosses as they were shaken by the gusts of wind. But in the early morning the gale calmed down for a while and there was a deep silence that revealed the immense loneliness of the place. At that moment, the professor heard a strange sound coming from the entrance to the compound, a noise like the flapping of large-winged bats. Intrigued, he headed towards the source of the noise and there he encountered a group of dark figures: they were the

[3] Luis Leal argues that the strong wind in Luvina is what governs the town and its residents [*cf*. Leal, L. (1974) "El cuento de ambiente: 'Luvina', de Juan Rulfo", in Giacoman, H. F., (ed), *Homenaje a Juan Rulfo*, New York: Las Américas Publishing, Co., pp; 91-98].

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women of Luvina. "I saw all the women of Luvina with their jugs on their shoulders, their shawls hanging from their heads, their black figures against the black background of the night" (p. 106). The women go out in groups at dawn in search of water, and after exchanging a few words with the professor, they left into the darkness of the night "as if they were shadows". The women and old men of Luvina are such dull figures that they are characterised more as shadow beings than as living, active people; they are sombre figures who move through the streets of the village day and night.

The misty environment of Luvina

The strong gale that blows in Luvina stirs up the dusty earth and causes the place to be constantly covered in brownish air. The environment in Luvina is always misty, as if a grey veil were hiding the entire horizon. The professor warns his interlocutor: "You will never see a blue sky in Luvina. There, the entire horizon is faded, always clouded by a hazy stain that never disappears. [...] everything is shrouded in an ashen mist" (p. 101). The grey mist that covers the region is oppressive, as it limits vision and robs one of perspective. The loss of vision is sinister because it blurs the contours of ordinary reality. The foggy atmosphere obscures familiar reality, awakening a feeling of strangeness. The professor's unease, as he questions his wife about this strange country they have arrived in, stems largely from the persistent mist. The hazy stain that settles over the region of Luvina, an atmospheric event from a naturalistic perspective, becomes a sinister phenomenon when one considers its ability to veil the ordinary world.

But the foggy environment not only disrupts spatial orientation in Luvina, it also seems to disrupt the sense of time. The lack of perspective is manifested in the inhabitants' reluctance to harbour any kind of expectation for the future, as if the grey mist instils despair in them. In Luvina, time seems to slow down, not only because no one cares to keep track of the passing hours and days, but also because of the monotony and stillness that prevail there. The professor cannot remember how many years he lived there, but he maintains that it must have been an immense amount of time. "The thing is, time is very long there" (p. 106). Life in that place becomes slow and heavy due to the adverse conditions of existence. The desolation of the environment and the perennial grey mist awaken a deep feeling of stagnation, as if time itself were suspended. It is not surprising that the inhabitants of Luvina escape from external reality to find refuge in their inner world. The elders of Luvina are not governed by objective time with its regular measurements, but live withdrawn into

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their inner selves, in that subjective world where one can live as if time did not exist. The elderly let their lives pass by sitting in the doorways of their homes: '[...] watching the sunrise and sunset, nodding their heads up and down, until the springs finally loosen and then everything stands still, timeless, as if one were living forever in eternity' (pp. 106-107).

The passage of time has no meaning in a place where stillness and monotony persist, in an area where a grey wind always blows, blurring the horizon and stealing perspective. The passing of time has no meaning in a region where only the strong gale that blows constantly or the deep silence that dwells in solitude can be heard. The succession of hours and days has no place for those old people who are tired and disenchanted with life, and whose only hope is the arrival of their own death. "Only day and night until the day of death, which for them is a hope" (p. 106). In Luvina, a dying region, the hour of death is still presented as a last hope, a strange expectation that the prolonged suffering of this life will cease and give way to a different way of being. In Comala, a gloomy region, this hope no longer exists, as death only ushers in other forms of suffering. The souls in torment who lament their sins and wander the streets of the town in search of a living being to intercede for them are a good example of this.

The possibility that Luvina's perception of space and time is disrupted is important because this would represent a point of proximity to Comala. The disturbance of the sense of time and space would be a good indicator that we are dealing with a dimension that distances itself from life and approaches death. The misty environment can be conceived as a sign of Luvina's dying condition; as an evocation of the indistinct, as "[...] the transitional period between two states" (Chevalier, 1999, p. 752). In the throes of death, one suffers the dissolution of the contours of the familiar world. In the novel *Pedro Páramo*, we read about the fatal accident of the landowner's s . Miguel was riding to Contla to see his girlfriend when, in an attempt to jump over a stone wall, he fell from his horse and died. The young man's soul visits Eduviges Dyada, who possesses a gift or a curse: a sixth sense that allows her to communicate with the dead. Miguel confides in her about a strange event that has just happened to him. He tells her that after jumping the stone wall, he continued riding towards Contla, but no matter how far he rode in that direction, he could not find the village. "I lost the village. There was a lot of fog or smoke or I don't know what, but I know that Contla does not exist. I went further than I thought I should, and I found nothing" (Rulfo, 2005b, p. 25). The young man confesses that he has come to her to tell her about this strange event because he knows that she will not judge him as

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crazy, as everyone else would. After listening to his story, the woman replies that he is not crazy, but that he is dead.

The presence of fog in Miguel Páramo's story is significant. In the story, the greyish wind that settles over Luvina blurs the contours of the horizon, but does not completely hide the surrounding world. The grey mist disturbs the perspective without completely suppressing it because Luvina is a dying region, not a dimension of death. In the novel, on the other hand, the smoke or mist that the young Páramo encounters completely hides the world from him. The fog that prevents him from reaching the village of Contla symbolises the dissolution of the world of the living and the consequent entry into the dimension of the dead. In his version of death by drowning, Juan Preciado says he felt himself lost in a whirlpool of foamy clouds. "I remember seeing something like foamy clouds swirling above my head and then rinsing me with that foam and losing myself in its cloudiness. That was the last thing I saw" (p. 61).

In the trance of dying, what the soul suffers when it separates from the body is absolute disorientation, in the sense of a total loss of time and space. The soul ceases to be in this world, to be in the here and now, because it separates from that which binds it to it, namely, the body. But no longer anchored to this mundane reality, the soul is no longer subject to space-time conditioning. This is what Juan Rulfo refers to when he argues that "[...] the dead have neither time nor space" (Sommers, 1974, p. 19). The dead are no longer governed by time and space, and for this reason, souls in torment can appear and disappear mysteriously and suddenly. This would explain, at least in part, the manifestation of such strange events in the region of Comala, such as hearing footsteps behind you without anyone walking nearby or hearing dogs barking without any dogs being present.

In conclusion

Luvina is a region full of suffering and despair; it is a place where sadness lurks and there is no room for smiles; it is a purgatory where people suffer torment without transcendence or redemption. The inhabitants of this village endure the hostile living conditions with resignation and limit themselves to surviving without any expectations. Luvina is a dying village where existence becomes slow and heavy. The teacher who spent a long time in that hellish place was deeply affected by that atrocious experience. At the end of the story, the teacher suddenly stops his narration about Luvina and, now drunk, stares intently at a fixed point on the table. There he finds some termites writhing with their

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wings singed after crashing into the shop's oil lamp. These insects can no longer fly and can only crawl on the table as if they were '[...] naked little worms' (Rulfo, 2005a, p. 107). The man seems to recognise himself in these little worms because he too has lost his wings; he has lost his zest for life after spending years in Luvina and suffering first-hand the harshness of this dying region. The experience of living in that agonising place consumed his own vitality, and now all he can do is follow the example of the elders of Luvina: retreat into his inner world, where he can live as if outside of time.

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