

# Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También*. Entertainment to nurture reflection and social context

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## Abstract

This Mexican road movie uses a comical-dramatic style to demonstrate, by way of an irreverent, amusing storyline, the nation's social fabric, with three characters' journey. Elitist society's ambivalent lifestyle is harshly critiqued, and its contempt for the norms is questioned. This is emphasized in the chronicle of two young men's journey of self-discovery, and is contrasted with the escape of a middle-aged woman in the midst of the same road.

**Key words:** Road movie; Cinema; Comedy; Youths.

Alfonso Cuarón, the director of this *road movie* presents the story, complete with unhurried introductions. Demonstrating a lack of moral obligations, he decisively introduces his protagonists, who have exuberant, shameless sex lives. At the time of its release, the movie was censored for non-adult audiences. However, it had originally been directed toward both adults and adolescents. The opening explicit on-screen sex scene provokes the audience, whose reactions range from inspiration to indignance.

*Y Tu Mamá también* was released in 2001. Tonally, it may be considered a drama with comical elements, which critically reconstruct a specific context found in the social fabric of Mexico. By way of a creative text, natural staging, symbolic strength, a fluid and linear series of events, camera positioning as a witness to all events, and an omniscient narrator, both the characters' conflict and conditions are reconstructed in detail.

The story begins with two young Mexican men, Julio and Tenosh. Although they come from different social classes, they share in their adolescence and affective inexperience. The staggering camera work portrays their personalities and daily activities in such a way that reveals their naked souls.

Alfonso Cuarón, the director of the new release, *Roma*, harshly criticizes Mexican social classism in this film by highlighting the ambivalence of the disparate lifestyles present within the same society. Via opulent scenes and behaviors, and against a backdrop of the indigenous working class, situations characteristic of Mexico unfold, removed from the protagonists' lives.

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Days after a party organized by Tenosh's family, the two characters meet the third protagonist, Luisa, a Spanish woman aggrieved by the emotional baggage she drags with her. Socio-behavioral contrasts are outlined not only between their classes, but also their age ranges.

Further, the omniscient narration reveals details that would otherwise be unclear to the audience. It provides clues to a puzzle, solved with a simple frequency, omitting the need to resort to anachronistic time. This enables the audience to concentrate on the details offered by the narrator. This works to the film's advantage, given that the aforementioned narrative technique effectively highlights significant moments in the film, such as the chicken truck accident that had occurred ten years prior, the danger of the curves on the road, and Tenosh's memory of his nanny. Without this resource, they would likely have passed unperceived by the audience.

Several notable elements establish an intertextual relationship between *Y tú mamá también* and *Roma*. Among these is the nanny, a fundamental figure for the director, inspired by Liboria Rodríguez, who cared for Cuarón during his childhood. While she is not directly mentioned in his movies, she is embodied in the woman who cared for Tenosh, who appears in his memory and comes to mind when he sees a sign for his home town: "Tepelmeme and the story of Cleo". Another coincidental element is the militarized context in which both movies are set, in which youth mobilization protests seek to "...demand the respect for civil rights and drive the governmental system toward the search for peace". The characters in question want the voice of the people to be heard, in order to promote real change.

The trip operates as an adventure motivated by possibility, especially that Julio and Tenosh, might have sexual relations with Luisa. She wants one last adventure, and after receiving sad news, becomes complicit to their desires. The trip becomes a metaphor for the speed of life. This mirrors the way in which we unwittingly reach unimagined destinations, such as "Boca del Cielo". In the midst of the story, said destination came to life.

A key feature of the trip is the distance between the characters and the events that occur nearby. They move forward, removed from the environment, making a movie of reality, as seen through the windshield, which also serves as a shield. On a road traveled at high speed, everything is scenery. One's gaze becomes fixed, and the destination is the sole focus. The trip itself seems to be an undesired means to this end.

The majority of those encountered on the trip are portrayed as separate from the protagonists inside the vehicle, reflecting a fractured social reality. The world is portrayed as a cruel place, in which the most vulnerable social classes are at the greatest risk. Problems that reflect the Mexican cultural and religious reality are woven together as the characters travel to the coast. Tension between Julio, Tenosh, and Lucía increases by the kilometer, as a result of confessions that are brought to light on the road. The *manifiesto de charolastras*, a list of guidelines created by the friends, is ultimately violated in interacting with Lucía, revealing their human weakness.

The body plays a central role in this film. There is no fear that cannot be undressed to reveal its nature, imperfections, and needs. The soul is revealed in the naked body. The film's

reference to Michelangelo's *David* allegorizes the importance of the body, both for the author and the seventh art.

At the end of the story, a change of course occurs, as if there had been a sudden turn in the road. The comical tone fades to a dramatic ending. After a joke that suggested that one of the characters had "fucked" the other's mother, it is revealed that Luisa died of cancer one year after the trip to the coast. All of the hints supplied by the director, throughout the story, merge to stun the audience. During the trip, one is seduced by speed, and pays insufficient attention.

Technically speaking, Cuarón seeks to project to intimacy to the audience, via a faint range of colors and oscillating camera movements that seem to move to a pulse, lending a more personal character. As the camera seems to pass unperceived by the actors, the aura is generated insinuates its natural placement, meant to follow their every move.

At the end, it seems that the trip alludes to life itself, with its highs and lows, decisions, betrayals, happiness, suffering, and indifference to the world that surrounds us, with the marvelous people that we find along the way, whose stories both move and startle us, while privately, we carry our own baggage and secrets. Nevertheless, we advance toward the coast, toward the immense blue sea, in search of our freedom, to leave this road, this physical vehicle, and the windows that are our eyes, which enable us to appreciate the world. Ultimately, with all of the potholes in the road, just like Luisa, we will turn to foam and surrender ourselves to the sea of eternity.

## Filmography

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