

# Cinema, Media and Society: The Trilogy of Life by Alejandro González Iñárritu

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## Abstract

This article intends to analyze three works of Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, pieces of his Trilogy of Life: Amores Perros (2000), 21 Grams (2003) and Babel (2006). The goal is to highlight and mark a kind of character in each one of the films, considering as a criterion the focus on masculine characters, given the situation of the lacking specific main characters in the entire trilogy. The methodology used is narratology. This essay aims to explain the complex world of this trilogy, analyse characters and key issues, in order to understand the perspective of the director and his objectives when he created this trilogy.



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## Introduction

This present work intends to analyze narratological aspects of three works from filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores Perros* (2000), *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006). The choice was motivated by the fact that all three share the same content of restlessness. Together, these films form the Trilogy of Life, a name given by the director himself. However, due to the tragic and arduous theme of the three, the films are known by the critics and the public itself as “the Trilogy of Chaos, or even of death, or pain”. (Motta, 2013). Why such disparate visions? For the filmmaker, the pain is relentless in life (Iñárritu, 2015), although he admits his fascination with death, he reaffirms that his films are about life, including the actual trilogy. “I think that I link to explore the sorrow of death, explore the observation of death. My films don’t revolve around death, but around life, the contingencies of life.” (Iñárritu, 2011). For the director, the pain is contained in life and the inevitability of death helps to define it. This concept is present in many of his films, but more directly exposed in the Trilogy of Life. The objective of this study is to highlight and analyze a kind of character in each one of the film’s trilogy, both on its role in the narrative and on its characteristics. Given the fact that the films at hand don’t have identifiable main characters, the criteria of choice will be outlined afterward. The methodology used is narratology.

## A brief biography of Alejandro Iñárritu

The Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu was born in the City of Mexico on August 15, 1963. When he had between seventeen and nineteen years, he traveled the world in a cargo ship, getting to know many countries. Later, his filmography would be hardly influenced by its places, some even becoming locations for his films. After this traveling season, the filmmaker graduated in Communication in the Ibero-American University, and started his career as the head of a radio. In 1984 he became a prestigious DJ in the same station. In 1988 he turned into a director of the radio station and transformed it in Mexico’s Number 1. From 1987 to 1989, Iñárritu focused on his first passion and composed music for six Mexican films. It was during this works that he met his screenwriter collaborator of many films, Guillermo Arriaga. The filmmaker says that the music, even more than cinema itself is his main influence in art. (Augustyn, 2019). Later, in the ’90s, the director created the producer Zeta films with Raul Olvera in Mexico, where he started to direct, produce and write short and publicity films. Soon after he would make his first film for TV, *Behind the Money*, in 1995. His producer later became one of the most prominent of Mexico and has released new filmmakers into the world, even though its own creator only directed his first feature film in 1999, *Amores Perros*, which received international acclaim. The film presented the actor Gael García Bernal, received the Great Critic’s Prize in Cannes and was nominated for Best Foreign Film in the Academy. From then on, the filmmaker has produced other two films with *Amores Perros*’s screenwriter, Guillermo Arriaga, *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006), that would become the Trilogy of Life, gaining other honors for each one of them. In 2009, after a disagreement with Arriaga, the director would produce his films with other screenwriters and even himself could write them. Between 2008 and 2009, the filmmaker directed *Biutiful*, which had a three-hand script, and was nominated for the second time to Best Foreign Film. (Augustyn, 2019). During a period of time, the filmmaker had dedicated himself to shorts, some of a more experimental nature, such as *Naranja* (2012).

In 2014, Iñárritu directed *Birdman*, his first comedy (tragicomic), and received the prize of Best Film in the Oscars, among other prizes, including Best Director. In the same year, the author announces his film *The Revenant*, that arrived on the big screen in 2015, has received three Golden Globes and again the Oscar of Best Director.

The filmmaker is the Latin director of greatest prominence nowadays, at least inside Hollywood, that, in turn, forecasts considerable influences to world cinema. Currently, Alejandro González Iñárritu is the first Mexican filmmaker to be nominated by the Academy to Best Director and by the Directors Association of America to Best Director. This is a noticeable fact, since the scenario of Latin's representation on English-spoken American media is stagnant, or has risen very little, even in acting as well as in-camera (Negrón-Muntaner, 2015). With the titles, Iñárritu has conquered a recent milestone for Latin cinema. "His first film, *Amores Perros* (2000), a Mexican production, has achieved great international recognition, being nominated to Oscar's Best Foreign Film and had won in Cannes for Best Film – Critics Week. The raw theme of *Amores Perros*, which depicts realistic situations, of tension, pain and suffering; the search of corrupted characters for a way of redemption; and the non-linear narrative would become recurring in some of his films, especially *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006), the *Trilogy of Life*." (Negromonte, 2017). These works are representative of a filmmaker in constant transformation and technic maturation. His films are, quintessentially, a statement of the "intensity and timeless inevitability of human's emotions and passions". (Deleyto e Mar Azcona, 2010). Of all the profound emotions, the *Trilogy* allude, on its core, to human suffering. In the words of Iñárritu himself, the pain is part of life: "My theory is that life is the relentless number of losses that we suffer. From the moment we are born until we die, we are losing. We lose our innocence. Lose our hair, our teeth, our health, and then we lose our life. For me, life is how we deal with it, how to transform pain. Because I think that pain must not be appreciated, but it is something that can change. It is a way to be connected with things. It is how nature works. The flower grows and blossoms then dries and dies, and soon it's born again. It is a constant part of life." (Iñárritu, 2015). "In his films, the reality is harsh, raw, frighteningly real, with human degradation being an element always present." (Motta, 2013). The *Trilogy of Life* is defined by the same theme, by the kaleidoscopic characters and his particular stories, that at a given moment meet one another because of a specific accident. In addition to the uniqueness of pain, each film works with one aspect of human existence: "*Amores Perros* is about the unrestrained passion, *21 Grams* is about on loss and *Babel* is upon compassion". (Iñárritu, 2006).

At his works, the filmmaker also addresses the concept of the Chaos Theory, as himself affirms, in one interview about *Babel*: "I thought about exploring the theme in a global scale, after having explored it locally in *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams* the same Chaos theory, and so that I could finalize my trilogy." (Iñárritu, 2006). The Theory of Chaos is based on "the fundamental idea that, in determined systems, small variations on the initial conditions can generate huge variations in the final results". It is about the well-known phenomena "Butterfly Effect". (Marietto, 2011). The narrative of the three films is always non-linear and fragmentary, but, by the end, they have their internal enigmas revealed. (Ferro, 2016). In each film, all the stories have an intrinsic relation, what is explicit by the editing of the film and the concatenation of narratives, and by the concept of Chaos Theory itself. One event unleashes another, and in a certain moment, all the stories are correlated or are associated in an implicit way. In the *Trilogy*, all the stories have a kind of relation, even in some of the cases the characters themselves in parallel narratives get to find each other (*21 Grams* and *Babel*), however, the actions of all affects them mutually. The *Trilogy of Life* was chosen for this analysis because of its relevance for contemporary cinema, its theme unicity, which refers to suffering, similarities of form construction (fragmentary structure and the use of parallel narratives) and the approach adopted by the director (realism).

It is assumed that, as well as in the literature, the narrative cinema is amenable of analysis: there is a variety and different formats on the way of telling a story on screen, but the narrative itself is a process and can be “described”. (Turner, 1999). And a fundamental element of the narrative is the characters, without them there is no story. After all, they can show up in multiple ways possible, as anthropomorphic, humans or Inhumans, in profusion or single.

The aim of this article is to research specifically the means of a character in each film, its characterization, function in the narrative, according to the proposal of Chatman (Cardoso, 2016). In the Trilogy of Life, there is a particular absence of a defined main character. There are multi protagonists, a phenomenon of the coral cinema or multiplot films, defined by Lipovetsky and Cherroy (2011): “it isn’t told one story, but two, three, ten... through vicissitudes that intertwine characters with very superficial connections with each other”. Each character has the same value to the film’s narrative as a whole, not only for its core in the script. The choice of the character was justified, therefore, by a matter of unicity in the plot, observed in the three films. According to Iñárritu himself, “in my films, I always have attempted to find redemption, a chance of evolution in a different direction” (Iñárritu *apud* Deletayo e Mar Aczona, 2010). It is noticeable the search for relief and freedom by all the characters in the trilogy. However, although their attempts of survival in tragic conditions, there were a few who could achieve some kind of redemption, even if it is limited. The analysis, therefore, sheds light on the latter. For a comparative effect, it was also chosen only male characters. There are female characters that possess other similarities, especially the ones characterized as blondes, but not all of them have in common the benefit of redemption in the narrative. The characters analyzed are El Chivo, from *Amores Perros*, Jack Jordan, from *21 Grams*, and Richard, from *Babel*.

## Analysis

### *Amores Perros*

*Amores Perros* shows an intrinsic relation between the human and dog characters in the story. The film explores Mexican society in the City of Mexico and the narrative is told through three stories that later interconnect. Three characters are transformed over the narrative: Octavio, a teenager, Valéria, a model, Daniel, his boyfriend, and lastly El Chivo, a hitman.

“What unites them all is the presence of dogs, whose behaviors blends with those of human characters. The events initiate as of the moment when a terrible car accident happens, that changes and intertwines their destiny. The narrative, although offers a plausible ending, is not linear, is fragmented and has a high level of realism. The representations of social inequalities are also realistic, [...], there is the constant use of medium shots, close-ups, and American shots, what indicates a preference for the representation of characters; the theme of suffering is addressed in a palpable way, different from the Mexican drama cliché.” (Negromonte, 2017).

The narrative of *Amores Perros* shows only a part of its characters’ lives, but that ends up being decisive to the change of path in their stories. (Costa, 2013). In the film, the characters are somewhat archetypal (the brother against the brother, the vain model, the nihilistic hitman), but, because of the realistic approach of the director, become tangible and plausible.

About the realism of *Amores Perros*, it is convenient to make a delimitation. The kind of realism of this and other film's Trilogy is very specific, as Bordwell defines:

"Certain specific types of realism motivate an imprecision of cause and effect, an episodic construction of the plot and rise of the symbolic dimension of the film, through the fluctuations of character's psychology". (Bordwell, 1985).

In the Trilogy, the films are non-linear and possess an episodic construction, besides their characters being constantly challenged. They search for redemption, an improvement of life, despite their ways of acting are inconstant and, in some cases, even powerless due to the challenges there are attributed to them by the script. This is a characteristic that follows many characters, but the ones that will be analyzed in this work have a particular difference. El Chivo, Jack Jordan and Richard Jones go by an ascendance, even if a relative one and the events of which they are submitted to necessarily make them more mature, what later allows them to a "redeemer" ending on the plot.

### 21 Grams

The title of the film is a reference to an initial citation of itself: it is said that, at the moment of death, the human body loses 21 grams. From here is already possible to recognize the fatalism of the work, that also uses the resource of intertwined stories to build its narrative. The plot is set in an American city, it is told the story of Cristina, a mother and wife, Jack, an ex-convict and evangelical practitioner, and Paul, who fights to get rid of his cardiac problems. A car accident is the catalyst of the changes in these character's lives. Cristina loses her spouse (Michael) and daughters, Jack is the hit-and-run driver, gets very upset, and Paul receives Cristina's spouse heart in a transplant, and become obsessed with the idea of knowing the donor's family. From then on, the characters are intertwined not only by the narrative but by the fact that they encounter and influence themselves mutually, without exceptions, which is already a change when comparing to *Amores Perros*. The characters are more dynamic and possess a greater potential to cause empathy on the public, because of their well-explored dramas and personalities on the script. (Costa, 2013). The car accident, once again the same resource used in *Amores Perros*, is the connector of all the narratives.

"The hitting of Cristina's husband and daughters, in addition, to constitute a common vicissitude for the three characters (and the ones close to them), is the wire that irreversibly connects them, symbolized by Michael's hearth transplanted to Paul's chest." (Costa, 2013).

The narrative, again, is non-linear and uses the resource of three stories that connect with each other. In this film, the formal aspects also are similar of those from *Amores Perros*, with the usage of medium shots, close-ups, and American shots, but it's noticeable preference for close-ups in certain scenes. The intention is to truly demonstrate, with details, the character's expressions and enhance the perceptions of emotions by the public, which, together with the characters deepening, helps to generate empathy regarding them.

"Another important observation in 21 Grams is the separation between the disturbance showed on the group (reinforcing aspects of an adventurous epic, typical of crime films, with its journeys of persecution and punishment) with moments of contemplation in closed shots, reinforcing, with great intensity, the sorrow in suffering faces (Jack, on his prayers and punishing cries; Cristina, in drugs consumption; Paul, in his circumstantial difficulty of locomotion or enquiry of the world surrounding him)." (Coração, 2012);

In other words, in *21 Grams*, the feature of close-ups is used not only to intensify the character's reactions but to also cause a contrast effect with the other filmic formal choices, more generalists and accelerated. This characteristic makes the narrative more dynamic and optimizes the dramatic moments.

### *Babel*

*Babel* is the last film of *Trilogy of Life* and also its most multicultural one. Filmed in many countries and spoken in several languages, deserves its name and uses of its character's nationalities to, once more, intertwined stories. This time, Iñárritu chooses to address the impersonality (Vasques, 2018), so distinctive of post-modern times, and how it exhibits itself in different cultures, affecting us all.

"*Babel*, the title, is a clear reference to the Babel tower described in the Bible. The film has a central theme the communication problems between people who speak different languages, that are part of diverse cultures, and also between those who speak the same idiom, but cannot understand each other. The events occur as of a shot done by a Marroquin with a rifle, donated by a Japanese, that fires an American, whose children are with care of a Mexican woman. From then on, many characters are revealed and their stories interlock. Once again, there is a non-linear narrative, fragmentary, also realistic. The character's drama is approached also in a realistic manner.

There is constant usage of medium shots, close-ups, and American shots, but it can also be perceived more general shots, that, not only gives emphasis on the characters but highlights the scenery, what reinforces the multiplicity of the locations filmed. There is a continuity of the suffering theme. [...] *Babel* talks, after all, of intolerance, dehumanization of people's relations." (Negromonte, 2017).

*Babel*, even having in common with the other films of the trilogy the artifice of several narratives intertwined, as well as the non-linearity, presents an evident concession of the director to its form. As himself affirms: "At *Babel* there is a formal style, it seems to me that, inside my trilogy, it is the most linear and chronologic of all, is the easiest in structural terms". (Iñárritu, 2006).

Iñárritu also explains that he continues to explore the Chaos Theory in the last film of his trilogy, but with another point of view. In *Amores Perros* and *21 Grams*, the focus was local, and in *Babel* the idea was always to approach the concept on a global scale. (Iñárritu, 2006). The film puts the human existence as part of a global village, where everything is interconnected, that's why its approach is as personal (in the case of the characters) as well as social. (Domínguez, Blanch e Iglesias, 2010).

And the other difference between the previous films is the reason for the accident that initiates all the other events:

"The violent act that happens in *Babel* has a different nature of the one in *Amores Perros*. Here, the act that causes the accident is the result of the innocence of the boys. As in Amélia's case, that takes the children to the other side of the frontier, a result of ignorance. Therefore, these acts don't originate of evil or a divine decision, of tragedy, in the Greek sense of the word tragedy. In *Babel*, a Japanese gifts his gun to a touristic guide, and that is an act of goodness. More than the accidents are the decisions that determine the characters". (Iñárritu, 2006).

The accident, even though is decisive to the narrative, is not as significant to the character's actions, it is noticeable the elaboration of a "free will" for them. However, when faced with tragedy, many reveal themselves as irrational, a kind of very human reaction (and realist). Some feel the weight of impotence in front of the facts, but the free decision –making process remains.

At last, in *Babel* it seems to be a peculiarity in the narrative: there is an object-protagonist, the rifle. (Vasques, 2018). It is it that is present in the whole film and develops the other situations, in addition to be the common ground of all the story's cores. May it be an intentional choice of the director? It is possible to argue that, in a film about the dehumanization of people's relations, (Negromonte, 2017), an inhuman main character that connects all of the characters is powerful symbolism.

## Characters

The analysis of the characters El Chivo (*Amores Perros*), Jack Jordan (*21 Grams*) and Richard Jones (*Babel*) is according to the proposal of critic Chatman (Cardoso, 2016), that is based upon the following suppositions: the being and acting of the character, information about the character, character-actor relationship and author-character relationship.

a) The being and acting of the character: the character is characterized by its identifiable traits (physical and physiological) and behavioral (its conduct in action). As in the literary field as well as in filmic, the character is defined by this set of facets, being both dynamic or flat. [...] its name contains several outlooks [...] In the filmic text, it is defined by the number and duration of the shots, as well as the amount of dialogue. B) Information about the character: the spectator gets information about the character through the dialogues, the action, the dramatic space, the voice-over of a storyteller, the physical aspect (sex, age, ethnicity, etc), specific characterization (make-up, clothing), the voice timbre and performance (which includes movements and gestures). C) Character-actor relationship: [the filmic character] establishes always a dialogue, most of the times a complex one, with the real actor. In reality, a very remarkable character, with an almost mythic outline, like Ulysses, or the Superman, can ineradicably define the career of an actor, who, in a way, may have it associated with, almost eternally. [...] But the opposite also happens: the actor is remembered, but not so much the character that he/she performs. D) Character-author relationship: in the literary universe, the character is the result of a creation of the author that instills on its values, ideologies or principles (personal or epochal), but there are also characters that do not reflect in an immediate way, or at all, the characteristics of its creators. Similar premise governs cinema. Often the so-called 'author's Cinema' explicitly identifies copyright concepts with the characters of the film [...] A character can still maintain certain characteristics that typify it, even if it is interpreted by different actors [...]. " (Cardoso, 2016)

For this analysis, we intend to investigate all these relationships, except the author-character, whose representation is not relevant in this excerpt of the *Trilogy of Life*. None of the three characters of the chosen scope illustrates specifically the values or ideologies of the authors, both of the director Iñárritu and the writer Arriaga. Nor do the characters in question identify copyright concepts, as they are interpreted only by an actor. Therefore, this study refers to the three other aforementioned relations.

### El Chivo, from *Amores Perros*

El Chivo is a former-university, current indigent, and a hitman. He takes advantage of the car accident, catalyst event of *Amores Perros*, to steal, lives surrounded by dogs and sponsor another dog that finds in the street, in the situation of the accident. He lives in an unhealthy environment and has a history of disbelief in the world, have moved away from his family and daughter. One day, El Chivo comes home and realizes that the new dog, Cofi, killed everyone around it. This is the beginning of a greater affinity between them and a moment of epiphany and self-criticism. At another time, El Chivo gives up his service, instead of killing, only kidnaps the victim and in an ironic dialogue informs her who commissioned her death. When he found out it was his own brother, the victim turns desperate. Subsequently, events triggered by El Chivo lead to the meeting of the executioner with his brother, imprisoned, and the now ex-hitman intends to put them side by side, trapped, next to a revolver. The next act of El Chivo is to modify his appearance, take more care of himself and break into his daughter's house, to take a photograph. Later, he comes back into his daughter's house, sneakingly, with the adapted photograph, now also containing his photo, money, and a recorded promise of being able to meet her at some point in his life. El Chivo is an older man, marked by life, with a beggar's appearance because he looks dirty and has a long, tangled beard. According to Costa (2013), its visual characterization is carefully thought to cause distemper in the public: The identification with the character of the old warrior could not be more remote: bearded, hairy, dirty, probably fetid and indifferent to anything that does not refer to his dogs, his character is meticulously characterized to provoke distance in Viewer. The coolness of his gaze is reflected in the way he executes the only victim whose death we witness and is extremely in the opportunism with which he plunders Octavio (still attached to the hardware of the car) or the disdain with which he contemplates those involved in the accident. His semblance only alters when he sees Cofi's body, dumped on the asphalt. (Costa, 2013). It is also known that El Chivo is a former university's teacher, current hitman and has had revolutionary ideals. At first, for him, nothing matters except his dogs. He prefers the company of dogs to humans and in much of the film is a cold character. He is almost archetypal, he can represent the figure of the ruthless killer or the old hermit, but because he has clear motivations, a good development within the history and well-outlined psychological aspects he is a dynamic character. He is, however, a character highly influenced by the environment and many of his reactions are identifiable as being part of the reality in which he lives: The characters of Octavio (Gael Garcia Bernal) and Chivo (Emilio Echevarria), both of *Amores Perros* and Jack (Benicio Del Toro), in *21 Grams*, are examples of weakness, fragility, impotence or degradation due to conjunctural aspects present in the environment in which they live. (Motta, 2013). It is also important to highlight the symbology of his name, actually a nickname, El Chivo. It means "the goat," an animal, and this fact is not by chance. Iñárritu also uses an animalistic nickname for the character of Jack in *21 Grams*, the only exception being the character Richard, of *Babel*. It is noteworthy that the goat is an animal that represents a negative symbology in the west, as the imagetive representation of Satan, a grotesque figure (Delumau, 2009). It is possible to do this parallel with the character El Chivo, during much of the film, he is "the Damned". Just when his physical and mental transformation is given, El Chivo loses his nickname and we know his real name: Martín. It is as if humanity was returned to the character, which is also reflected in the way it is called.

In addition to the aforementioned physical and psychological characteristics of El Chivo, it is possible to obtain information about the character through dialogues, the timbre of the voice and the interpretation of the actor. Thus, it is possible to perceive that cold acting indicates an



emptiness that is striking in the character, possibly of nihilistic ideology. His features only change, expressing emotion, at the beginning of the story, when he is in contact with the dogs. El Chivo is brusque, of wide movements, and impetuous has a striking voice, but tired, almost cavernous. All these attributes indicate his personality. Dialogues like the one that he hangs with the kidnapped, ("Abel, what did you do to deserve a brother like that?"), denote ironic humor and the beginning of personal change. The bodily modifications occur later, and they mark a twist in the way of being of El Chivo, which starts to have more calculated movements and begins to express more emotions. The culmination of his metamorphosis is the heated monologue that he has with the answering machine of his daughter's house, revealing his commotion, his repentance and his intention to one day have the courage to "look her in the eye". Observing his filmography, it is perceived that actor Emilio Echevarría, interpreter of El Chivo, is a veteran in Mexican cinema, currently has 75 years, which shows that he was already an old gentleman at the time of production of *Amores Perros*. It was precisely his performance in *Amores Perros* who hit him for international recognition (IMDb), for which he won the award for Best Actor at the International Film Festival of Chicago. To this day, it's his biggest prize.

Subsequently, his work opened the doors to the international market, having acted in *007 – a New Day to Die* (2002) and *Memorias de mis putas tristes* (2011), a Danish film, but inspired by the work of Gabriel García Márquez and spoken in Spanish.

In addition to the powerful interpretation of Echevarría as El Chivo, it is possible to argue that Iñárritu made a deliberate choice in recruiting him. *Amores Perros* is the only Mexican film of the trilogy and has raised favorable reviews internationally. The director also attempted, in the other films, to include, in some way, impressions of Latinity (Negromonte, 2017), such as the choice of Jack Jordan's actor and the narrative arch of Amelia, the Mexican nanny in *Babel*. Possibly the director saw potential in his film and gave chance for a veteran actor to be known outside the usual circuits.

### **Jack Jordan, from *21 Grams***

Jack Jordan is a former criminal, who has already been arrested and after this experience has converted to the Christian scriptures and has become an active evangelical. He's a father and a husband, he believes he's predestined for winning a truck in a raffle and living a more comfortable life than before until his faith is shaken. As in *Amores Perros*, what triggers the events is a car accident. In this case, it is Jack Jordan who runs over the family of one of the characters and, frightened, runs and does not lend the help that would be essential to save one of Cristina's daughters. From there, Jack enters into a terrible conflict, does not answer his wife's pleas and decides to introduce himself to the police to expiate his guilt. In jail, he refuses visits and only makes an exception for John, his reverend. He considers himself betrayed by Jesus, but he still sees himself as a predestined, because he believes it was God who put the van in his hands and made him commit this wrongful murder. Tries suicide, no success. His wife gets a lawyer to release him, but he's not satisfied with freedom. A self-exile is imposed to reflect upon its actions. Later, he is the target of revenge of the mother of the victims, but the mortal act is not fulfilled. He lets himself beat by her, presences the suicide of Paul, the other key character of the script, and decides to tell the police that it was himself the author of the shot that killed Paul. Subsequently, he is acquitted.

Jack Jordan is a man around his 40 years old, tormented by the past. Evangelical practitioner, he discovered in faith a possibility of personal reinvention. Visually, he is well-dressed, uses classic clothes like polo shirts, has a clean face, no beard, and medium and voluminous hair.

The touch of controversy lies in his numerous tattoos, which even prevent him from getting a job and, consequently, taking another step towards a new life. His personality, however, is marked by an internal confrontation and this is visible by his unstable behavior, early perceptible in the film:

"It is possible to glimpse in Jack, in the first few minutes of the film, some features that outline his dramaturgical function. In the anachronistic presentation of the characters (along with the 10 ' initials), he is the only one who manifests a conflict legible by the spectator. Of the others, although we can intubate the existence of intense questions and conflicts, these are limited to the sphere of the sensitive, as they are summarized to elliptical and anachronic occurrences that overlook different moments of their history. The brief and significant sequences of Jack Jordan allow us to infer some of its characteristics as "strength in a system of forces" (SOURIAU, 1993), even though the system itself is not yet visible or intelligible. " (Costa, 2013).

It is, therefore, a conflictual character that is constructed in a way that provokes antipathy in the public at an early moment. It is strongly influenced by its environment and an icon of impotence and weakness (Motta, 2013), but also has immutable characteristics such as pride. It is a dynamic character for presenting motivations, past history, and well-drawn evolution. Jack Jordan matures throughout the narrative, albeit in a limited way. If the name Jack Jordan does not have an obvious relationship with the psychology of the character, his nickname reveals his previous life full of crimes: Wolf, or Lobo. The symbolism of the wolf is associated, in the west, to a connotation at the same time powerful and harmful:

"Wolves and bears are animals associated with the symbolism of ferocity, of strength, of bravery, of power, of authority, of imponence, of virility, but also personified danger and fear." (Gräslund, 2009 apud Pessoa, 2016).

Beyond the aspect of danger, related to the character's criminal past, the wolf is also a predator, and also the metaphorical figure in the Hobbesian phrase "Man is the Wolf of Man." The latter is a clear allusion to the role of Jack Jordan in the film, as the cause of the hit-and-run of an innocent family. An act committed when it was no longer called by his nickname, the consequences lead him to prison again and there is recognized by his old and infamous epithet. That is, a clear demonstration that the past pursues him, and to distance himself from it is nothing trivial, not even through faith. To encompass beyond the physical and psychological settings of the character already commented, it is necessary to observe other characteristics, provided by the gradual access to the film. The dialogues, the timbre of the voice and the interpretation of the actor offer clues to the spectator about who is Jack Jordan. The character is initially restrained, of a paused and delineated speech, but these characteristics are revealing themselves as inconstant. Jack Jordan has a great internal conflict and an impossibility to control his strength and impulses. His voice, rather pleasing to our ears, turns into moments of explosion and laments. Not only the voice, but his movements also change, from gentle and calculated gestures to other more brutes. The event of the accident only makes his instability more evident: "The roadkill completely destroys the conditions that assured them a certain balance, although, in Jack's case, the fragility of his well-being was already exposed and, in some instance, relate to the occurrence of the accident itself." (Costa, 2013)

Still, on the conflict of Jack, it becomes apparent the predilection of the writer Guillermo Arriaga by characters of his type, whom he calls the "barrel of gunpowder":

"There are the ' volcano ' characters and the ' gunpowder ' characters. The ' volcano ' character is the one that is subterraneously creating a fire. Apparently, the surface is quiet and suddenly begins to expel the lava, all this fire starts to come out slowly. [...] The character ' barrel of gunpowder ' [...] is the one that suddenly explodes [...], is always on the verge of explosion. [...] I like the characters that walk on the edges of the abyss, [...] that are always in the extremes. (Guillermo Arriaga, Apud Costa, 2013) The dialogues are also evidence of important features about the character. In a conversation with a "brother", when trying to convert him, he says he only won his truck in the raffle because of God's purposes. He judges himself, therefore, predestined, and this perception is only strengthened throughout the story. At another time, referring to himself in the past, Jack says he was a "pig." Again considering the meanings imbued to the pig animal in the west, it is perceived that it is a vilipendious adjective. Finally, it is observed that Jack is a character of action (Costa, 2013), he often acts impulsively, but in addition, it is he who catalyzes the main action of the film, both by accident and the consequences that follow it and by his drastic decisions. Actor Benicio Del Toro, who impersonates Jack Jordan, was already enshrined in Hollywood when he acted in 21 grams. Regarded by Iñárritu as a man of "complex and profound" soul, and able to always be in a state of contemplation (Iñárritu, 2004), he would print character to Jack Jordan. Apparently, of the personality of the character, impulsive, the director did not let this fact go unnoticed, having thought to give the role initially to Sean Penn (who plays Paul):

"Penn usually acts like the hectic, so somehow Jack was the obvious role for him. But then I thought the opposite could be very interesting, and I'm glad I did it... Benicio is a perfect marriage to Jack. He has a great presence, physically and spiritually. " (Iñárritu, 2004). After Jack's interpretation, Del Toro was nominated for the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor. Another possible reason for the director's choice to summon him, in addition to the character's suitability, is that the actor would represent a Latin link in the most Yankee film of the trilogy. Of Puerto Rican origin, Del Toro would print diversity in a majorly American cast, maintaining a feature that the director is concerned to include in the three films.

### **Richard Jones, from *Babel***

Richard Jones is an American, father, and spouse, who is traveling to tourism in Morocco with his wife. Soon it is perceived that their relationship does not go well, there is resentment between the two because of the accidental death of a newborn child of both. The journey is an attempt to improve the tempers. Unfortunately, a rifle shot given by a Moroccan hit on his wife and, severely injured, Richard does anything to see her get treatment. (In *Babel*, the accident is this one, caused by the rifle). Richard rebels at the knowledge of a local authority that aid has been made difficult by political issues between the two countries. The passengers of the bus fear an attack on the part of the villagers where they are and some press Richard, who attacks one of them. During a phone call to the embassy, he realizes that the bus left, abandoning him, Susan and the guide on the spot. While they await the rescue, Richard and Susan share a moment of affection, and shortly after they apologize for the circumstances of the son's death. The helicopter arrives to rescue Susan, putting an end to their plight. The doctor informs Richard of the gravity of Susan's condition, saying there is a risk of gangrene. Richard calls home and cries when he hears his son's voice telling him what he did at school.

Subsequently, Susan manages to be treated and he receives the news that his children were experiencing problems in Mexico as a result of their trip with Valéria, the nanny. Angry, but understanding, Richard Jones decides not to press charges against Valéria. Richard Jones is a North American who's around 40 years old, has a nice appearance, has a well-trimmed beard,

uses clothes of neutral colors and shirts of earthy tones. He is a husband and father, in short, an ordinary man, of a high middle class. One can reach that conclusion, about his class, by perceiving the plot itself. According to Domínguez, Blanch, and Iglesias (2010), the trip carried out by him and his wife alone is an indicator of the social position of the couple, Westerners who go to an "exotic" location for their vacation destination. In contrast to other characters in the film, they are holders of a kind of power, coming from the power of consumption and mobility. It is perceived, therefore, that Richard is a character with certain purchasing power, with the ability to move around a global world and to have an active role in this context. It is a character of relative patience and cooperative personality, however, capable of extreme reactions to adverse circumstances. Nothing that represents an imbalance, however: they are plausible actions in extremely unfavorable situations. Richard Jones is considered a dynamic character for presenting motivations, previous history (albeit sketched) and a perceptible evolution. The journey through suffering for which he passes teaches him new lessons about mankind.

In this case, the character does not have a nickname that identifies him so clearly. But again, his name does not seem to be by chance. The meaning of Richard is "Courageous Prince". From Norman Origins, it is the junction of the word "*rik*", prince, and "*hard*", strong, courageous. It is possible to read this information in light of the character's function in the film. Richard is literally strong and courageous to go through the situations of potential loss that he passes through the story. But if he represents an ordinary man, where would the "prince" fit in? It's a metaphorical adjective. The character acts with nobility of intentions in at least two moments of the story, by showing his ability to forgive, hence the title may come. Perceiving characteristics outside the physical and psychological scope previously commented, once again it is possible to obtain data about the character through dialogues, voice timbre and the interpretation of the actor who personifies him. Richard Jones possesses a somewhat sweet look, sometimes resentful, and always with an aura of sadness. It is noticeable that he's going through a grieving process. At a given moment, the motive comes to light. He asks his wife calmly if there will ever be a day when she will forgive him. It's implied that maybe he had some kind of guilt involving the death of the couple's son.

"Similarly, between Richard and Susan, there seem to have been some carelessness in the past, which caused the death of the youngest son and triggered the crisis that the couple tried to solve on the journey through Morocco. There are no greater incidences of excesses or errors in his painful waiting for help, and not even Richard's aggression to one of the passengers and the consequent departure of the bus can be taken as actions that promote or broaden the fragility of his situation." (Costa, 2013).

Confronted with extreme situations, Richard loses part of his temperance, modifies his quiet and pleasant speech and voice, but still, these attitudes are plausible given his condition. Later, it is perceived that the extreme actions are also a result of despair, which is obvious in the scene when he engages in conversation with his son on the phone, trying to appear calm while waiting for news about the state of his wife. Soon afterward, when he shuts down, he falls into tears and shows himself hopeless and helpless in the face of fate. Finally, the actions of the character make it clear that, despite all suffering, he is a man capable of forgiving, because he manages to cease hostilities with his wife and learn a life lesson, and not to press charges about the nanny of his children, who had put them in danger (although not intentionally). On the interpreter of Richard Jones, Brad Pitt, at first there is no doubt about the weight of the actor's name in film production. However, in *Babel* the director, Iñárritu

himself states that the actor was not an evident choice: "In the case of Brad Pitt, I found it interesting the possibility of it not going to work. It wasn't a role of his style, it's not an obvious emotion for him." (Iñárritu, 2006). The director completed that, in addition to being putting the actor out of his comfort zone, he also did not believe for sure whether the public would validate and recognize Brad Pitt in a role not of gallant or hero, but of an ordinary man, who suffers like any other in a limit situation. Would it be plausible for the spectator? The choice proved to be correct not only by the positive statement of the director but also by the recognition in the Academy: Brad Pitt was named to Best Supporting Actor for this role.

## Conclusion

The Trilogy of Life turns up to be a tragic, complex series, capable to cause many reflections. It shows itself as a "mirror of the universal human", by showing characters from different nationalities and social classes, but also by placing them in typical situations of the human condition, of pain, and by the presence of the theme of death. (Terán, 2012). The characters are dynamic, some more multifaceted than others, but all have to deal with very adverse situations. The cinema of Iñárritu, in the context of the trilogy, proposes to study the human condition facing the tragedy and the possible reactions of people more, or less, ordinary, in the face of the inevitable. The following excerpt refers exclusively to Babel, but it is possible to extend its meaning throughout the trilogy: "All episodes are marked by considerable misfortunes, whether present or past and those who close their trajectory in a more positive way, obtain a kind of tragic assimilation of life. (Costa, 2013) ". This "tragic assimilation of life" is a recurring constant that accompanies all the characters, including those who have obtained some kind of redemption, such as those of the excerpt analyzed in this article. What is perceived is that El Chivo, Jack Jordan and Richard Jones have their particularities, and this makes different their possibilities of redemption. Everyone, although led to extreme situations, is able to make their own decisions. Of all the characters, the most well-meaning and with a less compromising past is Richard Jones. It does not seem to be by chance that this is the character who gets a new opportunity to live with his wife and receives almost total redemption, the most positive outcome of them all. And this, in a cinematographic context where the happy ending is not an option to be considered, where the total history does not end, remains open. Where "the director is interested in showing, and not telling a story with morals" (Terán, 2012).

Although we are talking about several films, the thematic unit of the trilogy includes this comparison: which characters ' fate is more serene. Richard Jones is also representing the common man (albeit with a strong class indicative), who can go through serious problems in life, is the character that most closely approximates the public. Secondly, El Chivo achieves the most partial redemption, consistent with his past. With the weight of the lives he took on the back, purposely, the character is not as exempt as the previous, but was able to make a self-criticism and change his life, albeit partially. The script presented him with a tenuous, but plausible, hope of reunion with his humanity through the approximation with his daughter, even though this is only suggested. El Chivo, of the three characters, is also the most archetypal, being able to represent the old madman/sage or the hermit. He was inspired by existing types, but he does not cease to have his vicissitudes and peculiarities. Lastly, there is a limited redemption of Jack Jordan. With the shaken faith, the pride, wounded, but still present, this may be the greatest defect of the character. Capable of a self-incriminating act, to atone for his guilt, and capable of demonstrating repentance, the character cannot fully give up his loftiness. His illusion of judging himself predestined prevents him from seeing with

more critical lenses his reality. His evolution, therefore, is visible but restricted. This is also his possibility of redemption: Jack Jordan gets rid of prison, but he has to learn to live again. This character is the one with the most specific personality of all, and from the beginning was created in order to cause antipathy in the spectator. But still in Jack, it is possible to identify with, the character is well delineated in his dramas that are universal: the loss of faith, the inability to get rid of the past...

In short, the stories presented here are raw but able to relate to everyone, due to the events shown on the screen. In them, the character is himself but also represents a collectivity. It is the universal character: "It can be an eternal human motive, a local allegory, but with universal immanence" (Martin, 1973). Jack Jordan, El Chivo, Richard Jones are peculiar by themselves, but they all see themselves in the face of the inevitable and their pain connects them. Not only within the trilogy but also outside, by hitting the spectator with his so human, all too human dilemmas.

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